

# **Stoke Poges Local Plan Objection – Submission**

## **March 2026**

### **Background**

Stoke Poges Parish is identified within Buckinghamshire Council's settlement hierarchy (Buckinghamshire Settlement Review, May 2025) as a Tier 4 settlement (Large Village). The parish has approximately under 5,000 residents and provides a limited range of local services typical of a village rather than a town, distinguishing it from higher-tier settlements with broader employment opportunities, transport connectivity, and infrastructure. Stoke Poges is not identified as a strategic growth location within the emerging Local Plan.

### **Transport and Infrastructure**

The parish does not have its own railway station. The nearest stations are Slough railway station (GWR/ Elizabeth Line, 3–4 miles away) and Gerrards Cross railway station (Chiltern Main Line, 3.9 miles away). Bus services to these stations are infrequent, running every 60–140 minutes to Slough and every two hours to Gerrards Cross, with no service on Sundays. Walking routes are often unlit, overgrown, or incomplete, and bus stops frequently lack shelters. Roads within the parish are narrow and lack pavements or cycle paths, creating high reliance on private cars, increasing carbon emissions, traffic, and congestion. Existing water and sewer infrastructure is limited, and parts of the parish are prone to surface water flooding; significant new development would require substantial upgrades to avoid risk to public health and the environment. Local healthcare provision is constrained, with the GP surgery already operating at capacity and no dental or optician services within the parish, further reinforcing the need to limit development until infrastructure can be appropriately scaled.

### **Geography and Green Belt**

The parish lies entirely within the Chilterns Green Belt, which plays a critical role in preventing urban sprawl, maintaining separation between settlements, and preserving the rural character of Stoke Poges. The countryside surrounding the village contains historic green wildlife corridors that provide habitats for flora and fauna, including protected species, while maintaining the distinctive character and identity of the settlement. Any proposal to release land from the Green Belt or reclassify it as "grey belt" would require exceptional circumstances supported by robust evidence, which have not been demonstrated in the Local Plan. Buckinghamshire Council's assessment of Green Belt land in Stoke Poges identifies parcels of previously undeveloped land as potential grey belt, but these areas strongly contribute to Green Belt purposes, including checking unrestricted sprawl, preventing settlement coalescence, and preserving the historic setting, particularly given the parish's proximity to Slough and the threat of northern expansion.

### **Heritage and Conservation**

Stoke Poges is a historic settlement, recorded in the Domesday Book (1086), with medieval origins under the de Poges family. The parish contains numerous listed buildings, including timber-framed cottages, 16th–18th century houses, and the medieval St Giles Church, where the poet Thomas Gray is buried. Other notable sites include the Stoke Poges Golf Club estate, remnants of manor houses, parklands, and four conservation areas, all contributing to the village's heritage and rural character. The historic routes, hedgerows, and field patterns further reinforce its distinctive semi-rural identity, which has remained largely intact due to the protection afforded by the Green Belt. Protecting these heritage assets is essential in local planning decisions.

### **Housing and Development**

Development in Stoke Poges should focus on small-scale infill, brownfield redevelopment, and windfall sites within the existing settlement boundary, in line with the Stoke Poges Neighbourhood Plan (adopted May 2025). The Plan identifies six suitable sites for development within the built-up area, adjacent to existing infrastructure, with only one site considered for grey belt. These sites were selected to support modest, sustainable growth while preserving the village's character, heritage, and Green Belt setting. Buckinghamshire Council's draft Local Plan, however, does not

appear to have fully taken these sites into account, instead assessing Green Belt land for potential development without reflecting the Neighbourhood Plan's prioritisation of infill and brownfield opportunities. This approach aligns with the NPPF (2024, paras 145–147, 170–187), which states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are evidenced and justified, and where other reasonable options for meeting housing needs have been considered. Housing provision should also cater to local demographic needs, including smaller homes for downsizers and housing for younger families, ensuring a balanced and vibrant community.

### **Ecological, Landscape Contributions**

Green Belt land in Stoke Poges provides significant ecological and landscape value, including biodiversity, wildlife habitats, carbon sequestration, air quality improvement, soil protection, and water management, helping to reduce flooding. It also protects views and vistas, reinforces the village's rural aesthetic, and acts as a buffer between settlements to prevent coalescence. Open spaces contribute to recreation and community well-being, offering walking, exercise, and informal recreation, which support mental and physical health.

Green Belt land also preserves Dark Skies, reducing light pollution and supporting nocturnal wildlife, as recognised in Neighbourhood Plan Policy SP12, which requires development to minimise lighting impacts to protect the rural character and night-time environment.

### **Urban Sprawl**

South Buckinghamshire contains multiple historic market towns and villages separated by green wildlife corridors. Any reclassification of Green Belt around Stoke Poges as grey belt risks fragmenting these corridors, weakening wildlife connectivity, and undermining the separation between settlements, increasing the risk of coalescence and urban sprawl. Maintaining the Green Belt is therefore essential to preserve the distinctive semi-rural character, heritage, and landscape of Stoke Poges.

### **Planning Contradictions**

#### **Magnolia Farm:**

Planning permission has recently been granted for development at Magnolia Farm, Stoke Poges, despite the draft Local Plan classifying this land as unsuitable for development. This represents a clear contradiction between Buckinghamshire Council's emerging Local Plan and its decision-making, undermining the stated objectives to protect the Green Belt and prevent urban sprawl. Magnolia Farm lies within a sensitive part of the parish, contributing to open countryside, landscape value, and wildlife connectivity, and its development conflicts with the principles of the Stoke Poges Neighbourhood Plan (adopted May 2025), which prioritises brownfield, infill, and sites within the existing built-up area for modest, sustainable growth.

Magnolia Farm may also be subject to land contamination given its previous uses. While not formally listed on Buckinghamshire Council's contaminated land register, past planning applications in the locality have included requirements for contamination assessments, remediation, and verification strategies, indicating that contamination risks are relevant. Development without proper, up-to-date investigation and remediation could pose environmental and public health risks to future residents and the surrounding community. Any proposals should therefore include a comprehensive, site-specific contamination assessment to ensure development is safe, sustainable, and compliant with national and local guidance.

Moreover, Magnolia Farm fails to meet all five of the Golden Rules for responsible Green Belt development. It:

1. Is not on previously developed land within the settlement boundary.
2. Is not required to meet a demonstrable local housing need that cannot be accommodated elsewhere.
3. Ignores existing infrastructure and transport limitations, exacerbating car dependency, congestion, and environmental impacts.
4. Threatens landscape, ecological, and heritage functions of the Green Belt.
5. Conflicts with Neighbourhood Plan policies preserving the semi-rural character and identity of Stoke Poges.

Compounding this concern, there is a pending planning application at Sefton Business Park for 373 dwellings immediately adjacent to Stoke Poges. This proposed development, if approved,

would significantly increase the scale of built form along the Green Belt edge, intensifying pressures on schools, infrastructure, traffic, local roads, air quality, and public services, and further eroding the separation between settlements. Together with Magnolia Farm, these proposals risk fragmenting Green Belt land, undermining landscape and ecological connectivity, and increasing development pressures in a semi-rural, heritage-rich area. This site is identified in the Stoke Poges Neighbourhood Plan in as much as approx. 12 acres are previously developed land, the remaining 21 acres is untouched green belt that adds great value to Stoke Poges. And therefore it is reasonable to envisage that this 12 acre area could be developed.

Buckinghamshire Council have failed to see the bigger picture in as much as these sites are adjacent to one another. In summary, both Magnolia Farm and the Sefton Business Park application contradict the Local Plan's designation of unsuitability, threaten the Green Belt's purposes under NPPF paragraph 143, and pose substantial environmental, infrastructural, and community impacts. Any development in these locations should be strictly controlled, prioritising brownfield, infill, or Neighbourhood Plan-allocated sites, to preserve the rural character, separation of settlements, and ecological integrity of Stoke Poges

Approving development on land deemed unsuitable by the draft Local Plan sets a concerning precedent, eroding the village's semi-rural character, heritage, and Green Belt integrity, particularly given the parish's proximity to the expanding urban area of Slough. It highlights the need for the Local Plan to consistently align with Neighbourhood Plan policies, Green Belt protections, and national planning guidance, ensuring that all future development decisions are evidence-based, preserve the distinctive identity of Stoke Poges, and protect ecological, recreational, and community functions.

### **Buckinghamshire Golf Club / Wycombe Wanderers Proposal:**

The South Buckinghamshire Golf Club and Farnham Park Playing Fields are correctly classified in Buckinghamshire Council's draft Local Plan as unsuitable for development. Stoke Poges Parish Council fully supports this assessment, as the site contributes strongly to the Green Belt by:

- Maintaining separation between Stoke Poges and neighbouring settlements.
- Preserving the rural and semi-rural character of the area.
- Providing landscape, visual, and ecological value, including important wildlife corridors.

Despite this, Wycombe Wanderers are proposing a Category 1 football academy on part of the site, which would involve reducing the golf course and constructing sports facilities. Such development would:

- Contradict the Local Plan's Green Belt classification, undermining the purpose of the Council's evidence-based assessment.
- Increase traffic, noise, and light pollution, impacting local residents and the Dark Skies environment (SP12).
- Erode Green Belt functions set out in NPPF paragraph 143, including preventing urban sprawl, safeguarding the countryside, and preserving the character of historic towns and villages.

Approval of this development would set a dangerous precedent and directly conflict with Buckinghamshire Council's own assessment that this land is unsuitable for development. Stoke Poges Parish Council therefore urges that the Local Plan designation be respected, and that no development outside the settlement boundary is permitted at this site

### **Wexham Park Hospital**

Wexham Park Hospital is already under significant pressure, with patients often facing long waiting times in A&E due to the high number of people relying on its emergency services. The NHS target is that patients should be seen, treated, admitted or discharged within four hours, but this target is frequently missed because of overcrowding with wait times of sometimes 11 hours or more.

Wexham Park effectively serves a catchment area of around 20–25 miles across East Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire, covering large communities such as Slough, Windsor, Maidenhead, High Wycombe and Beaconsfield.

Because there is no full A&E at Wycombe Hospital, many residents from that area also have to travel to Wexham Park for emergency treatment, further increasing demand. There is also clear public concern about this situation, demonstrated by a community petition calling for the return of a full 24-hour A&E department at Wycombe Hospital which has gained more than 10,000 signatures from local residents who believe emergency services should be restored.

Without investing in additional emergency care infrastructure, there are serious concerns about patient safety and the sustainability of local NHS services.

### **Conclusion**

Buckinghamshire Council's draft Local Plan does not adequately take into account:

- The Green Belt land in Stoke Poges that is critical to preventing urban sprawl, maintaining separation between settlements, and protecting heritage and landscape value.
- The prioritisation of infill and brownfield development identified in the Stoke Poges Neighbourhood Plan.
- The limited transport, drainage, and healthcare infrastructure that constrains sustainable development.

Any decisions to release or reclassify Green Belt land must be fully evidenced, justified, and consistent with national policy, including the protection of ecological functions, historic character, landscape value, and the Dark Skies and night-time environment. Development should be limited to small-scale infill and brownfield sites within the existing settlement boundary, maintaining the semi-rural, heritage-rich character of Stoke Poges and supporting the long-term sustainability and well-being of the local community.