Frequently Asked Questions

We will keep this page up to date as new questions come up.

If you have a question which is not covered below, you can email your question to planningpolicy@bedford.gov.uk – ideally put ‘consultation question’ as the title of your email. Additionally we have a dedicated phone line (01234 718300) where you can leave an answer phone message containing your query. We will monitor these and ensure the most appropriate officer calls you back within three working days. Please give a summary of your question and leave your name and contact number.

Why are you reviewing the Local Plan so soon after the Local Plan 2030 was adopted?

The Local Plan 2030 was adopted in January 2020 following an independent examination in public. National policy now requires that local plans are reviewed and if necessary updated every five years, but in Bedford’s case the examination resulted in the inclusion of a new policy in the Local Plan 2030 committing the Council to a more challenging review timetable. An updated or replacement plan must be submitted for examination by January 2023.

The first reason given for this by the examining Inspectors was that there is a need for the Council to have a plan that responds appropriately to longer term growth requirements, and in particular in relation to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, as soon as possible. They agreed that because of the uncertainty about Arc-related development and infrastructure needs post 2030, the plan they had been asked to consider should not try to do that, but that the next plan should do so fairly quickly. The second reason related to the speed with which new development would be built in coming years and the progress being made by local communities with their own neighbourhood plans, which the Local Plan 2030 relies upon to identify housing sites. The Inspectors saw that an early review of the Local Plan 2030 offers the opportunity for the Council to intervene if necessary, in order to maintain house building rates.
What is this consultation about?

The process for the preparation of a local plan is set out in Government legislation and includes consultation with the public and statutory bodies at set stages. The purpose of this paper is to ask for your comments on the scope of the plan; the issues that its policies should cover and the options available to address them. Our website will be kept up to date with all of the relevant information www.bedford.gov.uk/localplanreview

While the scale of housing and associated growth is set by the Government, there are a number of different ways in which this can be achieved. We are asking residents and people who work in the borough, as well as statutory consultees and others with an interest in our plan, for your opinions to help us plan for future development and identify what issues are important. This is your first opportunity to help shape the local plan review.

How much growth should there be?

Councils are required by the Government to plan for a certain level of housing growth in their local plans and reach a minimum number of new home completions each year. We may need to make new allocations to provide between 5,000 and 15,000 additional new dwellings over a plan period to 2040, depending on the Government’s formula. If the timescale is longer, then more housing sites must be allocated to meet the Government’s minimum target. At the moment the Government’s target is 1,305 dwelling per year. Additionally, as plans start to look further into the future, the assumptions they must make become more unpredictable as local and national policies and plans change. Development will need to be a balance of homes, jobs and other supporting uses.

How did you come up with that range?

Once existing commitments, currently around 11,000 dwellings, are taken into account (including allocations in earlier local plans, neighbourhood plans and planning permissions granted) we may need to make new allocations to provide between 5,000 and 15,000 additional new dwellings over a plan period 2020-2040, depending on the Government’s formula. The Government’s current minimum target for Bedford Borough is 1,305 dwelling completions per annum. As directed by Government this calculation is based on 2014 ONS population data. If the most recent 2018 based populations data is used, the number would be around 800 dwelling completions per annum.
This is because 800 – 1,305 per year, over 20 years (2020-2040) = 16,000 - 26,100 homes
800 x 20 = 16,000 take away 11,000 already committed = 5,000 homes to allocate
1,305 x 20 = 26,100 take away 11,000 already committed = 15,100 homes to allocate
If the plan period were to be 25 years (2020-2045) we would need to allocate between 9,000 and 21,625 additional new dwellings.

Where should development be located?

Deciding the best locations for growth will be an important part of the next local plan. The diagrams in the consultation paper show different locations where growth might take place along with some of the pros and cons. They do not represent strategy options for the local plan; it may be that the local plan strategy will need to combine elements from more than one of these locations to achieve the scale of growth required to meet minimum annual targets. Can you suggest other locations in the Borough?

What does this mean for neighbourhood plans?

In some parts of the borough Parish Councils are preparing neighbourhood plans with the support of their local communities. When officially ‘made’ neighbourhood plans have the same status as the local plan but must not conflict with the borough-wide local plan’s strategy. They can be used to allocate sites in the same way as the local plan and allow local residents to decide for themselves where development should take place.

Neighbourhood plans are currently being prepared by many parish councils. Those that are identifying sites to meet growth targets identified in the Local Plan 2030 are making good progress, though for some their referendum will now be delayed until May 2021 as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. Once ‘made’ all of the neighbourhood plans will have review mechanisms within them and in due course parish councils will decide if they want those plan reviews to allocate development beyond 2030, either in accordance with a Local Plan Review strategy or because there is local evidence of a need to do so.

Discussions with all local councils will continue during the preparation of the Local Plan Review.
What about the Oxford to Cambridge Arc?

Whilst the Government has set out its ambitions for growth in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc the local authorities have not as yet agreed an Arc-wide spatial strategy. At the present time there has been no specific suggestion from Government that Bedford should plan for a housing figure over and above the standard method number, and no agreement about how any additional growth associated with the Oxford to Cambridge Arc would be distributed. Meeting the level of growth required by the standard method alone sets a significant challenge and represents a 35% increase in housing growth from the levels planned for in Local Plan 2030.

What about East-West Rail?

The corridor for East-West Rail has been announced and is good news for Bedford, directly connecting the current Bedford Midland station and the town centre with Oxford and Cambridge. The precise route to the north of Bedford, between Bedford and St. Neots will be announced in late 2020 or early 2021. For the moment we know the broad corridor and this is shown in Figure 2 of the consultation paper.

What is Bedford doing about the climate emergency?

Bedford Borough Council has declared a climate change emergency and is reducing its own carbon emissions to become Carbon Neutral by 2030.

We already have planning policies in place which require new developments to have a positive impact on climate change through the use of design and layout which maximise solar gain, natural ventilation and cooling, the reduction of emissions and use of water and encouraging connections to district heating networks where possible. We know that climate change can be influenced positively when developments include measures to encourage the use of sustainable transport, walking and cycling. We intend to produce detailed guidance for developers to explain how the planning authority will be applying these policies when dealing with planning applications.

The Government is currently considering an uplift to energy efficiency standards through a new ‘Future Homes Standard’. Once this becomes clearer, the Council will consider how planning policies in the local plan need to change.
I objected to the amount of growth in the local plan last time and it didn’t make any difference; will it be any different this time?

Annual housing requirements are set by Government based on a formula called the standard method. It currently takes account of population projections and affordability to calculate housing need, but the Government has said it will update the formula very shortly so the current annual requirement (1,305 dwellings) is likely to change as we progress the plan.

As a result this consultation looks at the likely range of housing numbers that the plan may need to find sites for. Whilst the Council has little control of the levels of growth, where the development goes is something that can be influenced by the Council’s site selection process and overall strategy. The consultation responses will help the Council to decide where growth sites should be allocated so your suggestions and reasons for them are important

What about the added pressure on doctors' surgeries?

The Council is liaising with the relevant NHS England premises managers and Clinical Commissioning Groups, who are responsible for planning doctor’s surgeries. Where there is a requirement for expansion or provision of new surgeries arising from proposed development this will be identified in the Infrastructure Plan which will be prepared to support the Local Plan, and where appropriate land can be reserved for them within allocation sites.

What about added pressure on schools and other infrastructure?

An important consideration for the plan is whether the proposed sites are able to deliver necessary infrastructure and services, such as schools, community facilities, roads and drainage. In relation to primary schools, unless the development is of a type that does not create a need for school places, we need to ensure that sufficient spaces are available in existing schools. If it isn’t, in order to support growth, a new school or school extension may be needed. Proposed new primary schools could provide one form of entry (one class in every year group) but ideally would be a minimum of two forms of entry (two classes in every year group). Extensions to existing schools where possible should provide an additional whole form of entry. Based on recent analysis each additional 500 dwellings will generate the need for an additional form of school entry (i.e. 30 pupils in each year) and 1,000 dwellings will generate the need for two forms of school entry. The implication of this is that sites capable of providing around 500 or 1,000 homes are needed to justify the requirement of a new school. Sites must offer the provision of a school at an early stage of the development. In all cases the Council will require
sites for new primary schools to be a minimum of two hectares in size, which will provide sufficient space to enable one form entry schools to expand to meet future needs.

What about increased traffic?
Over the coming months the Council will assess each site that has been proposed for development and considered the suitability of access arrangements. Allocated sites will have to be capable of providing a safe access to the highway and this may mean that some improvements have to be made by the developer. The Council will also be looking at the effect on the wider highway network to see where changes are required to accommodate the additional traffic generated by development.