

Wilstead - a Rural Village

1. It is very important that Wilstead remains a rural village. Existing residents chose to live in a village – not in a small town. Any major increase in the number of houses over a relatively short period of time would completely alter the character of the community. Following separation from the Wixams area, Wilstead was left as a much smaller rural community which could not accommodate any significant increase in size and remain true to its rural heritage, which has existed for more than 1000 years.
2. Any substantial development would have a major effect on the visual aspect of the village – it would remove ready access to open countryside from a large proportion of the village. It would most likely consist of estate-type development which would be out of character with the rural, multi-age and mixed style of the current range of dwellings.
3. There needs to be a distinct gap between the village and Wixams (to prevent “coalescence”) and between the communities of Wilstead, Elstow and Cotton End so that their historically separate identities are preserved. The steady growth of Wixams, Shortstown and Cotton End already threatens to engulf Wilstead into the greater Bedford area. The village is very proud of its separate identity and residents will strongly object to loss of that separation. The areas between the communities should be a designated “Green Spaces”.
4. Sites put forward following the “Call for Sites” are mostly at the edge or between the “Ends” of the village. For example, Duck End has had a separate identity in the village since the time of the Domesday Book and removal of the Strategic Gap between this community and the main village would result in a loss of an important part of village heritage. Location of new development at the edges of the village is also to be discouraged as it results in the formation of separate communities and little increase in business for village shops and facilities. It also causes unnecessary car journeys.
5. Both Wixams and Wilstead are stated as Key Service Centres. Nowhere else in the Borough are there 2 Key Service Centres located next to one another. Should Wixams be allocated a large number of houses within the Plan, as shown in all the sub-options of Option 2, any substantial number of new houses in Wilstead would take away the ability to sell the additional houses in Wixams.
6. Wilstead should not be designated as a Key Service Centre anyway. The scoring methodology originally used to determine this needs to be updated. The village no longer has a weekly doctor’s surgery and too much emphasis was put on village amenities which are **not** those of a large community. The one Post Office and General Stores represented 20% of the overall score and the Chemist no longer has a Convenience store within. Similarly the village is quoted as being

on a bus route to and from Bedford. A large proportion of the village is located more than 800 metres from the nearest bus stop and there is no longer any service down Cotton End Road (except once on one day a week). Other facilities in the village have been provided by the villagers themselves after substantial fund-raising and community involvement (Playing Field, Bowls Club, Village Hall and Community Centre). These are well used already and were provided for the local community, not as reasons to attract new residents who have contributed nothing to their establishment. In addition, the local Primary School is full to capacity and cannot take further pupils. It was hoped that Secondary education would be available at Wixams Academy but this is already at capacity without additional houses being built in either Wixams or Wilstead.

7. There are other places in the Borough where development would result in much less effect on local communities. Previously new settlements were proposed North of Bedford. These are now being ruled out owing to a predicted problem with increased traffic into Bedford from the North. The favoured route for East West Rail is to approach Bedford from the North. Settlements on this side of the town should be well suited to travel by rail, which would reduce the need for road traffic and the need for road travel into the town.
8. There are villages in the Borough that are not being proposed for any development. A 10% increase in housing for each village would be much more equitable and it is possible that such a number would be included in the Neighbourhood Plan for each of those villages anyway. The Borough Council could also allocate more houses to larger villages such as Great Barford and Harrold who have expected capacity in terms of school places and so could take more development. They are also villages which have greater facilities such as GP surgery and more local shops.
9. Some of the development put forward after the Call for Sites would be in the direct flow of water draining from the Southern escarpment and some would be partly on a flood plain – existing ditches cannot cope already.
10. The increase in traffic from any development would result in even more congestion outside the school and in Whitworth Way - areas which are already dangerous at school opening and closing times. It would also put undue strain on other existing narrow village roads.