



Neighbourhood Planning in
Northhill Parish Villages

FINAL REFERENDUM VERSION

Site Assessment Report

for Northhill Parish Neighbourhood Plan

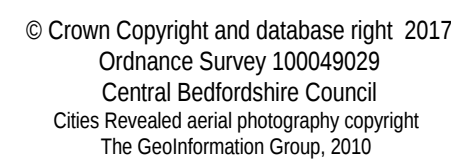


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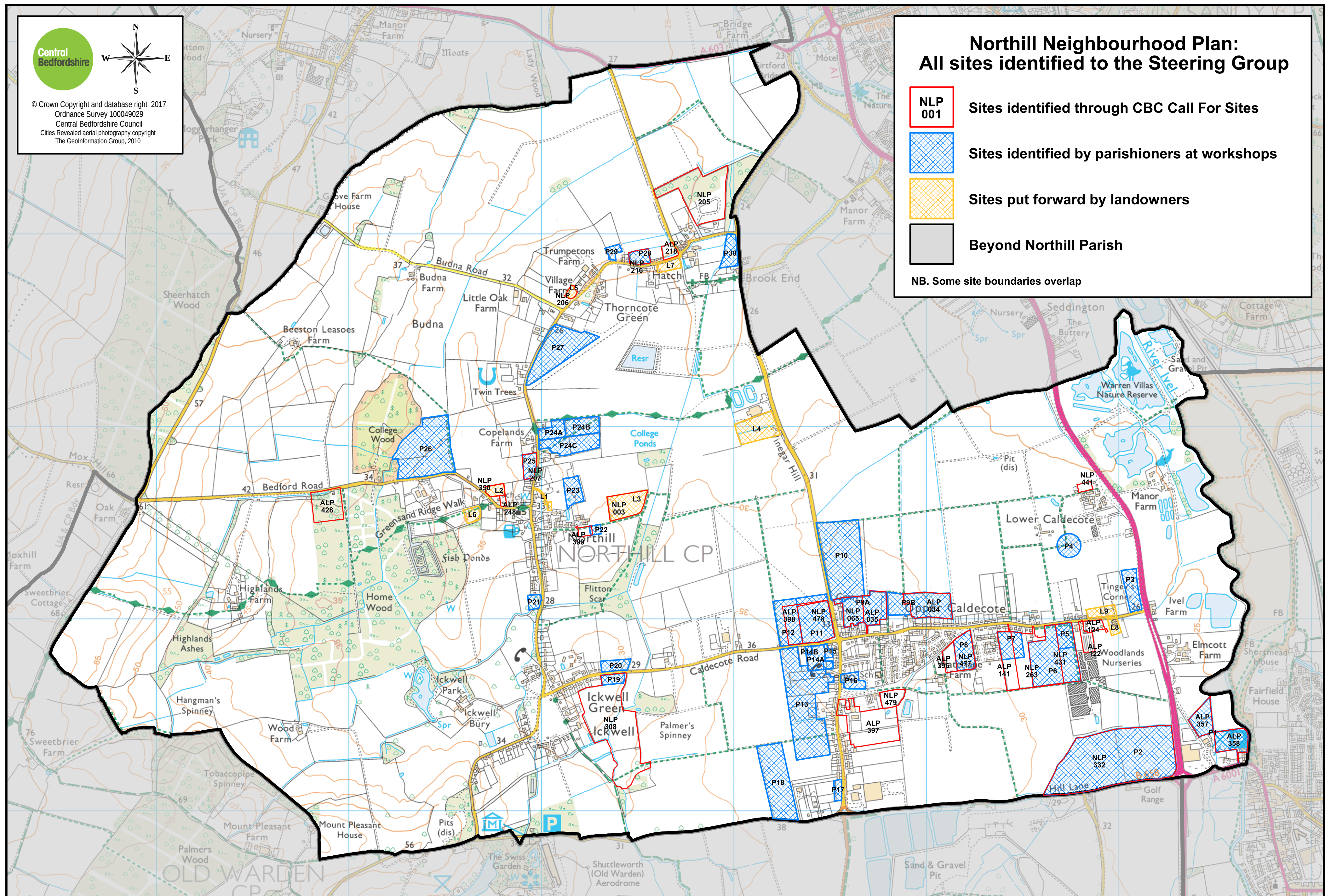
BEDFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL





- Sites identified through CBC Call For Sites
- Sites identified by parishioners at workshops
- Sites put forward by landowners
- Beyond Northhill Parish

NB. Some site boundaries overlap

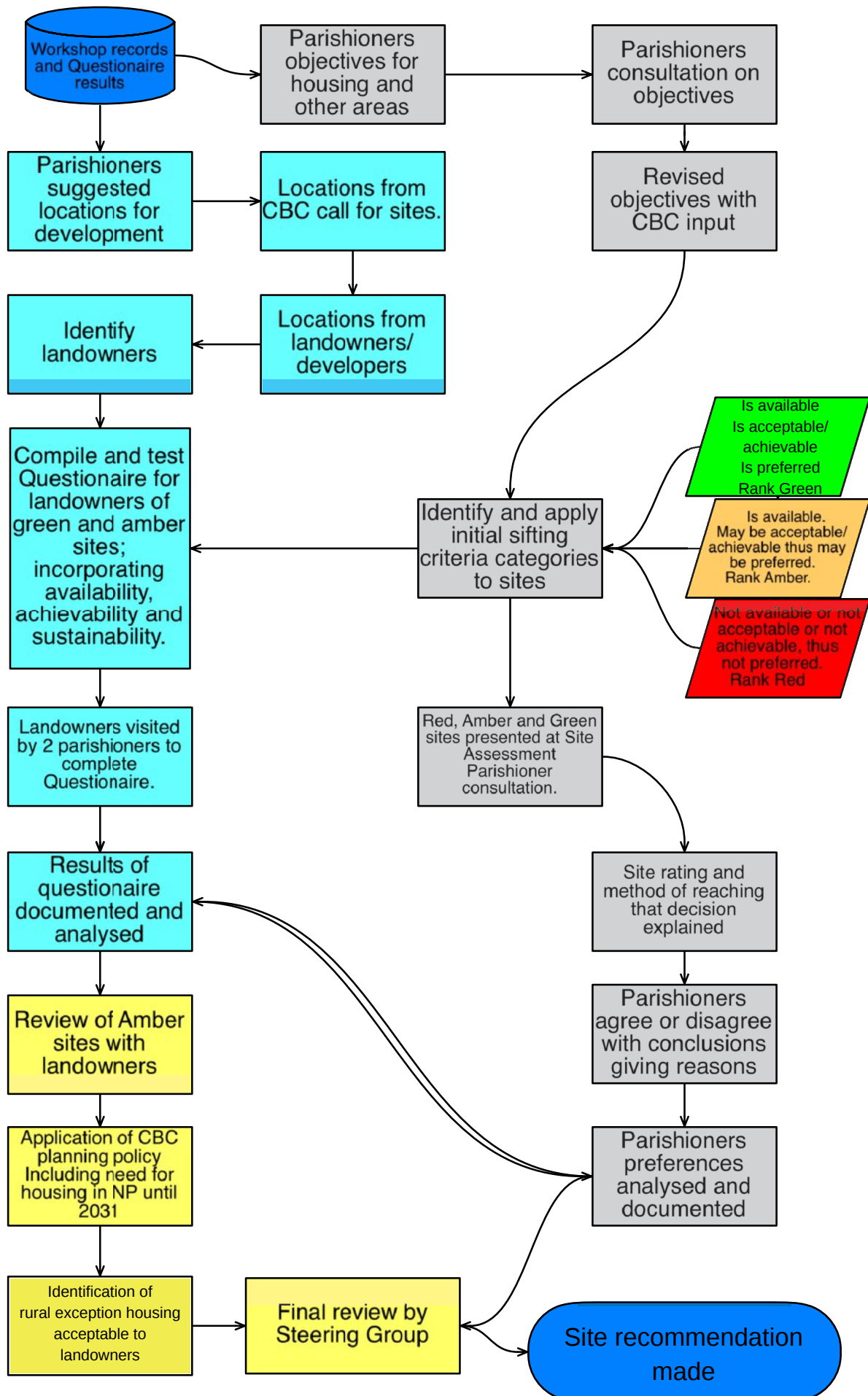


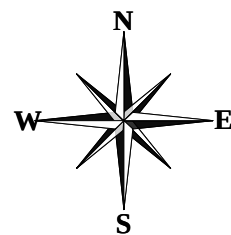
1. Introduction

- 1.1** This report is produced as part of the evidence base for the Northill Parish Neighbourhood Plan. It includes assessments of all sites that have been considered by the Steering Group, the process through which this was achieved and the reasoning underpinning that process.
- 1.2** Each site has received a comprehensive, objective assessment in terms of acceptability to parishioners, availability, achievability and sustainability from which suitability is concluded. The results of public consultations held in the autumn 2016 are included, which resulted in recommendations to the Steering Group regarding the allocation of sites for future housing development.
- 1.3** The CBC (Central Bedfordshire Council) Draft Local Plan (CBC 2035) was put out for consultation in July 2017. This included the results of their First Stage Assessment of sites offered to them under their 'Call for Sites'. These results were considered alongside the Steering Group's assessments.
- 1.4** At the time of the Sites Exhibitions, CBC had no specific deliverable sites within a five years housing plan. However, in April 2017, CBC stated that it had met its five-year land supply targets and hoped to be permitted to retain a 5% buffer as opposed to 20%. The impact of this will need to be assessed as development proposals come forward in the parish over the next 15 years.
- 1.5** Northill Parish is not listed as a site for major development in either CSDMP (2009) or CBC (2035). CSDMP (2009) suggests that sustainability considerations should limit the overall amount of development in rural areas. CBC (2035) proposes 2,000 homes spread across villages within Central Bedfordshire, where the local infrastructure can support them - for example large villages such as Upper Caldecote.
- 1.6** Recent planning approvals for open market housing are considered to be meeting local, regional and national need (Appendix 1, Northill Parish Neighbourhood Plan, Housing Needs Survey, BRCC 2015), (AECOM 2017).
- 1.7** All sites offered to the Neighbourhood Plan were outside the existing settlement envelope. The parishioners' requirement for affordable housing with a local connection could be achieved by development of rural exception housing. 20% open market housing could be permitted on these sites where viability issues are justified and demonstrated through a full financial viability assessment, submitted to and agreed by CBC.
- 1.8** Therefore, at Pre Submission Regulation 16 the Steering Group agreed to recommend four sites of up to 10 dwellings, for the development of rural exception housing with the possibility of 20% market housing on each site, as advocated in Policies NP 8, NP 9, NP 10 and NP11. These policies and related text were subsequently recommended for deletion by the Examiner.

1.9 The Site Assessment Process is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Overview of the Site Assessment Process

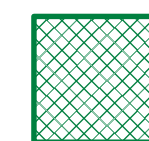




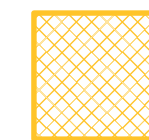
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Northhill Neighbourhood Plan

Preferred Sites Presented at Sites Exhibitions (Sept/Oct 2016)



Preferred sites considered suitable for development

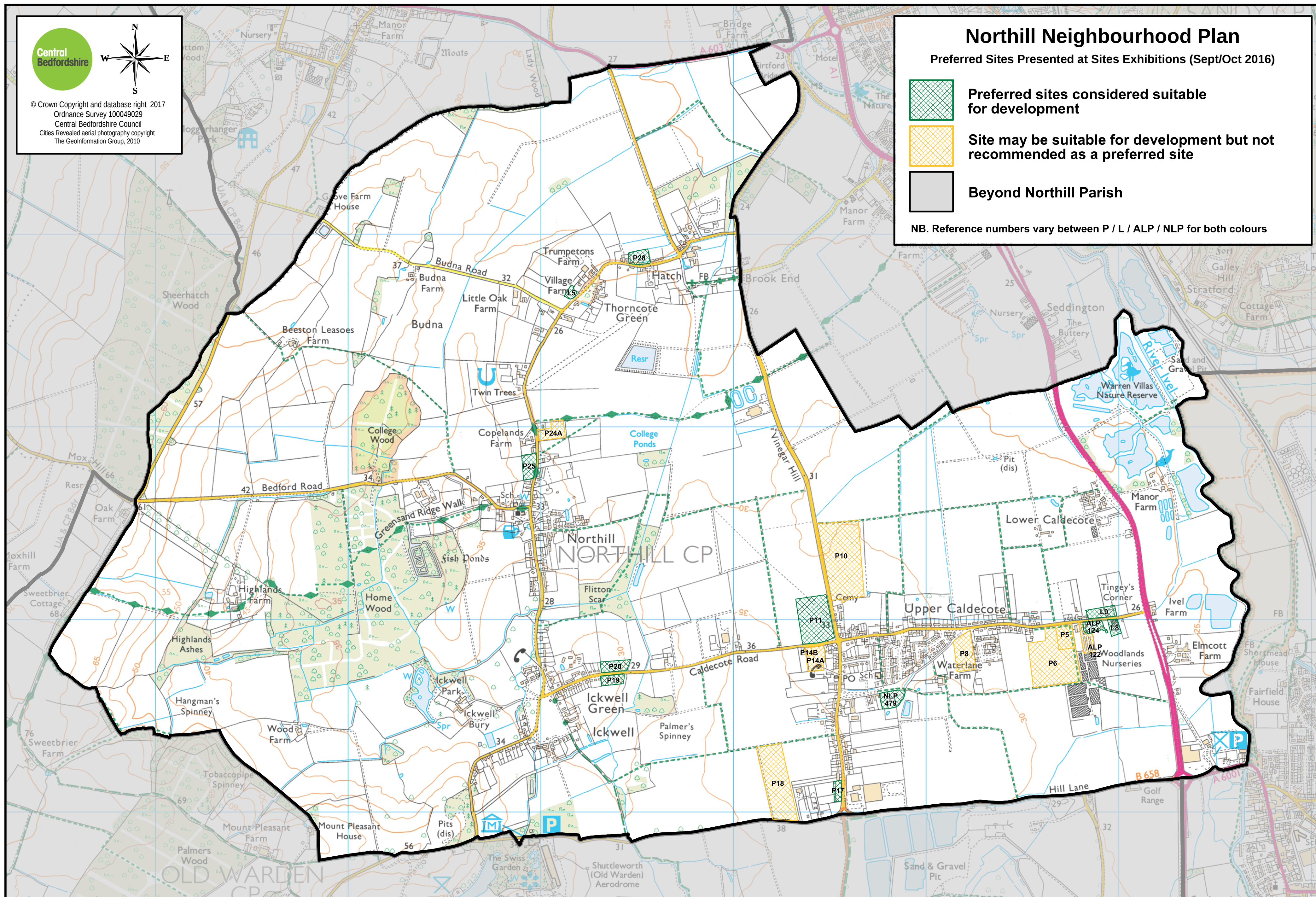


Site may be suitable for development but not recommended as a preferred site



Beyond Northhill Parish

NB. Reference numbers vary between P / L / ALP / NLP for both colours



2. Methodology

- 2.1** A conflict of interest was declared by one Co-Chair of NPNPSG who took no part in decisions made around the site assessment process, consultation or outcome or the ensuing policies. A conflict of interest was also declared by two NPNPSG members about certain potential sites. They took no part in discussion about these sites or at outcome determination. Three Parish Councillors declared a personal interest in one site.
- 2.2** The Steering Group initially considered 60 possible development sites, identified by parishioners, landowners and the CBC 'Call for Sites' process.
- 2.3** In September 2015, a set of site assessment criteria was drawn up from the CBC Draft Site Assessment document (Appendix SAR 1). The SG agreed a revised draft which went to public consultation with a representative group of parishioners. Their suggestions were taken into account and the criteria re-drafted. The final draft formed the basis of the Site Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), (Appendix SAR 2). The SAQ assessed availability, achievability and sustainability and was trialled with a landowner to check for any modification needed and ease of use.
- 2.4** Alongside this process and with CBC input, the Steering Group compiled 10 site determination questions considered to be most important by the parishioners (Appendix SAR 3). Subsequently the grade of agricultural land at these sites was not used as a determining factor, as the information available was not considered sufficiently accurate to be used in the assessment of individual sites.
- 2.5** Applying the site determination criteria resulted in a preliminary assessment of each site as either Red, Amber or Green (RAG rating) and established acceptability of sites to parishioners. A summary of the RAG ratings of each of the 60 sites is attached at Appendices SAR 4 (Green and Amber) and SAR 5 (Red).
- 2.6** Two sites that were initially assessed as involved with major commercial developments outside our remit were subsequently added to the list at the landowner's request (ALP122 and ALP 124), one was consigned to the Green sites and the other to the Amber. In addition, one Green, one Amber and one Red rated site were withdrawn as they obtained planning permission from CBC to develop their land. These were:
- Green - NP site L8, land between 154 and 158 Biggleswade Road, Upper Caldecote, CBC reference
 - Amber - NP site 8, Water Lane Farm Upper Caldecote, CBC reference ALP 396

- Red - Land north east of Bedford Road Northill, CBC reference NLP 350
- 2.7** Land ownership of all sites was researched, and landowners contacted to establish the availability of their site for development.
- 2.8** From the initial assessment 10 sites were rated Green (preferred), a further 8 sites were rated Amber (might be suitable for development) and the remainder were rated Red (not preferred). Landowners of Green and Amber rated sites were asked to complete the Site Assessment Questionnaire (Appendix SAR 2) by two volunteer parishioners with backgrounds in land management, agriculture and geography. Both worked independently of the NPNPSG.
- 2.9** The SG was advised by CBC to label two sites, both offered to the CBC Call for sites, as “outwith the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan”. One site (NLP205) at Woodside Caravan Park (put forward for residential dwellings) has in the past been the site of an illegal Gypsy and Traveller encampment, and the second site NLP441 (Grange Lane, Lower Caldecote) was under appeal for outline planning for 9 dwellings, as well as being offered to CBC as a site for G&T Accommodation. Our consultations did not indicate any need for further Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in the parish, only 3 comments being received on the subject.
- 2.10** Following the completed assessment of sites the SG met to consider the evidence compiled regarding each site and decided the final RAG ratings.
- 2.11** Four public Sites Exhibitions were held in September 2016, with a further mop up session in mid- October 2016. Parishioners were shown the RAG-rated sites and the reasons for allocating the ratings. 120 parishioners attended, which at 5.45% turnout of the total parish population, was considered to be satisfactory.
- 2.12** A comment sheet (Appendix SAR 6) asked them to indicate their four preferred sites from Green, Amber or Red categories and any site category they did not agree with, giving reasons. They could comment on the SG’s conclusions. The results from this consultation together with the results of the Site Assessment Questionnaire (Appendix SAR 4) resulted in a list of 18 sites.
- 2.13** Landowners of the 8 Amber rated sites were asked whether or not they would accept a development of 10 or less properties and to only develop land adjacent to (rather than behind) existing properties. Once they understood that these were the criteria that had rated their sites amber, they all agreed. Therefore both green and amber rated sites were judged capable of supporting housing development within certain parameters.

- 2.14** As all sites were outside the settlement envelopes, all 18 site landowners were sent a letter (Appendix 9) asking whether they would be willing to accept a rural exception site of 10 or less dwellings. These sites could include a limited number of market housing (20%). One landowner failed to give a definitive answer. Subsequent to our contact with the landowners, the CBC (2035) Draft Local Plan proposed that any market housing on a development in the form of an “exception site” would be subject to viability testing.
- 2.15** Six potential sites were identified, three adjacent to the settlement envelope (sites 17, 19, 20), two classed as infill outside the settlement envelope (sites 24a and 28) and one in open countryside (site 18).
- 2.16** The Draft Local Plan (CBC 2035) included an assessment of all sites offered to the CBC Call for Sites (2014 and 2016). Of the 29 sites in the parish, offered to CBC, 6 went forward to the second stage assessment. CBC’s reasons for excluding 23 sites were taken into consideration when finalising Northill Parish’s site allocation (Appendix SAR 7 and 8). Finally CBC allocated NP site 11 (Upper Caldecote) and site 25 (Northill) for market housing development. CBC (2035) Policy SP6 included provision for sites allocated by CBC to be developed outside the settlement envelope.
- 2.17** NPNPSG suggested three sites, each of up to 10 dwellings (NP Policies 8, 9 and 10) to be recommended for rural exception housing. A fourth site of 10 dwellings was to be chosen from one of the remaining two sites not in the open countryside or any other suitable site offered during the lifetime of the Plan (NP Policy 11). These policies were subsequently recommended for deletion by the Examiner.
- 2.18** In line with AECOM (2017) shown in NPNP Appendix 2, Policy NP3 supports the development of up to 40 dwellings on rural exception sites within the plan period, as identified by local housing need.
- 2.19** Residential development within our settlement envelopes will also be supported (Policy NP1), providing certain criteria are met. Any allocation should comply with all the policies within the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.20** The CBC Call for Sites process and ongoing planning approvals, running in parallel with the development of the NP, are likely to offset or exceed the number of market homes required in the parish until 2035.