



GREAT BRICKHILL PARISH

Character Appraisal

June 2025 V4

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

**Applicants,
Developers and
Landowners**



Applicants will be expected to use this document as a guide in the early stages of design to be confident in meeting design expectations within the neighbourhood plan area.

**Great Brickhill
Parish Council**



To use as a guide when commenting on planning applications to ensure that design guidance is complied with.

**Buckinghamshire
Council**



To discuss the design guide with applicants at the pre-application stage and to use as a reference when assessing planning applications.

**Community
Organisations**



To use as a reference when commenting on planning applications and to encourage design to respond to community aspirations.

**Statutory
Consultees**



To use as a reference when commenting on planning applications.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Character Appraisal is to provide a description of the character of the parish and how it is perceived by its residents.

In order to successfully plan for the future growth and development of the parish it is imperative that there is a clear understanding of its character and what makes it unique.

What is a Character Appraisal?

A Character Appraisal is a document which sets out the special interest, character and appearance of a particular place to highlight its local distinctiveness and identity.

The appraisal itself is a factual and objective analysis which seeks to enable an understanding of the wider qualities of a place by defining the physical elements that contribute to its special characteristics. Essentially, it identifies the qualities that help define and make a place unique, such as open space, materials, property type, maintenance and age of the structures.

In this instance, the study will define the character of the parish's settlements as a series of character areas. Each character area is described against a series of common physical characteristics.

Whilst this appraisal seeks to assess the area's special interest as comprehensively as possible, it cannot cover the minutiae of all issues. Consequently, any omission of a particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it has no value or interest. The appraisal is the starting point; all development proposals should fully consider the appraisal, having regard to national and local policies. Such proposals should be informed by an individual assessment commensurate with the scale of the project proposed.

The information within the appraisal will comprise

descriptive text supported by photographs, maps and other graphical material. It will also identify opportunities for future enhancement if considered necessary.

Purpose of the Character Appraisal

This appraisal serves multiple purposes, with its primary role being to inform the development of the emerging Great Brickhill Neighbourhood Plan. By identifying key issues, the appraisal will help shape the content, priorities and direction of the Plan.

Beyond this, the appraisal will act as a valuable tool for development management, supporting higher-quality, context-sensitive development. It will be a useful reference for residents and developers when preparing planning applications, as well as for individuals wishing to comment on current proposals.

Under the Localism Act 2011, communities have the right to shape their local areas by creating their own Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), and this appraisal will play a central role in guiding that process in Great Brickhill.

PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

This appraisal should be read in conjunction with the wider national and local planning policy and guidance.

National Policy Guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was adopted by the Government in March 2012 and revised on 12 December 2024. All of the policies in the

NPPF constitute the government's view of what sustainable development in England means in practice. One of the key dimensions of sustainability is that of design. This is supplemented by a second dimension of protecting and enhancing the historic environment. Development that fails to adhere to both the design and the historic environment policies is therefore not considered sustainable development.

The NPPF sets out how the government intends to deliver sustainable development through the planning process. It expressly states that sustainable development is about achieving positive growth and balancing economic, environmental and social considerations.

Whilst there is a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development, the framework also recognises the finite nature and value of the built heritage and natural environment.

Section 12 of the NPPF sets out the main policies in respect to the importance of design in the planning process:

- Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.
- Policies should ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.
- Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities presented by a site.
- Great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

Specifically with regard to the historic environment, the key messages are:

- There should be a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.
- When considering the impact of proposals on a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Substantial harm should be exceptional, whilst less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the development.

The National Design Guide

The National Design Guide was published in 2019 and sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in principle and in practice. It supports the NPPF as referred to in the previous section as well as sitting alongside the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) in regard to design process and tools.

It is intended to be used by local authorities, applicants and local communities to establish the design expectations of the government.

It identifies ten characteristics which underpin good design:

- Context,
- Identity,
- Built Form,
- Movement,
- Nature,
- Public Spaces,
- Uses,
- Homes and Buildings,
- Resources, and
- Lifespan.

This appraisal will draw on the principles of this National Design Guidance to help inform the recommendations.

Local Policy

The development plan for the parish currently comprises the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan 2013-2033. The Local Plan identifies the development strategy to be delivered in the district for the period to 2033 and includes policies of relevance to Great Brickhill Parish.

Great Brickhill is classed as a smaller village (under Policy S3). The Local Plan requires a total of 709 housing to come forward across all the small villages. These houses are expected to be allocated within neighbourhood plans or come forward through the development management process.

The parish has a number of environmental designations including Priority Habitat and Priority Habitats and is partially within a Mineral Consultation Area (Policy NE1).

There are also several listed buildings and 3 Conservation Areas in the parish (Policy BE1).

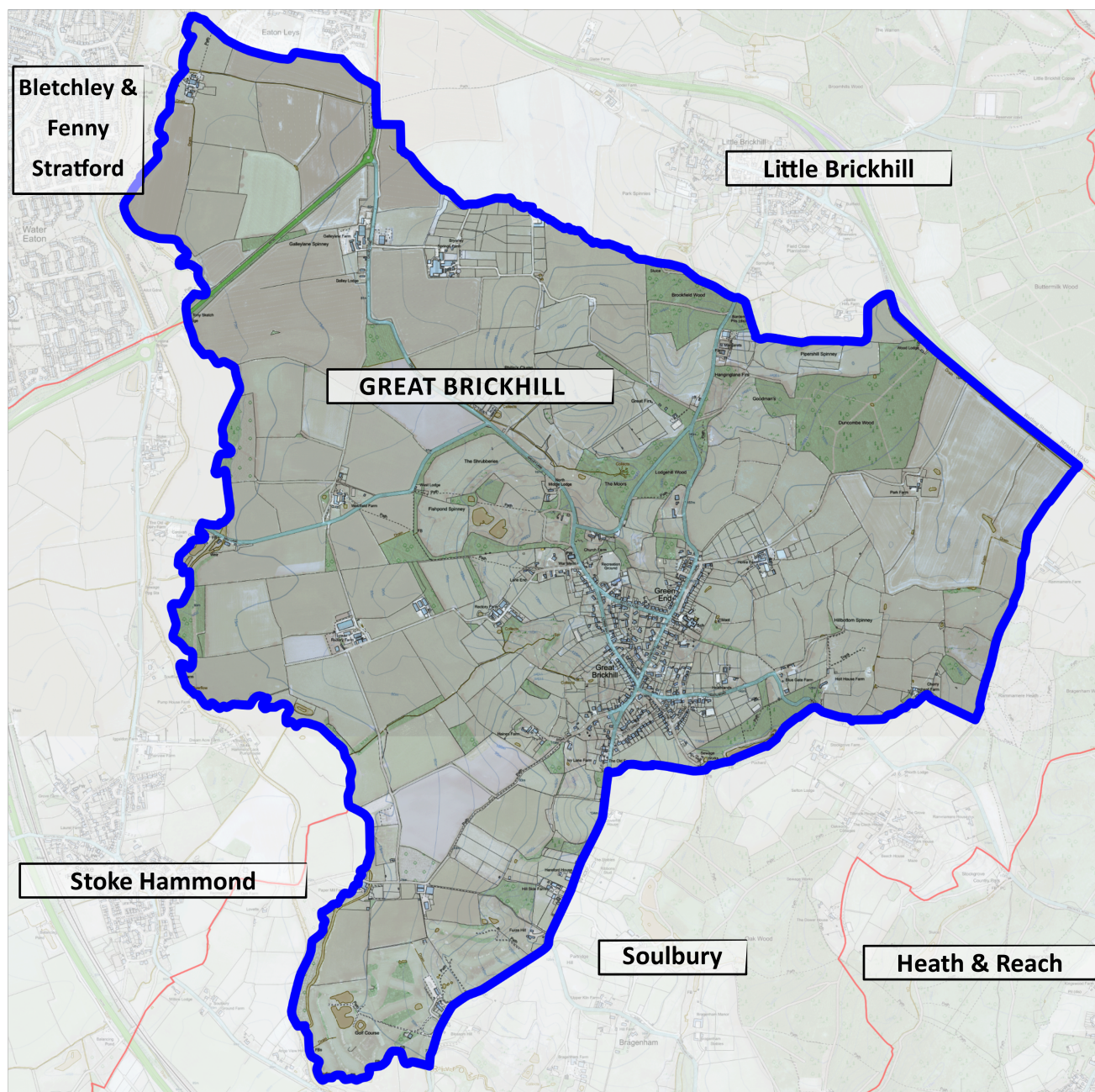
There are no designated housing or employment site allocations within the parish boundaries. However, development on the edge of Milton Keynes lies adjacent to the parish, and developers are now proposing new schemes for land located within the parish itself.

For a full list of relevant policies, please see the Great Brickhill Neighbourhood Plan.

Local Design Guidance

There is a Vale of Aylesbury Design supplementary planning document which sets out design principles and explains how to develop a design that integrates well into its local context and surroundings.

CONTEXT



Great Brickhill is succinctly summarised by the Parish Council on their website as:

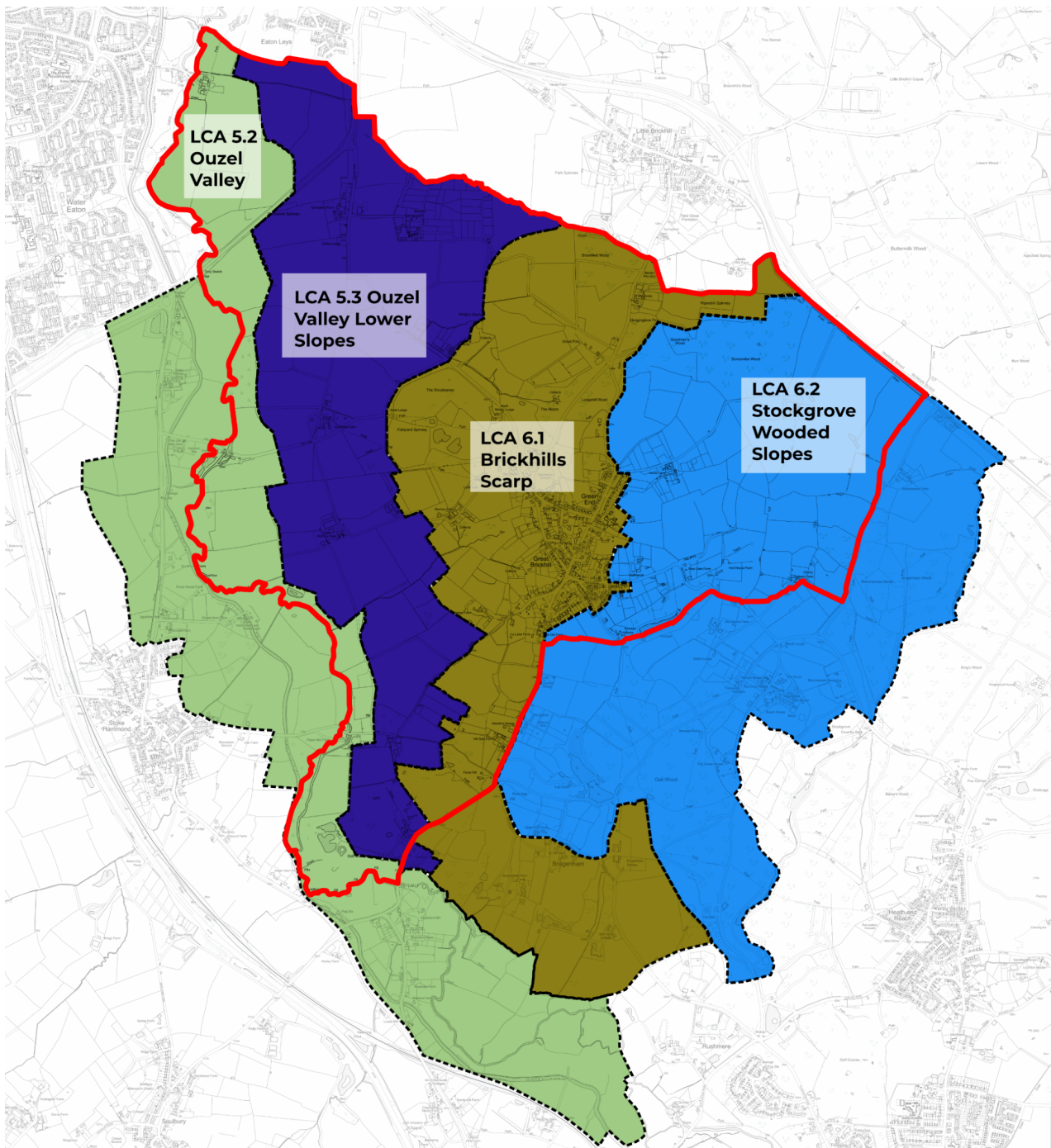
“a village of just under 900 persons situated in North East Buckinghamshire, surrounded by an Area of Attractive Landscape.

The village is situated some 6 km to the North of Leighton Buzzard, 18 km North East of Aylesbury & 10 km South East of Central Milton Keynes and sits at an altitude of approximately 140m above sea level on Cretaceous aged sandstone known locally

as The Greensand Ridge.

The lower lying land to the North and North West of the village centre are comprised of Jurassic aged clays, which has been mined for many centuries in nearby Newton Longville as it forms an excellent raw material for brick making. Many of the stone buildings in the village are built from locally quarried sandstone, the brick buildings are formed from locally manufactured bricks and most probably the sand used in the mortar comes from quarries in nearby Heath & Reach”.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER



Landscape Character Areas

In 2008 Jacobs Engineering UK Ltd undertook a Landscape Character Assessment on behalf of the Aylesbury Vale District Council and Buckinghamshire County Council.

The assessment identified 79 character areas categorised within 13 landscape character types. Within Great Brickhill Parish, as shown above, there are 4 landscape character areas that are in

2 landscape character types.

Type 5 Shallow Valleys

5.2 Ouzel Valley.

5.3 Ouzel Valley Lower Slopes.

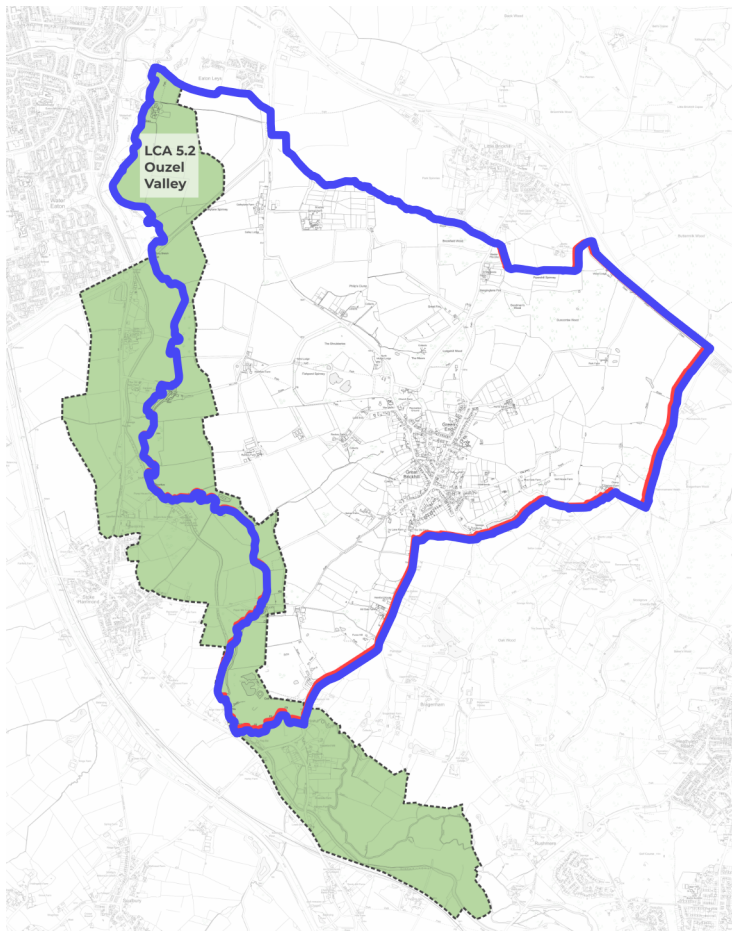
Type 6 Greensand Ridge

6.1 Brickhills Scarp.

6.2 Stockgrove Wooded Slopes.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Landscape Character Area 5.2 - Ouzel Valley



This LCA is the clay floodplain of the valley bottom. It follows the meandering course of the River Ouzel, which is fed by a number of smaller streams, providing aquatic habitats. The alluvium and river terrace drift lead to clayey and loamy soils that are seasonally waterlogged. The grasslands and small patches of woodland form the terrestrial habitats.

There are dispersed farmsteads and a former mill creating a landscape of mix of arable and grazing land, hedged with hawthorn and elm suckers. Mature tree belts of willow and ash are associated with the canal (which is outside the parish boundary), and somewhat to the river, which are both important for recreation.

There is evidence of prehistoric and Roman occupation, although again this is generally outside of the parish boundary.

The views of Milton Keynes and traffic associated to the A4146 are considered to be intrusive elements.

Recommendations and Findings for the Neighbourhood Plan

Retain the Key Characteristics and Features of:

- the River Ouzel valley bottom,
- large arable fields,
- willow and poplar trees along watercourses,
- narrow lanes crossing the river,
- historic meadows, and
- mixture of mature and clipped hedges.

Issues:

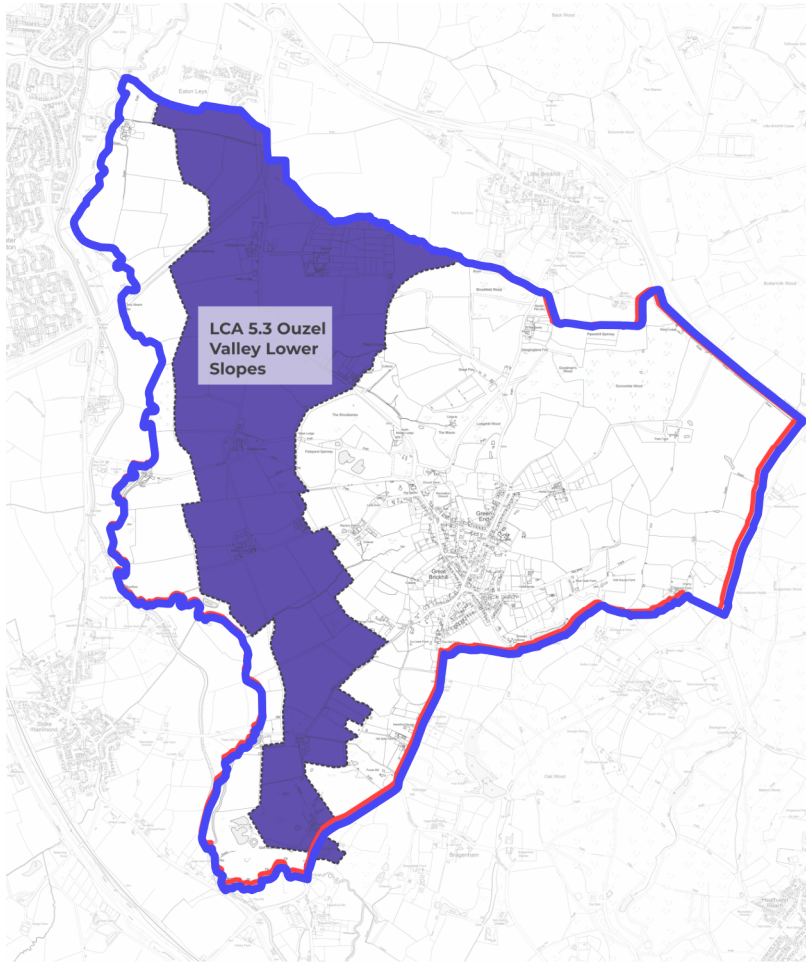
- protect the area from urban views of Milton Keynes,
- protect the area from traffic on A4146, and
- ensure that River Valley bottom does not become adversely impacted by development.



View Northwards Along the River Ouzel

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Landscape Character Area 5.3 - Ouzel Valley Lower Slopes



This LCA is west facing gentle clay slopes of the valley between the valley bottom and the ridge. The underlying land consists of Oxford Clay with deposits of head and river terrace on the slopes. Calcareous mudstone exists at the southern tip and there are some small water courses which drain into the River Ouzel.

The landscape is predominately arable land with a few pastures of which are predominantly parliamentary and 19th century enclosures, with some 18th century irregular enclosures.

Fields are hedged with hawthorn and occasionally elm, with varying presence of boundary trees. In places the fields are amalgamating due to loss of hedgerows. The land consists mostly of dispersed farmsteads with a few dispersed dwellings.

The views of Milton Keynes, traffic associated to the A4146 and Golf Course in the south are considered to be intrusive elements.

Recommendations and Findings for the Neighbourhood Plan

Retain the Key Characteristics and Features of:

- gently sloping valley side,
- large arable fields,
- small parcels of woodland and shelter belts, and
- narrow lanes climbing up the valley sides.

Issues:

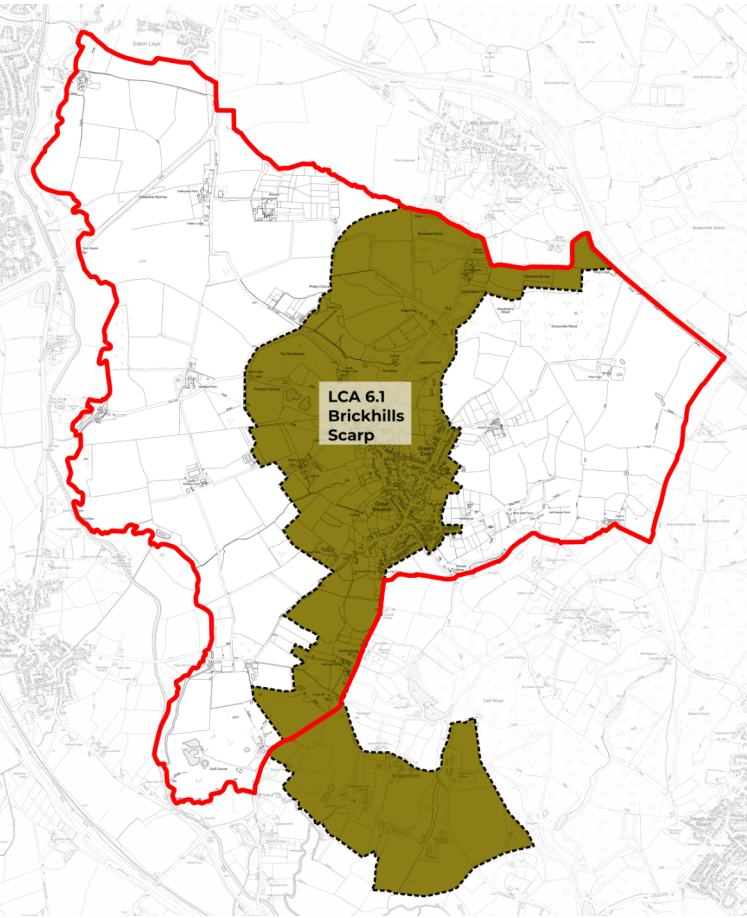
- protect the area from urban views of Milton Keynes,
- protect the area from traffic on A4146, and
- ensure that the golf course landscape to the south of the parish does not extend and become intrusive.



Long Distance View from Mill Lane Looking South

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Landscape Character Area 6.1 - Brickhill Scarp



This LCA is a dramatic scarp, which is sited on a deposit of Woburn Sand. It is highly visible from the west sitting at 164m AOD (on the Primary School site) and ranging to 100m AOD (see page 11 for topography).

The lower slopes are exposures of West Walton formation calcareous mudstones and Oxford clays whilst the top layer is overlain by glacial till and other glacial deposits.

Great Brickhill village is centrally positioned within the scarp and is highly visible from the western edges of the parish (although often hidden by woodland).

The landform is a mosaic of woodland, pasture and settlement. There is little arable cultivation due to the sandy acidic soils.

The long distance views to Milton Keynes and intermittent views of trains are considered to be intrusive elements in an area which is otherwise characterised by few visual detractors.

Recommendations and Findings for the Neighbourhood Plan

Retain the Key Characteristics and Features of:

- long distance views of, and from, the dramatic steep scarp,
- mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland,
- predominant pasture which has distinctive fine grasses reflecting their sandy/acid soils below (much of which is a priority habitat- see Page 12),
- narrow sunken lanes which connect Great Brickhill with surrounding settlements,
- the Parkland at the former Great Brickhill Manor,
- the layout and form of the historic settlement,
- the use of locally specific materials which either complement or utilise the distinctive red/brown sandstone,
- pockets of heathland, acid grassland and fens,
- maintain and improve the condition of existing mature trees and hedgerows, and
- support and promote the recreational use of the area with access and interpretation.

Issues:

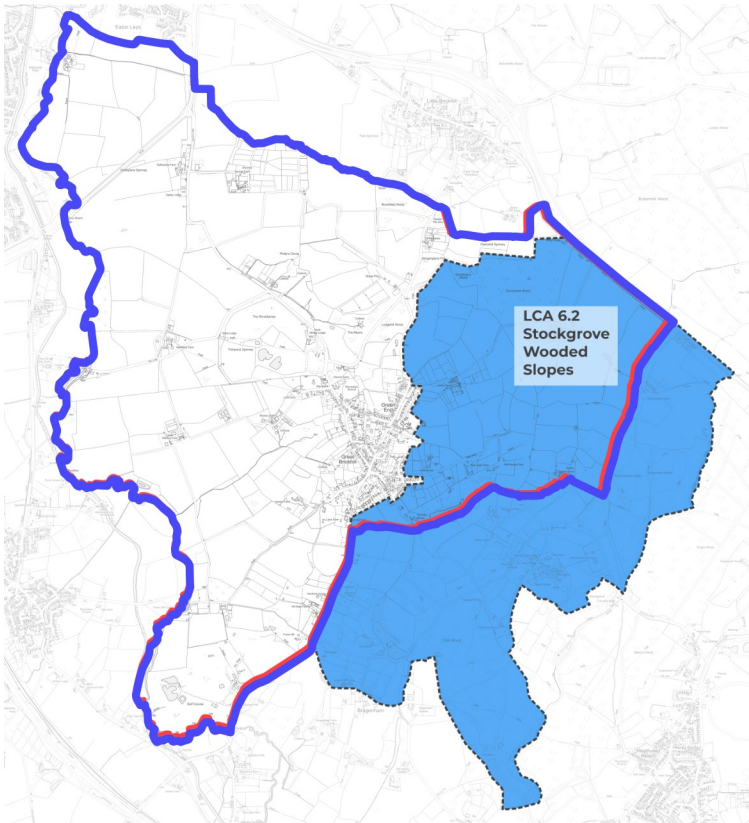
- protect the area from urban views of Milton Keynes.



Long Distance View From the Cemetery Looking Southwest

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Landscape Character Area 6.2 - Stockgrove Wooded Slopes



View Northwards Along Heath Road

The area exhibits a distinct topographic prominence due to its elevated landform compared to surrounding areas (although LCA 6.1 adjacent contains the highest point in the parish).

Watling Street Roman road forms the area’s north eastern boundary but otherwise there is little known archaeology.

This characteristic is further emphasised by the presence of mature woodland cover such as Duncombe Wood and around Pochard Lake. Outside of the parish boundary, woodland is particularly concentrated within the Stockgrove area to the southeast.

However, the woodland cover is not uniform across the entire area. In the north it transitions to intermittent cover with large expanses of open arable fields.

The elevated position and sparse tree cover in the north contribute to high levels of visual permeability. This means long-distance views are prevalent, particularly from the fringes of the parish, offering vistas of the surrounding landscape.

Due to these combined factors, the overall landscape sensitivity of the area remains high. This signifies a greater importance placed on preserving the existing character during any development considerations.

Recommendations and Findings for the Neighbourhood Plan

Retain the Key Characteristics and Features of:

- undulating landform,
- extensive woodland cover,
- sparse settlement pattern and dispersed farmsteads,
- pasture land set within woodland setting,
- narrow winding lanes connecting Great Brickhill with Heath and Reach,
- pre-18th century irregular fields,
- views to Stockgrove Country Park,
- adjacent to Rammamere heathland,

- forms part of a wider network of lakes,
- extensive areas of acid and neutral grassland,
- small areas of bracken,
- large areas of neutral grassland, acidic grassland, Fen, and
- support and promote the recreational use of the area with access and interpretation.

Issues:

- traffic on A5.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

