



PRESTWOOD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION TO BUCKINGHAMSHIRE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

Prestwood Community Association (PCA) is a voluntary, not for profit group working with and for residents and stakeholders of Prestwood. We seek to share visions and ideas for a strong, caring, happy and resilient village.

PCA's submission to Buckinghamshire's draft Local Plan consultation concentrates largely on issues relating to Prestwood and similar communities, in particular housing, infrastructure, transport and environmental protection.

PCA does not have the overall perspective to comment with authority on the present Government's national housing targets, and the top down directive for Buckinghamshire over the life of the Plan (to 2045). However, we agree with those who argue that seemingly arbitrary top down requirements will place an unreasonable burden on Buckinghamshire. This may ultimately be at the cost of some of Buckinghamshire's most prized natural assets and character. A CPRE study has recently highlighted the contribution that edge-of-town farmland makes to the country's food supply, providing more than 20% of all cereals and around 10% and more of many major food groups. Speaking on behalf of a rural village community, we fear that building houses to hit numerical targets may take precedence over consideration of necessary infrastructure, and at the expense of rural heritage and industries, and food production.

However, PCA recognises that Prestwood will need to accept additional development over coming years. PCA understands the need for a Local Plan, to provide the framework by which planners and developers can seek to achieve a balance between development, protection of Buckinghamshire's natural assets and building strong communities..

Especially for younger families and the children of residents, affordability of housing is a serious issue. Ultimately lack of sufficiently varied housing will impact adversely on Prestwood as a community.

PCA welcomes therefore the objective on affordable, accessible and specialist housing, and provision under rural exception sites. (Local Plan Objective 3).

Sustainability is a key consideration in planning decisions. It is often bandied about rather too simplistically. PCA is very anxious to stress that development in a rural village should be appropriate to its circumstances.

In presenting its strategic approaches for development, the draft Local Plan recognises this issue through its list of pros and cons in relation to 'Limited Expansion of Villages'.

Leaving aside the obvious threat to landscape within National Landscape and Green Belt, major new development within or on the edge of villages MUST be accompanied by investment in appropriate services, facilities and local transport. Transport is particularly important. Local Plan Objective 8 states, *"Aim: To improve connectivity across and between Buckinghamshire towns and villages... by securing new sustainable transport infrastructure, upgrading existing infrastructure and improving digital connectivity"*. Considering its size (7,600 residents), Prestwood is already something of a desert in terms of effective public transport.

The final 'con', 'Potential impact on village character needs to be carefully managed', is very true.

The Chilterns National Landscape covers 27% of Buckinghamshire. Approximately 32% of Buckinghamshire is designated as Green Belt. The updated NPPF contains considerable protections for National Landscapes (ie Chilterns). National Landscapes also enjoy protections under other legislation.

Para 189 of the updated NPPF states that *"Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues."*

Para 190 states *"When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest."*

Despite concerns about the NPPF's more permissive stance on development within Green Belt, introducing the concept of 'Grey Belt', its 'Golden Rules' place restrictions and hurdles on how this can be argued by applicants. One of these restrictions is a need for 50% affordable housing on new developments on Green Belt land. PCA notes that the UK Government has recently watered down affordable housing quotas in London in an attempt to stimulate developer activity; it is to be hoped that the NPPF will not dilute further protections on Green Belt.

PCA welcomes the draft Local Plan's provisions on Biodiversity Net Gain, which in any case is now a legal requirement. Whilst the NPPF does permit compensation for habitat loss through Section 106 contributions, or purchases through an off-setting provider, we welcome the statement that the latter should be a very last resort.

Based on examples and experience within our community, we urge Buckinghamshire Council to be more robust in ensuring achievement of net gains. It should be aware of and take account of developers stripping a site before application, to reduce the baseline for biodiversity calculation. Where permissions are granted, it should be robust in enforcing conditions relating to

biodiversity net gain. We also urge attention to detail in setting conditions, in particular ensuring that landscaping conditions are not open ended and therefore unenforceable.

Finally, the Spatial Strategy sets a target yield of 1,500-2,500 homes on brownfield sites within existing towns and villages. This seems unambitious, particularly at the lower end. PCA notes that the 2021 UK Census stated that Buckinghamshire contains nearly 10,000 'long term empty' dwellings.

29th October 2025