

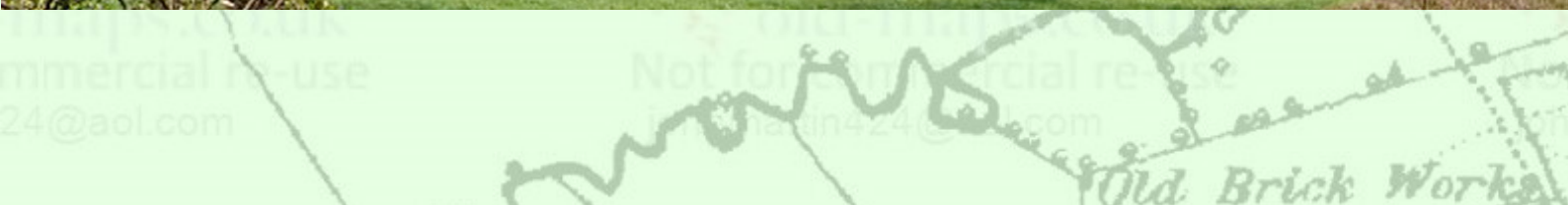
A historical map of Bitteswell, showing a network of roads and fields. The map is overlaid with a light green grid. The text "maps.co.uk" and "Not for commercial re-use" are visible in the background.

# Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan

2020 - 2041

## Submission version

June 2026



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# FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR

The Localism Act 2011 gave residents the power to shape the future of their communities by putting neighbourhood plans at the heart of a new planning system. Under the Act, councils and local people can make decisions about the impact of many aspects of future development, its design and location.

Bitteswell with Bittesby Parish Council made the decision to embrace these new powers and to draw up the 'Neighbourhood Plan', which will help to direct development across the parish over the lifetime of the emerging Harborough Local Plan (up to 2041). Provision is made for the Neighbourhood Plan to be kept 'live'. It will be regularly monitored and formally reviewed every 5 years or whenever there is a significant change to the Local Plan, such as an increase in housing need.

Our Neighbourhood Plan provides a local framework for future development, which must be taken into account when planning applications in the Designated Area are determined. The Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan has been compiled by local residents and an Advisory Committee reporting to the Parish Council.

The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared having regard to national planning policy and the existing development plan, and it does not propose a level of housing development lower than would otherwise be delivered in the Parish. Harborough District Council has recognised the Designated Area of Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan as the part of the parish comprising Bitteswell and leading up to the Magna Park strategic employment site and authorised Bitteswell with Bittesby Parish Council to lead the delivery.

The preparation of our Neighbourhood Plan has seen many local consultations and surveys. The Advisory Committee has met regularly, welcoming the public to its meetings and directing the work of two Theme Groups whose role it has been to develop the policies that are appropriate and meaningful to the people who live and work in our community. The final stages of the production of the Neighbourhood Plan have been delayed by the Coronavirus pandemic that led to significant disruption and lockdowns from March 2020 onwards. The group has sought to find alternative ways of keeping the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan in the minds of the local community and ensuring their continued contribution to its development.

The Plan, as a statutory document, will give residents a real influence in decisions on the location, character, sustainability and scope of new development and recognises the community's aspirations.

The Neighbourhood Plan is a legal document that forms part of the statutory Development Plan for the District. Planning decisions by Harborough District Council will be made having taken the Plan into account. Our policies, as stated in the Plan, will take priority over non-strategic policies in the Local Plan, giving our community a real and lasting tool to influence the future of our neighbourhood.

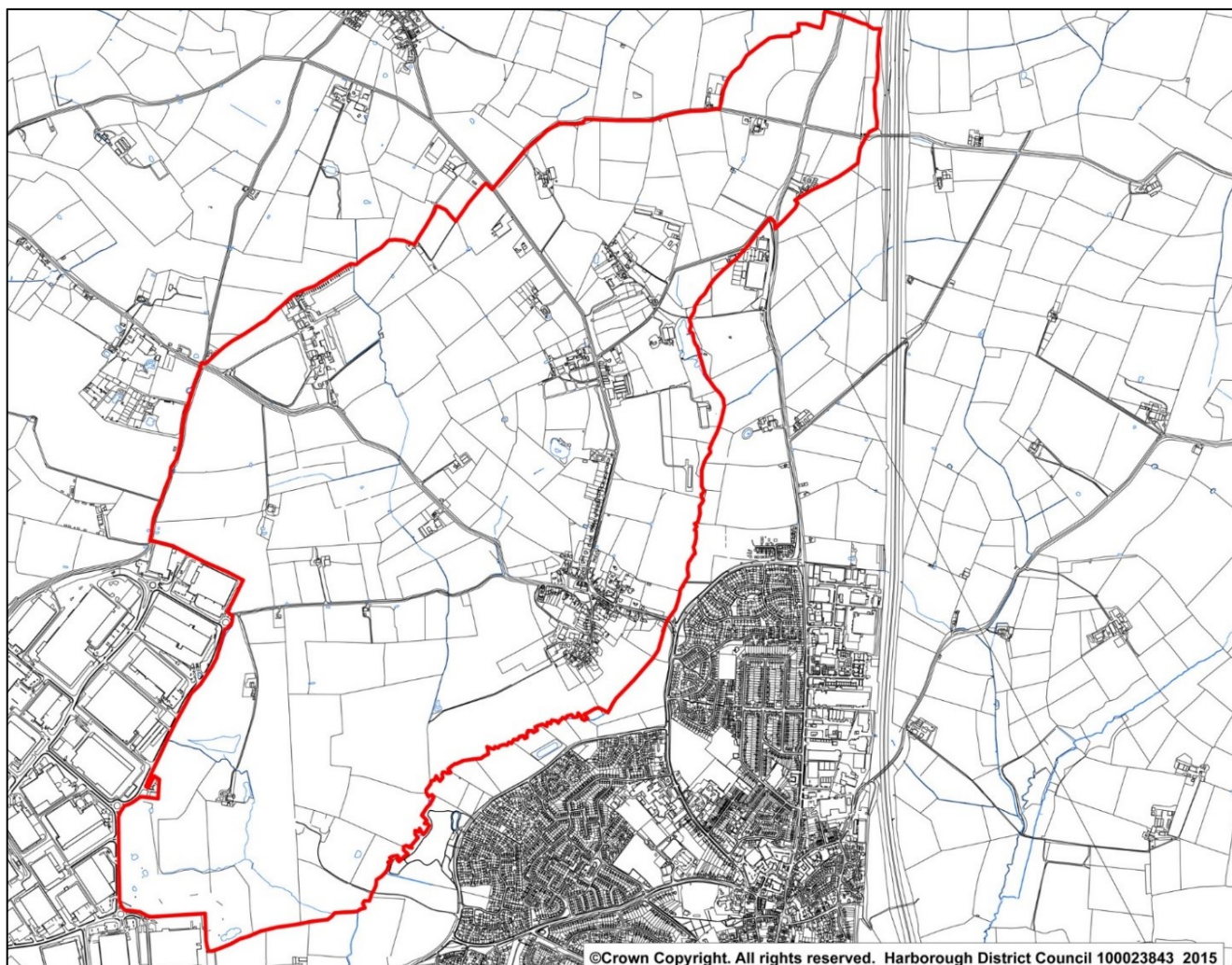
**John Allsopp**

**Chair, Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Committee, June 2026**

# 1 About this Neighbourhood Plan

Neighbourhood plans give local communities a much greater opportunity to influence future development in their areas. The NPPF (2024) is the Government's 'bible' on planning issues. It states that 'Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area.'

Figure 1: Neighbourhood Plan Area. Designated 31<sup>st</sup> January 2015



The Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan will sit alongside, and be aligned with, Harborough District's Local Plan. It cannot promote less development than in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies. Other than that, the Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan is able to shape and direct sustainable development in the Parish. Once approved, the policies it contains will take precedence over non-strategic policies in the Local Plan.

On 31 January 2015, Harborough District Council approved the application for designation as a Neighbourhood Plan area. The area to be covered by the Plan is defined by the part of the Parish covering Bitteswell and up to the boundary with Magna Park. (see Figure 1). The hamlet of Bittesby is excluded from the Neighbourhood Plan area as there are only a handful of residents in a largely rural area of open countryside.

## 2 Bitteswell with Bittesby Parish

The Harborough District Council Settlement Profile for the parish, written in 2016, noted that the Parish of Bitteswell with Bittesby lies immediately to the north-west of Lutterworth, the A4303 and the A426, as well as being between the A5 and M1 (junction 20). Market Harborough is approximately 15 miles to the west and therefore, Bitteswell lies close to the District's border with the Borough of Rugby. Bitteswell's boundaries are defined by certain stretches of the M1 and A5, the village occupies an area of approximately 1 mile (north to south) and 2 miles (east to west), bordered by Ullesthorpe to the west, Ashby Parva to the north and Gilmorton to the east, whilst the village shares a border with Lutterworth to the south, Magna Park is in the south-west part of the parish.

Bitteswell parish council assumed responsibility for Bittesby parish on 1 April 2014. This amalgamation considerably extended the parish boundaries in the north westerly area but has had little impact upon the parish's population as Bittesby has a population of only 6 (2001 census). Although this now means that Magna Park lies almost entirely within the parish, the independence of Bitteswell from Magna Park and Lutterworth continues to be a long-standing concern, with the physical limits between Bitteswell and Lutterworth being as little as 128 metres at its minimum.

Bitteswell was an important location for the RAF with RAF Bitteswell being located in the south of the parish from 1940-1987. Throughout that time, the area was also home to a Hawker Siddeley factory that built and maintained numerous aircraft. In the present day, Magna Park now occupies the area and is the single largest employer in the district, whilst also being an area of considerable strategic interest on a national level.

At the time of the 2021 Census, Bitteswell was home to around 531 residents living in 195 households. Analysis of the Census suggests that between 2011 and 2021 the local area population decreased by 23 people.

There is evidence of a higher-than-average representation of older residents living in the local area with over 31% of residents aged 65 and over which is higher than the district, region and national averages. In line with national trends the local population is likely to get older as average life expectancy continues to rise.

Home ownership levels are very high with around 80% of households owning their homes outright or with a mortgage or loan and at 7.6% the share of households living in social rented accommodation is very low when compared with regional and national rates.

## 3 The Consultation Process

The Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Committee was fully established by the Parish Council and held its inaugural meeting on 27 October 2018. This group comprises both Parish Councillors and other volunteers from the community. The Group members were approved by the Parish Council and given the authority and responsibility to deliver the Plan, assisted by YourLocale Neighbourhood Plan consultancy.

Its mandate was to drive the process, consult with the local community, gather evidence to support emerging policies and prepare the Plan for consideration and ultimately approval by Bitteswell with Bittesby Parish Council. A detailed chronology of the approach to consultation and the outcomes is contained within the Consultation Statement that is included as appendix B of the Submission Neighbourhood Plan.

The Advisory Committee also gathered statistical information about the parish from a range of sources to provide a body of evidence on which to base the Plan's emerging Policies.

An open event took place on 8 June 2019 which was attended by 56 residents. This provided an opportunity for people to comment about what should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan and to explain the process.



A community questionnaire produced in 2020 invited comments from the community and this helped to identify some of the key issues that would need to be addressed through the Neighbourhood Plan.

Two Theme Groups of members of the Advisory Committee along with other residents and stakeholders were formed in September 2019 to draw up policies that have informed and guided the future development described within the Plan. The groups met over the following 6 months and gathered the evidence needed to progress ideas and to formulate policies. They focussed on the themes of housing and the built environment and the natural and historic environment. A further work stream, involving community sustainability, was commenced in 2020.



The groups were guided by facilitators provided by YourLocale. They reported back to the Advisory Committee, met regularly and gathered information to support the formation of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan policies. Much of the information, which supported the decisions and provided evidence bases, has been gleaned from the extensive research, consultation and local knowledge of the group members.

## 4 A Plan for Bitteswell

The policies of the Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan are set within the context of the plan-making framework for England. The scope and content of the Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan has been shaped by the priorities and aspirations of the local community, led by the Parish Council's Neighbourhood Planning Advisory Committee. This Plan covers the period up to 2041.

In drawing up this Plan, the following vision and objectives have been prepared:

Our vision is:

**To maintain the integrity of Bitteswell as a small rural village set within beautiful countryside, keep its visual amenity and retain its existing strong community spirit, charm and character as an asset to all existing and future residents.**

This will be achieved by:

- Supporting small-scale sustainable developments that do not detract from the character of the village, maintain a variety of housing stock and which have the greatest level of community support.
- Ensuring that the style and design of developments maintain or enhance the character and charm of the village.
- Ensuring that future developments do not cause any significant loss of amenity to existing residents including erosion of privacy, loss of daylight, overlooking, visual intrusion, noise disturbance, reduced space around buildings, loss of car parking or mature vegetation.
- Strongly enforcing the 'area of separation' and policies included in the Neighbourhood Plan to control development in these locations.
- Ensuring the bund and present boundaries in and around Magna Park are maintained.
- Supporting and protecting our village amenities, including the school, public houses, village greens and the church.
- Retaining and enhancing the character and appeal of the existing conservation area.
- Ensuring that traffic and parking issues are managed to ensure the safety of pedestrians and cyclists and other road users, also that any future development provides adequate parking within the boundary of the site, avoiding the need for additional street parking.
- Supporting the continued viability of local farming and other endeavours that help maintain a rural economy.

- Ensuring elderly people are valued and continue to be active participants in village life, with accommodation appropriate to their needs.
- Supporting residents that want or need to work from home to continue to do so.
- Protecting and preserving the open countryside and rural character of the area.
- Working with Harborough Council and Historic England to ensure that any development will be in line with our vision, which in turn will allow full and comprehensive community support.

## 5 Planning Context

The procedure for the making of a neighbourhood plan is prescribed within the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The Regulations have informed the preparation of policies for the Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan, in particular ensuring that the Neighbourhood Plan:

- has appropriate regard to national planning policy;
- contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
- will not result in less housing development being delivered in the neighbourhood area than would be the case if the Plan were not made;
- takes appropriate account of climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- takes appropriate account of nature recovery; and
- is compatible with human rights requirements and other relevant legal obligations.

## Sustainable Development in Bitteswell

A definition of sustainable development is provided within the NPPF. It describes three dimensions to sustainable development and that these dimensions give rise to the need for planning to perform a number of roles:

### An economic role

Contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure.

The community of Bitteswell is primarily residential, but there is a strong desire to safeguard its employment locations, including the farming community. We therefore wish to retain the current level of employment and develop it further where possible and appropriate.

### A social role

Supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by promoting the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations and by creating a high-quality built environment,

with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being.

The Bitteswell Neighbourhood Plan does not anticipate more than limited and proportionate residential development over the lifetime of the Neighbourhood Plan. It seeks to ensure that any new housing delivers a mix of housing types to meet the needs of present and future generations and supports the community's health as well as its social and cultural wellbeing. The provision of bungalows for older people as well as some smaller and more affordable homes would be welcome. We are also seeking to support and enhance existing community facilities and to improve services for younger people.

## An environmental role

Contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment. As part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including supporting the move to a low carbon economy. In order to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment, we are seeking to ensure that:

- Special open spaces within the Neighbourhood Area are protected from development, to protect the village identity and retain the rural nature of its surroundings;
- Development preserves and contributes to the attractive local countryside including replacement of any natural boundaries lost, improvement of existing hedging and encouraging new planting;
- Development recognises the need to protect and, where possible, improve biodiversity and important habitats and includes adding hedging to boundaries of new developments

# 6 Housing and the Built Environment

## Overview

Lutterworth is a medium size and growing town to the South, until about fifty years ago the town was nearly a mile from the parish border, it is now adjacent. An area of warehousing at Magna park is also close by to the village to the West, protecting the parish from being “subsumed” by these two nearby land uses is a central focus of the Neighbourhood Plan and also Harborough’s adopted local plan.

Since its listing in the Domesday Book Bitteswell parish has been a continuously occupied settlement. Its development reflects its ancient origins and there are a large number of high quality older residential properties, many of which are listed. There remain a number of working farms within the parish which manage the land spreading outwards from the built form of Bitteswell village. As the principal agricultural employment declined and the associated buildings replaced with predominantly residential uses the population has changed from a mainly manual class of workers to one which is now mainly people from a professional background.

House prices are high by District averages and the parish is a very popular place to live. Bitteswell is a fairly small parish in terms of land area by regional standards and the built form makes up less than 10% of the total land area.

Maintaining and improving the unique aspects of the village and its wider environment are the key priorities in the Neighbourhood Plan.

## Bitteswell in context

It is important to consider the overall “context” of the parish, the aim of the Neighbourhood Plan is to maintain the distinctive features of the area and maintain its unique character. According to the most recently available 2021 Census (see Appendix C) Bitteswell had a population of 531 residents living in 195 households.

At the last census date around 14.6% of residents were aged under 16 which was lower than the district average of 17.6%. Around 54.7% of residents were aged between 16 and 64 which is lower than the district rate of 63.6%. Older people (aged 65+) represented 30.7% of total residents which is higher than the district rate of 23.0% and significantly above the national rate of 18.3%.

The Bitteswell housing needs report (appendix D) based on the 2011 Census data, shows that properties are generally larger than the district average in Bitteswell. The proportion of four bedroomed houses is 29.7% which is higher than the district (25.7%), regional (15.4%) and national (14.4%) rates. Similarly, the proportion of five bedroomed houses is 22.6% which is much higher than the district (8.5%), regional (4.4%) and national (5.4%) rates. People living in the Bitteswell Parish are therefore more likely to live in homes with a higher than usual number of bedrooms with the average number of bedrooms per household standing at 3.7 which is above the district (3.1), region (2.8) and

national (2.7) rates.

Home ownership levels remained very high at the 2021 Census with 80.3% of households owning their homes outright or with a mortgage or loan, this was higher than the district rate of 77.8% and significantly higher than the national (62.3%) rates. Social rented properties accounted for 7.6% of tenure which was less than the district (8.7%) and significantly lower than the England (17.1%) rates. Around 12.1% of households lived in privately rented homes which was lower than the district rate of 13.5% but below the England rate of 20.6%.

Data from the 2021 Census also showed that a very high 70.2% of residential dwellings were detached which was significantly higher than the district figure of 48.8% and national proportion of 22.9%. Terraced properties only made up 5.1% of the stock in Bitteswell, compared to 14.4% for the district and 23.0% nationally.

Land registry data (see appendix D) shows there were 135 property sales between 1995 and 2016 and eight of these were new build units, a building rate of nearly half a property per year. It should be noted that not all new builds will be captured in the land registry price paid data, for example some conversions and social housing units will be excluded.

## Community consultation and involvement

Consultation with the community has been an important element of the approach towards developing the Neighbourhood Plan as set out in detail in the consultation statement and attached appendices.

Agreeing what, if any, development was preferred within the village was undertaken by a series of events starting with a “drop in” event in June 2019 and supported with a lengthy questionnaire undertaken in the Autumn of 2019 (see supporting information).

The results revealed a strong preference for a limited amount of new residential building on smaller sites of around 2-5 units and a strong preference against any large scale development that was perceived as damaging the character, amenity and the “unique setting that makes Bitteswell so special”.

The predominant view of respondents when considering the type of homes required in the Parish is that smaller, affordable homes are needed, both for local people starting on the property ladder and for older people downsizing. In terms of tenure, owner occupied housing was the strong preference with support for shared ownership and little support for rented provision. The data shows a preference for smaller, affordable properties suitable for first time buyers and retirees in numbers proportionate to the size and character of the village.

Reconciling the data and community opinion is the key evidence to support the decisions on future provision that meets needs.

## Meeting future housing provision

It is important that the Neighbourhood Plan dovetails with the adopted Local Plan in terms of delivering the future housing provision required to meet housing need. The issue of new housebuilding in smaller rural settlements is very contentious and it is important that local people are fully involved in these decisions. The adopted Local Plan establishes a hierarchy of settlements to help to determine the most appropriate locations for future residential and economic development. On the basis of this hierarchy, Bitteswell is classified as a 'Selected Rural Village' which the local plan defines as "a sustainable location for more limited growth that will help to sustain the village". Bitteswell is proposed as a 'Small Village' in the emerging Local plan

The Local Plan explains that new housing will be limited to small sites to meet a locally identified need as proven through either a housing needs survey or a Neighbourhood Plan.

In terms of provision, the Leicester and Leicestershire Local Authorities (including Harborough District Council) and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) commissioned a Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) analysis from G L Hearn to assess future housing needs, the scale of future economic growth and the quantity of land and floor-space required between 2011 and 2031/36. The report provided the evidence base for the 2019 approved HDC local development plan. The HEDNA study was published in January 2017 and revealed an increase in housing need from earlier projections and this has since increased further by local issues including the Leicester Housing Market Assessment 2017 which identified Leicester City as being unable to accommodate its own housing need requirement based on the HEDNA figures. The LEP have also signed a "memorandum of understanding" with all of the relevant local planning authorities committing them to collectively deliver this forecast housing need by 2031.

As the adopted Local Plan states "The full objectively assessed housing need (OAN) for the Leicester and Leicestershire HMA is 4,829 dwellings per annum between 2011 and 2031 (96,580 total) and for HDC is an additional 532 dwellings per annum between 2011 and 2031 (HEDNA), giving a total plan requirement across the 20-year plan period of 10,640 dwellings". In addition, the Local Plan incorporates a 20% buffer and therefore makes provision for 12,800 dwellings from 2011 to 2031. Of this, 8,150 dwellings have already been built or committed through the granting of planning permission or through allocation in neighbourhood plans leaving a residual requirement of 4,650 dwellings up to 2031.

Harborough District Council then apportioned this District-wide housing provision target in line with the approved Local Plan settlement hierarchy, this gave a minimum target number of residential dwellings required to be built by 2031 and was set by the District Council for Bitteswell at 30 units. As 15 units have been built and are currently being constructed or have an extant planning consent the up to date target as at August 2020 has been confirmed with Harborough District Council as 15 units. The Housing Theme Group discussed the evidence of need in the parish and agreed that to "future proof" the Neighbourhood Plan and to help promote sustainable development, the minimum target of 15 units would be exceeded with a 20% buffer to meet anticipated future need, the new target of 18 additional units to 2031 was recommended to and supported by the community.

By the time of the submission of the Neighbourhood Plan, a Regulation 19 version of the new Local Plan has been published. This identifies a target of 29 dwellings for Bitteswell up to 2041.

The housing requirement for the emerging Local Plan is 13,182 between 2020 and 2041. The annual housing requirement is 657 homes per year between 2020 and 2036, and 534 homes per year between 2036 and 2041.

This new build target for Bitteswell is in addition to windfall units that are estimated at a level of one new dwelling a year up to 2041, making a total delivery level of 33 dwellings for the Neighbourhood Area, against the housing requirement of 29.

## Residential allocations

To ensure that future housing need will be met and to establish the availability of adequate and appropriate land for residential development to provide for an additional 18 residential units by 2041, the Parish Council issued a “call for sites”. A letter was sent to 8 landowners and a positive response was received.

In total, landowners offered 4 sites that would yield approximately 105 units. All of the sites were then subjected to a professional Sustainable Site Assessment (SSA) exercise conducted by Neighbourhood plan consultants YourLocale against criteria agreed with the Qualifying Body. The detailed SSA process that was undertaken is described in full in Appendix E.

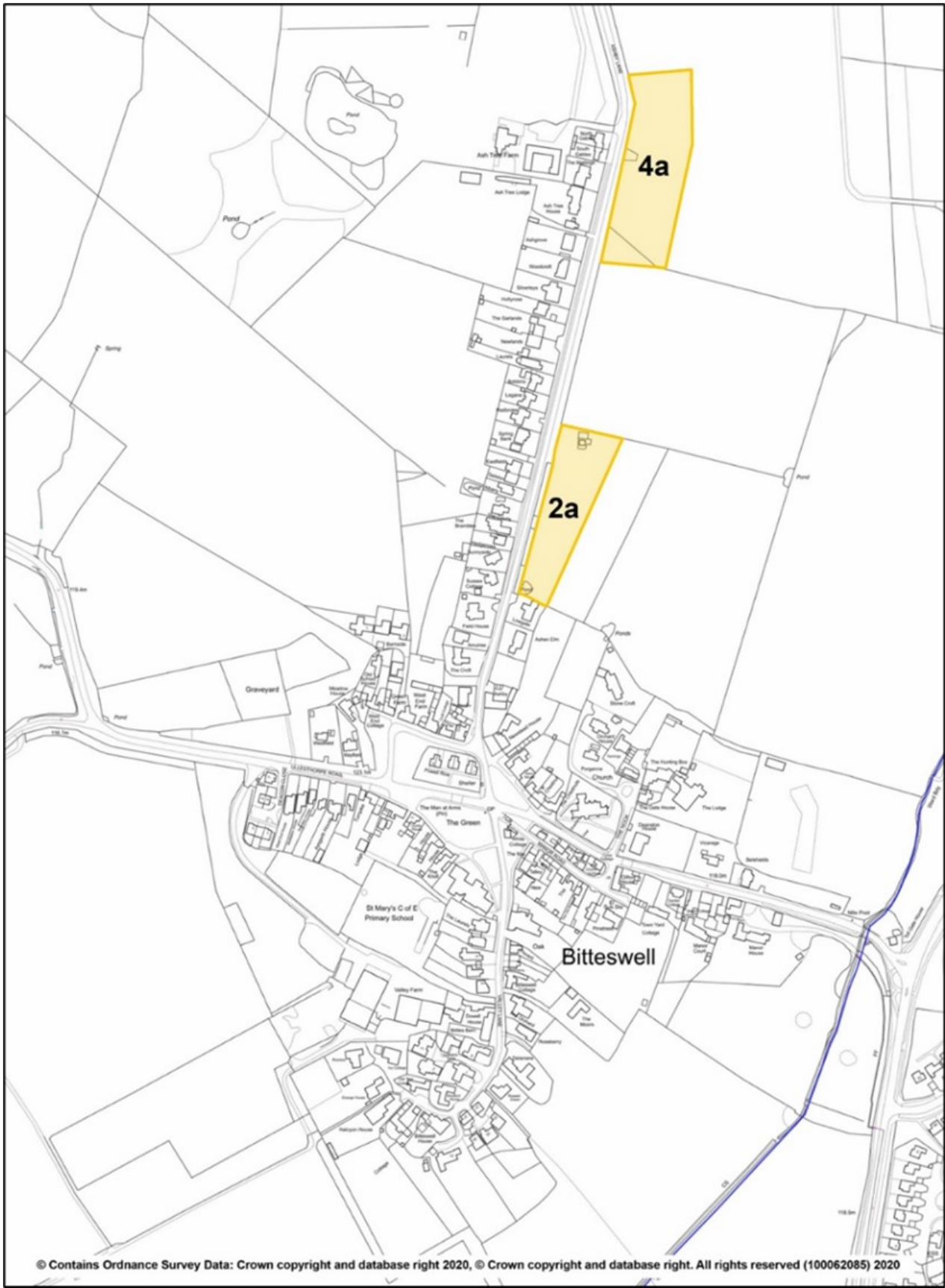
Through the Neighbourhood Plan the opportunity has therefore been taken to plan positively for additional housing that meets the local need, by allocating two medium sized sites for about 18 dwellings, to meet this need and to help support local services.

Census data reveals the cost of an entry-level property on average across England and Wales has increased by almost 20% in the last decade, to £140,000 (year ending June 2016). For new properties, the price was nearly £180,000. The data also shows that home-ownership prospects vary across the District, region and country.

In the Bitteswell local area a low to mid-priced property costs on average £215,000 which is somewhat higher than the national average. Assuming a 15% deposit, those entering the property market in the area would require a household income of about £40,611 and savings of £36,050.

Deprivation is not a significant issue in the local area. Small Area Housing Affordability data suggests that some residents may find it difficult to access owner-occupation or access the private rental market.

Figure 2: Residential allocation sites



**POLICY H1: Residential site allocations** - Land is allocated at site 2a for nine residential units and at site 4a for nine residential dwellings as shown in figure 2.

Development will be supported subject to the following criteria being met on each site:

- a) At least five of the dwellings should be three-bed or fewer in size;
- b) The development will not create an adverse impact on the character of the area, or the amenity of neighbouring dwellings;
- c) A footpath is provided along Ashby Lane;
- d) All roads and footpaths should be constructed to Leicestershire County Council's adoptability standards;
- e) The proposed development scheme should not encroach upon the Area of Separation and views of the Bitteswell Brook;
- f) Existing hedgerows should be retained along with the copse of trees on the southern part of site 4a; and
- g) Each site is to be built as a carefully designed scheme.

## Limits to development

Limits to development (LTD) are a commonly used tool in planning documents such as Neighbourhood Local Plans. They are used to define the extent of a built-up part of a settlement accommodating sustainable growth locations. They distinguish between areas where in planning terms development would be acceptable "in principle" such as in the main settlement and where it would not be "sustainable", such as in the open countryside.

As the adopted Harborough Local Plan has removed LTD in favour of criteria-based policies, the Neighbourhood Plan proposes to designate a LTD for the village of Bitteswell. The proposed LTD is shown below in Figure 3 and was developed following consultation.

Focusing limited development in the village of Bitteswell will help to support the existing services such as the school, the pubs and church, whilst helping to protect the countryside from inappropriate development.

Within the defined LTD identified in this Plan, small scale sustainable development will be viewed sympathetically. This development will comprise of windfall sites and the residential site allocations identified in Policy H1.

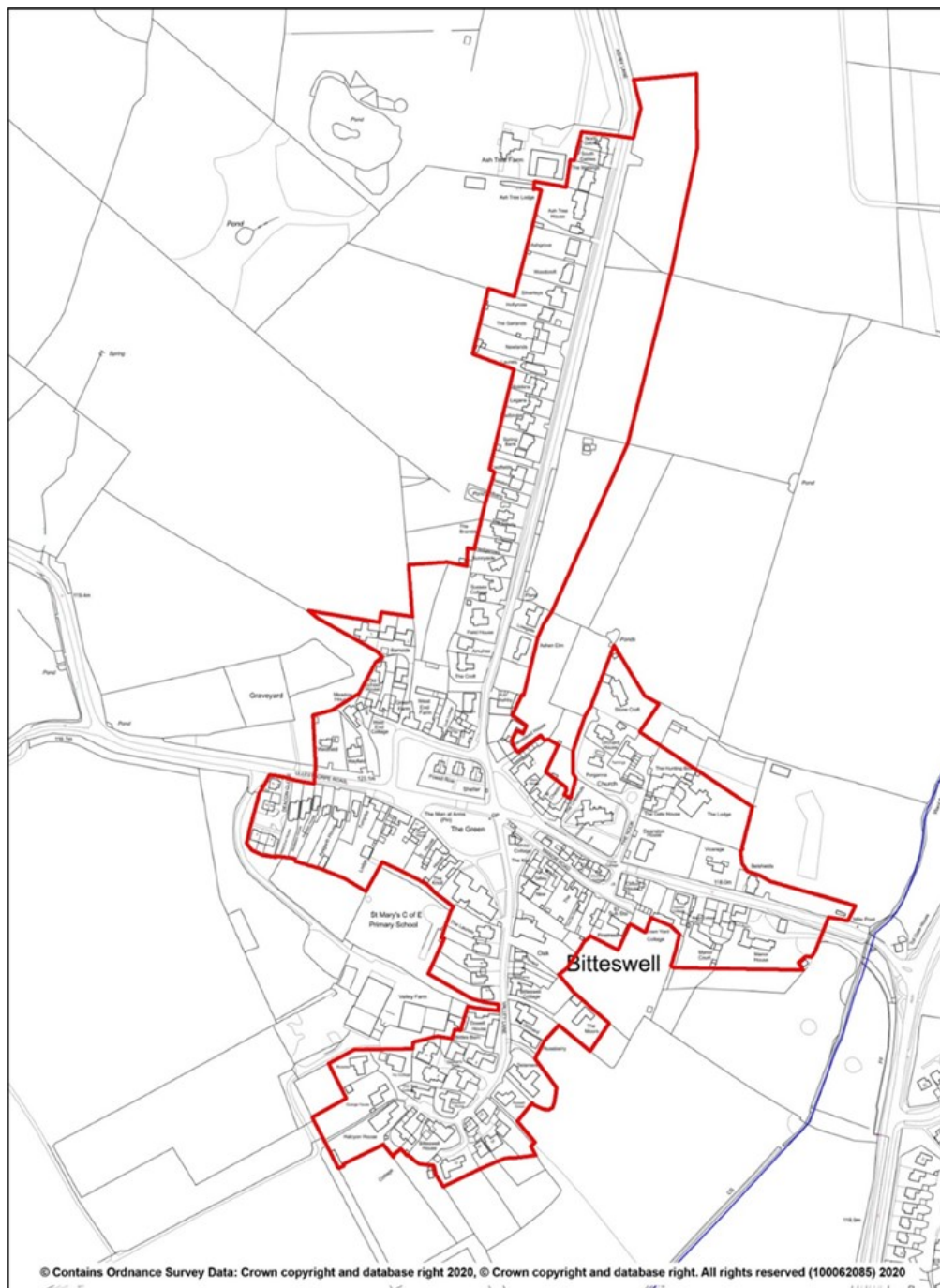
In addition, much of the built-up parts of Bitteswell have been developed at relatively low densities and there are limited public green spaces. Some properties are set within relatively large grounds whilst, conversely, others have very limited ground. The spaces between and around buildings contribute significantly to the special character of the village and the wider Parish and maintaining residential amenity. When considering development proposals, it is therefore important to have regard to the impact any development would have on the setting and layout of the surrounding area and on the special views and vistas.

## Methodology

The LTD for Bitteswell, as shown in Figure 3 has been determined using the following criteria:

1. Clearly defined physical features such as walls, fences, hedgerows and roads have been followed wherever possible;
2. The residential allocation sites identified in Policy H1 have been incorporated into the LTD.
3. Non-residential land which is Countryside, agricultural, paddock, meadow, woodland and/or another green-field use has been excluded.

Figure 3: Limits to Development



**POLICY H2: Limits To Development – Development proposals within will be supported on sites within the Limits to Development as shown in Figure 3 where they comply with the policies in this Neighbourhood Plan.**

Land outside defined Limits to Development will be treated as open countryside, where development will be carefully controlled in line with local and national strategic planning policies.

## Windfall development

A windfall site is defined in the NPPF as one which has not been specifically identified as available through the local or neighbourhood Plan process. Such sites normally comprise of previously developed land that unexpectedly becomes available. To help protect the character of Bitteswell, development beyond the housing allocations described above will be restricted to windfall sites within the Limits to Development boundary unless it complies with policies relating to development in the countryside. Windfall sites will be for no more than 2 new properties on any site, based upon previous scheme size and earlier planning consents.

There is evidence through Census data of under-occupancy suggesting a need for smaller homes which would be suitable for residents needing to downsize, small families and those entering the housing market. Providing suitable accommodation for elderly residents will enable them to remain in the local community and release under-occupied larger properties onto the market which would be suitable for growing families. This is also reflected in the Community Questionnaire where the highest number of responders referred to a lack of homes they could afford to buy at a price they could afford. The second highest category was in relation to insufficient small homes in the Parish. In another question, the highest categories of answers relating to the importance of new housing development were to enable old people to downsize or move into more suitable accommodation, followed by enabling young people to remain in or move to the parish.

Land Registry and council tax data indicates there has been some new build housing market activity over recent years, but this has been predominantly high value detached housing.

**POLICY H3: Windfall Sites - Proposals for infill and redevelopment sites will be supported where:**

- a) The location is within the LTD boundary for Bitteswell and for no more than 2 dwellings;
- b) Development helps to meet the identified housing requirement for the Parish;
- c) Existing important natural boundaries and features such as gardens, trees, hedges, footpaths and streams are retained;
- d) There is a safe vehicular and pedestrian access to the site;
- e) Development does not reduce garden space to an extent where there is an adverse impact on the character of the area or the residential amenity of neighbouring occupiers; and
- f) They give priority to dwellings of 3 bedrooms or fewer.

## Ensuring high design qualities

Bitteswell Parish has a rich and attractive built environment from its long history, resulting in a wide

range of heritage assets, attractive landscapes and a distinctive character. The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect this character and heritage by ensuring that the high-quality built environment is retained through the village and that development is in keeping with the existing high quality.

The NPPF (2024) states that ‘development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design ...’ (Paragraph 139).

In addition, the current consultation on the Planning White Paper (2020) stress the importance of good local design and the central role neighbourhood plans can play in design quality.

Residents in the Plan Area want their community to play its part in the sustainable development of the District. As noted in the National Planning Policy Framework, Planning Authorities should, through their policies, contribute as fully as possible to the aims of Biodiversity 2020 DEFRA, 2011. New development in Bitteswell should be designed to incorporate the current (at time of Application) best practice standards and methods for biodiversity protection and enhancement. Control of artificial lighting in new development required to enable bats to survive in the village will also contribute to energy conservation.

The Neighbourhood Plan Housing Theme Group and the wider community have produced the Bitteswell Village Design Guide as a central element of this Neighbourhood Plan. (See Appendix X). Its aim is to safeguard the distinctive character and rich heritage of Bitteswell and to guide any new development in a way that ensures it is sympathetic to the existing village and enhances its special identity and character. The design policies required to support the implementation of the Village Design Guide are as follows:

**POLICY H4: Design standards - Development proposals will demonstrate a high quality of design, layout and use of materials in order to make a positive contribution to the special character of the parish of Bitteswell and are required to have regard to the following design principles to a degree that is proportionate to the development:**

- 1) New development will be required to enhance and reinforce the local distinctiveness and character of the area in which it is situated. Proposals should clearly show how the general character, scale, mass, density and layout of the site, of the building or extension, fits in with the aspect of the surrounding area. Housing that visually looks the same will not be supported.**
- 2) Care should be taken to ensure that the development does not disrupt the visual amenities of the street scene and impact negatively on any significant wider landscape views;**
- 3) New buildings and extensions will follow a consistent design approach in the use of materials, fenestration and the roofline to the building. Varied materials should be chosen to complement the design of the development and add to the quality or character of the surrounding environment;**
- 4) New buildings and extensions will reflect the character and historic context of existing developments within the Parish. However, contemporary and innovative materials and design will be supported where positive improvement can be robustly demonstrated**

without detracting from the historic context;

- 5) Proposals should minimise the impact on general amenity and give careful consideration to noise, odour and light. Light pollution should be minimised wherever possible;
- 6) Development will include a need to enhance biodiversity and relate well to the topography of the area, with existing trees and hedges preserved whenever possible. Provision should be made for wildlife including roof design, bat and bird boxes, hedgehog friendly fencing and the use of hedges;
- 7) Where possible, enclosure of plots should be of native hedging, wooden fencing, or stone/brick wall, with gaps to maintain connectivity of habitat for hedgehogs and other terrestrial animals. Any enclosures that are necessarily removed through the development process should be reinstated in keeping with the original;
- 8) Housing plots should accommodate discreet storage containers compliant with the refuse and recycling collection system;
- 9) Development should incorporate sustainable design and construction techniques to meet high standards for energy and water efficiency, including the use of renewable and low carbon energy technology. Sustainable, environmentally friendly buildings are supported;
- 10) Development should incorporate sustainable drainage systems with maintenance regimes to minimise vulnerability to flooding and climate change;
- 11) Roof and wall construction should incorporate integral bird nest boxes and bat breeding and roosting sites;
- 12) Avoidance of all unnecessary artificial lighting: there is no legal duty requiring any place to be lit;
- 13) Security lighting, if essential, should be operated by intruder sensors and illuminated for no longer than 1 minute. Sports and commercial facility lighting should be switched off during agreed 'curfew' hours between March and October, following best practice guidelines in Bats and Lighting Leicestershire Environmental Records Centre, 2014; and
- 14) Lighting design, location, type, lux levels and times of use should follow current best-practice, e.g. by applying the guidelines in Guidance note 08/18 Bats and artificial lighting in the UK: Bat Conservation Trust / Institution of Lighting Professionals, 2018.

# 7 The Natural, Historic and Social Environment

## Introduction

This chapter of the Neighbourhood Plan deals with the *environmental* component of *sustainable development*, together with open spaces of community value from the *social* component, as described in the National Planning Policy Framework (2019), page 5. The chapter aims to balance the requirement for appropriate development in the Plan Area against the value of environmental and other features that are both *special* – appreciated, in their own right and as community assets, by local people - and *significant* for their wildlife and history. It also deals with broader environmental topics – biodiversity protection, climate change and flood risk, access for amenity and recreation, and views – which are of concern to the community.

Care was taken during preparation of the plan to ensure that the policies (and the sites and areas of environmental significance covered by them) were not unduly restrictive on development during the Plan’s lifetime. Less than 15% of the area of all open and currently undeveloped land in the Plan Area is protected at any level from potential environmentally damaging development. The key statistics are:

|                                                                                      |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 1. Total area of Neighbourhood Plan Area                                             | c.600 ha |
| 2. Open and/or undeveloped land                                                      | c.580 ha |
| 3. Area recognised in this Plan (or already designated) for environmental protection | c.64 ha  |

## Landscape, geology and setting

The Plan Area (see figure 1) covers the half of *Bitteswell with Bittesby parish* that is not within the Magna Park logistics and business complex.

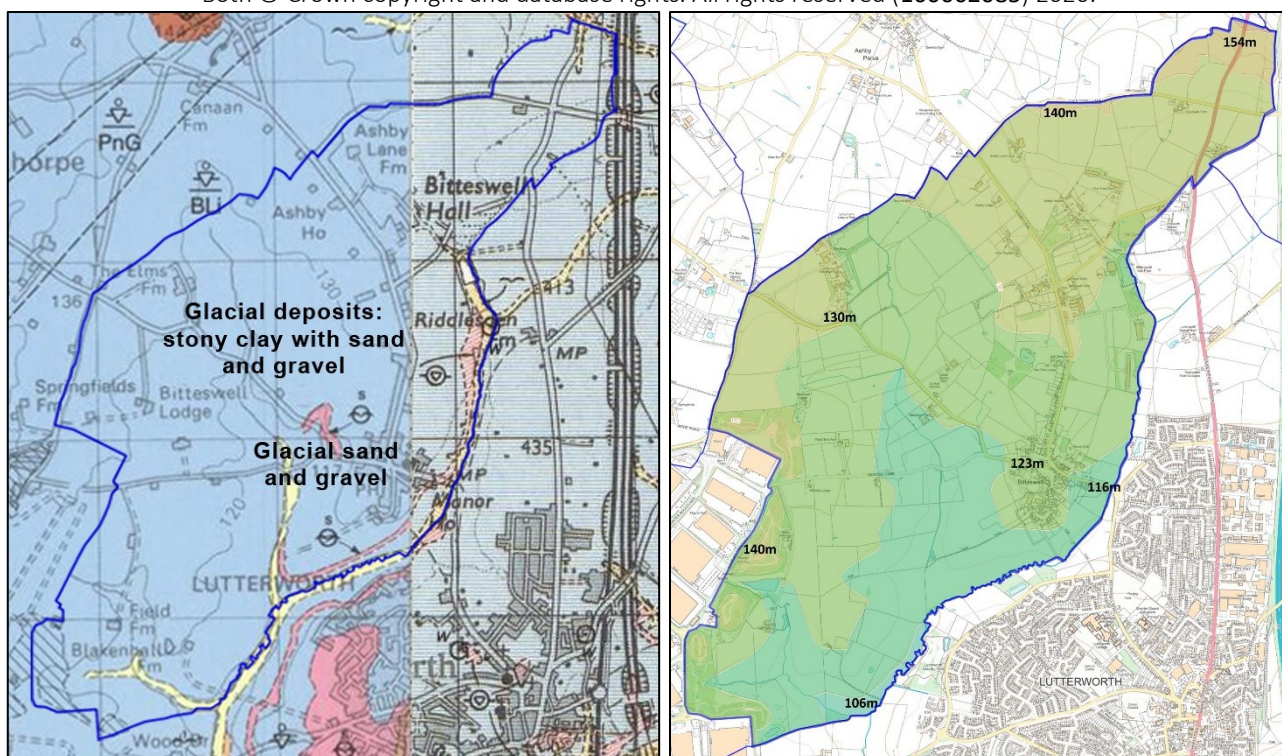
It is an area of gentle topography, in many ways typical of this part of south Leicestershire but nevertheless with features that distinguish it from other parts of the County and are valued by residents as defining characters of ‘home’. Perhaps the most significant of these is Bitteswell’s steadfast maintenance of the ambience of a properly rural village set in its agricultural milieu, despite being so close to expanding suburban Lutterworth and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Magna Park. This is recognised in the Harborough Local Plan and reinforced at the appropriate local level of detail in this Neighbourhood Plan.

The highest points, on its northern boundary, are on a shallow ridge which actually marks one of the principal watersheds of England, between the Avon/Severn and the Soar/Trent/Humber river systems. Views south from this ridge, although by no means spectacularly high, are still extensive, taking in a broad sweep of the Midlands. The village itself stands on a low bluff overlooking Bitteswell Brook, with the main street leading from the original river crossing point to the church and the historic (medieval) centre around the village green. Outside the village, the largely arable fields to the north, west and south still include an important area of permanent grazing land with ridge and furrow earthworks showing the layout of Bitteswell’s medieval open field agriculture. Tree cover outside the village is

sparse, except for fox coverts and ornamental woodland in the grounds of large houses, although recent planting around Magna Park has begun to remedy this ecological and scenic deficit.

The gentle topography and much of the characteristic appearance of Bitteswell is ultimately the result of its geological history and the soft sedimentary rocks that underlay it. Like much of the Midlands, the Area was extensively glaciated during the Ice Ages. Ice sheets advanced during cold phases, spreading rock debris and boulders across the landscape, a vast inland lake developed at one time, and meltwater torrents dropped sheets of sand and gravel. The modern landscape is the result of erosion by ‘new’ post-glacial streams of a thick blanket of these mixed glacial sediments – clay, sand, gravel and rounded boulders.

Figure 4: Geology (left) and topography of the Plan Area. Geological map adapted from British Geological Survey sources. Both © Crown copyright and database rights. All rights reserved (100062085) 2020.



## Existing designations

The Plan Area is in National Character Area (Natural England landscape areas, defined for Planning purposes) 94 *Leicestershire Vales* and the Harborough District Council Landscape Character Area *Lutterworth Lowlands*. There are 14 *Listed Buildings*, eight further sites and features of history significance (*Leicestershire Historic Environment Record*), three areas of *Priority Habitat* (as defined by Natural England), and 16 current and three historic *Local Wildlife Sites* (LWS, designated by Leicestershire County Council).

## Historic environment

Mesolithic and Bronze Age people were in the Plan Area, as demonstrated by field-walking and general surveys (flint scatters, surface finds and cropmarks), although there are no surviving prehistoric monuments or proven buried archaeology of relevance to the Plan. The sites of two Romano-British habitations are known, not unexpectedly in view of the proximity of Roman Watling Street just to the

south. The present village dates from the Anglo-Saxon immigration into this part of England some time after the Roman occupation's ending in AD 403, as shown by place-names and, more tellingly, by the bounds of the parish and the location and layout of Bitteswell itself.

#### History from place names

The whole parish roughly covers an early medieval (around AD 650) territory, of which the principal settlement was **Bitteswell**:

**Bitteswell** = Broad valley spring: *bytme* (Old English) a broad valley (modern English equivalent word is 'bottom') + *wella* (Anglian) a spring.

Bittesby appears to have been established later, as a Danish (Viking) settlement (after AD793), in a part of the original territory not already populated. It is possible that Byttel, its founder, was so named because he moved from Bitteswell, the Old English meaning of which had already been forgotten and mispronounced by the Danish incomers.

**Bittesby** = Byttel's farm or settlement: *Byttel* (Old English) personal name + *by* (old Norse) a farmstead or village.

[Source: Key to English Place Names, Nottingham University]

The territory established here by the Anglo-Saxons and Danish, with its farmsteads, villages and fields, endured through the whole medieval period of over one thousand years. As well as Bitteswell village, the parish Church of St Mary and some of the fields (as ridge and furrow earthworks) survive as visible heritage assets connecting modern residents with the area's long history. The open field farming system was ended in 1787 by Parliamentary Enclosure, and the entirely rural and local economy of pre-Georgian times was gradually broadened during and after the industrial revolution. Each period of growth and societal change is reflected in phases of village rebuilding and expansion, right through to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century; each phase added a new layer to the Plan Area's built heritage.

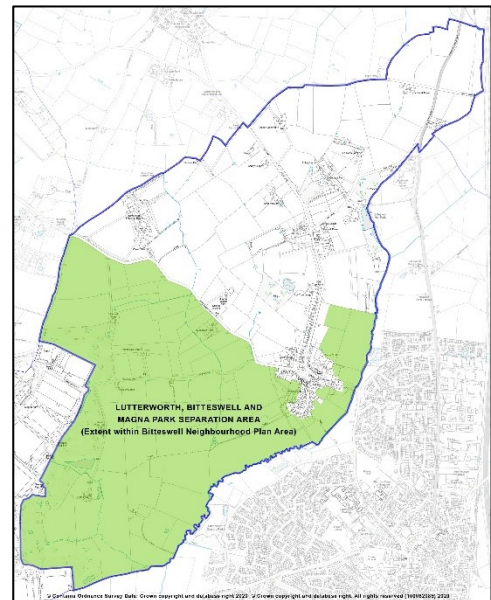
## Natural environment

More or less continuous occupation and agriculture for two millennia means that no 'wild' natural habitats survive here. Until recently, however, wildlife has been able to adapt, with some species co-existing with and even taking advantage of human activity. This means that among the buildings and arable fields there are still locally important patches of semi-natural habitat in Bitteswell, including species-rich grassland, woodland, wetland and watercourses. Planned habitat creation (as a wildlife buffer) in the Plan Area in conjunction with the development of Magna Park has added more (currently maturing) woodland habitat, while other 'artificial' areas, like ornamental parkland, gardens, allotments, churchyards and plantations, also have biodiversity value. Pressure on these rare remaining semi-natural places from intensive agriculture and development means that they are highly valued by the community, essential for preserving England's biodiversity and for carbon sequestration, and should be protected by the planning system as a vital component of sustainable development.

## Area of separation

Harborough District Council *Local Plan 2011 – 2031* (2019) designates an extensive *Lutterworth, Bitteswell and Magna Park Separation Area* to prevent coalescence (or further coalescence) of the two residential and commercial areas on its boundaries with the essentially rural village of Bitteswell.

Although large-scale development in the designated area is therefore precluded, the locally-detailed policies in this Neighbourhood Plan will be applied to small-scale and exception development proposals across the Plan Area, including the Area of Separation.



**Figure 5: HDC Area of Separation**

## Environmental inventory

An environmental inventory (Appendix G) of Bitteswell was carried out between January and July 2020. The work comprised two elements:

- Review of all existing designations and available information, and
- Fieldwork to identify sites and features of natural and historical environment significance in the context of the Plan Area.

The review compiled information from relevant sources, including DEFRA, Natural England, Historic England, Leicestershire Historic Environment Records, Leicestershire Environmental Record Centre records (biodiversity and geology), Environment Agency, Harborough District Council, British Geological Survey, old maps (Ordnance Survey, manuscript), local history and archaeology publications and local knowledge.

Fieldwork reviewed all open and currently undeveloped land in the Plan Area, and significant species, habitats, landscape characteristics, archaeological earthworks and other extant environmental features were checked, along with status and value as community open space (sport, recreation, access and other amenities).

These data, along with all relevant site-specific information from the existing information review, were mapped and tabulated, and each site was scored and evaluated using the seven criteria for Local Green Space selection in the *National Planning Policy Framework* 2019. The resulting inventory, along with the key numbered map and an explanation of the scoring system, forms Appendix G to this Plan.

192 parcels of open land in the parish were inventoried, evaluated and scored, and 65 were identified as having notable environmental (natural, historical and/or community) features.

## Local Green Spaces

Three sites score 18/25 or more (of the maximum possible) in the inventory and meet the essential requirements for designation as Local Green Space as outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024, paragraph 107). Their statutory protection will ensure that these most important places in Bitteswell's natural and human environment are protected.

**POLICY ENV 1: PROTECTION OF LOCAL GREEN SPACES** – Development proposals that would result in the loss of, or have an adverse effect on, the following Local Green Spaces (details Appendix H; map figure 6) will not be supported other than in very special circumstances.

Church of St Mary, Bitteswell, churchyard (Inventory reference 119); area 0.27 ha

Village Green, Bitteswell (183); 1.21 ha

The Moors (124); 4.27 ha

Figure 6: Local Green Spaces

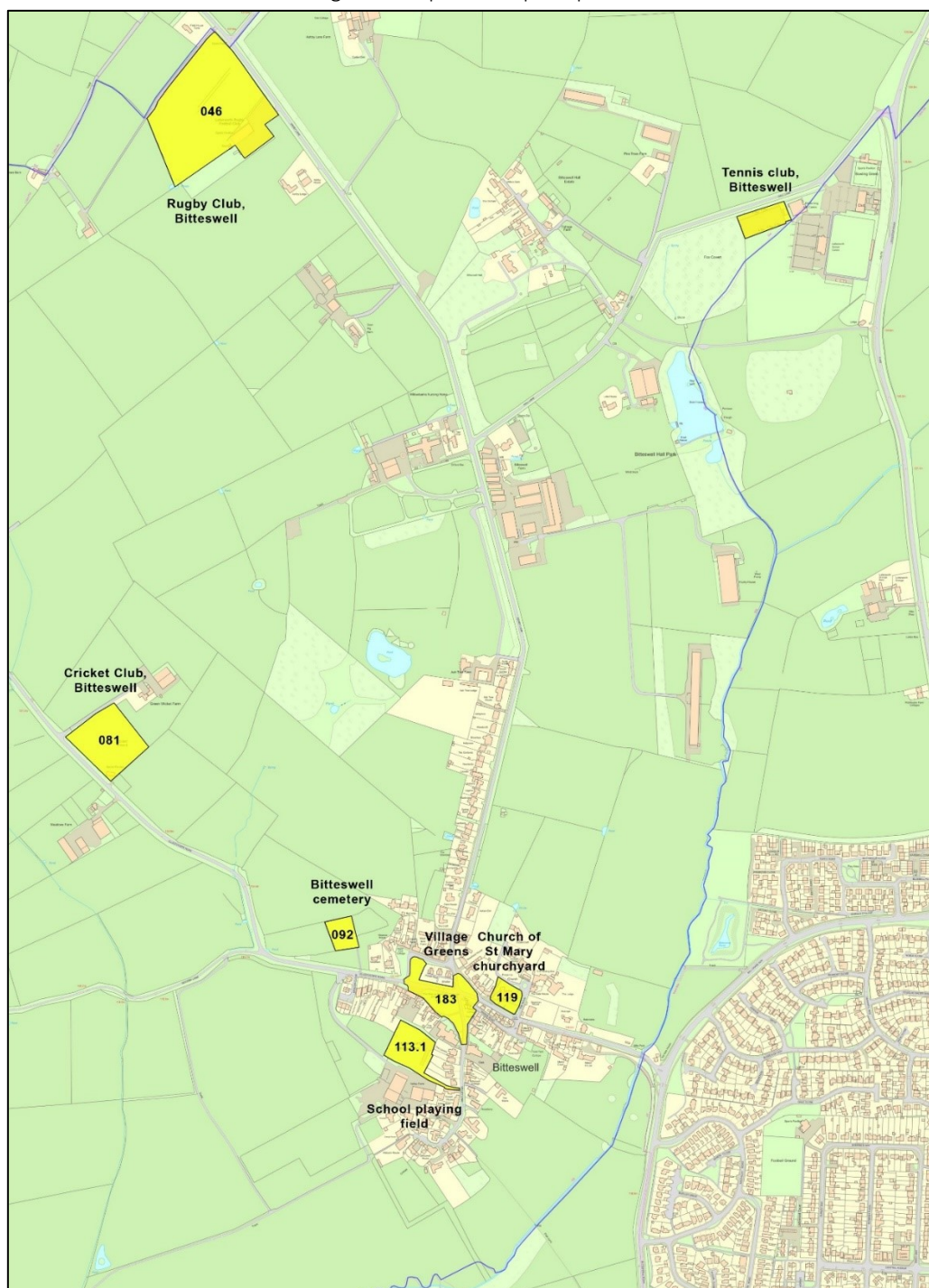


## Important Open Space

A group of sites scored highly in the inventory (under the 'special to community' criteria) for their amenity, community or open space value. They have been identified in fieldwork, community consultations and in Parish records; they are existing Harborough District Council Open Space, Sport & Recreation (OSSR) sites (Local Plan policy G12) and/or Bitteswell Parish Council assets while some, although privately owned, provide a community function. Their value as open space *within and close to the built-up areas* and/or as community resources are recognised in this Policy.

Sites 119 and 183 will be withdrawn if designated as Local Green Spaces.

Figure 7: Important Open Spaces



**POLICY ENV 2: IMPORTANT OPEN SPACES** – The following sites (figure 7) are of high value for recreation, amenity, beauty or tranquillity, or as open spaces within or close to the settlement. Development proposals that result in their loss, or have a significant adverse effect on them, will not be supported unless the open space is replaced by equivalent provision in an equally suitable location, or unless it can be demonstrated that the open space is no longer required by the community.

Lutterworth Rugby Club ground, Bitteswell (Inventory reference 046)

Tennis club, Bitteswell (Lutterworth Tennis Club) courts and facilities

Bitteswell Cricket Club ground and facilities (081)

Church of St Mary churchyard extension (Bitteswell cemetery) (092)

Bitteswell village greens (183)

Church of St Mary churchyard (119)

St Mary's CE Primary School playing field (113.1)

## Natural environment

### Sites of natural environment significance

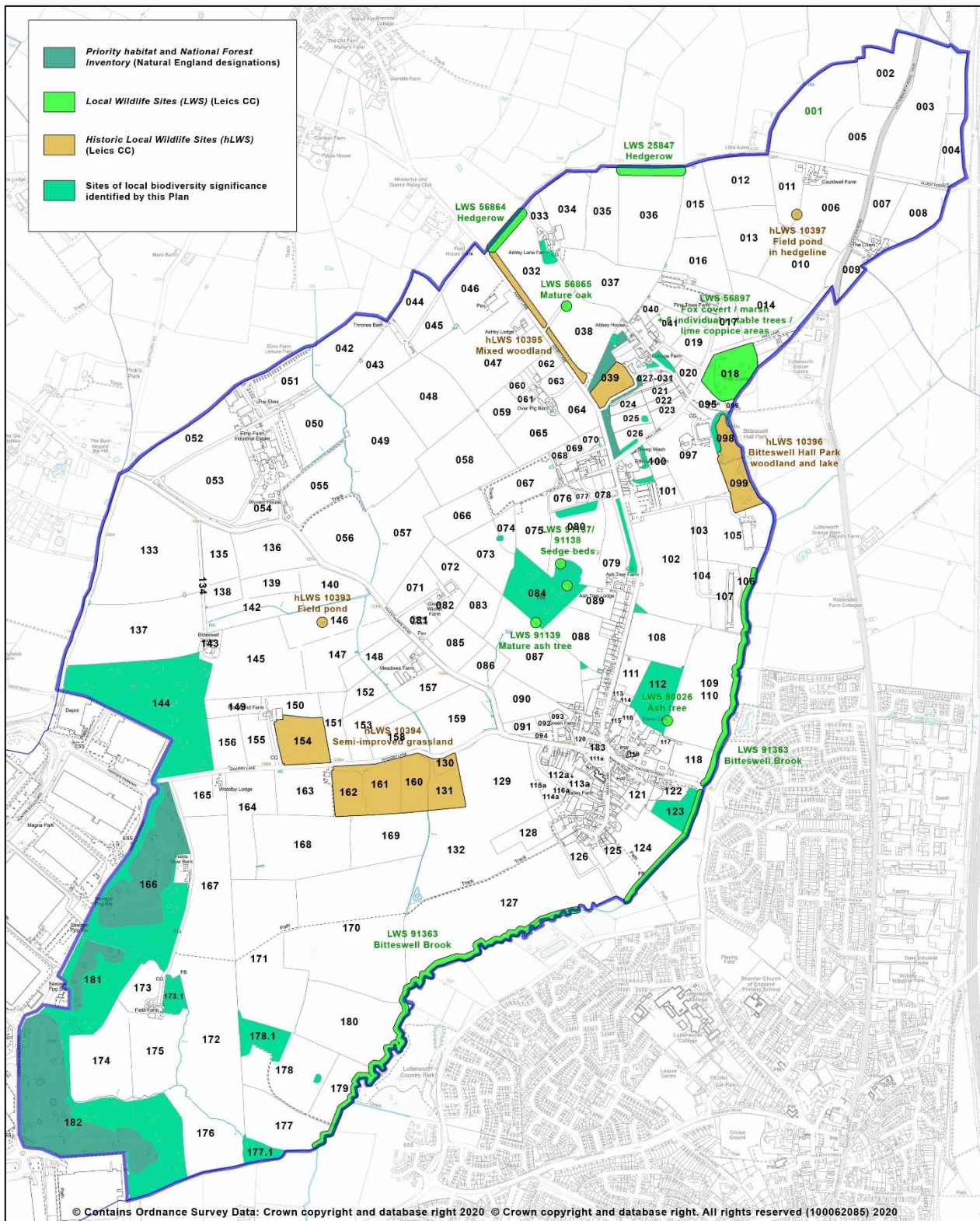
A group of inventory sites scores highly for 'wildlife' (scoring at least 3/5 under this criterion). The features for which the identified sites have been selected and notified are listed in the environmental inventory (Appendix G). The map (figure 8) shows their locations.

These sites of natural environment significance comprise a) those where *priority habitats* occur (Natural England mapping) or where *biodiversity action plan (BAP) species* have been recorded as breeding or as regular visitors; b) sites identified as ecologically significant by Leicestershire County Council, including Local Wildlife Sites, and c) other habitats and feature identified during the inventory process as being of high biodiversity significance in the context of the Plan Area.

Policy ENV 3 delivers site-level compliance in the Plan Area with the relevant Harborough District Council policies, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the European Habitats and Species Directives.

**POLICY ENV 3: PROTECTION OF SITES OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT SIGNIFICANCE** – The sites mapped here (figure 8) have been identified as being of local or wider significance for their natural environment features. They are ecologically important in their own right, make a contribution to carbon sequestration, and are locally valued. Development proposals should demonstrate that the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh any consequent biodiversity loss.

Figure 8: Sites of natural environment significance



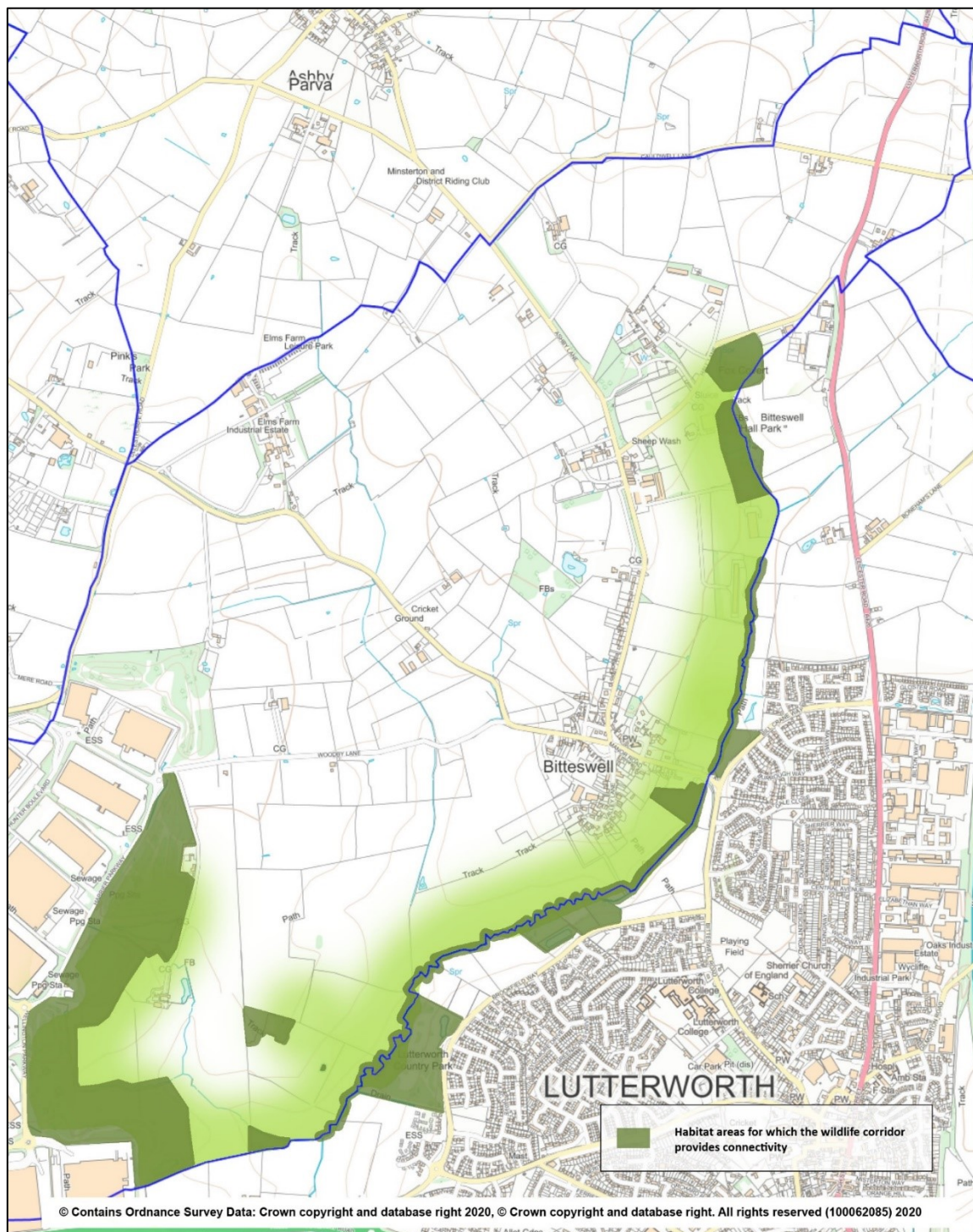
## Biodiversity and habitat connectivity

Because the Plan Area includes no nationally important wildlife sites, it might be argued that it is a 'typical' area of English Midlands countryside, and thus that it has little or no biodiversity significance to be taken into account in the Planning system. This would be a misunderstanding of the concept of biodiversity. England's biodiversity is entirely and only the sum of the wildlife in all of its individual

parishes: Bitteswell is as important in this regard as every other parish, and residents want it to play its essential part in protecting what remains of England's threatened and diminishing biodiversity.

Connectivity is an essential component of biodiversity. Isolated populations of animals and plants are at risk of destruction or of simply 'dying out'. Wildlife Corridors aim to re-connect populations and habitats within parishes and more widely. A wildlife corridor connecting the developing habitat sites adjacent to Magna Park via the Local Wildlife Sites along and beside Bitteswell Brook (including adjacent streamside semi-natural open spaces) with the mixed wetland and woodland sites at Bitteswell Hall has been identified during the preparation of this Plan (Figure 9, policy ENV 4).

Figure 9: Wildlife corridor providing habitat connectivity in the Plan Area



This policy is therefore about parish-level compliance with the relevant Harborough District Council policies, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 (as amended), and the European Habitats and Species Directives [or their transitioned English equivalents] – and about how Bitteswell can ‘do its bit’ to maintain biodiversity by taking it into account, at a neighbourhood plan level of detail, in the Planning system. The policy is also supported by National Planning Policy Framework (2019) paragraphs 170 (a) and (d); 174; 175 (a) on which the policy is based, 175(c); and 177.

**POLICY ENV 4: BIODIVERSITY AND HABITAT CONNECTIVITY-** All new development proposals will be required to safeguard habitats and species, including those of local significance. If significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided (through locating to an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or compensated for, planning permission should be refused in conformity with paragraph 175 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Development proposals should not damage or adversely affect the habitat connectivity provided by the Bitteswell Brook wildlife corridor identified on the map (Figure 9).

## Historical environment

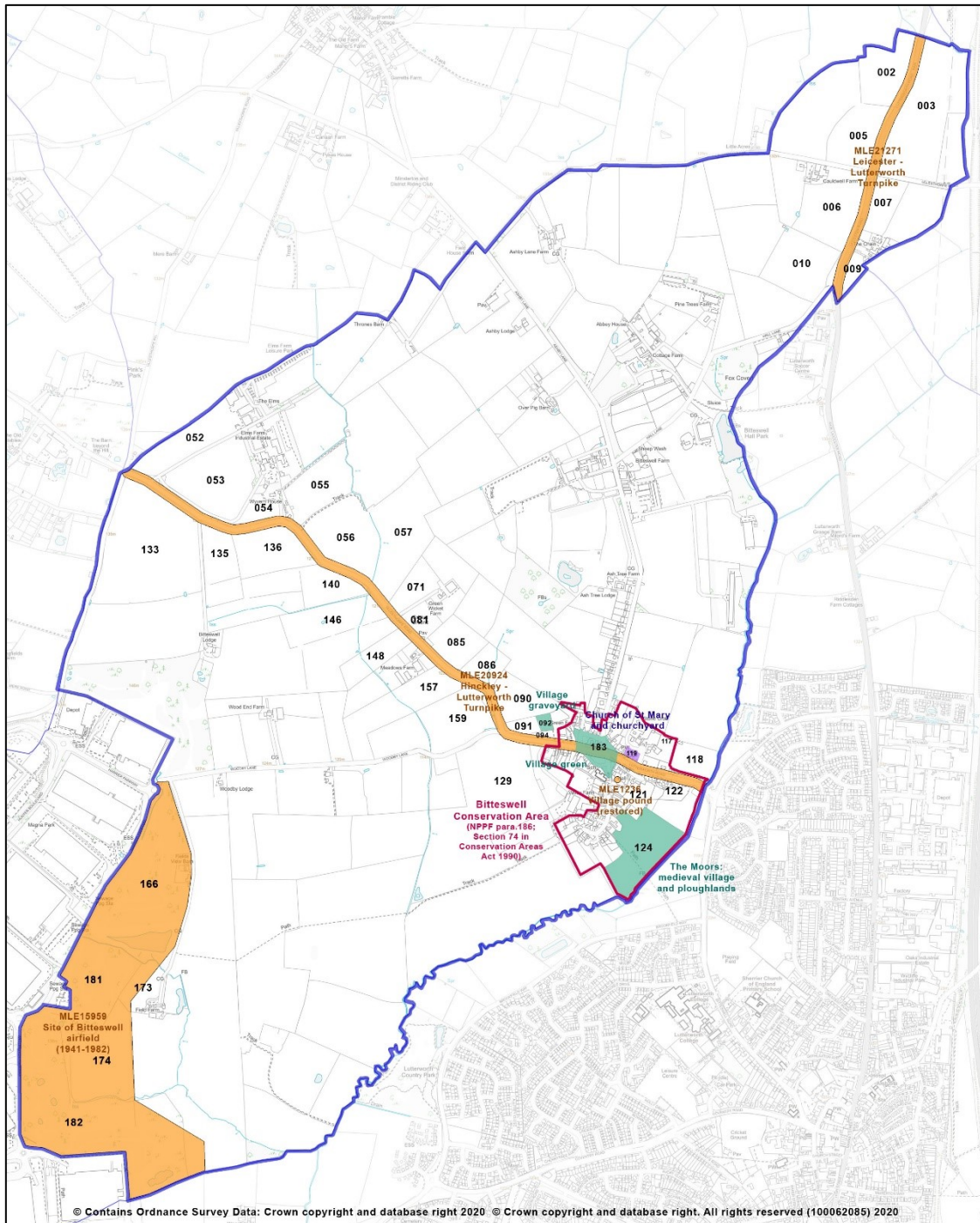
### Sites of historical environment significance

A group of inventory sites scores highly for history (scoring at least 3/5 under this criterion). The features for which the identified sites have been selected and notified are listed in the environmental inventory (Appendix G). The map (figure 10) shows their locations.

These sites of historical environment significance comprise a) statutorily protected sites, b) sites with *extant and visible* archaeological or historical features or proven buried archaeology, as recorded in the Historic England or Leicestershire Historic Environment Records databases, and c) other sites of historical and social significance identified in local records and during the inventory process.

**POLICY ENV 5: HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT: PROTECTION OF SITES OF HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT SIGNIFICANCE** – The sites mapped (figure 10) have been identified as being of local significance for their historical features. The features are extant and have visible expression, or there is proven buried archaeology on the site, and they are locally valued. Planning Applications must ensure that the significance of the features present is balanced against the local benefit of any development that would affect or damage them.

Figure 10: Sites and features of historic environment significance

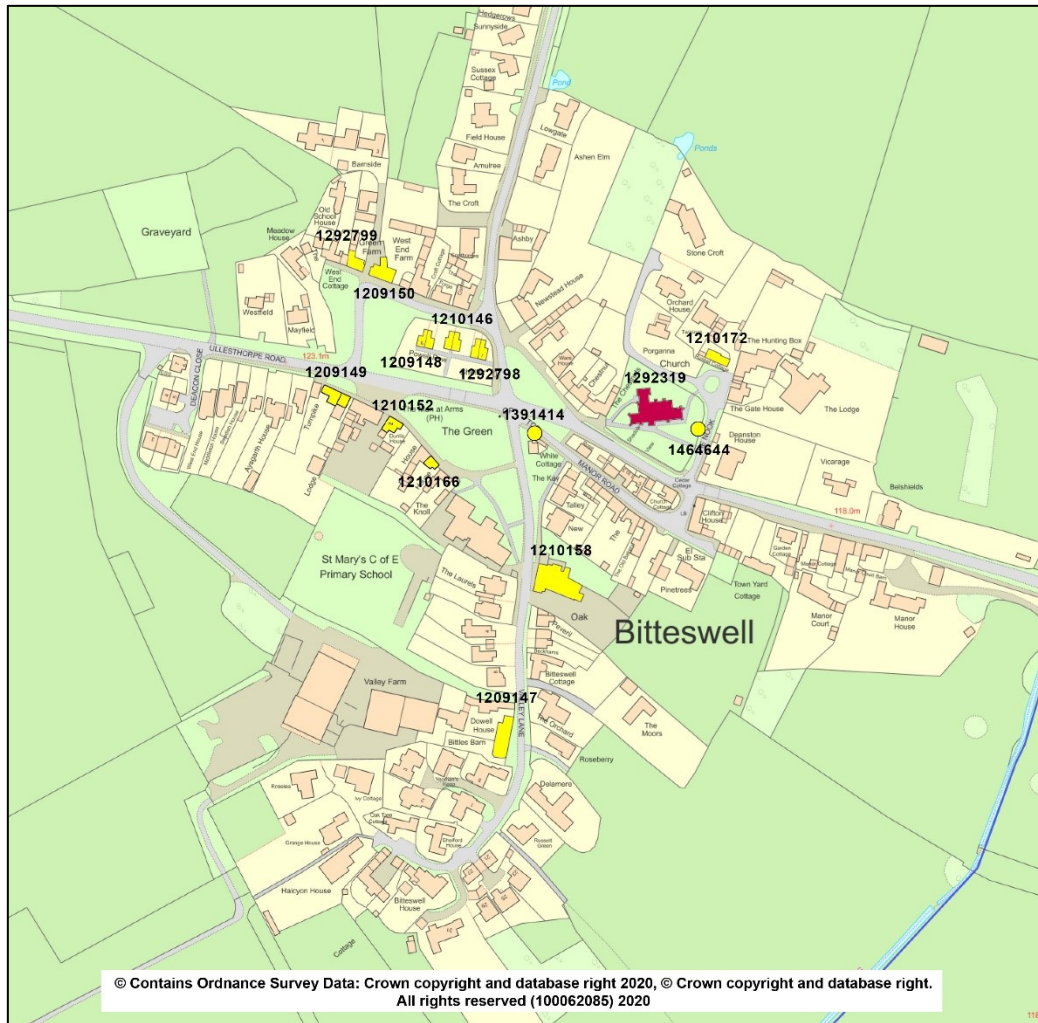


## Buildings, structures and features of local heritage significance

### Statutorily protected heritage assets

Fourteen buildings and structures in the Plan Area have statutory protection through Listing at Grade II\* or II. This Neighbourhood Plan lists them for reference (Supporting Document X), and to acknowledge that development proposals will be required to take their *settings* (as defined by Historic England) into account.

Figure 11: Statutorily designated heritage assets (Historic England)



## Ridge and furrow

The medieval township of Bitteswell was primarily agricultural and, beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, was farmed using the *Open Field* system. All the open land, other than small fields (closes) backing onto the village, meadows in stream valleys and a few patches of woodland or waste, was worked in a seasonal and yearly rotation of arable crops (cereals, beans), grazing and fallow. Medieval ploughs were pulled by oxen and, because they were not reversible, the soil was always turned rightwards as the plough team progressed up and down the furlongs, to produce a corrugated pattern of ridges and furrows whose dimensions increased with every season.

The open field system was practised for most of the medieval period until changes in land ownership and use beginning in the Tudor period and the ‘agricultural revolution’ of the 18<sup>th</sup> century instigated two changes: from large communal open fields to enclosed, privately-owned small fields with hedged boundaries, and from arable to pastoral (livestock) farming. The land in the Plan Area was enclosed in this way in several phases, culminating in the Parliamentary Enclosure in 1787.

The result of Enclosure, although socially disruptive, was to ‘fossilise’ the ridges and furrows under grass and hedgerows, and this situation persisted until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when a second agricultural revolution after the Second World War effectively reversed the first one. British

governments, later the European Union, encouraged farmers, mainly through subsidies, to plough the pastures and turn them over to intensive arable production. Wherever this happened, modern reversible ploughs quickly obliterated the ridge and furrow. In most English open field parishes, the loss of ridge and furrow since 1950 has been over 90%. In the 1990s, English Heritage (now Historic England), realising the scale of this destruction, undertook the first of a series of surveys (*Turning the Plough*) across the Midlands, including Leicestershire, and made recommendations for protection and management.

The extent of surviving ridge and furrow in Bitteswell was mapped in about 1999 (*Turning the Plough*, English Heritage *et al*), and this survey was used as a baseline for a new survey undertaken as part of the inventory for this Plan in 2020. The summary results show the decline since 1999; taking into account the loss of 7 hectares to Magna Park and the confirmation of a few ridge and furrow areas not recorded previously, the situation is now as follows:

|                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Plan Area</b>    | <b>c.600 ha</b> |
| <b>R&amp;F 1999</b> | <b>c. 69 ha</b> |
| <b>R&amp;F 2020</b> | <b>c. 67 ha</b> |

In English legislation ridge and furrow fields (except for the few that are Scheduled Monuments) are not statutorily protected, despite recognition that *“as the open field system was once commonplace in NW Europe, these [surviving] sites take on an international importance”* (English Heritage, 2001). It could also be argued that ridge and furrow is as important as ancient churches for connecting us to the lives of our medieval predecessors.

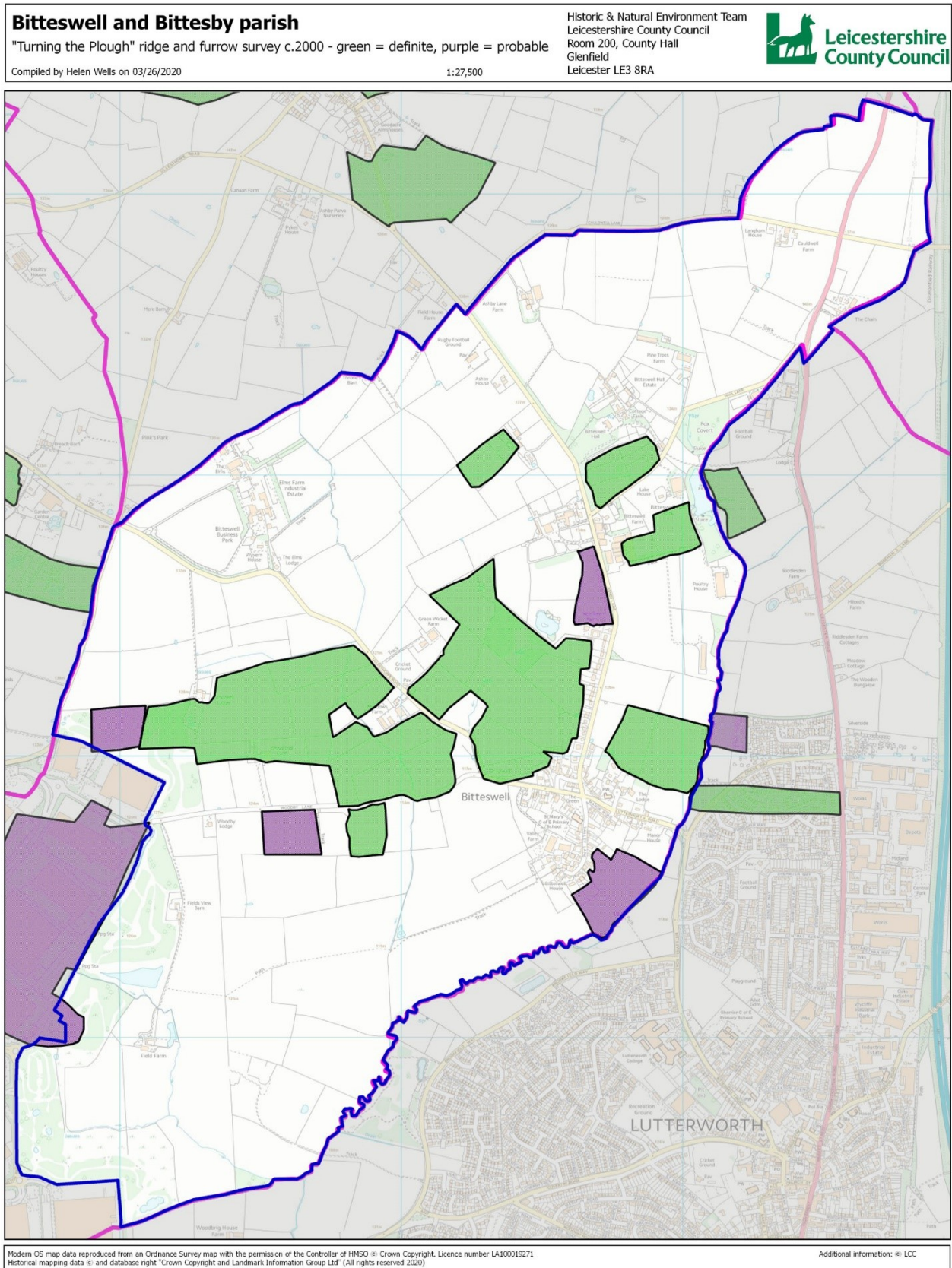
While individual fields with surviving ridge and furrow in the Plan Area are not claimed to be of international importance, the relatively coherent groups (showing how the ploughlands were laid out and worked) and their rarity across the Midlands means that any further, avoidable, loss would be highly detrimental. The policy is supported by NPPF (2024) paragraph 203. In line with the recommendation of Historic England, all surviving ridge and furrow in the Plan Area should now be regarded as a non-designated heritage asset and taken into account in the planning system as the visible evidence of a component of national heritage comparable in significance to that of surviving medieval buildings.

**POLICY ENV 6: HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT: RIDGE AND FURROW** - The areas of ridge and furrow earthworks in the Plan Area (figure 13) are non-designated heritage assets.

Any loss or damage arising from a development proposal (or a change of land use requiring planning permission) is to be avoided; the demonstrable benefits of such development must be balanced against the significance of the ridge and furrow features as heritage assets.

Figure 12: Ridge and furrow in the Plan Area c.1999

*Turning the Plough* survey, Historic England *et al*; map from Leics. CC Historic Environment Record data



Confirmed by fieldwork for this Plan

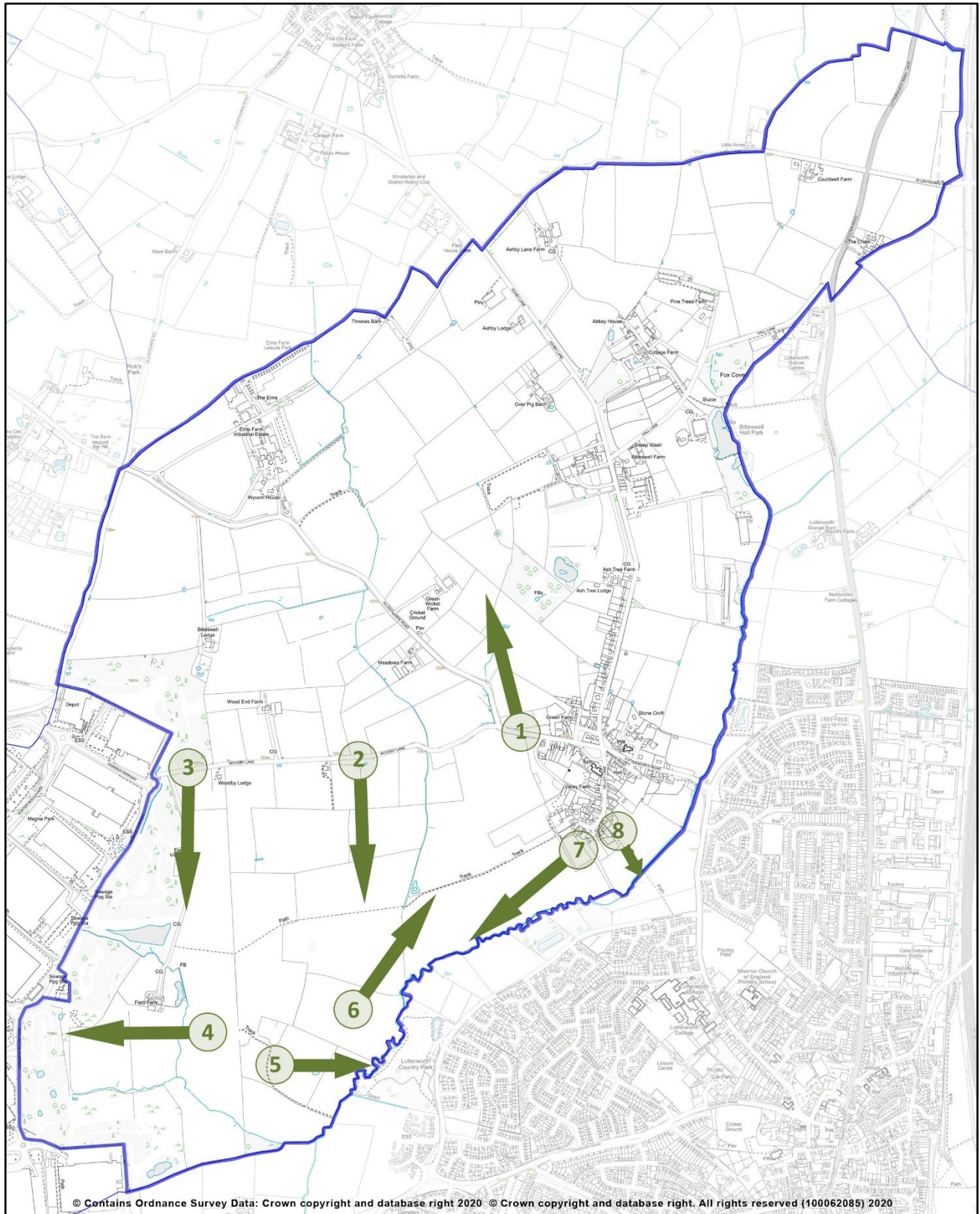


## Important views

Consultation during the Neighbourhood Plan's preparation identified a widely held wish to protect Bitteswell's rural setting, and its relationship with the surrounding landscape.

One of the main ways in which residents expressed this wish was by describing a number of valued views in the surrounding countryside and from there towards the village. These consultation findings were supported by the environmental inventory, which although principally aimed at identifying sites of environmental significance also confirmed the sightlines of the suggested views and mapped them (below, figure 14). Appendix I gives more detail.

Figure 14: Important views



POLICY ENV 7: PROTECTION OF IMPORTANT VIEWS – Development proposals should, whenever possible, respect and protect the views described in Appendix I and shown in Figure 14. Development which would have an unacceptable impact on the identified views will not be supported.

1. From Ullesthorpe Road at its northern junction with footpath W96, northwest over a good ridge and furrow field to open countryside
2. From Woodby Lane, views south over permanent grass fields to the historic water-meadows of the upper River Swift valley, with streamside willows
3. At the western end of Woodby Lane, adjacent to Magna Park (habitat creation areas) view south over gently rolling hills and woodland.
4. From headland of field 172 east of Field farm, south over arable farmland with the developing woodlands of Magna Park habitat creation (buffer) area to the west.
5. From the site of Blakenhall Farm on the extended footpath from Valley Lane, east and down into the river valley towards Lutterworth Country Park.
6. From headlands of field 180, views back to the village including the landmark church tower and spire.
7. From field accessed via footpath W94 over the open section of the Conservation Area (here so designated for archaeology and history (village earthworks, ridge and furrow).
8. From the end of Valley Lane, a locally-valued view of the remaining open countryside between Bitteswell and Lutterworth, including Lutterworth Country Park.

## Flood risk

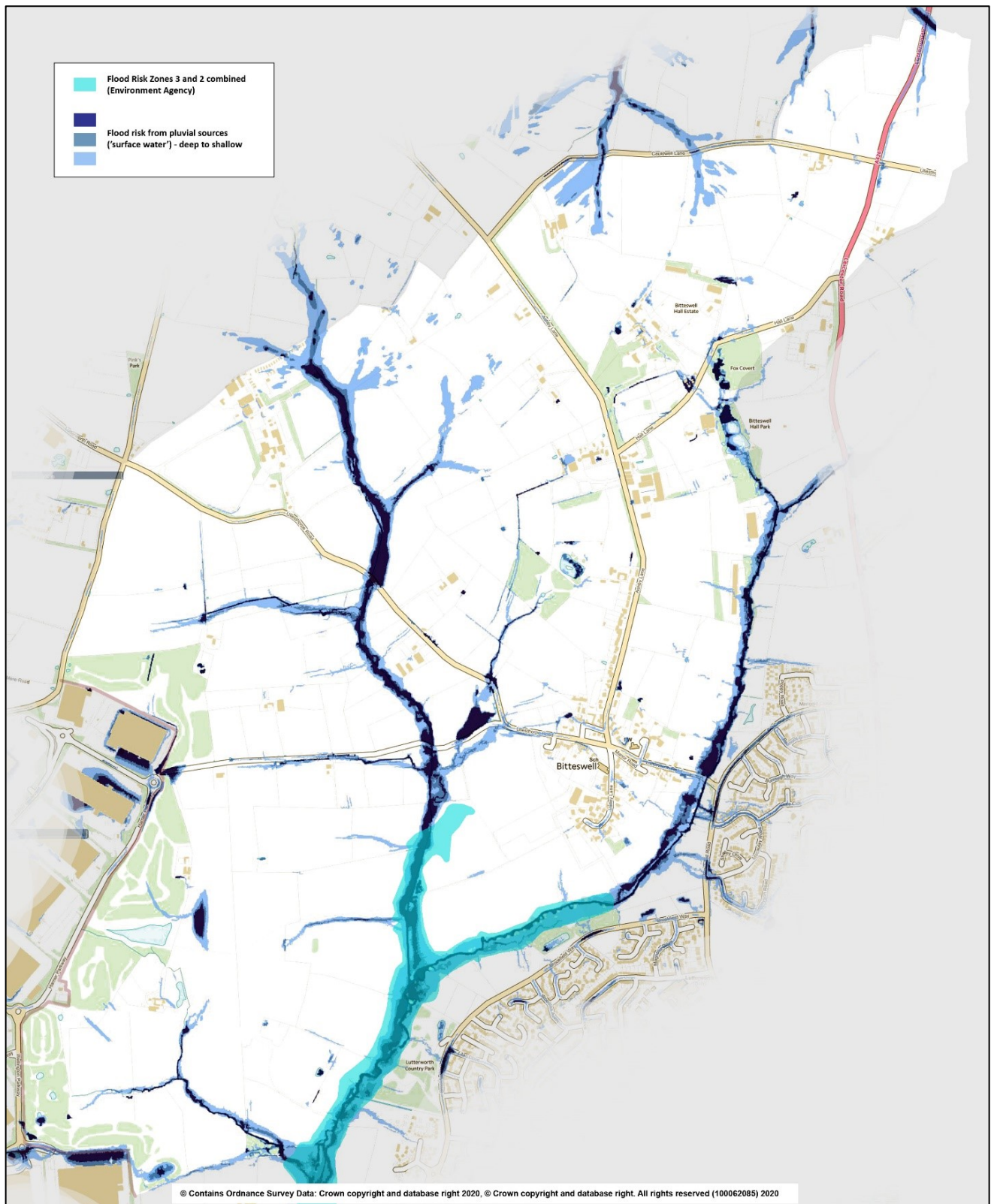
Even if international cooperation and national strategies and policies eventually succeed in halting the human and industrial contributions towards climate change, the effects of recent and current warming on weather events will likely persist for decades. It is therefore desirable to plan for at least a medium-term future, in which weather events will continue to become more extreme, by putting in place measures that mitigate the challenge of climate change for the lifetime of this Plan and beyond. This objective is explicitly supported by the Environment Agency (EA) draft *National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England* (2019), in which the strategic emphasis for the EA shifts from mitigation to resilience; in other words from requiring new development to reduce its adverse effects on flood risk and to avoiding creating or adding to flood risk at all.

A combination of topography, geology (see figure 4), changes in agricultural practice and new infrastructure in adjacent areas now makes parts of the Plan Area vulnerable to flooding events, both from rivers and watercourses and from surface water. Local experience in recent years, including during the time of preparation of this Neighbourhood Plan (2019-2020), is that these types of flooding, together with that caused by flow from an over-capacity water table, have increased in extent, duration and severity.

In light of this, it is particularly important that the location and technical standards of all new development proposals in the Plan Area should in future be judged on their likely contribution to

flooding in a climate change world. To complement this, the community will support proposals to improve the infrastructure within the built-up areas for managing flooding from the rivers and from surface water run-off events, providing this is not unduly detrimental to the historic built environment, biodiversity sites, or open and green spaces.

Figure 15: Flood risk (Environment Agency mapping)



This policy supports and has regard for NPPF (2024) paragraphs 162, 164(a), 170 and 172 (d, in particular) and is strongly supported by the draft National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England (2022), particularly the strategy's recognition of the need to build flood resilience into future strategic development planning. It also is in accord with Harborough District Council Local Plan policies CC3 and CC4.

**POLICY ENV 8: MANAGING FLOOD RISK** - The sequential test will be applied to all development proposals in flood zones 2 and 3. In addition, development proposals in areas of flood zone 1 adjacent to zones 2 and 3 should take account of the flooding levels expected as a result of climate change. New development will only be permitted in these areas if no other sites (with lower or no flood risk) in the Plan Area are available to meet housing supply targets or meet a locally identified housing need.

Future strategic development site allocations will only be made in areas not at risk of river (Zones 3 and 2) or pluvial (surface water) flooding and will include allowance for the effects of climate change.

In addition, except where inapplicable, each development proposal in the Plan Area will be required to demonstrate that:

- Its location takes geology, hydrology and flood risk into account;
- Its design includes, as appropriate, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), surface water management measures and permeable surfaces; and
- It does not increase the risk of flooding downstream.

Proposals to construct new (or modify existing) floodwater management infrastructure (ditches, roadside gullies, retention pools, etc.), including within the built-up areas, will be strongly supported.

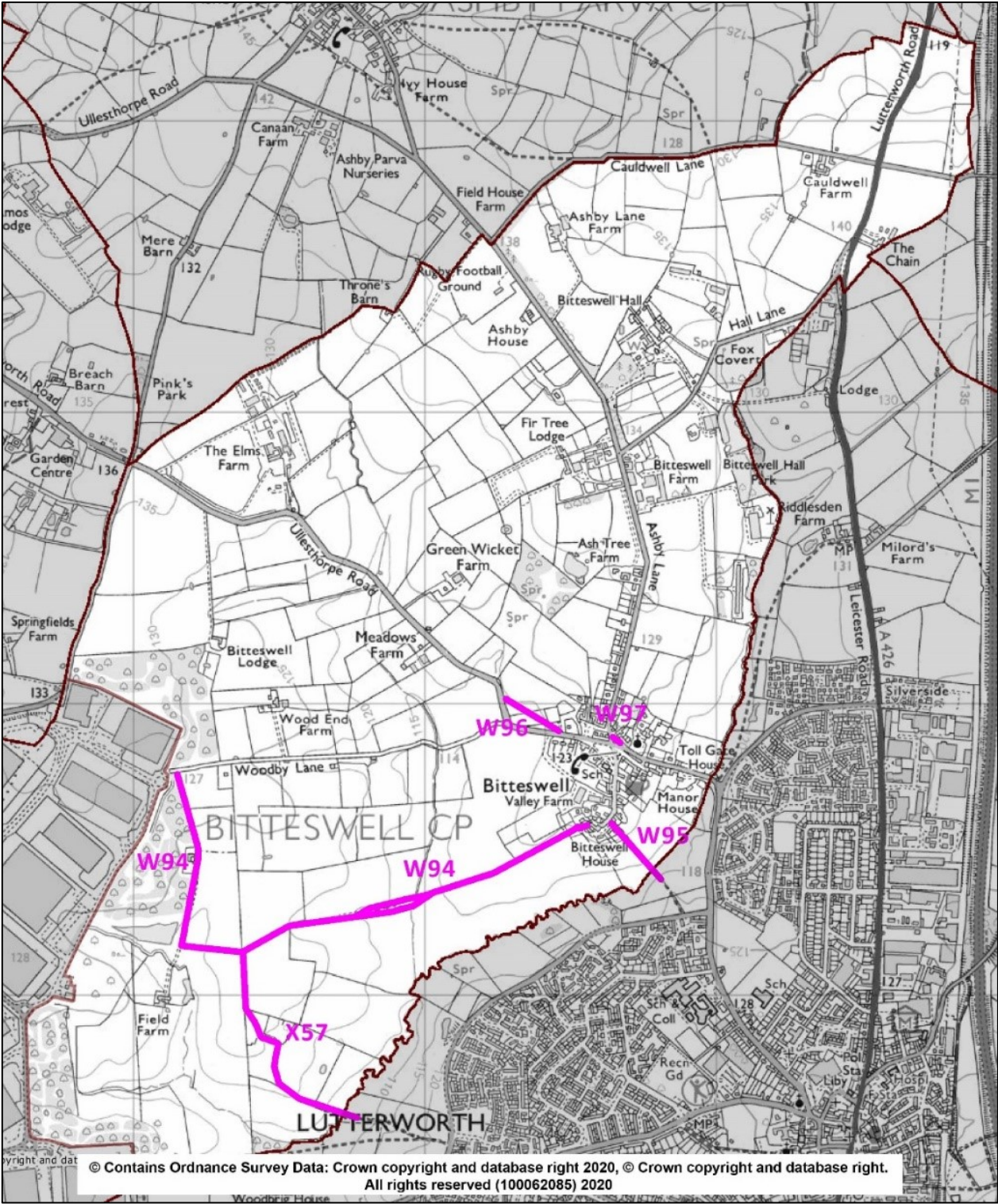
## Footpaths

The network of footpaths and other rights of way in the Plan Area is limited, being restricted to its southern third and to the village and its immediate environs. Because walking routes everywhere tend to be survivors from before the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enclosure of the farmed landscape and from before the development of paved motor roads, there are good historical reasons for this, including in the case of Bitteswell the way the medieval tracks were converted to roads (now public highways) and the exclusive development of the Bitteswell Hall estate in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, with modern recognition of the value of walking routes for health and wellbeing, the lack is unfortunate and any erosion of the network's extent and character will be resisted.

**POLICY ENV 9: FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEWAYS** - Development proposals that result in the loss of, or have a significant adverse effect on, the existing network of footpaths (see Figure 16) will not be supported without appropriate mitigation.

The creation of new footpaths, or the enhancement of existing footpaths, to encourage walking from the new developments to the village amenities for leisure and wellbeing, is supported. This includes links to connect the Care Home on Ashby Lane and Ullesthorpe Road towards Woodby Lane.

Figure 16: Existing network of rights of way



## 6 Community Facilities and Amenities

### Existing Community Facilities

Community facilities and amenities provide important infrastructure for the residents of Bitteswell, supporting and enhancing the quality of daily life and contributing to the vitality of the village. Some of these facilities and amenities offer local employment opportunities whilst others provide a focal point for social interaction and support important services; thereby reducing the need to travel, which is particularly important for those who do not have access to a car. The loss and threatened closure of facilities and services is, however, a common dilemma for rural communities. The viability of many rural services is likely to be challenged further in future as a consequence of squeezed local authority budgets and more car owning residents commuting to work, driving to retail centres and accessing leisure facilities and other amenities further afield.

For its size, Bitteswell village has a reasonably good range of facilities which include the following: St Mary's Parish Church is at the heart of the community. It holds regular services and is used by many villagers for major events such as weddings, baptisms and funerals. The church also works alongside the primary school and supports families and the community with events, such as the annual nativity. The church had an extension built in 2008 and is now able to provide extra space to support the community within the church building. The church reading room became the village hall in 1976. It hosts community activities and is available as a venue for villagers' celebrations. The management of the hall is carried out by a committee of local residents.

There are two public houses in the village serving restaurant-style food. The Olde Royal Oak also provides a hub for social events, parties and meetings of special interest groups.

Bitteswell has two local charities. Bitteswell United Charities provides funding for the benefit of the church and school and other educational and social benefits for residents, including the monthly newsletter and the free-of-charge taxi service for emergency use. The Powell-Welch charity manages the 6 Almshouses built in 1847 and two award winning flats on Ullesthorpe Road, completed in 2013.

**POLICY CF1: THE RETENTION OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND AMENITIES - Development leading to the loss of an existing community facility will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that:**

- a) There is no longer any need or demand for the existing community facility; or
- b) The existing community facility is no longer economically viable; or
- c) The proposal makes alternative provision for the relocation of the existing community facility to an equally or more appropriate and accessible location within the Parish which complies with the other general policies of the Neighbourhood Plan.

### New Community Facilities

The village is well served by the community facilities mentioned above. It is also in close proximity to Lutterworth town, where many other facilities are found. The village lost its general supply store (now

Tilt House) in 1970, its general store in 1997 and its part time post office in 2010. Consequently, there is now no shop in Bitteswell and older residents, in particular, find this inconvenient. Proposals for the provision of a small village shop/post office would therefore be viewed favourably.

**POLICY CF2: NEW OR IMPROVED COMMUNITY FACILITIES** - Proposals that provide new community facilities or improve the quality and range of existing community facilities, will be supported provided that the development:

- a) Will not result in unacceptable traffic movements that generate increased levels of noise, fumes, smell or other harmful disturbance to residential properties including the need for additional parking which cannot be catered for within the curtilage of the property;
- b) Will not generate a need for parking that cannot be adequately catered for.
- c) Is of a scale appropriate to the needs of the locality and conveniently accessible for residents of the village wishing to walk or cycle; and
- d) Takes into full account the needs of the disabled.

## Primary School

St. Mary's Church of England Primary school in Bitteswell is part of the Inspiring Primaries Academy Trust. The school was rated as "Outstanding" by OFSTED at the last inspection in 2013. The school still stands on and around the original schoolhouse built in 1888. There are currently 106 pupils attending the school, many of them from the village. There are four classrooms, 3 of which are mixed year groups. Changes over the years now provide teaching areas to meet modern demand, encompassing 4 classrooms, a library, music room, nurture room, kitchen, hall and outdoor classroom. The school sits in peaceful and attractive grounds with a wildlife garden, trim trail and patio area. The school is very much involved in the village community through its strong links to the church, residents and families.

**POLICY CF3: PRIMARY SCHOOL** - Proposals for the expansion of the existing primary school in the village will be supported where it can be demonstrated that:

- a) The expansion would not exacerbate existing access related or traffic circulation problems, unless suitable mitigation measures are brought forward as part of the proposal;
- b) There is no significant loss of outdoor recreation space at the school. Loss of any part of the playing field will only be supported if no longer required or alternative provision is made available; and
- c) The development would not result in a significant loss of amenity to local residents or other adjacent users and is in character, scale and form to the current building.

Where expansion is not possible on the current site, the creation of a new school in the village will be supported where:

- I. It would be safely accessible by pedestrians and cyclists and is well related to bus routes;
- II. It has appropriate vehicular access and does not adversely impact upon traffic circulation; and
- III. It would not result in a significant loss of open space and amenity to local residents or other adjacent uses.

# 7 Transport and Traffic

## Traffic Management

Communication with the surrounding areas is important for all inhabitants and businesses. With the probability of further housing development in the village and other developments in the region, the impact of increased traffic flows must be considered and mitigated. Where possible car sharing, public transport and cycle usage should be promoted to reduce the number of individual car journeys. With such new developments the provision for adequate off-road parking should be considered essential for the wellbeing of its inhabitants. Traffic calming measures should also be improved to prevent rat runners causing unnecessary congestion in the narrow streets.

The Parish Council has made every effort to persuade the County Council that Ashby Lane (which is a long, straight road, where cars speed) should have a 30mph restriction. The response has been that because only one side of the road is 'built up', 40mph is the accepted norm. Clearly, if and when, development takes place a 30mph restriction should be initiated.

**POLICY T1: TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT - With particular regard to the rural highway network of the Parish and the need to minimise any increase in vehicular traffic all development must:**

- a) Be designed to minimise additional traffic generation and movement;
- b) Incorporate sufficient off-road parking;
- c) Provide any necessary improvements to site access and the highway network either directly or by sufficient financial contributions;
- d) Consider, where appropriate, the improvement and where possible the creation of footpaths and cycleways to key village services; and
- e) Provide additional pedestrian crossings where appropriate.

## Public Parking

Bitteswell does not have any public car parking areas and the residents are rightly concerned about increases in street parking, which has unfortunately become essential for houses which either have no garages or off-street parking availability. This is causing an impact on the wide variety of vehicles that need to travel through the village including essential utility services and agricultural machinery. Where possible residents should be encouraged to use their garages and existing driveways to park their cars to reduce this problem. Any proposed new developments should include adequate off-street parking arrangements and garages to mitigate this issue.

**POLICY T2: CAR PARKING - Development proposals that would result in the loss of off-street car parking will only be acceptable where:**

- a) It can be clearly demonstrated that there is no longer any potential for the continued use of the land for car parking and that the loss of parking will not aggravate an existing shortfall of spaces in the vicinity.

- b) Adequate and convenient replacement car parking spaces will be provided elsewhere in the vicinity.

Proposals to develop off-street car parks in the village in suitable locations are supported.

## Electric Vehicles

The UK government has recently announced its intention to ban sales of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 to combat rising levels of air pollution (in particular NOx) and address climate change concerns. The implication is that the number of 'pure' (i.e. not hybrid) electric vehicles (EVs) on the road will increase rapidly; there is some evidence this is already starting. If EVs are to have a similar range to today's petrol/diesel cars, they will need to have large capacity batteries installed (for example, an EV with a 310-mile (500kms) range requires a battery capacity of 90kWh). This raises the crucial question for the planning system of providing infrastructure for EV battery recharging.

Residential charging is probably the current norm but using a typical generator size of 3.7kW (as currently installed as standard on board EVs, with similar electrical usage as a domestic kettle), this would take 19 hours to re-charge the battery (assuming a typical run-down state of 25% of maximum). The lower capacity (and lower range <100miles) Nissan Leaf would take about 6 hours. The availability of larger capacity on-board generators (7kW) is emerging, which would halve these times, but this is then the maximum that would be possible using current standard domestic electricity supply (single phase 240volt). However, residential charging is only allowed where off-road parking is available.

This issue is already influencing planning and building regulations and it would seem wise to include such requirements for new developments in Bitteswell if rural communities are not to be left behind. Similarly, commercial rapid charging facilities are growing across the country (making use of 3-phase supply not possible at the domestic level and reducing the 7kW re-charge time by a factor of 3). These could be utilised in Bitteswell for example by installation in a permanent parking area as described above, providing re-charging for residents with no off-road parking, and allowing opportunity fast re-charge for all residents.

**POLICY T3: ELECTRIC VEHICLES** - Residential development should, where practical, provide 7kW (or current best practice) cabling to a vehicle-accessible location on the exterior of each dwelling to facilitate subsequent installation of a home electric vehicle charging point.

The provision of communal vehicular charging points within the Parish will be supported where there is universal access and their presence does not impact negatively on existing available parking in the Parish.

## 8 Business and Employment

### Existing Employment

The strength of the local economy and of the community go hand in hand. Supporting the growth of a stronger local economy is recognised as an important theme of the Neighbourhood Plan. Indeed, the Harborough District local plan for 2011-2031 recognizes the need for sustainable development which both delivers local employment opportunities, supports and diversifies the rural economy and enables the expansion of local enterprise. Bitteswell enjoys close proximity of Lutterworth / ease of access to economic centres within and outside Harborough district.

There are also established businesses which are run from home-based facilities within the village. There is an increasing trend for residents to work from home (7.7% of people living in the parish (aged 16-74) compared to 5.7% in Harborough District) and with continuing changing employment patterns nationally, this trend is likely to continue.

For the majority of workers resident in the parish the lack of significant local employment opportunity means that their only option is to work away from the area, commuting increasingly greater distances to secure employment. 53.3% of residents go to work by car, above the rates for the Harborough district (50.3%) and England (36.9%). The lack of both local employment and affordable housing impacts particularly on the young people of Bitteswell.

Where there are buildings dedicated to business use in the parish it is important that they are protected against being lost to other uses. It should be clearly demonstrated that there is little prospect of existing building or land generating employment before allowing demolition or redevelopment.

**POLICY E1: SUPPORT FOR EXISTING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES - Where planning permission is required there will be a strong presumption against the loss of existing commercial premises or land which provides employment or future potential employment opportunities. Applications for a change of use for an activity that does not provide employment opportunities will only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that:**

- a) The commercial premises or land in question has not been in active use for at least 12 months; and
- b) The commercial premises or land in question has no potential for either reoccupation or redevelopment for employment-generating uses and as demonstrated through the results both of a full valuation report and a marketing campaign lasting for a continuous period of at least six months.

### New Employment proposals

New employment initiatives in the right location can greatly help to boost and diversify the local economy and to provide more local employment opportunities.

Overall, maintaining the rural nature of the parish strongly mitigates against any larger scale business development, although the existing business park located outside of the village does provide some scope for expansion within its boundary.

Any new employment initiatives should be sensitive to the character of the parish. Employment proposals should only be seen as acceptable if they avoid harmful impacts on other matters agreed to be locally important such as air quality, green spaces, increased traffic flows, parking, residential amenity, the preservation of historic/heritage assets and the local environment.

There is, however, a need to recognise and support the increasing numbers of people who conduct their businesses from home. The Neighbourhood Plan reflects this in its proposals to provide a wider range of housing and to both support conversion of redundant agricultural buildings and the development of local business premises where appropriate.

**POLICY E2: SUPPORT FOR NEW EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES** - In supporting additional employment opportunities, new development should:

- a) Fall within the boundary of planned limits of development for the village of Bitteswell unless it relates to small scale leisure or tourism activities, or other forms of commercial/employment-related development which justifies and is compatible with a countryside location or there are exceptional circumstances;
- b) Where possible, development should be sited in existing buildings or on areas of previously developed land;
- c) Be of a size and scale not adversely affecting the character, infrastructure and environment of the village itself and the neighbourhood plan area, including the countryside;
- d) Not involve the loss of dwellings;
- e) Not adversely impact on noise levels or light pollution or introduce any pollution to an extent that they would not adversely affect residential amenity;
- f) Will not result in unacceptable levels of traffic movements that generate a level of noise, fumes, smell or other harmful disturbance which cannot be mitigated to an appropriate standard including the need for additional parking which cannot be catered for within the curtilage of the property; and
- g) Be well integrated into and complement existing businesses.

## Home Working

The reduction of CO2 omissions to net zero by 2050 is now enshrined in law, so it is important to consider new employment opportunities in the right location for the residents of Bitteswell in order to help reduce vehicle usage and carbon footprint. The last census of 2021 identified 222 residents in employment (49.1% and lower than the Harborough average) and 118 working mainly from home (51.1% and higher than Harborough at 35.8%). 84 people regularly drove to work and back making a total of 168 vehicle journeys.

**POLICY E3: WORKING FROM HOME** - Proposals for the use of part of a dwelling for office and/or light industrial uses, and for small-scale free-standing buildings within its curtilage, extensions to the dwelling or conversion of outbuildings for those uses, will be supported where:

- a) Such development will not result in unacceptable traffic movements and that appropriate parking provision is made;
- b) No significant and adverse impact arises to nearby residents or other sensitive land uses from noise, fumes, light pollution, or other nuisance associated with the work activity; and
- c) Any extension or free standing building shall be designed having regard to policies in this Plan and should not detract from the quality and character of the building to which they are subservient by reason of height, scale, massing, location or the facing materials used in their construction.

## Farm Diversification

The conversion of former agricultural buildings enables farm diversification, leads to the sustainable reuse of vacant buildings and provides opportunities for the establishment and development of small businesses which generate income and employment opportunities for local people. This is a national trend, which the Parish Council would like to encourage within the Plan area to maintain a balanced and vibrant community, subject to the proper consideration of residential amenity for nearby houses, visual impact on the countryside and highway safety issues. New business development in the countryside is covered in Policy E2.

To help maintain the rural economy and protect the open countryside from inappropriate development, the Plan supports the sustainable growth and expansion of business and enterprise through the development and where appropriate conversion of farm existing buildings in the countryside. Specifically, this is intended to: Promote a viable and sustainable farming and rural economy in the Neighbourhood Area and the diversification of rural businesses; encourage new businesses to provide a wider range of local produce, services and leisure facilities, to provide local employment and attract both visitors and tourists to the parish and maintain and enhance the local environment of rural and agricultural lands.

The change of use of some rural buildings to new uses is already permitted under the General Permitted Development Orders. The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment and Consequential Provisions) (England) Order 2014 allows, under certain circumstances, the change of use of agricultural buildings to residential use and change of use of agricultural buildings to registered nurseries providing childcare or state-funded schools, under the prior approval system.

**POLICY E4: REUSE OF AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS** - The reuse, conversion and adaptation of well-designed rural buildings for small businesses, recreation, or tourism purposes will be supported where:

- a) The use proposed justifies and is compatible with the rural location;
- b) The conversion/adaptation works respect the local character of the surrounding area;
- c) The development will not have an adverse impact on any archaeological, architectural, historic or environmental features;
- d) The local road system is capable of accommodating the traffic generated by the proposed new use and adequate parking can be accommodated within the site; and
- e) There is no significant adverse impact on neighbours through noise, light or other pollution, increased traffic levels or increased flood risk.

## Broadband and telecommunications

The Harborough District Local Plan only allows development where there is adequate broadband infrastructure in place. This Neighbourhood Plan recognises the fundamental importance of ultra-fast broadband to the development of the local economy and that rural communities must not be disadvantaged with a poor communication infrastructure. Such facilities are particularly important for promoting and developing homeworking as outlined in policy E3.

**POLICY E5: BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE** - Proposals to provide increased access to a super-fast or ultra-fast broadband service (including future developments at present unforeseen) and improve the mobile telecommunication network that will serve businesses and other properties within the parish will be actively supported. This may require above ground network installations, which must be sympathetically located and designed to integrate into the landscape and not be located in or near to open landscapes.

- a) All new developments should have access to superfast broadband (of at least 30Mbps). Developers should take active steps to incorporate superfast broadband at the pre-planning phase and should engage with telecoms providers to ensure superfast broadband is available as soon as initial build on the development is complete; and
- b) Where possible telecommunication providers will be encouraged to improve existing mobile coverage and provide new 5G services.

## 9 Monitoring and Review

The Neighbourhood Plan will last until 2041. During this time, it is likely that the circumstances which the Plan seeks to address will change.

Bitteswell with Bittesby Parish Council will review the Plan on a regular basis to make sure that it takes into account any changes in National Planning Policy and the Harborough Local Plan. If it is considered by the Parish Council that changes are necessary to the Neighbourhood Plan, it will commence a formal review in conjunction with the Local Planning Authority.

A further review will be undertaken in 2029, at which point consideration will be given, and if necessary, processes commenced, to develop a further Neighbourhood Plan for the benefit of the residents of the Parish.