



# **Spatial Strategy**

**for the Town of**

**Berkhamsted**

**June 2009**

## **1.0 Spatial Strategy for Berkhamsted**

### **1.1 Characteristics**

#### 1.2 Siting & size

Berkhamsted is situated on the dip slope of the Chilterns Hills in the valley of the River Bulbourne. The town is linear in nature with the main communication routes (road, rail and canal) running along the valley bottom. It has a population of 18,522 (2001 Census) and sits midway between Hemel Hempstead and Tring. The town has good connections to London (40km) and the north via the A41, and has a railway station conveniently located near the town centre.

#### 1.3 Landscape character

There is a diverse valley topography. The valley floor is urbanised. The Grand Union Canal is an important feature with its associated canal basins, locks, embankments, bridges and characteristic architecture. The River Bulbourne is a chalk stream whose source is at Dudswell. It is culverted in places, but still has areas of wet meadows. Development has spread up the valley sides except at Northchurch, where the landscape is generally more open and arable. A prominent dry valley leads up to Berkhamsted Common from Berkhamsted Castle. The valley sides give way to the gently undulating and open plateau with its arable farmland, mixed woodland and large country estates (e.g. Ashlyns and Rossway) and (historic) parklands (e.g. Ashridge). The countryside surrounding the town includes land in the Green Belt and the Chilterns AONB.

1.4 The Urban Nature Conservation Study (UNCS)<sup>1</sup> recognises the importance of the town's hinterland as a biodiversity resource. Part of the Chilterns Beechwood Special Area of Conservation for habitats (SAC) lies to the north of Berkhamsted and is a nationally important nature conservation designation. This includes land within the Ashridge estate (which is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (Ashridge Commons and Woods SSSI)). North of the valley the remainder of Northchurch and Berkhamsted Commons dominate the wildlife resource. To the south there are other important wildlife areas such as Rossway parkland and woodland (with its mature hedgerows) and the ancient woodland at Dickshills.

1.5 Most open space in the settlement is in the form of school sports facilities and natural green space. The northern and central parts of the town are better served than areas to the south and east. Due to the fragmented nature of sites, there is no strong open space/wildlife link (north-south) across the settlement area and into the adjoining countryside. However, the canal, Canal Fields and the river provide an important open space and a wildlife corridor running east-west through the centre of the town. Other important wildlife sites include Berkhamsted Castle, the railway embankment, New Road allotments and Tunnel Fields. The UNCS highlights the role roadside tree belts and tree and shrub lines within gardens (reflecting older hedgerows), particularly

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<sup>1</sup> DBC Urban Nature Conservation Study (March 2006)

around Shootersway and Gravel Path, provide as smaller and locally valuable wildlife corridors through the urban area.

### 1.6 Built character

Berkhamsted has grown from a medieval market town. The historic cores contain properties of varying age, character and appearances, many of which are high quality and listed (e.g. Berkhamsted Town Hall, Dean Incent's House, Sayers Almhouses, and St Mary's Church etc.). At the western end of the settlement, Northchurch retains a strong village character centred on St Mary's Church.

1.7 The residential area is elongated and follows the valley topography. Housing stock is of good quality and combined with the attractiveness and accessibility of the town, means that property prices are some of the highest in the Borough. In recent times development has spread up the valley slopes, particularly on the south side of the High Street and westwards towards Northchurch. The open valley sides would be particularly sensitive to the effects of new development. The neighbourhoods have also been affected by residential infilling, particularly in areas of lower density housing towards the edge of the town (e.g. Shootersway).

1.8 The Berkhamsted Urban Design Assessment (UDA)<sup>2</sup> looked in detail at the character of the town and then set out a strategy plan and settlement principles (see Strategy Plan and Settlement Principles, page 6 of Berkhamsted Urban Design Assessment). It divides the settlement into a series of urban design zones along with key principles to guide development (see Table 1). It also sets out key circulation principles and identifies important view corridors.

**Table 1 Summary of key principles to the Urban Design Zones for Berkhamsted**

<b>Urban Design Zone</b>	<b>General location</b>	<b>Summary of key principles</b>
Town Centre	Town centre area.	Protect historic character and maintain a mix of uses that encourages activity. 4 storey development on High Street and low rise high density on gridded side streets.
In-town High Density Area	Two small areas of housing immediately east and west of the town centre	High to very high-density housing with strong links to the town centre and the train station. Building heights 2-4 storeys.
Inner Zone	Housing estates on	Low-rise, generally

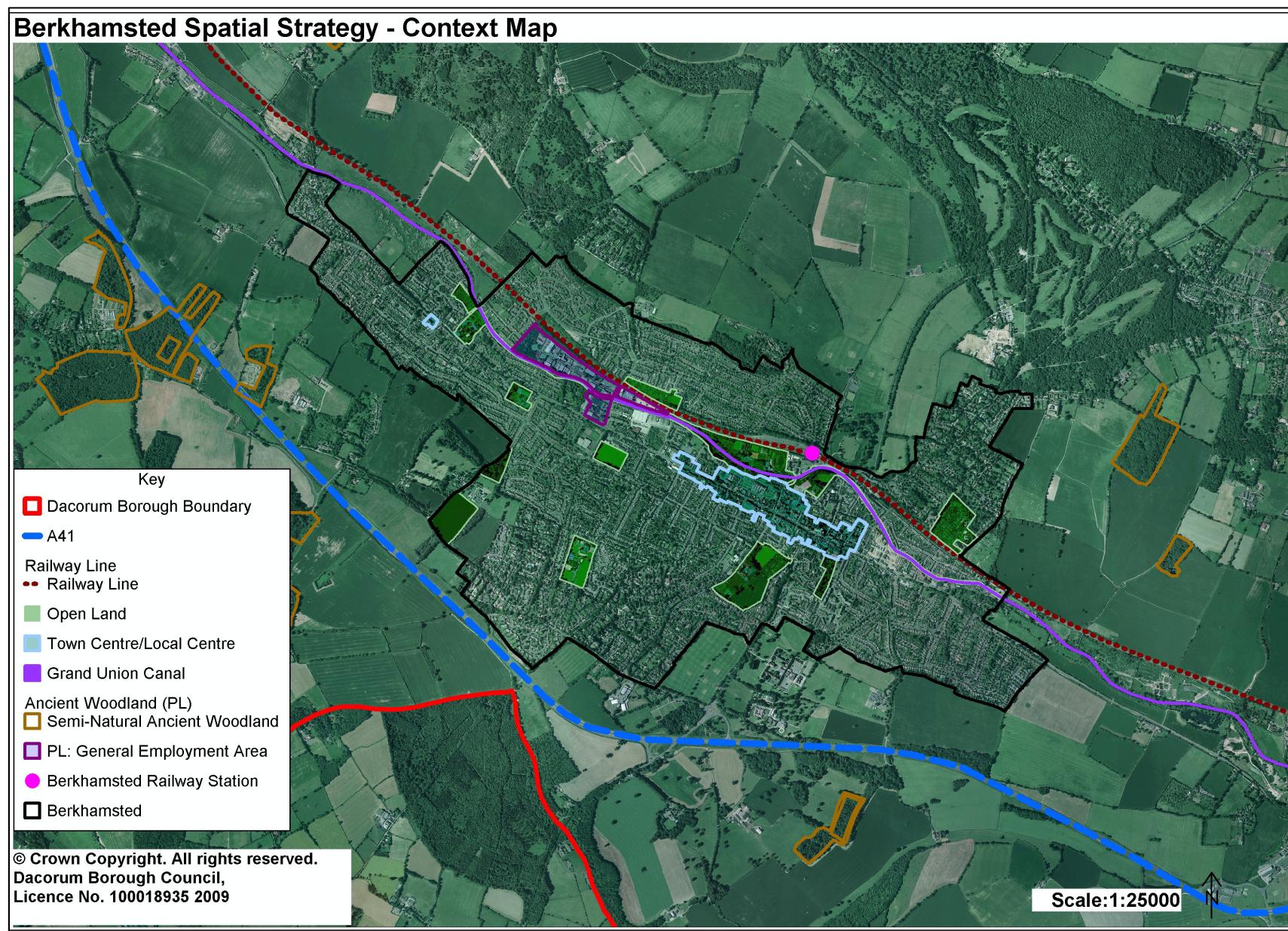
<sup>2</sup> Dacorum Urban Design Assessment – Berkhamsted (January 2006)

	lower valley sides.	medium density housing.
Northchurch Residential Area	Housing north and south of Tring Road	Maintain existing character of semi-detached housing with very low to medium densities.
Peripheral	Suburban housing neighbourhoods on upper valley sides.	Detached housing on large plots at very low densities. New development should be low density.

### 1.9 Key views

The UDA highlights that the valley form allows for a number of scenic views across the valley sides to and from the surrounding countryside. There are also several strong view corridors within Berkhamsted town centre, especially along the canal and at the opposite ends of the High Street. Development is generally visible off the crest of the valley side, except at Shootersway. The main routes into Berkhamsted and Northchurch provide attractive 'green', semi rural and suburban gateways.

**Figure 1.1 – Berkhamsted and Northchurch Context Map**



### 1.10 Leisure & sports facilities

A sports centre off Douglas Gardens that is managed by the Dacorum Sports Trust (Sportspace) serves the area. It is well used although in need of modernisation. The facilities comprise a large indoor multi-purpose sports hall, swimming pool and outdoor all weather pitch. Dual use of school leisure facilities is also important e.g. Ashlyns School and Berkhamsted Collegiate School. A deficit in leisure space is compounded by a high level of sports participation locally and consequently heavy use of outdoor sports pitches. Berkhamsted has a small football stadium and nearby private tennis club, both adjacent to the town centre. Two sports and social clubs can be found at either end of the settlement (Kitchener's Field and Northchurch), and to the north east is the Berkhamsted Golf Club. To the west of Northchurch at Cow Roast is a pavilion with a number of sport pitches.

1.11 Berkhamsted is home to The Rex Cinema, a very popular single screen art deco cinema. The settlement also provides a wealth of social and leisure facilities to support numerous clubs and societies that are active in the area. For example, the Town Hall and the Town Council's Civic Centre both host varied leisure activities, some of which are promoted by Berkhamsted Arts Trust.

### 1.12 Local business

While out-commuting, particularly to London, is of local significance, there remains a number of employment opportunities in the settlement. The town centre supports a range of banks, shops, and restaurants, and other small offices and services. These in turn ensure economic use of the numerous historic building to be found there. The town centre is also characterised by a number of specialist shops, many being independent traders. Alongside the shops is a regular Saturday street market. The town centre is also well known for its evening economy. There is a small local centre at Northchurch.

1.13 Most other businesses are within the three designated employment areas around Billet Lane. They generally support a range of small to medium sized firms. The British Film Institute (BFI) is a unique and important local employer outside of the employment areas. It undertakes nationally important film and television archiving and restoration. The BFI would like to expand operations, but the site is constrained by its location in the Green Belt.

### 1.14 Social and Community

Berkhamsted is one of three towns in Hertfordshire, and the only place in the borough, that has a three-tier schooling system. A number of schools are located within the Green Belt. The independent sector also has a strong presence (e.g. Egerton Rothesay School, Berkhamsted Collegiate School, Haresfoot School etc.), and is important to the character and economy of the town. Berkhamsted Collegiate School has extensive campuses in and around the town centre.

1.15 For teenagers there is the Swan Youth Centre, but there are few dedicated community (day) facilities for the elderly. However, there is a privately run retirement village (Castle Village) located at Berkhamsted Hill. The town also provides active support for the Hospice St Francis, which has recently moved

from a central site to modern purpose built facilities off Shootersway on the outskirts of the town.

1.16 Berkhamsted is a “Fair Trade Town” and “Transition Town”. Transition Town status aims to promote a safe and sustainable future, and a commitment to move away from the dependence on non-renewable energy. This demonstrates a strong local support for equitable trading, the environment and sustainable living.

## 2.0 The vision for Berkhamsted

### Vision

Berkhamsted will be a vibrant market town respecting its Fair Trade and Transition Town status. As an important town it will accommodate similar levels of new housing as in the recent past while maintaining the strong valley character of the settlement, and protecting key assets such as the Grand Union Canal. The settlement will have quality educational facilities in the public and private sectors. New development will be high quality, sustainable and locally distinctive that respects and protects the built and natural heritage of the town, the canalside environment, and the character of neighbourhoods. There will be more affordable housing and more, accessible open space. The town centre will be an attractive commercial, cultural and social focal point of the settlement with a strong district shopping and service centre role. It will be maintained and enhanced together with the neighbourhood role of Northchurch local centre. Employment areas around Billet Lane will provide local job opportunities and offer an attractive location for small to medium sized firms.

### Question 1 (Berkhamsted)

**Do you agree with the vision for Berkhamsted?**

**Yes/No**

**If not, what else should be different? (Please see questionnaire)**

## 3.0 The Issues and Opportunities

3.1 The East of England Plan sets out key strategies for development that need to be tackled by the spatial strategy for Berkhamsted and Northchurch. The plan defines the approach to development in market towns; giving emphasis to the protection and enhancement of the historic environment; encouragement of the Borough’s tourist industry promotion of public transport; and improvements to local walking and cycle networks.

3.2 The settlement is the second largest in the Borough, has a good range of services and facilities, and would normally accommodate a significant share of growth relative to Tring and the other large villages. New development would

also allow opportunities to address a range of issues and secure new services and facilities for the town. However, while growth would help support the vitality of the settlement, particularly the business areas, this would be constrained by the need to ensure that the distinctive character of the town and its valley setting are maintained.

3.3 Issues have emerged from technical work associated with the evidence base, through the Berkhamsted Town Plan<sup>3</sup>, and consultation including the place workshop for Berkhamsted.

#### **Key Issues:**

- The amount of growth the settlement should accommodate and the direction of change.
- How to bring forward development on the Durrants Lane /Shootersway housing site.
- Impact of growth on the Green Belt.
- Securing more affordable housing and a balanced mix of housing types.
- Ensuring new housing is matched by additional community facilities / infrastructure.
- Maintaining local distinctiveness / town character and protecting the built heritage.
- Providing more open space / leisure space for the town.
- How to accommodate future investment in schools and through any potential review of school organisation.
- The future of the New Road/Springfield Road link.
- Pressure on parking in the town centre and within the Conservation Area, and problems with commuter parking around the railway station.
- Maintaining and/or enhancing the role and character of the Grand Union Canal.
- The future of the British Film Institute site.
- Continuing pressure for infilling and its impact on the character of established residential areas.
- Concern for congestion in the town and town centre.
- Providing new cycle paths.

#### **Question 2 (Berkhamsted)**

**Are there any additional key issues we should be considering?**

**Yes/No**

**If so, please list. (Please see questionnaire)**

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<sup>3</sup> "A Future Berkhamsted – A 10-year Plan prepared by Berkhamsted Town Council (November 2006)"

3.4 We have considered the level of opportunities to deliver housing through a detailed assessment of sites identified through consultation on the Issues and Options Paper to the Site Allocations DPD and the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). This has been tested against different assumptions for growth in the town that have suggested levels varying from 750 (to maintain the existing population) to 1,500 (natural change) homes to 2031.

3.5 We believe that we should plan for an intermediate level of growth (1,200 dwellings). This would maintain the town's vitality, is consistent with previous rates of completions in the recent past, would ensure the delivery of sufficient affordable housing throughout the Plan period, would provide for community benefits from developer contributions, and would limit the size of a Green Belt land release. A higher level could be accommodated, but this would begin to impact on the character of the town, particularly through further pressure on the Green Belt, and would add to the need for additional school capacity.

3.6 School capacity is a particular issue for the town's first and middle schools. There is currently a sustained need for places, and while an additional 1/2-form entry is to be provided in 2009/10 at Greenway First School, we understand there is a need for further capacity to be sought, whatever the level of housing. The housing level we propose to 2031 is reasonable therefore in this context. The County Council does need to consider further the role of existing school sites and it would be prudent to reserve a site for a new 2-form entry school. We are continuing discussions with the County Council on these issues.

### **Question 3 (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you agree with this level of growth?**

**Yes/No**

**If not, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

3.7 Most of the 1,200 dwellings from 2006 to 2031 is to be accommodated within the urban area (1,088 units), part of which is already completed (148 units). A Strategic Site has been identified for Berkhamsted in and around the Egerton Rothesay School site. This is because the development of land in this location offers a key opportunity to deliver a number of the aspirations put forward in the vision for the town. These include providing quality education facilities, more affordable housing and increases in the provision of outdoor sports facilities for both the community and for local sporting teams. The site has already been released from the Green Belt and identified for a mixed housing/social community/leisure proposal in the current Local Plan. Given the benefits that the site can bring to the town, particularly by providing much needed public open space and playing fields, the proposal will be carried forward. However, The landowners have sought a slightly different format with a higher number of houses (c.250 units) with additional sports pitches (to be provided on land adjacent to the site), to make the scheme viable.

3.8 However, a small greenfield site outside of the town boundary of around 110 homes is needed to ensure that this level of growth is achieved and that opportunities continue to be available to deliver affordable housing (see Figure 1.2). Such a site would form part of a housing land reserve whose release would be carefully linked to infrastructure capacity.

3.9 The direction of greenfield growth in the town is constrained by a number of factors including:

- The need to maintain strong Green Belt boundaries;
- Impact of development on the valley sides and ridge top;
- Preventing spread along the valley bottom;
- Safeguarding the surrounding countryside, particularly that within the Chilterns AONB, from further encroachment;
- Maintaining an effective buffer between the existing built-up area and the A41-Bypass;
- Closeness to services and facilities;
- Good road access.

3.10 There are alternative directions the town could grow in. We have therefore decided to reject some options at this stage, although there is landowner/developer interest in development. The reasons are explained in Table 2.

**Table 2 – Reasons for rejecting options**

<b>Direction</b>	<b>Reasons</b>
Land off Ivy House Lane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Proximity to Chilterns AONB.</li><li>• Strong countryside/Green Belt boundary.</li><li>• Impact on valley sides and important dry valley location.</li></ul>
Land south of Bank Mill Lane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encroachment of the urban area along the valley bottom and into adjoining open countryside.</li><li>• Distance to town centre services and facilities, employment land and station.</li><li>• Impact on setting of the River Bulbourne.</li><li>• Reduction in the degree of separation between the town and Bourne End.</li></ul>
Land south of Upper Hall Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong countryside/Green Belt boundary.</li><li>• Development would be highly visible from this prominent ridge top location.</li><li>• Erosion of buffer between bypass and existing built up area.</li><li>• Poor relationship to town centre services and facilities, employment land and station.</li></ul>
Land south east and south west of BFI site,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Much of this area has poor direct access onto Kingshill Way.</li></ul>

Kingshill Way / Chesham Road (adjacent to A41)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erosion of buffer between bypass and existing built up area.</li> <li>Impact on important green gateway from A416 and A41.</li> <li>Potential impact on setting of cemetery.</li> <li>Development here could set a precedent for further development of land southwards to the A41.</li> </ul>
Land in the Ashlyns area, between Chesham Road and Swing Gate Lane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Important transition area between the town and open countryside would be damaged.</li> <li>This could also set a precedent for further development of land southwards to the A41.</li> <li>Not well related to existing housing.</li> <li>Visual impact on important gateway to town from A416 and A41.</li> <li>Proximity of A41 bypass.</li> <li>Potential impact on the setting of Ashlyn's Hall.</li> </ul>
South Northchurch (land between Durrants Lane and Pea Lane)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong countryside boundary.</li> <li>Impact on landscape/Chilterns AONB.</li> <li>Impact and visibility of development on valley sides.</li> <li>Poor relationship to town centre services and facilities, employment land and station.</li> </ul>

#### Question 4 (Berkhamsted)

**Do you agree that we should rule out the locations set out in Table 2?**

**Yes/No**

**If not, then please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

3.11 Our suggested choices of options are shown in Figure 1.2, Berkhamsted Vision Diagram and are assessed below.

## 4.0 Greenfield development options

Development Options	Pros	Cons
<b>Option 1 (Land off New Road)</b>  (capacity estimated at 50 dwellings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Smaller site with clear boundaries.</li> <li>Near to St Mary's C of E First School and Northchurch local centre.</li> <li>Could help part fund</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Site is insufficient on its own, but could be phased with other land.</li> <li>Some distance from the town centre.</li> <li>Next to the Chilterns</li> </ul>

	New Road / Springfield Road link.	<p>AONB.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site is too small to offer scope for additional town-wide leisure space.</li> <li>• The canal bridge on New Road is narrow and results in poor pedestrian access to local facilities.</li> <li>• Visually prominent site.</li> <li>• Proximity to railway line.</li> <li>• Impact on setting of the canal.</li> </ul>
<b>Option 2 (Land south of Hilltop Road)</b>  (estimated capacity of 50 dwellings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small discrete site.</li> <li>• Good relationship with existing housing.</li> <li>• Close to schools.</li> <li>• Development could help fund new school facilities.</li> <li>• Immediate access onto Hilltop Road.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site is insufficient on its own, but could be phased with other land.</li> <li>• Loss of school playing fields.</li> <li>• Impact on setting of Ashlyns School.</li> <li>• Would need to strengthen any new boundary to Green Belt.</li> <li>• Potential loss of trees on Hilltop Road frontage.</li> </ul>
<b>Option 3 (Land adjacent to Hanburys, Shootersway)</b>  (estimated capacity of 60 dwellings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close to first and upper schools.</li> <li>• Could help support expansion of facilities on the British Film Institute (BFI) site (and thus retention of the facility).</li> <li>• Immediate access onto Shootersway.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site is insufficient on its own, but could be phased with other land.</li> <li>• Site is part of the open transition area between the town and the wider countryside.</li> <li>• New building could set a precedent for further development of land southwards to the A41.</li> <li>• Site is too small to offer scope for additional town-wide leisure space.</li> </ul>
<b>Option 4 (Land adjacent to Blegberry Gardens, Shootersway)</b>  (capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate sized site with clear boundaries.</li> <li>• Close to schools.</li> <li>• Immediate access onto Shootersway.</li> <li>• Would achieve more than the minimum level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some distance from the town centre.</li> <li>• Important transition area between the town and open countryside would be affected.</li> <li>• New building could set</li> </ul>

estimated at 123 dwellings)	of development.	a precedent for further development of land to the A41 bypass. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site is too small to offer scope for additional town-wide leisure space.</li> <li>• Very close to the A41.</li> </ul>
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**Question 5a (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you prefer Option 1 for greenfield development in Table 3?**

Yes/No

**If yes, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

**Question 5b (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you prefer Option 2 for greenfield development in Table 3?**

Yes/No

**If yes, please give your reasons why. (Please see questionnaire)**

**Question 5c (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you prefer Option 3 for greenfield development in Table 3?**

Yes/No

**If yes, please give your reasons why. (Please see questionnaire)**

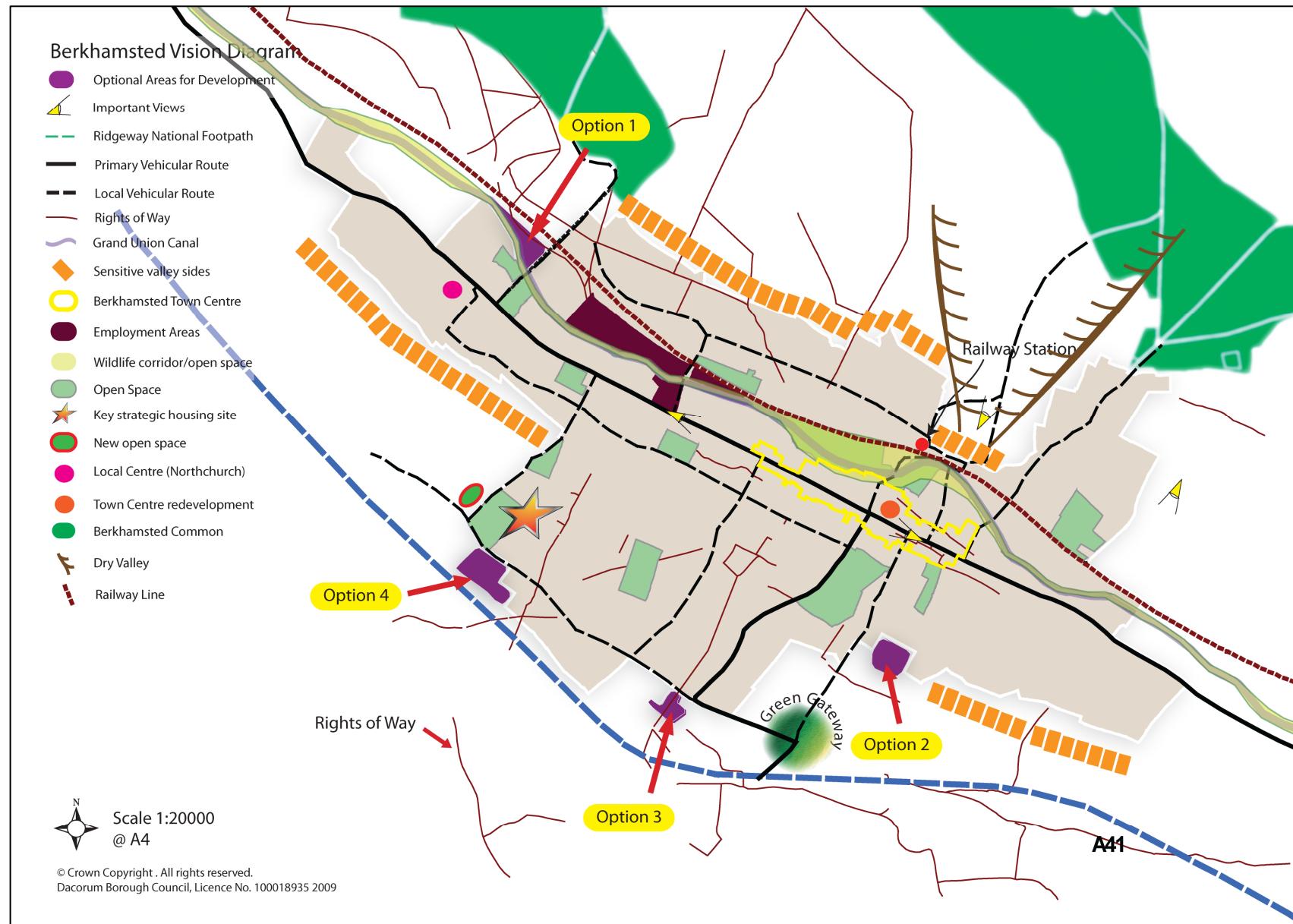
**Question 5d (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you prefer Option 4 for greenfield development in Table 3?**

Yes/No

**If yes, please give your reasons why. (Please see questionnaire)**

**Figure 1.2 – Berkhamsted Vision Diagram**



## **5.0 Spatial strategy themes**

5.1 The spatial strategy for Berkhamsted is built around four themes:

- looking after the environment;
- social and personal welfare;
- economic prosperity; and
- location and access.

### **a) Looking after the Environment**

(i) The settlement is linear in form and follows the valley topography. New development should respect this broad structure. The open valley sides and ridge top locations are especially sensitive to new building and development in these locations will not be supported. The Urban Design Assessment (UDA) stresses, the need to safeguard views across the valley (such as up the dry valley from Berkhamsted Castle), and in controlling building heights as you rise up the valley sides. The A41 Bypass will not represent the natural southern boundary to the town.

(ii) The UDA sets out a range of principles that we will take forward that will help guide development in the town and protect its character (see Table 1). Appropriate forms and densities of housing development are sought, including housing types and building heights. Progressively lower density development is encouraged from the high-density town centre and conservation area. This approach will reinforce the existing character and quality of areas. Particular emphasis is given to protecting the lower density on the outskirts of Berkhamsted as it represents a transition from town to the open countryside of the Green Belt.

(iii) The UDA also stresses safeguarding strong view corridors along the Canal and High Street. Views of the castle and St Peters Church, in particular, should not be impeded.

(iv) We intend to carry forward the existing Open Land Strategy for the town as set out in the Local Plan. This recognises the importance of protecting open space to the character of the town, especially the continuous open land on the valley floor in and around the canal, and that on the valley sides that helps break up the general mass of urban development. Open Land also remains important for informal and formal outdoor recreation, and as a biodiversity resource (although most of the key wildlife sites are actually outside of the town boundary). They must be protected from development. The Egerton Rothesay School site is a major chance to secure additional informal open space and playing fields.

(v) The Grand Union Canal and the River Bulbourne represent important linear open spaces and wildlife corridors linking the urban area to open countryside. This role should not be undermined and opportunities to de-culvert the river and to enhance the chalk stream environment should be taken where appropriate. The canal is important in its own right and its

character, history and built heritage, particularly in respect of wharfage, need to be protected.

(vi) The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment<sup>4</sup> undertaken by consultants Halcrow, did identify the possibility of overtopping or breach of the Grand Union Canal embankment, although British Waterways considered the risk to be low. Halcrow have assessed this risk in more detail.<sup>5</sup> They have forecast and mapped areas of risk and recommended that new development should normally be steered away from identified areas of breach. Halcrow also recommended that any development located in areas of high risk should undertake a flood risk assessment and provide for mitigation measures. The Council accepts the need to take a cautious approach to development close to the canal embankment.

(vii) The UNCS recommends a number of approaches to open spaces in the town that we consider should be carried forward. Opportunities should be taken to enhance the wildlife value of designated Open Land. The river corridor should be protected and enhanced, particularly given its urban location and link role with the valley. The contribution from other smaller open areas (such as the remnants of hedgerows in the low-density residential neighbourhoods) should be protected to provide opportunities for a network of wildspace linking the centre to the edge of the town.

**Question 6 (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you agree the approach to "Looking after the environment" of Berkhamsted outlined above?**

**Yes/No**

**If no, then please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

**b) Social and personal welfare**

(i) Berkhamsted should accommodate moderate levels of growth given it is the second largest settlement in the borough, the need to maintain the vitality of the settlement, and to ensure sufficient affordable housing is delivered. Its strong character, setting, and school capacity restrict the extent of growth. Most of the growth can be met within sites in the existing urban area.

(ii) However, an additional small element of housing on a greenfield site (c. 110 units) is still needed if Berkhamsted is to satisfy a reasonable level of its overall locally generated needs, to continue to deliver affordable housing and relative to its character, size, setting and capacity to absorb growth. Four broad locations have been identified as options to the north (at Lock Fields,

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<sup>4</sup> Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (August 2007)

<sup>5</sup> Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (June 2008)

New Road), south east (adjacent to Hanburys, Shootersway / east of Chesham Road), and south west (Shootersway (west)) of the town.

(iii) Land in and around the Egerton Rothesay School site represents a key strategic site for the town. This site is important because of the potential level of housing that could be achieved (c.250 units), the opportunity to deliver a large number of affordable homes, the provision of additional leisure space, and through securing new investment in (private) school facilities. It also lies within the settlement boundary.

(iv) House prices will remain high in the town and only a small number of affordable homes have been built over the last few years. Therefore, a key priority will be maximising opportunities for affordable homes, especially in larger development and through any potential release of Green Belt land for housing.

(v) First and middle schools are operating close to capacity, and some of the smaller sites are constrained. The current three-tier system could be reviewed over the life time of the Plan. In preparing the Core Strategy we must be alert to the alternatives that the three-tier system will remain or a two-tier structure, as in the rest of the borough, introduced and accommodate either. There will be on-going investment in school buildings whatever the option.

(vi) Existing Green Belt policy is very restrictive and would not support redevelopment (other than minor infilling) to create a new school on an existing site. Our approach needs to be sufficiently flexible to ensure that whatever investment is needed can take place and help support the provision of education in the long term. The designation of all school sites as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt<sup>6</sup> would not be appropriate as they vary in size, and this approach is limited to minor infilling between buildings only. An Open Land designation is not favoured either given its implications for Green Belt boundaries and the need to be consistent in our treatment of other school sites in the Green Belt. Consequently, we prefer a comprehensive policy approach to all existing Green Belt school sites in the town tailored to specifically meet the requirements for any change.

(vii) A key aim will be to protect existing leisure space from development and to improve the quality of provision. The sports centre is in need of investment to refurbish buildings and upgrade facilities, and developer contributions could be sought to support this. Similarly, this could also help contribute towards further community facilities for children, young people and the elderly. There will be greater infrastructure opportunities within greenfield development earlier on (e.g. Egerton Rothesay School site)

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<sup>6</sup> Normally new development in the Green Belt is inappropriate. However, Government advice in Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belt permits local authorities to identify substantial large-scale built sites in the Green Belt as major developed sites. This would then allow opportunities for small-scale infilling between buildings as appropriate development.

### **Question 7 (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you think the Council should be more flexible in its approach to new development on school sites in the Green Belt?**

**Yes/No**

**If not, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

#### **c) Economic prosperity**

- (i) To ensure the town remains a sustainable settlement, a reasonable balance needs to be struck between new homes and local job opportunities. However, given the built up nature of the town there are limited opportunities to expand floorspace in the town centre, within existing commercial areas and elsewhere. There is also no strong justification for identifying additional land on a greenfield site on the outskirts of the town.
- (ii) Berkhamsted town centre has a vibrant mix of shopping, services, food and drink outlets and leisure facilities, all set against a High Street of high quality historic buildings. This provides it with a strong character. The UDA supports protecting its historic character, encouraging a mix of uses, and promoting increased densities given its sustainable location. The Saturday street market adds to its attraction together with a well-developed evening economy that draws visitors from a wide area. A compact centre needs to be maintained with a lively range of uses, given the elongate nature of the settlement. This will help protect the key district shopping and service role of the centre.
- (iii) We intend to carry forward the existing Local Plan proposal for the redevelopment of High Street / Water Lane site, including the public car park. It will provide an opportunity to deliver higher quality buildings, will enhance the centre's shopping offer through a new supermarket and small shop units, and secure improved public car park environment and new toilets. The Dacorum Retail and Leisure Study<sup>7</sup> did not identify any pressing need for new shopping floorspace in Berkhamsted, but did support redevelopment of the site. It felt that the redevelopment would provide for a significant mixed-use scheme in the town centre and would increase the depth of the retail area.
- (iv) While out-commuting is important and a limited loss of employment land to housing has been supported in the past, existing employment space within the industrial estates around Billet Lane and Northbridge Road should continue to be protected. They help contribute towards the town's local economy, provide local job opportunities, and offer an attractive location for small to medium sized firms.

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<sup>7</sup> DBC Retail and Leisure Study (January 2006)

(v) The BFI site is important because of the nationally recognised work it undertakes and that the organisation is a key local employer. They would like to expand activities on their site. Residential or other forms of enabling development on part of the site would help fund this aim, but any change is restricted by its Green Belt location. It is difficult for the Council to be flexible as any new development would have implications for the Green Belt and the setting of the site. One approach is the retention of the main use and allowing more development within the built area of the site. Another possible alternative is to link the site to possible greenfield development on adjoining land (see Development Options above).

**Question 8 (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you agree that the existing employment areas should be safeguarded for employment uses?**

**Yes/No**

**If not, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

**Question 9a (Berkhamsted)**

**Should the British Film Institute be allowed to expand on its site?**

**Yes/No**

**If not, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

**Question 9b (Berkhamsted)**

**If the site is expanded should it consolidate development in one area of the site?**

**Yes/No**

**If you answered yes, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

**Question 9c (Berkhamsted)**

**If the site is expanded should it link site to possible greenfield development?**

**Yes/No**

**If you answered yes, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

**d) Location and access**

- (i) The town already has a bypass, a traffic calmed town centre, and a variety of measures to reduce problems with rat running on local roads. Generally, movement east-west is easier along the valley floor than north-south across and up the valley sides.
- (ii) Public car parks are well used in the town centre, car ownership is high, and roads heavily parked, particularly in the adjoining residential areas. It is difficult to accommodate new parking, particularly multi-storey, in the town centre because of a number of factors (e.g. its built-up nature, existing layout, and attractive historic core). The development of the Water Lane / High Street site will provide for a modest increase in spaces in the form of basement parking associated with the new supermarket. It will also offer scope to create a high quality car-parking square with improved landscaping, surfacing materials, and street furniture.
- (iii) The Council has no control over the pricing of the parking at the railway station, which can influence where commuters park. However, a deck is to be added to Berkhamsted Railway Station Car Park creating an extra 114 spaces, although no dates have yet been set for this work. This should help relieve some of the pressure from commuter parking. Furthermore, controlled parking measures in residential areas was investigated a few years ago and the scheme proved unpopular with residents following consultation. Although, such measures could be explored again, there is likely to be similar opposition and no particular proposal is suggested.
- (iv) The masterplanning of the Tunnel Fields estate always envisaged the creation of a link through to New Road as it was seen as bringing some traffic relief to Northchurch. Springfield Road has also been built to a standard to accommodate this additional level of through traffic. However, the final short length of the link has never been completed. The works needed would be fairly substantial and would impact on a wildlife site. It remains a low priority in terms of transport schemes, and is unfunded. Even if development of the nearby Lock Field site off New Road were supported as a housing option (see Table 3 above) and a contribution sought towards the link, it would only be able to part fund it. A decision will need to be made, in discussion with

Hertfordshire County Council, as to whether the scheme is deliverable and should continue to be supported.

(v) The need for improved cycle routes and facilities (for example at the train station) have emerged as an issue for the area through earlier consultation on the Core Strategy. Additional footpaths/cycleways improvements, where possible, would improve accessibility. The West Hertfordshire Area Transport Plan has implemented some improvements, but a number of other schemes proposed have not been carried out because they have proved difficult to implement; some were costly and some did not demonstrate a contribution to countywide transport targets. The Council will explore appropriate schemes further with Hertfordshire County Council through an update of the Berkhamsted and Northchurch Urban Transport Plan in 2012/13. The transport plan will also look in detail at other key transport issues raised above which could include parking.

**Question 10 (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you think we should continue to support the completion of the New Road / Springfield Road link?**

**Yes/No**

**Please give reasons for your answer. (Please see questionnaire)**

**Question 11 (Berkhamsted)**

**Should the potential for new cycle routes in the town continue to be investigated?**

**Yes/No**

**If not, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)**

**Question 12 (Berkhamsted)**

**Do you have any other concerns or comments regarding the spatial strategy for Berkhamsted?**

**Yes/No**

**If yes, please add them here. (Please see questionnaire)**