

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Leighton- Linslade Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report to accompany the
Regulation 14 version of the
Neighbourhood Plan

Leighton-Linslade Town Council

October 2025



Quality Information

Prepared by	Checked by	Verified by	Approved by
A.V.	M.F.	M.F.	N.C.B.
Environmental Consultant	Associate Environmental Consultant	Associate Environmental Consultant	Technical Director

Revision History

Revision	Revision Date	Details	Name	Position
V1.0	October 25	Initial version for Town Council comment	M.F.	Associate Environmental Consultant
V2.0	October 25	Version for consultation	M.F.	Associate Environmental Consultant

Prepared for:

Leighton-Linslade Town Council

Prepared by:

3 Rivergate
Temple Quay
Bristol
BS1 6ER

aeom.com

© 2025 AECOM Limited. All Rights Reserved.

This document has been prepared by AECOM Limited ('AECOM') in accordance with its contract with the Client and in accordance with generally accepted consultancy principles, the budget for fees and the terms of reference agreed between AECOM and the Client. Any information provided by third parties and referred to herein has not been checked or verified by AECOM, unless otherwise expressly stated in the document. AECOM shall have no liability to any third party that makes use of or relies upon this document.

Table of Contents

Non-Technical Summary	i
1. Introduction	1
2. What is the Scope of the SEA?	6
3. Policy Context for the Neighbourhood Plan	10
4. Vision and Objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan	11
5. Consideration of Reasonable Alternatives Through the SEA	12
6. Appraisal of the Regulation 14 Version of the Neighbourhood Plan...	13
7. Next Steps	26
Appendix A : Scoping Report	27

Non-Technical Summary

Purpose of This Report

This Environmental Report presents the findings of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Plan (LLNP). The SEA is required because the LLNP has the potential for adverse environmental effects, particularly due to its proximity to the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The SEA ensures that environmental considerations are integrated into the plan-making process.

What Is the Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Plan?

The LLNP sets out a vision and policies to guide development in Leighton-Linslade for the next 18 years. It aims to:

- Support a vibrant town centre and local economy
- Provide new homes and community facilities
- Protect and enhance green spaces and heritage assets
- Promote sustainable transport and climate resilience

How Was the SEA Carried Out?

The SEA process involved:

- Reviewing environmental objectives and baseline conditions
- Identifying key sustainability issues
- Assessing the likely effects of the LLNP on seven SEA themes
- Making recommendations to avoid or reduce negative effects and enhance positive ones

The SEA Framework

The SEA Framework provides the basis for assessing the LLNP. It consists of seven SEA themes and related objectives:

SEA Theme	SEA Objective
Biodiversity	Maintain and enhance the extent and quality of biodiversity habitats and networks within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Climate Change (including Flood Risk)	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities in the neighbourhood area.
	Support the resilience of the neighbourhood area to the potential effects of climate change, including flood risk.
Community Wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents and in suitably connected places, supported by the appropriate and timely provision of infrastructure to enable cohesive and inclusive communities.
Historic Environment	Protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape, including green infrastructure corridors.
Land, Soil, and Water Resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

Consideration of Alternatives?

It was not possible to identify any reasonable alternatives, given the scope and objectives of the LLNP. Whilst a centrally important policy is that relating to allocation of Land South of the High Street for 151 homes, there is no clear strategic choice in respect of this policy, or in respect of the approach to allocating land for growth in general. As a result, the focus is simply on assessing the draft LLNP.

What Are the Key Findings?

The LLNP is expected to deliver a range of environmental and social benefits, although the scale of these varies by topic:

- Biodiversity: **Significant long-term benefits** through habitat protection, green and blue infrastructure, and biodiversity net gain.
- Climate change: **Moderate benefits** from energy efficiency, active travel, and nature-based flood solutions. Minor construction impacts are possible.
- Community wellbeing: **Significant benefits** from improved access to services, green spaces, and active travel.
- Historic environment: **Significant benefits** from heritage-led regeneration and reuse of historic buildings, though site-specific risks remain.
- Landscape: **Significant benefits** from protecting open spaces and enhancing townscape quality, subject to sensitive design.
- Land, soil and water: **Moderate benefits** from brownfield reuse and water quality improvements; minor construction impacts possible.
- Transportation: **Moderate benefits** from promoting walking, cycling, and public transport; minor temporary disruption during construction.

No significant negative effects are predicted. **Minor short-term negative effects** may occur during construction but can be managed through good practice.

Cumulative and In-Combination Effects

The LLNP aligns with other local and regional plans, including the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan and the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC Mitigation Strategy. **No significant adverse cumulative or in-combination effects** have been identified. Many policies are expected to deliver co-benefits, such as LL8 (Green and Blue Infrastructure), which supports biodiversity, climate resilience, and landscape quality.

Policy Recommendations and Monitoring

Minor policy recommendations have been made to strengthen the plan (see **Section 6.6**), including:

- Adding flood mitigation measures for the site allocation
- Supporting water efficiency and EV charging infrastructure
- Including heritage-led design principles for sensitive sites

Monitoring will be undertaken by Central Bedfordshire Council through its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) process. No additional monitoring is considered necessary, as no significant adverse effects are predicted.

Next Steps

The draft LLNP and this Environmental Report will be consulted on. Feedback will help shape the final version of the LLNP before it is submitted for independent examination and, if successful, a local referendum.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

- 1.1.1. AECOM has been commissioned to undertake an independent strategic environmental assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Plan (LLNP).
- 1.1.2. The LLNP is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011¹ and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012,² and in the context of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan. The LLNP will set out a vision, strategy, and range of policies for the next 18 years in the neighbourhood area.
- 1.1.3. The Leighton-Linslade neighbourhood area was designated in June 2024, covering the civil parish of Leighton-Linslade, located in Central Bedfordshire district (Bedfordshire county). The neighbourhood area is depicted in **Figure 1-1**.

¹ UK Government (2011) '*Localism Act 2011*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

² UK Government (2012) '*The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Figure 1-1: Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Area



1.2. SEA Screening

- 1.2.1. A neighbourhood plan requires strategic environmental assessment (SEA) where it is likely to have significant environmental effects. In this respect, neighbourhood plans are more likely to be screened in as requiring an SEA if both of the following apply:
- the neighbourhood plan is being prepared in an area with significant environmental constraints, such as, for example, Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, or large concentrations of heritage assets; and
 - the neighbourhood plan is likely to allocate sites for development.³
- 1.2.2. The LLNP was screened by Central Bedfordshire Council in 2024. The screening process is based upon consideration of standard criteria to determine whether the LLNP is likely to have “significant environmental effects”, and subsequently whether there is a need for SEA. The screening concluded that an SEA (and Habitats Regulation Assessment [HRA]) is required because of its proximity to Chilterns Beechwoods SAC.
- 1.2.3. In light of this outcome, an SEA process is being undertaken to meet the specific requirements prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations).⁴

1.3. SEA Explained

- 1.3.1. SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the potential impacts of an emerging plan, and potential alternatives in terms of key environmental issues. The aim of SEA is to inform and influence the plan-making process with a view to avoiding and mitigating potential negative impacts and maximising the potential for positive effects. Through this approach, the SEA for the LLNP seeks to maximise the emerging plan’s contribution to sustainable development.

³ DLUHC (February 2022): Chief Planner’s Newsletter, February 2022 ‘*Strategic Environmental Assessment for Neighbourhood Plans: Timely and effective screening*’ accessible [here](#).

⁴ UK Government (2004) ‘*The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004*’ can be accessed [here](#).

- 1.3.2. Two key procedural requirements of the SEA Regulations are that:
- When deciding on 'the scope and level of detail of the information' which must be included in the Environmental Report there is a consultation with nationally designated authorities concerned with environmental issues; and
 - A report (the 'Environmental Report') is published for consultation alongside the draft plan (i.e., the draft LLNP) that presents outcomes from the environmental assessment (i.e., discusses 'likely significant effects' that would result from plan implementation) and reasonable alternatives.
- 1.3.3. This 'Environmental Report' is concerned with item 'ii' above.

1.4. Structure of this Environmental Report

- 1.4.1. This SEA Report incorporates the information required for Environmental Reports by the SEA Regulations. The information presented in this IIA Report is outlined in **Table 1-1**.

Table 1-1: Questions that Must be Answered by the SEA Environmental Report to Meet the Regulatory⁵ Requirements

Environmental Report question	In line with the SEA Regulations, the report must include... ⁶
What is the scope of the SEA?	What is the plan seeking to achieve? An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan. Relationship with other relevant plans and programmes. The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.

⁵ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

⁶ NB this column does not quote directly from Schedule II of the Regulations. Rather, it reflects a degree of interpretation.

Environmental Report question	In line with the SEA Regulations, the report must include... ⁶
What is the sustainability 'baseline'?	The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.
What are the key issues and objectives?	Key problems/issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e., provide a 'framework' for) assessment.
What has plan-making/SEA involved up to this point?	Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with. The likely significant effects associated with alternatives. Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives appraisal/a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the current version of the plan.
What are the assessment findings at this stage?	The likely significant effects associated with the Regulation 14 version of the plan. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the Regulation 14 version of the plan.
What happens next?	The next steps for the plan making / SEA process.

2. What is the Scope of the SEA?

2.1. Summary of SEA Scoping

- 2.1.1. A Scoping Report was prepared for the SEA in April 2025. The purpose of this report was to outline the 'scope' of the SEA through setting out the following information:
- A context review of the key environmental and sustainability objectives of national, regional, and local plans and strategies relevant to the LLNP;
 - Baseline data against which the LLNP can be assessed;
 - The key sustainability issues for the LLNP; and
 - An 'SEA Framework' of objectives against which the LLNP can be assessed.
- 2.1.2. The SEA Regulations require that: *'When deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies'*. In England, the consultation bodies are Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Historic England.⁷ These authorities were consulted on the scope of the SEA in April 2025.
- 2.1.3. Responses received on the Scoping Report, and how they were addressed, have been summarised in **Table 2-1**.
- 2.1.4. The final version of the Scoping Report is attached as **Appendix A**.

⁷ In-line with Article 6(3) of the SEA Directive, these consultation bodies were selected because *'by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programme'*.

Table 2-1: Consultation Responses Received for the SEA Scoping Report

Consultation Response	How the Response was Considered and Addressed
Historic England A.B., Historic Places Adviser (response received on 21 March 2025)	
<i>'We would refer you to the advice in Historic England Advice Note 8: Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment, available at: https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/sustainability-appraisal-and-strategic-environmental-assessment-advice-note-8/. This advice outlines the historic environment factors that should be considered during the Strategic Environmental Assessment or Sustainability Appraisal process, along with our recommendations for the information that should be included.'</i>	Comment noted.
<i>'We would also refer you to Historic England Advice Note 3: Site Allocations and Local Plans, which sets out what we consider to be a robust process for assessing the potential impact of site allocations on relevant heritage assets. In particular, we highlight the Site Selection Methodology on page 5. This methodology is similar to that used to assess potential impacts on the setting of heritage assets (Good Practice Advice 3), but is specifically tailored to the site allocation process and is therefore more appropriate in this context. We would expect a proportionate assessment based on this methodology to be undertaken for any site allocation where there is a potential impact—positive or negative—on a heritage asset, and for the SEA to advise on how any harm should be minimised or mitigated. Advice Note 3 is available at: https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/historic-environment-and-site-allocations-in-local-plans/.'</i>	Comment noted.
<i>'We welcome the SEA Scoping Report and, having reviewed Chapter 6, are content that it has identified a suitable evidence base and many of the key issues relating to the historic environment. The objectives and assessment questions provide a helpful framework for the assessment.'</i>	Comment noted.
<i>'Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local planning authorities are closely involved throughout the preparation of the plan and its</i>	Comment noted.

Consultation Response

How the Response was Considered and Addressed

assessment. They are best placed to advise on local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER), which should be consulted as part of the SEA process. In addition, they can advise on how any site allocation, policy, or proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment, the nature and design of any required mitigation measures, and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.'

Natural England

S.W., Office, Consultations Team (response received on 30 May 2025)

'...Natural England has no specific comments to make on the scope of this neighbourhood plan's SEA...'

Comment noted.

Environment Agency

No response.

n/a.

2.2. SEA Framework

- 2.2.1. The SEA framework provides a way in which environmental effects can be defined and subsequently analysed based on standard 'tests'. The reasonable alternatives and each proposal within the current version (i.e., the Regulation 14 version) of the LLNP will be assessed consistently using the framework.
- 2.2.2. The updated SEA framework (including any amendments following statutory consultation) is presented in **Table 2-2**.

Table 2-2: SEA Framework for the LLNP

SEA Theme	SEA Objective
Biodiversity	Maintain and enhance the extent and quality of biodiversity habitats and networks within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Climate Change (including Flood Risk)	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities in the neighbourhood area.
	Support the resilience of the neighbourhood area to the potential effects of climate change, including flood risk.
Community Wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents and in suitably connected places, supported by the appropriate and timely provision of infrastructure to enable cohesive and inclusive communities.
Historic Environment	Protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape, including green infrastructure corridors.
Land, Soil, and Water Resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

3. Policy Context for the Neighbourhood Plan

3.1. National Policy

- 3.1.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides an overarching framework for development in England. It sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It is supported by planning practice guidance, which is a suite of policy papers covering a broad range of topics, including SEA.
- 3.1.2. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has now been published following the consultation period that ended in September 2024. The new framework includes significant reforms aimed at boosting housing supply and supporting sustainable growth. One of the key changes is the reintroduction of mandatory housing targets, which now require an increased number of dwellings in Central Bedfordshire. These updates may influence Leighton-Linslade Town Council's decision to allocate sites.

3.2. Local Plan Context

- 3.2.1. The relevant local plan for the neighbourhood area is the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan (2015-2035).⁸ The Plan allocates 368 dwellings across three strategic sites in Leighton-Linslade, and includes employment land allocations at five sites within the neighbourhood area.
- 3.2.2. Neighbourhood plans will form part of the development plan for Central Bedfordshire, alongside, but not as a replacement for, the Local Plan. Neighbourhood plans are required to be in general conformity with the Local Plan and can develop policies and proposals to address local place-based issues. In this way it is intended for the Local Plan to provide a clear overall strategic direction for development in Central Bedfordshire, whilst enabling finer detail to be determined through the neighbourhood planning process where appropriate.

⁸ Central Bedfordshire Council (2021). 'Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015-2035' can be accessed through [this link](#).

4. Vision and Objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan

4.1.1. The vision for the LLNP captures the community's views and aspirations for the neighbourhood area as expressed through the neighbourhood planning process. It forms the basis on which the neighbourhood objectives and proposed policies have been formulated.

4.1.2. The vision is as follows:

'A 21st century market town that thrives on the strength of its heritage, community, environment and entrepreneurs/creatives'

4.1.3. The vision is accompanied by the following six objectives:

- To promote Leighton Buzzard Town Centre as a modern market town, with a vibrant daytime and evening economy; developing creative and cultural experiential opportunities along a strong retail offer.
- To expand the range of social infrastructure to promote good health, reduce social isolation and encourage community cohesion.
- To celebrate local heritage through recognition of key buildings and locations, as well as the creation of dedicated space to display the history of the parish.
- To ensure new development promotes high standard in design, including maximising energy efficiency measures.
- To promote active travel opportunities, improving connectivity between the town centre and the wider community, reducing congestion and encouraging reduced use of the private car for short journeys.
- To strengthen green and blue infrastructure, ensuring all residents have access to high quality places and spaces to support physical and mental wellbeing together with the provision of enhanced habitats to enable flora and fauna to thrive in harmony with the community.

5. Consideration of Reasonable Alternatives Through the SEA

5.1. Introduction

- 5.1.1. A key aim of any Environmental Report is to present an assessment not only of the draft plan but also reasonable alternatives. Furthermore, there is a requirement to present “an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with”.

5.2. Defining Reasonable Alternatives

- 5.2.1. Whilst there have been a range of key issues addressed throughout the course of the plan-making process that have involved a choice, it is difficult to pinpoint reasonable alternatives in the context of the Leighton Linlade Neighbourhood Plan.
- 5.2.2. The context is that alternatives are defined as mutually exclusive options, and ‘reasonable’ alternatives are defined as those that: A) reflect “the objectives and geographical scope of the plan”; and B) can be assessed leading to meaningful conclusions in terms of differential “significant effects”. In short, the aim is typically to define alternatives relating to the key choice, or a key choice, at the very heart of the plan.
- 5.2.3. The plan does look to allocate, which is typically a step that can involve reasonable alternatives; however, in practice choice is clearly limited.
- 5.2.4. Specifically, the emerging preferred approach is to allocate Land South of the High Street and, other than the possibility of not allocating the site (which is the baseline situation, and so not an alternative option that can be appraised), it is not possible to identify a ‘reasonable alternative’ approach to allocation, with no omission sites known to be realistically in contention for allocation (given the remit and scope/objectives of the plan).
- 5.2.5. Nor is there considered to be a clear choice regarding the emerging preferred approach in respect of Land South of the High Street, which is to support residential led mixed use development of up to 151 homes. It is understood that alternatives have been given consideration in the past, but at the current time the available evidence, including in terms of development viability, points strongly to this approach to development.
- 5.2.6. As such, the conclusion reached is that there are no reasonable alternatives at the current time.

6. Appraisal of the Regulation 14 Version of the Neighbourhood Plan

6.1. Introduction

6.1.1. The aim of this chapter is to present appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the Regulation 14 version of the LLNP. This chapter presents:

- An appraisal of the current version (i.e., the Regulation 14 version) of the LLNP under the seven SEA theme headings;
- Consideration of potential cumulative effects; and
- The overall conclusions at this current stage.

6.2. LLNP Policies

6.2.1. To support the implementation of the vision statement for the LLNP, the Regulation 14 version of the plan puts forward 15 policies to guide new development within the neighbourhood area. These are outlined in **Table 6-1**.

Table 6-1: Policies in the LLNP

Policy Reference	Policy Name
Policy LL1	Centre of Town Renewal
Policy LL2	Leighton Buzzard Town Centre
Policy LL3	Bridge Meadow/Canal Quarter
Policy LL4	Linslade Cluster
Policy LL5	Land South of the High Street
Policy LL6	Housing Mix and Type
Policy LL7	Local Community Assets
Policy LL8	Green and Blue Infrastructure
Policy LL9	Local Green Spaces

Policy Reference	Policy Name
Policy LL10	Chiltern Beechwoods
Policy LL11	Active Travel
Policy LL2	Infrastructure Priorities
Policy LL13	Education
Policy LL14	Energy Efficiency

6.3. Approach to the Appraisal

- 6.3.1. For each theme, ‘significant’ effects of the Regulation 14 version of the LLNP on the baseline are predicated and evaluated. Account is taken of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. For example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the effects as far as possible. These effect ‘characteristics’ will be described within the assessment, as appropriate.
- 6.3.2. Cumulative effects are also considered, i.e., the potential for the LLNP to impact an aspect of the baseline when implemented alongside other plans, programmes, and projects.
- 6.3.3. Every effort is made to identify and evaluate effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the high-level nature of the LLNP. The ability to predict effects accurately is also limited by understanding of the baseline and the nature of future planning applications. Because of the uncertainties involved, there is a need to exercise caution when identifying and evaluating significant effects to ensure all assumptions are explained. In many instances, given reasonable assumptions, it is not possible to predict ‘significant effects’, but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) of the draft plan in more general terms.

6.4. Appraisal

Biodiversity

- 6.4.1. Given the proximity of the neighbourhood area to internationally designated sites for biodiversity, a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process has been completed for the LLNP. Providing the recommendations within the HRA are incorporated into the submission version of the LLNP, it is anticipated that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of these sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. The most sensitive habitats, including the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), are specifically addressed through Policy LL10, which requires all net new housing to contribute to mitigation measures in line with the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC Mitigation Strategy. This approach will help manage recreational pressure and safeguard the ecological integrity of these internationally important sites.
- 6.4.2. Direct beneficial effects on biodiversity are anticipated from several policies. Policy LL8 is the most relevant in this respect, as it identifies a Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Network and sets clear expectations for development to enhance habitat connectivity, restore river and canal corridors, and deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The policy also promotes nature-based solutions for flood risk and pollution reduction, which will provide co-benefits for biodiversity. Similarly, Policy LL9 designates Local Green Spaces, many of which include priority habitats or corridors for wildlife, and protects them from development. Together, these policies will help prevent habitat loss and fragmentation and contribute to nature recovery across the neighbourhood area.
- 6.4.3. Other policies will also deliver biodiversity benefits. Policy LL1, which focuses on town centre renewal, promotes urban greening and improved links to the canal, river, parks and countryside, while Policy LL3 includes targeted provisions for Bridge Meadow and the Canal Quarter, such as safeguarding flood-prone areas as green infrastructure and enhancing the River Ouzel and Grand Union Canal corridors. These measures will improve ecological connectivity and create conditions for urban wildlife.
- 6.4.4. Indirect benefits will arise from policies that encourage active and public transport, particularly Policy LL11, which seeks to improve walking and cycling networks. Reduced car dependency can lower air and noise pollution, benefiting sensitive species. Policy LL5, which allocates land for mixed-use development, also promotes active travel and improved access to Parsons Close Recreation Ground, indirectly supporting biodiversity by enhancing green space connectivity, although it does not include specific biodiversity requirements.

- 6.4.5. Potential adverse effects on biodiversity are expected to be minor and temporary. These may include localised habitat disturbance and species displacement during construction phases of any development, particularly for allocation sites such as LL5. However, such effects are likely to be mitigated through standard construction best practice.
- 6.4.6. Overall, the LLNP is expected to result in **major (significant) long-term beneficial effects** for biodiversity through urban greening, habitat creation and improved ecological connectivity. These benefits are anticipated to be greatest along the River Ouzel, Grand Union Canal and within the designated GBI Network. **Minor short-term adverse effects** during construction are possible, but will be temporary and localised.

Climate Change (Including Flood Risk)

- 6.4.7. Policies that promote active and sustainable travel (particularly LL11 but also LL1 to LL5) are expected to contribute to long-term reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in Leighton-Linslade by supporting new active travel infrastructure such as pedestrianisation, cycle parking, and new walking and cycling routes, and by appropriately locating development close to the town centre. These measures are likely to reduce reliance on private vehicles and lower transport-related emissions, contributing to climate change mitigation. Policies LL1, LL3 and LL5, supported by the strategic infrastructure policy LL12, also encourage the reuse and repurposing of existing buildings, which may reduce embodied carbon associated with demolition and new construction.
- 6.4.8. Policy LL14 is expected to support climate change mitigation by requiring new development to be 'zero carbon ready' and encouraging high energy efficiency standards such as Passivhaus. It also promotes whole life-cycle carbon assessments and post-occupancy evaluations to ensure buildings perform as intended. These measures will help reduce both operational and embodied carbon emissions of new developments.
- 6.4.9. In terms of climate change adaptation, flood risk is addressed in Policy LL3, which requires that flood-prone land in the Bridge Meadow / Canal Quarter be retained as green infrastructure. This approach will help reduce surface water flooding, support natural flood storage and limit pollution risks to the River Ouzel.

- 6.4.10. Policy LL8 and LL10 further support climate resilience by promoting nature-based solutions to flooding such as wetland and woodland creation, which can contribute to flood mitigation, carbon sequestration and improved water quality. Policy LL8, combined with the designation of Local Green Spaces (LL9) and the delivery of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (LL10), may also support climate adaptation by maintaining permeable surfaces and reducing urban heat island effects associated with rising temperatures. Similarly, LL14 supports climate adaptation by encouraging passive design strategies that improve building resilience to future temperature extremes and energy demands.
- 6.4.11. The site allocation under LL5 is located within Flood Zone 1, which suggests that fluvial flood risk is unlikely to comprise a significant constraint to development. However, the site is in proximity to Flood Zone 3, so the policy could be strengthened to include explicit requirements for appropriate flood mitigation measures such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).
- 6.4.12. Minor adverse effects related to greenhouse gas emissions may arise from the construction phase of any development, for example from Policy LL5, but these are likely to be mitigated through standard good practice construction techniques.
- 6.4.13. Overall, the LLNP is expected to result in **moderate (not significant) long-term beneficial effects** in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation through the prioritisation of active travel, high energy efficiency standards and nature-based solutions. **Minor short-term adverse effects** may arise from emissions associated with construction, but these will be temporary and localised.

Community Wellbeing

- 6.4.14. Policies that support the retention and enhancement of existing community facilities (including LL8 and LL12) are expected to result in beneficial effects with regard to community wellbeing. These policies seek to safeguard valued assets and promote the development of new infrastructure such as health centres, cultural venues and spaces for sport and recreation. Where proposals involve the reuse of existing buildings, there may also be indirect benefits from reduced construction impacts and preservation of local character, which can strengthen community identity.

- 6.4.15. Policies that promote mixed-use development and active travel (particularly LL11 but also LL1 to LL5) are likely to support improved access to services, reduce social isolation and encourage healthier lifestyles. For example, improved walking and cycling connections between residential areas, green spaces and community hubs may increase opportunities for physical activity and informal social interaction. The integration of community uses within town centre and canal-side developments will help ensure that new growth is supported by appropriate infrastructure and will also contribute to improved air quality by reducing car dependency. These measures will be particularly important for addressing health inequalities by improving access to services for those without access to a car and by creating inclusive, accessible environments for people with mobility impairments.
- 6.4.16. The designation of Local Green Spaces (LL9), alongside the enhancement of local blue and green infrastructure (LL8), will further contribute to beneficial effects by protecting areas used for recreation and community events. These spaces play an important role in supporting mental and physical health, particularly in urban areas where access to natural environments can be limited.
- 6.4.17. Employment opportunities may also be supported indirectly through policies that encourage town centre renewal (LL1 and LL2) and mixed-use development (LL3 and LL5), which can help sustain local businesses and create spaces for cultural and creative activities. Expanded educational facilities under LL13 will ensure that the needs of a growing population are met, while also providing opportunities for learning and skills development, indirectly supporting the local economy.
- 6.4.18. New housing delivered through LL5 (supported by LL6) will provide 151 additional dwellings, with benefits compounded by requirements for accessible and adaptable housing. These benefits could be strengthened further through the inclusion of affordable housing provision.
- 6.4.19. The quality of housing will also be supported by LL14, which sets out several provisions to promote energy-efficient and low-carbon development. This will help to address issues such as fuel poverty, which is particularly important in the current economic climate given the rising cost of living.
- 6.4.20. Policies that support the retention and enhancement of the historic environment (particularly LL7) will also contribute to community wellbeing by preserving local heritage assets that form part of the town's cultural identity.
- 6.4.21.

- 6.4.22. Overall, the LLNP is expected to result in **major (significant) long-term beneficial effects** on community wellbeing, particularly in relation to access to local facilities, active travel, and the protection of valued public spaces.

Historic Environment

- 6.4.23. Policies that promote heritage-led regeneration and the reuse of existing buildings (including LL1 to LL5, and LL12) are expected to result in beneficial effects for Leighton-Linslade's historic environment. These policies encourage development that enhances the neighbourhood area's historic character, supports the refurbishment of older buildings and integrates heritage features into the design of new proposals. This approach will help maintain the distinctive character of the town while accommodating change in a sensitive manner.
- 6.4.24. Indirect beneficial effects on Leighton-Linslade's historic environment may also arise from policies that promote active travel and public realm improvements (such as LL4 and LL11) through both the improvement of access to historic assets and the reduction of traffic in sensitive areas, which can enhance their setting. Similarly, policies that support the safeguarding and expansion of green and blue infrastructure networks (such as LL9 and LL9) will contribute to the setting and tranquillity of heritage assets, reinforcing their historic character.
- 6.4.25. There is potential for adverse effects from the allocation policy LL5 and from development associated with LL4, given their location within or adjacent to a conservation area and the presence of listed buildings. While protection will be afforded by higher-level planning policies, LL5 could be strengthened by explicitly acknowledging the sensitive heritage context of the allocation and requiring heritage-led design principles. In the case of LL4, the policy already indicates that development will only be supported where it preserves and celebrates local heritage, which provides an important safeguard.
- 6.4.26. Overall, the LLNP is expected to result in **major (significant) long-term beneficial effects** on the historic environment, particularly through the reuse of buildings, heritage-led design and the protection of designated and non-designated assets. **Site-specific adverse effects (significance uncertain)** may occur where development proposals are not sufficiently sensitive to historic context, but these can be mitigated through appropriate design, assessment and adherence to policy requirements.

Landscape

- 6.4.27. The designation of Local Green Spaces (LL9) and the potential retention of playing fields (LL13) is expected to contribute to the protection of landscape character by preventing development on existing open areas, many of which are valued for their visual, recreational or cultural significance. These spaces will also help maintain green breaks within the townscape and support the transition between built-up areas and the surrounding countryside.
- 6.4.28. The safeguarding and enhancement of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Network through LL8 is also likely to deliver improvements to landscape quality by promoting the integration of natural features into development and supporting the restoration of river and canal corridors. This is reinforced by LL1, which identifies a key principle for town centre renewal as creating a greener town centre, linking the core area to the canal, river, parks and countryside. These measures will help strengthen the visual character of the town and improve its relationship with the wider landscape.
- 6.4.29. Development policies (LL1 to LL4) and the allocation policy (LL5) favour development within the settlement boundary, which will avoid adverse effects on the open countryside and reduce the risk of urban sprawl. The historic landscape is also an important consideration for the LLNP, given the area's rich heritage. In this respect, LL7 (supported by policies LL1 to LL5) ensures that development is only supported where it preserves or enhances the historic environment, which in turn will have beneficial effects on the character of the historic landscape.
- 6.4.30. Policies that support active travel and public realm improvements, such as the creation of a new multi-modal hub (LL4) and new bus shelters (LL11), may lead to positive effects on townscape quality by encouraging the redesign of streets and movement corridors. These changes have the potential to improve the visual quality of Leighton-Linslade's townscape, although the extent of benefits will depend on the design approach and materials used.
- 6.4.31. While the LLNP includes several provisions that support landscape and townscape quality, the scale of benefits will depend on the sensitivity of design, the protection of key views and the integration of development with existing character. There remains potential for adverse effects where proposals are not well aligned with local context or where cumulative change alters the perception of place.

- 6.4.32. Overall, the LLNP is anticipated to result in **major (significant) long-term beneficial effects** on landscape and townscape character, particularly through heritage-led design, the protection of open spaces and the enhancement of public realm. Adverse effects may occur where development is not well integrated with its surroundings, but these can be mitigated through appropriate design and layout.

Land, Soil, and Water Resources

- 6.4.33. Policies that promote the reuse of previously developed land (including LL1, LL3, LL5, and LL12) are expected to avoid adverse effects on undeveloped sites, which will help limit soil sealing and land take. Where existing buildings are repurposed rather than demolished, there may also be indirect benefits in terms of reduced construction waste and lower use for raw materials. The re-purposing of educational facilities under LL14 will provide similar benefits by reducing the need for new land take and supporting more efficient use of existing assets.
- 6.4.34. Water resource protection is addressed directly in LL3 and LL8, which include provisions for managing flood risk and enhancing the ecological function of river and canal corridors. LL3 requires that flood-prone land in the Bridge Meadow / Canal Quarter be retained as green infrastructure and that development incorporates appropriate mitigation measures to prevent pollution and surface water runoff. LL8 supports the creation of wetland habitats and the re-naturalisation of river channels, which may contribute to improved water quality and groundwater recharge. Both policies are anticipated to result in beneficial effects on water quality and availability, while also supporting wider ecosystem services. In addition, LL14 indirectly supports water efficiency through its emphasis on sustainable design and whole life-cycle assessments, which can encourage measures to reduce water consumption in new developments.
- 6.4.35. The designation of Local Green Spaces under LL9 may also help protect soil and water resources by maintaining the regulatory functions these spaces provide, including drainage management and natural infiltration. These benefits will be particularly important in mitigating the effects of increased urbanisation and climate change.
- 6.4.36. Adverse effects may arise from development associated with certain policies (such as LL5), which may introduce impermeable surfaces and increase the potential for diffuse pollution during construction. However, these effects are anticipated to be minor and can be mitigated through standard good practice construction techniques and the use of SuDS, where appropriate.

- 6.4.37. Overall, the LLNP is expected to result in **moderate (not significant) medium to long-term beneficial effects** in relation to land, soil and water resources through supporting brownfield development and enhancing the neighbourhood area's green and blue infrastructure network. **Minor short-term adverse effects** may arise during construction, including runoff and potential pollution, but these can be mitigated through appropriate site management and adherence to policy requirements.

Transportation

- 6.4.38. Policies that support a shift away from private car use (particularly LL11) are expected to result in long-term beneficial effects with regard to transportation. These policies promote walking, cycling and wheeling, alongside improvements to public transport infrastructure and services, supporting modal shift. These interventions are likely to reduce congestion, lower transport-related emissions and improve access throughout the neighbourhood area. Safety of the transport network will also be improved through LL11, which seeks to deliver public realm enhancements and safer routes for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 6.4.39. The integration of active travel routes with green infrastructure (LL8) may also contribute to improved connectivity and encourage modal shift. In particular, the alignment of walking and cycling routes with the Green Wheel and canal-side corridors will make active travel options more attractive. LL4 further supports this objective by promoting a new multi-modal hub at Leighton Buzzard railway station, including bus interchange facilities, cycle storage and e-bike hire, which will enhance connectivity between sustainable transport modes and reduce reliance on private vehicles.
- 6.4.40. Modal shift is also supported by policies that guide development in the town centre, canal-side areas and Linslade Cluster (LL2 to LL4), which include provisions for pedestrianisation and permeability. These measures will improve safety and accessibility for non-motorised users and create a more attractive environment for walking and cycling.
- 6.4.41. Indirect beneficial effects will arise from LL8 and LL9, which seek to safeguard and redevelop local community assets and designated Local Green Spaces, reducing the need to travel for existing users by maintaining access to essential services and recreational opportunities within the neighbourhood area.

- 6.4.42. While development under LL5 has the potential to lead to some adverse effects on the local transport network (such as congestion on roads or increased demand on public transport), these effects are likely to be minor as the allocation is within walking distance of key amenities, which will reduce the need for car travel. Additionally, the site benefits from being in proximity of bus stops, public rights of way, and a National Cycle Route.
- 6.4.43. Construction activities may also result in localised temporary minor adverse effects due to congestion and disruption, but these will be short-term and can be managed through appropriate site management measures.
- 6.4.44. Overall, the LLNP is expected to result in **moderate (not significant) long-term beneficial effects** in relation to transportation, particularly through the promotion of active travel, integration with public transport and improvements to the public realm. **Minor short-term localised adverse effects** may occur during construction, but these can be mitigated through traffic management measures.

6.5. Cumulative and In-Combination Effects

Cumulative Effects

- 6.5.1. The LLNP seeks to complement the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015 - 2035. Consideration has also been given to the emerging Central Bedfordshire Local Plan (to cover the period to 2042), although plan-making is at a very early stage.
- 6.5.2. The LLNP has also considered the policies within the Central Bedfordshire Transport Strategy LTP3 (2011–2026), while also monitoring emerging policies in the forthcoming Central Bedfordshire Transport Strategy (expected to be adopted in Summer 2026).
- 6.5.3. In addition, the LLNP aligns with other relevant strategies and programmes, including the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC Mitigation Strategy, the emerging Bedfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Central Bedfordshire Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy. These plans share objectives for biodiversity enhancement, sustainable transport and climate resilience, which are consistent with the LLNP's policies.
- 6.5.4. Overall, **no significant adverse cumulative effects** have been identified with other plans or projects.

In-Combination Effects

- 6.5.5. The LLNP's policies are expected to deliver multiple co-benefits across themes. For example, LL8 (Green and Blue Infrastructure) will enhance biodiversity while also supporting climate change adaptation and improving landscape quality. Similarly, LL11 (Active Travel) will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality and encourage healthier lifestyles, contributing to both climate and health objectives. LL14 (Energy Efficiency) will reduce carbon emissions and help address fuel poverty, supporting both climate and community wellbeing.
- 6.5.6. Overall, **no significant negative in-combination effects** have been identified.

6.6. Recommendations for Implementation of the LLNP

- 6.6.1. A number of recommendations can be made at this stage in relation to each of the SEA topics. **Table 6-2** highlights a number of recommendations which should be considered during the development and implementation of schemes and proposals proposed for delivery through the LTS.

Table 6-2: Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendation	Relevant SEA Topic	Relevant Policy
Strengthen the allocation policy to include explicit flood mitigation measures (e.g., SuDS)	Climate Change (Including Flood Risk); Land, Soil, and Water Resources	LL5
Add requirement for water efficiency measures in new development, given that Leighton-Linslade is in an area of 'serious' water stress according to the EA	Climate Change (Including Flood Risk); Land, Soil, and Water Resources	LL1-LL4
Include reference to heritage-led design principles for the allocation policy	Historic Environment; Landscape	LL5
Include support for EV charging infrastructure in new developments	Transportation; Climate Change (Including Flood Risk)	New policy or amend LL11
Designate key views	Landscape	New policy

Policy Recommendation	Relevant SEA Topic	Relevant Policy
Support community-led initiatives that promote wellbeing, such as local events, volunteering, and shared spaces for learning or creativity	Community Wellbeing	New policy
Support circular economy principles for new developments	Land, Soil, and Water Resources; Climate Change (Including Flood Risk)	New policy
Support use of shared transport schemes	Transportation; Community Wellbeing	New policy

6.7. Monitoring

- 6.7.1. The SEA regulations require ‘measures envisaged concerning monitoring’ to be outlined in this report. This refers to the monitoring of likely significant effects of the neighbourhood plan to identify any unforeseen effects early and take remedial action as appropriate.
- 6.7.2. Monitoring can also help to evaluate whether a plan or strategy is fulfilling its core objective of delivering sustainable development and providing for a high level of environmental protection. The gathered information provides a basis to inform the review and preparation of subsequent iterations of plans, strategies and projects that sit within them, thus better informing future decisions.
- 6.7.3. It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the LLNP will be undertaken by Central Bedfordshire Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). No significant adverse effects are considered likely in the implementation of the LLNP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Central Bedfordshire Council.

7. Next Steps

7.1. Plan Finalisation

- 7.1.1. Following Regulation 14 consultation, responses will be considered in finalising the LLNP and SEA for submission. Once submitted, the LLNP and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At Independent Examination, the LLNP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for neighbourhood plans and is in general conformity with the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.
- 7.1.2. If the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the LLNP will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Central Bedfordshire Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the LLNP, then it will be 'made'. Once 'made', the LLNP will become part of the local planning policy framework for Central Bedfordshire, covering the defined neighbourhood area.

Appendix A : Scoping Report

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Leighton- Linslade Neighbourhood Plan

Scoping Report

Leighton-Linslade Town Council

September 2025



Quality information

Prepared by	Checked by	Verified by	Approved by
A.V. Environmental Consultant	M.F. Associate Environmental Consultant	N.C.B. Technical Director	N.C.B. Technical Director

Revision History

Revision	Revision date	Details	Name	Position
V1.0	30.04.25	Initial version for Neighbourhood Group comment	M.F.	Associate Environmental Consultant
V2.0	18.09.25	Final version	M.F.	Associate Environmental Consultant

Prepared for:

Leighton-Linslade Town Council

Prepared by:

AECOM Limited
Aldgate Tower
2 Leman Street
London E1 8FA
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0)20 7061 7000
aecom.com

© 2025 AECOM Limited. All Rights Reserved.

This document has been prepared by AECOM Limited ("AECOM") in accordance with its contract with Locality (the "Client") and in accordance with generally accepted consultancy principles, the budget for fees and the terms of reference agreed between AECOM and the Client. Any information provided by third parties and referred to herein has not been checked or verified by AECOM, unless otherwise expressly stated in the document. AECOM shall have no liability to any third party that makes use of or relies upon this document.

Front cover: All Saints Church, Leighton Buzzard

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction.....	2
2.	Air Quality	8
3.	Biodiversity	12
4.	Climate Change (Including Flood Risk).....	24
5.	Community Wellbeing	35
6.	Historic Environment.....	44
7.	Landscape	53
8.	Land, Soil and Water Resources	62
9.	Transportation.....	71
10.	Next Steps	79
	Appendix A Proposed SEA Framework	80

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

- 1.1.1. AECOM has been commissioned to undertake an independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Plan (LLNP).
- 1.1.2. The LLNP is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011¹ and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012,² and in the context of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.
- 1.1.3. The Leighton-Linslade neighbourhood area was designated in June 2024 and is depicted in **Figure 1-1**.

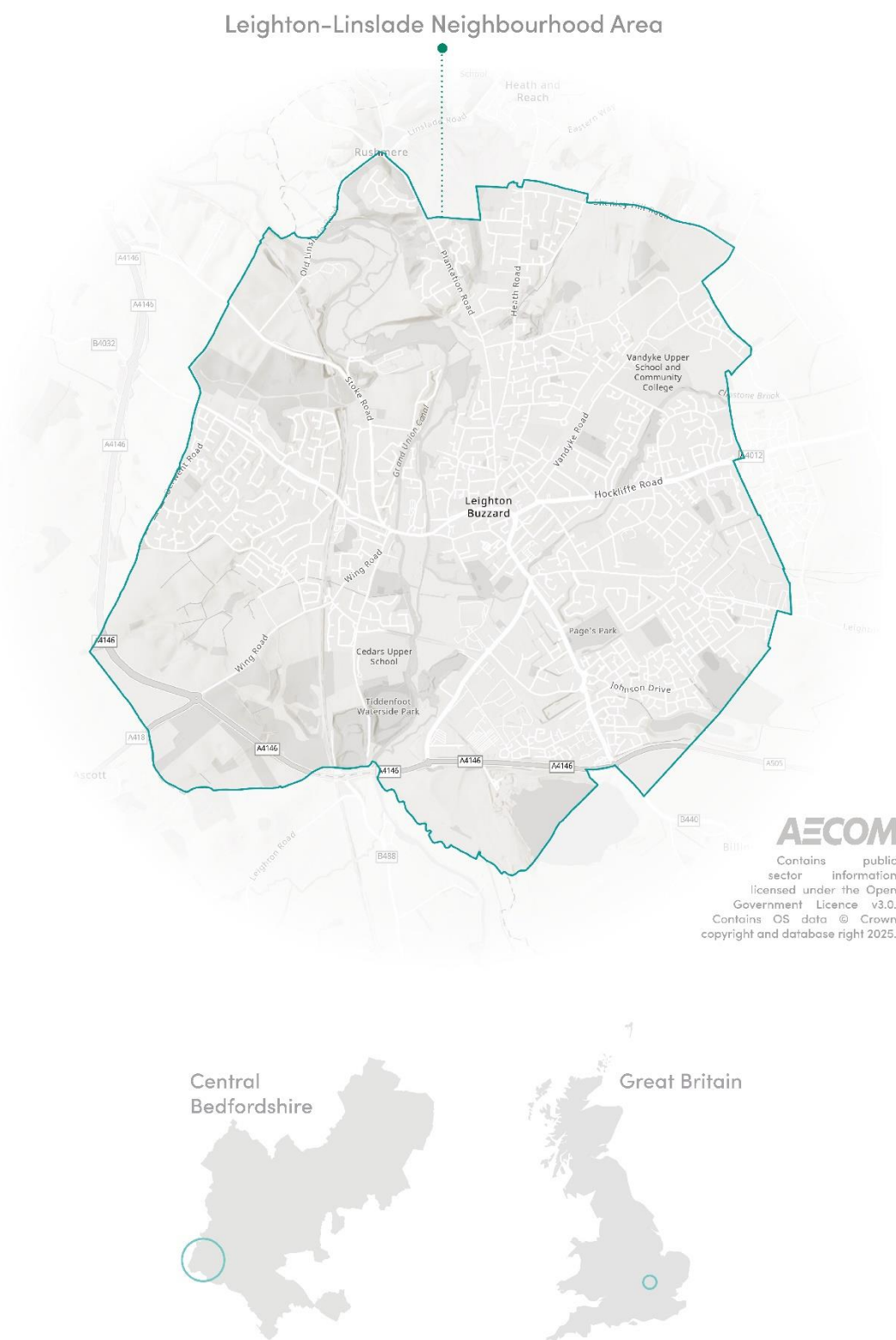
Table 1-1: Key Information Relating to the Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Plan

Name of Responsible Authority	Central Bedfordshire Council
Title of Plan	Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Plan
Subject	Neighbourhood planning
Purpose	The Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared as a neighbourhood plan under the Localism Act 2011 and Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, and in the context of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan (2021). The Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Plan will be used to guide and shape development within the neighbourhood area.
Timescale	The plan period is expected to cover a period of at least 15 years (from adoption).
Area covered by the plan	The neighbourhood area covers the civil parish of Leighton-Linslade, located in Central Bedfordshire district (Bedfordshire county).
Summary of content	The Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Plan will set out a vision, strategy, and range of policies for the neighbourhood area.

¹ UK Government (2011) '*Localism Act 2011*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

² UK Government (2012) '*The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Figure 1-1: Leighton-Linslade Neighbourhood Area



1.2. Planning Policy Context

- 1.2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides an overarching framework for development in England. It sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It is supported by planning practice guidance, which is a suite of policy papers covering a broad range of topics, including SEA.
- 1.2.2. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has now been published following the consultation period that ended in September 2024. The new framework includes significant reforms aimed at boosting housing supply and supporting sustainable growth. One of the key changes is the reintroduction of mandatory housing targets, which now require an increased number of dwellings in Central Bedfordshire. These updates may influence Leighton-Linslade Town Council's decision to allocate sites.
- 1.2.3. The relevant Local Plan for the neighbourhood area is the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan (2015-2035).³ The Plan allocates 368 dwellings across three strategic sites in Leighton-Linslade, and includes employment land allocations at five sites within the neighbourhood area.
- 1.2.4. Neighbourhood plans will form part of the development plan for Central Bedfordshire, alongside, but not as a replacement for, the Local Plan. Neighbourhood plans are required to be in general conformity with the Local Plan and can develop policies and proposals to address local place-based issues. In this way it is intended for the Local Plan to provide a clear overall strategic direction for development in Central Bedfordshire, whilst enabling finer detail to be determined through the neighbourhood planning process where appropriate.

1.3. SEA Explained

- 1.3.1. SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the potential impacts of an emerging plan, and potential alternatives in terms of key environmental issues. The aim of the SEA is to inform and influence the plan-making process with a view to avoiding and mitigating potential negative impacts and maximising the potential for positive effects. Through this approach, the SEA for the LLNP seeks to maximise the emerging plan's contribution to sustainable development.
- 1.3.2. SEA is undertaken to meet the specific requirements prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations).

³ Central Bedfordshire Council (2021). 'Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015-2035' can be accessed through [this link](#).

SEA Screening

- 1.3.3. A Neighbourhood Plan requires SEA where it is likely to have significant environmental effects. In this respect, neighbourhood plans are more likely to be screened in as requiring an SEA if both the following apply:
- the neighbourhood plan is being prepared within a neighbourhood area with significant environmental constraints, such as, for example, sites of international or national importance for biodiversity conservation, or large concentrations of heritage assets; and
 - the neighbourhood plan is likely to allocate sites for development.⁴
- 1.3.4. The LLNP was screened by Central Bedfordshire Council in 2024. The screening process is based upon consideration of standard criteria to determine whether the LLNP is likely to have “significant environmental effects”, and subsequently whether there is a need for SEA. The screening concluded that an SEA (and Habitats Regulation Assessment [HRA]) is required because of its proximity to Chilterns Beechwoods SAC.

SEA Scoping Explained

- 1.3.5. This Scoping Report seeks to establish a suggested scope for the SEA. A key procedural requirement of the SEA Regulations is to present this scope for the SEA, so that the designated authorities (Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency) can provide timely comment.
- 1.3.6. Developing the draft scope for the SEA as presented in this report has involved the following steps:
- Exploring the policy context for the LLNP and SEA to summarise the key messages arising;
 - Establishing the baseline for the SEA (i.e., the current and future situation in the area in the absence of the LLNP) to help identify the plan’s likely significant effects;
 - Identifying particular problems or opportunities (‘issues’) that should be a particular focus of the SEA; and
 - Considering this information, developing an SEA framework comprising SEA Objectives and assessment questions, which can then be used as a guiding framework for the subsequent assessment.

⁴ DLUHC (February 2022): Chief Planner’s Newsletter, February 2022. ‘*Strategic Environmental Assessment for Neighbourhood Plans: Timely and effective screening*’ is available through [this link](#).

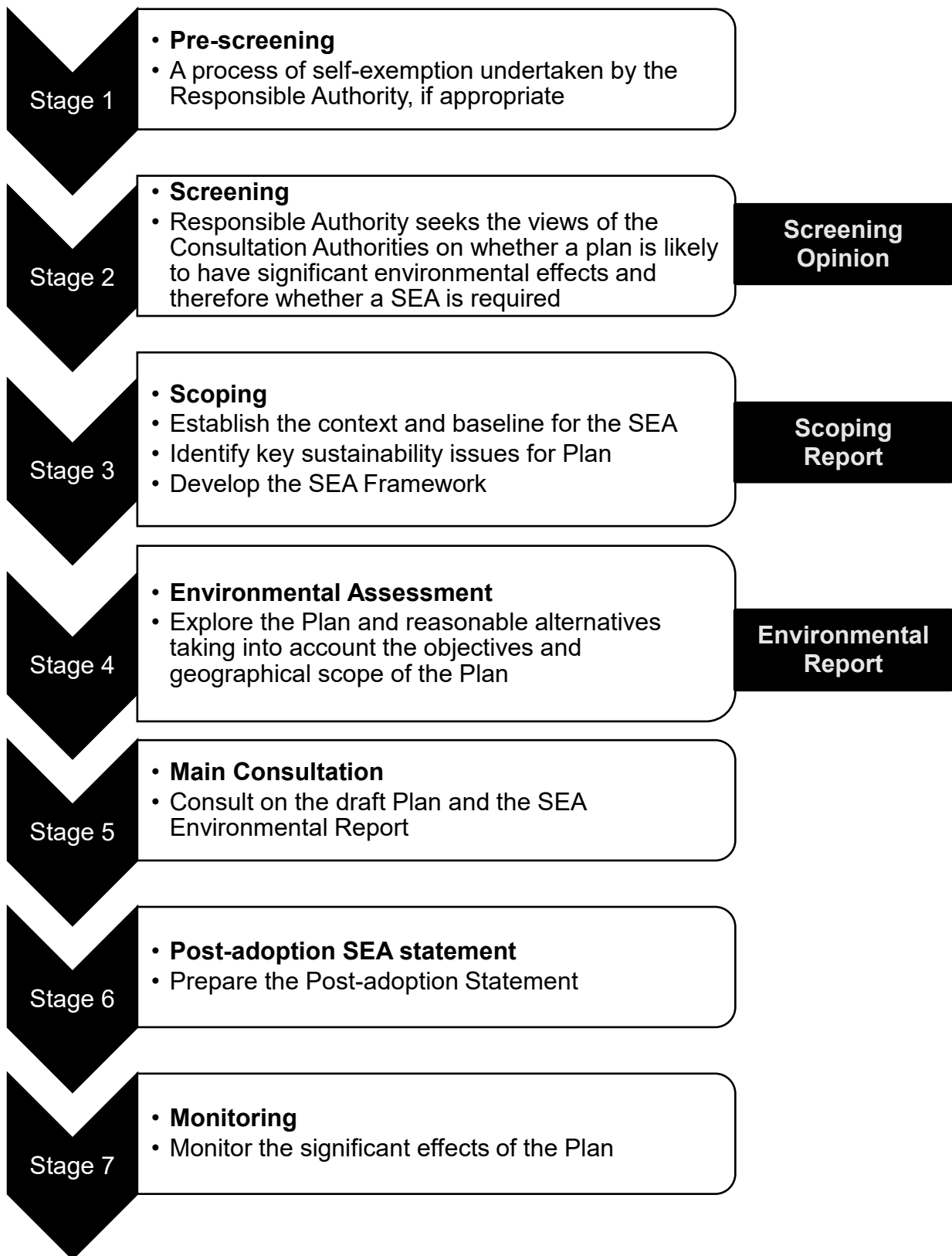
1.3.7. The scope is explored and presented under a series of key environmental themes as follows:

- Air quality
- Biodiversity
- Climate Change (Including Flood Risk)
- Community Wellbeing
- Historic Environment
- Landscape
- Land, Soil and Water Resources
- Transportation

1.3.8. The selected IIA themes incorporate the 'SEA topics' suggested by Schedule 2(6) of the SEA Regulations.⁵ These were refined to reflect a broad understanding of the anticipated scope of plan effects. The discussion of the scoping information for each theme is presented in **Chapters 2 to 9**, and the proposed SEA framework is brought together as a whole at **Appendix A**. Each proposal within the LLNP will be assessed consistently using this Framework.

⁵ UK Government (2004). '*The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

1.4. Steps in the SEA



2. Air Quality

2.1. Focus of Theme

- 2.1.1. This theme focuses on air pollution, in particular: sources of air pollution, air quality hotspots, and areas known to exceed objectives for air quality.

2.2. Policy Context

- 2.2.1. **Table 2-1** presents the most relevant documents identified in the policy review for the purposes of the SEA.

Table 2-1: Plans, Policies and Strategies Reviewed in Relation to Air Quality

Document Title	Year of Publication
National	
<u>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (and guidance)</u>	2024
<u>The Environmental Targets (Fine Particular Matter) (England) Regulations 2023</u>	2023
<u>Environment Act</u>	2021
<u>The Clean Air Strategy</u>	2019
<u>A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment</u>	2018
<u>UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations</u>	2017
Local	
<u>Central Bedfordshire Local Plan</u>	2021
<u>Central Bedfordshire Council Air Quality Action Plan</u>	2019

- 2.2.2. The key messages emerging from the review are summarised below:

- The LLNP will be required to be in general conformity with the NPPF, which predominantly seeks early planning to reduce/ mitigate air quality impacts in development and to take advantage of opportunities to improve air quality. Measures to improve air quality include traffic and travel management and green infrastructure provision. Strategic development is expected to be focused on locations that have or will be provided with high levels of accessibility; supporting both a reduced need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. Smaller-scale development should consider the potential for cumulative effects in relation to air quality;

- The LLNP will also be required to be in general conformity with the Environment Act 2021, which introduces the need for the Secretary of State to set an annual mean particulate matter (PM2.5) level target. This links to the Environmental Targets (Fine Particulate Matter) (England) Regulations 2023, which sets out to ensure annual PM2.5 concentrations are equal to or less than 10 micrograms per cubic metre by the 31 December 2040;
- The Clean Air Strategy outlines how the government will tackle all sources of air pollution. The strategy proposes goals to cut public exposure to particulate matter pollution and outlines required action to meet these goals. Furthermore, it seeks to recognise wider sources that cause poor air quality, such as diffuse sources and smaller contributors. The proposed measures include new legislation and local powers to act in areas with air pollution issues. The Air Quality Action Plan for Central Bedfordshire (2019) seeks to reflect this strategy on a more localised scale;
- The 25 Year Environment Plan establishes how the government will expand net gain approaches to include air quality improvements, such as planting more trees in urban areas and changing fuel supplies. In particular, 'Goal 1 Clean air' and the policies contained within 'Chapter 4: Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste' directly relate to the air quality SEA theme;
- The UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide is an air quality plan focused on bringing nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) within statutory limits in the quickest time possible. The plan identifies that improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions is also important and wants to position the UK at the forefront of vehicle innovation by making motoring cleaner;
- Local authorities are required to monitor air quality across the district, report regularly to Defra and act where nationally set levels and limits of pollutants are likely to be exceeded under Section 82 of the Environment Act (1995). Monitoring is undertaken to assess levels of nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, ozone, benzene, and particulates. Where exceedances exist, areas are declared as air quality management areas (AQMAs) and local authorities are required to produce an air quality action plan (AQAP) to improve air quality in the area. Under Schedule 11 in the Environment Act (2021), a local authority must identify any parts of its area in which it appears air quality standards or objectives are not likely to be achieved within the relevant period. Additionally, local authorities must also identify relevant sources of emissions that are considered partly or wholly responsible for failing to achieve air quality standards or objectives in the area. As such, the Central Bedfordshire 2024 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR) is the last available report for the neighbourhood area; fulfilling the requirements of the local air quality management (LAQM) as set out in Section 82 of the Environment Act (1995);

- The LLNP will also need to conform with the relevant policies in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.

2.3. Baseline Summary

Current Baseline

- 2.3.1. Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) are declared in areas which exceed national objectives for levels of particulates, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, ozone, benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, butadiene, carbon monoxide, lead and/ or nitrogen oxides.
- 2.3.2. There are no AQMA declared within Leighton-Linslade and the neighbourhood area. The nearest AQMA to the neighbourhood area is in Dunstable, approximately 8 km south-east of Leighton-Linslade.
- 2.3.3. There is one air quality monitoring site in the neighbourhood area, located on Hockliffe Street (ID: SB52), which monitors Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) levels. According to the Central Bedfordshire's 2024 Air Quality Annual Status Report, there were no exceedances of Air Quality Objectives (AQOs) for NO₂ in 2023, and levels have steadily declined in recent years.
- 2.3.4. In terms of local sources of air quality pollution, Leighton-Linslade's road network consists of a mix of residential streets, town roads, and larger connecting routes. Notable roads passing through the area include the A4012 and A4146, which serve as key routes for local and through traffic. Additionally, several B roads and smaller residential streets contribute to the town's overall traffic flow and potential air quality impacts. Congestion is an issue during certain times of the day on roads across the neighbourhood area, including major roads such as the A4012.
- 2.3.5. The neighbourhood area also has a train line passing through it, which represent an additional source of local air quality pollution.

Future Baseline

- 2.3.6. The growth associated with future housing provision within the neighbourhood area has the potential for adverse effects on air quality in the short to medium term, due to increased levels of traffic and associated pollutants. However, given the existing air quality baseline is relatively good, this is perhaps less likely to lead to exceedances of local air quality objectives. Furthermore, in line with higher level planning policy, future development should contribute towards improving air quality, supporting opportunities to improve accessibility, particularly in terms of the use of sustainable modes of transport, including active travel modes, working from home and electric vehicle use.

- 2.3.7. The growth associated with future housing provision within the neighbourhood area has the potential for adverse effects on air quality, due to increased levels of vehicles on the road network, which could lead to congestion and an increase in associated pollutants. However, this is unlikely to lead to any significant increase in emissions, both locally or within the wider area.
- 2.3.8. It is also recognised that in line with higher level planning policy, future development should contribute towards improving air quality. Notably this includes supporting opportunities to improve accessibility, particularly in terms of the use of sustainable modes of transport, including active travel modes, working from home and electric vehicle use.

2.4. Key Issues

- 2.4.1. Considering the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues (constraints and / or opportunities) are identified in relation to the Air Quality SEA theme:
- Local congestion is seen in many parts of the neighbourhood area, including major roads such as the A4012. The effects of the LLNP in relation to traffic and congestion, especially on these roads, will be explored under the 'Transportation' SEA theme (**Chapter 9**); and
 - While air quality is not a significant constraint in the neighbourhood area, an increase in vehicle numbers within the neighbourhood area as a result of new development has the potential to negatively affect the health of residents;
 - The LLNP presents opportunities to enhance accessibility and support more local and sustainable journeys / connections around the neighbourhood area. These opportunities will also be explored under the 'Transportation' theme (**Chapter 9**).
- 2.4.2. Considering the above, within the neighbourhood area there is an absence of any significant air quality issues (i.e., AQMAs) and there are no exceeded or expected exceedances of national air quality objectives. Therefore, **the Air Quality theme has been scoped out for the purposes of the SEA process.**

3. Biodiversity

3.1. Focus of Theme

- 3.1.1. This theme focuses on nature conservation designations, habitats, and species within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.

3.2. Policy Context

- 3.2.1. **Table 3-1** presents the most relevant documents identified in the policy review for the purposes of the SEA.

Table 3-1: Plans, Policies and Strategies Reviewed in Relation to Biodiversity

Document Title	Year of Publication
National	
<u>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (and guidance)</u>	2024
<u>Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework</u>	2023
<u>Environment Act 2021</u>	2021
<u>A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment</u>	2018
<u>UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework</u>	2012
<u>The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature (Natural Environment White Paper)</u>	2011
<u>Biodiversity 2020 Strategy</u>	2011
<u>The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act</u>	2006
<u>UK Biodiversity Action Plan</u>	1994
Local	
<u>Central Bedfordshire Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy</u>	2022
<u>Central Bedfordshire Local Plan</u>	2021
<u>A Nature Conservation Strategy for Central Bedfordshire</u>	2015
<u>Local Nature Recovery Strategy</u>	emerging

3.2.2. The key messages emerging from the review are summarised below:

- The LLNP will need to consider the principles set out in the NPPF, which indicate that planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance sites of value for biodiversity. Plans should also identify, map, and safeguard components of wider ecological networks, promote positive action for priority habitats and species, and pursue opportunities to secure biodiversity net gains. The NPPF also states that if development causes substantial harm and cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or compensated, then planning permission should be refused;
- The Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework provides a structure to analyse where greenspace in urban environments is needed most. It aims to support equitable access to greenspace across the country, with an overarching target for everyone being able to reach good quality greenspace in their local area. The framework's ultimate goal aims to help increase the amount of green cover in England to 40% in urban residential areas;
- The Environment Act makes provision for biodiversity gain to be a condition of planning permission in England, in addition to creating biodiversity gain site registers and biodiversity credits. It recognises there is a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity and encourages the identification of suitable areas through biodiversity reports and local nature recovery strategies. Furthermore, habitat maps are expected to include recovery and enhancement areas which are currently, or could become, important for biodiversity;
- The NPPF also supports the establishment and enhancement of habitat networks and green infrastructure to allow for more resilience to current and future pressures for biodiversity;
- Over the past decade, policy (for example, The Natural Environment White Paper and Biodiversity 2020) has demonstrated a move away from the traditional approach of protecting biodiversity, to a wider landscape approach to enhancing biodiversity, as part of the overall aims to halt biodiversity loss. The 25 Year Environment Plan places emphasis on improvements to the natural environment; identifying the need to *“replenish depleted soil, plant trees, support wetlands and peatlands, rid seas and rivers of rubbish, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, cleanse the air of pollutants, develop cleaner, sustainable energy and protect threatened species and habitats”*. Working at a landscape scale transformation is expected to connect habitats into larger corridors for wildlife;
- The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is a response to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which calls for the development and enforcement of national strategies and associated action plans to identify, conserve and protect existing biological diversity, and to enhance it wherever possible. In particular, the BAP identifies priority species and habitats that are most threatened and require conservation action. The UK BAP is succeeded

by the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework, which aims to ensure that biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored, and wisely used, and ecosystem services are maintained. This helps to sustain a healthy planet that delivers essential benefits for everyone;

- The Central Bedfordshire Green and Blue Infrastructure presents both the strengths and weaknesses of Central Bedfordshire's green/blue infrastructure network and identifies priorities for enhancement. It also presents an over-arching Vision for the network, which provides the framework for a mutually supportive set of projects;
- Central Bedfordshire's Nature Conservation Strategy identifies the overall aims, objectives and priorities for the conservation of biodiversity in Central Bedfordshire in a single document;
- The emerging Bedfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies aims to identify local actions and locations where nature recovery can be delivered across the county of Bedfordshire. The Strategy is expected to be published in 2025; and
- The LLNP will also need to conform with the relevant policies in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.

3.3. Baseline Summary

Current Baseline

Internationally and Nationally Important Sites

- 3.3.1. There are no internationally designated biodiversity sites within or adjacent to the neighbourhood area. The only internationally designated biodiversity site within 10 km of Leighton-Linslade is Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), approximately 9.2 km south.
- 3.3.2. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are nationally important sites for wildlife and / or geological conservation.
- 3.3.3. National Nature Reserves (NNRs) were established to protect some of our most important habitats, species and geology, and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research.
- 3.3.4. While there are no SSSIs or NNRs within Leighton-Linslade, there are 11 of these designations within 5 km of the neighbourhood area boundary. These are:
 - Nine Acres Pit SSSI, approximately 0.3 km north;
 - King's Wood And Rushmere NNR, approximately 0.3 km north;
 - Nares Gladley Marsh SSSI, approximately 0.4 km north;
 - Kings and Bakers Woods and Heaths SSSI, approximately 0.6 km north;

- Double Arches Pit SSSI, approximately 1.8 km north;
- Poker's Pond Meadow SSSI, approximately 2.7 km west;
- Warren Farm, Stewkley SSSI, approximately 4.2 km west;
- Totternhoe Knolls SSSI, approximately 4.2 km south-east;
- Totternhoe Stone Pit SSSI, approximately 4.3 km south-east;
- Totternhoe Chalk Quarry SSSI, approximately 4.4 km south-east; and
- Tebworth Marsh SSSI, approximately 4.6 km north-east.

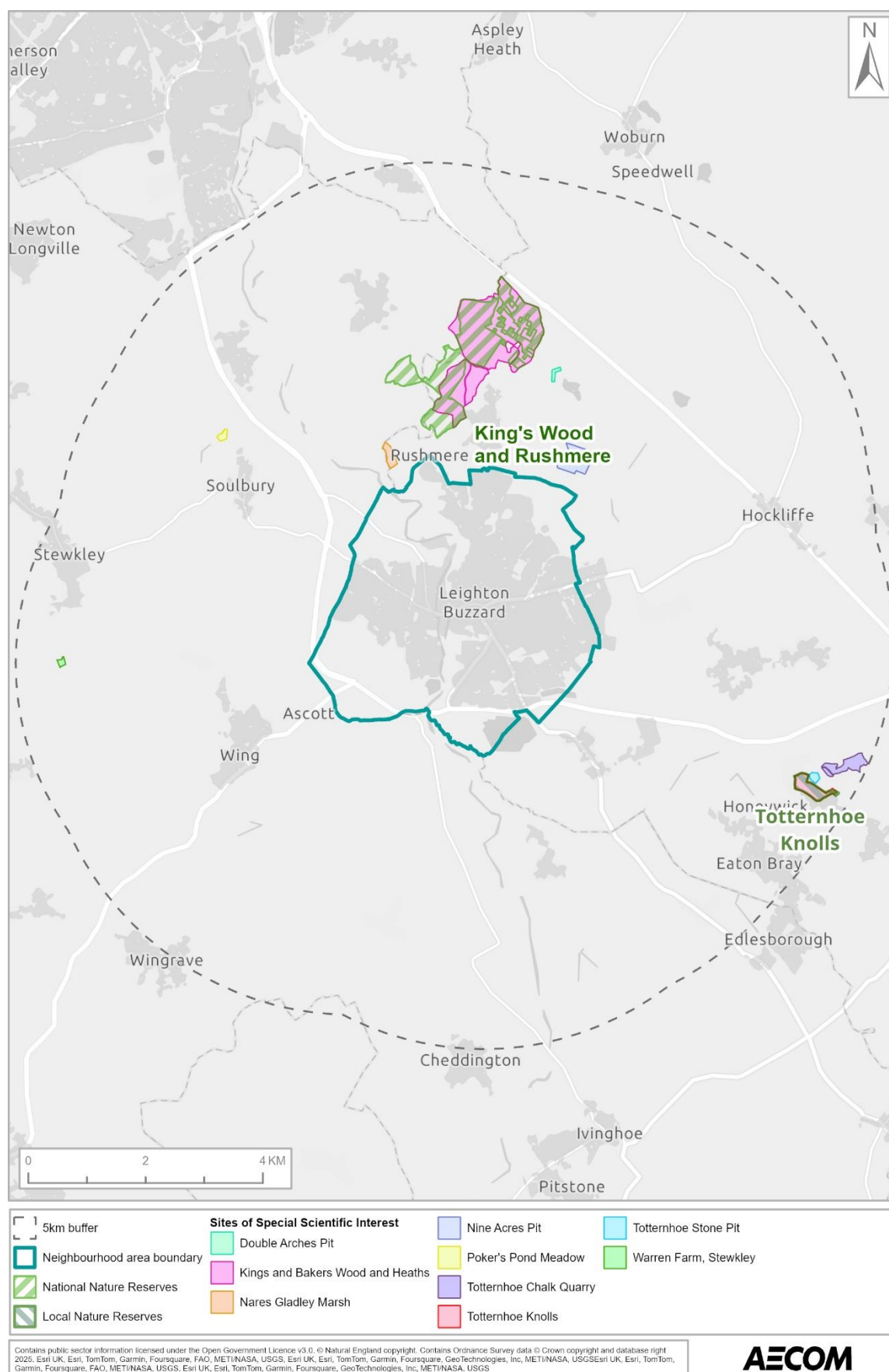
3.3.5. The international and national designations are presented in **Figure 3-1** and **Figure 3-2**.

3.3.6. SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZ) are a GIS tool/dataset that map zones around each SSSI according to their sensitivities. They specify the types of development that have the potential to have adverse impacts at a given location, and thresholds of development which indicate a need to consult Natural England. In this respect, the entirety of the neighbourhood area overlaps with IRZs for any residential developments with a total net gain in residential units; therefore, consultation with Natural England may be required for any applications that come forward in these locations.

Figure 3-1: International Designations for Biodiversity Conservation in Leighton-Linslade



Figure 3-2: National Designations for Biodiversity Conservation in Leighton-Linslade



Locally Important Sites

- 3.3.7. There are no Local Nature Reserves within 2 km of the neighbourhood area.
- 3.3.8. A County Wildlife Site (CWS) is a site in Bedfordshire or Luton that has been recognised as important for wildlife for characteristics such as its size, diversity, rarity, fragility, typicalness and recorded history.
- 3.3.9. Recognition as a CWS does not confer protection on the site, or right of access, however for any significant change of land use the planning authorities will expect the wildlife interest to be taken into account alongside other normal planning considerations. Local conservation organisations may comment on planning applications that could affect a CWS.
- 3.3.10. Detailed information on CWS locations is not available publicly online; however, the Bedfordshire and Luton Minerals and Waste Local Plan Map 2 suggests that there are several CWS in Leighton-Linslade, including east of Mentmore Road Memorial Park, at Southcott Ridge, and at Ouzel Meadows (north of the town centre).⁶

Priority Habitats and Species

- 3.3.11. The neighbourhood area is interspersed with a range of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats, particularly in the north-western and south-western extents of Leighton-Linslade, as shown in **Figure 3-3**.
- 3.3.12. The most common BAP Priority Habitat is deciduous woodland, which is present in various pockets scattered across the neighbourhood area. Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh is also a common habitat in Leighton-Linslade, with a large area of this habitat found in the north-west of the neighbourhood area, by the River Ouzel.
- 3.3.13. Less common BAP Priority Habitats present in the neighbourhood area include traditional orchard and good quality semi improved grassland.
- 3.3.14. The Beds and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre⁷ contains archives of protected and notable species within Bedfordshire and Luton, including those species protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981⁸ and under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The BAP Priority Habitats and ecological designations within and surrounding the neighbourhood area are likely to support populations of protected species.

⁶ Bedfordshire County Council (2005). '*Bedfordshire and Luton Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2005 – Map 2*', can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁷ The Beds and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre website can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁸ UK Government (1981) '*The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Ancient Woodland

3.3.15. Ancient woodland takes hundreds of years to establish. It is considered important for its wildlife (often including rare and threatened species), and soils. Ancient woodland includes land that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. This means the following is included under its designation:

- Ancient semi-natural woodland mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration; and
- Plantations on ancient woodland sites - replanted with conifer and broadleaved trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi.⁹

3.3.16. Within the neighbourhood area there is one sites of ancient and semi-natural woodland: Linslade Wood, located south of Stoke Road (see **Figure 3-3**).

National Habitat Network

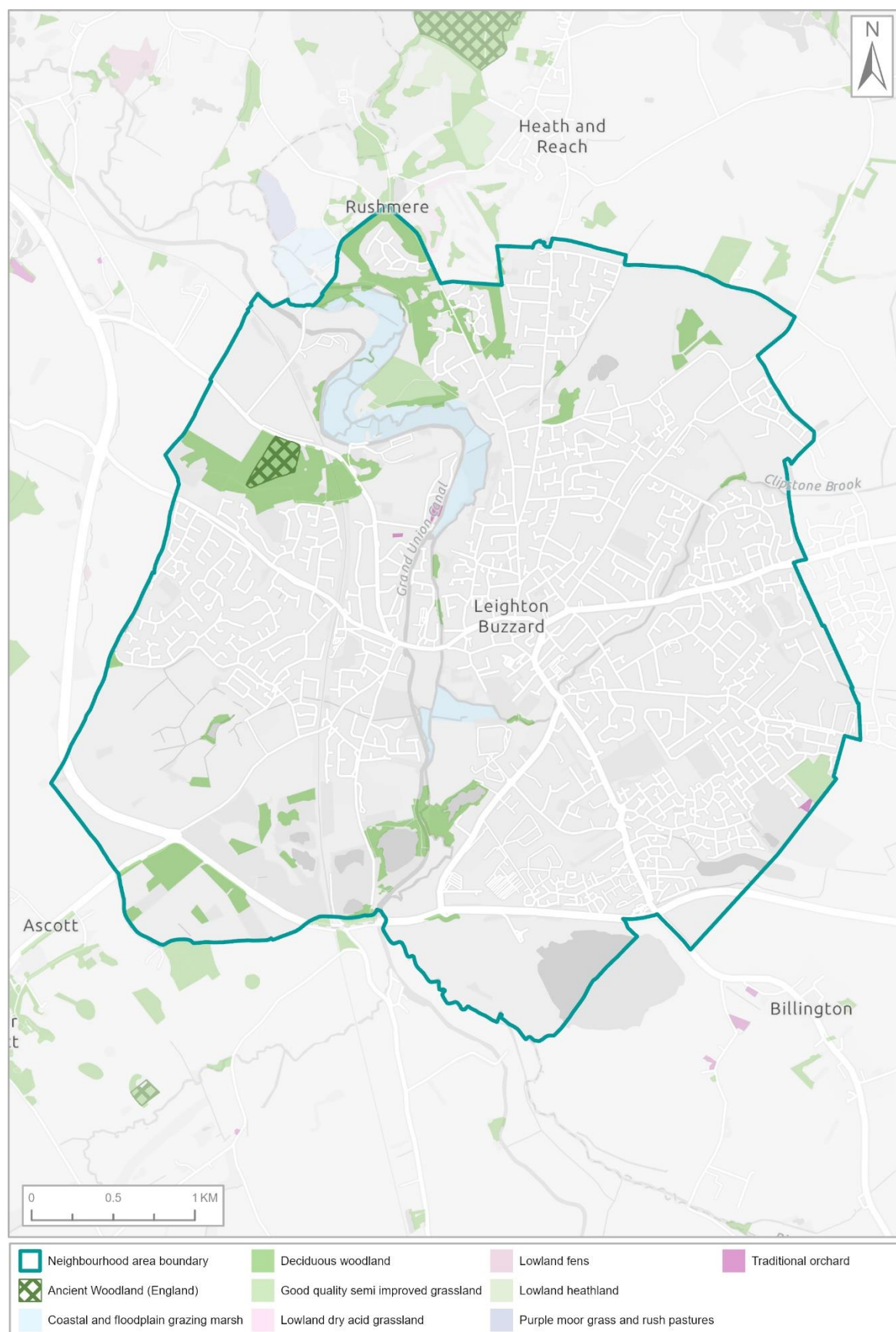
3.3.17. The National Habitat Network (NHN) is a set of maps that work to help identify areas for future habitat creation and restoration at a landscape scale.¹⁰

3.3.18. According to the NHN there are large areas of Network Enhancement Zone 1 (deemed most suitable for habitat re-creation supporting the primary habitat), Network Enhancement Zone 2 (most suitable for new habitats and green infrastructure), Network Expansion Zone (identified as a suitable location for connecting and linking up habitats across a landscape through new habitat creation), in the north-west and south-west of the neighbourhood area.

3.3.19. The NHN for Leighton Linslade is presented in **Figure 3-4**.

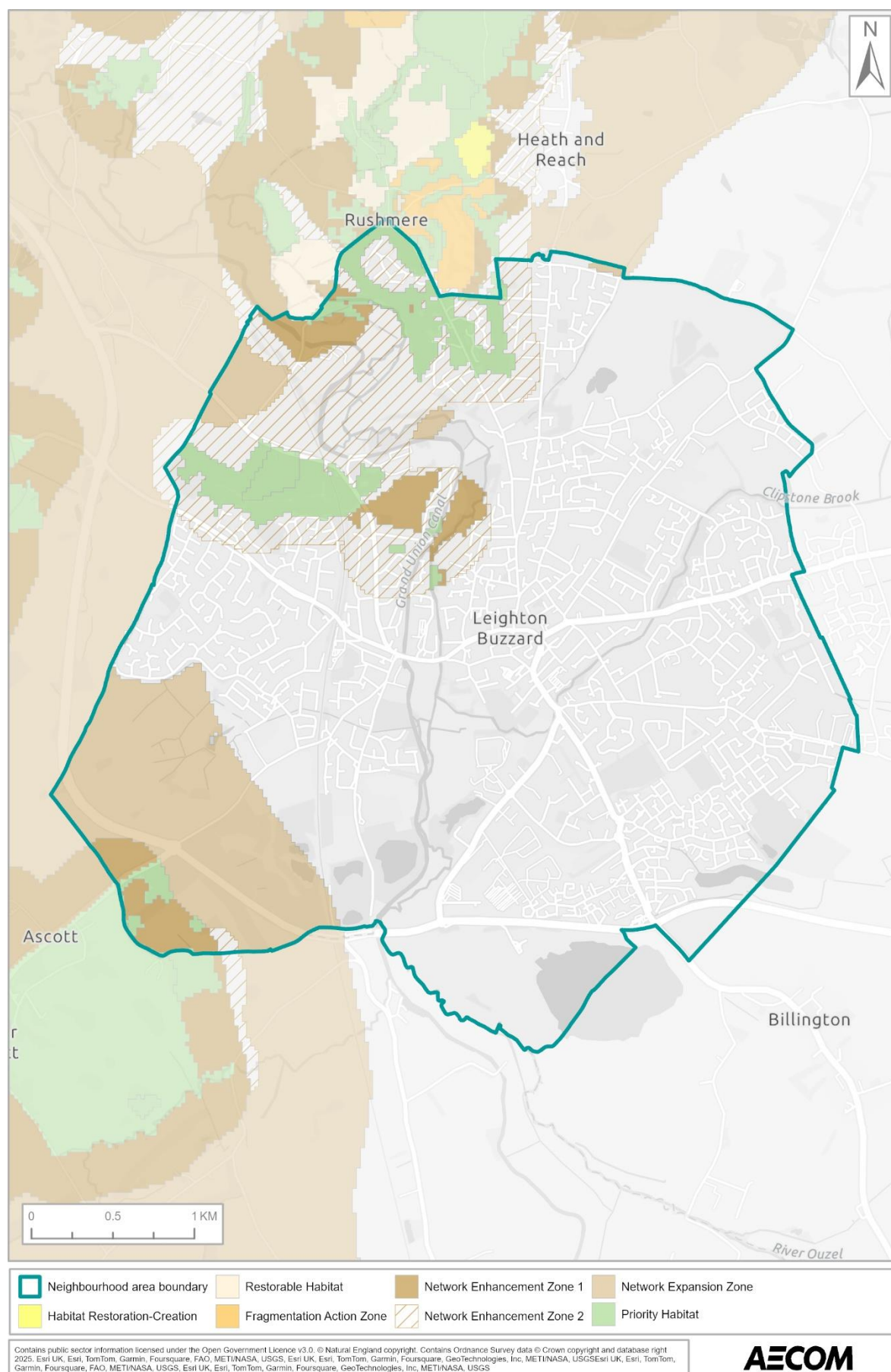
⁹ GOV.UK (2022). 'Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions' can be accessed through [this link](#).

¹⁰ Natural England (2020). 'National Habitat Network Maps' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Figure 3-3: Habitats and Ancient Woodland in Leighton-Linslade

Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. © Natural England copyright. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2025. Esri UK, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, FAO, MET/NASA, USGS, Esri UK, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, GeoTechnologies, Inc, MET/NASA, USGS, Esri UK, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, FAO, MET/NASA, USGS, Esri UK, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, GeoTechnologies, Inc, MET/NASA, USGS

AECOM

Figure 3-4: National Habitat Network in Leighton-Linslade

Future Baseline

- 3.3.20. Habitats and species will potentially face increasing pressures from future development within the neighbourhood area, with the potential for negative impacts on the wider ecological network. This may include a loss of habitats and impacts on biodiversity networks, which may be exacerbated by the effects of climate change. This has the potential to lead to changes in the distribution and abundance of species and changes to the composition of habitats.
- 3.3.21. The LLNP presents an opportunity to maximise benefits for biodiversity by including consideration of important habitats, species, and designated sites at an early stage of planning for future growth. To maintain and improve the condition of biodiversity in the future, it will be important to not only protect and enhance important habitats, but also the connections between them. It will be crucial to effectively coordinate the delivery of new development to ensure that opportunities to improve green infrastructure and ecological corridors are maximised within the neighbourhood area.

3.4. Key Issues

- 3.4.1. Considering the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues (constraints and / or opportunities) are identified in relation to Biodiversity:
- New development through the LLNP may result in indirect impacts to the integrity of an SAC, SSSIs and an NNR in the area surrounding Leighton-Linslade. Development proposals should assess and mitigate potential impacts on these designations;
 - The neighbourhood area contains various BAP Priority Habitats (such as deciduous woodland and coastal and floodplain grazing marsh) and ancient woodland. These habitats support protected species, requiring careful planning to avoid habitat loss and fragmentation;
 - The entire neighbourhood area overlaps with IRZs for all residential developments, indicating a need for consultation with Natural England for any proposed developments; and
 - The LLNP presents an opportunity to improve biodiversity in the neighbourhood area by encouraging development to incorporate biodiversity net-gain techniques and features. Furthermore, the emerging LLNP could encourage the creation, better connectivity and / or recovery of habitats, which will bring biodiversity ecological benefits to the neighbourhood area and the surrounding environment.

3.5. SEA Objective

3.5.1. Considering the key issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SEA should include the following objective and assessment questions in relation to Biodiversity:

Table 3-2: Proposed SEA Objective for Biodiversity

SEA Objective	Assessment Questions (Will the Option / Proposal Help to...)
Maintain and enhance the extent and quality of biodiversity habitats and networks within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.	• Protect and enhance nationally, and locally designated sites, including supporting habitats and mobile species that are important to the integrity of these sites? • Protect and enhance priority habitats and the links between them? • Achieve a net gain in biodiversity over and above national BNG standards? • Support habitat restoration or new habitat creation within the identified Network Enhancement or Expansion Zones? • Support enhancements to multifunctional green infrastructure networks and the network of open spaces?

4. Climate Change (Including Flood Risk)

4.1. Focus of Theme

- 4.1.1. This theme focuses on activities in the neighbourhood area that contribute to climate change and climate change mitigation, as well as the effects of climate change, including flood risk, and climate change adaptation.

4.2. Policy Context

- 4.2.1. **Table 4-1** presents the most relevant documents identified in the policy review for the purposes of the SEA.

Table 4-1: Plans, Policies and Strategies Reviewed in Relation to Climate Change and Flood Risk

Document Title	Year of Publication
National	
<u>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (and guidance)</u>	2024
<u>Third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3)</u>	2023
<u>UK Climate Change Risk Assessment</u>	2022
<u>The National Design Guide</u>	2021
<u>National Model Design Code</u>	2021
<u>National Infrastructure Assessment</u>	2021
<u>Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener</u>	2021
<u>UK Sixth Carbon Budget</u>	2020
<u>National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy</u>	2020
<u>Heat Networks: Building a Market Framework</u>	2020
<u>The Clean Air Strategy</u>	2019
<u>Clean Growth Strategy</u>	2019
<u>25-Year Environment Plan</u>	2019
<u>How Local Authorities Can Reduce Emissions and Manage Climate Change Risk</u>	2012
<u>Flood and Water Management Act</u>	2010
<u>UK Climate Change Act</u>	2008

Document Title	Year of Publication
Local	
<u>Central Bedfordshire Sustainability Plan (2023-2030)</u>	2024
<u>Central Bedfordshire Local Plan</u>	2021
<u>Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for Central Bedfordshire</u>	2014

4.2.2. The key messages emerging from the review are summarised below:

- The LLNP will be required to be in general conformity with the NPPF, which requires proactive planning to both mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies are expected to improve the resilience of communities and infrastructure to climate change impacts, avoid inappropriate development in the flood plain, and support the move to a low carbon economy. The NPPF recognises the potential for planning to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and deliver long-term resilience, including through reuse, regeneration, and conversion;
- The UK Climate Change Risk Assessment is published on a 5-yearly cycle in accordance with the requirements of the Climate Change Act 2008. It required the Government to compile an assessment of the risks for the UK arising from climate change, and then to develop an adaptation programme to address those risks and deliver resilience to climate change on the ground. For both the 2012 and the 2017 UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, the Adaptation Sub-Committee commissioned an evidence report aiming to understand the current and future climate risks and opportunities.
- Following the publication of each Change Risk Assessment, the Government must lay out its objectives, policies, and proposals to address the climate change risks and opportunities. The third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3), sets out these objectives, policies, and proposals, was published in 2023.
- The Sixth Carbon Budget, required under the Climate Change Act, is the legal limit of UK net greenhouse gas emissions and requires the country to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 relative to 1990 levels. This puts the country on track to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 at the latest;
- The National Design Guide (NDG) and the National Design Code address how the Government recognises “well-designed places” including opportunities for climate change measures. Notably the NDG defines what constitutes a well-designed place using ten characteristics under three themes of climate, character, and community. Under the climate theme, homes and buildings should be functional, healthy, and

sustainable, resources should be efficient and resilient, and buildings should be made to last;

- The National Infrastructure Assessment is published every five years and analyses the UK's long-term economic infrastructure needs to create a strategic vision and recommendations. The baseline report states that climate change will increase pressures on all sectors, including economic infrastructure;
- The Clean Growth Strategy, Clean Air Strategy, Net Zero Strategy, and the 25-year Environment Plan are a suite of documents which seek to progress the government's commitment under the UK Climate Change Act to becoming net zero by 2050. The documents set out detailed proposals on how the government will tackle all sources of air pollution, whilst maintaining an affordable energy supply and increasing economic growth. This parallels with the 25-year Environment Plan, which further seeks to manage land resources sustainably, recover and reinstate nature, protect soils and habitats, increase resource efficiency, improve water quality, and connect people with the environment. The documents also interlink with the government's commitment to decarbonising transport, a recognised challenge that needs more work in a timely manner if government are to achieve net zero targets. Furthermore, the decarbonisation plan recognises the twinned need to undertake action to adapt the transport sector and increase resilience to climate change risks; and this challenge is more directly addressed through the UK's National Adaptation Programme;
- The Flood and Water Management Act was introduced in 2010 as a response to the need to develop better resilience to climate change. The Act requires better management of flood risk, creating safeguards against rises in surface water drainage charges, and protecting water supplies for consumers. Good flood and coastal risk management is further outlined through the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy (2020). At a local scale, the Central Bedfordshire Council Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 (2017) provides understanding of flood risk within the District to inform planning decisions and ensure sustainable development;
- The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy released a framework for heat networks which includes proposals to increase access to renewable heat sources and achieve a net zero target by 2050;
- The Committee of Climate Change's 2012 report entitled 'How Local Authorities Can Reduce Emissions and Manage Climate Change Risk' emphasises the crucial role councils have in helping the UK meet its carbon targets and preparing for the impacts of climate change. It outlines specific opportunities for reducing emissions and highlights good practice examples from Local Authorities;

- Central Bedfordshire’s Sustainability Plan (2024) focusses on promoting environmental sustainability by improving operations and processes, leading by example in managing buildings, facilitating infrastructure investments, and encouraging sustainable practices among residents, businesses, and supply chains in Central Bedfordshire. The Plan includes specific actions, assigned responsibilities, and clear timelines for each objective; and
- The LLNP will also need to conform with the relevant policies in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.

4.3. Baseline Summary

Current Baseline

Climate Emergency

- 4.3.1. Central Bedfordshire Council has not formally declared a climate emergency. However, the Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing climate change through various initiatives. In July 2019, the council supported a proposal to prioritise responding to climate change.¹¹ Subsequently, the Council endorsed a refreshed Sustainability Plan outlining steps to become carbon neutral by 2030.¹² Additionally, in January 2024, the council backed the Climate and Ecology Bill, aligning with national efforts to tackle climate and ecological crises.¹³

Contribution to Climate Change

- 4.3.2. The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order of 2019 requires carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from the built environment to be monitored and recorded at the local authority level. The CO₂ emissions shown in **Figure 4-1** and **Figure 4-2** are derived from data supplied by the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy.¹⁴
- 4.3.3. Beginning with **Figure 4-1**, it shows that throughout the entirety of the period observed, the majority of Central Bedfordshire’s CO₂ emissions arose from two sectors: transport and domestic.

¹¹ Central Bedfordshire Council (2020). ‘*Council approves sustainability plan*’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

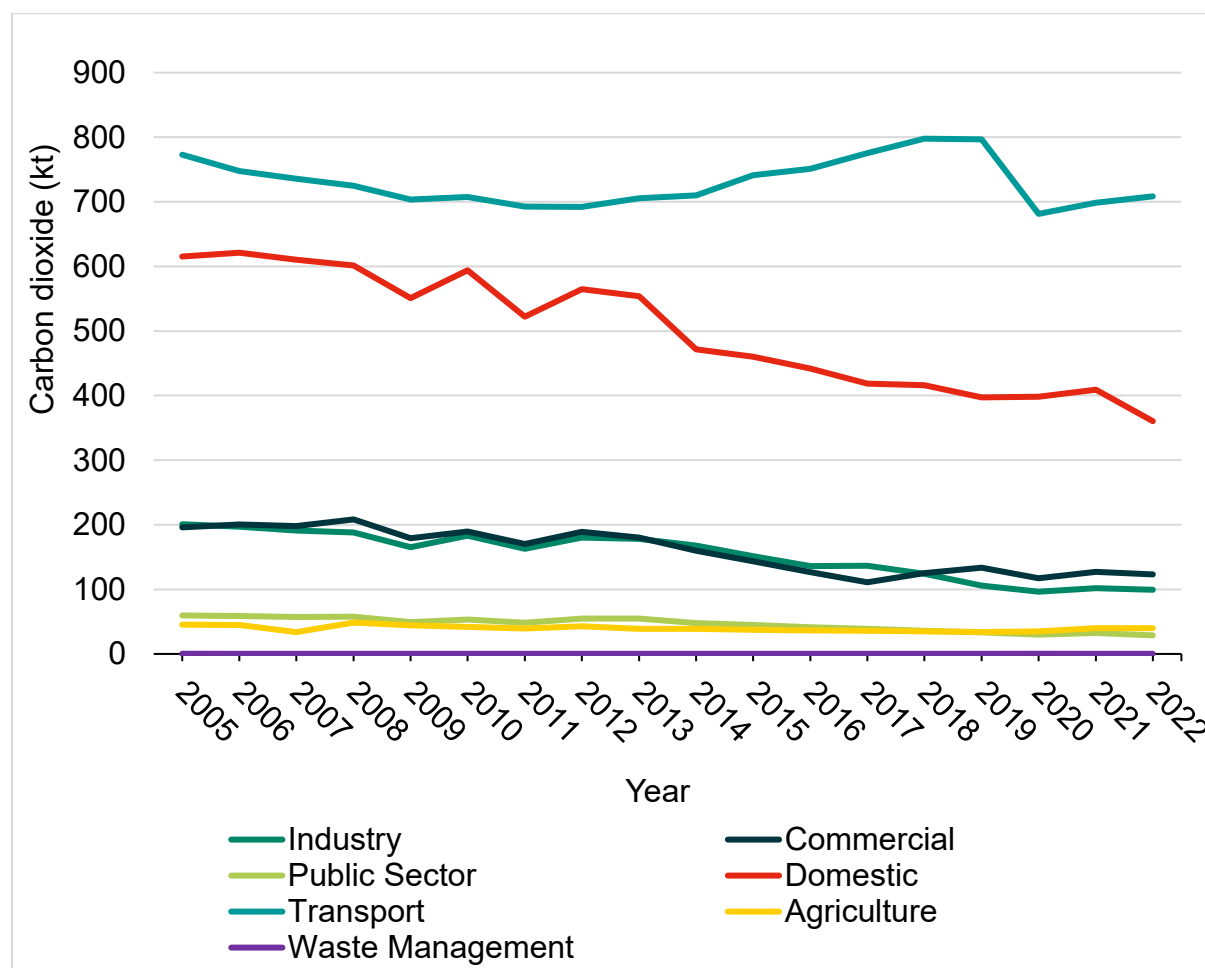
¹² Central Bedfordshire Council (2024). ‘*Tackling Climate Change and developing our sustainability plan*’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

¹³ Central Bedfordshire Council (2024). ‘*Central Bedfordshire Council backs motion to support Climate and Ecology Bill*’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

¹⁴ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2024). ‘*UK local authority and regional carbon dioxide emissions national statistics: 2005-2022*’ can be accessed through [this link](#). Table 1.2.

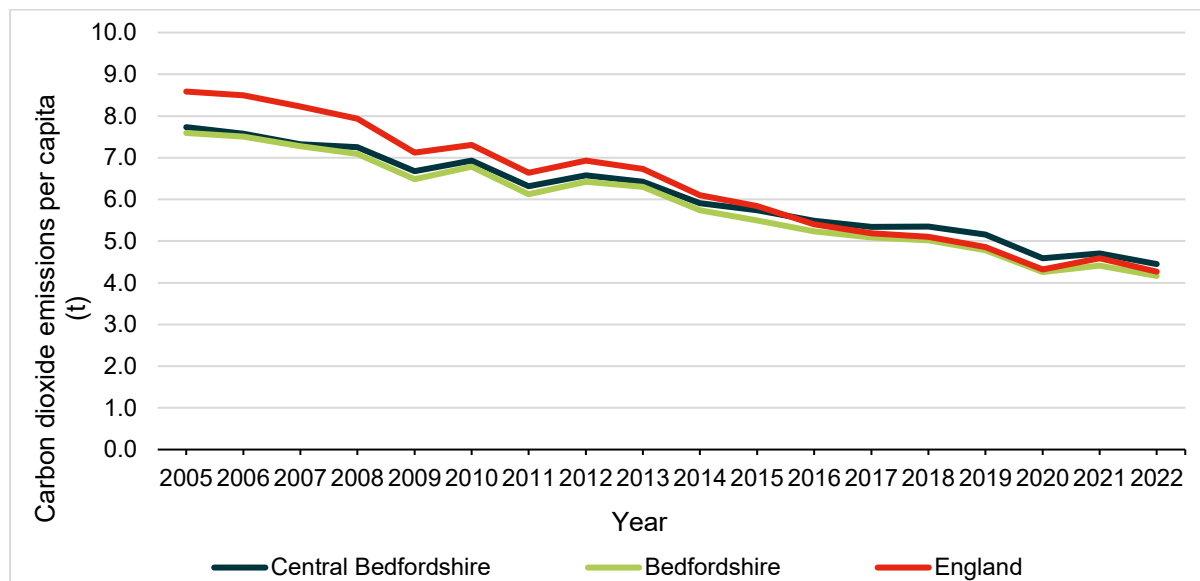
- 4.3.4. In 2021, transport emissions were by far the largest contributing sector for CO₂ emissions in Central Bedfordshire. Whilst the transportation sector reduced its CO₂ emissions between 2005 and 2009, after a period of relative stagnation between 2009 and 2014, emissions began to grow again to its peak in 2019. Between 2019 and 2020, there was a significant drop in transport emissions - this trend that was likely influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. By 2021, annual transport emissions had risen again, but remained lower than the 2018 peak.

Figure 4-1: Local Authority territorial carbon dioxide emissions estimates in Central Bedfordshire 2005-2021 (kt CO₂e)



- 4.3.5. **Figure 4-2** presents that per capita CO₂ emissions at the district, county, and national scale have all shown a similar negative trend between 2005 and 2022. It is also worth noting, however, that per capita emissions at the district scale remained greater than the county and country at the end of the observed period.

Figure 4-2: Territorial carbon dioxide emissions CO₂ emissions per capita (in tons) for Central Bedfordshire, Bedfordshire, and the whole of England (2005-2021)



Renewable Energy

- 4.3.6. Electric Vehicles (EVs) do not burn fuel and create almost no noise. They are battery powered and have the potential to be ‘zero-emission vehicles’ (ZEVs) if powered by renewable electricity. As of July 2024, there were 217 public electric charging devices in Central Bedfordshire¹⁵; 49 of these charging points are located within the neighbourhood area.¹⁶
- 4.3.7. In terms of renewable energy, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy publishes annual statistics on renewable energy generation, disaggregated by Local Authority.¹⁷ The most recent data (to 2023) shows that Central Bedfordshire has a total of 6,426 renewable energy (electricity) installations (the majority of which are photovoltaics), amounting to a total renewable electricity capacity of 160.6 MW.

Flood Risk

- 4.3.8. As shown in **Figure 4-3**, fluvial flood risk in the neighbourhood area largely follows the River Ouzel, Clipstone Brook, and an unnamed watercourse east of Leighton Buzzard, with the areas closest to these watercourses within Flood Zone 3. Areas of High and Medium risk of surface water flooding also broadly follow these watercourses; however, high-risk areas are also found across the neighbourhood area, including across Leighton Buzzard, as demonstrated in **Figure 4-4**. The two figures show that there are significant constraints related to flooding within Leighton-Linslade.

¹⁵ HM Gov (2024) ‘*Electric vehicle charging infrastructure statistics: July 2024*’ can be accessed through [this link](#) Table 1a.

¹⁶ Zap Map (2025) can be accessed through [this link](#).

¹⁷ DBEIS (2024) ‘*Renewable electricity by local authority, 2014 to 2023*’ can be accessed through [this link](#). LA-Sites 2023. LA-Capacity 2023.

Figure 4-3: Fluvial / coastal flood risk in Leighton-Linslade

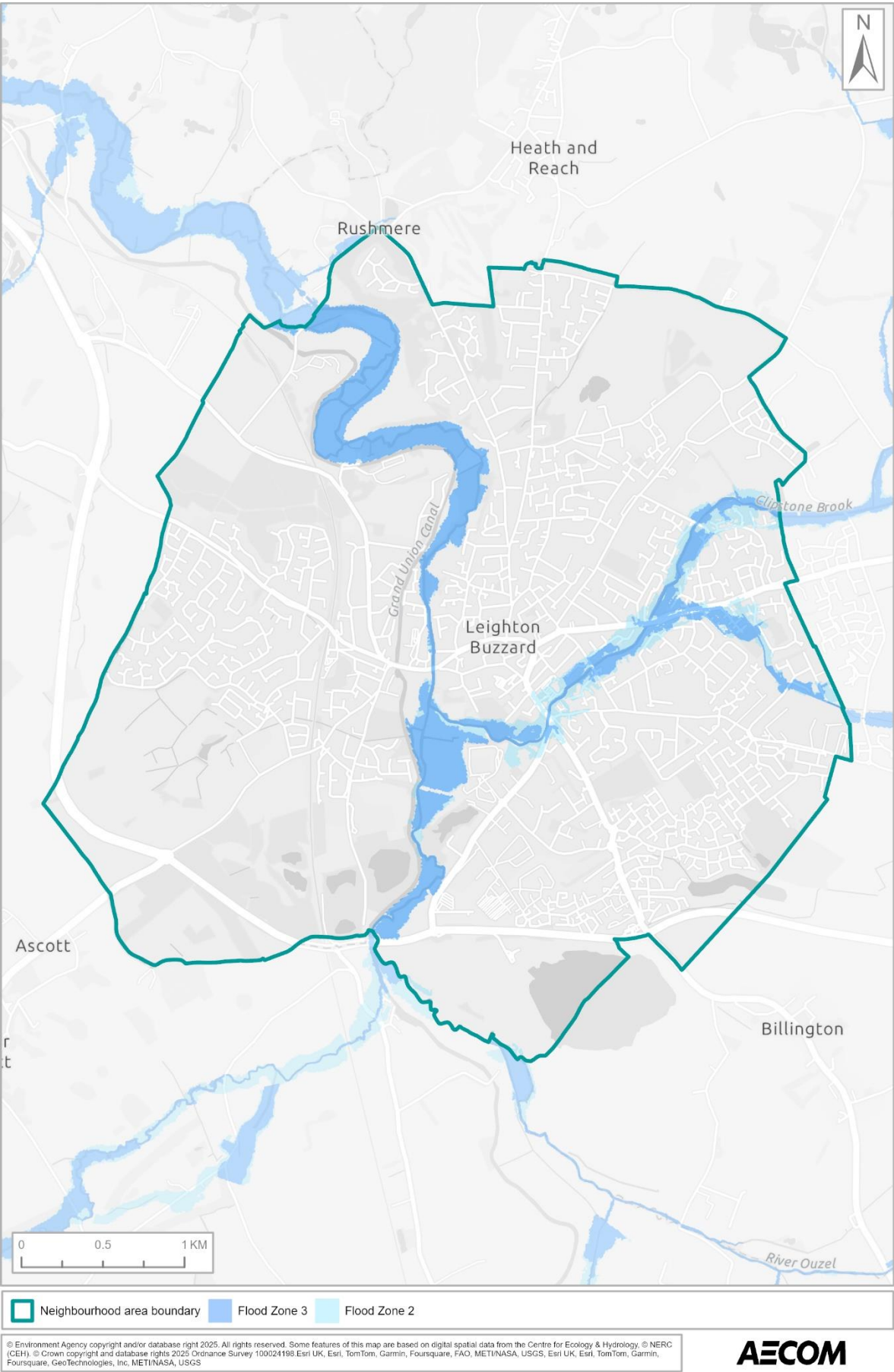


Figure 4-4: Surface water flood risk in Leighton-Linslade

Future Baseline

Impacts of Climate Change

- 4.3.9. Research on the probable effects of climate change in the UK was released in 2018 by the UK Climate Projections (UKCP18) team. UKCP18 gives climate information for the UK up to the end of this century and projections of future changes to the climate are provided, based on simulations from climate models. Projections are broken down to a regional level across the UK and are shown in probabilistic form, which illustrate the potential range of changes and level of confidence in each prediction.
- 4.3.10. As highlighted by the research, the effects of climate change for the East of England by 2040 in a 'medium emissions' (RCP4.5) scenario are likely to be as follows:¹⁸
- An increase in winter mean temperature of 1°C and an increase in summer mean temperature of 2°C; and
 - A change in winter mean precipitation up to +10% and summer mean precipitation up to -10%.
- 4.3.11. Resulting from these changes, a range of risks exist for the neighbourhood area, including:
- Effects on water resources, such as a reduction in availability of groundwater for extraction and a need to increase capacity of wastewater treatment plants and sewers;
 - Adverse effect on water quality from low stream levels and turbulent stream flow after heavy rain;
 - Increased risk of flooding and a need to upgrade flood defences;
 - Soil erosion due to flash flooding;
 - Loss of species that are at the edge of their southerly distribution and spread of species at the northern edge of their distribution;
 - Increased demand for air-conditioning; and
 - Heat stress related issues with infrastructure due to increased temperature.

Renewable Energy Uptake

- 4.3.12. In line with UK trends and national commitments, emissions are likely to continue to fall as energy efficiency measures, renewable energy take-up

¹⁸ Met Office (2019) 'Climate change projections over land' can be accessed through [this link](#).

and new technologies, such as EVs and solar PV, become more widely adopted.

- 4.3.13. With regard specifically to transport emissions, the uptake of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEVs) will contribute positively towards the reduction of road transport related emissions. In line with assumptions made by the Department for Transport's 'Road to Zero' Report (2018)¹⁹, it is assumed that ULEV uptake will increase rapidly in the coming decade and aside from Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs), many additional vehicles could be ultra-low emission (powered either by hydrogen or electricity) by 2030.

4.4. Key Issues

- 4.4.1. Considering the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues (constraints and / or opportunities) are identified in relation to Climate Change (Including Flood Risk):
- While Central Bedfordshire Council has not formally declared a climate emergency, they have demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing climate change through various initiatives, including support for a proposal to prioritise responding to climate change and publishing a refreshed Sustainability Plan outlining steps to become carbon neutral by 2030;
 - The majority Central Bedfordshire's CO₂ emissions arise from the transport and domestic sectors. While transport emissions have decreased since 2005, they remain significant. Development should focus on reducing emissions from these sectors to align with national targets;
 - It will be important for any new development in the area to adopt best building practices to limit the emissions linked to construction. Additionally, the use of sustainable features and renewable energy infrastructure where appropriate can help reduce the overall carbon footprint of new housing;
 - As with much of the country, extreme heat events are likely to occur more frequently in the future. In addition to this, drought is likely to become an increasing issue in summer, whilst surface water / groundwater flooding is likely to increase during winter months. In this respect, climate change resilience should form an integral part of the emerging LLNP policy framework;
 - Flood risk is likely to be a significant constraint for future development in Leighton-Linslade, with high risk found in Leighton Buzzard and its surrounding land, where the focus of future development is most likely to

¹⁹ HM Gov (2018) 'The Road to Zero – Next steps towards cleaner road transport and delivering our Industrial Strategy' can be accessed through [this link](#).

occur. Development must therefore consider these risks and incorporate flood mitigation measures;

- Increases in the built footprint of the neighbourhood area has the potential to exacerbate flood risk issues (i.e., from surface water run-off and potential proximity to flood risk areas); and
- Opportunities to enhance the resilience of the neighbourhood area and its residents to the effects of climate change should be sought out in the LLNP. This can include adaptation strategies, green infrastructure enhancement, flood betterment measures (such as sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS)), infrastructure development, and increased renewable energy sources.

4.5. SEA Objectives

4.5.1. Considering the key issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SEA should include the following objectives and assessment questions in relation to Climate Change (Including Flood Risk):

Table 4-2: Proposed SEA Objectives for Climate Change (Including Flood Risk)

SEA Objective	Assessment Questions (Will the Option / Proposal Help to...)
Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities in the neighbourhood area.	• Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport? • Improve or extend local footpaths, cycle paths or strategic green infrastructure routes? • Increase the number of new development meeting or exceeding sustainable design criteria? • Generate energy from low or zero carbon sources? • Support the transition to electric vehicles?
Support the resilience of the neighbourhood area to the potential effects of climate change, including flood risk.	• Avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding, considering the likely future effects of climate change? • Improve and extend green infrastructure networks in the neighbourhood area? • Sustainably manage water runoff? • Increase the resilience of the local built and natural environment? • Ensure the potential risks associated with climate change are duly considered in the design of new development in the neighbourhood area?

5. Community Wellbeing

5.1. Focus of Theme

- 5.1.1. This theme focuses on health indicators and deprivation, healthcare provision in the neighbourhood area and influences on resident health and wellbeing, including access to open space and the countryside.

5.2. Policy Context

- 5.2.1. **Table 5-1** presents the most relevant documents identified in the policy review for the purposes of the SEA.

Table 5-1: Plans, Policies and Strategies Reviewed in Relation to Community Wellbeing

Document Title	Year of Publication
National	
<u>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (and guidance)</u>	2024
<u>Levelling-up and Regeneration Act</u>	2023
<u>Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On</u>	2020
<u>Planning Practice Guidance</u>	2019
<u>The 25 Year Environment Plan</u>	2018
Local	
<u>Strategic Plan</u>	2024
<u>Central Bedfordshire Leisure Strategy</u>	2021
<u>Central Bedfordshire Local Plan</u>	2021
<u>Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025</u>	2020
<u>Central Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy (CES) 2013-16</u>	2013

- 5.2.2. The key messages emerging from the review are summarised below:

- The Government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Act seeks to reduce regional inequalities and promote economic growth and opportunities in less prosperous areas. It has been designed to address regional disparities, stimulate economic development, and enhance infrastructure and community well-being in order to create a more balanced and inclusive nation;

- The LLNP will need to have regard for the principles set out in the NPPF, which seek to retain and enhance access to community services and facilities such as educational facilities and open spaces. The NPPF recognises the benefits of having a range of local provision to support community needs, in addition to the benefits of creating cohesive communities in safe environments where the fear of crime (and crime itself) does not undermine resident quality of life. This contributes to ensuring settlement and community identities are protected;
- As set out in the NPPF, it should be ensured that the design of streets, parking areas, other transport elements and the content of associated standards reflects current national guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. The Design Guide and Model code illustrate how well-designed places that are beautiful, healthy, greener, enduring, and successful can be achieved in practice;
- The NPPF highlights the role of development plans in helping to deliver access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity, therefore contributing to the health and wellbeing of communities. The health benefits of access to nature, green spaces and green infrastructure are further reiterated in the 25-year Environment Plan;
- The 2020 Health Equity in England Report identifies that the health gap between less and more deprived areas has grown in the last decade, where more people can expect to spend more of their lives in poor health, and where improvements to life expectancy have stalled, or even declined for the poorest 10% of women;
- The Planning for Sport Guidance seeks to help the planning system provide formal and informal opportunities for everyone to take part in sport and be physically active. The Guidance outlines 12 'planning-for-sport' principles;
- The Central Bedfordshire Strategic Plan outlines the long-term vision and priorities for the development and improvement of the area. It sets the framework for shaping the community, enhancing services, and fostering economic growth, while addressing key challenges such as housing, infrastructure, and sustainability. The plan provides a guide for decision-making and policy development to ensure the area's success and well-being in the future;
- The Central Bedfordshire Leisure Strategy focusses on enhancing the region's leisure and recreational services. It aims to provide accessible, high-quality leisure facilities and opportunities for residents to engage in physical activities. The strategy outlines priorities for developing new facilities, improving existing ones, and ensuring that leisure services meet the needs of all community members, contributing to health and well-being;

- The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy addresses the issue of homelessness within Central Bedfordshire. It outlines actions to prevent homelessness, provide support for those at risk, and assist individuals who are currently homeless or sleeping rough. The strategy aims to ensure that vulnerable people have access to the necessary services and resources to rebuild their lives, with an emphasis on prevention, support, and sustainable housing solutions;
- The Central Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy focusses on strengthening the relationship between the local government and the community. It outlines how the council will engage with residents, encourage participation, and ensure that community voices are heard in decision-making processes. The strategy aims to foster a sense of ownership and partnership, promoting active involvement in shaping the future of the area; and
- The LLNP will also need to conform with relevant policies in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.

5.3. Baseline Summary

Current Baseline

Population

- 5.3.1. As of the 2021 Census, the population of Leighton-Linslade was 42,392 – an increase of 4,923 individuals (+13%) since 2011.²⁰ It is recognised that an increasing population has the potential to impact upon the vitality of the local community and community infrastructure.
- 5.3.2. In 2021 it was estimated that approximately 24% of the population of the neighbourhood area were between the ages of 0-19, 59% were between the working ages of 18-64 and 18% were ages 65 and over.²¹

Index of Multiple Deprivation

- 5.3.3. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (IMD) is an overall relative measure of deprivation and is the combination of seven different domains as described below:
- **Income:** the proportion of the population experiencing a deprivation relating to low income. There are a further two subsets of this measure:
 - **Income deprivation affecting children:** the proportion of children aged 0-15 living in income deprived families; and
 - **Income deprivation affecting older people:** the proportion of all adults aged 60 and above that experience income deprivation.

²⁰ City Population (2025) 'Leighton-Linslade' can be accessed through [this link](#).

²¹ Nomis (2021). 'TS007B - Age by broad age bands' can be accessed through [this link](#).

- **Employment:** the proportion of the working-age population involuntarily excluded from the labour market, including those who want to work but cannot;
 - **Education, skills, and training:** the lack of attainment and skills in the population;
 - **Health deprivation and disability:** the risk of premature death and the impairment of quality of life through poor physical or mental health;
 - **Crime:** the risk of personal and material victimisation at the local level.
 - **Barriers to housing and services:** the physical and financial accessibility of housing and local services, split into 'geographical barriers' linked to physical proximity and 'wider barriers' linked to access to housing; and
 - **Living environment:** the quality of the local environment, categorised into 'indoors living environment' to measure the quality of housing and 'outdoors living environment' to measure indicators like air quality and road traffic accidents.
- 5.3.4. Lower super output areas (LSOAs)²² are designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics in England and Wales. They are standardised geographies intended to be as consistent as possible, with each LSOA containing approximately 1,000 to 1,500 people. In relation to the IMD 2019, LSOAs are ranked out of the 32,844 in England and Wales, with 1 being the most deprived.
- 5.3.5. **Table 5-2** outlines which of Leighton-Linslade's LSOA IMD domain scores are within the 50% most deprived, or worse, LSOA scores in England and Wales.
- 5.3.6. Reflecting on this data highlights that several parts of the neighbourhood area rank poorly on the deprivation index, particularly Central Bedfordshire 020C and Central Bedfordshire 021E, which have the lowest overall IMD rankings. It is also notable that parts of Leighton-Linslade fall within the 10% most deprived LSOAs in England for the Education, Skills and Training domain, as well as the Crime domain.

²² The Indices of Deprivation Explorer can be accessed through [this link](#).

Table 5-2: IMD Rankings for the Neighbourhood Area

Indices	LSOA within 50% most deprived in England	
Overall IMD score	• Central Bedfordshire 020C	30% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021A	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021C	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021E	30% most deprived
Income score	• Central Bedfordshire 020C	30% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021A	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021C	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021D	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021E	20% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 024C	50% most deprived
Employment score	• Central Bedfordshire 020C	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021A	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021C	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021E	30% most deprived
Education, Skills and Training score	• Central Bedfordshire 020A	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 020B	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 020C	10% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021A	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021C	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021D	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021E	20% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 024A	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 024C	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 024F	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 024G	50% most deprived
Health and deprivation score	• Central Bedfordshire 020C	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021A	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021C	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021E	40% most deprived
Crime score	• Central Bedfordshire 020A	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021A	10% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021C	30% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021D	30% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021E	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 022A	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 022C	40% most deprived

Barriers to Housing and Services score	• Central Bedfordshire 020C	20% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 020E	30% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021E	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 022C	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 022D	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 023A	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 023B	30% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 023C	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 023D	30% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 024C	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 024E	30% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 024F	20% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 024G	30% most deprived
Living Environment score	• Central Bedfordshire 021A	50% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 021B	40% most deprived
	• Central Bedfordshire 022A	50% most deprived

Housing

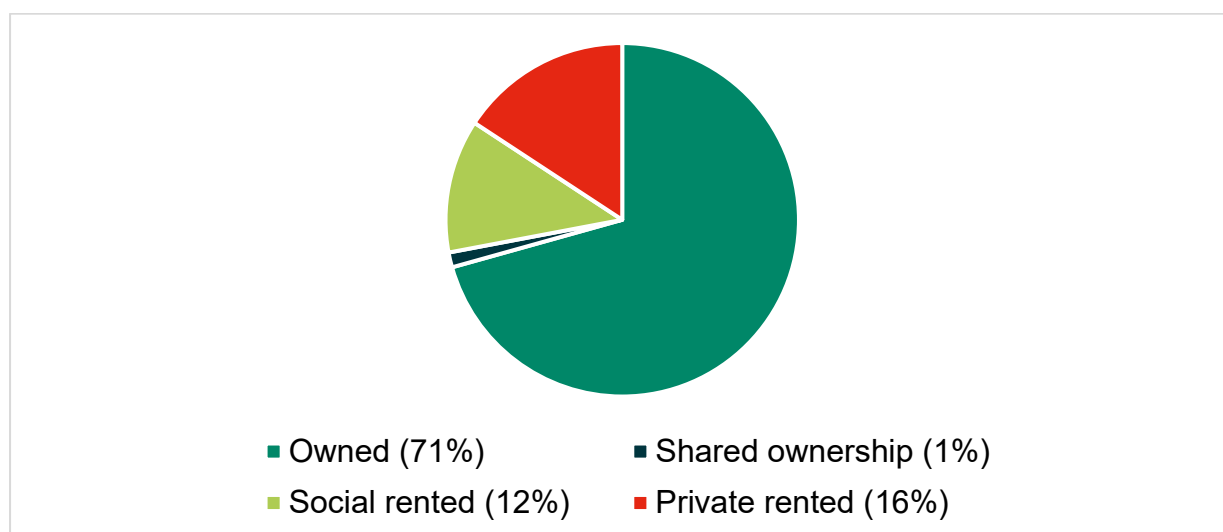
- 5.3.7. As reported by Zoopla,²³ the average house price over the past 12 months in Leighton Buzzard is £340,074 – with detached houses selling for an average of £480,536, semi-detached houses selling for an average of £347,279, terraced houses selling for an average of £302,534, and flats selling for an average of £184,635. Bedfordshire's average sale price for the same period (£364,931) was slightly higher than Leighton Buzzard.²⁴
- 5.3.8. **Figure 5-1** overleaf indicates housing tenure in the neighbourhood area. In the 2021 Census,²⁵ 71% of the neighbourhood area's households owned their property outright or with a mortgage/loan, with an additional 1% in shared ownership. Private rent and social rent accounted for 16% and 12% of the area's tenure mix, respectively.

²³ Zoopla (2025) 'House prices in Leighton Buzzard' can be accessed through [this link](#).

²⁴ Zoopla (2025) 'House prices in Bedfordshire' can be accessed through [this link](#).

²⁵ ONS (2021) 'TS054 – Tenure' can be accessed through [this link](#).

**Figure 5-1: Tenure by Household Composition for the Neighbourhood Area
(Based on 2021 Census Data)**



Community Assets and Infrastructure

5.3.9. Leighton-Linslade has a range of community assets and infrastructure that support local residents and businesses:

- The neighbourhood area benefits from a well-connected transport network, including a railway station with direct services to London Euston and the A5 and M1 nearby for road access;
- Education facilities include several primary and secondary schools, as well as the Cedars Upper School;
- Healthcare services are provided through local GP practices and dental clinics;
- The neighbourhood area has a variety of leisure and recreational facilities, including Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre, sports clubs, and parks such as Parsons Close Recreation Ground;
- Cultural and community hubs include the Leighton Buzzard Theatre and the Leighton Buzzard Railway, a heritage narrow-gauge railway;
- Leighton Buzzard town centre hosts a weekly market alongside a mix of independent shops and national retailers;
- Green spaces such as the Grand Union Canal and Rushmere Country Park offer opportunities for outdoor activities; and
- Additionally, the neighbourhood area is home to a range of charities, faith groups, and community organisations who provide support and services for residents of all ages.

Green Infrastructure

- 5.3.10. Access to gardens, parks, woodlands, and rivers is important, especially considering recent events such as the pandemic, the shift to working from home, and the focus on work/life balance.
- 5.3.11. Almost nine in ten adults surveyed by Natural England reported that being in nature makes them feel happy, and nearly three quarters of adults were concerned about biodiversity loss in England.²⁶
- 5.3.12. Despite the neighbourhood area's urban setting, there is a good supply of open green spaces and rivers (particularly in the west of the neighbourhood area), many of which can be accessed by the extensive local public footpath network. Examples include Ouzel Meadows and Tidenfoot Waterside Park.
- 5.3.13. The LLNP will seek to enhance local green infrastructure by mapping existing blue/green infrastructure and designating Local Green Spaces (these are particularly special sites that are cherished by the local community for a combination of their public access, tranquillity and recreational value).

Future Baseline

- 5.3.14. As the population of the neighbourhood area increases through development brought forward by the LLNP, it is likely this could lead to increased pressure on the services within the neighbourhood area, and those outside of it. This highlights the need to support the retention of existing community facilities in the area and seek new (or upgrades to) services/ infrastructure where possible. This is more likely to be appropriately considered and addressed through planned development rather than unplanned development.
- 5.3.15. The suitability and affordability of housing for local requirements depends on the implementation of appropriate housing policies through the emerging LLNP. Planned development may have wider implications in terms of transport and access to infrastructure, or the natural environment, while unplanned development can be sustainably located and supported by infrastructure to meet local needs.

5.4. Key Issues

- 5.4.1. Considering the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues (constraints and / or opportunities) are identified in relation to Community Wellbeing:
- A growing population in LLNP has the potential to impact upon the vitality and capacity of the local community and community infrastructure, necessitating careful planning to support the expanding population;

²⁶ Natural England (2020) People and Nature survey can be accessed through [this link](#).

- There are pockets of deprivation found throughout the neighbourhood area. This includes areas among the most deprived in England for Education, Skills and Training domain, the Crime domain, and the Barriers to Housing domain. Addressing these issues will be important for improving community wellbeing;
- Housing prices in the neighbourhood area are slightly lower than county trends. Ensuring a mix of housing types and tenures to meet local needs is required to address barriers to housing and services;
- Local services, facilities, and amenities are plentiful. Efforts should be made to retain and enhance existing assets, and to seek additions whenever possible;
- Access to green spaces (such as gardens, parks, woodlands, and rivers) provides valuable ecosystem services that support physical and mental well-being. Enhancing and maintaining these spaces is important for promoting healthy lifestyles, reducing stress, and improving overall quality of life; and
- The LLNP provides the opportunities to plan for development which accommodates for changing working patterns and lifestyles, and places greater emphasis on high levels of accessibility.

5.5. SEA Objective

5.5.1. Considering the key issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SEA should include the following objective and assessment questions in relation to Community Wellbeing:

Table 5-3: Proposed SEA Objective for Community Wellbeing

SEA Objective	Assessment Questions (Will the Option / Proposal Help to...)
Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents and in suitably connected places, supported by the appropriate and timely provision of infrastructure to enable cohesive and inclusive communities.	• Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality and affordable housing? • Support the provision of a range of house types and sizes targeted at aligning the housing stock with local needs? • Provide flexible and adaptable homes that meet people's changing needs? • Improve the availability and/ or accessibility of local services and facilities? • Encourage and promote social cohesion and active involvement of local people in community activities? • Contribute to improving aspects of deprivation in the neighbourhood area? • Maintain or enhance the quality of life of existing and future residents?

6. Historic Environment

6.1. Focus of Theme

- 6.1.1. This theme focuses on designated and non-designated heritage assets and features (including archaeology) and their setting.

6.2. Policy Context

- 6.2.1. **Table 6-1** presents the most relevant documents identified in the policy review for the purposes of the SEA.

Table 6-1: Plans, Policies and Strategies Reviewed in Relation to Historic Environment

Document Title	Year of Publication
National	
<u>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (and guidance)</u>	2024
<u>Historic England Advice Note 18: Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency</u>	2024
<u>Historic England: Heritage and Climate Change</u>	2022
<u>Historic England Advice Note 11: Neighbourhood Planning and the Historic Environment</u>	2022
<u>Historic England Advice Note 4: Tall Buildings Advice Note</u>	2022
<u>The National Design Guide</u>	2019
<u>Historic England Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management</u>	2019
<u>The 25 Year Environment Plan</u>	2018
<u>Historic England Good Practice Advice: The Setting of Heritage Assets</u>	2017
<u>Historic England Advice Note 8: Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)</u>	2016
<u>Historic England Advice Note 3: The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans</u>	2015
Local	
<u>Arts and Culture Strategy</u>	2024
<u>Central Bedfordshire Local Plan</u>	2021

6.2.2. The key messages emerging from the review are summarised below:

- The key high-level principles for the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment are as follows:
 - The historic environment is a shared resource;
 - Everyone should be able to participate in sustaining the historic environment;
 - Understanding the significance of places is vital;
 - Significant places should be managed to sustain their values;
 - Decisions about change must be reasonable, transparent, and consistent; and
 - Documenting and learning from decisions is essential.²⁷
- The significance of places is the key element which underpins the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. Significance is a collective term for the sum of all the heritage values attached to a place, be it a building an archaeological site or a larger historic area such as a whole village or landscape;
- The LLNP will be required to be in general conformity with the NPPF, which ultimately encourages the conservation and enhancement of historic environment assets in a manner appropriate to their significance. The NPPF seeks planning policies and decisions which are sympathetic to local character and history without preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation of change. The NPPF supports the use of area-based character assessments, design guides and codes and masterplans to help ensure that land is used efficiently while also creating beautiful and sustainable places;
- As set out in the NPPF, it should be ensured that the design of streets, parking areas, other transport elements and the content of associated standards reflects current national guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. Design Codes can set out a necessary level of detail in sensitive locations, for example, with heritage considerations, and they can set out specific ways to maintain local character;
- Planning Practice Guidance expands on the NPPF recognising the proactive rather than passive nature of conservation;
- The role of the historic environment, as part of healthy and thriving ecosystems, landscapes and cultural values, including settlement identity, is reiterated through the key messages of the 25 Year Environment Plan and National Design Guide;

²⁷ Historic England (2008). *'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance'* can be accessed through [this link](#).

- Historic England's Advice Notes, Good Practice Advice, and Climate Change strategy provide further guidance in relation to the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. Of particular relevance for the LLNP is the emphasis on the importance of:
 - Understanding the different types of special architectural and historic interest which underpin designations, as well as how settings and/ or views contribute to the significance of heritage assets;
 - Advising on mitigating, managing risks, and adapting to challenges posed by climate change;
 - Recognising the value of implementing controls through neighbourhood plans, conservation area appraisals and management plans; and
 - Appropriate evidence gathering, including clearly identifying those issues that threaten an area or assets character or appearance and that merit the introduction of management measures.
- The Central Bedfordshire Arts and Culture Strategy focusses on developing and promoting arts, culture, and heritage within the district. It outlines plans to enhance access to creative and cultural activities for residents, support local creative industries, and preserve the area's rich heritage; and
- The LLNP will also need to conform with the relevant policies in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.

6.3. Baseline summary

Current Baseline

Designated Heritage Assets

- 6.3.1. Listed buildings are designated heritage assets, of national importance, that are protected through the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.²⁸ To assess the historic environment, the National Heritage List for England, provided by Historic England,²⁹ has been utilised. There are a total of 124 listed buildings in the neighbourhood area: 120 Grade II, two Grade II*, and two Grade I (Church of St Mary; Leighton Buzzard Church Of All Saints).

²⁸ UK Government (1990) '*Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

²⁹ Historic England (no date) '*National Heritage List for England – Search the List – Advanced Search*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

6.3.2. In England, scheduled monuments are nationally important archaeological sites or historical building designated and protected by Historic England under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.³⁰ The neighbourhood area has four scheduled monuments:

- Leighton Buzzard market cross;
- Canal bridge at Old Linslade;
- Bowl barrow south of the Knolls; and
- Bowl barrow east of the Knolls.

6.3.3. The neighbourhood area is also home three conservation areas (CA):³¹

- Southcott Village CA;
- Leighton Buzzard CA; and
- Linslade CA, designated in 1974 for its well-preserved Victorian streetscape, the area features historic architecture, traditional street materials, and a rich mix of brick and ironstone detailing.

6.3.4. Conservation area appraisals have been made for Southcott Village CA and Leighton Buzzard CA; however, these are not available on the council website.

6.3.5. Leighton Linslade's CAs are shown in **Figure 6-1**, while the other designated historic environment features are shown in **Figure 6-2**.

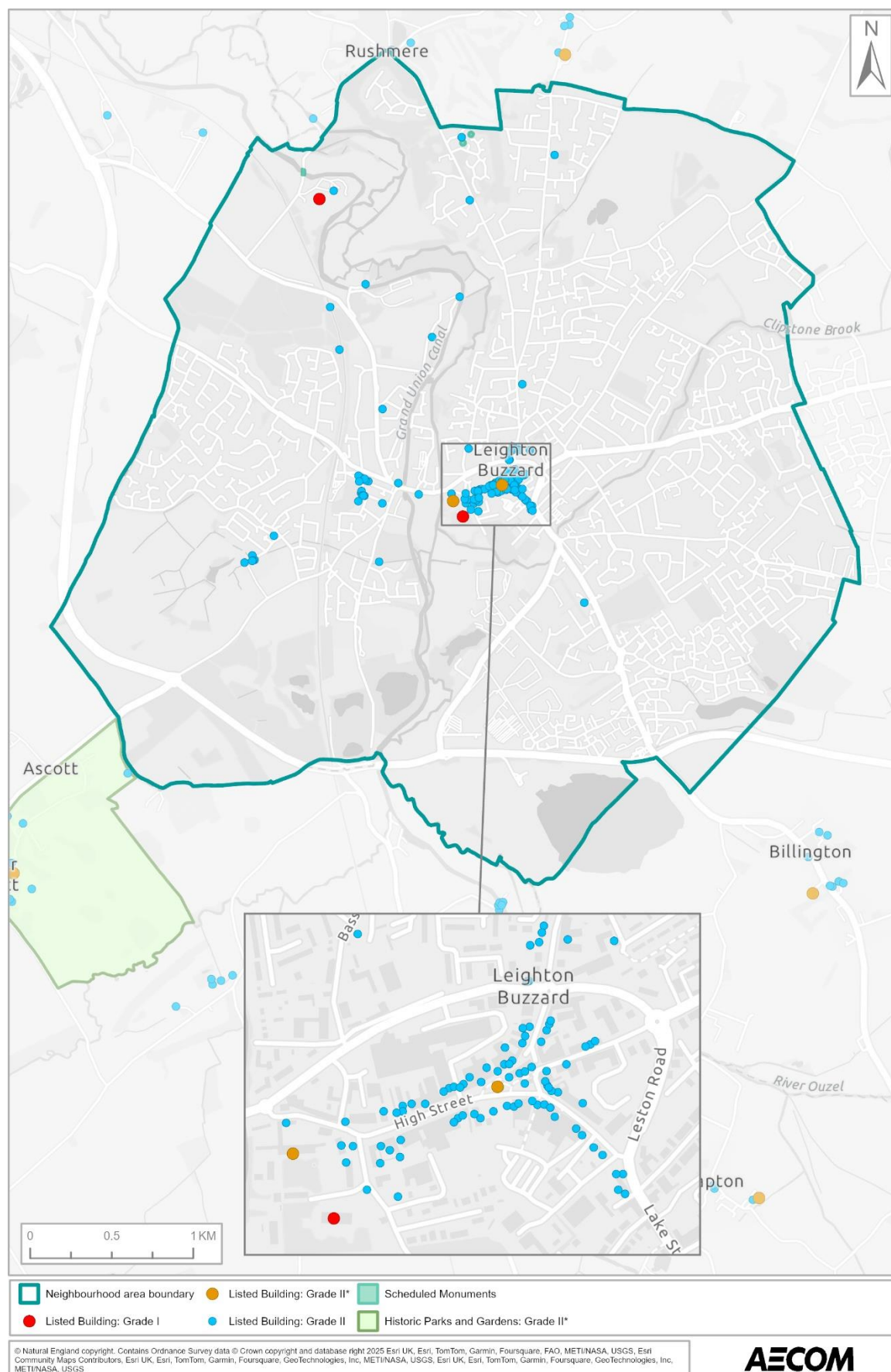
³⁰ Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979) can be accessed through [this link](#).

³¹ Central Bedfordshire (no date). 'Archaeology, Heritage & Conservation' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Figure 6-1: Conservation Areas in Leighton-Linslade

6.3.6. None of the identified designated assets are known to be at risk³² of being lost due to neglect, decay, or inappropriate development. However, it is important to recognise that Heritage at Risk registers for areas outside of London do not contain information about the status of Grade II listed buildings. As such, it is currently not possible to determine whether any of the Grade II listed buildings within the neighbourhood area are at risk.

³² Historic England (2024) '*Heritage at Risk 2024 Registers*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Figure 6-2: Historic Environment Assets in the Neighbourhood Area

Locally Important Heritage Features

- 6.3.7. It is noted that not all of the neighbourhood area's historic environment features are subject to statutory designations and non-designated features contribute a large part of what people interact with on a day-to-day basis. Although not designated, many buildings and areas are of historic interest and are important to local communities.
- 6.3.8. The Central Bedfordshire and Luton Historic Environment Record (HER) identifies important and distinctive structures or features that positively contribute to the local sense of place and distinctiveness of the county. However, a high-level review of the HER via the Heritage Gateway³³ returned 0 results within the neighbourhood area.
- 6.3.9. It is also noted that the LLNP will seek to identify and protect buildings that have local heritage interest because of their architecture or historic connections.

Archaeological Significance

- 6.3.10. Leighton-Linslade has a rich archaeological history spanning thousands of years. Mesolithic evidence includes a 10,000-year-old encampment near the Ouzel water meadows, while Bronze Age discoveries like pottery in Heath and Reach suggest early settlements. In the medieval period, Leighton was granted to the Abbey of Fontevraud in 1164, leading to the establishment of Grovebury Priory (just outside of the neighbourhood area). The 15th-century Market Cross, built by Alice Chaucer, remains a historic landmark.³⁴
- 6.3.11. During the Victorian era, industrial growth is reflected in clay pipe production sites in Bassett Road. More recently, excavations by the Leighton Buzzard & District Archaeological & Historical Society (LBDAHS) have uncovered artifacts like a Jacobean fork and a WWI cap badge.³⁵ Ongoing research includes the search for the medieval Holy Well in Old Linslade. These findings showcase the area's continuous human activity from prehistoric times to today.

³³ Heritage Gateway (2025) '*More Detailed Search*' can be accessed through [this link](#). Open the link, change the tab from 'map' to 'admin location', type 'Leighton-Linslade' into the administrative location search bar and press the search button at the bottom of the page.

³⁴ LBDAHS (2023). '*Archaeology & History in Leighton Buzzard*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

³⁵ LBDAHS (no date). '*Latest Archaeology Update*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Future Baseline

- 6.3.12. Whilst designated and non-designated assets will continue to be afforded protection under the provisions of the NPPF and the Local Plan, it is recognised that future development has the potential to negative affect historic character and settings, detract from historic settlement qualities and disrupt valued viewpoints; being susceptible to insensitive design and layout in new development.
- 6.3.13. Climate change threatens heritage assets through extreme weather, rising sea levels, and erosion. Increased rainfall and humidity can accelerate material decay, while coastal sites risk permanent loss. Sustainable conservation strategies, like improved drainage and digital documentation, are important for protecting historic sites for the future.

6.4. Key Issues

- 6.4.1. Considering the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues (constraints and / or opportunities) are identified in relation to the historic environment:
- New development within the neighbourhood area has the potential to impact the historic setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets and areas. The emerging LLNP can help overcome this by ensuring any development that comes forward within the neighbourhood area is sensitive to the character of local assets and their setting, particularly in terms of design and layout. This is especially important when considering the three conservation areas in Leighton-Linslade; and
 - It will be important for any new development to consider the historic context of the neighbourhood area as set out in the three conservation area appraisals (if available); and
 - Planning for future growth through the LLNP will support the minimisation of impacts. It can also seek opportunities for public realm improvements, and accessibility improvements which can indirectly benefit access to and enjoyment of the historic environment.

6.5. SEA Objective

- 6.5.1. Considering the key issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SEA should include the following objective and assessment questions in relation to the Historic Environment:

Table 6-2: Proposed SEA Objective for Heritage

SEA Objective	Assessment Questions (Will the Option/ Proposal Help to...)
Protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.	• Conserve and enhance buildings and structures of architectural or historic interest, both designated and non-designated, and their settings? • Conserve and enhance the special interest, character and appearance of locally important features and their settings? • Protect the integrity of the conservation areas and their setting? • Protect the integrity of the historic setting of key monuments of cultural heritage interest as listed in the Central Bedfordshire and Luton HER? • Support the undertaking of early archaeological investigations and, where appropriate, recommend mitigation strategies? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the special qualities and significance of the neighbourhood area?

7. Landscape

7.1. Focus of Theme

- 7.1.1. This theme focuses on designated and protected landscapes within or near to the neighbourhood area, as well as landscape and villagescape character, landscape quality and visual amenity.

7.2. Policy Context

- 7.2.1. **Table 7-1** presents the most relevant documents identified in the policy review for the purposes of the SEA.

Table 7-1: Plans, Policies and Strategies Reviewed in Relation to Landscape

Document Title	Year of Publication
National	
<u>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (and guidance)</u>	2024
<u>National Model Design Code</u>	2021
<u>The National Design Guide</u>	2019
<u>A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment</u>	2018
Local	
<u>Central Bedfordshire Local Plan</u>	2021
<u>Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024</u>	2019

- 7.2.2. The key messages emerging from the review are summarised below:

- The LLNP will be required to be in general conformity with the NPPF which gives great weight to conserving and enhancing protected landscapes, as well as landscape character and scenic beauty. The NPPF recognises the role of green infrastructure in landscape settings, as well as the importance of designated biodiversity sites, habitats, woodland, historic features, agricultural land and cultural landscapes. The positive contribution that land remediation can make in terms of addressing despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land is also recognised;
- The 25-year Environment Plan and National Design Guide complement each other with their aims for a cleaner, greener country which puts the environment first and celebrates the variety of natural landscapes and habitats. Design is focused on beautiful, enduring and successful places,

which respond to local character and provide a network of high quality green open spaces;

- The National Model Design Code states that all design codes should include a landscape and open space strategy that incorporates the existing natural features and new structural elements. It recognises that landscapes can be major drivers in the design process;
- Management plans have been published for Chilterns National Landscape (NL), which is within 10 km of the neighbourhood area. The LLNP should give due regard to this management plan to ensure local development aligns with broader conservation objectives and preserves the character of the landscape. This alignment helps protect biodiversity, cultural heritage, and the visual integrity of the area, contributing to sustainable and responsible land use; and
- The LLNP will also need to conform with relevant policies in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.

7.3. Baseline Summary

Current Baseline

Nationally Protected Landscapes

- 7.3.1. There are no nationally protected landscapes within the neighbourhood area. However, the Chilterns National Landscapes (NL) is located within 10 km south and east of the neighbourhood area.
- 7.3.2. The Chilterns NL (see **Figure 7-1**) is dominated by its chalk hills, ancient woodlands, and rolling countryside. The area is home to a rich history, with evidence of prehistoric settlements and medieval towns, as well as a variety of wildlife. Its distinct character is shaped by centuries of agricultural use, including the iconic beech woodlands and chalk grasslands. The Chilterns also provide a network of trails and footpaths, making it a popular destination for outdoor activities and offering views across the landscape.³⁶
- 7.3.3. Development near NLs is subject to stricter scrutiny to preserve the landscape's quality and character. Development plans must align with the relevant NL Management Plan and adhere to specific guidelines to ensure responsible land use and protect the area's unique features.

National Character Areas

- 7.3.4. The majority of Leighton-Linslade sits within the Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge National Character Area (NCA). The western quarter of the neighbourhood area sites within the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA.

³⁶ Chilterns National Landscape (no date). 'About the National Landscape' can be accessed through [this link](#).

7.3.5. The Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge profile ³⁷ describes the NCA as ‘...a distinctive ridge with a north-west-facing scarp slope, formed by the underlying sandstone geology which has shaped the landscape and industry of the Ridge...’.

7.3.6. Environmental opportunities for this NCA include:

- Protect, manage and enhance the historic landscape and its wealth of sites of heritage interest, including the remnant ridge and furrow, ironage hill forts, designed parklands and associated country houses, estate villages, farmsteads and houses using traditional building material, for their contribution to landscape character and as a recreational and educational resource.
- Manage the agricultural and woodland resource and priority habitats for the benefit of biodiversity, landscape character and the economy.
- Protect the Ridge’s aquifer, the river valley landscape of the Flit, Ivel and Ouzel to benefit biodiversity, prevent soil erosion, improve river flow and quality, support pollinators and protect and enhance wildlife and recreational corridors.
- Promote and protect the distinct character and geodiversity of the Greensand Ridge landscape, with its prominent sandstone ridgeline rising from the surrounding low-lying vales; protect the long open views and high levels of tranquillity to ensure continued enjoyment of the landscape and plan for the sustainable extraction and restoration of sites associated with the distinctive geology.

7.3.7. The Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands profile³⁸ describes the NCA as ‘...a broad, gently undulating, lowland plateau dissected by shallow river valleys that gradually widen as they approach The Fens NCA in the east...’.

7.3.8. Environmental opportunities for this NCA include:

- Maintain and manage a sustainable and productive claylands arable landscape, while managing, expanding and linking woodlands, hedgerows and other semi-natural habitats to benefit biodiversity, improve soil and water quality, and ameliorate climate change by promoting good agricultural practice.
- Protect aquifers and enhance the quality, state and structure of the River Great Ouse, its valley and tributaries, habitats, waterbodies and flood plain by seeking to enhance their ecological, historical and recreational importance while taking into account their contribution to sense of place and regulating water flow, quality and availability.

³⁷ Natural England (no date) ‘National Character Area 90 Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

³⁸ Natural England (no date) ‘National Character Area 88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

- Plan and create high-quality green infrastructure to help accommodate growth and expansion, linking and enhancing existing semi-natural habitats. Regenerate the post-industrial landscapes of the Marston Vale and Peterborough to improve and create new opportunities for biodiversity, recreation, timber and biomass provision while strengthening sense of place, tranquillity, resilience to climate change, and people's health and wellbeing.
- Protect, conserve and enhance the cultural heritage and tranquillity of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA, including its important geodiversity, archaeology, historic houses, parkland, and Second World War and industrial heritage, by improving interpretation and educational opportunities to increase people's enjoyment and understanding of the landscape.

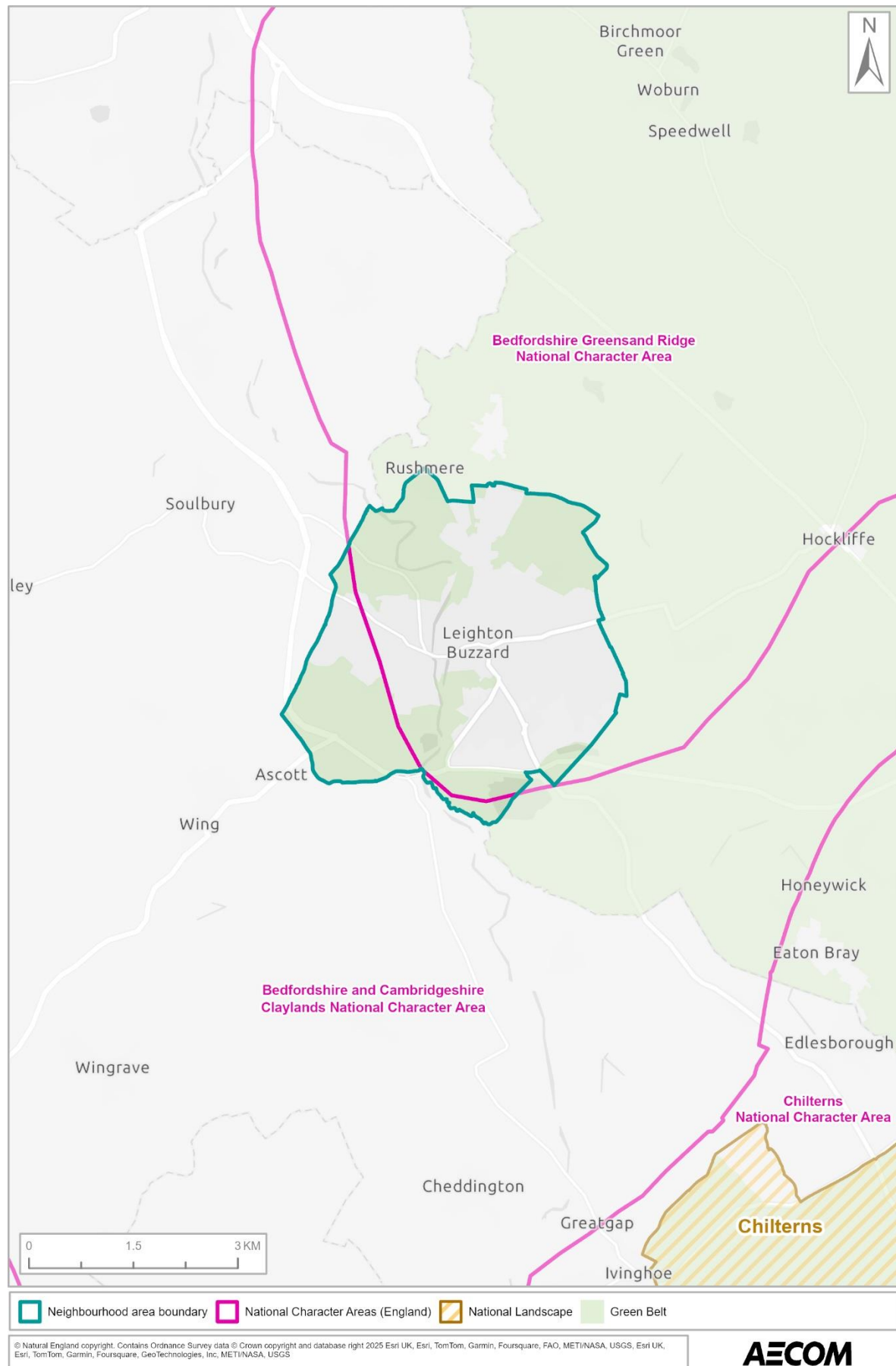
7.3.9. The ecosystem services provided by both of the NCAs should be protected, including food provision, water availability, regulating soil erosion, regulating soil quality, regulating water quality, sense of place / inspiration, sense of history, recreation, biodiversity, and geodiversity.

7.3.10. Leighton-Linslade's NCAs are presented in **Figure 7-1**.

Greenbelt

7.3.11. Green Belt is a policy designation in the UK that aims to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land around cities and towns largely undeveloped. It protects open spaces, preserves the character of rural areas, and encourages regeneration within existing urban boundaries rather than outward expansion.

7.3.12. As shown in **Figure 7-1**, the land surrounding the settlement boundary of Leighton Buzzard within, and surrounding, Leighton-Linslade falls within the Green Belt.

Figure 7-1: Landscape Designations in Leighton-Linslade

Local Landscape and Townscape Character

- 7.3.13. The Central Bedfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and distinctive features (characteristics) of the district's landscape.
- 7.3.14. The LCA³⁹ identifies that parts of Leighton-Linslade lie within three Central Bedfordshire Landscape Character Areas (CBLCA):
- 6A Woburn Greensand Ridge, found in north of Leighton-Linslade, is described as '*...a large scale, rolling, elevated landscape... with a distinctive ridge topography*'.
 - 7B Ouzel Greensand Valley, found in the north-west and south-west of the neighbourhood area, is described as '*a small to medium scale river valley running through the prominent band of Lower Greensand*'.
 - 8A Toddington – Hockcliffe Clay Hills, found in the south-western corner of Leighton-Linslade (and bordering the neighbourhood area to the east), is described as '*a medium scale landscape defined by a series of connected (subtle) hills*'.
- 7.3.15. The respective profile pages for each CBLCA contain unique Guidelines for New Development and Landscape Management Guidelines that should be considered if development comes forward in these areas.

Tree Preservation Orders

- 7.3.16. A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is a legal measure used by local planning authorities to protect specific trees, groups of trees, or woodlands from being cut down, topped, lopped, uprooted, or otherwise damaged without prior consent. TPOs are typically placed on trees that offer significant amenity value to the local environment. Similar protections are afforded trees within designated conservation areas.
- 7.3.17. According to Central Bedfordshire's website⁴⁰ there are 146 TPOs within Leighton-Linslade. Their locations are available to view on the My Central Bedfordshire mapping website.⁴¹

Topography

- 7.3.18. The topography of Leighton-Linslade (see **Figure 7-2**) consists of low-lying floodplain areas and gently rising hills. Leighton Buzzard sits largely within a valley, with elevations ranging from around 75 to 100 m near the River Ouzel and Grand Union Canal, where there is a natural risk of flooding.

³⁹ Central Bedfordshire Council (2015). '*Central Bedfordshire Landscape Character Assessment*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

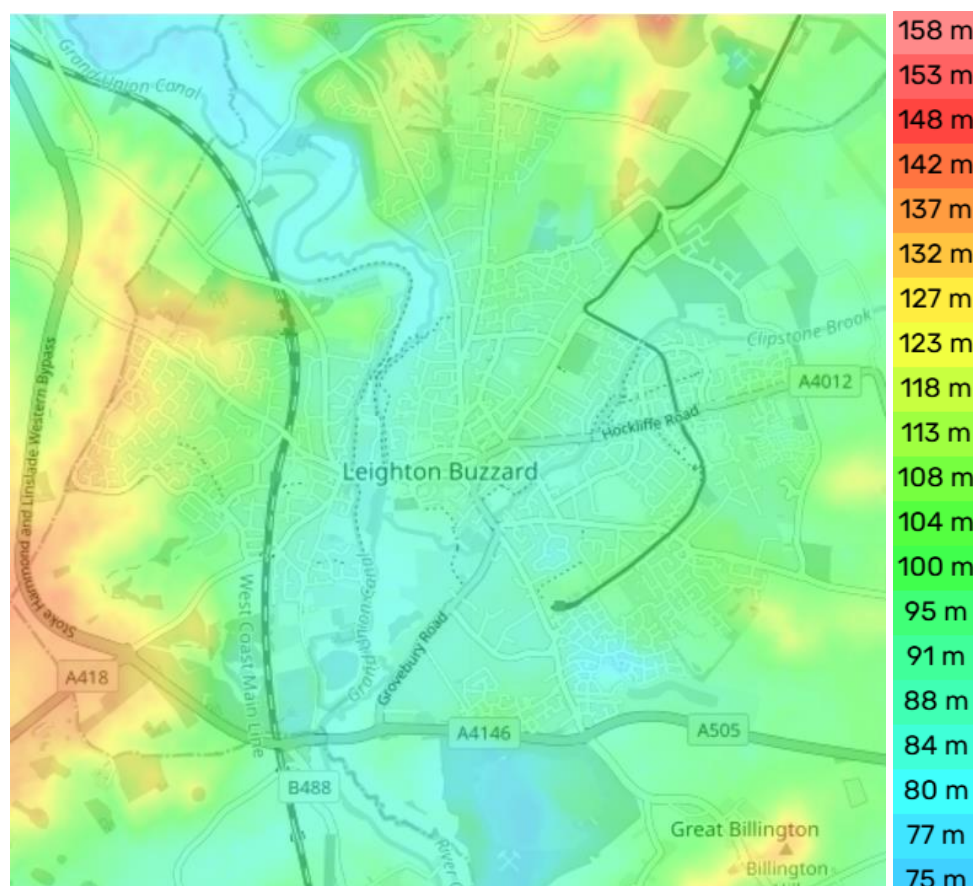
⁴⁰ Central Bedfordshire Council (2025). '*Start Tree Preservation Order search*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁴¹ Central Bedfordshire Council (2025). '*My Central Bedfordshire*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Surrounding areas rise gradually to over 150 m, particularly to the north-east and south-west.

- 7.3.19. Development has the potential to alter the landscape, particularly on higher ground. Buildings on elevated sites could disrupt the area's natural skyline, affecting long-distance views both into and out of the area. Hilltop development may dominate the horizon, while construction in lower areas could obscure existing sightlines. Careful planning is needed to preserve key viewpoints and maintain the area's visual character.

Figure 7-2: Topography of Leighton-Linslade⁴²



Future Baseline

- 7.3.20. New development has the potential to lead to incremental changes in landscape quality within and surrounding the neighbourhood area. This could place increased pressure on the surrounding countryside and local settings. Development also has the potential to disrupt views to and from the neighbourhood area.
- 7.3.21. The recent update to the NPPF has introduced the concept of the 'grey belt', which refers to previously developed or lower-value land within the Green Belt that could be considered for redevelopment. This change seeks to strike a balance between conservation and the need for more housing by prioritising underused sites rather than untouched countryside. This may

⁴² Topographic-map.com (2025). 'Home', available through [this link](#).

result in changes to the landscape surrounding the settlement of Leighton Buzzard, if available grey belt land is released for developed.

- 7.3.22. Coordinated delivery of green infrastructure, recreational spaces, and any regeneration opportunities could support landscape enhancements in the Neighbourhood Area. The LLNP therefore presents an opportunity to plan for development in a way which minimises landscape impacts and maximises improvement/ enhancement to the landscape resource where possible.

7.4. Key Issues

- 7.4.1. Considering the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues (constraints and / or opportunities) are identified in relation to the Landscape SEA theme:
- The neighbourhood area is in proximity of the Chilterns NL. Development near this designation must align the NL Management Plan to preserve landscape quality and character;
 - Leighton-Linslade is within the Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge NCA and the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands NCA, as well as three CBLCA's. New development should be sensitive to its location and setting, and consider the designations' environmental opportunities/ guidelines for new development.
 - The western and north-eastern regions of Leighton-Linslade are set in an area of rising topography. As such, new development in these areas could impact views and landscape character. Sensitive design and layout are essential to protect important views and the interplay between built and natural environments;
 - Development in Leighton-Linslade is constrained by the London Area Greenbelt designation, which surrounds the settlement boundary of Leighton Buzzard;
 - New development within the neighbourhood area has the potential to impact landscape and townscape character and locally important landscape features in the absence of sensitive design;
 - The interplay between the existing built environment and open countryside is an important consideration for plan making within Leighton-Linslade.

7.5. SEA Objective

7.5.1. Considering the key issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SEA should include the following objective and assessment questions in relation to Landscape:

Table 7-2: Proposed SEA Objective for Landscape

SEA Objective	Assessment Questions (Will the Option / Proposal Help to...)
Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape, including green infrastructure corridors.	• Protect and/ or enhance the integrity and setting of the Chilterns NL? • Protect and/or enhance the integrity of the overlapping NCAs and CBLCA's? • Protect and/ or enhance local landscape and townscape character and quality of place? • Conserve and enhance local identity, diversity, and settlement character? • Identify and protect locally important viewpoints which contribute to character and sense of place? • Protect and extend/ enhance green infrastructure corridors? • Protect visual amenity? • Will the option conserve the landscape integrity and openness of the Greenbelt? • Retain and enhance landscape and villagescape features that contribute to the rural setting, including trees and hedgerows?

8. Land, Soil and Water Resources

8.1. Focus of Theme

- 8.1.1. This theme focuses on the quality of soil resources, the extent of mineral resources, water supply resources and water quality in the neighbourhood area.

8.2. Policy Context

- 8.2.1. **Table 8-1** presents the most relevant documents identified in the policy review for the purposes of the SEA.

Table 8-1: Plans, Policies and Strategies Reviewed in Relation to Land, Soil, and Water Resources

Document Title	Year of Publication
National	
<u>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (and guidance)</u>	2024
<u>Environment Act</u>	2021
<u>The 25 Year Environment Plan</u>	2018
<u>Future Water: The government's water strategy for England</u>	2011
<u>Water for Life</u>	2011
<u>Safeguarding our Soils: A strategy for England</u>	2009
Local	
<u>Anglian Water: Water Resource Management Plan 2024</u>	2024
<u>Central Bedfordshire Local Plan</u>	2021
<u>Bedfordshire and Luton Minerals and Waste Local Plan</u>	2005

- 8.2.2. The key messages emerging from the review are summarised below:

- The LLNP will be required to be in general conformity with the NPPF, which seeks to protect high quality soil resources, and improve the water environment; recognising the wider benefits of natural capital and derived from ecosystem services. Furthermore, the NPPF recognises the need to take account of the long-term implications of climate change and build resilience in this respect. The NPPF encourages efficient land use, utilising brownfield land opportunities and land remediation schemes where appropriate and delivering environmental gains;

- The NPPF places a requirement on mineral planning authorities to prepare an annual Local Aggregate Assessment (LAA), which reports on the demand for and supply of aggregates in their area. The relevant LAA for Leighton-Linslade is the Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Luton Borough Councils' Local Aggregate Assessment 2016;
- The 25-year Environment Plan presents a focus for environmental improvement in the next couple decades, with aims to achieve clean air, clean and plentiful water, and reduced risk from environmental hazards. This includes measures to improve soil quality, restore and protect peatlands, use water more sustainably, reduce pollution, maximise resource efficiency and minimise environmental impacts. This leads on from and supports the soil strategy for England (Safeguarding our soils) which seeks to ensure that all England's soils will be managed sustainably, and degradation threats tackled successfully by 2030, as well as the national water strategies which seek to secure sustainable and resilient water resources and improve the quality of waterbodies, and the national waste plan which seeks to identify measures being taken to move towards a zero-waste economy;
- The Anglian Water Water Resource Management Plan 2024 outlines strategies for ensuring a sustainable and reliable water supply for the future. It assesses current and future water demand, climate change impacts, and potential water shortages, and identifies solutions to balance supply and demand. The plan focuses on improving water efficiency, enhancing infrastructure, and safeguarding water resources to meet the needs of residents and businesses in the region over the long term;
- The Bedfordshire and Luton Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2005 sets out the policies and strategies for managing minerals extraction and waste disposal in the region. It aims to ensure the sustainable use of mineral resources while addressing the management of waste through recycling, disposal, and landfill. The plan provides a framework for planning decisions related to minerals and waste, aiming to protect the environment, minimise impacts, and promote efficient resource use throughout Bedfordshire and Luton.
- The LLNP will also need to conform with the relevant policies in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.

8.3. Baseline summary

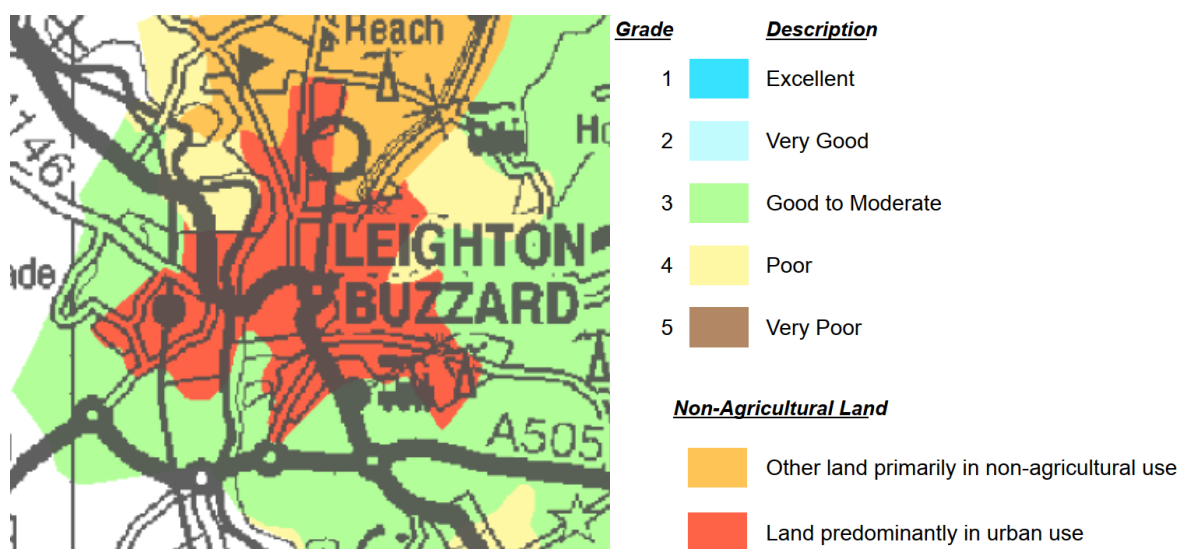
Current Baseline

Agricultural Land

- 8.3.1. The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) classifies land into six grades (plus 'non-agricultural land' and 'urban'), where Grades 1 to 3a are recognised as being the 'best and most versatile' (BMV) land and Grades 3b to 5 are of poorer quality.

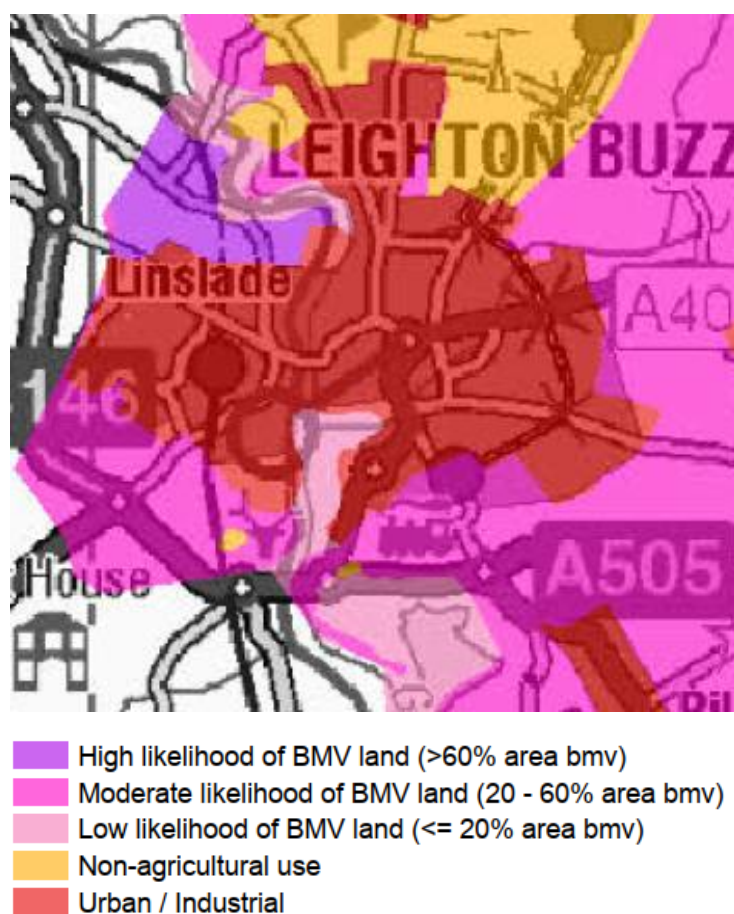
- 8.3.2. As shown in **Figure 8-1**, the neighbourhood area is mostly underlain by land predominantly in urban use. In areas north of the settlement of Leighton Buzzard, land is classified as Grade 2 (poor) or other land primarily in non-agricultural use.
- 8.3.3. The highest grade agricultural land (Grade 3 – good to moderate) in the neighbourhood area can be found surrounding Leighton Buzzard to the west, south, and east.
- 8.3.4. In the absence of a detailed agricultural land classification it is not possible to distinguish between areas of sub-grade 3a land (BMV) and sub-grade 3b land (not BMV).
- 8.3.5. Overall, development across the neighbourhood area could result in the loss of high-quality agricultural land, with an element of uncertainty at this stage.
- 8.3.6. It will be important to protect the higher quality agricultural land from future development and promote the use of previously developed land where possible.

Figure 8-1: Agricultural Land Classification for the Neighbourhood Area⁴³



- 8.3.7. **Figure 8-2** shows the results of Natural England's 'Predictive Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land Assessment' for the Eastern region. It indicates there is an area of high likelihood for being BMV land found in Leighton-Linslade's central western region. Moderate likelihood BMV land is found south-west and east of Leighton Buzzard. The remaining land in the neighbourhood area is considered to be low likelihood of BMV or not in agricultural use.

⁴³ Natural England (2010) 'Agricultural Land Classification map Eastern Region (ALC008)' can be accessed through [this link](#).

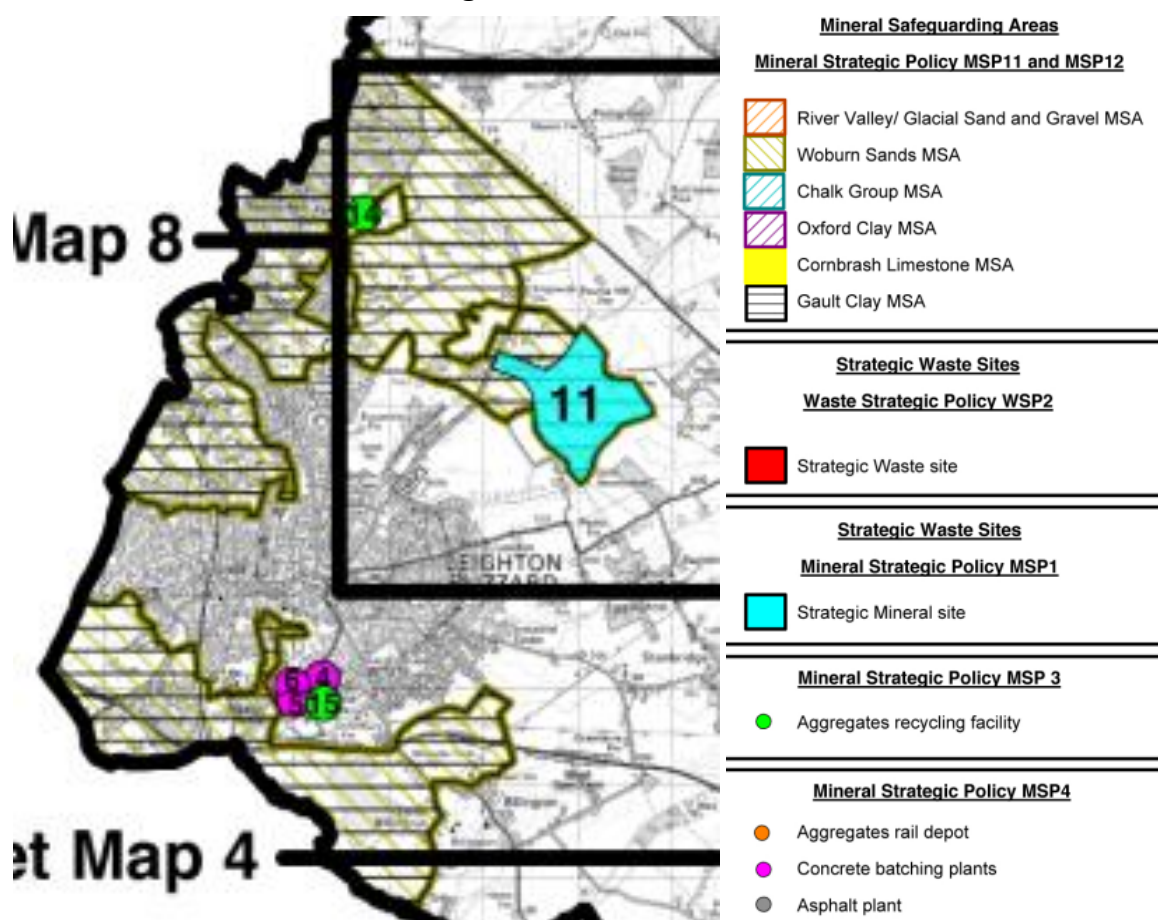
Figure 8-2: Likelihood of BMV Land Within the Neighbourhood Area⁴⁴

Minerals and Waste

- 8.3.8. Mineral resources are defined as natural concentrations of minerals or bodies of rock that have the potential to be of economic interest in the present or the future due to their inherent properties. As minerals are a non-renewable resource, minerals safeguarding is deployed as the process through which it is ensured that non-minerals development does not needlessly prevent the future extraction of mineral resources.⁴⁵
- 8.3.9. The Bedfordshire and Luton Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2014) identifies that the north-west and south of Leighton Buzzard is surrounded by gault clay Mineral Safeguarding Area (MSA) and woburn sands MSA (see **Figure 8-2**). The south of the neighbourhood area also contains three concrete batching plants, and one aggregate recycling facility. To the east of the neighbourhood area there is also a strategic mineral extraction site.
- 8.3.10. There are no designated strategic waste sites in the neighbourhood area.

⁴⁴ Natural England (2017) 'Likelihood of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land – Strategic scale map Eastern Region' can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁴⁵ UK Government (2014) 'Guidance: Minerals' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Table 8-2: Mineral Sites in Leighton-Linslade⁴⁶

Local Geological Sites

- 8.3.11. Local Geological Sites (LGS) are designated geological sites of local significance. They are chosen on the basis of their educational value for students, their historical value in the study of earth sciences, and their aesthetic value in the landscape, especially in promoting public awareness of geology.⁴⁷
- 8.3.12. Local planning authorities are required to consider these sites in their decision-making processes, ensuring that proposed developments do not adversely affect their geological features.
- 8.3.13. One LGS is within Leighton-Linslade: 'Ouzel Valley, Leighton-Linslade, Bedfordshire', found by the River Ouzel in the north-west corner of the neighbourhood area.

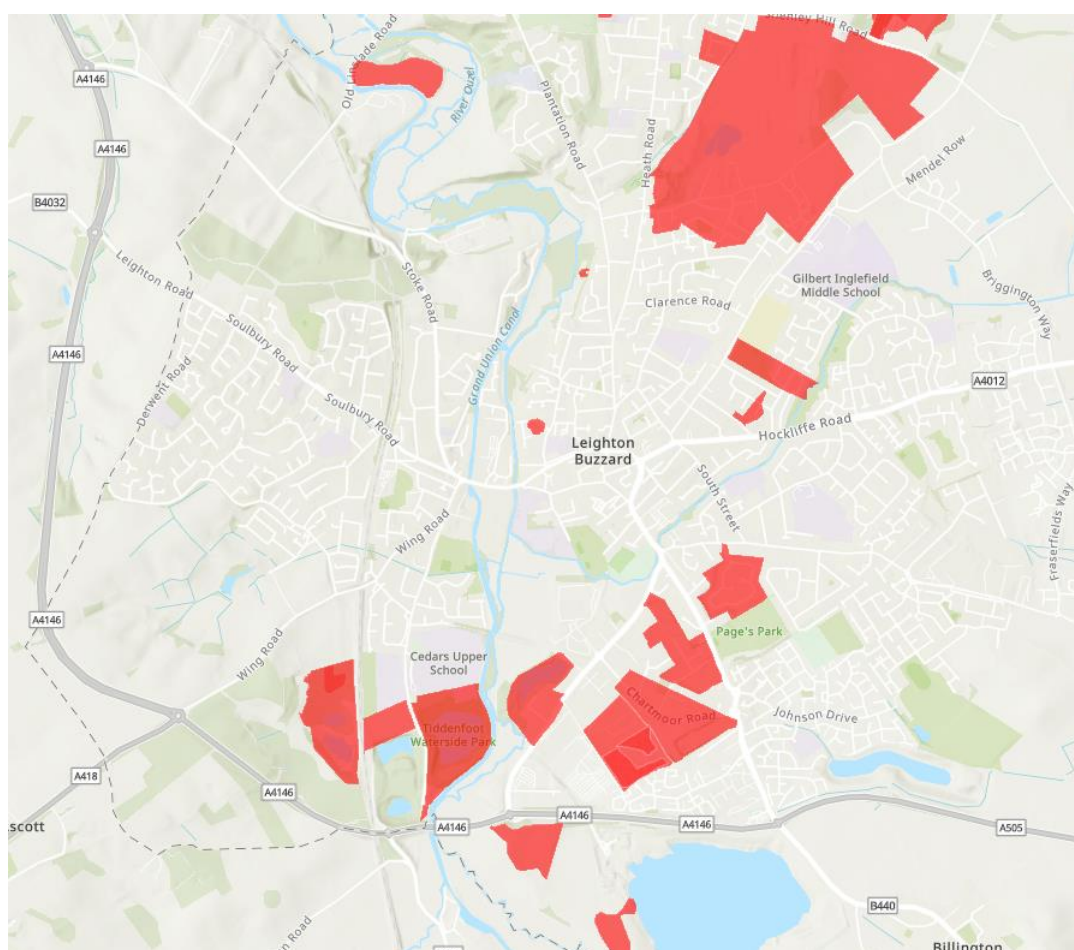
⁴⁶ Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough Councils (2014). 'Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Strategic Sites and Policies' can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁴⁷ Bedfordshire Geology Group (no date). '*Geological sites in Bedfordshire*' can be accessed [here](#).

Historic Landfill Sites

- 8.3.14. Historic landfill sites (HLS), once used for waste disposal, can create challenges for development due to potential contamination from harmful gases and leachate. Development sites near to HLS must conduct site assessments to check for environmental risks, which may require remediation efforts like soil removal or gas monitoring.
- 8.3.15. **Figure 8-3** illustrates the presence of several HLS in the neighbourhood area, with hotspots identified to the north-east and south of Leighton Buzzard town.

Figure 8-3: Historic Landfill Sites in Leighton-Linslade⁴⁸



Brownfield Sites

- 8.3.16. Brownfield sites are previously developed land that is no longer in use. They are preferred for new developments because they help reduce urban sprawl, make use of existing infrastructure, and regenerate neglected areas.

⁴⁸ Arcgis (no date). 'Historic landfills in England (created by Dr James H. Brand using Environment Agency data)' can be accessed through [this link](#).

- 8.3.17. The most recent Central Bedfordshire Council Brownfield Register (2024) identifies five sites within Leighton Linslade. Three of these already have planning permission, four are pending a decision and one site is allocated.⁴⁹

Water Quality

- 8.3.18. The neighbourhood area is located within the Anglian River Basin District. Specifically, within the Ouse Upper and Bedford management catchment and within the Ouzel and Milton Keynes operational catchment.⁵⁰
- 8.3.19. The south and west of the neighbourhood area is within the Ouzel (US Clipstone Brook) water body area. The north of the neighbourhood area falls within the Ouzel US Caldecote Mill Water Body area. Finally, the central and eastern parts of the neighbourhood area are within the Clipstone Brook water body area. All three water body areas recorded a moderate ecological status, but failed chemical status due to the presence of priority hazardous substances, during their most recent survey.
- 8.3.20. Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) represent areas at risk from agricultural nitrate pollution, identifying rules in relation to the use of fertilisers and manures as well as a requirement to prevent water pollution from farming areas.⁵¹ According to the interactive map⁵² the central and western parts of the neighbourhood area are within Surface Water S391-Great Ouse NVZ and Groundwater G76 – Woburn Sands NVZ.

Water Resources

- 8.3.21. In England, watercourses can be designated as ‘main rivers’. These are usually larger rivers and streams, and are managed by The Environment Agency. There are two designated ‘main rivers’ in the neighbourhood area: the River Ouzel, which runs through the centre of the neighbourhood area. Clipstone Brook, a tributary of the River Ouzel also extends into the central-eastern part of the neighbourhood area.
- 8.3.22. Rivers that are not designated as main rivers are known as ‘ordinary watercourses’, and are instead managed by lead local flood authorities, district councils and internal drainage boards. The neighbourhood area also contains several ordinary watercourses, an unnamed watercourses to the east and south-west of Leighton Buzzard.
- 8.3.23. Finally, the Grand Union Canal also passes through the neighbourhood area and runs in parallel to the River Ouzel.

⁴⁹ Central Bedfordshire Council (2024). ‘2024 Brownfield Register’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁵⁰ Environment Agency (2025) ‘Ouzel and Milton Keynes Operational Catchment’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁵¹ UK Government (2018) ‘Nitrate vulnerable zones’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁵² UK Government (2021) ‘Nitrate vulnerable zone designations and appeals 2025 to 2028’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

- 8.3.24. In relation to water resources, the neighbourhood area is served by Anglian Water. The Environment Agency have published a document entitled 'Water Stressed Areas – 2021 classification' which included a map of England, identifying areas of relative water stress. In this regard, the whole of Anglian Water's supply area is shown as an area of 'serious' water stress, based upon the amount of water available per person both now and in the future.⁵³
- 8.3.25. Groundwater Source Protection Zones (SPZs) have been defined by the Environment Agency in England and Wales to protect groundwater sources such as wells, boreholes, and springs that are used for public drinking water supply.⁵⁴ The north-eastern corner of the neighbourhood area falls within a total catchment SPZ.

Future Baseline

- 8.3.26. Future development has the potential to affect soil resources in the neighbourhood area through the loss of BMV ('good') quality agricultural land. Due to the presence of BMV land surround large parts of Leighton Buzzard, it is likely that development outside of the urban settlement could lead to the permanent loss of this resource. However, it is recognised that detailed land classification has not been carried out and therefore uncertainty remains in this respect.
- 8.3.27. Future development also has the potential to affect water quality through increased consumption, diffuse pollution, waste-water discharges, water run-off, and modification. Anglian Water are likely to maintain adequate water services over the LLNP period; therefore, it will be important for new development to avoid negative impacts on water quality, and instead contribute to reducing consumption and improving efficiency.
- 8.3.28. It is also noted that the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, as transposed into national legislation, are likely to lead to continued improvements to water quality within the LLNP and wider area. However, it will nonetheless be important for new development to avoid impacts on water quality, and support demand management measures by contributing to reduced consumption and improved efficiency.

8.4. Key Issues

- 8.4.1. Considering the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues (constraints and / or opportunities) are identified in relation to Land, Soil, and Water resources:
- Allocating land for development could influence changes to land, soil and water resources, particularly given the extent of 'good' agricultural land around Leighton-Linslade. It will therefore be important for development

⁵³ Environment Agency and DEFRA (2021) '*Water stressed areas – 2021 classification*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁵⁴ UK Government (2017) '*Groundwater Protection*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

to be focussed away from higher quality BMV land within the neighbourhood area to prevent the loss of productive agricultural land;

- Large areas outside of Leighton Buzzard are located in MSAs. Development must consider the safeguarding of these mineral resources to ensure their availability for future extraction;
- The presence of HLS in the neighbourhood area, particularly to the north-east and south of Leighton Buzzard, must be considered in development proposals. Development should assess and mitigate potential environmental risks, including soil and groundwater contamination, to ensure public safety and environmental protection;
- The neighbourhood area is within three water body areas, which all have a moderate ecological status. It is also covered by NVZs for surface and groundwater. Development must implement measures to prevent water pollution and protect water quality; and
- The neighbourhood area is served by Anglian Water and is classified as experiencing serious water stress. The River Ouzel, a designated main river, runs through the area. Development should focus on reducing water consumption and improving efficiency to address water stress and ensure sustainable water management.

8.5. SEA Objectives

8.5.1. Considering the key issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SEA should include the following objectives and assessment questions in relation to Land, Soil, and Water resources:

Table 8-3: Proposed SEA Objectives for Land, Soil, and Water Resources

SEA Objective	Assessment Questions (Will the Option / Proposal Help to...)
Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.	• Avoid the loss of high-quality agricultural land resources? • Support sustainable resource consumption and waste management? • Promote any opportunities for the use of previously developed land, or vacant / underutilised land? • Avoid impacts on water quality? • Support improvements to water quality? • Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside development? • Avoid developing on HLS sites? • Protect the neighbourhood area's waterbodies? • Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water harvesting and/ or water recycling? • Protect the integrity of mineral resources?

9. Transportation

9.1. Focus of Theme

- 9.1.1. This theme focuses on transport infrastructure, transport usage, traffic flows and congestion, and accessibility levels in the neighbourhood area.

9.2. Policy Context

- 9.2.1. **Table 9-1** presents the most relevant documents identified in the policy review for the purposes of the SEA.

Table 9-1: Plans, Policies and Strategies Reviewed in Relation to Transportation

Document Title	Year of Publication
National	
<u>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (and guidance)</u>	2024
<u>Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain</u>	2021
<u>Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge</u>	2020
<u>The National Design Guide</u>	2019
<u>The Transport Investment Strategy – Moving Britain Ahead</u>	2017
<u>The Department for Transport's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy</u>	2016
Local	
<u>Central Bedfordshire Sustainability Plan (2023-2030)</u>	2024
<u>Central Bedfordshire On-Street Parking Management Strategy</u>	2022
<u>Central Bedfordshire Local Plan</u>	2021
<u>Central Bedfordshire Local Transport Plan 3</u>	2011

- 9.2.2. The key messages emerging from the review are summarised below:

- The LLNP will be required to be in general conformity with the NPPF, which seeks the consideration of transport issues from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals to address any known issues and maximise opportunities to increase accessibility, particularly by walking, cycling and public transport. Larger developments are expected to be delivered in areas which are or can be made sustainable by limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.

However, it is recognised that sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural environments;

- National transport strategies set out investment priorities which ultimately all seek to improve the connectivity, effectiveness and reliability of transport networks, whilst reducing impacts on the natural environment (including through decarbonisation). Furthermore, they place great emphasis on making cycling and walking the natural choice for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journeys. This includes investment in new and upgraded infrastructure, changing perceptions, and increasing safety;
- Central Bedfordshire's Sustainability Plan (2024) focusses on promoting environmental sustainability by improving operations and processes, leading by example in managing buildings, facilitating infrastructure investments, and encouraging sustainable practices among residents, businesses, and supply chains in Central Bedfordshire. The plan includes actions to support sustainable transport, such as promoting greener travel options and reducing emissions;
- The Central Bedfordshire On-Street Parking Management Strategy outlines how the local authority will manage on-street parking in the area to ensure efficient use of parking spaces and improve traffic flow. It sets policies and actions to address parking demand, reduce congestion, and enhance the safety of road users;
- The Central Bedfordshire Local Transport Plan 3 provides a long-term vision for the district's transport infrastructure and services. It outlines strategies to improve accessibility, reduce congestion, and promote sustainable travel, including walking, cycling, and public transport; and
- The LLNP will also need to conform with relevant policies in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan.

9.3. Baseline summary

Current Baseline

Rail Network

- 9.3.1. There is one train station in the neighbourhood area – Leighton Buzzard, which is operated by London Northwestern Railway. The station offers regular services to London Euston, Milton Keynes Central and Birmingham New Street.⁵⁵

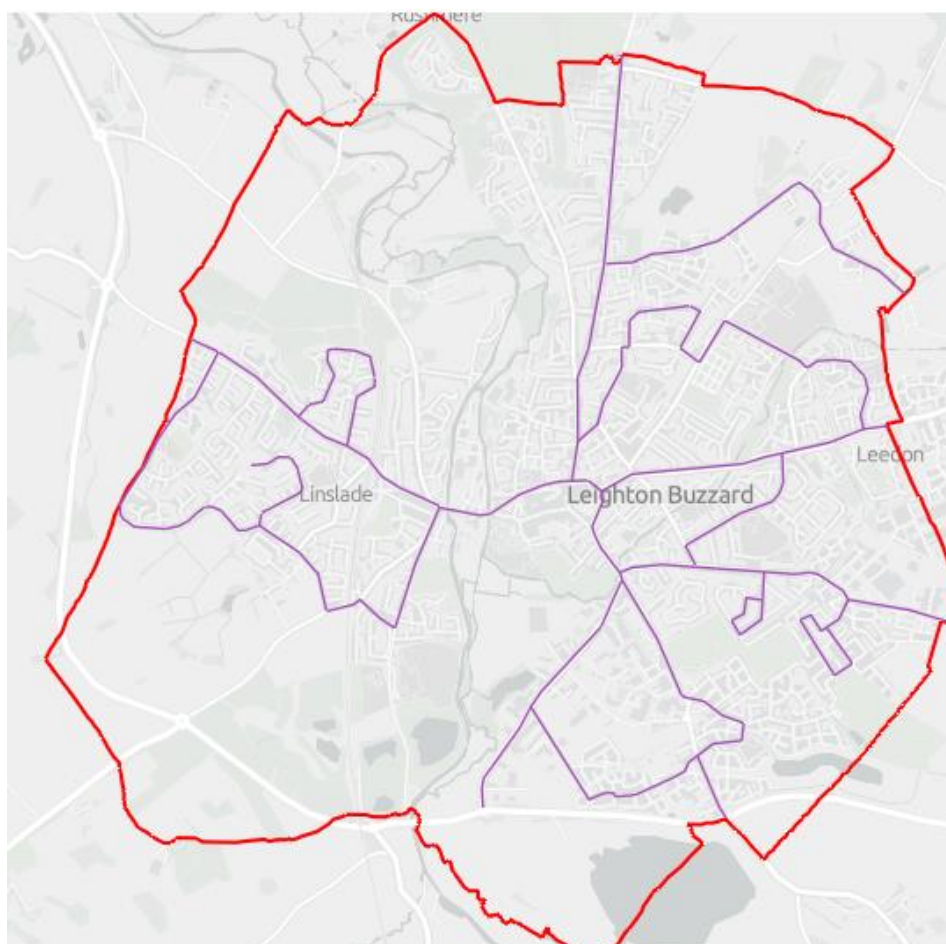
⁵⁵ GWR (2025). 'Leighton Buzzard Train Station' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Bus Network

9.3.2. According to Bustimes,⁵⁶ Leighton-Linslade is served by a variety of bus services connecting the neighbourhood area to surrounding areas (see **Figure 9-1**). Operators and their destinations include:

- Arriva Beds and Bucks: Aylesbury, Milton Keynes, Leighton Buzzard, Sandhills, Brooklands, Linslade.
- South Beds Dial-a-Ride: Toddington, Leighton Buzzard.
- Red Rose Travel: Stewkley, Bletchley, Leighton Buzzard, Edlesborough, Ivinghoe.
- Z&S Transport: Aylesbury, Leighton Buzzard, Wingrave, Wing.
- Marshalls Coaches: Tesco, The Broadway.

Figure 9-1: Bus Routes in Leighton-Linslade⁵⁷



⁵⁶ Bustimes (2025) 'Leighton Buzzard; can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁵⁷ Leighton Linslade Neighbourhood Plan Informal Consultation (2025). 'Policies - LL14: Active Travel and Parking' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Road Network and Congestion

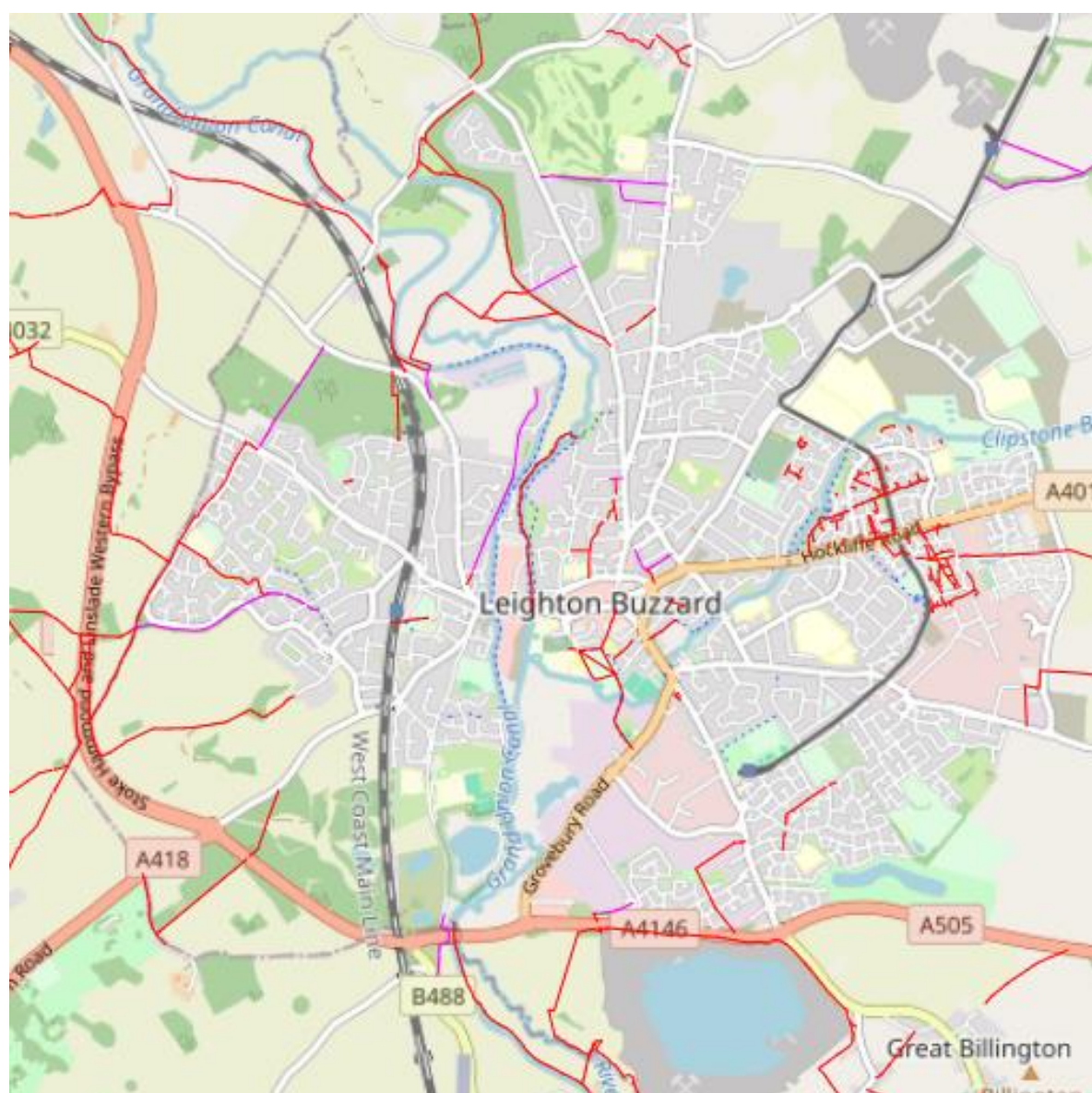
- 9.3.3. The road network in Leighton Buzzard consists of several key routes that connect the town to surrounding areas. The A505 runs south of the town, forming the Leighton Buzzard Bypass and linking with the A4146 and A418. The A4146 skirts the southern edge of the neighbourhood area, providing a connection to Milton Keynes and access to the M1 motorway. The A418 runs westward from near Ascott, passing through Wing and leading to Aylesbury. Within Leighton Buzzard town centre, the A4012 passes through the High Street and links the town with Hockliffe to the east. In addition to these main roads, a network of minor roads and local streets serves residential areas and facilitates access to nearby villages.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and Cycleways

- 9.3.4. Leighton Buzzard's designated Public Rights of Way (PROW) network is relatively limited due to the town's well-developed street network, which provides pedestrian access to most areas. The majority of foot travel takes place along pavements and designated pedestrian routes within residential and commercial areas, reducing the need for extensive public rights of way. However, some footpaths do exist, primarily on the outskirts of the town, where they connect to rural areas and provide walking routes beyond the built-up environment.⁵⁸
- 9.3.5. The Leighton Linslade Green Wheel is an emerging active travel network for Leighton-Linslade. The Green Wheel establishes routes (quiet roads and paths) that walkers and cyclists can use to access the town, and across, into or out of the town, linking areas of greenspace as well as creating safe and attractive routes to schools, areas of employment, shops and the station.
- 9.3.6. The foundation of the Green Wheel are public rights of way, footpaths, and bridleways. The Green Wheel masterplan⁵⁹ require the creation of new routes and rights of way to fill gaps in the network. The LLNP seeks to map the existing active travel network to draw the attention of developers to where this network is so that they can take it into account in designing their proposals.

⁵⁸ Footpathmap.co.uk (no date) 'FPM' can be accessed through [this link](#).

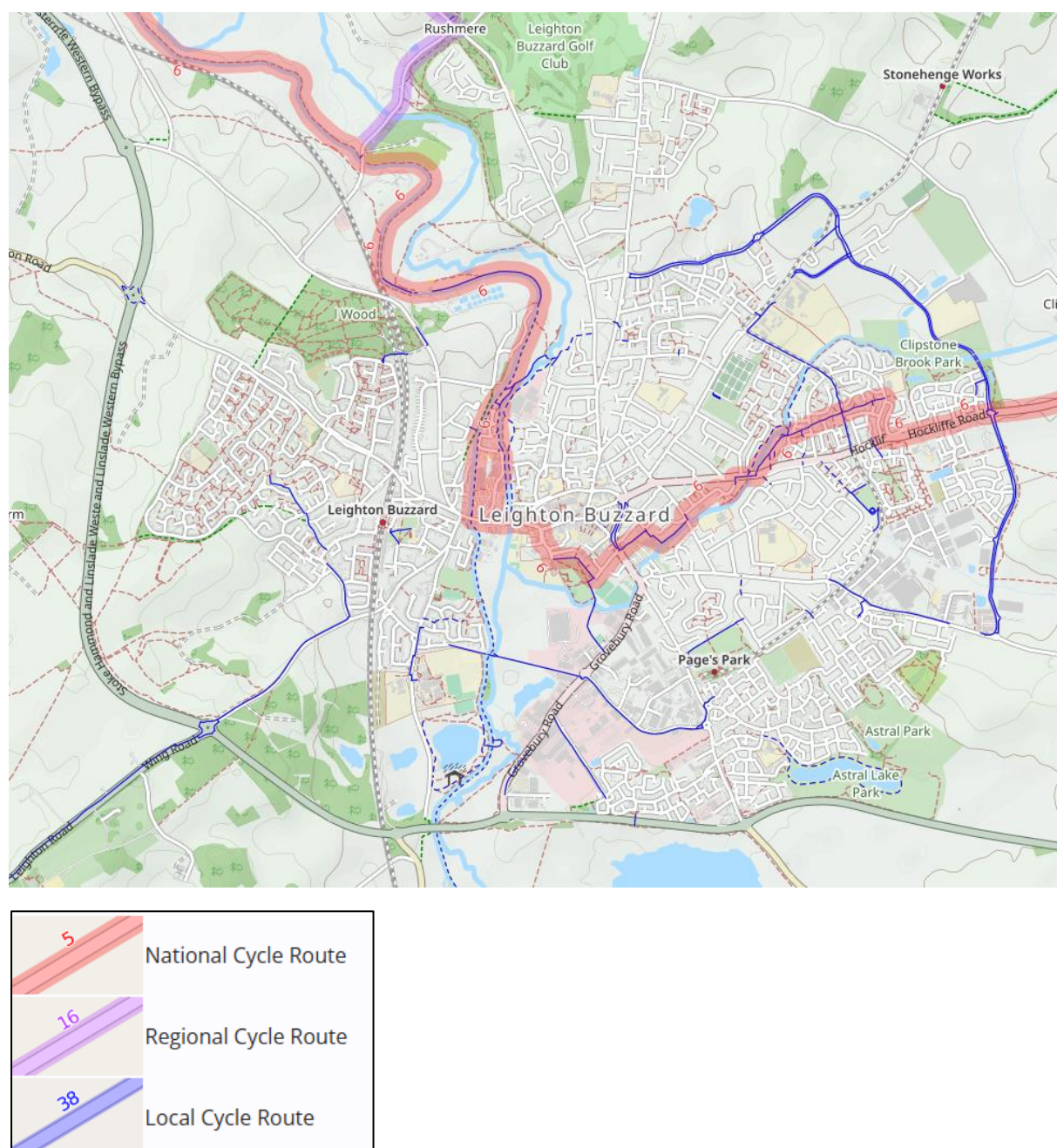
⁵⁹ Leighton Buzz Cycles (no date). 'The Leighton Linslade Green Wheel' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Figure 9-2: Public Rights of Way in Leighton-Linslade

—	Footpath (England & Wales), Core Path (Scotland)	—	Bridleway
—	Restricted Byway	—	National Trail / Coastal Path
—	Byway		

9.3.7. Leighton-Linslade also benefits from several cycle routes that pass through the neighbourhood area. This includes National Cycle Route 6, which follows the Grand Union Canal from Milton Keynes into the centre of Leighton Buzzard before continuing eastward towards Luton. Other cycle paths in the area include Regional Cycle Route NB, located in the north, as well as several local cycle routes.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Opencyclemap (no date) 'Cycle Map' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Table 9-2: Cycle Network in Leighton-Linslade⁶¹

Future Baseline

- 9.3.8. Increased road congestion, air quality issues, and carbon emissions could become more pronounced as new developments bring additional demand for transport infrastructure. The reliance on private car travel is likely to continue, leading to further pressure on local roads, particularly at peak times.

⁶¹ Opencyclemap (no date) 'Cycle Map' can be accessed through [this link](#).

- 9.3.9. Future transport infrastructure improvements, such as those outlined in the Central Bedfordshire Local Transport Plan, may help mitigate some issues by promoting active travel and public transport use. However, if these measures are not supported at the neighbourhood level, opportunities to integrate sustainable transport solutions could be missed. Additionally, emerging technologies, including electric vehicles, may become more prevalent, but without coordinated local policies, their adoption and effectiveness could be uneven.
- 9.3.10. Climate change will impact Leighton-Linslade's transport network, with extreme weather increasing risks like flooding, road damage, and public transport disruptions. Heavy rainfall may waterlog roads, while extreme heat could degrade surfaces and affect rail reliability, potentially leading to greater car dependency, congestion, and emissions. To mitigate these risks, future transport planning must integrate climate resilience measures and promote sustainable travel options.

9.4. Key Issues

- 9.4.1. Considering the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues (constraints and / or opportunities) are identified in relation to Transportation:
- Leighton-Linslade benefits from a well-connected train station with services to major destinations, as well as a variety of bus routes;
 - Key routes, including the A505, A4146, and A4012, provide connectivity to surrounding areas, but congestion is an issue, particularly within the town centre and at peak times. Reliance on private vehicles is expected to continue, adding pressure to local roads;
 - The town's street network provides good pedestrian access, and there are several cycle routes, including National Cycle Route 6. However, opportunities exist to enhance infrastructure and connectivity for active travel to further encourage walking and cycling;
 - Planned developments will increase demand for transport infrastructure, potentially worsening congestion, air quality, and carbon emissions. Without proactive measures, reliance on car travel may persist; and
 - Extreme weather events, including flooding and heat damage, pose risks to the transport network, potentially leading to more disruptions, higher maintenance costs, and reduced reliability of public transport. Future transport planning should integrate resilience measures and promote low-carbon alternatives.

9.5. SEA Objective

9.5.1. Considering the key issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SEA should include the following objective and assessment questions in relation to Transportation:

Table 9-3: Proposed SEA Objective for Transportation

SEA Objective	Assessment Questions (Will the Option / Proposal Help to...)
Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.	• Support the objectives within the Central Bedfordshire Local Transport Plan to encourage the use of more sustainable transport modes? • Encourage opportunities to enhance connectivity and accessibility within the neighbourhood area, including through the uptake of active travel opportunities? • Extend or improve active travel networks? • Facilitate working from home to reduce the use of private vehicles to access workplaces outside of the neighbourhood area? • Reduce the impact of the transport sector on climate change? • Improve road safety?

10. Next Steps

10.1. SEA Stages

10.1.1. Scoping (the current stage) is the second stage of the SEA process:

- Screening;
- Scoping;
- Assess reasonable alternatives (to inform preparation of the draft plan); and
- Prepare the Environmental Report (to inform consultation and plan finalisation).

10.1.2. The next stage will involve appraising reasonable alternatives for the LLNP. The findings of the appraisal of these alternatives will be fed back to the Town Council so that they might be considered when preparing the draft plan.

10.1.3. Once the draft ('pre-submission version') plan has been prepared by the Town Council, it will be subjected to SEA and the Environmental Report prepared for consultation alongside it.

10.1.4. Following consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Plan and the Environmental Report, the Neighbourhood Plan will be finalised and submitted to Central Bedfordshire Council for Independent Examination.

10.2. Consultation on the Scoping Report

10.2.1. Public involvement through consultation is a key element of the SEA process. At this scoping stage, the SEA Regulations require consultation with statutory consultation bodies but not full consultation with the public.

10.2.2. The statutory consultation bodies are the Environment Agency, Historic England, and Natural England. This scoping report has been released to these three statutory consultees.

10.2.3. Consultees are invited to comment on the content of this scoping report, particularly the evidence base for the SEA, the identified key issues, and the proposed SEA Framework.

10.2.4. The consultation period runs from 30 April 2025 to 4 June 2025. Comments on the scoping report should be sent to:

Antonio Vinti, AECOM

Email address: antonio.vinti@aeacom.com

10.2.5. All comments received on the scoping report will be reviewed and will influence the development of the SEA where appropriate.

Appendix A Proposed SEA Framework

10.2.6. The SEA framework has been established through the identification of key issues and environmental objectives as part of the scoping exercise. This draws upon the baseline position and policy context that has been prepared for a range of SEA themes (as set out in **Chapters 2-9**).

10.2.7. The framework consists of a set of headline objectives and supporting assessment questions, which will be used to appraise the environmental effects of the draft Plan (and reasonable alternatives).

10.2.8. **Table A.1** below outlines the proposed SEA framework, bringing together the objectives that have been set out at the end of each SEA theme. Note that the supporting assessment questions are not repeated here for brevity.

Table A.1: Proposed SEA Framework

SEA Theme	SEA Objective
Biodiversity	Maintain and enhance the extent and quality of biodiversity habitats and networks within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Climate Change (including Flood Risk)	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities in the neighbourhood area. Support the resilience of the neighbourhood area to the potential effects of climate change, including flood risk.
Community Wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents and in suitably connected places, supported by the appropriate and timely provision of infrastructure to enable cohesive and inclusive communities.
Historic Environment	Protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape, including green infrastructure corridors.
Land, Soil, and Water Resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

