

# Sutton Neighbourhood Plan



## Background Evidence Report

### Part 3 of 3 – Developed Environment



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Submission Version

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# Contents

<b>1. Sutton Character Areas .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1. Background.....	3
1.2. Housing Styles and Street Scenes.....	3
1.3. Sutton Character Area 1 – High Street (East) and Sutton Road (Clay End) .....	4
1.4. Sutton Character Area 2 – High Street (West) (Conservation Area) .....	8
1.5. Sutton Character Area 3 – Church Road.....	13
1.6. Sutton Character Area 4 – Sutton Crossroads (Biggleswade Road and Carthage Road) .....	17
1.7. Sutton Character Area 5 – Non-Village Locations .....	19
<b>2. Parking .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1. Background.....	21
2.2. Public Transport .....	21
2.3. Car Use .....	21
2.4. Sutton Village Hall .....	22
2.5. Sutton V.A. Lower School .....	22
2.6. The John O’Gaunt Inn .....	23
2.7. All Saints Church.....	24
2.8. High Street, Clay End .....	24
2.9. General Questionnaire Analysis .....	24
2.10. Summary.....	26
<b>3. Important Green Gaps .....</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1. General .....	28
3.2. Picturesque and Rural Setting .....	29
3.3. Historic Environment and Setting .....	29
3.4. Dark Skies .....	30
3.5. Tranquillity.....	31
3.6. Agricultural Land .....	32
3.7. Wildlife Corridors and Habitats.....	32
3.8. Strategic and Local Development Pressure.....	33
3.9. Conclusion .....	34
3.10. Methodology .....	34
3.11. Important Green Gap 1 (IGG1).....	39
3.12. Important Green Gap 2 (IGG2).....	40
3.13. Important Green Gap 3 (IGG3).....	40
3.14. Important Green Gap 4 (IGG4).....	41
<b>4. Acknowledgements and Copyright Information.....</b>	<b>42</b>

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# 1. Sutton Character Areas

## 1.1. Background

Sutton has a wide variety of buildings and building styles which have developed over centuries. There are a mix of dwellings, including listed medieval buildings, farm houses, public housing developments and more modern large individual homes.

Most of the housing in Sutton is set in a linear style along the single road through Sutton village itself (what was High Street, later split into High Street and Church Road). There are no housing estates in Sutton.

In 1869 a local fire-raiser set several rows of houses ablaze in the village before eventually being caught 'in the act' and sent to Bedford Prison. Many of these houses were rebuilt from 1870 onwards, which resulted in several small groups of houses along the High Street being built in a distinctive 'Burgoyne' style.

Other developments have occurred at different times, in particular, public housing was developed at Sutton Crossroads (Biggleswade Road) in the 1920s – after the Great War.

At different times during the 20<sup>th</sup> century further small groups of public housing were built towards the eastern end of High Street, up as far as Clay End, and additional small developments of houses (usually in small clusters of two or three) were also built to infill gaps along the High Street.

In the 1960s, the John O'Gaunt Golf Club owned Sutton Park. The Club sold off thirteen parcels of land along a strip fronting what is now Church Road in order to raise funding to purchase what is now the Carthage 18-hole golf course. Thirteen large and individual houses were built on these plots along what is now Church Road.

Residents of Sutton frequently describe areas within the parish, including where they live, in broadly five categories:

1. Clay End (High Street and Sutton Road)
2. High Street
3. Church Road
4. Sutton Crossroads
5. Farms / Farmland

## 1.2. Housing Styles and Street Scenes

The Sutton Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee examined the styles of housing, layout of buildings and street scenes within the parish and concluded that there are five distinctive character areas within the parish and that these broadly align with the definitions that have generally been used by parishioners for many years.

The whole of High Street consists of a mix of housing styles, including listed buildings, detached houses, rows of terraced houses, houses with on-plot parking and houses with



There are two listed buildings in this character area, a row of 18th century cottages at 29-35 High Street (Grade II, NHLE 1114088) which now form a single detached dwelling, and a thatched cottage at 37 High Street (Grade II, NHLE 1321631).

Most of the buildings are set behind small front gardens and face onto the main street. The majority of front spaces are either open or enclosed with hedges. To the rear, there are spacious gardens, glimpses of which can be obtained through existing gaps. The undeveloped part of the High Street, to the east of Clayend Farm provides a sense of openness and reinforces the rural setting of the village.

The street layout is predominantly linear in form, although there is a small area of housing set back from the road around a small green space.

The majority of houses do have on-plot/off-street parking, though there are a significant number, particularly of the later groups of former public housing dwellings that do not have dedicated parking and are reliant on street parking and shared bays.



*Street Scene – High Street (Clay End) Looking West*



*Street Scene – High Street (Non-Conservation Area) Looking East*

Photographs of a sample of housing styles in Sutton Character Area 1







#### 1.4. Sutton Character Area 2 – High Street (West) (Conservation Area)

This area covers the eastern part of the Sutton Conservation Area, the area of the High Street within the conservation area.

There is no distinct building line here with varied sized front gardens, apart from the sites of the John O’Gaunt Public House and Sutton Lower School which are set behind hard landscaping areas, though even these are bounded at the sides by hedges which somewhat softens their appearance when viewing along the street. The street layout is predominantly linear in form.

A variety of typologies can be found here dating from post-medieval to modern times. The buildings in this character area are single or two storeys, facing onto the High Street and set back from it, apart from the Village Farm buildings that are set against the street. The buildings are varied and contain a mix of styles and building materials, with generally no more than three or four dwellings of any particular style. The buildings are mainly detached, with two small terraces of period cottages.

There are five listed buildings in this character area, of timber-framed construction, however, in most cases concealed behind rendered façades. Modern infill has respected the low density of the area, as well as the scale and height of the historic properties. It has however diluted the historic character and appearance of the area.

The Village Hall sits on a large plot in this area, set back behind a hedgerow.

An additional listed structure, the Packhorse Bridge (also a scheduled monument), marks the western boundary of this character area and illustrates the medieval history of the village and contributes to a sense of local distinctiveness.

The larger houses all have good sized gardens, the terraced houses generally have smaller, narrow gardens. The majority of front spaces are either open or enclosed with hedges. Village Farm is bordered by a wall of oblique layered sandstone interspersed with supporting brick pillars – a design of which is unique to the area.

The majority, but not all, of the houses have some on-plot/off-street parking, though there is a considerable amount of on-street parking, particularly in the areas of the terraced houses as the number of vehicles exceeds available off-road parking in this area. Parking is problematic at school drop-off and collection times, as well as when there are large events in the village hall.



*Street Scene – High Street (Conservation Area) Looking East*



*Street Scene – High Street (Conservation Area) Looking West*

Photographs of a sample of housing styles in Sutton Character Area 2

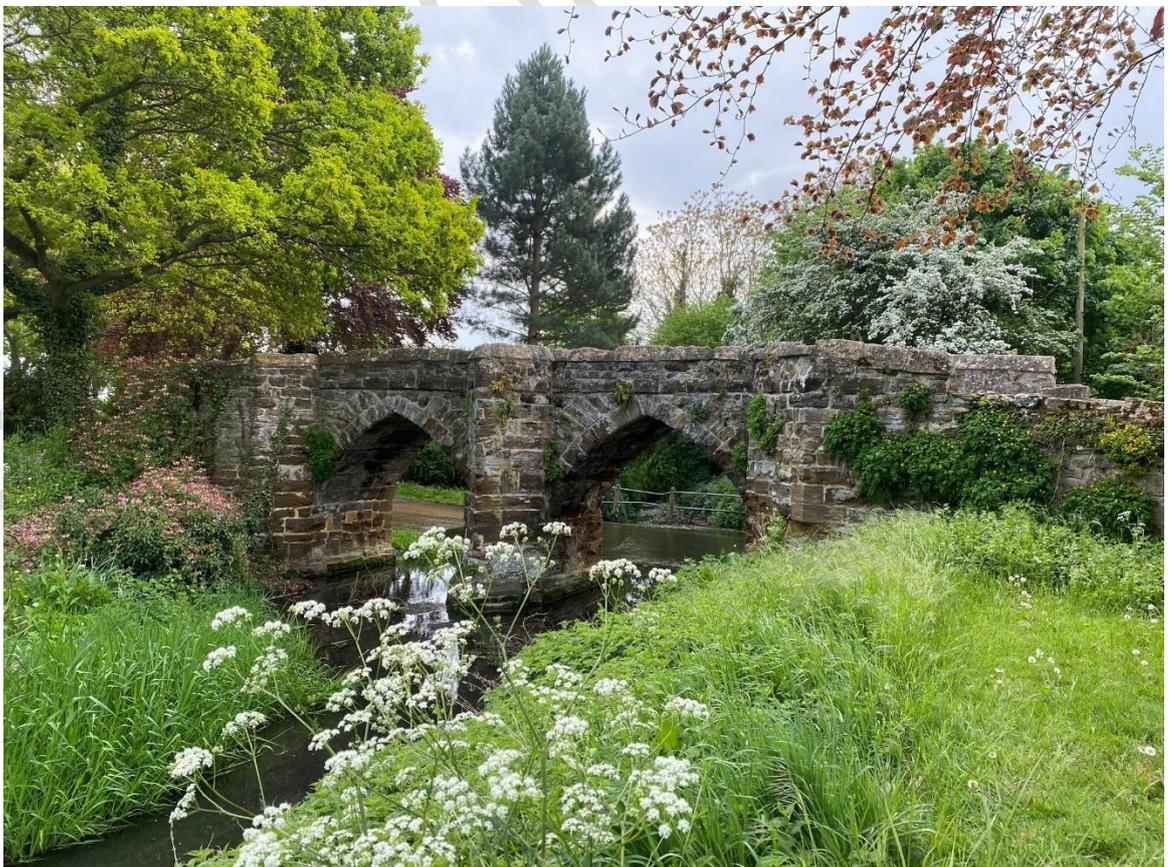




**Photograph of a sandstone structures in Sutton Character Area 2**



*Obliquely Laid Sandstone Wall - High Street, Sutton*



*Sutton Packhorse Bridge - Made of Sandstone*

### 1.5. Sutton Character Area 3 – Church Road

This area covers the whole of Church Road, the eastern end of which falls with Sutton Conservation Area.

The buildings in this area are all detached and, with the exception of five bungalows, they are generally large, individual style, two storey houses, standing at the centre of large plots (generally 1,700m<sup>2</sup> or more). The houses are set behind large front gardens, following a distinct building line. The bungalows sit at the centre of smaller, but practical gardens.

The majority of front spaces are bordered with trees, shrubs and hedges which forms a rural lane appearance to the street scene. Most have considerable lawn and parking areas. All the dwellings have ample on-plot parking, with on-street parking by residents very rarely seen.

The Church of All Saints and The Old Rectory stand toward the eastern end of Church Road, within the conservation area. The Church of All Saints is the most distinctive building in this area, as well as the whole village. It sits on a raised churchyard, which includes a number of listed monuments, and its tower is a local landmark. There is a cluster of historic buildings around the church, most of which are listed, including The Old Rectory (Grade II, NHLE 1114085). Although set low down, three modern bungalows to the north of the Grade II listed Church Farmhouse (NHLE 1321629) detract slightly from the historic character of the area.

There are a mix of building materials here, including stone, timber-frame and render as well as red brick. The sandstone boundary wall of the churchyard and the old red brick wall of The Old Rectory contribute to a sense of enclosure along with the blank red brick façade of the Coach House and stable-block to The Old Rectory (Grade II, NHLE 1138134).

The street scene of Church Road is generally one of large trees and shrubs, with the houses and garages set back from the road - almost unseen when looking along the street. The street layout is predominantly linear in form.

Church Field playing area sits behind a hedge near the ford and packhorse bridge at the eastern end of Church Road.



*Street Scene - Church Road*

**Photographs of a sample of housing styles in Sutton Character Area 3**







### Photograph of a sandstone structures in Sutton Character Area 3



*Sandstone Wall and Church – Church Road, Sutton*

#### **1.6. Sutton Character Area 4 – Sutton Crossroads (Biggleswade Road and Carthagen Road)**

This area covers the most western part of the village, the houses at Sutton Crossroads, both on Biggleswade Road and Carthagen Road.

This is a small group of houses, of two storeys, set behind small front gardens, following a distinct building line, in ribbon development on one corner of Sutton Crossroads. The buildings appear detached from the rest of the village and are mainly surrounded by countryside. Local legend has it that these houses should have been built at Clay End crossroads (east end of the village) but were mistakenly constructed at the wrong crossroads; if true, this might explain why these houses were built so far away from the village centre (in the 1920s there would have been no houses in the village this side of the All Saints Church).

There are predominately two styles of semi-detached houses with a single exception (a later detached in-fill). The majority are a single style of rendered semi-detached, two storey, public housing dwellings built in the 1920s. Towards the Biggleswade end of the development are two slightly newer, brick-built semi-detached, two storey houses.

The houses all have good sized gardens, backing on to open fields, woodland or a playing field. The houses have on-plot parking, though there is also some on-street parking along Carthagera Road. The majority of front spaces are used for a mix of lawn/shrubs and parking areas. The boundary treatment is generally low pre-fabricated concrete fencing or low picket fencing.

The street scene is fairly open with the houses sitting on the south-west corner of the crossroads on the B1040 Biggleswade Road and Carthagera Road. Two of the other corners of the crossroads are undeveloped (one is the Carthagera course of the John O'Gaunt Golf Club and the other is an open arable field). The fourth (north-east) corner contains a small open space and then leads into the ribbon of development along the north side of Church Road.

This B1040 Biggleswade Road does get quite busy, particularly at peak-times. Residents have complained about the speed of some vehicles on the B1040 Biggleswade Road. This road is the main link between the towns of Pottton and Biggleswade.



*Street Scene - Sutton Crossroads (B1040 Biggleswade Road & Carthagera Road)*

#### **Photographs of a sample of housing styles in Sutton Character Area 4**





### 1.7. Sutton Character Area 5 – Non-Village Locations

This area covers the remainder of the parish outside of Sutton village, which is rural with scattered, longstanding, traditional farmhouses (some of which are Grade II listed) and illustrates the agricultural and rural history of the area. One farmhouse is a modern replacement on the site of a former farmhouse.

The listed farmhouses (Turnpike Farmhouse, Portabello Farmhouse and Fen Farmhouse) are of timber-framed construction or of red brick with clay tiled roofs. The farmhouses often have agricultural buildings nearby, and sometimes a single neighbouring farm cottage. These farmhouse buildings are substantial dwellings set within the countryside / farmland and some distance from other dwellings. Most are set well back from the road and accessed via traditional farm tracks.

Sutton Park, now a golf course, is prominent in the landscape, closely associated with the history and development of the parish, including the village. The clubhouse of the John O'Gaunt Golf Club is the former manorial home sitting within extensive parkland.

**Photographs of a sample of housing styles in Sutton Character Area 5**



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## **2. Parking**

### **2.1. Background**

Sutton village is an ancient settlement, where many of the roads and dwellings, especially in the medieval core at the centre of High Street, were not designed with motor vehicles in mind.

Parking was raised as a specific issue by residents at the neighbourhood plan kick-off brainstorming session held on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2018. The Visitors Questionnaire also identified parking as an area for improvement. Particular locations that were mentioned included the High Street, especially around the school and village hall, and also in Church Road near the church.

### **2.2. Public Transport**

Like many rural areas, Sutton is poorly served by public transport.

Sutton has an infrequent (approximately 2 hourly) bus service on six days per week, with buses to Biggleswade and to Sandy via Potton and Gamlingay. The first bus to Sandy departs at 8:37am, arriving in Sandy at 9:14am. The first bus to Biggleswade departs at 9.52am, arriving in Biggleswade at 10.06am. The last bus from Biggleswade to Sutton departs at 4.40pm. The last bus from Sandy to Sutton departs at 5.42pm. The timing of the bus service means that it is not generally practical to use the bus service for commuting to and from work.

On a Wednesday (once per week) there is a community bus from Sutton to Cambridge, departing at 9.29am, arriving at 10.15am and then returning at 2.03pm.

### **2.3. Car Use**

Sutton is a rural parish, and the village is some distance away from almost all facilities and services.

Like many rural areas, Sutton has high car ownership and usage. The 2011 census indicated that in the parishes of Sutton and Eyeworth (which were combined for census purposes) 64% of households have two or more cars/vans, double the average of 32% in England; 10% of residents work at home, which is double that of the 5% national average; just 4% of residents walk to work, well below the national average of 11% (according to the 2011 census data). This exacerbates the problems with transport and car parking in the village.

In response to the General Questionnaire for Sutton, 45% of all respondents indicated that they travel to work outside of the parish. 97% of respondents indicated that their usual mode of transport included the car.

Most of the children who live in the village travel to the independent school in the parish. They travel to the school by car as there is no footpath between the village and the independent school.

Travel to the farm-shop and café in the parish is almost exclusively by car, as they are not on the footpath or bridleway network.

The nearest railway stations are at Biggleswade (5km) and Sandy (7km), both of which have car parks.

Local services – distances from Sutton village:

- Farm shop - 2km
- Local shop - 3km
- Supermarket - 5km
- Pharmacy - 3km
- GP surgery - 3km
- Hospital - 22km
- Railway station - 5km
- Job Centre - 5km
- Upper School - 5km
- Post Office - 3km
- Bank – 5km

#### **2.4. Sutton Village Hall**

Sutton Village Hall is positioned on the High Street in the centre of Sutton village. The village hall has a capacity for up to 100 people. The village hall has some limited off-road parking (estimated for up to 10 vehicles). Attendees unable to park in the village hall car park tend to park elsewhere on the High Street, sometimes overflowing onto Church Road.

#### **2.5. Sutton V.A. Lower School**

The largest proportion of the parking related comments in the General Questionnaire related directly to Sutton V.A. Lower School.

Sutton V.A. Lower School sits at the centre of Sutton village on the High Street, opposite the John O’Gaunt Inn and close to Sutton Village Hall.

There is a small area of off-road parking for some of the staff to the front of the school, however this is insufficient for all the staff parking, and even with a kind arrangement by the village hall to allow some additional staff parking at the village hall, some staff have to park on the High Street.

Currently (May 2020) the school has 73 pupils with capacity for 75. By far the majority (95%) of pupils live outside the parish and travel to school by car.

The owners of the John O’Gaunt Inn, which is opposite the school, kindly let parents use their car park at school drop-off and pick-up times. However, this car park can only handle a fraction of the volume of cars, so despite this kind arrangement, this still creates severe parking and traffic problems in the High Street at the beginning and end of each school day, with the road sometimes becoming gridlocked for a period of time.

Sutton V.A. Lower School is currently planning to convert to a primary school, thereby increasing pupil numbers by 30, to a maximum of 105 pupils. Planning permission has

been granted for an additional classroom to accommodate the additional pupils (CB/19/04253/FULL). As a condition of this planning permission a single yellow line traffic regulation order along the south side of High Street with parking/waiting restrictions between 08:00 to 09:00am and 15:00 to 16:00pm is expected to be put in place.



*Parking for School Pick-Up, High Street, Sutton*

## **2.6. The John O’Gaunt Inn**

The John O’Gaunt Inn, which stands opposite Sutton Lower School on the High Street, has a small car park for use by patrons, although as outlined above, with kind permission of the owners, they allow parents to use the car park for drop-off and pick-up from school.

The John O’Gaunt Inn is a well-regarded and popular pub. The pub serves good food, it is popular with both residents and visitors throughout the year, the pub is described in the 2020 Michelin Guide as “Well-run by experienced owners, this is a cosy, honest village inn with a fire-warmed bar, a smart dining room and delightful gardens overlooking wheat fields.” In May 2020 Tripadvisor rated the John O’Gaunt Inn as the #1 bar and #3 restaurant in the Sandy area.

At popular times, the pub car park can become full, resulting in patrons parking on the High Street.

## **2.7. All Saints Church**

All Saints Church is a Grade I listed building which was built in the late 12th century or early 13th century. It is positioned towards the eastern end of Church Road in Sutton Village.

There is no parking for All Saints Church, with cars parking along the length of Church Road for large services such as weddings, baptisms and funerals, and for the regular Friday service which usually has around 100 attendees.

## **2.8. High Street, Clay End**

There are a number of 20<sup>th</sup> century, former public housing dwellings towards the eastern end (Clay End) of High Street which have shared parking, in either small on-street bays or a small shared parking area. Parking provision in this area is inadequate for the number of dwellings/vehicles, hence residential parking in this area almost continuously overflows onto the main street.

## **2.9. General Questionnaire Analysis**

The General Questionnaire had two specific questions relating to parking:

- Question F8/Q25: What changes to parking would benefit Sutton?
- Question F9/Q26: If additional parking were to be provided in the area of the High Street, where and how could this be provided?

In response to question F8/Q25: “*What changes to parking would benefit Sutton?*”, 69% of respondents mentioned parking at the school. The Church and Village Hall received 15% and 11% of mentions respectively.

The analysis of Question F8/Q25, provided the following overview of Sutton’s parking problem (numbers in brackets relate to number of responses allocated to this point):

- (i) Sutton Village is linear (1) with notable pinch points (4) – e.g. Rectory Corner, the ford and beside Village Farm (4) - where any on-road parking obstructs through traffic and residents. On-road parking is approaching saturation (1) and there are few places in the village centre where cars can park on both sides of road without creating obstructions (2). Away from the village centre Carthage Road (1) and Sutton Road (1) were both identified as having similar problems.
- (ii) Meanwhile many hundreds of people drive into, or through, Sutton every day to:

- a. deliver children to / collect them from Sutton Lower School;
  - b. access the recreational facilities. Groups of walkers (and their parked cars) are common sights;
  - c. attending classes and events at the village hall;
  - d. make deliveries and provide services;
  - e. drive through on their way to and from work.
- (iii) The parking congestion has daily, weekly and annual cycles:
- a. on school days there is serious but brief periods of congestion when children are delivered to and collected from Sutton Lower School (11);
  - b. given limited parking on the former school playground in front of Sutton Lower School, some teachers, support staff and school visitors have to park on the road outside Old School House and Village Farm (2);
  - c. every working day there are peaks in the through traffic during commuting times
  - d. the car park at the John O’Gaunt Inn overflows onto the street at summer lunchtimes, evenings and at weekends;
  - e. worshipers attending services and other church events tend to park outside the church on a dangerous bend, just before one of the traffic pinch points;
  - f. refuse collections of Fridays can involve up to three different collections – the black or green refuse bins, the food waste bins and (in spring, summer, autumn) the green bag collections;
  - g. some residents do not have adequate parking on their properties and/ or choose to park their cars on the road (4);
  - h. village festival and events can bring large number of visitors to Sutton with corresponding demands for extra car parking (1);
  - i. large agricultural machines need to negotiate their ways around all the parked cars as they move through the village (2).
- (iv) The result of all of the competition for parking spaces at key times:
- a. residents driveways can be blocked (5);
  - b. vehicles have to park on or drive over the pavements (3);
  - c. the movement of large contractors, agricultural and public service vehicles through the village can be seriously obstructed (3);

- d. (although not mentioned by any of the respondents) the children and parents crossing High Street from between parked cars while traffic moves through the village constitutes a road safety hazard;
- (v) Some respondents saw no need for change (5) or even that there was a problem (2). One respondent made the point that creating new car parks would encourage further visitors and traffic. Another made the same point in a different way, "parking problems deterred tourists. Conversely, others saw it as inhibiting to future tourist development (2);"

In response to question F9/Q26: "*If additional parking were to be provided in the area of the High Street, where and how could this be provided?*", there were a mix of responses, however, by far the most common suggestion, with 29% of responses, was the suggestion of using the village hall car park, with several of these suggesting extending the village hall car park into the field at the rear (north). 16% of respondents suggested using Church Field. 7% suggested expanding the school, possibly at the rear, to provide additional car parking.

Parking was also raised in respect of its negative impact upon the appearance of Sutton, especially in the area of the High Street near the pub, school and village hall (Q3).

Additionally, parking was raised as a constraint against developing Sutton's tourist and recreation potential (Q17).

Furthermore, respondents identified that more car parking was needed near Sutton V.A. Lower School in response to Q23 (*What improvements to (or new) roads, bridleways, paths and other transport infrastructure would benefit Sutton?*).

## 2.10. Summary

Whilst overall Sutton is relatively well provisioned for off-road parking, there are three particular hot-spots. These would all benefit from additional off-road parking:

- High Street (centre of Sutton village), in the vicinity of the older terraced houses, Sutton Village Hall, Sutton V.A. Lower School and John O'Gaunt Inn;
- High Street, Clay End in the vicinity of numbers 41 - 67 High Street;
- All Saints Church, Church Road (during large services).

The area of High Street at the centre of Sutton Village, in the vicinity of the John O'Gaunt Inn, Sutton Lower School and Sutton Village Hall is clearly the most acute of these. This area becomes very severely congested with parking:

- At school pick-up and drop-off times;
- In the evenings and weekends when most residents are at home;
- When events are held in the village hall;
- When the popular John O'Gaunt Inn is busy, especially in summer.

Additional parking is most significantly and urgently required at the centre of Sutton Village, in the area near the school, pub and village hall. The most proposed solution to this parking problem was the provision of additional parking in the vicinity of the village hall and school, with respondents to the General Questionnaire suggesting an area behind the village hall (which also adjoins the school grounds).

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## 3. Important Green Gaps

### 3.1. General

Central Bedfordshire is an area of growth and Central Bedfordshire Council have identified that it is important that this growth is managed in a way which is complimentary and in keeping with the existing character and identity of the many town and villages which make up this diverse area.

There are increasing pressures for development in the countryside. In some locations, the gaps of undeveloped countryside between settlements are narrowing and becoming more sensitive and important for wildlife, biodiversity, quality of life and to protect against urban sprawl and coalescence.

With the increased pressure for the delivery of new homes within Central Bedfordshire and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc the need to protect settlements from coalescence and identify areas which are at risk has also increased.

Important Green Gaps have been identified as strategic gaps in order to preserve the rural nature and historic setting of Sutton village, as well as preserve the separation of towns and villages so that their individual identities are maintained, that important historic settings, biodiversity assets and wildlife corridors can be maintained and enhanced, and that the tranquillity and dark skies enjoyed by both wildlife and residents can be preserved. Important Green Gaps will also prevent the reductions and narrowing of undeveloped breaks that are seen and experienced when travelling between settlements.

The Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan (2005) Policy CS21 'Important Countryside Gaps' set out to define sensitive gaps and resist development that would 'promote the visual or physical coalescence of nearby settlements. Important Countryside gaps have therefore been successfully used to protect towns and villages from coalescence in the former Mid Bedfordshire district. This now Central Bedfordshire Council policy is a 'saved' policy from the Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan 2005.

Sutton is a historic, rural and agricultural parish. The parish benefits from highly productive and high-quality agricultural land (which is primarily Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land), high quality landscape including open countryside, woodlands and parklands, extensive wildlife and varied habitats, dark skies, and exceptional tranquillity, especially given its proximity to major towns and cities. Sutton also has important locally distinctive features such as Sutton Park, the ford and the ancient packhorse bridge. According to the General Questionnaire and Visitors Questionnaire, the residents of Sutton and its many visitors place great value on these factors.

The General Questionnaire asked a free-text-response question "What are your three favourite things about Sutton?" The top four most favourite things (ranked first by respondents) were:

- Packhorse bridge and ford
- Tranquillity
- Open countryside and wildlife
- Picturesque village setting

The Peace and Tranquillity, The Natural Environment and The Dark Skies were all rated as extremely important to preserve by respondents of the General Questionnaire (Q9):

- The peace and tranquillity (89% extremely important, 10% fairly important)
- The natural environment (84% extremely important, 14% fairly important)
- The dark skies (65% extremely important, 21% fairly important)
- Trees and woodland were the top items mentioned in 'Other'.

There is a strong concern from residents that, in the medium to long term, Sutton, with all its charm and qualities, could lose its tranquil nature and rural character, and disappear as a distinct village, coalescing with Biggleswade and/or Pottton.

### **3.2. Picturesque and Rural Setting**

Sutton village is surrounded by attractive countryside with several farms spread across the parish. It is a rural village with a mix of building ages and styles, with a conservation area at the centre of the village which includes the stunning 13th century packhorse bridge and adjacent ford. Sutton remains, as it has been for centuries, a rural and primarily agricultural parish.

Sutton enjoys views over open fields, many good walking routes, fresh air, tranquillity and a wide variety of abundant flora and fauna. Residents and local businesses take advantage of these facilities, which are a key and important part of life in the parish.

The rural economy is heavily dependent upon this rural setting, especially for local businesses such as farming and the riding school.

Sutton receives many visitors, mainly on foot and bicycle, of residents from nearby towns, particularly from Pottton and Biggleswade who visit the area for recreation purposes, to enjoy the country walks and to enjoy the peace and tranquillity. Sutton provides an attractive, tranquil and yet easily accessible rural area for both the residents of Sutton and the residents of the nearby towns.

The character of the area, and particularly of the village, is defined by a small and traditional English rural village, with a uniquely attractive and picturesque ancient packhorse bridge and ford at its centre, all set in the heart of open fields and countryside.

### **3.3. Historic Environment and Setting**

Sutton has a rich rural and agricultural heritage which extends back to Saxon times. Sutton has a medieval village at its heart, two Scheduled Monuments and the historic parkland of Sutton Park. The current schedule of listed structures as included on the Historic England list shows 23 structures, with 21 Grade II, one Grade II\* and one Grade I structure (All Saints Church), the majority of these structures lie within Sutton village itself.

The village sits at the heart of the parish, surrounded by historic parkland and fields. The Enclosure Act of 1742 shaped the layout of the local fields and significantly influenced the local landscape. These remained in the ownership of the manorial family until 1939, and remain very much a part of the parish character and the village setting today.

In particular, at the heart of Sutton village sits the 13th century ancient Packhorse Bridge (Grade II\* listed, number: 1321630 and Scheduled Monument, number: 1004501) and adjoining ford which cross what is now known as Potton Brook.

When asked what is special or unique about Sutton many respondents highlighted the heritage features and the history of Sutton. Responses to the General Questionnaire question on importance of Sutton's past and monuments almost all rated highly showing the keen interest and importance of the heritage of Sutton to its residents. The old trees, and old footpaths and bridleways were also highlighted in free-text responses to the General Questionnaire section on heritage.

The heritage of Sutton is covered extensively in section 7 of the main neighbourhood plan document.

The historic nature of the village, its medieval heart and its setting within an open and rural area are extremely important and unique characteristics of Sutton.

### **3.4. Dark Skies**

Sutton is within an area with dark skies, where many stars and planets can be seen with the naked eye at night.

Dark skies are not just important for star-gazers. High levels of artificial night-time light can disrupt the circadian rhythm leading to sleep problems in humans and animals alike.

Wildlife, particularly bats, birds and insects, such as moths can be severely adversely impacted by artificial light. For instance, moths can gather around light sources which can lead to them becoming disorientated, easily predated and getting too exhausted to feed or reproduce; they can even be burned by the lamps themselves. Sutton is home to several species of moths, including the nationally scarce White-Spotted Pinion Moth (*Cosmia diffinis*) which lives on particular type of elm and is a Priority Species in UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

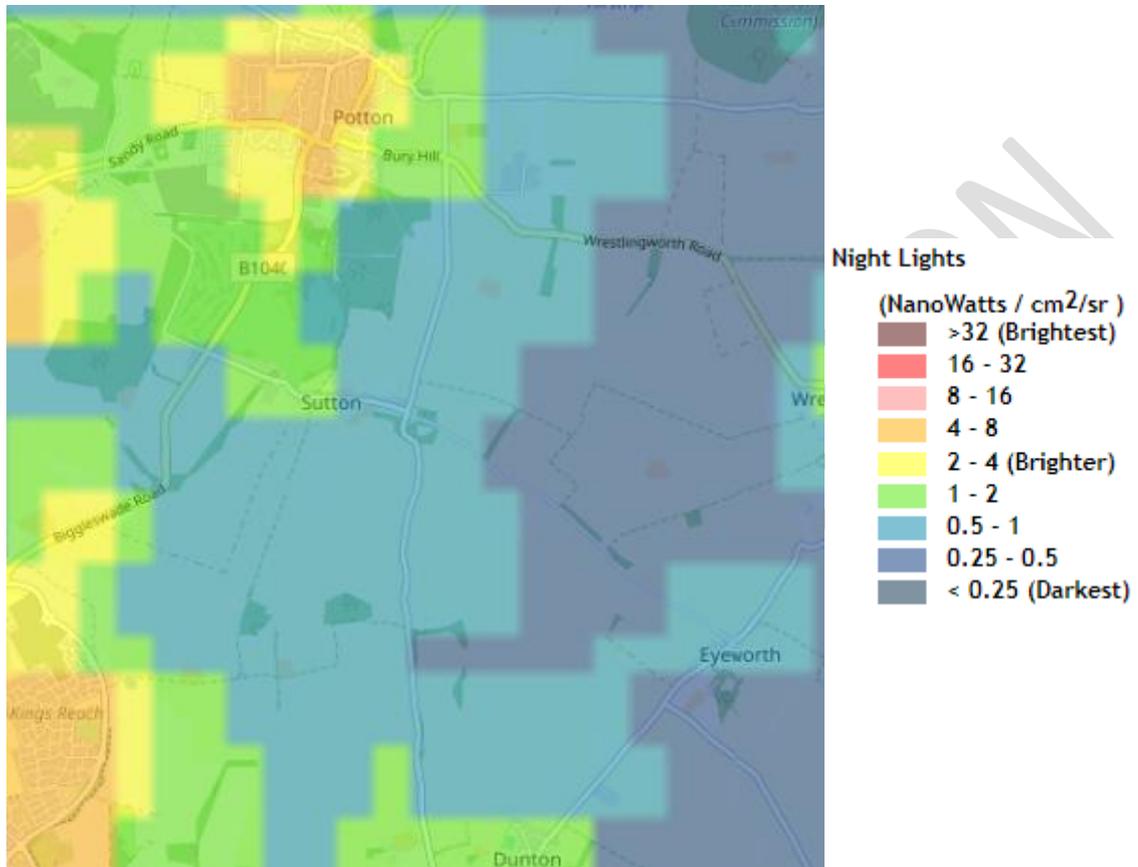
The UK is home to 18 species of bat, all of them protected and at least eight species of which reside in Sutton:

- Soprano Pipistrelle Bat
- Common Pipistrelle Bat
- Daubenton's Bat
- Serotine Bat
- Noctule Bat
- Brown Long Eared Bat
- Natterers Bat
- Barbastelle Bat

Bats generally feed on insects and rely on a healthy insect population. According to the Natural History Museum ( <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/light-pollution.html> ): "Some types of bats, such as brown long-eared, greater horseshoe and Natterer's bats, are used to operating in complete darkness very late at night. They use echolocation calls to build up a picture of their landscape and commute through that landscape from roost to preferred feeding site". "Bats fly at night for a pretty specific reason and that's predator

avoidance. Their natural predators are mostly avian, which with the exception of owls which will predate bats, mostly come out during the day. Bats associate lit areas with being at risk from predators, so many will tend to avoid them entirely.”

Sutton, particularly the east of the parish, has some of the darkest skies in Bedfordshire with light levels typically between 0.25 and 1.0 nW/cm<sup>2</sup>/sr.



*Light Pollution and Dark Skies - <https://www.nightblight.cpre.org.uk/maps>*

### 3.5. Tranquillity

Tranquillity attracts people to visit an area. Visual and audible tranquillity encourages participation in the natural environment, improves physical and mental health, largely due to stress reducing effects of peace and quiet. This ‘attractor’ in turn supports local businesses and local economies.

Finding tranquillity is not reliant on large scale land or seascapes; relative tranquillity can be found in small pockets within a busier mass. The Campaign for the Protection of the Rural Environment (CPRE) have commissioned a number of studies and produced maps assessing what constitutes tranquillity, the benefits and impact of change.

From CPRE surveys, tranquillity is defined by seeing and hearing natural landscapes, and natural features including:

- Seeing natural woodland, stars at night, rivers and the sea.
- Peace and quiet, hearing wildlife, bird song and the sound of water.

Negative impacts on tranquillity are highlighted in CPRE surveys as:

- Traffic and transport, transport corridors
- Light pollution
- Urban areas, large numbers of people
- Pylons and power lines, masts and wind turbines

Sutton is one of the most tranquil areas in Central Bedfordshire [Central Bedfordshire Environmental Framework, adopted June 2016]

Background noise levels were measured in Sutton village during April and May 2020 and found to be as low as 30dBA at times.

Sutton residents and visitors highlighted the tranquillity of the area as a key and important feature of Sutton. In the General Questionnaire, the peace and tranquillity was identified by 99% of respondents as being important to them (89% extremely important, 10% fairly important). The peace and tranquillity was identified in free-text responses as the second most-favourite thing about Sutton (after the ford and packhorse bridge).

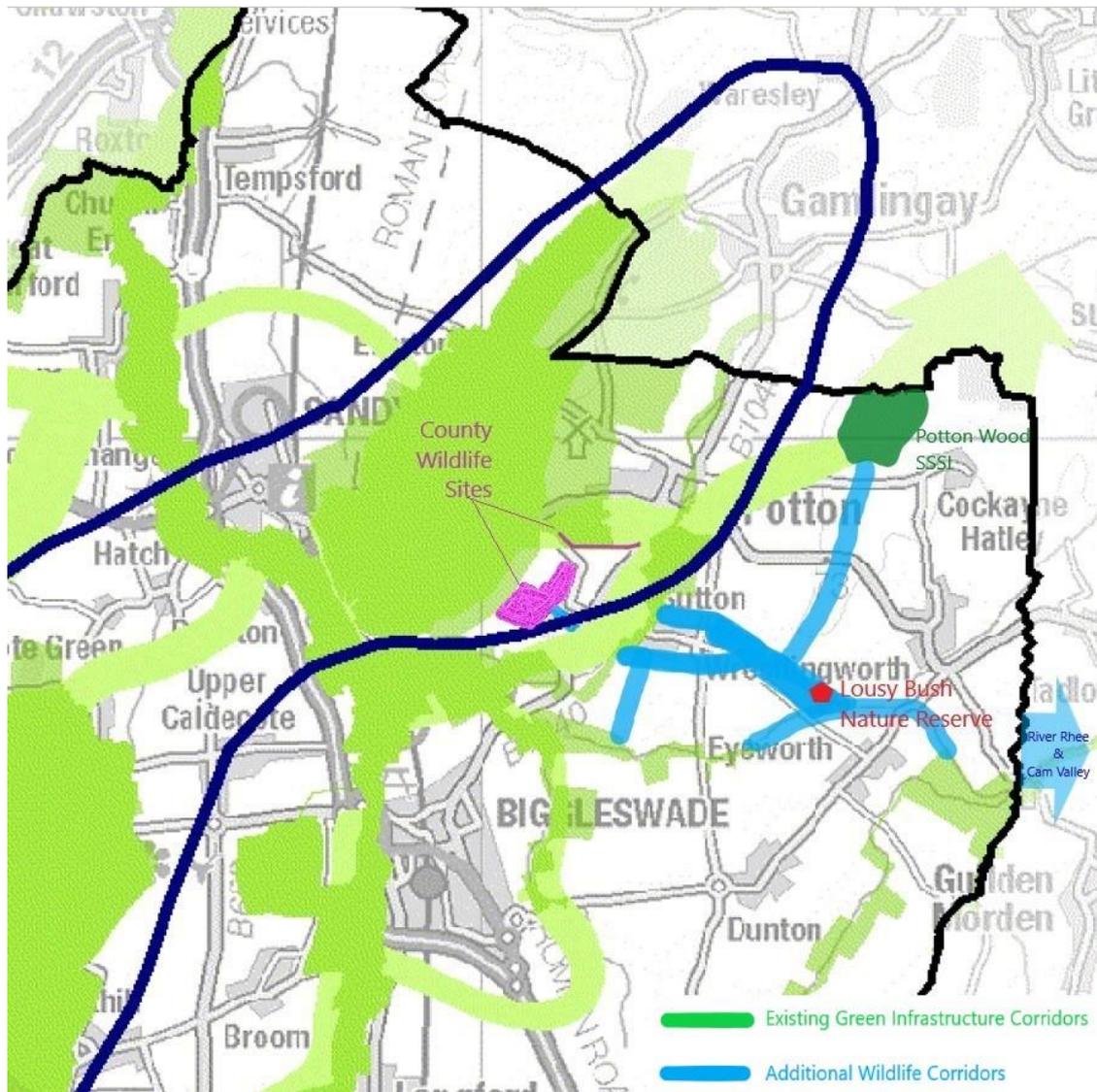
### **3.6. Agricultural Land**

The majority of the land within Sutton parish is Grade 1 and Grade 2 Agricultural Land. Please see Appendix G of the Sutton Neighbourhood Plan. Part 2 of the Background Evidence Report highlights how this high-grade agricultural land is supplemented by abundant sources of ground and surface water thereby providing exceptionally resilient and productive agricultural land.

### **3.7. Wildlife Corridors and Habitats**

Evidence from Part 2 of the Background Evidence Report highlights the wide variety of nature in Sutton, and, in particular the evidence from the wildlife/fauna survey, as well as older reports from residents, visitors and experts shown that Sutton has a wide array of wildlife, including several species of protected, rare or endangered insects, birds and mammals, several of which are covered by sections 40 and 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, as well as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. There is evidence of these species, including toads, using corridors to the rear of gardens on High Street, birdlife and mammals using the tree cover of The Belt and the trees on the south of Church Road, as well as the golf courses (including Sutton Park), ditches and hedgerows.

Part 2 of the Background Evidence Report also highlights how Sutton sits between a number of important strategic and local wildlife networks and corridors, and also highlights the gap between district levels plans, for instance between the Greensands Ridge and River Cam. Evidence from the wildlife records in Part 2 shows a great number and wide variety of wildlife movements in Sutton and suggests that key hedgerows, ditches and other features which are used extensively by wildlife do, in practice, form wildlife corridors which join the networks shown in the district level plans. These corridors could benefit from being enhanced by further planting of native species to close gaps in existing and former hedgerows and with the provision of Important Green Gaps along the edge of the settlement to ensure that wildlife can continue to move and migrate freely.



*Green Infrastructure Corridors with additional wildlife corridors shown in teal  
[underlying map: Figure 4: Connectivity of biodiversity networks across Central Bedfordshire – ‘A Nature Conservation Strategy for Central Bedfordshire – January 2015 – Central Bedfordshire Council’]*

### 3.8. Strategic and Local Development Pressure

Sutton sits within the broad Oxford to Cambridge Arc and is within easy reach by car of the A1 and to the mainline railway stations in Sandy and Biggleswade, which offer fast services to central London. There is therefore a great deal of pressure to develop more and more land in the area, despite infrastructure such as transport, schools and healthcare being at, or beyond, capacity.

The nearby towns of Sandy, Potton and Biggleswade all adjoin Sutton parish, to the west, north and south respectively. All have expanded considerably over the past decade or so, with housing developments getting ever closer to Sutton. In particular Biggleswade has been expanding to the east (towards Sutton) for several years and in 2019 outline permission was granted (CB/18/02458/OUT) for a further 1,500 homes east of Biggleswade which will abut to the Sutton parish southern boundary. To the north, Potton is expanding, with development now underway (CB/16/03943/OUT) which abuts the northern boundary of Sutton parish.

In 2015, Central Bedfordshire Council embarked upon producing a new local plan for the area. This identified considerable pressure for development in the A1 corridor with Central Bedfordshire, within which area Sutton falls. As part of this planning process, Central Bedfordshire Council identified that the land between Sutton, Biggleswade and Dunton could accommodate up to four new 'linked-villages', with up to 6,600 new homes [CBC Draft Local Plan July 2017], this was subsequently reduced to 6,500 (1,500 in policy SA4 and 5,000 as an area of land identified for future development in paragraph 6.3.7 (and Appendix 7) [CBC Pre-Submission Local Plan, January 2018]. Whilst through the examination phase of the CBC local plan process, the latter of these areas (paragraph 6.3.7 and Appendix 7) has now been removed from the emerging Local Plan, CBC has clearly indicated its intention to consider these areas as part of a partial review of its Local Plan which it commits to do within 6 months of the adoption of its new plan [CBC Local Plan Examination, document EXAM 12].

The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) report 'Partnering for Prosperity: a new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc' was published on 17 November 2017. This identified the Oxford-Cambridge Arc as a strategic location for growth, including housing growth. The NIC define the Arc as stretching 130 miles from Cambridgeshire, via Bedford and the south east midlands, to Oxfordshire. It forms a broad arc around the north and west of London's green belt, encompassing Northampton, Daventry and Wellingborough to the north, and Luton and Aylesbury to the south. This area includes Central Bedfordshire, and Sutton which sits within the 'Food Tech' area of major business clusters [p21 of the NIC report]. The report also shows 60,000 new homes are already planned for Bedfordshire, with 170,000 additional homes required in Bedfordshire to meet corridor level housing need, and a further 70,000 additional homes to reflect pressures from land constrained markets. A total of 300,000 new homes planned and required for Bedfordshire between 2016 and 2050 [p28 of the NIC report].

### **3.9. Conclusion**

These unique combination of circumstances show that there is overwhelming pressure for development in the area, both at a strategic and a local level, and that policies are required to maintain wildlife corridors, maintain the rural and tranquil nature of the Sutton village, maintain the historic character and setting of Sutton village, and to prevent coalescence between Sutton and the expanding surrounding towns and potential new settlements.

### **3.10. Methodology**

The sites that are included within this study reflect areas where it is most necessary to provide strategic gaps to preserve the rural nature and historic setting of Sutton village, these are also important to retain the separation of towns and villages so that their individual identities are maintained, that important biodiversity assets and wildlife corridors can be maintained and enhanced, and that the tranquillity and dark skies enjoyed by both wildlife and residents can be preserved.

Important Green Gaps will also prevent the reductions and narrowing of undeveloped breaks that are seen and experienced when travelling between settlements.

Once areas have been identified as potential for Important Green Gaps, they were then drawn using GIS software utilising desktop studies and local knowledge. Where possible the Important Green Gaps have been drawn to reflect where the potential for damage to the rural nature and historic setting of Sutton village, along with potential coalescence of settlements, and the loss of the countryside character, rural atmosphere, tranquillity and wildlife corridors, is most likely to occur.

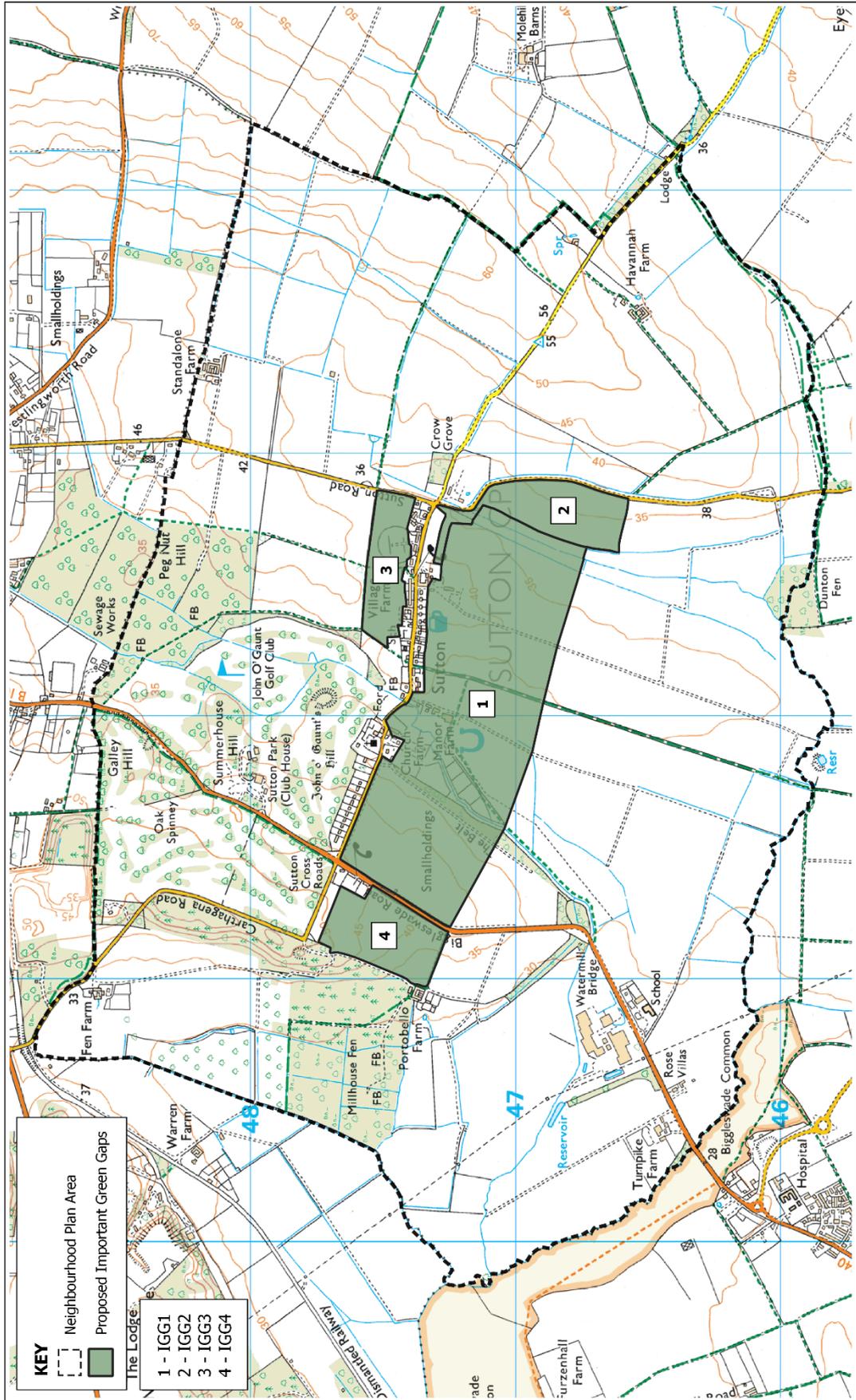
To achieve this, the boundaries of these allocated sites reflect existing defensible boundaries where appropriate. This can include: field boundaries, hedgerows, roads, settlement envelope boundaries, parish boundaries and water courses, or other defined features.

Where a defensible boundary cannot be located in an appropriate area then an assumption is made on where the boundary would be most appropriate in protecting the settlement and wildlife corridor from coalescence.

In some cases, there may also be existing small-scale development in the countryside such as utility sites, farms buildings, etc. and these have not been included within the Important Green Gap.

Areas that already have planning permission have also not been included within an Important Green Gap.

Following feedback at the Regulation 14 consultation stage, the boundaries of some of these Important Green Gaps were further refined (to better align with the physical features shown within the pink lines on diagram 3.1 below).



**KEY**

- Neighbourhood Plan Area
- Proposed Important Green Gaps

1 - IGG1  
 2 - IGG2  
 3 - IGG3  
 4 - IGG4

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<b>SUTTON</b> <b>Neighbourhood Plan</b> <b>Proposed Important Green Gaps</b>	<b>1:13000</b> <b>POLICY RC4</b>

*Proposed Important Green Gaps*

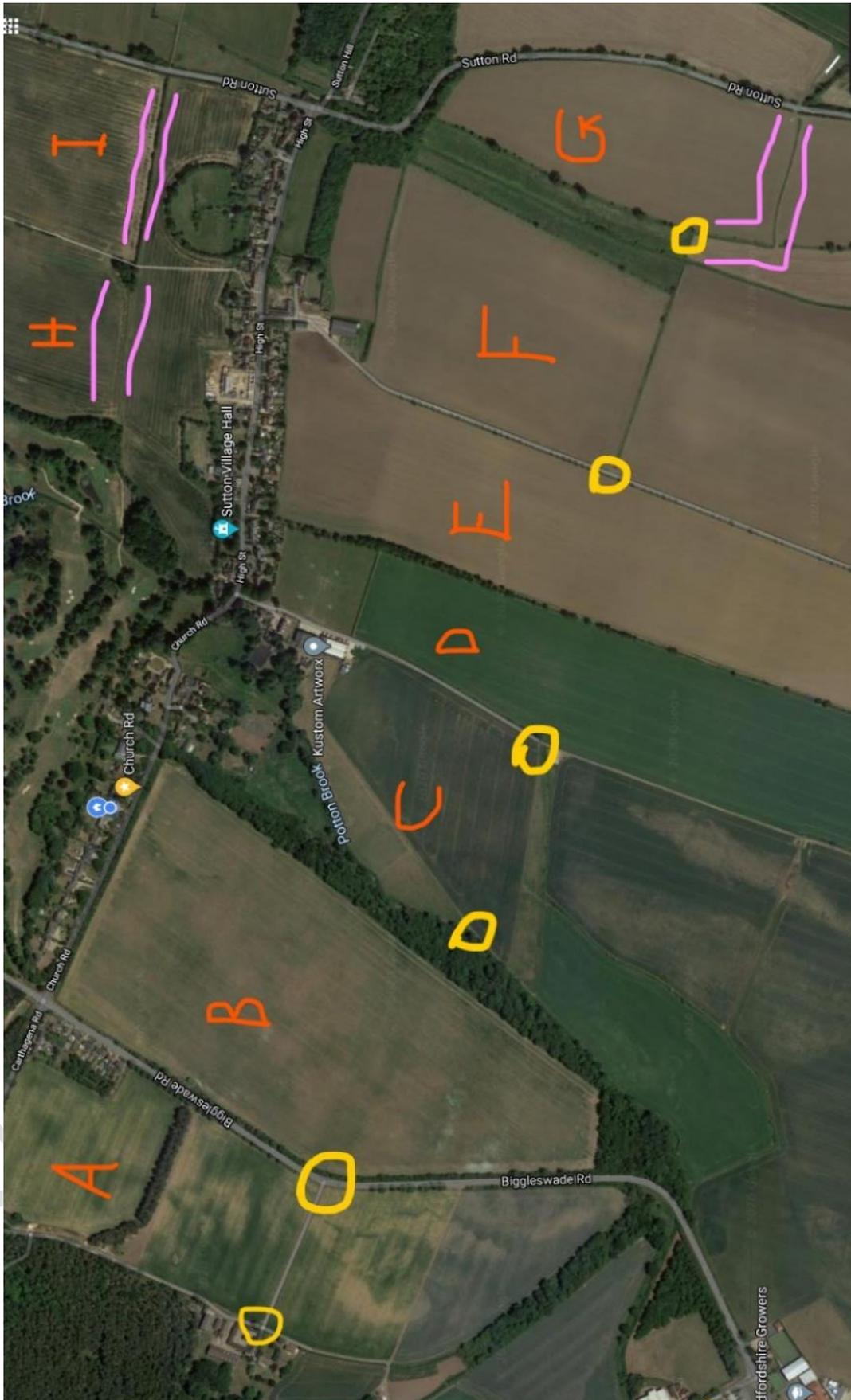


Diagram 3.1 – Important Green Gap Boundary Identification

The boundaries of the Important Green Gaps are defined as follows, using the references in Diagram 3.1:

### **Important Green Gap 1 (IGG1)**

- the northern boundary of IGG1 runs along the northern edge of the fields 'B', 'C', 'D', 'E' and 'F', south of Sutton village and, for field 'F' along the southern boundary of Sutton Millennium Wood.
- The eastern boundary of IGG1 follows the ditch at the west of field 'G';
- The southern boundary of IGG1 runs as follows (all points circled in yellow on Diagram 3.1):
  - from a point at the western edge of field 'B' opposite where the track to Portabello Farm (also bridleway BW9) enters Biggleswade Road, across field 'B' and The Belt woodland to a point where Potton Brook meets footpath FP4, to a point where the ditch at the south-east corner of field 'C' meets the farm track at the rear of Manor Farm, to a point where the ditch at the south-east corner of field 'C' meets Lantern Lane (BW3), to a point where the ditch at the south-west corner of field 'F' meets the farm track, to a point the ditch which runs along the western boundary of field 'G' meets the ditch running along the south of Field 'F';
- The western boundary of IGG1 runs along the boundary of the field 'B'.

### **Important Green Gap 2 (IGG2)**

- the northern boundary of IGG2 runs along the northern boundary of Sutton Millennium Wood and then along the boundary of field 'F' at Sutton Road;
- the eastern boundary of IGG2 runs along the boundary of field 'F' and Sutton Road;
- the southern and western boundary of IGG2 runs along the southern boundary of Sutton Millennium Wood (adjoining IGG1) and then follows the ditch at the western edge of field 'F'

### **Important Green Gap 3 (IGG3)**

- the northern boundary of IGG3 follows the line of public footpath FP11 in the south of field 'H' extending as far east as public footpath FP2, then the line of the hedge at the south of field 'I';
- the eastern boundary of IGG3 follows the boundary of field 'I' and Sutton Road, excluding the gardens of the two properties on Sutton Road (Grassmere and Sievewright House);
- the southern boundary of IGG3 follows the southern boundary of the fields south of 'H' and 'I' up to the northern boundaries of the gardens of the properties on High Street, but taking in 'Bear Garden' (the area of, and enclosed by, the circular hedge);

- the western boundary of IGG3 follows public footpath FP1.

#### **Important Green Gap 4 (IGG4)**

- the northern boundary of IGG4 follows a line parallel to Carthage Road at a depth into field 'A' back from the road which is the same depth as the existing gardens of the existing dwellings on Carthage Road;
- the eastern boundary of IGG4 follows the eastern boundary of field 'A';
- the southern boundary of IGG4 follows the track farm leading to Portabello Farm (also public bridleway BW9);
- the western boundary of IGG4 follows the western boundary of field 'A';

#### **3.11. Important Green Gap 1 (IGG1)**

This is formed of an area to the south of High Street and Church Road in Sutton. This Important Green Gap aligns with the originally proposed CBC Countryside Gap CG2 in the Pre-Submission version of the CBC Local Plan, dated January 2018:

The main reasons for this Important Green Gap are:

- to preserve and enhance the historic nature and rural setting of Sutton village;
- to preserve and enhance an important east-west wildlife corridor, as outlined above and in Part 2 of the Background Evidence Report;
- the pressure of development in the area as outlined above;
- the continued expansion of Biggleswade eastwards as outlined above, and the potential of further expansion towards Sutton village;
- that the agents for the owner of the land immediately to the south of Sutton village have clearly indicated their intention to develop on the land, and published a masterplan for development on the land immediately to the south of Sutton village, this illustrative masterplan was included in the planning permission CB/18/02458/OUT which was granted in 2019. Document reference: 'Design + Access Statement – Land East of Biggleswade', dated November 2018, page 36. A similar document was also published in June 2018, which contained the same, or very similar, masterplan, also on page 36. *The documents/masterplans have not been included here for copyright reasons;*
- that there are important open countryside views to the south of Sutton village, and, in particular the views as outlined in the Sutton Neighbourhood Plan document (as shown at Appendix J of the Sutton Neighbourhood Plan) and in the Green Infrastructure Plan.

### 3.12. Important Green Gap 2 (IGG2)

This is formed of an area immediately south and south-east of the area at Clay End, High Street, Sutton which has been identified for development in the emerging CBC Local Plan (area identified as HAS48), including the Sutton Millennium Wood and extending to the east of IGG1 to fill the gap between IGG1 and Sutton Road.

The main reasons for this Important Green Gap are:

- to preserve and enhance an important east-west wildlife corridor, as outlined above and in Part 2 of the Background Evidence Report;
- the pressure of development in the area as outlined above;
- the continued expansion of Biggleswade eastwards as outlined above, and the potential of further expansion towards Sutton village;
- that the agents for the owner of the land published a masterplan for development on the land immediately to the south of Sutton village, this illustrative masterplan was included in the planning permission CB/18/02458/OUT which was granted in 2019. Document reference: 'Design + Access Statement – Land East of Biggleswade', dated November 2018, page 36. A similar document was also published in June 2018, which contained the same, or very similar, masterplan, also on page 36. The documents/masterplans have not been included here for copyright reasons;
- that the agents for the land known as 'Clay End Nurseries' at Clay End Crossroads, off Sutton Hill (also formerly known as Savins Nursery) have indicated their intention to develop that land, and published a development masterplan to accommodate 75 houses and 6 flats on that land. The documents can be found here:  
<https://centralbedfordshire.oc2.uk/readdoc/20/searchrepresentations/4516> ;
- to provide a buffer at the edge of the new edge of Sutton village, to south of the new development identified in the emerging CBC Local Plan (area identified as HAS48), to prevent the coalescence of the linear Sutton village with other potential developments in the area.

### 3.13. Important Green Gap 3 (IGG3)

This is formed of an area immediately north of the High Street, east of public footpath FP1 and west of Sutton Road.

The main reasons for this Important Green Gap are:

- to preserve and enhance the historic nature and rural setting of Sutton village;
- to preserve and enhance an important east-west wildlife corridor, as outlined above and in Part 2 of the Background Evidence Report, in particular, linking this corridor to Sutton Park and Pegnut Wood;
- the pressure of development in the area as outlined above;

- the recent tendency for planning permission to be granted for dwellings behind the current line of development in High Street and encroaching on to the open fields and Grade 1 agricultural land, including application numbers: CB/17/02365/REG3 and CB/17/02625/LB;
- that there are important open countryside views to the north of Sutton village, towards Pegnut Wood and, in particular the Views of Particular Importance as outlined in the Sutton Neighbourhood Plan document and the Policies Map.

#### **3.14. Important Green Gap 4 (IGG4)**

This is formed of an area behind Sutton Crossroads, west of the Biggleswade Road and south of Carthagen Road, adjoining the Sutton Fen and Woods County Wildlife Site (CWS).

The main reasons for this Important Green Gap are:

- to preserve and enhance an important east-west wildlife corridor, as outlined above and in Part 2 of the Background Evidence Report, in particular, linking Sutton Fen and Woods County Wildlife Site to this corridor (there is only limited access east-west across the golf courses and Sutton Park due to the low permeability of the boundary of Sutton Park against the Biggleswade Road);
- the pressure of development in the area as outlined above.

## 4. Acknowledgements and Copyright Information

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