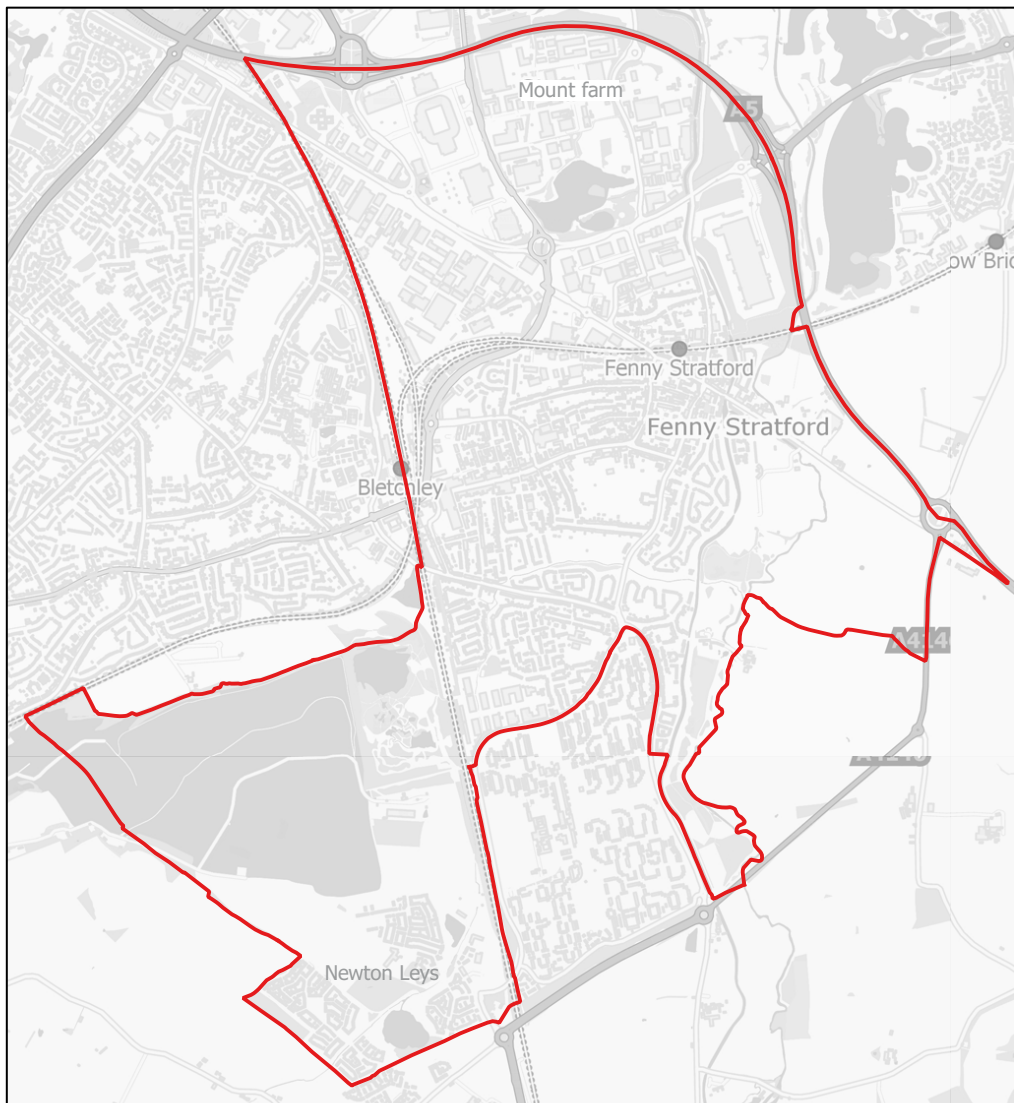


BLETCHLEY & FENNY STRATFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

SCOPING SESSION NOTE: OCTOBER 2022



1. INTRODUCTION

Bletchley & Fenny Stratford Town Council (BFSTC) has engaged Oneill Homer (OH) to support the Steering Group (SG) in the production of the first Bletchley & Fenny Stratford Neighbourhood Plan (BFSNP). The Parish lies in the local planning authority area of Milton Keynes Council (MKC). An initial session took place on 6 October 2022 to explore the scope of the BFSNP. A slide pack of background information was prepared to inform the session.

This note does not repeat that information – the slide pack is published separately – and instead captures the essence of that discussion and recommends an action list and timetable for the project. It is for the SG to consider in agreeing how to take the project forward.

The absence of a policy idea from this note does not mean that the issue is not important, nor that it cannot be explored as the project proceeds. The paper is not an expression of the final content of the BFSNP, it simply sets out a starting point to assist in defining a manageable project focussing limited resources. The action plan may lead to ideas that the SG wishes to explore that is not currently included within this note. Equally, once the evidence has been explored further, it may suggest that the issue is adequately dealt with through existing or forthcoming national and MKC policies.

2. KEY POINTS RAISED

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

Managing expectations of what a Neighbourhood Plan can and can't do is important. For example, concerns around traffic management are often raised but it is not always possible for a Neighbourhood Plan to address this.

It will be important for the SG to provide regular updates to BFSTC as the 'qualifying body' who will take the plan through its formal stages (see Figure 1 below).

A key difference in preparing Neighbourhood Plans from other development plan documents is the requirement to secure a successful referendum from the local community before the plan can be 'made'.

The Process and Roles

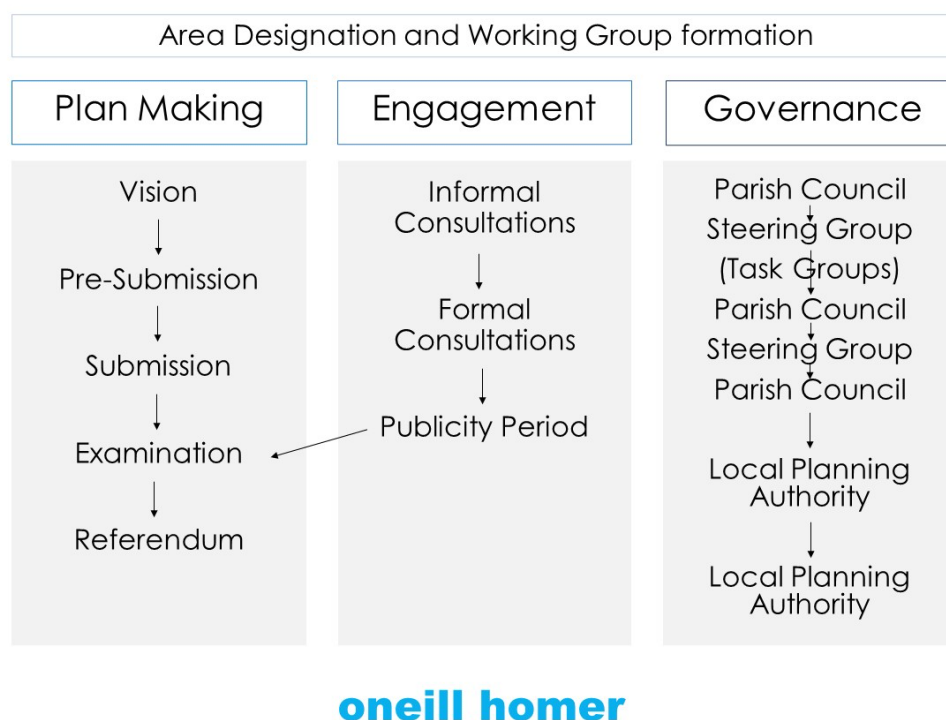


Figure 1: The neighbourhood planning process and rules

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

The plan area contains six parts: Bletchley, Fenny Stratford, Denbigh, Water Eaton, Newton Leys and Eaton Leys. Each has its own character and history and in the case of the latter two, geographic separation from the main urban area.

Bletchley and Fenny Stratford form the two largest residential areas and have a much longer history than MK itself. Bletchley is the larger of the two, with its town centre (Queensway) and railway station, but Fenny also has an established commercial street (Aylesbury Street) and station. The boundary between the two is blurred in practice though many in their communities would regard themselves as 'belonging' to one or the other. Bletchley has seen, and is seeing, some development around the edges of the town centre (Bowling Green, Leisure Centre, South Terrace/Bus Station); Fenny less so in recent years.

The much smaller Water Eaton area is also a historic centre and distinct from its larger neighbours, with important social infrastructure. The Lakes Estate lies to its south (and outside the plan area) – and would regard itself as distinct – with the new Eaton Leys housing scheme further south on the new edge of MK (most of which lies in neighbouring Bucks, which has yet to be built).

Newton Leys is another recent urban extension to MK and Bletchley but lies on the other side of the main railway line. It lies adjacent to the Lakes and is separated from them by the Blue Lagoon Nature Reserve and waste management area. It is large enough to be a relatively self-contained settlement in terms of local services but its connectivity with the rest of the plan area is limited. A smaller southern part of the settlement lies in neighbouring Stoke Hammond Parish in Bucks.

Denbigh is very different in its almost exclusive commercial land uses, some of which serve a city/region-wide purpose (e.g. MK Stadium, IKEA), with only Granby Court housing scheme in a different use.

The River Ouzel, Grand Union Canal and Waterhall Park run north-south through the area forming a major green infrastructure asset of increasing importance with the build out of Eaton Leys to its east in the coming years. The railway line and A5 form the other two major physical features of the area that define its northern and western boundaries respectively. Both serve to separate the plan area from West Bletchley to the west and from the rest of MK (Simpson, Ashland etc) to the north.

PLANNING ISSUES

Plan: MK

- The adopted Local Plan runs to 2031 and together with the Site Allocations Plan of 2018 it contains a wide range of strategic and non-strategic policies and proposals covering the BFSNP area
- In which case, the goal for the BFSNP is to either fill a policy gap, refine an existing MK policy so that it better suits the plan area and/or update and replace a non-strategic MK policy where necessary and justified
- The BFSNP must avoid repeating or wordsmithing existing MK (or national) policy as this will add no value, it will take up valuable time and resource, and very likely the examiner will recommend to MKC it is deleted from the referendum version
- In the evidence base of Plan: MK is a wide range of [technical studies](#) that may inform the BFSNP if they remain up to date, e.g. the 2018 retail study
- In support of those plans, MKC has adopted a series of [Supplementary Planning Documents](#) on a variety of subjects, of which the BFSNP must be mindful – again there is likely to be little or no value to add to the content of those documents and so this should also be avoided; the most recent SPD covers [parking standards](#)
- MKC has begun the process of rolling forward Plan: MK to [2050](#) but is some way off publishing draft proposals; some evidence has been gathered and this is likely to be published during 2023 (e.g. ‘Call for Sites’, Open Space Survey)

Milton Keynes: Strategy for 2050

- This [document](#) published in 2020 sets out MKC's thinking for the longer term future of the city, including how it might relate to its wider hinterland
- Ambitious plans for population growth, not all of which may be possible by continuing to expand outwards, which may increase interest/pressure on those existing urban areas that have the potential for significant intensification – will parts of the BFSNP area face this?
- The document will inform MKC's proposals for the new Local Plan

Central Bletchley Urban Design Framework

- Adopted by MKC in March 2022 this [document](#) sets out detailed proposals for the Queensway and Station area (as well as into West Bletchley)
- It is relatively narrowly focused in terms of its geographic area and is not clear about how its fringes into the rest of the town will be affected by change
- Some of its proposals will be taken forward with funding from the [Town Deal](#)

COMMUNITY SURVEY 2022

The community engagement work carried out so far has been regarded as a successful initial step in gauging local opinion on planning (and other) matters. A report of the May 2022 workshop is published separately but it highlighted a series of priority issues for the BFSNP to tackle if it could.

At the vision session, we focused on the following that were given the highest priority and are considered to relate to land use and development and therefore fall within the scope of the plan:

- Additional off-street car parking as part of the regeneration
- Larger housing developments to include sustainable transport plans
- Greater variety in the types of housing available for new and existing residents
- Ensure the local ecology with greater access to outside green spaces - walking routes, bike trains, etc.
- New housing to incorporate low carbon technology e.g. solar panels, and sustainable building practices
- Generation of new wild spaces (ponds, woodlands, etc) to counterbalance the environmental impact of new builds, particularly increased susceptibility to flooding
- Increased emphasis on renewable energy schemes e.g. electric vehicle charging points
- Preserve and promote local heritage
- Prioritise the regeneration around brownfield sites

- Higher standard of new developments in the town centre, particularly around the Queensway achieved through a stronger planning policy, bringing back a sense of civic pride
- More shops, bars, cafes, restaurants and new supermarket in the town centre

SESSION DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The following points and observations were noted during the session:

General

- Divisions between Bletchley and Fenny Stratford
- Water Eaton is another distinct area - has more of a 'village' feel to it and its own sense of identity perception that you shouldn't assume Fenny is simply a part of Bletchley
- Some residents can't pinpoint where Fenny starts and ends
- Green infrastructure – much to be recognised, protected and improved
- Also need a better articulation of the good/benefits of the green infrastructure in and around B&FS
- Noted Environment Act 2021 and its proposals for Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery; could a policy relating to the waterways also be drawn into this, especially with the importance of the Grand Union Canal

Bletchley

- Future of the town centre - success and 'feel' of a town are often based on the state of its town centre
- Every neighbourhood should have its own distinct 'beating heart' (town centre) - need to find ways the NP can 'help the heart beat' and a cultural purpose
- Was the Urban Design Framework a success? Has only made observations about Central Bletchley; before the expansion of Milton Keynes, Bletchley was far more of a shopping hub; Bletchley's use has changed over time, more built around being a transport hub
- There is a feeling that the town centre is drifting westwards with the major investments in West Bletchley ('station quarter')
- Eastern entrance to the railway station is something the community has always wanted, but are not optimistic about
- The 'beating heart' of the Queensway needs to come from the transport links, provided by the railway station
- West and Central Bletchley should complement each other
- Could think more about how the NP will affect the fringes of Bletchley, including Fenny which the Central Bletchley document ignored

- Already concerns about opportunistic development in the Town Centre e.g. Bletchley View (either side of Burger King); quite dense
- Concerns about permitted development and the effect this is having on the town centre, notably properties on the Queensway
- Quality of the residential developments aren't good
- Noted former Jobcentre site being redeveloped into 27/28 flats
- Adjustments have been made to vehicle access and parking
- Speculative Home Bargains development
- If there was a significant development, it could be an option to designate a specified number of plots for local start-ups at an affordable rate
- Could add a list of locally significant buildings, either for historical or social reasons

Fenny

- History, culture and defined places within Fenny Stratford
- Historic similarities between Fenny and Stoney Stratford at either end of Milton Keynes on Watling Street (A5)
- Fenny used to be a coaching town, Bletchley was a railway town
- To reinforce the differences between the two, or whether they don't matter?
- Fenny has a very distinctive high street, Bletchley has a very distinctive Queensway
- Fenny has the benefit of the Grand Union Canal
- There are no good connections between the waterway and Aylesbury Street (Fenny High Street)
- Fenny Lock is the only one in MK and is a significant heritage asset
- Aylesbury Street is seen to have more potential, particularly architecturally
- Fenny Stratford station is likely to close down to achieve better frequency and journey times for the East-West rail; will this be a considerable loss? There will have to be alternative transport provisions – a bus service? The level crossing would be shut for most of the day due to the frequency of trains in any event; there will need to be some kind of pedestrianised crossing over the train line
- Noted Travis Perkins site proposal for over 100 houses – a signal of wider changes of use here?

Denbigh

- There is a residential community (Granby Court) in Denbigh; cannot see being rebuilt within 10 years (the scope of this NP) but is physically disconnected
- Denbigh is key leisure, retail area – including the stadium
- To what extent should the Denbigh area be focused on in the Neighbourhood Plan? Engagement with business community would be very difficult and there is no obvious planning policy gap for the NP to fill, so leave outside policy scope for now

Eaton Leys

- The B&FS part is onsite with completion soon; new public footpath network and a new footbridge over the river but there are still concerns about how well connected it will be to Fenny
- There will be 1 shop and a site allocated for health facilities, potentially replacing the current facilities in Fenny – will it be a ‘self-contained’ facility that doesn’t have to depend on places? But a number of people living in flats with no access to cars
- The larger Bucks part of Eaton Leys has yet to receive planning permission

Newton Leys

- Seen as very car dependent; feels very separate/different to the surrounding area; looks very different architecturally; bus transport links are limited
- Is there any policy space left for the NP to fill? There may be 1 or 2 opportunities to move the goalposts for an outcome the developer would be interested in, e.g. site designated for the construction of a hotel
- No direct link with the Blue Lagoon
- Lots of residents who feel as they have no connection to Bletchley Town Centre
- East West Rail - will there be a willingness to invest due to the area becoming more attractive as a result of the travel connections?
- Belief that people may be more attracted to West Bletchley, than Central Bletchley as the shift moves towards the East, particularly the younger generation who are more likely to be commuters

MKC's wider goals

- MK has not had to do much in-filling in previous years, due to the nature of its geographical expansion - will it have to work harder in the next 10-20 years to intensify the current urban area?

3. ACTION PLAN

With that priority list in mind, the following initial policy ideas are recommended for the project to pursue further and an action plan proposed for how each idea is explored.

Brownfield Sites (DTT)

- Identify, map and photograph all land that has been previously used but is now derelict, vacant or under-used or is currently in use but it is anticipated (or known from local knowledge) may be subject to redevelopment proposals over the next five years
- Check the recent planning history and planning status of each site (using the [MKC planning application website](#), the [Plan:MK Policies Map](#), the [2017 Urban Capacity Study](#) and the [2017 Employment Land Study](#)) to identify if proposals have been made in the past (approved but not implemented) and what policy constraints there might be on the land (e.g. protected employment land)
- Consider what other uses may be suited to the land assuming those constraints can be overcome (e.g. through new BFSNP policy) and briefly explain why
- Pull all this information and analysis together into a single report
- Consider if securing a Locality Technical Support Package (Site Options & Assessment) may be helpful in taking forward site-specific ideas
- If so, make an application to Locality
- Brief the consultants and comment on their draft report
- Receive and publish their final report

Housing Types & Tenures (DTT)

- Consider if securing a Locality Technical Support Package (Housing Needs Assessment) may be helpful in taking forward this idea
- If so, make an application to Locality
- Brief the consultants and comment on their draft report
- Receive and publish their final report

Green Infrastructure (ETT)

- Review a map of all existing GI features and opportunities for local nature recovery to be produced by OH
- Relate the map features to any other land that other actions are identifying (e.g. brownfield, town centre) to identify if and how that land may contribute to improving green infrastructure
- Identify opportunities to increase street tree planting either on single or groups of streets or as part of wider public realm improvements

- Review the [Urban Green Factor](#) policy and guidance of the London Plan to decide if this approach is desired in the plan area and to what extent, if any, the factor needs to be modified to suit the area
- Pull all this information and analysis together into a single report

Local Green Spaces (ETT)

- Draw up a list of candidate spaces using the [Locality guide](#)
- Map and photograph each candidate and note ownership if possible
- Finalise list by describing what it is about each space that is special and write to each owner (where known) to invite comments on the possibility of their land being identified in the BFSNP
- Review and finalise list in a single report

Climate Change (ETT)

- Review the types of policy that other recently made neighbourhood plans have included on the subject, e.g. zero carbon energy performance – to be provided by OH
- Consider which policy types may be suited to the BFSNP area
- Put this analysis in a single report

Walking & Cycling Routes (ETT)

- Review the [MK Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan](#)
- Create a single plan of its proposals within the BFSNP area
- Identify and map any additional opportunities for connectivity improvements
- Show this information and analysis in a single report

Economic Development (DTT)

- Identify, map and photograph all existing buildings in business, commercial and service (known as Class E) uses in Queensway, Aylesbury Street/Watling Street and other locations within the area, except Denbigh – the [Plan: MK Policies Map](#) and the [2018 Retail Study](#) (Main Report and Appendix 5) will be helpful as a starting point
- Note the type of ground floor uses and if upper floors are part of that use or are in a separate use (e.g. dwelling, office) and note vacancies
- Use local knowledge to record how the current use (or most recent use if vacant) has changed in recent years
- Make a simple table to record this information and to calculate the % of use types (e.g. shop, café, office etc) in each main frontage (say Aylesbury Street northside)
- Use local knowledge to note how the mix in each frontage has changed over recent years and to what extent change has occurred since Covid

- Ascertain from MKC planning application website how many buildings have changed use using the Prior Approval permitted development process rather than planning applications
- Summarise the above information for Queensway (Town Centre) and Aylesbury Street/Watling Street (Fenny) and make observations on the nature, scale and rate of change and how this has changed their overall success as economic as well as social 'hubs', relating the findings to those of the 2018 Retail Study (which was based on 2017 and earlier data)
- If possible, compare this information with other town/secondary centres (e.g. Stoney Stratford, Wolverton, Newport Pagnell) to consider how well the Town Centre and Fenny are performing
- Consider what the BFSNP might do to change policy to improve the viability and vitality of those two centres
- Identify and map all the commercial uses (existing and planned) at Newton Leys and Eaton Leys and consider if there is scope/desire to see these increased in future years to meet local needs
- Pull all this information and analysis together into a single report

Local Heritage Assets (ETT)

- Draw up a candidate list of buildings and structures of local architectural and historic interest using the [Bucks Council guidance](#) on what might qualify and the information needed to support the case
- Map and photograph each candidate and note of ownership if possible
- Finalise list by describing what it is about the building that is of local heritage value (and should therefore be taken into account in future planning proposals) and write to each owner (where known) to invite comments on the possibility of their building being identified in the BFSNP (explaining the implications and stressing this is not the same as 'listed building' status)
- Review and finalise list in a single report

Bletchley Town Centre (BTT)

- Review all of the above reports to identify linkages (or potential conflicts) between policy ideas for the town centre area, including its edges to the surrounding residential areas
- Produce a note making observations on if and how the mix of policy ideas will combine in the area, noting any implications for its functional relationship with Fenny and any issues that may influence the Town Deal and Urban Design Framework proposals

Fenny Stratford Centre (FTT)

- Review all of the above reports to identify linkages (or potential conflicts) between policy ideas for the Fenny area
- Produce a note making observations on if and how the mix of policy ideas will combine in the area, noting any implications for its functional relationship with Bletchley

To manage the delivery of these actions, it is recommended that the SG forms two initial Task Teams: Development (DTT) and Environment (ETT). The teams should be drawn from members of the SG as well as invited others with an expertise and/or interest in those subjects. OH will provide support to both teams as they pursue their actions. Each should be chaired by an SG member whose role it is to report back to the SG on progress etc.

The SG should monitor the task teams' work to judge at what point two further task teams are set up: Bletchley Town Centre (BTT) and Fenny Stratford Centre (FTT). These teams will be used to make the valuable spatial connections of the DTT and ETT work outputs. It is likely they will be helpful before the DTT and ETT complete their work. Otherwise, the SG itself could retain responsibility for making those connections. It should also continue to plan for and deliver on its various engagement activities (as noted in the project plan).

4. TIMETABLE

Bletchley & Fenny Stratford Neighbourhood Plan: Project Plan (Basic)																
14.10.22		2022			2023											
Action	Who	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1 Strategic Context & Policy Option Evaluation																
1.01 Project Inception	SG/OH	X														
1.02 Document Review & Slide Pack	OH															
1.03 Scoping session	SG/OH	X														
1.04 Session report	OH															
1.05 SG review	SG/OH	X														
2 Task Teams																
2.01 Site investigations	OH/SG															
2.02 SG meetings	SG/OH	X	X	X	X	X										
2.03 Stakeholder engagement	SG/OH															
2.04 Policy idea generation	OH															
2.05 SG review	SG/OH							X								
2.06 Informal consultations	SG															
3 Policy Drafting																
3.01 SG review	SG/OH								X							
3.02 Draft policy production etc	OH															
3.03 Stakeholder engagement	SG/OH															
3.04 Evidence base improvement	OH															
4 Draft Plan Preparation (Reg 14)																
4.01 Document production	OH/SG															
4.02 SG review	SG/OH												X			
4.03 BFSTC approval	BFSTC												X			
4.04 Reg 14 consultation period	SG															
5 Critical Review (Reg 15)																
5.01 Review comments	OH/SG															
5.02 SG review	SG/OH															
5.03 Final document production	OH															
5.04 Draft Basic Conditions Statement	OH															
5.05 Draft Consultation Statement	SG/OH															
5.06 SG review	SG/OH														X	
5.07 BFSTC approval	BFSTC															X
5.08 Submission to MKC	BFSTC															X

5. NEXT STEPS

- This Note should be published (on the Town Council website for example) and sent to MKC for information – there will be a number of opportunities to discuss progress with them as the work progresses and its help can be secured when necessary (notably as part of tasks 2.03, 2.04, 2.06, 3.03 and 5.01)
- Assign actions based on tasks identified in the Note having set up the task teams and hold a joint 'orientation' session with them both to explain their tasks and to answer queries
- Apply for the technical support packages as soon as possible as these can take some time to secure and complete.