

# **Biddle Pension & Life Assurance Plan (the 'Plan')**

## **Statement of Investment Principles (the 'Statement')**

### **Scope of Statement**

This Statement has been prepared in accordance with s35 and s36 of the Pensions Act 1995 (as amended by s244 and s245 of the Pensions Act 2004, the Occupational Pension Schemes (Investment) Regulations 2005 and the Occupational Pension Schemes (Investment and Disclosure) (Amendment) Regulations 2019).

The effective date of this Statement is December 2024. The Trustees will review this Statement and the Plan's investment strategy no later than three years after the effective date of this Statement and without delay after any significant change in investment policy.

### **Consultations made and parties involved**

The Trustees have consulted with the Employer prior to writing this Statement and will take the Employer's comments into account when it believes it is appropriate to do so. The Trustees will also consult with the Employer on any revision to this statement.

The Trustees are responsible for the investment strategy of the Plan. They have obtained and considered written advice on the investment strategy appropriate for the Plan. They have obtained advice on the preparation of this Statement and this advice was provided by Aon Investments Limited ("Aon"), which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

A copy of this Statement is available to the members of the Plan.

### **Objective**

The objective of the investment strategy is to ensure that the Plan's assets and future contributions are invested in such a manner that the benefits due to members and their beneficiaries can be paid from the Plan as they arise.

### **Kinds of investments**

The Trustees have decided to invest the Plan's assets in Aon's Delegated Consulting Service ('DCS'). Management of the Plan's assets has been delegated to Aon Investments Limited ('AIL'), who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Under DCS, AIL manage the Plan's assets in a range of funds which can include multi-asset, multi-manager and specialist third party liability matching funds. AIL conducts the necessary day to day management of the funds required to meet the Trustees' objectives and appoints asset managers to manage investments on behalf of the Trustees.

## The balance between different kinds of investment

Under DCS the Plan will have an allocation between five different funds as detailed in the table below. The Nominal and Real Funds contain exposure to both the Managed Growth Strategy and liability hedging instruments.

Investment	Objective	Return Target
Diversified Liquid Credit Strategy	Invests in a diversified mix of credit strategies that deliver returns through making long-only investments in credit markets and collecting the income from these assets.	SONIA +1.5% p.a.
Nominal +2 Fund	<p>There are two components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It invests in a portfolio of leveraged fixed interest gilt funds, which are designed to match a typical pension scheme's liabilities with around 17 year duration.</li> <li>It invests in growth assets to target 3% outperformance.</li> </ul> <p>This is expected to broadly match the Plan's nominal liabilities in combination with the Nominal +1 Fund, and add returns.</p>	Gilts <sup>(1)</sup> +2% p.a.
Nominal +1 Fund	<p>There are two components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It invests in a portfolio of leveraged fixed interest gilt funds, which are designed to match a typical pension scheme's liabilities with around 17 year duration.</li> <li>It invests in growth assets to target 1% outperformance.</li> </ul> <p>This is expected to broadly match the Plan's nominal liabilities in combination with the Nominal +2 Fund, and add returns.</p>	Gilts <sup>(1)</sup> +1% p.a.
Real +2 Fund	<p>There are two components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It invests in a portfolio of leveraged index linked gilt funds which are designed to match a typical pension scheme's liabilities with around 17 year duration.</li> <li>It invests in growth assets to target 3% outperformance.</li> </ul> <p>This is expected to broadly match the Plan's real liabilities in combination with the Real +1 Fund, and add returns.</p>	Gilts <sup>(1)</sup> +2% p.a.
Real +1 Fund	<p>There are two components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It invests in a portfolio of leveraged index linked gilt funds which are designed to match a typical pension scheme's liabilities with around 17 year duration.</li> <li>It invests in growth assets to target 1% outperformance.</li> </ul> <p>This is expected to broadly match the Plan's real liabilities in combination with the Real +2 Fund, and add returns.</p>	Gilts <sup>(1)</sup> +1% p.a.

(1) The manager will calculate a notional benchmark which reflects the underlying gilts held to match a typical pension scheme liabilities with around 17 year duration

The Trustees review the investment strategy in conjunction with each formal actuarial valuation of the Plan (or more frequently should the circumstances of the Plan change in a material way). The Trustees take written advice from its professional advisers regarding an appropriate investment strategy for the Plan.

### **Asset allocation strategy**

The Plan's investment strategy has been established as laid out on the following page. The Plan's actual position relative to this asset allocation strategy is to be formally reviewed on an annual basis in order to determine whether any rebalancing is required.

<b>Investment</b>	<b>Target Weight (%)</b>
Diversified Liquid Credit Strategy	28.0%
Nominal +2 Fund	30.0%
Nominal +1 Fund	5.0%
Real +2 Fund	31.0%
Real +1 Fund	6.0%

### **Expected returns on assets**

The target return of each individual investment is outlined in the above table. Broadly speaking, the objective of the Diversified Liquid Credit Strategy is to generate returns through making long-only investments in credit markets and collecting the income from these assets,, and the objective of the Nominal and Real Funds is to generate long term capital growth to varying degrees, whilst simultaneously matching movements in liabilities on an exposure basis.

### **Risks arising from the investments and risk management**

The Trustees measure and manage the credit risk, market risk and liability mismatching risk of the Plan's investments on a regular basis. In the case of market risk, the Trustees make distinction between risks that arise from, currency exposure, interest rate and inflation exposure, and other pricing risks.

Measurement of each of the risks is detailed in ongoing reporting provided by Aon. The methods the Trustees employ for managing each risk is set out below.

#### **Credit risk**

Credit risk is the risk that one party to a financial instrument will cause a financial loss for the other part by failing to discharge an obligation.

Direct credit risk arising from pooled investment vehicles is mitigated by the underlying assets of the pooled arrangements being ring-fenced from the pooled manager, the regulatory environments in which the pooled managers operate and diversification of investments amongst a number of pooled arrangements. The manager carries out due diligence checks on the appointment of new pooled investment managers and on an ongoing basis monitors any changes to the operating environment of a pooled manager.

Indirect credit risk arises in relation to exposure to underlying bond pooled investment vehicles. This risk is mitigated through the underlying exposures on aggregate basis being predominantly

investment grade credit securities, and by funds holding a diverse portfolio of investments with exposure to a range of issues and issuers.

Cash is held within financial institutions which are at least investment grade credit rated.

### **Currency risk**

Currency risk is the risk that the fair value or future cash flows of a financial asset will fluctuate because of changes in foreign exchange rates.

The Plan is subject to currency risk because some of the Plan's investments are held in overseas markets via pooled investment vehicles. AIL may enter into currency exchange transactions and/or use techniques and instruments to seek to protect against fluctuation in the relative value of its portfolio positions as a result of changes in currency exchange rates between the trade and settlement dates of specific securities transactions or anticipated securities transactions.

### **Interest rate and inflation risk**

Interest rate and inflation risk is the risk that the fair value or future cash flows of a financial asset, primarily bonds, interest rate swaps and pooled investment vehicles held mainly in bonds, will fluctuate because of changes in market interest rates.

The Plan is subject to interest rate and inflation risk because some of the Plan's investments are held in gilt derivatives, through pooled vehicles, and cash. These investments are held in order to mitigate the impact of interest rate and inflation changes on the Plan's liabilities. The Plan also has some exposure to bond pooled investment vehicles as part of its diversified return seeking growth portfolio.

### **Liability mismatching risk**

Liability mismatching risk is the risk that changes in the value placed on the Plan's liabilities are not matched by appropriate changes in the value of the Plan's assets.

The Plan's investment strategy is determined through asset-liability modelling exercises. This enables measurement of the extent of liability mismatching risk through qualitative and quantitative assessment of the expected volatility of the liabilities relative to the Plan's current and alternative investment strategies. On an ongoing basis, the risk is managed by assessing the progress of the actual growth of the liabilities relative to the selected investment strategy.

### **Other price risk**

The Trustees define other price risk as the risk that the fair value or future cash flows of a financial asset will fluctuate because of changes in market prices (other than those arising from interest rate risk or currency risk), whether those changes are caused by factors specific to the individual financial instrument or its issuer, or factors affecting all similar financial instruments traded in the market.

Other price risk arises principally in relation to the Plan's return seeking assets which are held in pooled vehicles, investing in turn in a diversified range of pooled vehicles including, but not limited to, equities, fixed income, debt, property, infrastructure, hedge funds and other asset classes.

### **Realisation of investments and liquidity**

The Trustees recognise that there is a risk in holding assets that cannot be easily realised should the need arise.

The majority of the assets held are realisable at short notice (through the sale of units in pooled funds).

### **Social, environmental or ethical considerations**

The Trustees consider investment risk to include ESG factors and climate change. These risks could negatively impact the Plan's investments. The Trustees consider these risks by taking advice from its investment adviser. The Trustees have appointed AIL to manage the Plan's assets. AIL invests in a range of underlying investment vehicles.

As part of AIL's management of the Plan's assets, the Trustees expect AIL to:

- Where relevant, assess the integration of ESG factors in the investment process of underlying managers;
- Use its influence to engage with underlying managers to ensure the Plan's assets are not exposed to undue risk; and
- Report to the Trustees on its ESG activities as required.
- Ensure that (where appropriate) underlying managers exercise the Trustees voting rights in relation to the Plan's assets; and
- Report to the Trustees on stewardship activity by underlying managers as required.

### **Members views and non-financial factors**

In setting and implementing the Plan's investment strategy the Trustees do not explicitly take into account the views of Plan members and beneficiaries in relation to ethical considerations, social and environmental impact, or present and future quality of life matters (defined as "non-financial factors"<sup>(1)</sup>).

### **Arrangements with Asset Managers**

The Trustees have appointed AIL as their fiduciary manager and consider AIL to be their asset manager. References in this policy to 'underlying asset managers' refers to those asset managers which AIL in turn appoints to manage investments on behalf of the Trustees.

The Trustees recognise that the arrangements with AIL, and correspondingly the underlying asset managers, are important to ensure that interests are aligned. In particular, the Trustees seek to ensure that AIL is incentivised to operate in a manner that generates the best long-term results for the Plan and its beneficiaries.

The Trustees receive regular reports and verbal updates from AIL on various items including the investment strategy, performance, and longer-term positioning of the portfolio. The Trustees focus on longer-term performance when considering the ongoing suitability of the investment strategy in relation to the Plan's objectives, and assess AIL over 3-year periods.

The Trustees also receive annual stewardship reports on the monitoring and engagement activities carried out by AIL, which supports the Trustees in determining the extent to which the Plan's engagement policy has been followed throughout the year.

The Trustees share the policies, as set out in this SIP, with AIL and request that AIL reviews and confirms whether its approach is in alignment with the Trustees' policies.

The Trustees delegate the ongoing monitoring of underlying asset managers to AIL. AIL monitors the Plan's investments to consider the extent to which the investment strategy and decisions of the underlying asset managers are aligned with the investment objectives of the Plan. This includes monitoring the extent to which the underlying asset managers:

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<sup>(1)</sup> The Pension Protection Fund (Pensionable Service) and Occupational Pension Schemes (Investment and Disclosure) (Amendment and Modification) Regulations 2018

- Make decisions based on assessments about medium- to long-term financial and non-financial performance of an issuer of debt or equity; and
- Engage with issuers of debt or equity in order to improve their performance in the medium- to long-term.

Before appointment of a new fiduciary manager, the Trustees will review the governing documentation associated with the appointment and will consider the extent to which it aligns with the Trustees' policies. Where necessary, the Trustees will seek to amend that documentation or express their expectations (such as through side letters, in writing, or verbally at Trustee meetings) so that there is more alignment.

The Trustees believe that having appropriate governing documentation, setting clear expectations to AIL, and regular monitoring of the AIL's performance and investment strategy, is sufficient to incentivise AIL to make decisions that align with the Trustees' policies and are based on assessments of medium- and long-term financial and non-financial performance.

Where AIL is considered to make decisions that are not in line with the Trustees' policies, expectations, or the other considerations set out above, the Trustees will typically engage with AIL to understand the circumstances and materiality of the decisions made.

There is typically no set duration for arrangements with AIL, although the continued appointment will be reviewed periodically. Similarly, there are no set durations for arrangements with the underlying asset managers that AIL invests in, although this is regularly reviewed as part of the manager research and portfolio management processes in place.

### **Cost Monitoring**

The Trustees are aware of the importance of monitoring their asset managers' total costs and the impact these costs can have on the overall value of the Plan's assets. The Trustees recognise that in addition to annual management charges, there are other costs incurred by asset managers that can increase the overall cost incurred by their investments.

The Trustees receive annual cost transparency reports from AIL. These reports present information in line with prevailing regulatory requirements for fiduciary managers. They clearly set out on an itemised basis:

- The total amount of investment costs incurred by the Plan;
- The fees paid to AIL;
- The fees paid to the investment managers appointed by AIL;
- The amount of portfolio turnover costs (transaction costs) incurred by the investment managers appointed by AIL;
  - The trustees define portfolio turnover costs as the costs incurred in buying and selling underlying securities held within the funds of the investment managers appointed by AIL;
- Any charges incurred through the use of pooled funds (custody, administration, and audit fees)
- The impact of costs on the investment return achieved by the Plan.

The Trustees acknowledge that portfolio turnover costs are a necessary cost to generate investment returns and that the level of these costs varies across asset classes and manager. AIL monitors the level of portfolio turnover (defined broadly as the amount of purchases plus sales) of all the investment managers appointed on behalf of the Trustees.

The Trustees benefit from the economies of scale provided by AIL in two key cost areas:

- The ability of AIL to negotiate reduced annual management charges with the appointed investment managers;

- The ability of AIL to monitor ongoing investment costs (including additional fund expenses and portfolio turnover) incurred by the investment managers and achieve efficiencies where possible.

### **Evaluation of performance and remuneration**

The Trustees assess the (net of all costs) performance of their asset manager on a rolling three-year basis. The remuneration paid to AIL and fees incurred by third parties appointed by AIL are provided annually by AIL to the Trustees. This cost information is set out alongside the performance of AIL to provide context. The Trustees monitor these costs and performance trends over time.

### **Stewardship – Voting and Engagement**

The trustees recognise the importance of their role as a steward of capital and the need to promote the highest standards of governance and corporate responsibility in the underlying companies and assets in which the Plan invests, as ultimately this creates long-term financial value for the Plan and its beneficiaries.

The Trustees have delegated all voting and engagement activities to the Plan's investment managers, via AIL. The Trustees accept responsibility for how the managers steward assets on their behalf, including the casting of votes in line with each managers' individual voting policies. The Trustees review manager voting and engagement policies on an annual basis from AIL to ensure they are in line with the Trustees' expectations and in the members' best interests.

As part of AIL's management of the Plan's assets, the trustee expects AIL to:

- Ensure that (where appropriate) underlying asset managers exercise the trustees' voting rights in relation to the Plan's assets; and
- Report to the trustees on stewardship activity by underlying asset managers as required.

Managers are expected to vote at company meetings and engage with companies on the Trustees' behalf in relation to ESG considerations and other relevant matters (such as the companies' performance, strategy, risks, capital structure, and management of conflicts of interest). Where possible, the transparency for voting should include voting actions and rationale with relevance to the Plan, in particular where: votes were cast against management; votes against management generally were significant or if votes were abstained. Where voting is concerned the trustees expect the underlying asset managers to recall stock lending as necessary in order to carry out voting actions.

The trustees may engage with AIL, who in turn is able to engage with underlying asset managers, investee company or other stakeholders, on matters including the performance, strategy, risks, social and environmental impact, corporate governance, capital structure, and management of actual or potential conflicts of interest, of the underlying investments made.

This engagement aims to ensure that robust active ownership behaviours, reflective of the Trustee's active ownership policies, are being actioned. This will take the form of annual reporting which will be made available to Plan members on request.

Should the Trustees' monitoring process reveal that a manager's voting and engagement policies and actions are not aligned with the Trustees' expectations, the Trustees will engage with AIL to discuss how alignment may be improved to bring about the best long-term outcomes for the Plan.

**Signed on behalf of the Trustees of the Biddle Pension & Life Assurance Plan**

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**Name (print)**

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**Signature**

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**Date**