

Chapter 2 Policy Context



National Policy Context

The Sustainable Communities Plan sets out a long-term national programme for delivering sustainable communities in urban and rural areas throughout England.¹⁷ It aims to address housing supply issues in the South East and East of England regions and low demand in other parts of the country to deliver a better quality of life for all. The Plan contains two key elements that are of direct relevance to Green Infrastructure:

- Liveability - How the Government plans to improve local environments by providing cleaner streets, improved parks and better public spaces etc
- Protecting the countryside - How land will be used more effectively

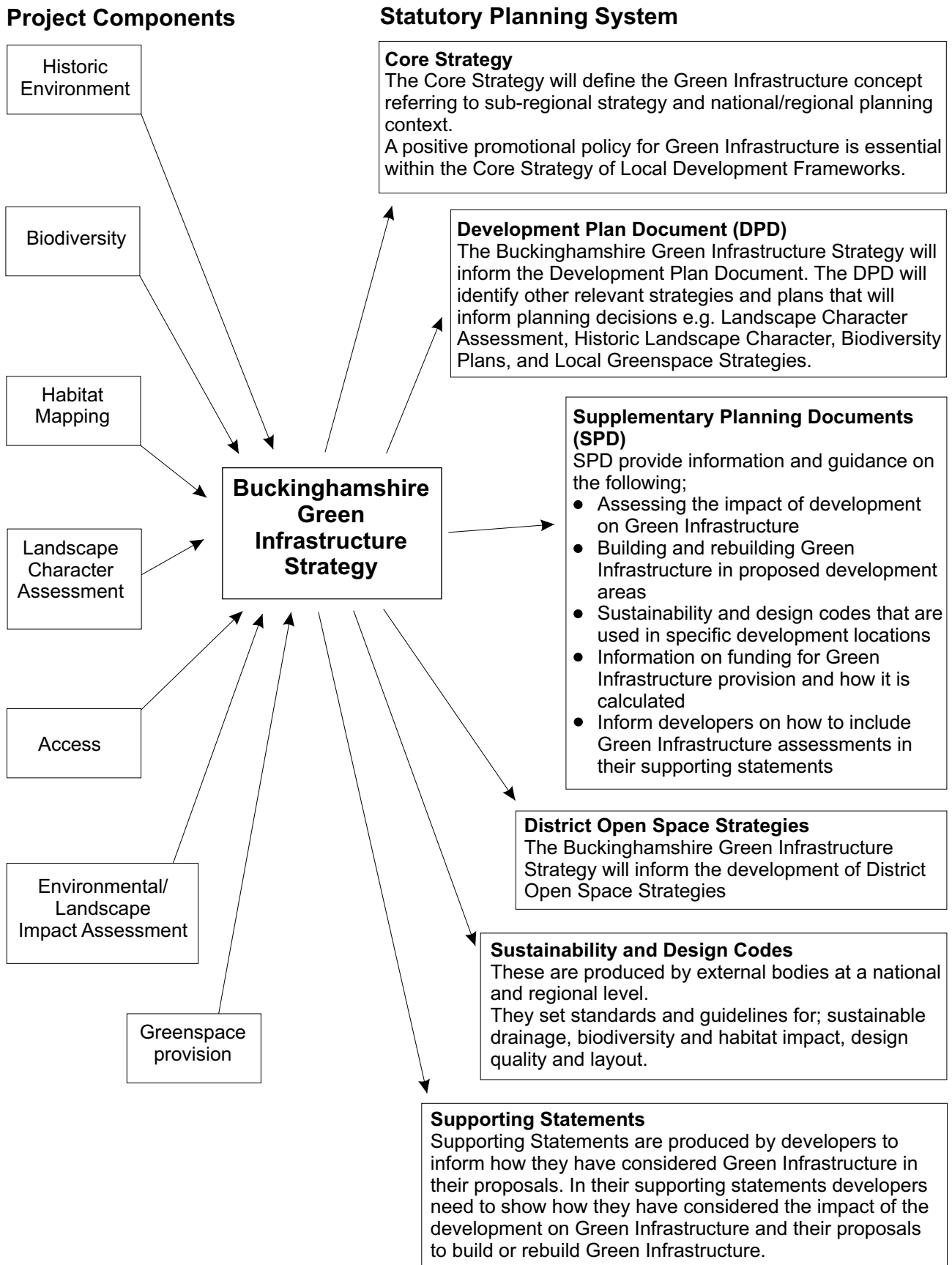
The sustainable communities approach focuses on improving community 'liveability', supports the principles underpinning Green Infrastructure and reinforces its importance in creating a healthy and enhanced environment. This Strategy supports the recognition of the values of Green Infrastructure through the planning system and for building sustainable communities in the County and the wider growth areas. Figure 2.1 illustrates the project components that have informed the Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Strategy and shows how the Strategy feeds into the Statutory Planning System.

¹⁷The Sustainable Communities Plan, Building for the Future (OPDM, 2003)

The national planning policy framework includes a number of statements and guidance notes that demonstrate the Government's commitment to meeting sustainable development objectives related to the protection, enhancement and use of Green Infrastructure assets. Of particular significance are the following:

- Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 1: Delivering Sustainable Development - Requires development plans and planning decisions to have due regard to environmental issues in meeting sustainable development objectives.
- Supplement to PPS 1: Planning and Climate Change – Sets out how planning, in providing for new homes, jobs and infrastructure needed by communities, should help shape places with lower carbon emissions and be resilient to the climate change now accepted as inevitable. The direction and purpose of this Strategy embraces the need to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- PPS3: Housing – Mentions how new housing developments need to involve the creation of a quality setting for the new communities. A Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan will address these issues and help ensure that development occurs in the correct locations with the appropriate level of access to community facilities and Green Infrastructure.
- PPG 4: Industrial, Commercial Development and Small Firms – Encourages economic diversity and business within rural areas.
- PPS 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas – Planning policies for rural areas, including County towns and villages and the wider, largely undeveloped.
- PPS9: Biological and Geological Conservation – Requires Local Authorities to maintain functioning ecological networks of natural habitats. This is to be achieved by avoiding and then repairing existing fragmentation and isolation of habitats, undertaken as part of a wider strategy for the protection and extension of open spaces and access routes.
- Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 15: Planning and the Historic Environment – Environmental stewardship should effectively protect for all aspects of the historic environment and acknowledges its importance to quality of life, local distinctiveness, leisure and recreation.
- PPG 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation – Requires Local Authorities to undertake open space audits and strategies, which can inform Green Infrastructure plans at both the strategic and local level. PPG17 also requires the development of policies based on standards for provision of public open spaces, including greenspaces.

Figure 2.1: How Green Infrastructure feeds into the Statutory Planning System



The Green Infrastructure approach is also increasingly reflected in the work of many Government agencies.¹⁸ Natural England, for example, has confirmed its commitment towards helping to deliver high quality, locally distinctive and environmentally sustainable development, including the provision of multi-functional Green Infrastructure and set a target to establish Green Infrastructure Strategies in all of England's Growth Areas by 2007. Its 'Breathing Places' Campaign further supports Green Infrastructure by addressing the proximity of natural green spaces to home.¹⁹

The Environment Agency has highlighted opportunities through the integration of Green Infrastructure "creative solutions" (arising from flood risk assessment and management schemes), and water resource planning and conservation, which could provide new Green Infrastructure links and wider benefits.

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and CABE Space (the Government's advisor on parks and green space) see the establishment of Green Infrastructure as an integral process that supports many of their aims and aspirations for securing quality in the design of parks, public spaces and the built environment through the planning system.

Regional Policy Context

Draft South East Plan

Aylesbury Vale and adjacent areas in authorities adjoining the County are allocated for significant growth within the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan. This is reflected in the Draft South East Plan submitted to Government in March 2006 by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA).²⁰ The Draft Plan sets out a long-term spatial vision and development strategy for the region up to 2026, and provides the regional and sub-regional development context for Buckinghamshire.

Over the period 2006-2026, the Draft Plan proposes major growth for Buckinghamshire within the Aylesbury Vale and Milton Keynes sub-region. The Draft Plan allocates proposed growth in Wycombe District as part of the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley Sub-region. Outside of these sub-regions, lower levels of growth are envisaged. Whilst the southern parts of the County are significantly constrained by the Chilterns AONB and Metropolitan Green Belt designations, there will be increasing growth pressures from neighbouring areas. The emerging growth proposals for these sub-regions are outlined in this section.

¹⁸ See statements of commitment set out in 'Green Infrastructure: Making the Connection – Strategic Framework Study for Northamptonshire' (River Nene Regional Park, November 2006)

¹⁹ Natural England Breathing Places Campaign (2005-2009)
<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/campaigns/breathingplaces/default.htm>

²⁰ A Clear Vision for the South East: The South East Plan – Draft Plan for Submission to Government (SEERA, March 2006)

Table 2.1 Policy CC8: Green Infrastructure

Local Authorities and partners should work together to plan, provide and manage connected and substantial networks of accessible multi-functional green space. Networks should be planned to include both existing and new green infrastructure. They should be managed with the primary aim of maintaining and improving biodiversity, but should also deliver recreational and cultural benefits and ensure that an improved and healthy environment is available for the benefit of present and future communities.

The provisions of this policy apply nation-wide. However, the successful designation and management of Green Infrastructure will be particularly important in areas designated as regional hubs, in areas close to sites of international ecological importance and in areas identified for significant growth (Strategic Development Areas).

The Green Infrastructure concept is bound within SEERA's recognition that provision of all types of infrastructure and services is a critical requirement to support future growth. Of particular importance to this Strategy is policy CC8, which focuses specifically upon the issues of Green Infrastructure.

This commitment to delivering Green Infrastructure is further embedded in the Interim Implementation Plan²¹ the central message of the Draft South East Plan is that it aims to nurture and enhance existing assets throughout the region, maintaining quality of life and increasing prosperity while meeting needs through a sustainable management programme embracing enhanced adaptation and mitigation and better resource use. This approach will provide the best context for a timely delivery of an impressive programme of growth throughout the region.

The Draft South East Plan contains a range of both cross-cutting and specific policies which are relevant to the continued provision and enhancement of Strategic Green Infrastructure assets throughout Buckinghamshire. These policies are listed and briefly described in Table 2.2.



²¹A Clear Vision for the South East: The South East Plan – Draft Plan for Submission to Government (SEERA, March 2006)

Table 2.2 Policies relating to Green Infrastructure from the Draft South East Plan

Policy	Title	Brief Description
SP3	Urban Focus and Urban Renaissance	Requires new development to be well designed and adhere to urban renaissance and sustainable development principles
SP4	Regeneration and Social Inclusion	Encourages community involvement in the design and implementation of regeneration schemes
SP5	Greenbelts	Seeks opportunities to improve land-use management and access to Greenbelts
Cc2	Climate Change	Supports opportunities and options for sustainable flood management that are compatible with biodiversity objectives
CC3	Resource Use	Encourages more prudent use of natural resources and reduced waste generation
CC6	Sustainable Communities and Character of the Environment	Seeks to enhance the character and distinctiveness of settlements and landscapes
T1	Manage and Invest	Seeks an improved and integrated network of public transport services in and between urban and rural areas
T7	Rural Transport	Opportunities should be sought to improve facilities for cyclists and pedestrians between towns and their nearest villages
NRM5	Conservation and Improvement of Biodiversity	Promotes habitat restoration and the protection of biodiversity and wildlife
NRM7	Woodlands	Woodland should be protected and promoted
C3	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	Gives high priority to the conservation and enhancement of AONBs within the region
C4	Landscape and Countryside Management	Encourages positive and high quality management of the open countryside
C5	Managing the Urban Rural Fringe	Local Development Documents should address urban-rural fringe issues
C6	Countryside Access and Rights of Way Management	Actively encourages access to the countryside via Public Rights of Way
C7	The River Thames Corridor	Promotes joint working and sustainable management to protect and enhance its environmental, heritage and recreational values
BE1	Management for an Urban Renaissance	Requires that Green Infrastructure accompany new development
BE6	Management of the Historic Environment	Supports the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment

Policy	Title	Brief Description
TSR7	Priority Areas for Tourism	Encourages the identification of opportunities for tourism, sport and recreation during the development plan process
S1	Supporting Healthy Communities	Recognises the role of parks, open spaces, physical recreation and cultural facilities in shaping healthy communities
S5	Cultural and Sporting Activity	Encourages increased and substantial participation in sport, recreation and cultural activities
WCBV5	The Colne Valley	Supports joint working to conserve the habitats, geological features and animal/plant species of the park through G.I networks
MKAV3	Spatial Framework for Aylesbury Growth Area	Recognises the strong amenity need for large scale informal recreational facilities

As a result of the Examination in Public held throughout 2007, a number of recommendations for revisions to the Draft Plan were detailed in the Report to the Panel. The Secretary of State has since published its Proposed Changes for the Draft Plan.²² This companion document, detailing a number of changes to the previous policies listed in the Plan, was used to create the above table. Therefore, the policy numbers and titles may not match the original document.

South East Regional Economic Strategy

The South East Regional Economic Strategy (2002-12) sets out the overall framework for a sustainable approach to economic development. It identifies five objectives, recognising that infrastructure issues are central to economic success:

- Encouraging competitive business
- Developing successful people
- Developing vibrant communities
- Effective infrastructure
- Sustainable use of natural resources

The protection and provision of Green Infrastructure can deliver significant benefits in relation to economic contribution/encouragement and employment. As such, the Green Infrastructure Strategy will help support the Buckinghamshire Economic Learning Partnership in delivering the Regional Economic Strategy at a County level.

²²GOSE (2008) The South East Plan: The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East of England. Companion Document. GOSE

Sub-Regional Policy Context

The Draft South East Plan proposes nine sub-regions with distinctive issues that need to be addressed, and sets out strategies that provide the planning frameworks for each sub-region. Four of these sub-regions have a high relevance to Buckinghamshire (Figure 2.2):

Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale Sub-Region

Milton Keynes, to the north of the County boundary, and Aylesbury Vale in Buckinghamshire form part of the wider Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Area defined in the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan. The Draft Plan seeks to accommodate development in key urban centres within this sub-region throughout the Plan period. Within Buckinghamshire, the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy will have most impact on Aylesbury where proposals state that 16,800 new homes will be built by 2026. In addition, a further 5,930 homes are planned in North East Aylesbury Vale and 4,700 in the rest of the District. It is clear that an important objective will be to deliver the Green Infrastructure necessary to support the proposed growth and potential increase in demand for accessible greenspace generated by new development in the sub-region.

Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley Sub-Region

South Bucks District and the southern part of Wycombe District, including High Wycombe and Marlow, fall within the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley Sub-Region. Whilst it is not defined as a growth area in the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan in the same way as the Milton Keynes and South Midlands areas, its continued prosperity is seen as crucial to the continued buoyancy of the South East Region. The Draft South East Plan recognises the need to provide more affordable housing and ensure that economic growth continues without unreasonably increasing the pressure on resources and the natural environment. In this context, 7,800 houses in Wycombe District and 1,890 houses in South Bucks are proposed between 2006 and 2026.

Central Oxfordshire Sub-Region

This sub-region lies immediately to the west of Buckinghamshire. There are opportunities for expansion of the towns close to the Buckinghamshire border, such as Bicester where 4,300 new dwellings have been proposed over the Plan period. This may have implications for Buckinghamshire and give rise to additional need and demand for Green Infrastructure resources in the area. The proposed ecotown at Bicester could also impact upon Green Infrastructure capacity in Buckinghamshire.

Luton/Dunstable/ Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade growth

MKSMSRS proposes a considerable level of development in this part of the wider growth area in the period up to 2031. During the period 2001 to 2021, 26,300 new homes are to be provided within Luton and South Bedfordshire, and as part of a review of the South Bedfordshire Green Belt boundary sufficient 'headroom' must be provided for a further 15,400 proposed new homes between 2021 and 2031. The cross-boundary nature of the

growth in this area means that some development could spread into neighbouring authority areas, including the potential for growth to the west of Linslade, into Buckinghamshire. Laying close the eastern edge of Aylesbury Vale, 4000 homes have already been delivered or have permission to the south of the Leighton-Linslade, with a further 4000 proposed by developers in the east of the town.

The creation of the Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Strategy is largely a response to the environmental challenges posed by these sub-regional growth areas in and around Buckinghamshire, particularly in relation to the Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale sub-region.

Sub-Regional Green Infrastructure Planning

Several Green Infrastructure studies, strategies and plans are being produced for areas in and surrounding the County. Those that present major opportunities for connectivity with the Green Infrastructure network in Buckinghamshire include:

Chilterns AONB Management Plan: The Framework for Action 2002-2007

A significant area of green space under consideration within this Strategy falls within the sensitive habitats and landscapes of the AONB. The Chilterns Conservation Board has a statutory duty to prepare a management plan for the Chilterns AONB. The plan is for the period 2008 to 2013. The Management Plan covers a wide range of issues including nature conservation, land and water management, recreation and access, planning and development and the rural economy and transport. The Plan is complemented by a 3 year Action Plan detailing activities, outputs and timescales.

The Bedfordshire and Luton Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan

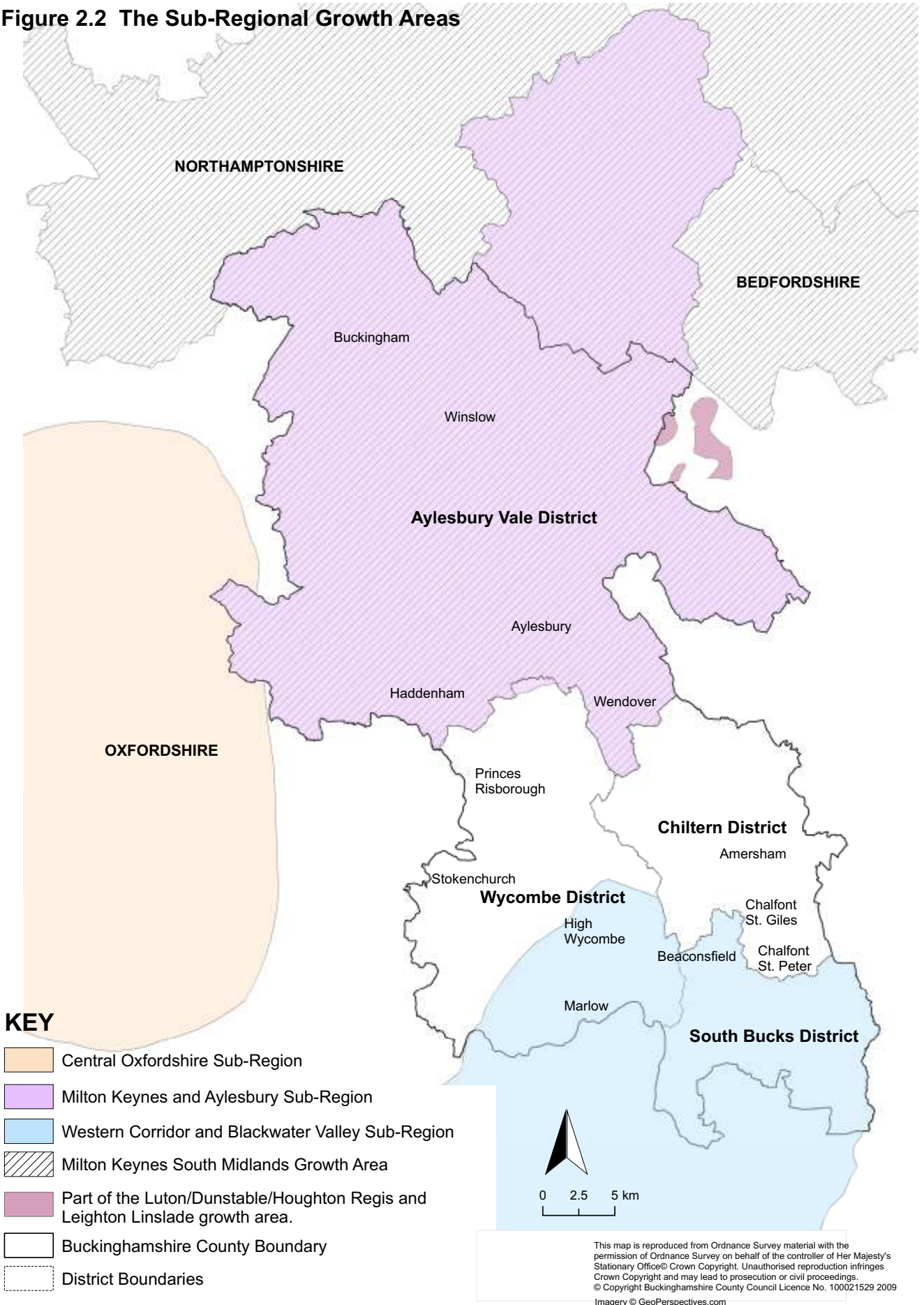
The Bedfordshire Green Infrastructure Consortium has been established in response to the MKSM growth proposals and has completed its Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan in 2009 in order to address the needs of Bedfordshire's existing and expanded communities. The Plan seeks to create a coherent linked network of multi-functional greenspace, consisting of public and private assets in urban and rural locations.

The Luton and South Bedfordshire Green Space Strategy

The Luton and South Bedfordshire GSS has been funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government and forms a key planning based document. It assesses current provision levels and determining future needs for green space and Green Infrastructure in southern Bedfordshire. Of particular relevance to Buckinghamshire are the possible additional demands that may impact on the County as a result of the housing growth proposed for the Leighton-Linslade area.

Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework Study for Northamptonshire This Study was commissioned by the River Nene Regional Park, and forms part of an ongoing commitment to Green Infrastructure development and delivery across the MKSM Sub

Figure 2.2 The Sub-Regional Growth Areas



Region and the wider East Midlands Region. The Study seeks to take a proactive approach to environmental protection and enhancement whilst embracing economic regeneration and growth and was developed in partnership with Interreg/ SPARC, English Nature, the Countryside Agency, English Heritage, the Environment Agency, Sport England, Northamptonshire County Council and the other Local Authorities within Northamptonshire.

Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure Plan (2008)

The Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure Plan was commissioned by Milton Keynes Council and was produced by the Landscape Partnership. The purpose of the study is to set out a clear vision for Green Infrastructure within the Borough of Milton Keynes.

The Buckinghamshire Policy Context

Local Development Frameworks

Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) will provide the planning framework in Buckinghamshire to 2026 and are written by the District Councils. These comprise a suite of development plan documents that will determine the precise location of growth and associated infrastructure for the plan period. They also set out the core planning and development control policies that will guide decisions in the plan area.

The LDFs will be required to conform to both the Spatial Strategy and the range of policies set out in the South East Plan, including the requirement for Green Infrastructure to accompany new development to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits in areas subject to growth proposals.

Buckinghamshire Community Strategy 2005-2008

The Buckinghamshire Community Strategy provides the framework for joint action by public, private and voluntary organisations in the County. It seeks to promote the development of sustainable communities within Buckinghamshire as places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. Key themes that can be supported by the Green Infrastructure Strategy include:

Cohesive Communities - Supporting the development of strong and cohesive communities throughout Buckinghamshire, empowering them to deliver solutions to local issues

Healthy Communities - Promoting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of people in Buckinghamshire and tackling health inequalities through partnership working

Accessible Communities and Transport - Ensuring ease and safety of movement for both people and goods, supporting sustainable growth and economic development, and enhancing and protecting the environment (e.g. through improved air quality)

Superb Environments - Securing a safe, prosperous and high quality environment in both rural and urban areas in Buckinghamshire. Many of the outcomes for Superb Environments can be delivered through Green Infrastructure initiatives, including:

- providing sustainable new developments which conserve natural resources and enhance the character of both the towns and the countryside
- providing better and easier access to the countryside for all
- using good quality urban design and construction methods
- ensuring protection of the built and historic environment
- increasing energy conservation and reducing air pollution
- protecting biodiversity
- minimising waste
- increasing personal responsibility for the environment amongst Buckinghamshire residents.

The Community Strategies for each of the District authorities within Buckinghamshire closely reflect these aspects of the County-level vision and are supported by the proposals for Green Infrastructure provision set out in this Strategy.

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Biodiversity Action Plan 2000 – 2010

The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes was produced by the Buckinghamshire Nature Conservation Forum in 2000 and proposes a framework for action to conserve the County's wildlife. Responding to the UK BAP, the local BAP seeks to target resources for appropriate habitat management and for large-scale habitat restoration and creation to increase the existing biodiversity resource and reverse the effects of habitat fragmentation.

The Plan has recently been reviewed under the direction of a partnership steering group comprising key members of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership and operating under a Memorandum of Agreement established in 2006. The review has allowed a more specific and spatially defined set of targets to be met by the Partnership, including the identification of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas.

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Rural Strategy 2008-2012

The Rural Strategy provides the first independent multi-agency action plan for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes' rural areas. The Strategy has been developed and delivered by Buckinghamshire Rural Affairs Group (BRAG) in partnership with Milton Keynes and reflects the needs and concerns as well as the opportunities presented to the County's rural communities. Utilising partnership working, it seeks to address the key issues impacting upon rural life in Buckinghamshire, including those impacting on its economy, communities and the environment. Through its adoption by rural stakeholders and bodies, service delivery organisations and through integration into Local Government processes the Rural Strategy acts as a key driver for change initiating a process of positive action in rural areas.

Buckinghamshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 required every Local Highway Authority to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) within five years of its implementation. The Act specifically requires all ROWIPs to assess:

- The extent to which local Rights of Way meet the present and likely future needs of the public
- The opportunities provided by Rights of Way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area
- The accessibility of Rights of Way to the blind or partially sighted and those with mobility problems

As the Local Highway Authority for Buckinghamshire, the County Council has published its ROWIP for the ten year period 2008-2018. This forms part of the Council's Local Transport Plan and sets out the Council's objectives for Rights of Way and access provision in a statement of action to:

- deliver an accurate and fully up to date Definitive Map and Statement (DMS)
- provide and protect a well maintained Rights of Way network
- publicise public Rights of Way and access information and the DMS
- deliver a better integrated and more accessible Rights of Way network
- improve the use and enjoyment of the Rights of Way network
- improve the asset management of the Rights of Way network
- provide an efficient, value for money service supported by high customer satisfaction
- support safe, strong and cohesive communities
- protect and assert the County's National Trails and Chiltern's AONB
- improve access to 'Open Access' sites
- deliver economic benefits to local communities and businesses
- generate positive historical, environmental and biodiversity benefits
- deliver health benefits for users and residents

Buckinghamshire Local Transport Plan 2006-2011

The draft Buckinghamshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2006-2011 is based on a twenty-year transport vision, aiming to *'secure the strategic and local transport infrastructure and services to sustainably develop the economy; to facilitate growth; and improve accessibility; whilst balancing free, safe and efficient movement of people and goods with protection of the environment.'*

The LTP contains a number of issues and policy objectives that are of particular relevance to Green Infrastructure, including:

- The countryside will be actively promoted for leisure & recreation

- Maintenance of footways & Rights of Way in rural areas will aim to improve access to specific facilities

Buckinghamshire Cultural Strategy 2003-2008

The Strategy sets out a range of actions to enhance the cultural opportunities throughout Buckinghamshire and addresses local issues by widening access to culture, celebrating diversity and value, fostering community pride and supporting creativity in the built and green environments throughout the County.

Buckinghamshire Infrastructure Study

Buckinghamshire County Council, Aylesbury Vale Advantage and the four districts in Buckinghamshire commissioned Colin Buchanan consultants to undertake a Buckinghamshire Infrastructure Study in 2007. The Infrastructure Study has been carried out in two phases. Phase 1 is focused on Aylesbury Vale District and Phase 2 is focused on the rest of Buckinghamshire. The study will form part of the evidence base for statutory planning and Local Development Framework preparation within the County.

Buckinghamshire County Council Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework

Buckinghamshire County Council is responsible for preparing a County wide Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework (MWLDF). The MWLDF sets out the spatial strategies and detailed land use policies and proposals for the extraction of minerals and management of waste in the County. An Annual Monitoring Report is submitted to the Government as part of the MWLDF.

District and Local Green Infrastructure Plans

In accordance with Government guidance the District authorities in Buckinghamshire (Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe) are undertaking audits and strategies for public open greenspaces in their urban areas.²³ This work should inform the recommended Local Green Infrastructure Plans at the District level, developed in-line with the agreed County-wide Strategy and Action Plan, and underpinned by standards for the provision of public open green space and the formulation of policies in Local Delivery Frameworks (LDFs).

Buckinghamshire Walking Strategy

The key drivers for the production of the Buckinghamshire Walking Strategy have been to meet the requirements of Central Government to produce a walking strategy as set out in Buckinghamshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 2.

The benefits of having a Walking Strategy are to help promote sustainable transport, improve peoples' health and encourage social inclusion. This can be achieved through

²³Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17 – Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (ODPM, 2004)

joint working between partner organisations, better management of the walking asset, and a more consistent promotional message of walking as a mode of transport and a recreational activity. The Walking Strategy has one key aim: To get more people walking, more often, by delivering work more efficiently through improved partnership working.

A number of objectives have been agreed between the partnering organisations to deliver this key aim. They are as follows:

1. Creating a joint strategy
- 2a. Mapping the network; and
- 2b. Creating a route mapping system
- 3a. Managing the walking asset;
- 3b. Ensuring walking is considered at all stages in the land use planning process;
- 3c. Managing and mitigating the barriers to walking
4. Promoting walking consistently through key message(s)
5. Ensuring work is coordinated and joint efforts are made for seeking and maximizing impact of funding streams

Buckinghamshire County Council Sustainability Strategy

This is a high level internal policy document that encompasses and embeds sustainability into the heart of all Buckinghamshire County Council operations. The document has an action plan that incorporates all service areas that will be reviewed and updated annually.

The Buckinghamshire Sustainability Partnership Environment Task Group has been working on a Countywide climate change Action Plan. The Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Comprehensive Area Agreement (CAA) include climate change and natural resource indicators.

NI185 (Percentage CO2 reduction from Local Authority Operations) is in the LAA. NI186 (Per Capita CO2 emissions in the Local Authority Area) and NI188 (Planning to adapt to climate change) are currently not in the core set of indicators but Buckinghamshire County Council is working on delivering these.

