

MILTON ERNEST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

LOCAL GREEN SPACES, MILTON ERNEST NATURAL AREAS AND OTHER IMPORTANT ENVIRONMENTAL REGIONS.

The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them.

Local Green Spaces (LGS)

Despite Milton Ernest lying in a predominantly rural area, within the picturesque Ouse Valley, green spaces and natural places in our built-up areas provide a welcome breathing space as we go about our day to day lives.

Community consultation events highlighted the importance of maintaining and where possible enhancing these spaces for the benefit of our natural world and well-being.

Paragraph 100 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states: The Local Green Space (LGS) designation should only be used where the green space is:

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

Crucially, policies for managing development in a LGS should seek to prevent *any harm* to the green space - and only permit harm to occur where this is outweighed by other exceptional circumstances. Local Green Space designation is a powerful tool to resist *inappropriate* development, and creates an opportunity to plan positively to enhance their beneficial use.

Through the MENP the following Local Green Spaces are designated:

1. The playing field; and
2. Riverside Meadow: a demonstrably special area for the village in terms of recreational value, tranquillity and wildlife.

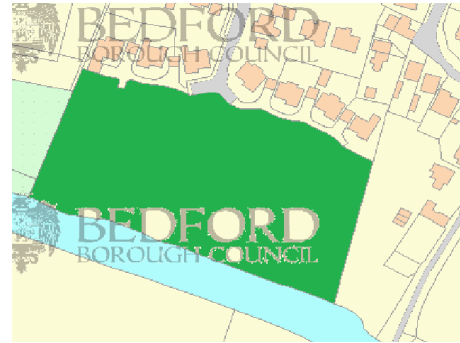


Fig.1 Local Green Space.

Playing Field, Radwell Road

Fig.2 Local Green Space.

Riverside Meadow



The reasons for these designations are significant and important to the community. Both are 'demonstrably special areas for the village in terms of recreational value, tranquillity and wildlife'.

The playing field and the equipment thereon is maintained by the Parish Council but is on land owned by the Bedfordia Group. Bedfordia continues to support the community and undertake certain roles, including ensuring that the perimeter hedge is regularly cut, on behalf of the village.

A survey back in 2010 identified that at least one member of every household regularly used the playing field and its facilities. There is also clear evidence that younger members of the community invite friends from outside the village to take advantage, where they can play and enjoy themselves in relative safety away from roads and near neighbours.

Riverside Meadow holds a similar level of importance to the community, if perhaps a slightly more mature user, whether for dog walking or simply meandering through the mown grass rides. In addition to providing open green space the meadow has been planted with wild and native flowers. Members of the community themselves continue to propagate these native flowers on an annual basis, which informs the timing of the annual hay cutting that then goes to feed animals on a nearby farm.

The meadow provides open access to the river and allows users to take advantage of the picnic benches to soak up the peace and tranquillity on a summers evening.

Milton Ernest Natural Areas (MENA)

In addition to the LGS there remain a number of natural areas in Milton Ernest that are important to the life of the community but have no protection from the Bedford Borough Council designations above. The MENP defines these as Milton Ernest Natural Areas (MENA).

The criteria for a MENA are:

- it is a small area (not more than 1000m²);
- it is grassed or otherwise natural areas;
- since establishment, it has not been subjected to development; and
- there is community benefit to the site, natural and undeveloped.

The MENP plan identifies eight natural areas, primarily within the development of Huntsmans Way, together with three in Radwell Road and one in River Lane.

Huntsmans Way (MENA)

The Huntsmans Way housing development was completed in the 1970's and within the estate are a number of small pieces of undeveloped land. The areas are grassed and several contain small but mature trees. These sites were purchased from the Crown Estate by the Parish Council in 2018.



Figure 3, Natural Area allocations – Huntsmans Way/Radwell Road.

The Parish benefits from a limited range of open space and tree assets outside of those in private ownership. The management of these strategic green spaces within a largely residential area of the village allows a natural sink to absorb rain water runoff and slow its passage into drains, brooks and rivers. Thereby reducing the immediate impact upon our river network and subsequent flood risk.

A recent environmental survey identified an abundance of wildlife living and frequenting the 8 sites. This included significant counts of songbirds, butterflies and insects. The sites also include approximately 10 mature and semi-mature broadleaf trees. The trees form a natural screen and provide much needed breathing space for the benefit of both those living in the area and the environment.

Map Ref.	Natural Area	Reason for Inclusion
73A	Land off Huntsmans Way/Radwell Road, Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire.	This plot of land is one of eight plots, interspersed between housing, pathways and garage areas. The plot is owned by the Parish Council The two largest plots are designated as play areas in the registered title. Some sites include trees and shrubbery.
73B	Land off Huntsmans Way/Radwell Road, Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire.	An area of green space and window into nature.
73C	Land off Huntsmans Way/Radwell Road, Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire.	An area of green space and window into nature.
73D	Land off Huntsmans Way/Radwell Road, Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire.	An area of green space and window into nature.

73E	Land off Huntsmans Way/Radwell Road, Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire.	An area of green space and window into nature.
73F	Land off Huntsmans Way/Radwell Road, Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire.	An area of green space and window into nature.
73G	Land off Huntsmans Way/Radwell Road, Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire.	An area of green space and window into nature.
73H	Land off Huntsmans Way/Radwell Road, Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire.	An area of green space and window into nature.

In addition to these eight sites three more natural areas are included within the plan, located on Radwell Road, close to its junction with the A6 and one at the end of River Lane, leading down to the Great Ouse river.



Fig.4 Natural area allocation,
Radwell Road, A6.

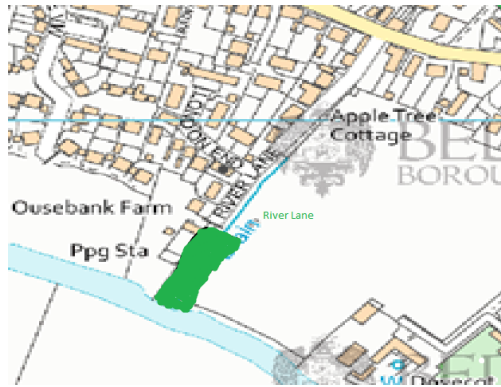
The areas in question borders a footpath that links the A6 to Radwell Road. An 1896 map of the village, shows the footpath and the areas of land being in existence then. There is no evidence of there ever having been any building on the land.

The land is open to the public and, from the recollection of residents of Milton Ernest, always has been. Its specialness results from the way the land sits within the natural rhythm of the village and provides an enduring link to its historical context.

The larger of the three plots includes mature fruit trees and in provides an impressive show of daffodils' and spring flowers. All three areas are maintained by the Parish Council.

The section of green space at the end of River Lane is particularly peaceful and tranquil. Families can often be found relaxing, with younger members taking advantage of the shallow clear waters on a sunny day. Others take advantage of the Willow Tree as a look out perch to watch for Kingfishers or Otters, both are regularly spotted from the river bank. The location does have a darker side, however, and can often flood as far up as the pumping station following periods of heavy and prolonged rain.

Fig.5 Natural area allocation, River Lane.



It is not intended that domestic gardens will be included as Local Green Spaces or natural areas. Every effort has been made to draw the maps accurately to ensure that domestic gardens are excluded.

Areas designated to be village open spaces are already protected and include the playing field, village green and the green space behind the village hall, between the A6 and Marsh Lane.

Other important environmental areas

The Green and Village Open Spaces

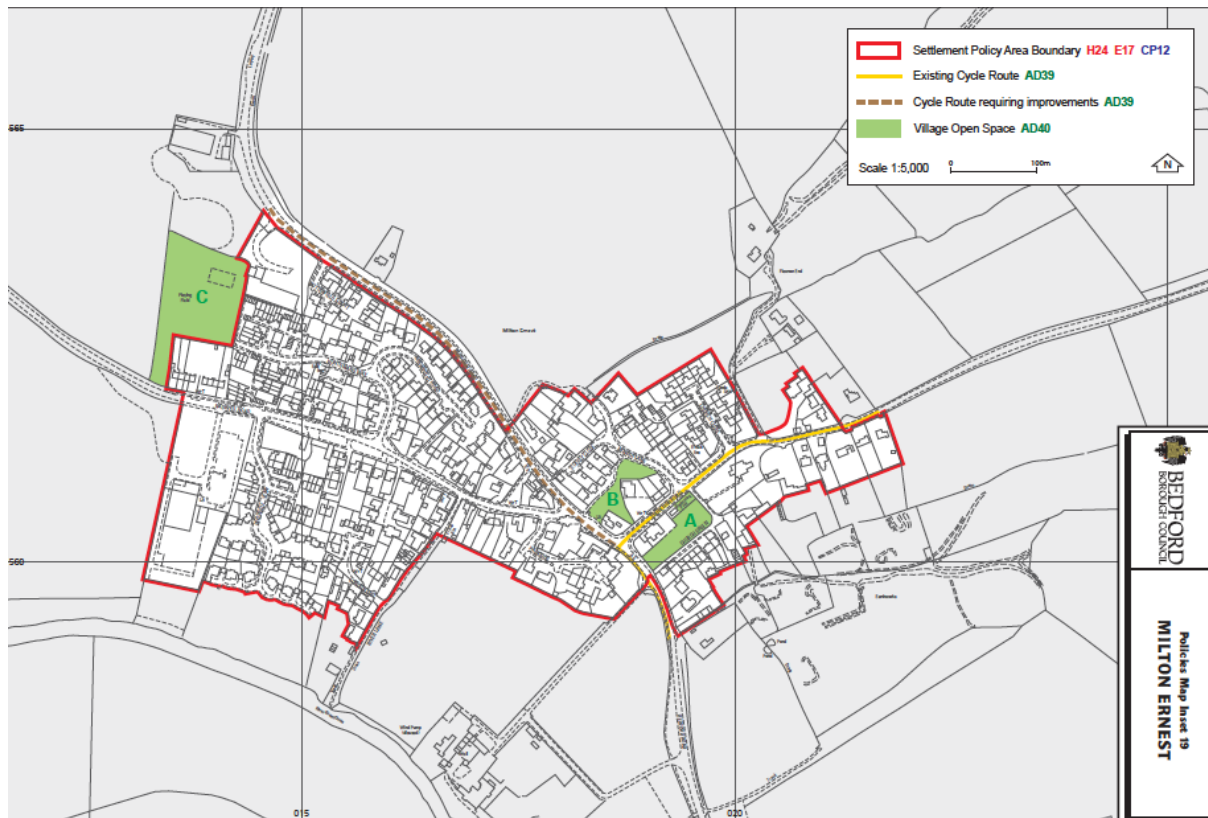
The Green is an important part of Milton Ernest's heritage and is located right at the heart of the village next to the Lower School, the village Hall and the Church. The village green is used by the village as a recreation and amenity area. It is also leased by the local education authority for the use of Milton Ernest VC Lower School for children's sports and activities. It's also used by Milton Ernest Fete Committee for the annual Village and Church Fete and for other events.

The Parish Council planted an English Oak tree on the site in 2014, in memory of those killed and wounded in the great War, which has been further augmented with the purchase and installation of a commemorative bench. The green has statutory protection as a designation village green.

Village Open Spaces

Through its Open Space allocations in 2013, Bedford Borough Council allocated the following three areas as Village Open Space:

- The Green (A);
- Area around Marsh Lane (B); and
- The playing field (C).



Permanent Grassland

In addition to these designated village open and local green spaces, the neighbourhood planning process has identified other natural areas within the parish that provide particular benefit to the community.

Some of these have protection under existing legislation, for example sites designated as ancient monuments and trees covered under preservation orders (TPO). Examples of the former can be found on land either side of Thurleigh Road. The Horse Chestnut trees, which are protected by preservation orders, together with the belt of trees on the opposite roadside, provides an impressive vista as you enter the village on the A6 from the south.

Other areas of the parish have been pasture land for a considerable length of time. Some, including land associated with Milton Ernest Hall, have been identified as ancient ridge and furrow. The following are areas defined as Permanent Grassland, which is defined as areas that have been used for grass and not cultivated for the last 25 years.

This expanse of green parkland space forms the backdrop to homes along River Lane, Parkside Drive and part of Radwell Road. The area has been part of the Milton Ernest Hall Estate since the 1850's and has remained effectively untouched since this time. It surrounds the Hall, a grade 1 listed building, and has developed into a haven for wildlife.



Fig.7 Parkland surrounding Milton Ernest Hall (Grade 1 listed building)

The park includes a number of protected trees and provides uninterrupted access to the River Great Ouse and views to the farmland and hills beyond. It is important that views of historical and natural features, as are described in the Character Assessment, are preserved.

These views include, the Church, Village Green and surrounding grounds, Milton Ernest Hall and park, and vistas of the River Great Ouse, including the open countryside leading back towards the village from Radwell.

The park is part of Milton Ernest Hall, a grade I listed building, built in the 1850s and designed by the architect William Butterfield. It is considered of exceptional and significant interest, because it is Butterfield's only complete country house. The stable block, dovecote and wall to the grounds were listed in August 1987 as Grade II, of special interest.

The contribution to these heritage assets is hugely and positively affected by their setting. Any development of the green spaces surrounding these buildings would have a significant and detrimental impact.

The Hall and its formal principal entrance (opposite the village church) is part of the village's heritage trail, which attracts many visitors. The green spaces border this avenue and provide excellent views of the Hall and surrounding countryside.

Other than some recent minor maintenance work and some minimal cattle grazing (believed 3 animals 8-10 yrs. ago), the grounds have been untouched for many years. This have allowed various forms of grasses and ground cover to flourish which have encouraged small mammals to thrive and large Yellow Meadow Ant mounds to form. Consequently, the area is a favoured hunting and nesting ground for Barn Owls, Kestrels and similar raptor species. Recent research has also identified significant number of bats.

Other tracts of land in this category include land adjacent to Flewton End and Thurleigh Road, and to the north of Marsh Lane and Starey Close.



Fig. 8 The Glebe land is managed by the Diocese of St Albans as a nature reserve, part is rented out to a local farmer to graze sheep.

Fig 9 The remainder is in private ownership, although includes land designated as an ancient monument.



These areas of permanent grassland continue to provide much needed havens for biodiversity and our natural world.

The Neighbourhood Plan includes objectives specifically intended to protect and where possible enhance our natural world.

Policies and projects included in the C4 section of the Neighbourhood Plan respond to the following aims:

- To ensure that features of ecological value including hedgerows,
- watercourses, woodland and other habitat that supports wildlife are
- unaffected or enhanced by development.
- To encourage the provision of new features and habitat to underpin an increase in the ecological value.
- To retain the trees along the A6 corridor.
- To retain and enhance the ecological value of the riverbanks and natural areas alongside the River Great Ouse and other watercourses.
- To retain and protect the County Wildlife Sites and areas of Permanent Grassland in Milton Ernest.
- To support biodiversity enhancements through the Biodiversity Opportunity Network.

Policy ME C3: Local Green Spaces

The following areas, as identified on Figure 6, are designated as Local Green Spaces:

1. The playing field
2. Riverside Meadow

Planning applications for development on the Locally Designated Green Spaces will not be permitted unless they perform a supplementary and supporting function to the Green Space.

Policy ME C4: Natural Areas

Development that would have an adverse impact on the Milton Ernest Natural Areas (MENA), as shown on Figure 6, that cannot be mitigated will not be approved.

These include:

- Seven sites within Huntsman's Way area development;
- Three sites at the junction of Radwell Road and the A6; and
- Land between terraced housing and Marsh Lane.

Policy ME NE1: Ecology

New developments must provide a biodiversity net gain, enhancing features of significant ecological value and habitats including (but not limited to) existing ecological corridors, natural landscape features, watercourses and woodland.

Policy ME NE2: Natural Environment and Views

New development must maintain, and where applicable enhance the amenity of the natural environment. Open views to key historical and natural features that define the village, as described in the Character Assessment, must be maintained and include:

- Views of the church, church green and the associated area.
- Views of Milton Ernest Hall (currently limited to the upper floor and chimneys).
- Views to the river.
- Views of open countryside from Radwell Road towards Radwell village.

Policy ME NE3: Characteristic features

New developments must protect features of the built and natural environment so as to maintain the character of the village. These features include (but are not necessarily limited to) the trees and verges along the A6 and Radwell Road, and the tall trees around the vicarage of All Saints Church.

Policy ME CF2: Green Routes

Where existing green routes run through proposed development sites the green route shall be retained and incorporated into the development proposals. The stopping up of green routes will not be permitted. Any proposal that would result in harm to or loss of a green route must be justified, and any harm minimised.

Policy ME SD4: Flood risk

Developments shall avoid being in areas of medium or high flood risk as defined by the Environment Agency. Any proposals for development in these areas will need to be supported by sequential and exceptions testing. Development shall not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere downstream of the development.

Proposals for development must incorporate measures that manage and minimise flood risk and surface water run-off. SuDS should be incorporated in and form an integral part of new open space and the network of green infrastructure wherever possible. These should be designed in line with guidance from Bedford Borough Council and may incorporate, but not be limited to, the following measures:

- Attenuation ponds.
- Raingardens within the urban realm.
- Green walls and roofs.
- Permeable surfaces in areas of parking.
- Planting of trees.

Where SuDS are to be provided, they should be designed such that they are in harmony with the surrounding landscape.