

Cliddesden Neighbourhood Plan

Local Gap Background Paper

August 2023



Fig 1: Aerial view of the proposed Local Gap area showing the distinction between Cliddesden parish to the south and Basingstoke town to the north. ref: Google Maps

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
2. DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL GAP AREA	5
3. THE LOCAL GAP'S INDIVIDUAL FIELDS WITH PHOTOGRAPHS AND DESCRIPTIONS.....	6
4. EVIDENCE from COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS.....	9
5. EVIDENCE from OTHER SOURCES - Supporting Documents.....	11

1. INTRODUCTION

Preventing Coalescence with Basingstoke and Protecting the Setting of Cliddesden village.

Protecting the separate identity of Cliddesden is a key community objective of the Neighbourhood Plan as is protecting and respecting the landscape.

From the Cliddesden Neighbourhood Plan: Vision and Aims statement:

"In 2038 Cliddesden will continue to be secure in its identity as a small and thriving rural settlement physically and distinctly separate from Basingstoke"

and

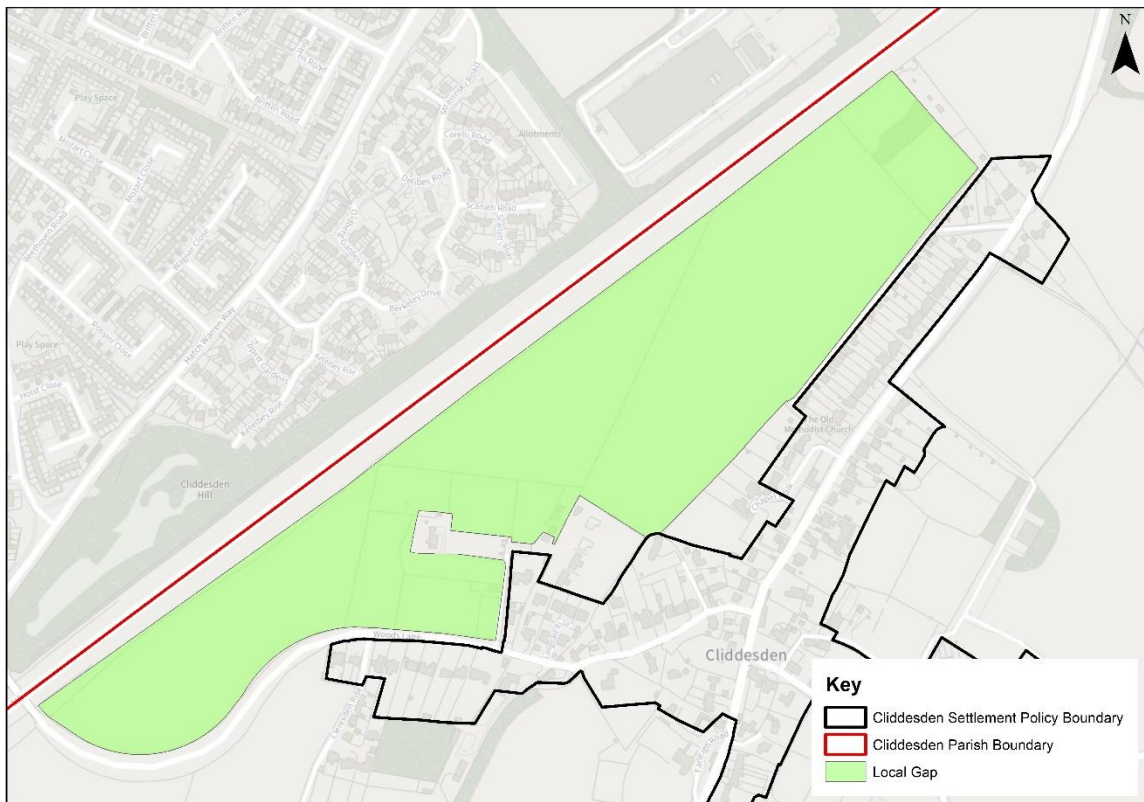
"Maintain the visual and physical separation of Cliddesden from the urban expansion of Basingstoke by Means of a "Local Gap"

Coalescence would result in negative changes to the character and rural atmosphere of the village.

There is currently no protection by designated SINCS, AONBs, SSSIs, LNRs or any statutory designations or other local designations.

Any intensification of development beyond the defined Settlement Boundary which would have the effect of reducing the separate identity of the two distinct settlements and increasing the coalescence between them would be inappropriate. Even limited new development could contribute to a cumulative undermining of the effectiveness of the Built Up Area Boundary which has been designated with the protection of open countryside and the prevention of coalescence in mind.

This Local Gap Policy proposes to identify land as a Local Gap.



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Fig 2: Map of amended Local Gap Area outlining 4 individual adjoining fields (shaded green) to be incorporated in the recommended Local Gap.

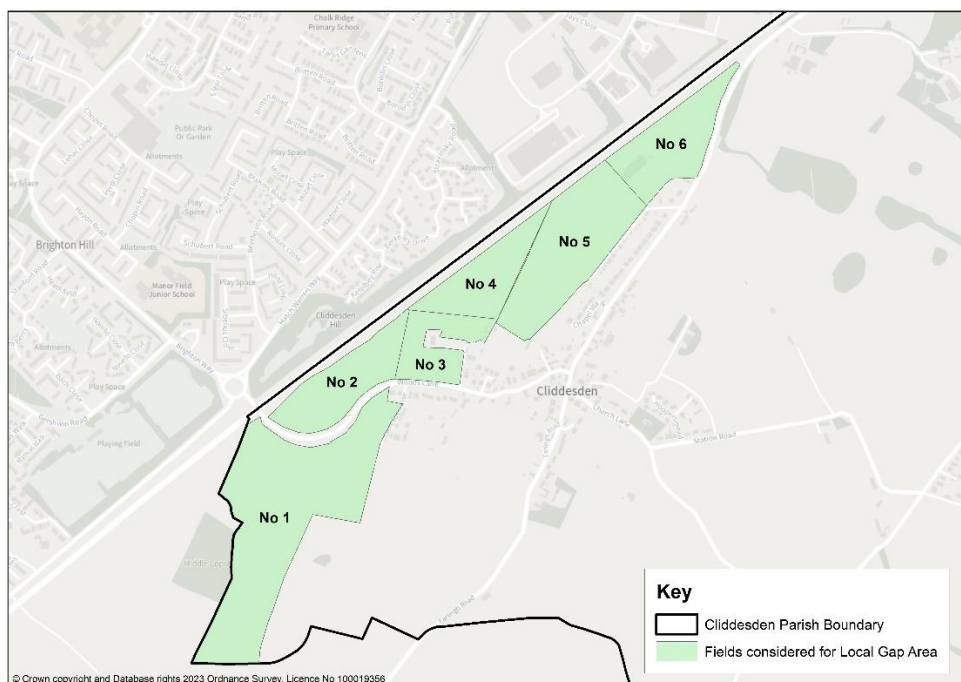


Fig 2a: Map of Original Local Gap Area outlining 6 individual fields (shaded green)

PLEASE NOTE that, following the regulation 14 consultation, Fields 1 and 6 have been removed from the original gap area leaving Fields 2,3,4, and 5.

Given the responses to the representation made at Reg 14, we have reassessed the extent of the local gap and made modification to its extent to ensure it serves its purpose to prevent coalescence. Fields 1 and 6 have been removed leaving 4 fields - numbers 2, 3, 4 and 5 as Fig 2.

The proposed gap is proportionate in size being 44.5 acres - 4% of the total acreage of the parish. It utilises entirely physical and defensible field boundaries and encompasses the smallest area of land compatible with providing adequate protection against coalescence.

It is located immediately adjacent to the M3 motorway on the south side and the larger urban settlement of Basingstoke. See Fig 1. The gap is designed to prevent the expansion of development northwards of the Cliddesden Settlement Policy Boundary so retaining the smaller local identifiable village. It is promoted to avoid the risk of coalescence with Basingstoke. Coalescence would result in massive negative changes to the character and rural atmosphere of the village.

The separate identity of settlements and local communities should be safeguarded by ensuring the retention of undeveloped 'countryside gaps' between them and avoiding decisions which would result in their coalescence. One of the distinctive features of Cliddesden is its setting, and visual connectivity with the surrounding countryside. The landscape forms an intrinsic part of the character and setting of the village and provides informal and formal recreational opportunities for the community.

The general principle of settlement gaps to prevent the coalescence of settlement is broadly supported by national policy.

The purpose of Settlement Gaps is to prevent settlement coalescence and define settlement character. It is considered important to ensure the spacing, openness and rural character of the parish between the village

and the adjoining urban areas are retained and protected. As housing demands increase there is a need for a clear gap between the major urban area of the town and the parish of Cliddesden. The borough council's current housing requirement set out in the adopted Local Plan is 850 homes a year by 2029.

Due to this continuing development pressure, the area between Basingstoke and Cliddesden is at risk of development which would drive coalescence.

Maintaining the gap between Cliddesden and Basingstoke is of paramount importance for the retention of the wildlife habitat corridor allowing wildlife populations to travel through different habitats from:

- Middle Copse (to the south) which links ancient woodland across arable and grass fields bordered by native hedgerows, to:
- Cleresden Meadow (a local undesignated wildlife reserve to the north) See Fig 3.
Note that the fields removed are still supporting wildlife and act as part of the wildlife corridor.

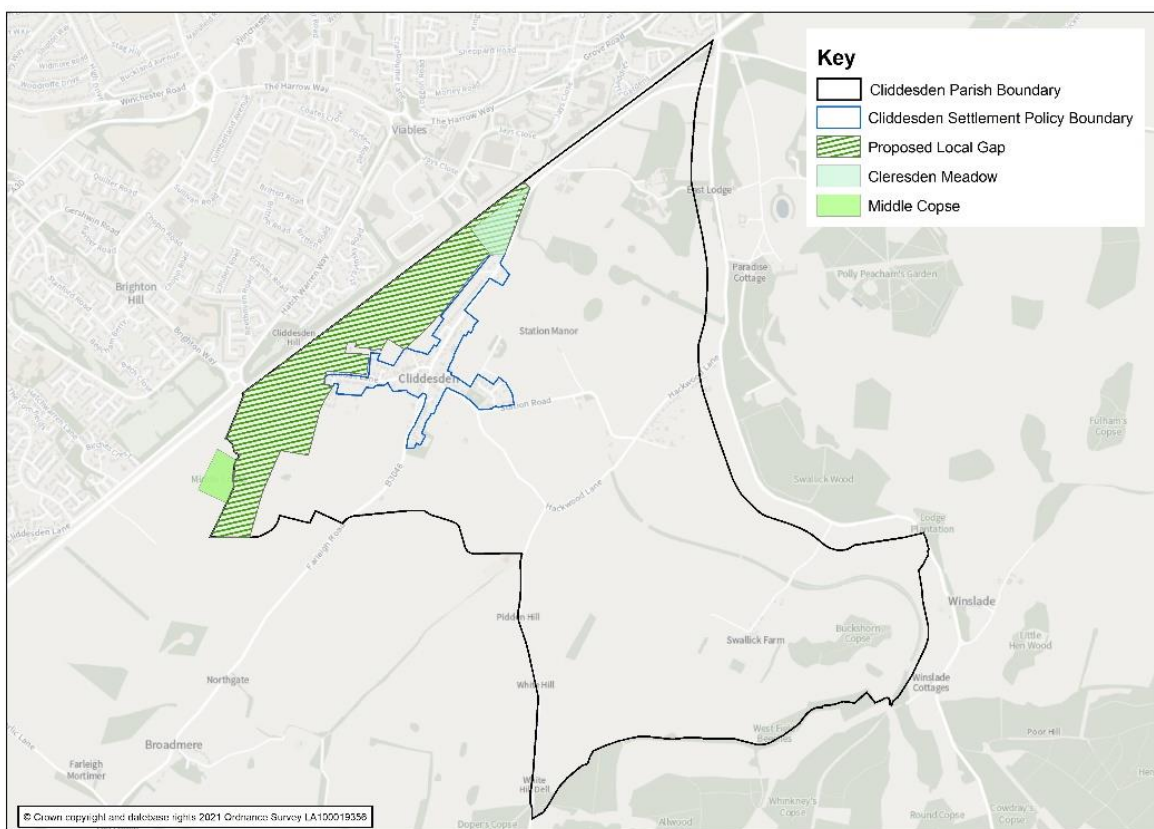


Fig 3: Outlined: the green corridor from Middle Copse northwards to Cleresden Meadow which allows wildlife to thrive and colonise new areas, increasing biodiversity.

2. DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL GAP AREA



Western Boundary - M3 motorway (2018)

The Local Gap, partly in agricultural use, is located immediately adjacent to the M3 motorway on the south side, the larger urban settlement of Basingstoke is located to the north.

The Gap is designed to prevent the larger settlement subsuming the smaller local settlement and avoid the risk of coalescence with the town to prevent Cliddesden becoming another suburb of Basingstoke.

It provides the landscape backdrop to the village. The pastoral landscape of the Hampshire Downs on either side of Woods Lane and beyond is in distinct contrast to the extensive built-up housing estates of Brighton Hill.



The M3 motorway (1972) under construction

Since its opening in 1972 the M3 motorway has traditionally been a barrier between Basingstoke and the open countryside to the south. It has had the effect of limiting development and this has had a positive result in preserving the unique village separate identity.

The area of the proposed local gap is a green corridor that links Middle Copse, a small parcel of ancient woodland, through arable and grass fields to Cleresden Meadow, a wildlife sanctuary, that allows a wealth of protected wild animals and plants to migrate through the landscape. These are characteristics and qualities which should be safeguarded.

No new build development will be allowed within this defined, continuous, green landscaped corridor unless the proposers can demonstrate that it will enhance the landscape and not have an

adverse impact on the Local Gap between Cliddesden and Basingstoke, or on wildlife, or on the buffering of traffic noise.

Proposals for development within the Local Gap will only be acceptable provided it relates to the use of the land for agricultural purposes, would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation of the village from Basingstoke or harm Cliddesden's landscape setting and would not compromise the integrity of the Local Gap, either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development.

3. THE LOCAL GAP'S INDIVIDUAL FIELDS WITH PHOTOGRAPHS AND DESCRIPTIONS

(See Fig 2 above for map of fields.)



REMOVED - Field No 1. Agricultural field sown with crops bordered by the M3 (parish boundary) to the west, the field boundary (parish boundary) by Middle Copse to the south, the reservoir boundary hedge to the east and Woods Lane to the north. (36 acres)

Note: The built area at the bottom of this photograph was a scrapyards that has now been redeveloped as a small enclave of ten houses.



Field No 2. Agricultural triangular field bordered by the M3 to the west, Woods Lane to the south and Hillfield to the east where it meets the M3 boundary. (11.4 acres)



Field No 3a



Field No 3b.

Field Nos 3a and 3b are grass paddocks at Hillfield sandwiched between Fields numbers 2 and 3. (7.5 acres)



Field No 4



Field No 4 tree planting

Field No 4. Agricultural triangular field sown with wildflowers bordered by the M3 to the west, Hillfield to the south and the field boundary to the east. (9.2 acres) 550 British native trees were planted in one corner by Portsmouth Estates and volunteers in March 2022 to create a copse for the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee.



Field No 5. Grass Field (known as the kite field) bordered by the M3 to the west, Hillfield to the south, Southlea Cottages to the east and the disused railway to the north. (22.20 acres)



REMOVED - Field No 6. Cleresden Meadow (a local undesignated nature reserve) is a triangular field bordered by the M3 to the west, the disused railway to the south and Farleigh Road B3046 to the east, including land of the disused railway. (8.25 acres)

TOTAL ACREAGE OF LOCAL GAP: approx. 44.5 acres

TOTAL ACREAGE OF PARISH: approx. 1122 acres

PERCENTAGE of LOCAL GAP approx. 4 %

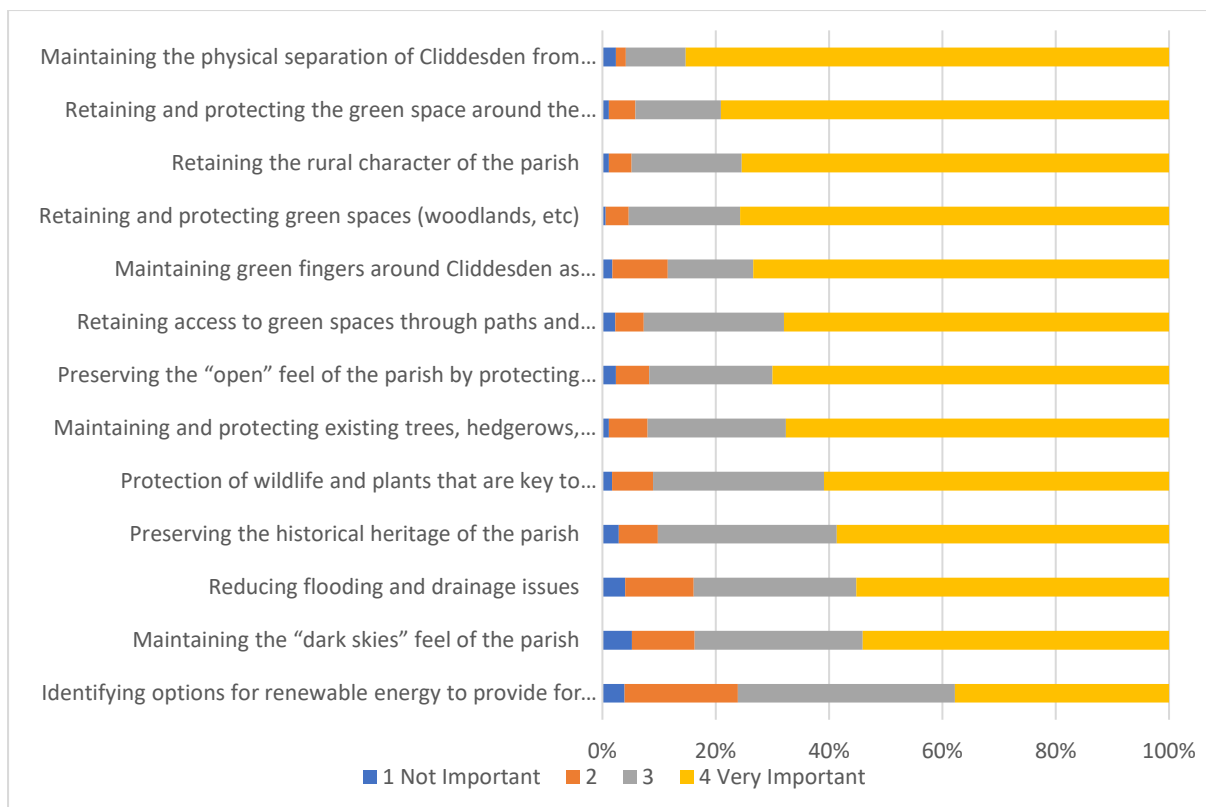
This Local Gap Policy proposes to identify land as a Local Gap (see Fig 2)

The proposed gap is proportionate in size being 4% of the total acreage of the parish.

4. EVIDENCE from COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

The community is shown to be overwhelmingly in favour of this policy. Almost all of the respondents to the first questionnaire felt strongly that maintaining the physical separation from the urban expansion of Basingstoke was very important to prevent coalescence of town and village.

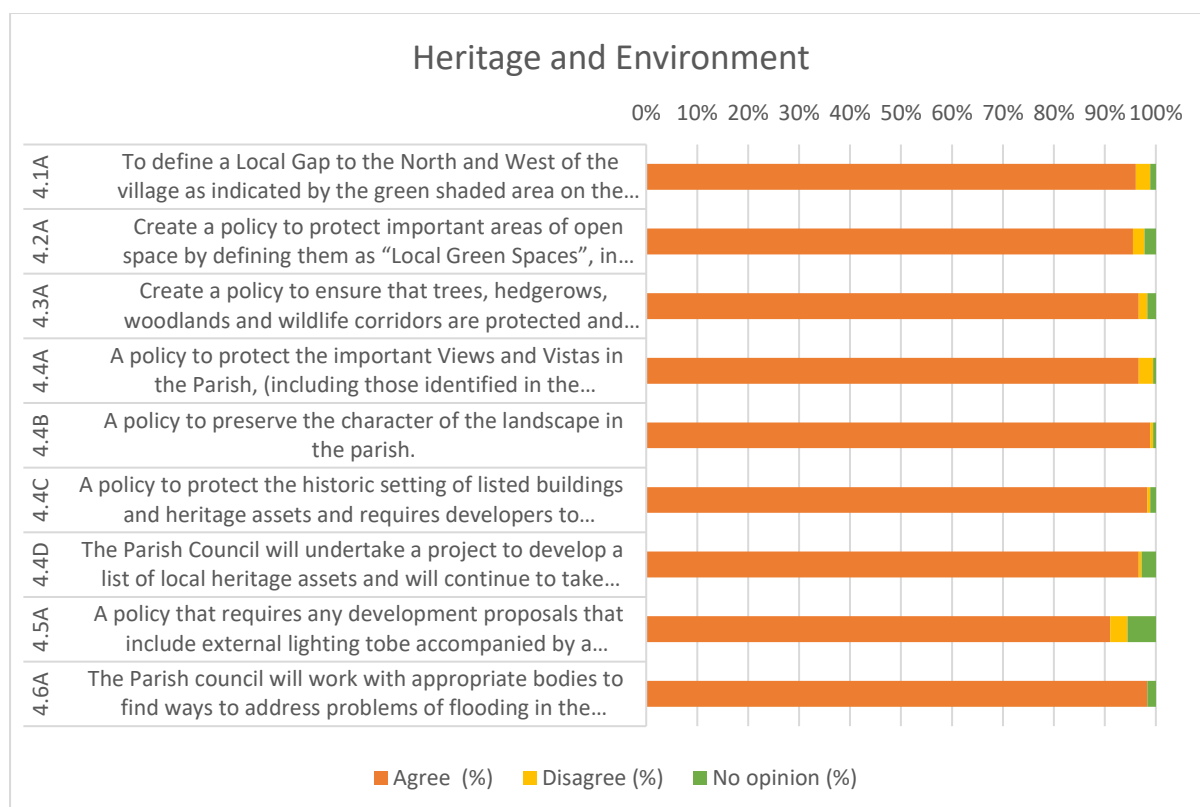
The 2019 Community Questionnaire



Question 2: How important do you feel the following environmental issues are for Cliddesden?

In response to Question 2 which asked how important “maintaining the physical separation of Cliddesden from the urban expansion of Basingstoke”, responses indicated 96% felt this issue was important.

The 2020 Issues and Options Consultation



Question 4: Heritage and Environment

In response to the 2020 Issues and Options consultation, 96.1% of respondents agreed with the option 4.1A to create “a policy to define a Local Gap to the north and west of the village as indicated by the green shaded area on the map. Development would not normally be permitted in the Local Gap except in very special circumstances”

5. EVIDENCE from OTHER SOURCES - Supporting Documents

Cliddesden Village Design Statement p 17

"The route chosen for the M3 and the situation of the village at the northern edge of downland has meant that Cliddesden retains its character as a separate village despite the early 1960s designation of Basingstoke as a London overspill area and its subsequent expansion."

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BASINGSTOKE & DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

BDBC have in the past taken the risk of coalescence with other villages seriously and have recognised that risk and have included gaps in the local plan as a result.

BDBC Local Plan Policy EM1 states:

"development proposals must respect, enhance and not be detrimental to the character or visual amenity of the landscape likely to be affected" and h. "development proposals will not be accepted unless they maintain the integrity of existing settlements and prevent their coalescence"

The Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan includes a number of Strategic Gaps around Basingstoke with the purpose of preventing settlement coalescence and maintaining separate identities (Policy EM2).

BDBC Local Plan Policy EM2 states:

"Strategic Gaps: In order to prevent coalescence of built up areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following gaps will be protected:"

BDBC LOCAL PLAN June 2016

BDBC have in the past taken the risk of coalescence with other villages seriously and have recognised the risk, and have included gaps in the Local Plan as a result.

Policy SS6 – New Housing in the Countryside states:

Page 65 4.70 *"The aim of the Local Plan is to direct development to within the identified Settlement Policy Boundaries and specific site allocations. **Within the countryside it is the intention to maintain the existing open nature of the borough's countryside, prevent the coalescence of settlements and resist the encroachment of development into rural areas.** The countryside is therefore subject to a more restrictive policy."*

Policy EM2 – Strategic Gaps states:

"In order to prevent coalescence of built up areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following gaps will be protected: Development in gaps will only be permitted where: a) It would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation; and b) It would not compromise the integrity of the gap either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development; or c) it is proposed through a Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order, including Community Right to Build Orders."

Page 104 6.15 *“A clear gap between settlements helps maintain a sense of place for both residents of, and visitors to, the settlements on either side of the gaps. When travelling through a strategic gap (by all modes of transport) a traveller should have a clear sense of having left the first settlement, having travelled through an undeveloped area and then entered the second settlement.”*

Policy EM5 - Green Infrastructure

“Development proposals will only be permitted where they do not:

- a) Prejudice the delivery of the council’s Green Infrastructure Strategy (and subsequent updates);*
- b) Result in the fragmentation of the green infrastructure network by severing important corridors/links.”*

Hampshire Integrated Character Assessment 2012 8B: BASINGSTOKE OPEN DOWNS describes:

“Seasonally parched open arable landscape in high summer from A339 - low often fragmented hedge lines. Dramatic far reaching views across the North Hampshire lowlands.”

and *“Low density nucleated pattern of small settlements – Cliddesden”*

National Planning Policy Framework July 2021 (NPPF)

12. Achieving well-designed places

130. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- c) “are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);”*

The Government’s National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) underpins the NPPF and states:

‘One of the core principles in the NPPF is that planning should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. This includes designated landscapes but also the wider countryside.’

The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) in its publication “Landscape Issues In Your Neighbourhood Plan” cites several examples of adopted Neighbourhood Plan policies incorporating the protection of strategic gaps, ie:

Tattenhall Neighbourhood Plan (adopted 2014) Policy 2: Does not unacceptably erode the important, predominantly undeveloped gaps between the three settlements of Tattenhall, Newton-by-Tattenhall and Gatesheath

Cringleford Neighbourhood Plan (adopted 2014) Policy ENV1 - No new built development will be allowed within the zone unless the proposers can demonstrate that it will enhance the landscape and not have an adverse impact on the Strategic Gap between Cringleford and Hethersett

Broughton Astley Neighbourhood Plan (adopted 2014) Policy EH2 – Area of Separation - The area of separation is desirable in order to ensure that the identity and distinctiveness of settlements is retained.

Basingstoke and Deane Strategic Gaps Topic Paper, October 2014

<https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/content/doclib/473.pdf>

The Topic paper sets out the following criteria for the designation of Gaps in the borough:

- a) The land to be included within the gap is open and provides a sense of separation between settlements.

- b) The land to be included within the gap performs an important role in defining the settlement character of the area and separating settlements at risk of coalescence (in particular from land allocations in the Local Plan).
- c) In defining the extent of a gap, no more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements should be included, having regard to maintaining their physical and visual separation.

The Cliddesden Neighbourhood Plan Local Gap, meets the criteria of the Basingstoke and Deane Strategic Gaps Topic Paper, October 2014.

Hart District Council Gaps between Settlements Topic Paper June 2018

The adjacent Borough of Hart has published a Topic paper on the subject of Gaps.:

https://www.hart.gov.uk/sites/default/files/4_The_Council/Policies_and_published_documents/Planning_policy/TOP2%20Gaps%20between%20Settlements.pdf

This document addresses both strategic and local gaps in Hart.

The following section of the evidence document has been inspired by the Hart document.

What are Gaps between settlements?

The term 'Gaps' refers to land between settlements that has been identified as important in helping to define the character of settlements and shaping the settlement pattern in the district. In parts of the district, settlements are close together and gaps prevent their coalescence and help maintain separate settlement identities. Gaps are areas which are predominantly open or undeveloped and, being close to settlements, are often subject to development pressures. Development on the edge of settlements can reduce the physical extent of Gaps and development within them can reduce visual separation between settlements. Both the individual and cumulative effects of existing and proposed developments need to be taken into account as both can have an impact on the physical separation of settlements over time.

Gaps are therefore a landscape function to prevent coalescence of distinct and separate settlements, rather than related to landscape quality or protection of landscape character. Gaps also provide green infrastructure and wildlife benefits close to settlements. Many contain Public Rights of Way which are valued highly by residents and can be heavily used.

Neighbourhood Plans may define the extent of a Gap or may designate further Gaps.

Gaps identify specific, targeted areas of countryside where the issue or threat of settlement coalescence must be taken into account when determining a planning application.

Is a Gaps policy consistent with national policy?

Local Plans must be consistent with national policy. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) does not refer to Gaps and as such is not prescriptive on supporting or opposing gaps in principle. It does however state: "Planning should...take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it;" NPPF paragraph 17 –bullet point 5 The NPPF also states: "Crucially, Local Plans should identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance;" NPPF paragraph 157, Bullet point 7

The Cliddesden Local Gap, has been designed to preserve the character of Cliddesden, by ensuring separation between settlements and helping to maintain their distinct character and identity. It is also an example of an area where development is considered to be inappropriate. This is consistent with the NPPF as it helps provide certainty on where development is unacceptable except in defined circumstances. As a restrictive policy designation, The Local Gap is therefore focussed on an area where there is a genuine case for the designation.

A High Court Judgment (HCJ)1in 2014 underlines the legitimacy of Gap policies in local plans, provided such policies are focused and do not act as ‘blanket ban policies’ outside settlement boundaries. The HCJ states that: “policies designed to protect specific areas or features, such as the gaps between settlements....could sensibly exist regardless of the distribution of housing and other development”.

Since the NPPF was published, several Hampshire authorities have had Gap policies in their local plans found to be sound at examination:

- Winchester District Local Plan Part 1 –Joint Core Strategy (adopted March 2013) -Policy CP18: Settlement Gaps
- East Hampshire District Council and South Downs National Park Joint Core Strategy (Adopted June 2014) -Policy CP23 Gaps between settlements
- Test Valley Local Plan (adopted January 2016) -Policy E3: Local Gaps
- Basingstoke & Deane Local Plan (adopted May 2016) –Policy EM2: Strategic Gaps¹⁶. It is clear that under the NPPF gaps are still seen as an important and legitimate tool in managing growth.

Is a Gaps policy in a Neighbourhood plan consistent with national policy?

The identification of gaps through a neighbourhood plan is considered to be legitimate and consistent with national policy for the following reasons.

National planning policy guidance on neighbourhood planning makes it clear that a neighbourhood plan forms part of the development plan to sit alongside the Local Plan prepared by the local planning authority (reference: Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 41-003-20140306). As such decisions on planning applications will be made using both the Local Plan and the neighbourhood plan in addition to any other material considerations.

Paragraph 16 of the NPPF identifies that neighbourhood plans should “support the strategic development needs set out in the Local Plan” and “support local development, shaping and directing development in their area that is outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan”.

Accordingly, 156 of the NPPF identifies the strategic priorities for an area that should be set out in a Local Plan. In doing so gaps are not identified as a strategic priority. Therefore, identification of gaps in a neighbourhood plan would not be contrary to national policy.

Cliddesden Local Gap

This century has also seen the growth and expansion of the Borough of Basingstoke & Deane and the area continues to experience significant development pressures. Its good communication links with London and the rest of southern England have led to significant pressures for development and new housing. Growth has been seen in and around Basingstoke and in Cliddesden itself.

Coalescence with Basingstoke and the smaller hamlets in the parish resulting in a continuous urban sprawl is a real threat and separation needs to be maintained through the maintenance of a local gap. Historically, the M3 motorway and the area around the M3 has acted as an important feature that has maintained the separation of settlements as is mentioned in the Cliddesden Village Design

Statement in 2004. However continued development pressure means that it is important to further safeguard the separation and prevent coalescence.

The Local Gap is consistent with the Local Plan and with the NPPF.