

**Mid Bedfordshire Local Development
Framework**

**Site Allocations: Clifton
Issues & Options Consultation**

**RESPONSE FROM CLIFTON
PARISH COUNCIL**

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1. The Mid Beds Consultation Process.

Whilst no doubt a lot of thought went into the development of the consultation process Clifton Parish Council feels that the impact was diluted by several serious weaknesses.

1. The leaflet distributed to all households was poorly designed, lacking clarity and impact to the point that many people opened the envelope, glanced at it, viewed it as junk mail, and dumped it.
2. The process was very heavily biased towards electronic viewing of the proposals and electronic response. This disadvantaged those without easy access to the internet, especially the elderly, the less well off and households where there is internet access but where one or other partner is not a user. Partially sighted people did not like the process. A major concern is that the internet layout gave a blinkered view of a particular village and ascertaining proposals for adjoining villages, in our case for Shefford and Henlow, was time consuming and could easily be overlooked.
3. There were serious inconsistencies and inaccuracies with regard to the information given site by site on the availability of space in the various tiers of schools serving the village.
4. A key concern of everyone is the level of existing traffic and congestion, and yet whilst the site information gave walking time to various facilities to the nearest 10th of a second there was no information on traffic loading on the adjoining roads.
5. The exhibition that served Clifton was on a working day and for fairly curtailed hours of opening bearing in mind that it served three villages.
6. Providing response by hard copy was made unnecessarily difficult because no thought had been given to the design of the response form. To comment on all the sites in Clifton required completion of 13 forms when it would have been possible for all the information to be provided on one well designed form.
7. The deficiencies in the consultation process (from our point of view) were not made clear at the briefing session for Town & Parish Councillors, and emerged sometime later. Clifton Parish Council was then placed under an unnecessary strain as, in order to assist yourselves in obtaining as much public interaction as possible, it aimed to arrange a village event at short notice, and before the Easter holiday.

2. The Clifton Parish Council Consultation Exercise

Whilst Clifton was obviously served by the consultation arrangements put in place by Mid Beds DC, the Parish Council considered that village residents would welcome the opportunity to examine the proposals and make their comments at a venue within the village and at a more convenient time.

Accordingly, a village exhibition was arranged for Saturday 15th March, at the Clifton Community Centre, running from 10am until 4pm and manned by Parish Council Members.

A letter giving full details of the Mid Beds arrangements and an invitation to visit the Clifton exhibition was distributed to virtually every house in the village.

Approximately 160 residents visited the exhibition and many made their comments on the hard copy response forms that were available. This was despite the fact that to comment on all the Clifton sites 13 forms had to be completed. One better designed A3 form could have sufficed and would have generated even more feedback!

The Parish Council received many compliments for the initiative that it had taken, and people welcomed the chance to discuss matters with other villagers and Members whose sole interest is the future of the village community.

3. A Planning Context for Clifton

Any exercise to consider possible further developments in the village cannot start from scratch. It has to take into account the history of the village, the impact that new developments have had over the past 40 years, its existing infrastructure, and to use this information to try and develop guide lines for any future development.

The History

Clifton is an ancient village and its basic central shape of two parallel main roads (Shefford Road / Broad Street and Stanford Lane / Stockbridge Road), joined by Church Street, has been unchanged for centuries. Church Street, Grange Street and sections of Pedley Lane, Broad Street and New Road are the heart of the old village and now form the core of the Conservation Area. This was last reviewed in 2004.

The village was an agricultural village with a rural setting with lots of internal space within the village and a clear defined boundary with separation from neighbouring communities.

In the centre of the village there are many Victorian terraced cottages that may have a reasonable sized rear garden but they were not designed to accommodate cars and they therefore are forced to park in the street.

One of the key features is grass verges in most streets and wide and prominent grass verges in Grange Street, Shefford Road, Broad Street, Stockbridge Road and Stanford Lane.

Large scale development started in the 1920s with the construction of council houses in Stockbridge Road and Broad Street. Whilst the houses are urban in design they have ample gardens designed to allow residents a large kitchen garden.

This helped to mitigate their visual impact. Car parking is in garage blocks.

From the late 50s onwards the village received a steady stream of new developments: Early 50s Whiston Crescent and Brickle Place, 1959 Spring Road, early 1960s Hitchin Lane, 1970 Manor Close, Bilberry Road estate and Fairfax Close, 1971 Knolls Way estate, 1972 Lychmead, 1977 Rectory Close, 1985 Clifton House Close and Elms Farm Close, 1985 Burroughs Close, 1986 Sears Close, 2002 Chapel Close, Fairground Way, 2005 Clifton Fields and 2007 Stockbridge Close. Finally, a development at Pedley Farm yard is likely in 2008/09.

The current situation:

In the centre of the village there is an unresolved, and probably unresolvable, problem with congestion resulting from many residents having no option but to park on the road.

Whilst the village benefited greatly from the construction of the bypass the increase in the size of Clifton, the growth of housing just off Clifton Road Shefford and the huge expansion of the Samuel Whitbread Community College have together led to large increases in the volume of traffic going through the village. These changes have been totally unmanaged, such that the current volumes and speed of traffic going through Clifton are having a serious negative impact on the quality of life in the village. Suffice it to say that on average about 60% of the traffic going through the village exceeds the speed limit.

Recent new developments have featured houses built nearly on the pavement, small gardens, narrow roads, inadequate parking provision and only token facilities for children. Each of these factors increases the stress of life and is to be deplored.

Contrary to the opinion and advice of the LEA as set out in the Consultation document, the village lower school is at its capacity and village children are now likely to have to attend a school outside the village. A large increase in housing would make a new lower school essential and even if this could be sited and funded it would damage the character of the village and create a large amount of additional traffic.

The after hours recreational facilities available for young people on the site of the upper school were destroyed by Bedfordshire County Council and have not been replaced.

Health facilities struggle to cope with the expansion of Clifton and the other catchment villages and it is arguable that current and welcome rebuilding plans only rectify a current problem, and may not fully deal with the problems of the future

Funds received via s106 agreements, and intended to help traffic problems in the village, have been largely wasted by officers with little intimate knowledge of the real situation.

The green wide grass verges now represent a key feature of Clifton that differentiates it from most of the nearby villages and it is essential that they do not become degraded due to damage by vehicle parking. Hence any new development should be required to provide adequate parking.

The future:

Looking back it is clear that Clifton has done its fair share in accommodating new development. It now needs a period of stability for the impact of the Stockbridge Road and Pedley Farm developments to be assessed before anything further of any size is contemplated. Also it is essential that an effective programme of traffic calming covering the whole village is established before any steps are taken that would increase the traffic load in the village.

It is also essential that it should be kept as a village with its unique identity. This requires the ruling out of any further expansion of Clifton towards Henlow and Shefford; and any expansion of Henlow and Shefford towards Clifton.

Merging of these settlements would finish for all time their claim to be villages and destroy for ever their social fabric. They would then be little more than names on a map similar to the phoney villages of Milton Keynes or Stevenage.

4. Overall concerns affecting all sites in Clifton

Whilst every proposed site has some individual features that can be listed against it, virtually all the sites impact on the following issues that are main concerns both for Clifton Parish Council and for the residents it represents.

1. The first concern has to be to maintain Clifton as a village, and at all costs to prevent it disappearing into an amorphous blob of high density development that runs, without a break, from Shefford to Henlow. Retaining the various green wedges is therefore of paramount importance.

2. More houses equates to more traffic in a situation where traffic flowing through the village is totally unmanaged. Neither Bedfordshire County Council nor Mid Beds District Council has any up to date traffic flow information for the roads in Clifton. This information is available only in the traffic survey commissioned by Clifton Parish Council from the Police. This survey shows many busy roads and about 60% of all traffic breaking the speed limit. Action has to be taken to reduce, and slow down, traffic before any further development should be considered.

3. More houses means more children, and more pressure on the schools. The information given against the various sites was inconsistent and in some cases incorrect. Clifton and Henlow Lower Schools, and Henlow Middle School, do not have space for more children; and the situation cannot be rectified by developers offering a few thousands of £s as a contribution. Where will additional children go to school? How will they get there? Parents moving into the village need answers to these questions now!

4. The Mid Beds consultation document refers to a couple of sites that are in Clifton but says that that they are really a part of Shefford. Clifton Parish Council objects strongly to this approach. Houses built in the Parish of Clifton will be in Clifton until such time as the Boundary Commission decides otherwise. The bottom tier of the council tax will be based on the Clifton Parish Council precept and this money will be paid to Clifton Parish Council. Past experience indicates that people prefer to live in Clifton rather than being transferred to Shefford. This is likely to be the case in the future especially since the Shefford Town Council precept is many times higher than that of Clifton Parish Council. There is no clarification as to if these sites were used whether the dwelling numbers would be put against Clifton's 15 – 50 quota or Shefford's 50 – 250 quota.

5. The current use of the major sites is listed as "agriculture". In the current situation where people are facing sharply increased food prices due to a shortage of supplies it should not be forgotten the "agriculture" equals food production.

5. Specific Comments on the sites submitted for Clifton

Following careful consideration within the Council and feedback from residents, Clifton Parish Council submits the following comments on the sites submitted for Clifton and wishes them to be given full consideration.

Site Ref: H119 – 33-35 Church Street. (1 – 9 dwellings)

The Council disagrees with the MBDC assertion that smaller scale development could be considered here. The site is within the Village's only Conservation Area, and the property designated for demolition, whilst not being a listed building, contributes to the character and appearance of the Area. The Conservation Area plan requires any new development within the Area *to enhance* the area.

Site Ref: H136 – Land at Stockbridge Road. (20 – 30 dwellings).

The Council disagrees with the assertion that development of this site would present an opportunity to improve the entrance to the Village. Ignoring the current Local Plan designation of this area as an Important Countryside Gap would mean a reduction in the green open space between Clifton and Henlow.

Also the Parish Council's funded traffic volume and speed survey shows heavy daily vehicle use of Stockbridge Road. The County Council has to date been unable to put in place any suitable traffic calming features; and the police, due to heavy work commitments in other areas, have been unable to institute any meaningful speed control. Any further development being served by this road would exacerbate the present situation.

Site Ref: H206 – Harbrook Farm, 32 New Road. (50 dwellings)

The Council disagrees with this high density development proposal.

It also disagrees with the District Council proposal that it would consider smaller scale development on the site.

The extreme narrow access/egress proposals for this site are totally inappropriate; especially on to two roads with traffic usage of between 1593 and 1772vpd – Monday to Friday with over 50% of the numbers speeding (New Road) and between 4922 and 5128vpd – Monday to Friday in Shefford Road.

In addition the 'run off' of surplus water from this area into the Shefford Road remains a problem in inclement weather.

Site Ref: H222 – Land to the East of Hitchin Road, Shefford.

This site is situated within the Parish of Clifton.

The Council disagrees with this particular proposal and with the District Council's assertion that some growth would be expected here as Shefford is being identified in the emerging Core Strategy as a Minor Service Centre.

Site Ref: H223 – Land South of Pedley Lane. (2 dwellings)

Subject to the landscaping of the adjoining field it was felt that this site could be considered for the proposed development of two detached village houses.

Site Ref: H224 – Clifton Farm Yard, Church Street. (9 dwellings)

Subject to confirmation that the existing agricultural buildings are truly redundant and that plans are not in place to replace them elsewhere. The Council agrees that subject to the satisfactory resolving of the drainage problems in this area, the site could be considered for the development of a maximum of nine dwellings which should match in style the neighbouring Clifton Barns development.

Site Ref: H235 – Land off Shefford Road. (50 dwellings)

The Council disagrees with the proposal for development of this land. The access to the site is inadequate, especially on to Shefford Road with vehicle usage of between 4922 and 5128vpd – Monday to Friday; and the heavy pedestrian use by attendees of the Sam Whitbread Community College. Also at a time when the Government and local authorities are stressing the need for more environmental awareness development should not be considered on, or near, a flood plain.

Site Ref: 251 – Land to West of Hitchin Lane and to the East of New Road. (235 dwellings)

The Council disagrees with this proposal as parts of the site have already been refused by the District Council for housing development. Also, parts of the site are within the Conservation Area. In addition it was felt that Hitchin Lane, Fairground Way and New Road are inadequate highways to cope with such development; with the eventual additional traffic usage of Broad Street as one of the possible eventual recipients of most of the traffic was considered as potentially dangerous.

Site Ref: 261 – Land at New Road. (50 dwellings)

The Council disagrees with the proposal. The Council presumed that access would be via Harbrook Lane or New Road. Access via Harbrook Lane considered inadequate and potentially dangerous. Access onto New Road was considered equally inappropriate and potentially dangerous. The highway layout and current parking problems in this part of New Road are not conducive to allowing any development of this land with access/egress to it. Equally the current width restraint of Harbrook Lane provides a totally inadequate access/egress to the site from Shefford Road, a busy through road, bus and pedestrian route to the Sam Whitbread Community College

The council also disagrees with the Council statement that smaller scale development would be considered here.

Site Ref: H298 – Land East of Hitchin Road. (230 – 266 dwellings)

The Council disagrees with this proposal.

The land should remain as a 'green wedge' between the two communities of Clifton and Shefford.

Any development on land adjoining Shefford Road, Clifton would exacerbate the current problems associated with traffic volume, speed and safety of vehicles, passengers and pedestrians.

Site Ref: H302 – Land rear of 196 Shefford Road. (4 dwellings)

The council disagrees with the proposal as no intelligent consideration of development on land can be given without first having an awareness of access proposals. The plan submitted showed no proposed access.

Site Ref: E40 – Wren Park, Hitchin Road. (Business use)

On assumption that there will be no enlargement of site, maintenance of the existing tree screening and that any proposed use would be sympathetic to the adjoining users the Council raised no objection to this proposal.

6. Sites in Shefford and Henlow

Developments in Shefford and Henlow can have an enormous impact on Clifton and especially on the volume of through traffic. Some of the large sites proposed for Henlow have the capacity to destroy Clifton as a village and totally swamp it with traffic. Clifton Parish Council is not in favour of those sites being developed

The effect of an increasing volume of traffic originating in Shefford and passing through Clifton has been particularly evident as more residents from "The Musicians Estate" access the Bypass via Clifton Road Shefford / Shefford Road Clifton / Broad Street / Clifton Road Henlow.

Clifton Parish Council predicted correctly that the expansion of Samuel Whitbread School, which is in Clifton, would lead to a large increase in traffic within the village. The Council requested that a new access should be formed leading from Hitchin Road Shefford. Shefford Town Council supported this proposal. This request was ignored in favour of a totally worthless panacea "The Green Travel Plan".

The Parish Council requests that the possibility of a new access be reconsidered. It is totally illogical that the County Council spent a huge amount of money building the Bypass to take traffic out of the villages but is now one of the main agents causing increased traffic to return to the village.

7. Conclusions

Clifton has only a limited and very small capacity to absorb further development. The Pedley Farm site has not been fully considered by the District Council pending the results of further surveys and therefore should count towards Clifton's "quota", and in this consultation the Parish Council has indicated conditional support for two further sites.

It is essential that before any large scale development is approved in the adjoining area that a multi village traffic assessment and remediation plan based upon up to date traffic flows is commissioned and the results implemented.

Similarly a comprehensive multi village assessment of educational requirements should be commissioned and the results implemented.

Finally Clifton Parish Council reiterates, on behalf of itself and the residents that it represents, that **Clifton must be protected and sustained as a village and not destroyed.**