



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

Central Bedfordshire adopted Local Plan Key Policies (2026)

1. Policy SP4: Development in the Green Belt

The Green Belt is shown on the policy maps and generally covers the southern and western parts of Central Bedfordshire, outside the main settlements.

The Council will work proactively with developers, and landowners to enhance the beneficial uses of the Green Belt.

Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development. Development proposals within the Green Belt will be assessed in accordance with government guidance contained in the NPPF and NPPG.

Within this Plan's washed-over Green Belt settlements, applicants will be expected to pay particular attention to the quality and design of development proposed, to ensure that development respects and is sympathetic to the character and openness of the settlement and its surroundings.

The redevelopment of brownfield sites within the Green Belt will be acceptable as long as the redevelopment would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt or the purposes for including land within the Green Belt than the existing development

2. Policy SP5: Important Countryside Gaps and Preventing Coalescence

Within the areas defined as Important Countryside Gaps, new development will be permitted provided that it does not result in the physical or visual coalescence of settlements or settlement 'ends' and would not undermine the separate character, appearance and/or identity of settlements.

In considering applications for development outside Important Countryside Gaps, the Council will also have regard to maintaining the individual identity of towns, villages and settlement 'ends'. Proposals will only be permitted where they would not result in physical or visual coalescence, or, where it can be demonstrated that appropriate mitigation would prevent any harm arising from coalescence or to the character and appearance of the settlement.

3. Policy SP7: Windfall Development

Settlement Envelopes provide a distinction between settlements and the countryside.

Within the Settlement Envelopes the Council will support housing, employment and other uses including new retail, service and community facilities proportionate to the scale of the settlement, taking account of its role and function in the settlement hierarchy.

Within Settlement Envelopes of Small Villages, development will be limited to infill development, small-scale employment uses and community facilities.

Where an identified need exists for further community facilities (such as education, health, sports and recreation uses or mixed community uses) and there is no land available within the settlement, a site adjacent to the settlement may be granted planning permission. Such development should make the best use of available land and lead to more sustainable communities.

Outside Settlement Envelopes, the Council will recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and only particular types of development will be permitted. This includes the development of those sites allocated by this Development Plan, rural exception schemes, dwellings for the essential needs of rural workers and the re-use and replacement of existing buildings in accordance with Policies H5, DC1, DC2 or DC3. planning permission will also be granted for the redevelopment of previously developed land where the proposal does not cause the coalescence of settlements when considered against Policy SP5, the site is, or can be made, accessible to nearby services and facilities by sustainable modes of transport, there will be no detrimental impact on the built and/or natural environment, settlement character, highway network or the amenity of occupiers of neighbouring properties and where the proposal does not prejudice the deliverability of allocated sites.

Proposals for employment, tourism, leisure, rural and community uses will also be considered favourably subject to their conformity with Policies EMP3, EMP4, EE13, HQ3, HQ4 and DC4.

Limited extensions to gardens beyond Settlement Envelopes may be permitted provided that they do not harm the character of the area.

4. Policy HQ1: High Quality Development

The Council will ensure that all developments are of the highest possible quality and respond positively to their context. Development proposals, including extensions and change of use, will be permitted where:

1. Proposals take account of opportunities to enhance or reinforce the local distinctiveness of the area and create a sense of place;
2. Size, scale, massing, orientation, materials and appearance relate well to the existing local surroundings and reinforce local distinctiveness, both built and natural;
3. Careful consideration is given to the density of all new housing proposals to ensure that they make the most efficient use of the land available, whilst reflecting the existing character of the surrounding area and making provision for appropriate landscaping and boundary treatments;
4. Proposals are well connected to surrounding areas, providing safe, attractive and convenient routes that encourage travel by sustainable modes and meet the needs of all street users;
5. The distinction between public and private space is clear, with defined boundaries;
6. Proposals are complementary to the existing natural environment, taking account of the landscape setting, landscape character and tranquillity, Rights of Way, biodiversity and Green Infrastructure;
7. High quality hard and soft landscaping appropriate to the scale of development proposed should be used to integrate the proposal into the existing built, natural and historic environment;
8. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through the design and layout of the development;
9. Inclusive design is considered from the outset of the design process;
10. Layouts are designed to maximise surveillance and increase pedestrian activity within the public realm to reduce opportunities for crime and the fear of crime;
11. There is not an unacceptable adverse impact upon nearby existing or permitted uses, including impacts on amenity, privacy, noise or air quality;
12. Any lighting associated with the development does not have a detrimental impact on the surrounding area; and
13. Development supports the sustainable management of waste through the appropriate layout and design of buildings, external spaces and roads in accordance with the Design Guide for Central Bedfordshire and Waste Strategic Policy WSP5 of the Minerals and Waste Local Plan (January 2014).

All new development will be expected to have regard to the Central Bedfordshire Design Guide (and subsequent revisions).

5. Policy HQ8: Back-land Development

Proposals for the development of back-land sites will be resisted where they are against the existing pattern and grain of development, and the character and appearance of the area would be harmed. Proposals will be expected to secure high-quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

6. Policy EE5: Landscape Character and Value

In order to safeguard intrinsic character, scenic beauty and perceptual qualities of the landscape such as tranquillity, all development proposals will need to have regard to the key characteristics and sensitivities of the site and its setting, as set out in the Central Bedfordshire Landscape Character Assessment.

All major development proposals will be required to demonstrate how they incorporate landscape enhancement, in accordance with the guidelines in the LCA, the Central Bedfordshire Design Guide and other relevant documents for specific areas. This includes the Chilterns AONB, Forest of Marston Vale and the Greensand Ridge Nature Improvement Area. Landscape and visual appraisal will be expected to support planning applications and include the assessment of local landscape character and views. All development will be required to respect, retain and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the local landscape by:

1. Reflecting the local character and distinctiveness in terms of the scale and pattern of the surrounding landscape and existing settlement form; and
2. Integrating on-site mitigation sympathetic to local character in scale with the landscape setting as well as the scale of the development.

7. Policy EE7: The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally designated landscape and permission for major developments in the Chilterns AONB will be refused unless exceptional circumstances prevail as defined by national planning policy.

Planning permission for any proposal within the AONB, or affecting the setting or appreciation of the AONB, will be restricted to proposals that:

1. Conserve and enhance the Chiltern AONB's special qualities, distinctive character, tranquillity and remoteness in accordance with national planning policy and the overall purpose of the AONB designation;
2. Are appropriate to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area or are desirable for its understanding and enjoyment;
3. Meet the aims of the statutory Chilterns AONB Management Plan, making practical and financial contributions towards management plan delivery as appropriate; and
4. Avoid adverse impacts from individual proposals (including their cumulative effects), unless these can be satisfactorily mitigated.

Developments in the Chilterns AONB and its setting should respond to the landscape character (having considered all the relevant landscape character assessments) and be informed by landscape and visual impact assessment to understand the impacts of the proposed development on landscape character, and what options for mitigating negative impacts are possible.

8. Policy EE8: Greensand Ridge Nature Improvement Area

Development proposals within the Greensand Ridge Nature Improvement Area (NIA) will be permitted where they:

1. Demonstrate how a net gain in biodiversity will be delivered, including how gains in the quality and connectivity of ecological networks within and linking to the development will be delivered;
2. Enhance wildlife networks and increase ecological connectivity through buffering, extending and linking characteristic habitats (as listed above) both within and adjacent to developments;
3. Demonstrate how provision is made for species recovery and resilience;
4. Respect the topography and landscape of the NIA and be designed in such a way that it minimises visual impacts and protects local amenity; and
5. Provide opportunities for people to access and experience the NIA in a way that is sympathetic and sustainable towards existing habitats.

9. Policy HE3: Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Built Heritage

Development proposals affecting designated and non-designated heritage assets of local importance will be granted provided they:

1. Where possible, preserve, sustain and enhance the special character, significance, appearance and/or special architectural or historic interest of the asset/s in terms of scale, form, proportion, design, materials and the retention of features in accordance with national planning policy and legislation;
2. Preserve the setting of the asset/s and its historic significance, and include hard and soft landscape proposals, where appropriate, that respect the character and appearance of the heritage asset; and
3. Developments that will result in a reduction of the number of heritage assets on the Heritage at Risk Register will be encouraged.

Development proposals that affect the significance of any heritage assets must be accompanied by a Built Heritage Statement. The Built Heritage Statement must:

4. Describe the significance of any heritage assets that may be affected by the development;
5. Assess the level of impact that the development proposals will have on those assets, including where necessary an assessment of the impact of the development proposals on their setting; and
6. Demonstrate that opportunities to avoid harmful impacts have been explored, and where this is not possible, set out necessary mitigation measures.

Where development proposals will lead to harm to designated or non-designated heritage assets they will be assessed against the relevant criteria in the National Planning Policy Framework, taking into account the scale of harm and the impact on the significance of the heritage asset.

10. Policy T2: Highways Safety and Design

Proposals for new development must not have a detrimental effect on highway safety and patterns of movement, must provide appropriate access and have regard to the Council's standards as set out in the Council's Design Guide and Highway Construction Standards and Specifications Guidance.

Development will be permitted where:

1. The proposal is, or will be, well integrated with the existing transport network within and beyond the development itself; avoiding severance of communities as a result of measures to accommodate increased levels of traffic on the network;
2. The proposal does not impede the free flow of traffic on the existing network or create hazards to that traffic and other road users;
3. The proposal retains or enhances existing footpaths, bridleways and cycleway links;
4. The proposal promotes walking and cycling permeability and ensures that linkages and publicly accessible through-routes are created to successfully integrate the development into wider networks;
5. The development provides safe and convenient access and has regard to the appropriate standards in the Council's Design Guide and Highway Construction Standards and Specifications Guidance, that promote accessibility for all users and all modes of transport and includes designs, where appropriate, that incorporate low speeds;
6. The proposal must make adequate provision for loading and unloading, circulation, servicing and vehicle turning; and
7. The proposal fully funds where appropriate or contributes towards the costs of any measures required to cost effectively mitigate the impacts arising from the development.

Development will be refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe.