

**BLAKE STEPHENSON MP**  
Member of Parliament for Mid Bedfordshire



**Cllr. Adam Zerny**

Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council  
Priory House  
Monks Walk  
Chicksands  
SG17 5TQ

Dear Adam,

**Central Bedfordshire Local Plan Review Consultation**

I am writing to share my feedback to the above-mentioned consultation as the Member of Parliament for Mid Bedfordshire. As you will know, we are very fortunate in Mid Bedfordshire to benefit from beautiful countryside – from the foothills of the Chilterns to the Greensand Ridge, to the Marston Vale Forest.

As the local Member of Parliament, constituents tell me that they want the best parts of living here protected; whilst delivering the new affordable homes, transport infrastructure, schools, healthcare, and environmental improvements that will ensure people can enjoy living in Mid Bedfordshire for generations to come.

***What makes a great place to live?***

Mid Bedfordshire is a great place to live because of the historic character of our towns and villages and the easy access they provide to some of the most beautiful countryside England has to offer. It is important that the Local Plan protects and enhances that character – ensuring that we restore and enhance our natural environment and strengthen the ability of local people to enjoy it and that any development is beautiful, in keeping with our communities, and does not change the character or setting of our towns and villages.

That means protecting our remaining historic Bedfordshire Ends villages, characterised by their linear development, from backfill and retaining the countryside gaps which delineate our communities against the growing threat of windfall development. On the Greensand Ridge, we should have consideration for SEO1<sup>1</sup> and be gentle custodians of the historic character of this important landscape.

It is also important that we protect the integrity of our communities. At the time of writing, we are waiting for a consultation on the East-West Rail project to open. Modern transport infrastructure is important, but I know that there are concerns about the impact that a more regular stopping service would have on communities bisected by the Marston Vale Line, including Lidlington. I would therefore welcome proposals that have regard to these concerns.

A great place to live also contains a well-defined centre, with a good range of places for people to work and spend time. The Local Plan can play a role in providing focussed re-generation to help improve some of the place-making that has failed to deliver clear centres where large villages have

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<sup>1</sup> National Character Area Statement of Environmental Opportunity:  
<https://nationalcharacterareas.co.uk/bedfordshire-greensand-ridge/statement-of-environmental-opportunity/>.

become towns through urban sprawl rather than deliberate planning. In Mid Bedfordshire, I believe that the community would welcome ambitious plans that support a greater sense of a central place to Flitwick in particular, including effort to improve connectivity over the railway

Great places to live are also characterised by great local services. As the Local Plan develops, I would like to see ambitious plans for schools (that bring greater choice to families and drive-up educational outcomes) and better access to local healthcare – including in some of our smaller towns and villages. It is important that we learn the lessons of the past by ensuring that infrastructure comes first – not as an afterthought or not at all.

### ***Where should new homes and jobs go?***

The new Government is asking Central Bedfordshire to find sites for 31,485 homes for local people. This will be an extra-ordinary task to complete, but I would also urge the Council at this starting point to resist in the strongest terms any calls to take any of the 17,160 homes the Government has targeted for Luton, or to de-classify Greenbelt land except in the most exceptional of circumstances. Land at Steppingley Road in Flitwick was de-classified from Greenbelt to accommodate Luton's unmet needs, and this is not acceptable to many in the local community.

Within Central Bedfordshire, I would urge the Council to seek to build on brownfield sites and within the boundaries of our existing urban areas as the main priority. We must resist the urge to turn our beautiful countryside into urban sprawl spreading out from London. In an age of growing insecurity internationally, we must also protect our food security by ensuring that our prime agricultural land is protected – both from housing and from large-scale solar, which should go on roofs rather than on productive farmland at every reasonable opportunity.

In the main, I believe the Council should focus development on our larger towns: Leighton-Linslade, Dunstable and Houghton Regis. Many of our villages will need to grow more sustainably, and gradually, with a mix of housing, rather than a bias towards executive homes which are unaffordable for many local people. As mentioned in the previous section, I would also welcome place-making developments that would allow the creation of new jobs and places for people to spend time.

There is also a significant opportunity presented in the form of MOD Chicksands. Located next to a large market town and with good access by road to Bedford and the wider Central Bedfordshire area, I believe that we should be encouraging proposals at this site for homes and jobs within the existing developed footprint – so long as those proposals are highly sensitive to the historical significance of the site and the heritage assets on it.

We are fortunate to have a world-leading university in Cranfield and a high-tech cluster. We should ensure that we support the high value jobs of the future to complement those existing assets, ahead of development to support warehousing and logistics. The proposed Universal development just over the border in Bedford Borough will create new economic opportunities in tourism and in the wider Universal supply chain. We will need to make sure that the Local Plan allows us to take full advantage of those opportunities.

### ***What else should be considered?***

The current Local Plan has strong, positive commitments to the development of the Bedford-Milton Keynes Waterway Park and the Forest of Marston Vale. It is important that we retain those commitments in this Local Plan, alongside wider efforts to restore nature and enhance our beautiful natural environment. I would welcome a further commitment to natural re-generation in the Chilterns National Landscape Area and along the Greensand Ridge in Mid Bedfordshire. We have a profound opportunity to leave these beautiful areas of nature in a much better condition than generations past have enjoyed.

Cycleways, footpaths, bridleways and the like which connect our villages and allow access to the wider countryside will need to be properly planned, built into masterplans, and delivered.

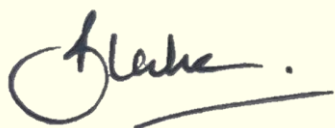
We will also need to ensure that development is resilient to climate change, with houses designed to be warm in the winter and cool in the summer, with water capture and solar as standard. Residents in Maulden have made compelling representations to me about the threat that development is posing to their village, with worsened water retention causing an increased risk of flooding. We must do much more to consider inter-connected issues and challenges that arise between sites and existing dwellings to protect communities like Maulden's against, for example, the flooding risks caused by excessive (and particularly up-slope) development.

Updated flood plain reviews are necessary to help inform appropriate site selections in this Local Plan. Given that increasing flooding risk might in future render homes uninsurable and uninhabitable, avoiding building on high-risk flooding areas is vitally important to the long-term sustainability of our communities.

Where communities, like Wixams, span the boundary between local authority areas, we must ensure that the plans and resources available are sufficient to deal with the complexity that cross-boundary communities present – as illustrated by the difficulties being faced in delivering infrastructure such as a GP surgery to serve the community - so that these communities can be properly served and represented. With sites likely to come forward in Mid Bedfordshire and increasing coalescence with communities also in the Luton and Milton Keynes local authority areas, it is important that there is holistic planning and extensive consultation with the local communities to ensure there is congruence and clear accountabilities for the delivery of infrastructure.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to discussing this further with you as the consultation progresses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Blake', with a horizontal line underneath it.

**Blake Stephenson MP**  
Member of Parliament for Mid Bedfordshire