

# **LITTLE MILTON NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN APPENDIX B**

## **GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPEN SPACES**

**Feb 2018**

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## INTRODUCTION

The preservation of Green Infrastructure and Open Spaces is important to protect biodiversity and connected habitats.

Green infrastructure is a network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities.

Open spaces are an essential part of any balanced community. National guidance<sup>1</sup> states:

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements
- the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location
- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

In the 2016 Village Survey<sup>2</sup>:

- 85% of respondents considered it important to maintain existing green spaces as they are
- 54% thought there should be a full Green Space Plan to manage future needs of existing green spaces and promote more green spaces in any new developments

Assessment of the open spaces in the parish of Little Milton has been carried out following the methodology recommended by My Community Locality<sup>3</sup>. The process has also been informed by the work done on the South & Vale Infrastructure Strategy<sup>4</sup>.

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1 NPPF 74

2 Little Milton Village Survey Nov 2016

3 My Community Locality – Neighbourhood Planning Local Green Spaces Feb 2017

## **GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE<sup>5</sup>**

Green Infrastructure includes established green spaces and new sites and should thread through and surround the built environment and connect the urban area to its wider rural hinterland. Consequently it needs to be delivered at all spatial scales from sub-regional to local neighbourhood levels, accommodating both accessible natural green spaces within local communities and often much larger sites in the urban fringe and wider countryside.

Within a rural village such as Little Milton, the Green Infrastructure is all around us. However threads and connections running through the villages such as streams, footpaths, gardens, trees, hedges, dry stone walls, etc are equally important. Wildlife can use these threads and connections to move through the village or connect with the surrounding open country. Some of the larger gardens in the village contain ponds which are small ecosystems in their own right. Buildings provide roosting or nesting sites for bats and birds such as barn owls, swallows and swifts.

It is important when considering development, and new building development in particular, that such threads and connections are not compromised and habitats adversely affected. Preservation of the Green Infrastructure is all important.

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4 South & Vale Green Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Draft March 2017

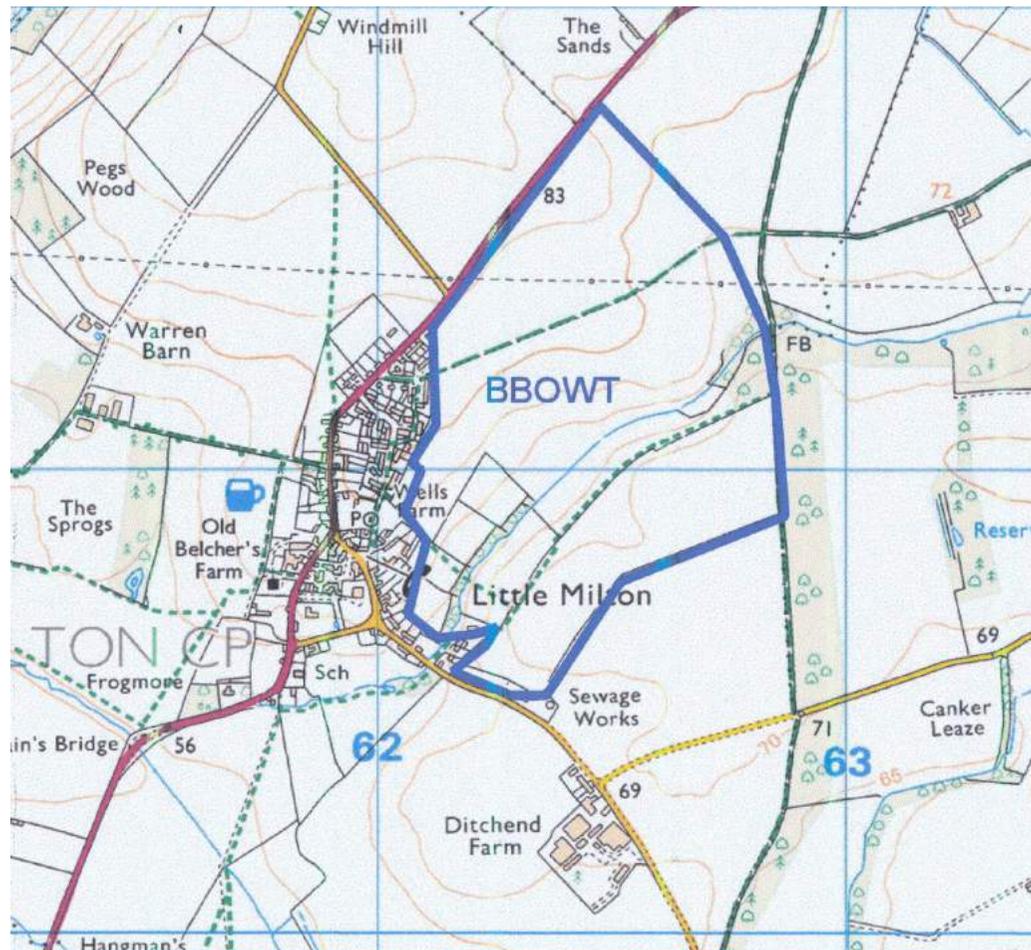
5 Natural England Green Infrastructure Guidance



All the footpaths in the parish are readily accessible and well maintained, except for 280/13 which has fallen into disuse. Paths are used extensively for recreational purpose, keeping fit, dog walking and observing wild life. 73% of villagers (those responding to Nov 2016 survey) walk local footpaths at least weekly<sup>7</sup>. In addition, permissive footpaths and nature trails have been established on the BBOWT Wells Farm Nature Reserve, the boundaries of which are shown below:

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<sup>7</sup> Little Milton Village Survey Nov 2016



## OPEN SPACES

The network of footpaths and the largely open fields across which they run together constitute a significant resource in terms of open spaces available for community use.

The BBOWT Nature Reserve is of great significance to the village and is described as follows<sup>8</sup>:

The land at Wells farm is held on a long lease by the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). The conditions of the lease<sup>9</sup> require the tenant to use the property for agricultural purposes consistent with supporting the charitable purposes of the tenant and to ensure that the property is used in a manner which is sympathetic to the needs of wildlife. The lease also stipulates that no building whatsoever may be erected on the property except the farmyard.

At Wells Farm BBOWT is striking a balance between farming wheat and barley and creating a thriving habitat for wildlife<sup>10</sup>.

The open fields are edged by six-metre wide margins that have been sown with a colourful wildflower seed mixture which attract insects and small mammals. In addition, a wide grassy bank crossing the arable fields from north to south has been sown with a variety of tufted grasses to provide cover for spiders and beetles. These in turn help to control pests. Retained winter stubble and seed-bearing crops provide food and shelter for mixed flocks of finches in the colder months.

The farm is named after the numerous springs emerging on the valley side. In the valley bottom, a wildflower meadow has been created, and a small tree-lined brook links two ponds, attracting a wide range of wildlife such as frogs, toads, chaffinches, coots and dragonflies.

A community allotment project is also underway where local people are being encouraged to grow their own organic produce and live in a more sustainable way by reducing their food miles.

The Wells Farm Nature Reserve is noted as forming an element of the South Oxfordshire Accessible Countryside<sup>11</sup> Fig 2.3 and is one of the few sites outside the Chiltern Hills AONB.

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8 Background Document - Environmental Factors

9 Wells Farm lease dated 9 Dec 1990

10 BBOWT website – Wells Farm

11 South & Vale Green Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Draft March 2017

A review has been carried out of all the Open Spaces in the village. This review was based on the extensive local knowledge of Steering Group members and Parish Councillors and the following were identified as being of significant value to the community:

|   |                            |   |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| A | Recreation Ground          | Site of Village Hall, Pre-school, Village Shop, Playing Field, Children's Play Area, Multi-Use Games Area, Car Park.                |
| B | BBOWT Barn Field & Spinney | Field giving access from the centre of the village to the BBOWT land.   |
| C | BBOWT allotments           | Portion of BBOWT land made available as allotments  |
| D | Remainder of BBOWT land    | Walked by 62% of villagers (of those who responded to Nov 2016 survey) at least weekly <sup>12</sup>                                |
| E | Churchyard                 |   |
| F | Village Green              | A small triangular grassed area in the historic centre of the village.  |
| G | Four Trees                 | A small crescent shaped grass bank where four iconic trees grow and which forms part of a road junction. Bench seating is provided. |

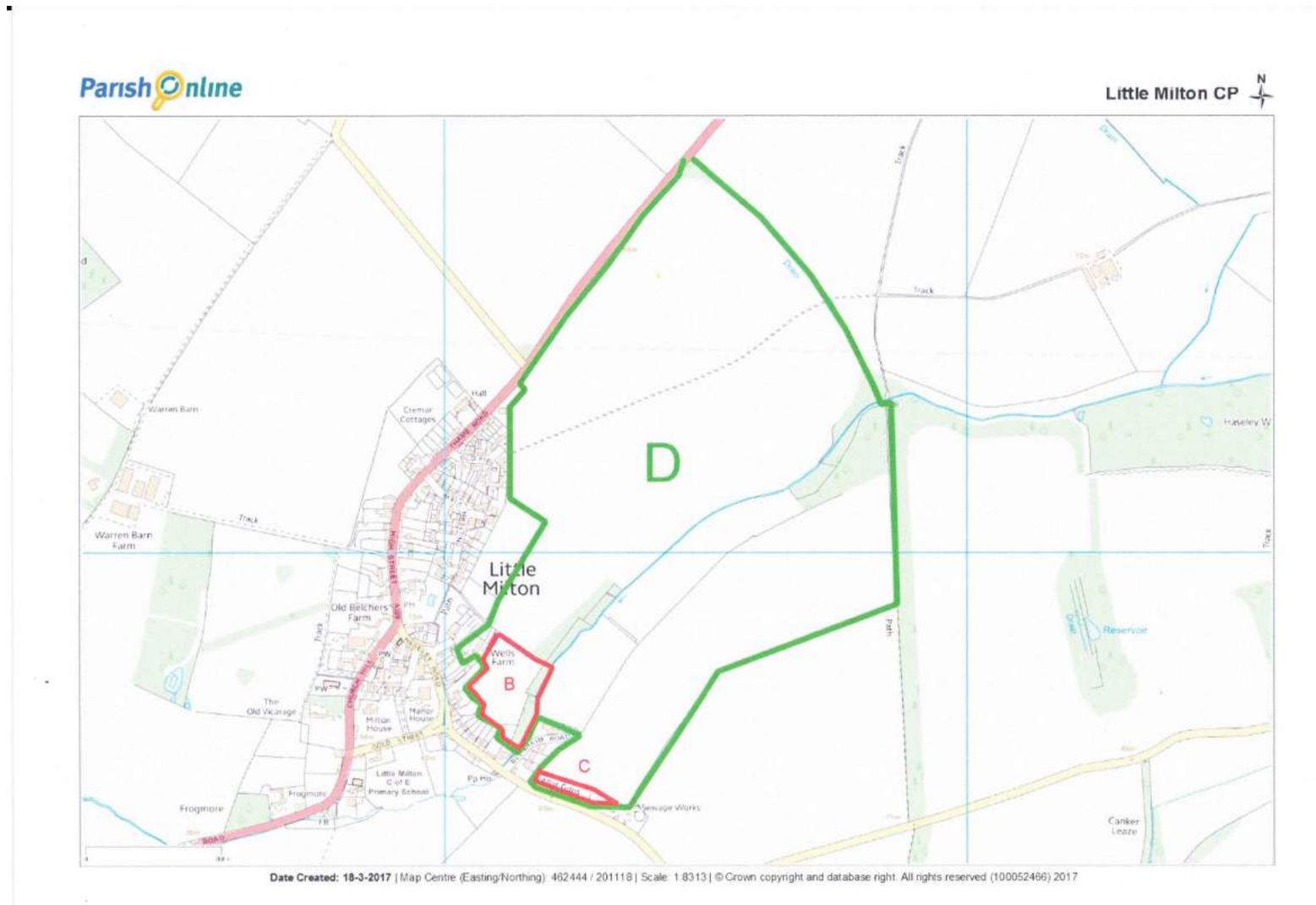
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<sup>12</sup> Little Milton Village Survey Nov 2016

The location of each of these open spaces, apart from D is shown on the following map:



Site D is very much larger than all the others. The 3 sites on the BBOWT land, including Site D, are shown below:



A number of options are available in order to protect open spaces:

1. Designation as a Local Green Space
2. Agreements with land-owners
3. Community Purchase - in some instances local communities have purchased important sites to ensure that they remain in community control in perpetuity.
4. Village Green status
5. Local Nature Reserve – A Local Nature Reserve (LNR) provide people with special opportunities to study or learn about nature or simply to enjoy it. Local Nature Reserves are designated by district or county councils and the Local Authority must control the LNR through ownership, lease or agreement with the owner.
6. Assets of Community Value - The Community Right to Bid gives community groups a fairer chance to prepare and bid to buy community buildings and facilities that are important to them. This could include village shops, pubs or allotments. The right covers private as well as public assets. It is important to nominate land and buildings to be part of the register of assets of community value. If something on this register is offered for sale, the community then have up to six months to prepare a bid.

Each of the Open Space sites has been assessed against a number of criteria as follows:

|                               | <b>A</b>   | <b>B</b>                                 | <b>C</b>                                 | <b>D</b>                                 | <b>E</b>                                   | <b>F</b>                            | <b>G</b>          |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
|                               | <b>Recreation Ground</b>                               | <b>BBOWT Barn Field &amp; Spinney</b>    | <b>Allotments on BBOWT land</b>          | <b>Remainder of BBOWT land</b>           | <b>Churchyard</b>                          | <b>Village Green</b>                | <b>Four Trees</b> |
| Important Village Open Space? | Yes  | Yes                                      | Yes                                      | Yes                                      | Yes  | Yes                                 | Yes               |
| Landowner                     | Parish Council   | Private owner (freehold) / BBOWT (lease) | Private owner (freehold) / BBOWT (lease) | Private owner (freehold) / BBOWT (lease) | Church                                     | Parish Council                      | Highways?         |
| Current protection            | Parish Council owned; Green Belt; Restrictive Covenant | BBOWT lease                              | BBOWT lease                              | BBOWT lease                              | Consecrated church land; Conservation Area | Parish Council owned; Village Green | Conservation Area |
| Current protection adequate?  | Yes  | No                                       | No                                       | No                                       | Yes  | Yes                                 | Yes               |

The assessment shows that 4 of the 7 sites are adequately protected.

## LOCAL GREEN SPACES - POLICY

The status of the BBOWT land is worthy of further consideration, in particular whether some or all of the land is suitable for designation as Local Green Spaces. National policy<sup>13</sup> states:

Local communities through local and neighbourhood plans should be able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. Identifying land as Local Green Space should therefore be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or reviewed, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.

Criteria which must be met are:

- not with an extant planning permission within which the Local Green Space could not be accommodated
- not allocated for development in the relevant Neighbourhood Plan or the Local Plan, unless it can be shown that the Local Plan housing allocation is not strategic and can be re-located somewhere else in the neighbourhood plan area; or alternatively that the Local Green Space could be incorporated within the site as part of the allocated development

The policy<sup>14</sup> further states that designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:

- where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example:
  - because of its beauty,
  - historic significance,
  - recreational value (including as a playing field),
  - tranquillity or
  - richness of its wildlife; and
- where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

Firstly, an assessment of the BBOWT land has been carried out against the 5 key Local Green Space criteria, all of which must be met:

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13 NPPF 76

14 NPPF 77

**LOCAL GREEN SPACES - ASSESSMENT**

| Code | Criteria                              | Site B   | Site C  | Site D  |
|------|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| SD1  | Name of Space                         | <b>BBOWT Barn Field &amp; Spinney</b>  | <b>Allotments on BBOWT land</b>                           | <b>Remainder of BBOWT Land</b>                        |
| SD2  | Space description                     | The site runs from Wells Farm downhill across the Barn Field to the Spinney, through which runs the Gainsbridge Brook. | The allotments at the south-east corner of the BBOWT land | The remainder of the BBOWT land excluding Sites B & C |
| SD3  | Has a map of the space been provided? | Yes  | Yes   | Yes   |

All the following criteria must be met:

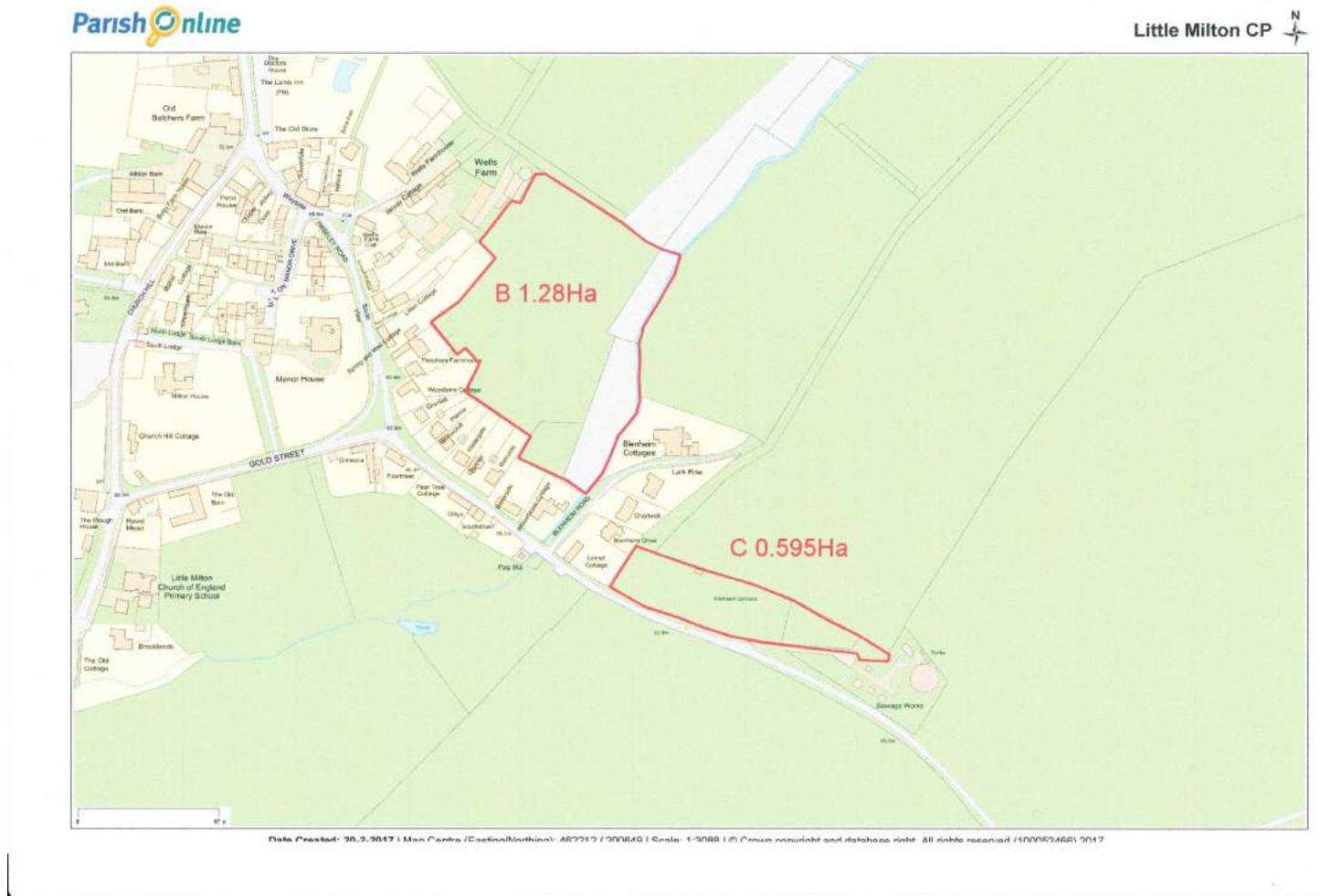
| <b>TABLE 1</b> |   |  |  |  |
|----------------|---|--|--|--|
| Code           | Criteria  | Site B   | Site C   | Site D   |
|                |   | <b>BBOWT Barn Field &amp; Spinney</b>  | <b>Allotments on BBOWT land</b>  | <b>Remainder of BBOWT Land</b>   |
| 1.1            | Land is not subject of a planning permission for development                          | Site is <b>not</b> the subject of a planning permission for development                      | Site is <b>not</b> the subject of a planning permission for development                      | Site is <b>not</b> the subject of a planning permission for development                      |
| 1.2            | Space is not allocated or proposed for development in the Local or Neighbourhood Plan | Space is <b>not</b> allocated or proposed for development in the Local or Neighbourhood Plan | Space is <b>not</b> allocated or proposed for development in the Local or Neighbourhood Plan | Space is <b>not</b> allocated or proposed for development in the Local or Neighbourhood Plan |
| 1.3            | The space is not an extensive tract of land and is local in character                 | This is <b>not</b> an extensive site. Total area is 1.28Ha                                   | This is <b>not</b> an extensive site. Total area is 0.595Ha                                  | This is an extensive site. Total area is 62Ha  |

|     |  |   |  |  |
|-----|--|---|--|--|
|     |  |   |  |  |
| 1.4 | The space is within close proximity of the community it serves                                   | Space immediately adjoins the built area of the village   | Space immediately adjoins the built area of the village  | Space adjoins the built area of the village  |
| 1.5 | The space is demonstrably special to the local community and holds particular local significance | The BBOWT land as a whole has a Friends group who support the proposal to designate this space and who agree the space is special to the local community. The the village survey, | The BBOWT land as a whole has a Friends group who support the proposal to designate this space and who agree the space is special to the local community. The Allotments also have their own group of allotment holders who also agree the local significance of this site | The BBOWT land as a whole has a Friends group. In the Nov 2016 village survey, 89% of respondents thought that the BBOWT land should be protected from development |

From this phase of the assessment, it is not appropriate to consider site D, the remainder of the BBOWT land, for designation as a Local Green Space as this is an extensive tract of land and therefore does not meet the criteria..

Sites B & C meet all the initial 5 criteria. These two sites now need to be considered in greater detail and assessed further against additional criteria:

**SITES B & C**



Both sites have well-defined boundaries which are readily identifiable both on maps and plans and on the ground.

**Site B – Barn Field and the Spinney (1.28Ha) - BBOWT Nature Reserve**  
(Map from Ordnance Survey and Land Registry Title Plan ON138789)



The site runs from Wells Farm downhill across the Barn Field to the Spinney, through which runs the Gainsbridge Brook. The Barn Field, amongst other fields, is used by BBOWT for grazing livestock, normally either sheep or ponies. The site is crossed by one public footpath and one permissive path leading from the BBOWT car park. These paths give further onward access to a network of paths and to the BBOWT Wells Farm Nature Reserve. It is the village's gateway to wider open spaces, and is easily accessible from all parts of the village. It is the village's 'safety valve' in that anyone who wants a breath of fresh air can quickly walk down to the field. It is well used by dog walkers (dogs to be on a lead for the safety of livestock and protection of wild life.-. This field is special to the community; it is a haven of tranquillity close to the centre of the village and it leads immediately to an area noted for the richness of its wildlife in the woodland, stream and ponds at the bottom of the field.

The view from the lower part of the field is across slightly rising ground to one of the historic farms of the village, namely Fletcher's Farm. The field makes an important contribution to the setting and visual amenity of this part of the village.



## Fletcher's Farm from Barn Field

The Spinney is lightly managed woodland bordering the stream and is rich in plant life, especially that suited to slightly boggy ground. A bridge crosses the stream and slightly raised walkways allow access even when the area is flooded, as happens most winters. The stretch of woodland is the only tract of such land in the parish which is accessible to the public.

*The Barn Field and the Spinney combined are of particular local significance for their recreational value, being areas which lead on to good walks through woodland and across open fields. As mentioned, dog walkers use these routes extensively. They offer havens of peace and tranquillity, along with the opportunity to see a rich variety of wildlife which itself enjoys the protection of the BBOWT Nature Reserve. (Dog walkers are requested to observe the nature reserve signage in relation to the control of dogs especially around livestock.)<sup>15</sup>*

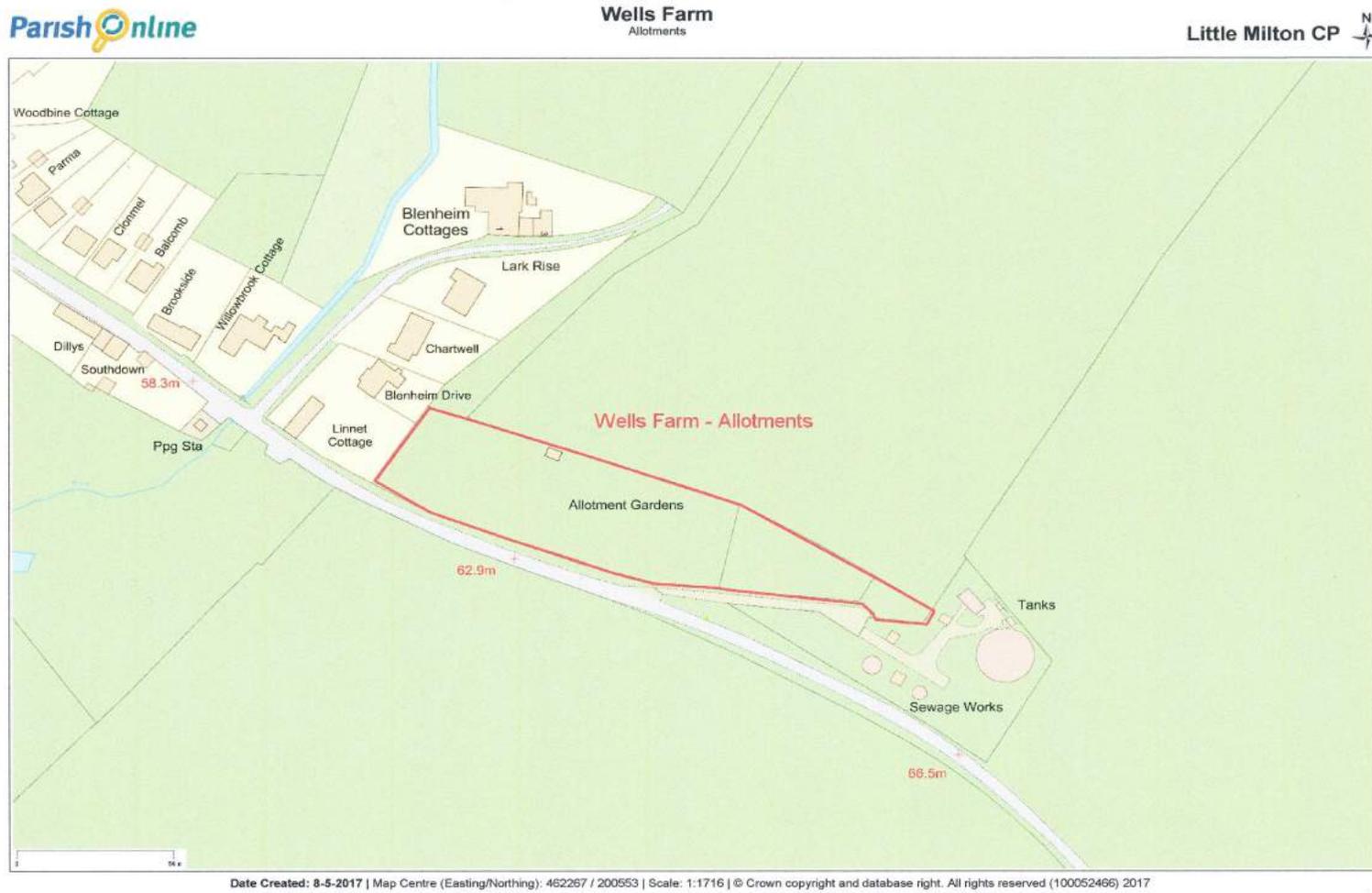
The site currently forms a small but important part of the BBOWT Nature Reserve and enjoys a degree of protection from development under the terms of the lease, which prohibits building on the land. However it is unprotected in planning terms and is therefore suitable for designation as a Local Green Space.

The freehold of the land is held by a private owner; the long lease (999 years) of the land is held by BBOWT. In addition, there is a Friends of Wells Farm group within the village who assist with maintenance tasks on the land. There is also a group of 'watchers' who keep an eye on the livestock, thus taking a significant work load off the BBOWT staff. The freeholder, BBOWT and the Friends group are all supportive of the proposals to designate Site B, Barn Field and the Spinney as a Local Green Space.

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15 BBOWT (Giles Strother) email 6 June 2017

**Site C – The Allotments (0.595Ha) – BBOWT Land**  
(Map from Ordnance Survey and Land Registry Title Plan ON138789)



There have been allotments in the village for a long time. According to an 1881 Ordnance Survey map, the large field (Blenheim) immediately to the north of the current allotments and also the unused land next to Hillview Cottage in the High Street were designated allotment gardens in the past. There is a long tradition of allotment tending in the village.

The current allotments were granted for use by residents under the terms of the BBOWT lease in 1990 'for so long as those residing in the Parish of Little Milton or villages in the immediate vicinity who require the use of such allotments express the wish to do so'. As outlined earlier, BBOWT actively encourage the use of such allotments: 'A community allotment project is also underway where local people are being encouraged to grow their own organic produce and live in a more sustainable way by reducing their food miles.'<sup>16</sup>

The current allotments are partly on the site of what was once the garden of a cottage and the well on this site has been dated to 1775. The allotments remain as popular and as sought after as ever. One allotment holder has described the allotments in the following terms<sup>17</sup>:

*The BBOWT allotments on Haseley Road are a fantastic resource for the village providing space for organic gardening on land next to fields and nature. Much is now being discussed about the health and wellbeing benefits of gardening and we, as a village are very fortunate to have this well organised and well-equipped facility available to us. There is a shed for tools and a natural water pump, plus numerous water harvesters on site. There are raised beds available for the use of school children and disabled tenants, if required and there is road access and parking available, although it is possible for many people in the village to get to the allotments without needing to walk on the roads.*

*It is also a great place to meet up with other gardeners or commune with nature, with grass snakes, voles and numerous bird species in residence. The soil is well drained and of high quality and perfect for growing fruit, vegetables and flowers.*

*The current allotments has been in situ since at least 1975, and although much smaller than available previously, it provides enough plots for the needs of village residents. It is appreciated greatly by allotment holders and we believe it should be maintained as a green space for the benefit of the village.*

A second user has commented<sup>18</sup> as follows:

*I would also like to add the following benefits of continuing to have the allotments available to villagers:*

- enhancement of social activity with BBQs and meetings which are open to all visitors;*
- allotment updates are published in the monthly village magazine promoting community cohesion;*
- the siting of the allotments whilst at the edge of the village is in a position where adjacent properties can provide an added sense of security for those using the site. Prior to the added secure arrangements at the allotments the space had been open to undesirable*

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<sup>16</sup> BBOWT website – Wells Farm

<sup>17</sup> Email 1 28 Feb 2017

<sup>18</sup> Email 2 28 Feb 2017

*antisocial behaviour, this is now a safe place for villagers to visit;*

- *increase in voluntary activities including the maintenance of communal assets and grounds with a number of people also giving their time to help out with BBOWT activities both on and off site.*

*For the site to be designated as a Local Green Space can only be beneficial to the community as a whole.*

As well as allowing villagers to grow their own crops, the allotments offer a haven of calm, away from the pressures of everyday life. They are of recreational value to the users and are of special significance to the community. The continuing availability of allotments within the community is an important element in maintaining a balanced community. The freeholder, BBOWT, the Friends group and the allotment holders are all supportive of the proposals to designate Site C, the Allotments as a Local Green Space.

These two sites are now assessed against the required criteria s follow:

| <b>TABLE 2</b> |   |   |   |
|----------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Code</b>    | <b>Criteria</b>   | <b>Site B</b>   | <b>Site C</b>   |
|                |   | <b>BBOWT Barn Field &amp; Spinney</b>   | <b>Allotments on BBOWT land</b>   |
| 2.1            | The proposed space is of particular local significance because of its visual amenity value (beauty) | Yes<br>This site is an open field running down the spinney through which runs a stream. It is immediately adjacent to the Conservation Area and overlooked by some of the oldest buildings in the village (Fletchers Farm, Spring & Well Cottage and Wells Farm.)<br>It has high visual amenity value | No  |
| 2.2            | The proposed space is of particular local historic significance                                     | No  | Yes<br>There is a long history of allotments in the village and this site has been in use for a dwelling and later for allotments since the 18 <sup>th</sup> century. The site is immediately adjacent to the Conservation Area |

|     |  |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 2.3 | The proposed space is of particular local significance because of its recreational value   | <p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>Used extensively by villagers for recreation, primarily walking. 62% of villagers responding to the Nov 2016 said they walked the BBOWT land at least weekly. This field is also good for sledging in the winter</p>                            | <p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>Tending allotments is an important recreational activity for many villagers and the allotments are an important amenity</p> |
| 2.4 | The proposed space is of particular local significance because of its tranquillity         | <p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>An area of particular tranquillity, this site is a short walk from the centre of the village, where one is subjected to the noise of passing traffic. This site allows people to get away to a quiet area within just a few minutes walking</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>The allotments offer a haven of tranquillity, away from the main road and away from the noise of traffic</p>                |
| 2.5 | The proposed space is of particular local significance because of the richness of wildlife | <p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>This site forms part of the BBOWT Wells Farm Nature Reserve which is particularly rich in wildlife.</p>   | <p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>This site forms part of the BBOWT Wells Farm Nature Reserve which is particularly rich in wildlife.</p>                     |
| 2.6 | The proposed space is of particular local significance because of another reason           | <p style="text-align: center;">No</p>   | <p style="text-align: center;">Yes</p> <p>Allotments are of particular local significance to the village and an amenity which is highly valued</p>                    |
|     |  |   |   |

| <b>CONCLUSION OF ASSESSMENT</b> |  |  |  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Code</b>                     | <b>Criteria</b>  |  |  |
| CA1                             | Have all the Local Green Space criteria in Table 1 been met? Why is the area considered to be demonstrably special to the local community? | Yes<br>Amenity value; Recreational value; Tranquillity;<br>Richness of Wildlife  | Yes<br>Historic significance; Recreational value;<br>Tranquillity; Richness of Wildlife: Other Reasons |
| CA2                             | Is the space suitable as a Local Green Space?  | Yes  | Yes  |
| CA3                             | Landowner details  | Jean Gordon (freehold) 46 High St, Fortrose IV10 8TF<br>BBOWT (lease): The Lodge, 1 Armstrong Road, Littlemore, Oxford OX4 4XT   |  |
| CA4                             | Has the landowner been informed at an early stage about the proposal to designate any part of their land?                                  | Both the freeholder and the leaseholder were consulted by email at the earliest stage, have been kept fully informed throughout and support the proposal to designate Sites B & C as Local Green Spaces. |  |

**OPEN SPACES – FUTURE MANAGEMENT**

The village is well served by Open Spaces. The Wells Farm Nature Reserve is a particularly valuable asset, which is currently protected by the BBOWT lease. The continuation of this Nature Reserve is very important in retaining the character of the village.

Future development must retain a balance between the built-up areas of the parish and the open spaces, and specific provision must be made within any significant future development to retain that balance. This process should be informed by the South & Vale Green Infrastructure Strategy.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

1. Sites B and C should be designated as Local Green Spaces as per NPPF 76-77.
2. As far as is practicable, the remainder of the land which currently forms the BBOWT Wells Farm Nature Reserve should be protected from development.
3. Future development must retain a balance between built-up areas and open spaces and, where necessary, make specific open spaces provision within development proposals.

Little Milton Parish Council

Feb 2018