



Benson Parish

Neighbourhood Plan

Referendum Version

May 2018



Benson Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2018–2033

This Neighbourhood Plan is published by Benson Parish Council for Final Submission Consultation under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and in accordance with EU Directive 2001/42.

April 2018

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Executive Summary

The submitted Plan represents the views of the local community with regard to the future of Benson up to 2033. It has been prepared by the Parish Council and with extensive support from the local people, statutory bodies and the development industry. In our view, it represents a strong and robust approach to the Localism agenda. Within this context it has been designed to deliver the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan (2011-2033) in the Benson Neighbourhood Plan area.

Our Ambitions

The Plan has been designed to be a planning, land use document. However, within this important context it delivers several overlapping community ambitions in Benson as follows:

- A wish to plan positively for growth rather than to respond on an ad hoc basis to unplanned growth and development;
- A wish to bring forward the implementation of its relief road through additional housing development beyond that which is strategically required in the emerging Local Plan;
- An ambition to reduce the impact of through traffic on the B4009 in our village in general, and in its centre in particular (See Appendix F);
- An ambition to enhance the vitality and viability of its village centre;
- A wish to safeguard the rural character of the village.

Sustainable Development

The submitted Plan has paid particular attention to delivering sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. We recognise its importance in both national and local planning policies. We are confident that the Plan and its suite of policies will deliver sustainable development within the context of its three dimensions as set out in the NPPF as follows:

With regard to the economic dimension of sustainable development the Plan will:

- Deliver approximately 565 new houses;

- Provide considerable assistance in securing a 5-year housing land supply in the District;
- Provide the context for the revitalisation of the village centre through a reduction in through traffic and increase in the population base of the village.

With regard to the social dimension of sustainable development the Plan will:

- Deliver much-needed new affordable housing.
- Enhance the ability of local people to enjoy the character, the appearance and the services in the village centre.
- Enhance access to recreational facilities.

With regards to the environmental dimension of sustainable development the Plan will:

- Deliver high quality design in new developments;
- Safeguard the character and appearance of the Benson Conservation Area;
- Safeguard ecology and biodiversity assets in the Plan area;
- Designate Local Green Spaces;
- Maintain the separation between Benson and surrounding settlements;
- Define the new edge of Benson with a landscape buffer.

The Benson Relief Road

This proposal is a key element of the Plan. The emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan proposes that a line for this route is safeguarded. The submitted Neighbourhood Plan takes this proposal a step further. The identification of new housing sites will collectively secure the delivery of this route.

Benson has particular transportation issues. It is located at the junction of the A4074 Oxford to Reading road and the B4009 which links the village to the M40 to the east. During the development of the Plan it became clear significant development outside Benson (such as potential development at Chalgrove Airfield, Berinsfield & Culham) would have significant traffic flow implications for the existing road system in the centre of Benson. These developments, together with the increase in Benson housing numbers and the general increase in housing numbers across the District made it evident that there was a need for new transport infrastructure. Detailed supporting material for the relief road is set out in the Plan (See Section 9 and Appendix F - Transport Assessment).

Foreword

Benson is a rural village in South Oxfordshire located approximately 12 miles from Oxford and 15 miles from Reading. The nearest town is Wallingford, located some 3 miles to the South West of Benson.

Benson Parish is made up of Benson village, the hamlet of Preston Crowmarsh and the small settlement of Oakley Wood. RAF Benson, a front line helicopter support base within Joint Helicopter Command, is located on the eastern edge of the village and is home to Chinook and Puma helicopters, 606 Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force as well as lodger units No 6 Air Experience Flight, Thames Valley Air Ambulance and National Police Air Service (South East).

The River Thames and Thames Path lie to the western edge of Benson as does the A4074, the main Oxford – Reading road. Benson Brook (also known as Ewelme Stream) a chalk stream running through the village, discharges into the River Thames.

The Parish retains a good range of facilities including two pubs, several shops (Co-Op convenience store, Butchers, Green Grocers, Hairdressers and Estate Agent), a Doctors surgery, Dentist, garages, part-time Post Office and primary School.

There are two Conservation Areas, the historic core of Benson extending to Littleworth Road and one at the southern end of Preston Crowmarsh.

The village has a strong 'sense of place' with many clubs and societies and a wide variety of events taking place, all of which makes Benson a highly desirable place to live.

In order to meet the Parish's housing need and to guide sustainable development, in early 2016 Benson Parish Council agreed to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan.

Our Vision

Benson will accommodate the level of growth required to meet our local housing needs, while respecting its history and protecting its rural setting beneath the Chiltern Hills and alongside the River Thames. Our Neighbourhood Plan will encourage a modern, thriving and self-confident village centre, together with the facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of the community. As part of this, the planning process will promote sensitive development that integrates well with the rest of the village and design standards that ensure Benson retains its distinctive character.

List of Policies

Policy	Title
NP1	Housing Allocation Policy
NP2	Land to the north of Littleworth Road- Residential development
NP3	Land at Hale Road – Residential development
NP4	Land to the north and north east of The Sands – Residential development
NP5	Land to the south of St Helen’s Avenue – Burial ground
NP6	Conservation and Heritage
NP7	Design
NP8	Traffic Flow
NP9	Access to Public Transport
NP10	Pedestrians and Cyclists
NP11	Sustainable Travel
NP12	Community Facilities
NP13	Benson Library
NP14	Shops
NP15	Village Centre
NP16	Assets of Community Value
NP17	Internet Provision
NP18	Broadband

Policy	Title
NP19	<u>Allotments</u>
NP20	<u>Outdoor Recreation</u>
NP21	<u>Protection of Local Green Space</u>
NP22	<u>Creating new Local Green Space</u>
NP23	<u>Biodiversity</u>
NP24	<u>Wildlife Corridors</u>
NP25	<u>Green Infrastructure Management Plans</u>
NP26	<u>Benson Brook</u>
NP27	<u>Distinctiveness of Settlements</u>
NP28	<u>Important Views</u>
NP29	<u>Scope for development</u>
NP30	<u>Sustainable Drainage Systems</u>

Introduction & Background

1.1 Benson Parish Council has prepared a Neighbourhood Plan for the area designated by the local planning authority, South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The designated area is shown in Figure 1 below (The area was designated in 2013 when a Neighbourhood Plan was started but then halted due to a lack of volunteers).

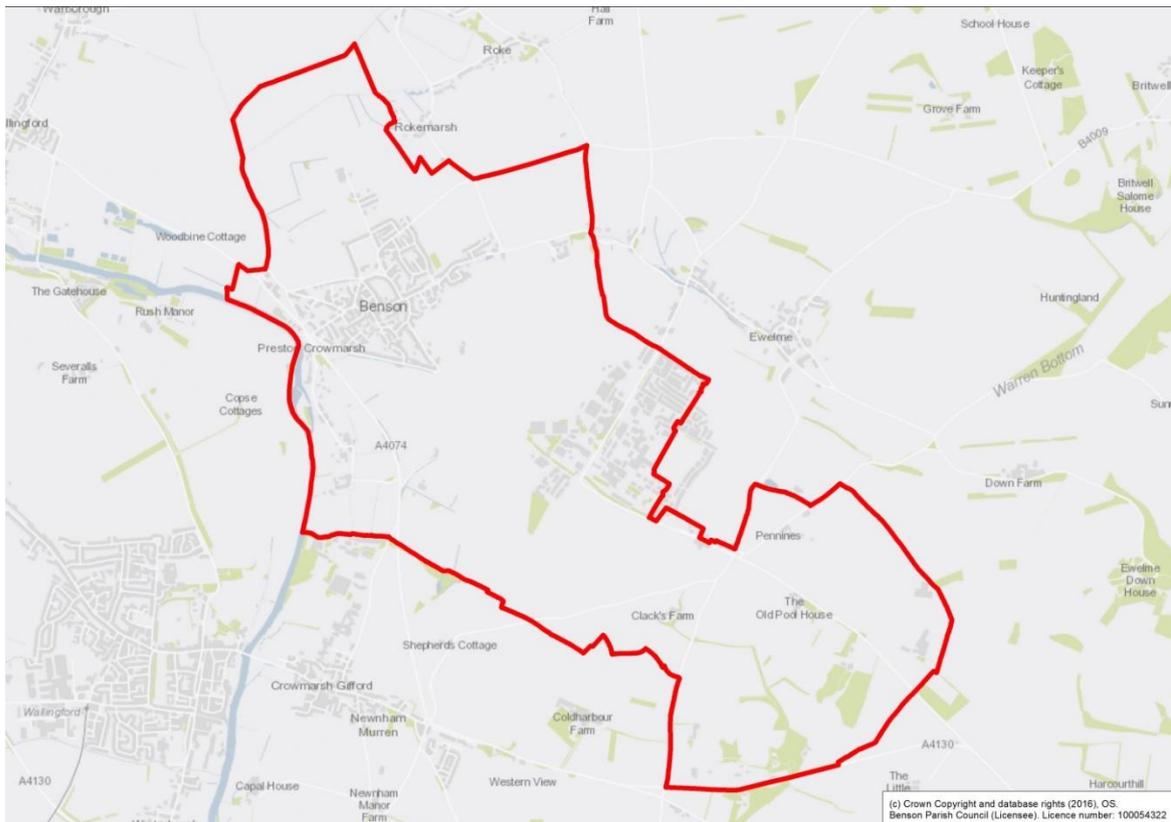


Figure 1 - Benson Parish Designated Area

- 1.2 The purpose of the Benson Neighbourhood Plan is to make planning policies that can be used to determine planning applications in the area in the period to 2033. Its policies aim to positively plan for growth of the village but do so in ways that protect the special character of the Parish.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood Plans provide local communities with the chance to shape the future development of their areas. Once approved at Referendum, the Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the development plan for the area and will carry significant weight in how planning applications are determined.

- 1.4 Neighbourhood Plans can therefore only carry land use policies that can be used for this purpose. Other important issues of interest to the local community that cannot be addressed in a Neighbourhood Plan should be pursued through alternative means if not directly related to planning.
- 1.5 Although there is considerable scope for the local community to decide on its planning policies, Neighbourhood Plans must meet some 'basic conditions'. These are:
- Is the Plan consistent with the National Planning Policy?
 - Is the Plan consistent with local planning policy?
 - Does the Plan promote the principles of sustainable development?
 - Has the process of making the Plan met the requirements of the European environmental standards?
- 1.6 In addition, the Parish Council must be able to show that it has properly consulted local people and other relevant organisations during the process of making its Neighbourhood Plans and has followed the 2012 Neighbourhood Planning Regulations.
- 1.7 These requirements will be tested by an independent examiner once the Neighbourhood Plan is finalised. If satisfied, the examiner will recommend the Plan goes to a referendum of the local electorate. If a simple majority votes for the Plan, then it becomes adopted as formal planning policy for the area.

The Pre-Submission Plan

- 1.8 The Pre-Submission Plan was submitted for consultation in March 2017. A total of 256 comments were received from Statutory Bodies, Developers and local residents. The Benson Neighbourhood Plan website contains background information: www.bensonplan.org
- 1.9 The Parish Council received a Screening Opinion from SODC which established the need for the Benson Neighbourhood Plan to be accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA)) under the Directives 42/2001 and the 2004 Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations.

The Neighbourhood Area

2.1 Benson is located in the County of Oxfordshire and is approximately 3 miles from Wallingford and 12 miles from Oxford. The population of Benson Parish is currently 4754¹ people, inclusive of RAF Benson personnel. It has 1719 dwellings however, it should be noted that this figure includes RAF Benson Service Family Accommodation which is not available to non-service personnel. Therefore, for the purpose of Neighbourhood Planning, the accurate figure for the number of dwellings in Benson is 1319.

None of the facilities within RAF Benson are available to non-service personnel with the exception of the RAF Benson Primary School, which is open to non-service children.

2.2 Benson was once known as Bensington and developed east of the River Thames which once formed the boundary between British tribes of the Anglo-Saxon era (fighting at Bensington is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle).

2.3 Bensington was a Royal manor for over 800 years from the days of Offa the Mercian, who built the first stone church in Benson, to 1628 when it was sold by King Charles I. Prosperity came to Benson with the growth of the stage-coach service from London to Oxford when Benson became an important stop on this route. There are still a number of former coaching inns in the village.

2.4 In 1937 work began on the construction of RAF Benson on fields on the outskirts of the village. During World War II it was home to the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit and later the Queen's Flight. It is now a front line helicopter support base within Joint Helicopter Command and is home to Chinook and Puma helicopters as well as various Lodger units.

2.5 Benson is a rural community surrounded by agricultural land, with the exception of RAF Benson which lies to the East of the village. There are limited employment opportunities in the village with the majority of working people commuting to their place of work.

2.6 The Parish Facilities include St Helen's Church, Benson Church of England primary school, the Mill Stream Day Centre, several shops, a Doctors Surgery, two pubs and a petrol filling station. The Parish Council also maintains four play

¹ 2011 Census figure

areas, two sets of allotments and a large recreation ground used for football, general recreation and hosting community events.

- 2.7 The nearest train station is Cholsey, located approximately 5 miles from Benson, and provides links to Oxford, Reading and London Paddington. The X39/X40 provides a good bus service to Oxford and Reading and the 136 service provides a local service between RAF Benson and Cholsey via Benson and Wallingford.
- 2.8 There are two conservation areas in the Parish. The historic core of Benson extending to Littleworth Road, and another at the southern end of Preston Crowmarsh. There are also 74 listed buildings in Benson. For further detail see Section 7: Conservation and Heritage, and Appendices C Heritage and E Character Assessment.

Planning Policy Context

- 3.1 The Plan area lies within South Oxfordshire District in the County of Oxfordshire.
- 3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published by the Government in 2012 is an important guide in the preparation of Local and Neighbourhood Plans. The Benson Neighbourhood Plan must demonstrate that it is consistent with the provisions of the NPPF. The following paragraphs of the NPPF are particularly relevant to the Benson Neighbourhood Plan:
- Supporting a prosperous rural community (paragraph 28)
 - Good Design (paragraph 58)
 - Protecting healthy communities (paragraph 70)
 - Protecting local green spaces (paragraph 76)
 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment (paragraph 109)
 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment (paragraph 126)
 - Neighbourhood Planning (paragraph 185)
- 3.3 The development plan for the Parish currently comprises the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy of December 2012 (covering a plan period to 2027) and a number of saved policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011, adopted in January 2006 (covering the plan period to 2011). The emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2033, which is expected to be adopted in 2018, will replace the Core Strategy and saved policies.
- 3.4 Although the Benson Neighbourhood Plan will be tested for general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted Core Strategy and Local Plan, the imminence of the new Local Plan means the Benson Neighbourhood Plan should consider the emerging policy direction and its reasoning and evidence.
- 3.5 The overall planning strategy for the District is to focus development on a new strategic town, the existing main towns of Didcot, Henley and Wallingford and the larger villages of the District whilst maintaining the rural character of the open countryside that makes up the majority of the area. See Figure 2 below.

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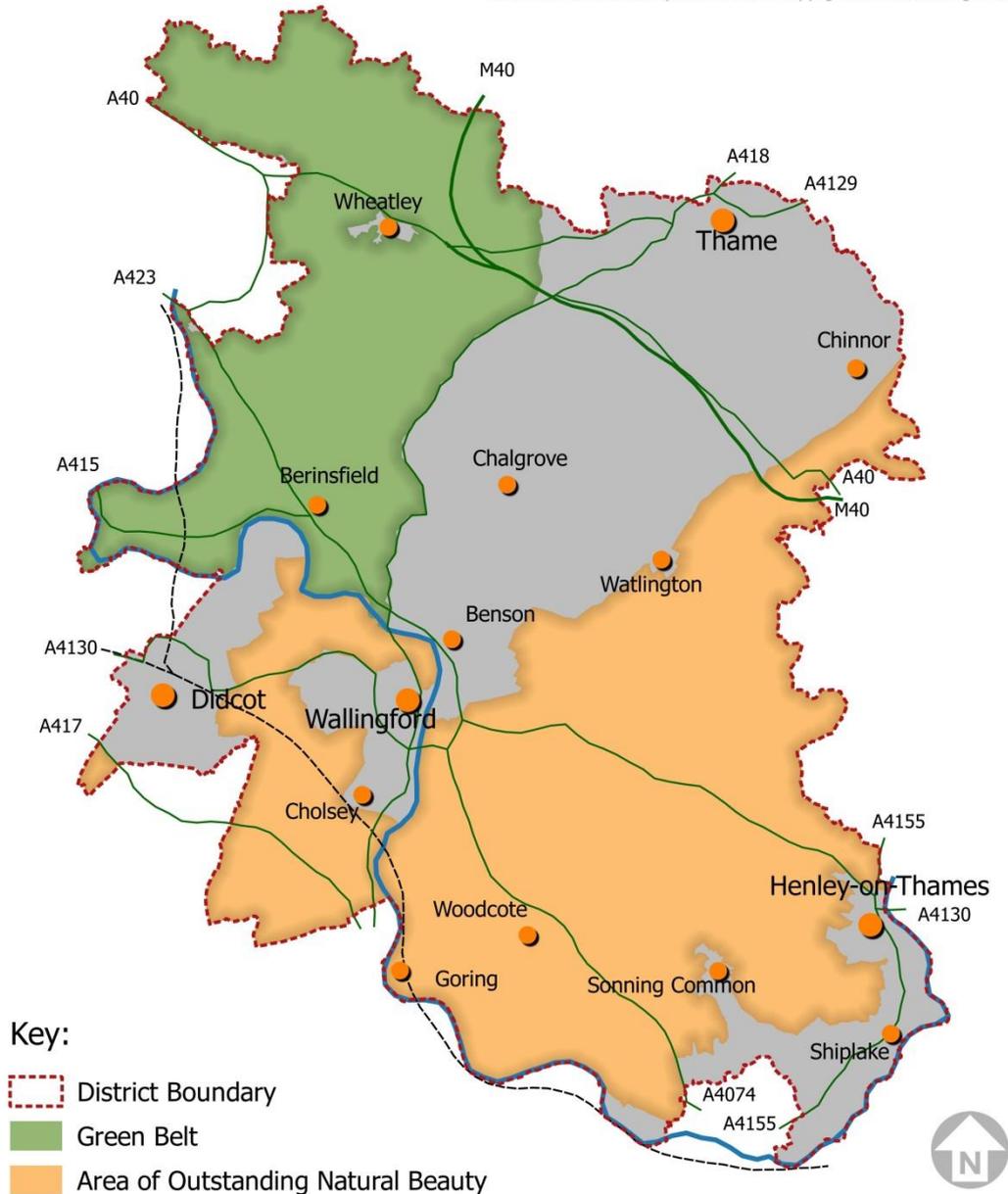


Figure 2 - South Oxfordshire District Map

- 3.6 The rural economic development strategy favours rural diversification, tourism development and home working, provided proposals respect the quality of their countryside location. There is no specific policy proposal in the new Local Plan to this effect but it is not expected the strategy will change, thus encouraging Benson Neighbourhood Plan policies to promote appropriate proposals to support local jobs in the Parish.
- 3.7 The affordable housing policy framework is well-established and is not likely to change in respect of the proportion of overall housing numbers required per scheme. However, national changes to affordable housing policy, specifically the

inclusion of Starter Homes in its definition, are likely to significantly alter the economics and therefore mix of tenure type that can be planned for through the local planning system.

- 3.8 The indication from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) is that Benson will be required to plan for an additional 383 dwellings in the period to 2033 (Core Strategy + 15% growth). In July 2016 the District Council Planning Committee voted in favour of delegating authority to grant outline planning permission to the Head of Planning for 241 dwellings on the site opposite Littleworth Road, subject to the completion of a Section 106 agreement and various conditions.
- 3.9 This followed an earlier Appeal hearing which found in favour of the 159 dwellings on the same site at Littleworth Road. This figure was then increased to 187 via an amended planning application. Therefore a total of 428 dwellings are being developed on the site. Given the timing of the approval of the second phase these additional houses count as a commitment rather than as additional growth. Nevertheless a policy is included in the Plan to control the development of this site in the event that revised or new applications are submitted.
- 3.10 The Benson Neighbourhood Plan Team recognise the 15 year period of the Plan and the facilities that Benson offers as a larger village. The Benson Neighbourhood Plan will therefore be recommending up to an additional 324 dwellings in addition to the 241 already approved. This reflects a balanced approach that seeks to facilitate new residential development to include the construction of a Relief Road. The road will provide capacity for the new developments themselves and in doing so will bring significant relief to the historic street network as the B4009 runs through the village in an east-west direction. This approach to the future development of the Plan area is set out in the Strategic Policies section of this document. Policies NP 2-5 respectively set out the details of the sites concerned and the development principles that will be applied to each in turn.
- 3.11 The Core Strategy requires the mix of housing types to reflect local circumstances, which is expected to remain a requirement as this is consistent with the NPPF.

- 3.12 The Core Strategy and saved policies seek to prevent the unnecessary loss of valued community facilities. This provides an opportunity for the Benson Neighbourhood Plan to identify those community facilities in the Parish that warrant protection from these policies.
- 3.13 There is a comprehensive framework of landscape protection policies that are relevant to the Plan area, given its proximity to the AONB and River Thames. The framework allows for appropriate development but reinforces the importance of ensuring all development proposals respect the landscape character. The policies will help inform site selection and other policies of the Benson Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.14 Although these policies now repeat national policy guidance, and so are therefore unlikely to be included in the new Local Plan in these forms, they reinforce the importance of proposals having full regard to heritage assets, whether formerly designated or not. The Parish contains a significant number of listed buildings as well as two Conservation Areas. These heritage assets will very much shape the Design and other policies of the Benson Neighbourhood Plan. The Benson Neighbourhood Plan may also define the special character of the local Conservation Areas and design specific guidance that is appropriate to this character.
- 3.15 The local policy framework contains a range of generic design and development management policies to be applied to all types of development proposals across the District. There is the opportunity for the Benson Neighbourhood Plan to refine this framework so the guidance is specific to the Parish. This more specific Plan area guidance will have weight in decision making.
- 3.16 The framework contains a variety of policies promoting the multi-functional benefits of green infrastructure assets and requiring their protection, achieving no net loss of biodiversity. Such assets are especially important in defining the character and in the functioning of the village and wider Parish. The Benson Neighbourhood Plan will bring forward specific policy proposals to protect and improve existing green infrastructure assets and to create new assets through development proposals.

Community Views on Planning

- 4.1 The decision to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan was taken by Benson Parish Council in January 2016 following a public meeting held in the Parish Hall on the 15th January 2016. A Steering Group for the Neighbourhood Plan, made up of residents and 3 Parish Councillors, was formed in February 2016.
- 4.2 A consultant, recommended and funded by SODC, was appointed in January 2016. With the assistance of the consultant, the Benson Neighbourhood Plan was developed over a period of 12 months, rather than the usual 2 or 3 years.
- 4.3 The Parish Council submitted an application to South Oxfordshire District Council to designate the area covered by the Benson Neighbourhood Plan in the first quarter of 2016. The agreed designated area is the same as the Parish boundary.
- 4.4 A Neighbourhood Plan is a community project and must derive its authority and policies from the community. Communication, consultation and feedback have played a major part in the development of our Plan. The consultation process included:
- The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group meeting at least monthly;
 - Minutes of the meetings being posted on the Neighbourhood Plan website;
 - Updates were provided in the Benson Bulletin (village magazine) and Neighbourhood Plan Facebook page;
 - One to one meetings with land owners and developers;
 - Updates to the Parish Council;
 - Drop-In sessions for villagers throughout the development of the Plan;
 - Attendance at Village Events (e.g. Benson Village Fayre);
 - Regular email updates to villagers;
 - Village meetings open to all residents of the village
- As the Neighbourhood Plan progressed, the frequency of meetings has increased in order to gauge community response to site allocations and policies.
- 4.5 In May 2016 an independent Housing Needs Survey was commissioned by the Neighbourhood Plan Team and undertaken by Community First Oxfordshire. The Housing Needs Survey allowed respondents to answer questions designed to

help establish priorities for the Plan and allowed them to make general comments. The results were independently collated and made available to the Neighbourhood Plan Team and Parish Council. A total of 595 questionnaires were returned, representing a 42.4% response rate.

- 4.6 In order to inform development of the Plan a traffic study was carried out by the Transport Team of the Neighbourhood Plan with traffic data also being obtained from Oxfordshire County Council Highways. The data was collected from various points within the village and used to assess the impact of developments on the current road infrastructure within the village and known traffic 'pinch points'.
- 4.7 A heritage study was undertaken in collaboration with members of the Bensington Society History Group with results set out in Appendix C. It looks at key areas of local heritage significance and identifies buildings within Benson and Preston Crowmarsh which are not designated as listed buildings but are of local note. The results of this study were also used, along with character assessments carried out by members of the Design Team, to inform the Design Policy and the Design Statement for Benson.
- 4.8 An independent planning consultant, Andrew Ashcroft, recommended by SODC was appointed to help with policy development. In addition RCOH Ltd was appointed to undertake the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
- 4.9 The Benson Neighbourhood Plan and its supporting evidence is available on the Benson Neighbourhood Plan website and Parish Council website. Links are also provided on the Neighbourhood Plan Facebook page. To allow for access to those without the Internet, paper copies have been made available at the Parish Office and Library.

Vision, Objectives and Land Use Policies

Vision

- 5.1 Benson will accommodate the level of growth required to meet our local housing needs, while conserving and enhancing its heritage and protecting its rural setting beneath the Chiltern Hills and alongside the River Thames. Our Neighbourhood Plan will encourage a modern, thriving and self-confident village centre, together with the facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of the community. As part of this, the planning process will promote sensitive development that integrates well with the rest of the village and design standards that ensure Benson retains its distinctive character.

Objectives

- 5.2 In order to achieve the above Vision a number of objectives have been identified as follows:
- Provide sufficient housing to meet local needs;
 - Cater for growth in a manner that maintains the distinct and separate character of the village;
 - Cater for growth in a manner that conserves and enhances heritage within the Neighbourhood Plan area;
 - Cater for growth in a manner which respects Benson's setting in the rural landscape and its close association with the River Thames;
 - Ensure that Benson has a modern, vibrant village centre;
 - Ensure there are adequate facilities to serve our growing local population;
 - Ensure the sustainability of economic activity in the Neighbourhood Plan area;
 - Safeguard and enhance existing green infrastructure and secure the provision of additional green space connected to the wider countryside;
 - Ensure that new development is sited, planned and executed in a way that takes account of climate change and other changes in the natural environment;
 - Ensure that new development contributes towards the free and safe flow of traffic and has a minimum impact on the existing highway infrastructure;

- Encourage walking and cycling to get around the village by providing a network of safe pedestrian and cyclist routes, in particular to the centre;
- Encourage sustainable modes of transport by all means available.

Land Use Policies

Introduction

6.1 Prior to development of the Neighbourhood Plan, Phase 1 of site BEN1 at Littleworth Road was approved for development following an Appeal Inquiry (See SODC Planning Application P14/S0673/O). The original outline application was for 159 dwellings however this was subsequently increased to 187 dwellings following the submission of an amended planning application,

Housing Allocation Policy

6.2 An assessment of each potential development site was undertaken as part of the Neighbourhood Plan development in order to objectively assess the 10 sites put forward. The sites were assessed against the following criteria:

- Landscape Character and setting
- Green Infrastructure
- Heritage
- Core Facilities
- Transport
- Other

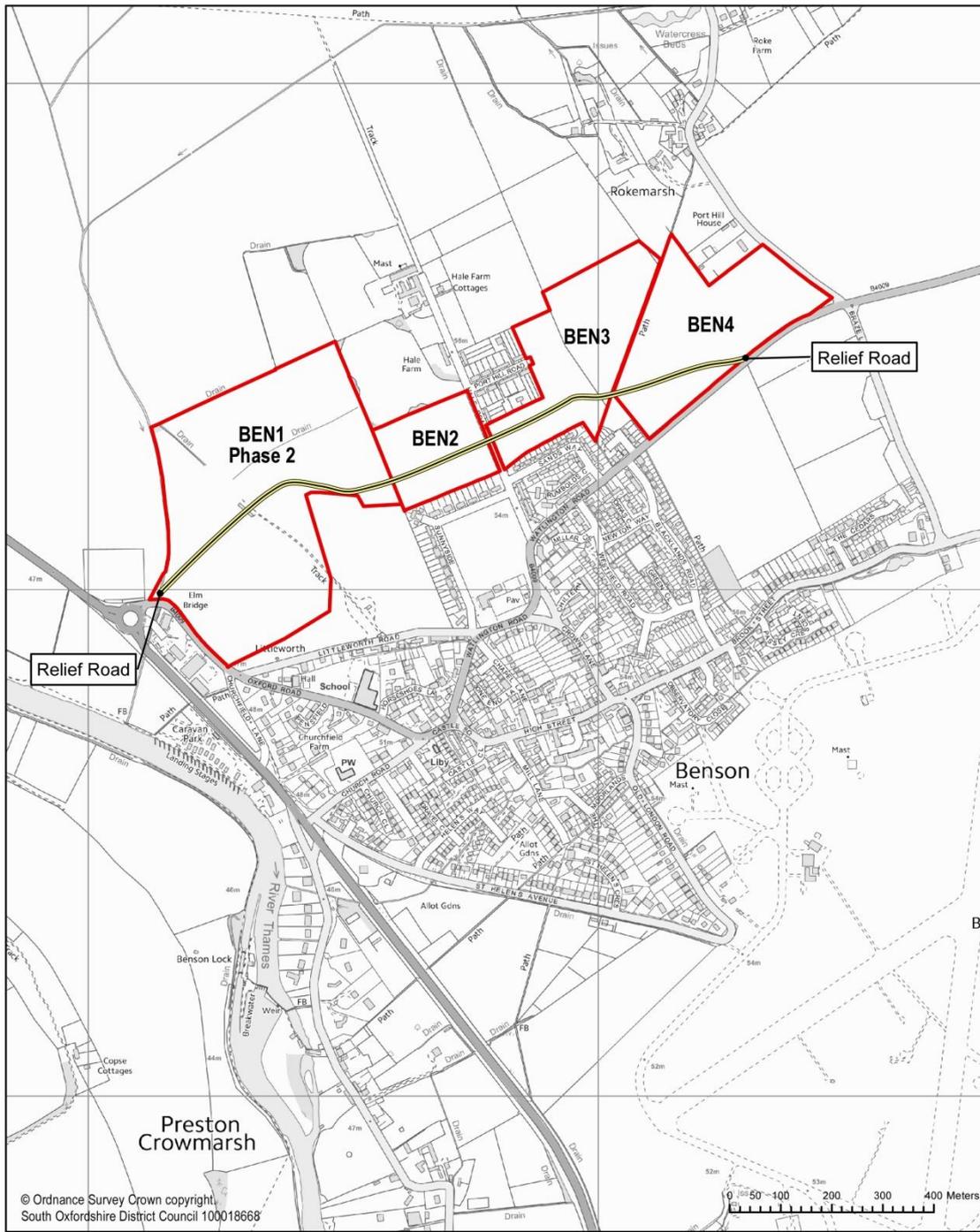
The Sites Assessment report can be found at Appendix A.

6.3 Following the assessments, three of these sites (BEN1 Phase 2, BEN2, BEN3/4) are allocated for housing development in this Neighbourhood Plan. These three allocated sites will together deliver 565 additional homes.

6.4 Phase 1 of site BEN1 already has the benefit of planning permission and that, taken together with sites BEN1 Phase 2, BEN2, and BEN3/4, would be able to deliver a Relief Road to the north of the village, linking the B4009 on the east side directly with the A4074 or B4009 on the west. This is the only feasible route for such a Relief Road, bounded as the village is by RAF Benson on the south and east and by the A4074 and River Thames to the south and west (see the Transport Assessment at Appendix F). The Relief Road would provide appropriate transport

capacity for the new homes, provide connectivity for the allocated sites to the services and facilities in the village and also provide relief to the existing road network within the village, thereby reducing congestion and traffic flow through the congested village centre. The proposals would therefore provide sustainable development.

- 6.5 A small-scale site at The Meer (BEN10) has been identified as a possible site for 100% affordable housing. Parts of two further sites are allocated for provision of communal facilities, one for a burial ground (BEN7) and one for a green space nature area with car parking (BEN9 - Materials Store).
- 6.6 The remaining sites put forward for development are not allocated for housing for the reasons set out in the Site Assessment Report (Appendix A). The selected sites represent sustainable development and further less sustainable sites are not required as local housing requirements will be met by the allocated sites. They would place additional load on infrastructure without securing the delivery of the much needed Relief road, and could prejudice delivery of that road by consuming school places for which there is limited additional capacity. Development levels beyond that proposed in this Neighbourhood Plan would represent excessive and unsustainable change to the village in both environmental and social terms.
- 6.7 The community recognises that the development of the various sites will take place throughout the Plan period. Nevertheless, each housing allocation sets out a requirement that the site's contribution towards the development of the Relief Road is completed during the construction period.
- 6.8 A map showing the housing allocation sites and proposed Relief Road is shown below (Figure 3)



BENSON:
 Housing allocation sites and
 the Proposed Relief Road

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 South Oxfordshire District Council 100018668

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South Oxfordshire
 District Council
 Listening Learning Leading
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 April 2018

Figure 3 - Housing allocation sites and Proposed Relief Road map

NP 1

New residential development in the neighbourhood will be focussed in the three proposed housing allocations (Policies NP2 – NP4) as shown on the Housing allocation sites and proposed Relief Road map. The three large scale developments identified in Policies NP2 – NP4 will be supported where they:

- Together safeguard land for the whole route of a Relief Road, to a specification agreed by OCC Highways, to the north of the village that connects the B4009 at or near Braze Lane in the east to the A4074 or B4009 at or near Elm Bridge roundabout in the west; and
- Provide for the construction of the Relief Road to a single consistent specification across their site and connecting with neighbouring sites; and
- Contribute proportionally to the financing and connecting of the Relief road into the B4009 at or near Braze Lane in the east and into the A4074/B4009 at or near Elm Bridge roundabout to the west; and
- Conform to the other policies in this Plan.

In-fill development, which reflects the scale and character of the village, will be supported within the built up area of Benson and on sites of up to 0.1ha within the settlement of Preston Crowmarsh, where the proposals accord with the other policies in this plan and the other parts of the development plan.

Proposals for development outside of the built up area of Benson or outside of the sites identified in Policies NP2 – NP4 will only be supported if they are consistent with local development plan policies.

Site Allocations

- 6.8 The Plan proposes the development of three sites throughout the Plan period. These allocations sit at the very heart of the Plan. All of the development sites

are fundamentally associated with the construction of the proposed Relief Road. The fourth site proposes the allocation of a burial ground.

The site allocations are as follows:

- NP2 Land to the north of Littleworth Road (Site BEN1 Phase 2) - Residential development
- NP3 Land off Hale Road (Site BEN 2) – Residential development
- NP4 Land north and north east of The Sands (Sites BEN3/4) – Residential development
- NP5 Land south of St Helen’s Avenue (Site BEN7) – Burial ground

The proposed development of each site is set out in the remainder of this section of the Plan.

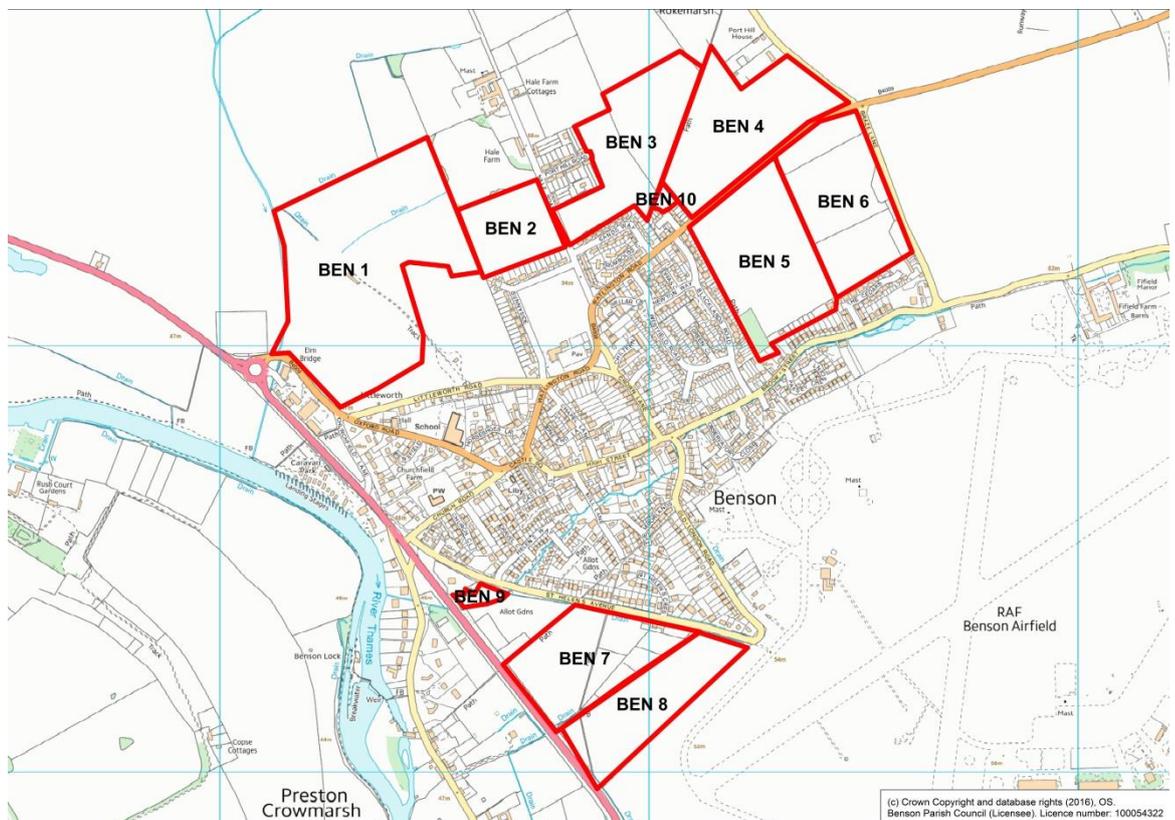


Figure 4 – Site Map

Land to the north of Littleworth Road (Site BEN1 Phase 2)

6.8.1 This parcel of land lies to the immediate north of a parcel of land off Littleworth Road which already has the benefit of planning permission. In effect the site promoted in this Plan would represent the second phase of wider development. The site sits on the western edge of the village adjacent both to Littleworth Road and to Oxford Road. When fully developed, it will provide an important gateway

to the village. The western part of the site falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3 and is allocated as multifunctional green space.

- 6.8.2 The proposed Relief Road for the village would run through this site and is proposed to link into the A4074 in the vicinity of Elm Bridge roundabout.
- 6.8.3 Other policies in this Plan set out the need for the delivery of recreational open space on new residential developments. This principle is applied directly to this site. In addition, this site has been identified for the provision of a Youth Facility Building, Fitness Trail, a Skate Park and other green infrastructure including space to meet wildlife needs (as set out in Policy NP23 of this Plan).
- 6.8.4 This and other sites will increase the demand on the usage of the GP surgery in the village. The Parish Council has included the expansion of the Doctors Surgery as a potential recipient of CIL funding from the developments planned within Benson (see Appendix I).
- 6.8.5 This site has the potential to offer one of the highest yields of new homes of the allocated sites proposed in this Plan. Its approximate yield is anticipated to be 240 dwellings. Its development in accordance with the principles set out in this policy will contribute much to sustainable development – in particular it will bring an economic dimension through the houses themselves, it will have a social dimension through its community and open spaces contributions and its part in delivering a Relief Road will have significant environmental benefits
- 6.8.6 The land to the west of the Littleworth Road site is Flood Zone 2 and 3, and in proposals seeking outline consent for development, the developer proposed the creation of a 5 ha nature park/reserve on this section of land. This plan formally allocates that land for this purpose, ensuring that policy NP22, which maintains and enhances biodiversity, is met. Habitat creation on the reserve will be taken forward to achieve the locally specific priorities set out in Benson's People and Nature Strategy. This significant new green space for the village will be have footpaths aimed at encouraging public access/recreational use including as a fitness trail. It will also connect via margins around the development with the new green buffer proposed to the north of land off Hale Road (BEN 2), land to the north and north east of Sands Way (BEN3) and land to the north of The Sands B4009 (BEN4).
- 6.8.7 There is an opportunity to enhance connectivity by creating a walking/cycling route between the new 5ha nature area/reserve and Warwick Spinney (a Benson

community-owned green asset immediately adjacent to the western parish boundary). The Spinney is managed for its wildlife interest (as agreed with the Charities Commission) and the provision of green space for dog walking, but at present there is no safe pedestrian access from the village. A new connection would address this shortcoming. A footbridge will be provided crossing Berrick Stream and Lady Brook from the nature area, to link up with Footpath 392/17 (WB17) which runs north towards Warborough and thus create access to Warwick Spinney. The access involves crossing a small area of farmland, currently not in cultivation, upon which the landowner is supportive of creating a permissive path to facilitate this measure.

6.8.8 This policy identifies a series of obligations on the land owner and/or developer concerned. These obligations reflect the overall strategy of the Plan and its ambition to secure high-quality, sustainable development in Benson. There are two principal obligations. The first is for the developer to construct the relevant section of the relief road as part of the development of the site. The second is for the provision of affordable housing to development plan standards.

6.8.9 The Parish Council recognises that the costs of delivering the relief road may be beyond those normally associated with the development of a housing site of this scale. It also acknowledges that viability is a key consideration in national planning policy. Nevertheless, any proposals to reduce the scale of contributions associated with this site will only be considered in the event that they are supported by a full justification underpinned by robust evidence and a clear reasoning for the proposed reduced contributions. Such matters should be included with the wider package of information submitted with the eventual planning applications.

NP 2

Proposals for the residential development of land off Littleworth Road as shown as BEN1 on the Housing allocation sites and proposed Relief Road map will be supported subject to delivery of a comprehensive proposal addressing the following criteria:

- Provision of a new road across the full extent of the housing development on this site, to a specification adequate to serve as the completed relief road (as defined in Appendix 6 of the signed section 106 agreement attached to planning permission 16/1139/OUT) and with the alignment shown on the Housing allocation sites and proposed Relief Road map. This new road must connect at its north-east edge to allocated site BEN2 (covered by Policy NP3). The route of the final western section of the relief road linking the western edge of the housing development with the junction on Oxford Road near Elm Bridge roundabout, as shown on the Housing allocations sites and the proposed Relief Road map, must be safeguarded, regardless of any alternative access routes provided to the site.
- Provision of open space and allotments and associated parking and access as set out in Policy NP19, NP20, plus the provision of a Youth Facilities building with appropriate parking, Skate Park and Fitness Trail;
- A housing mix to meet local needs as informed by the SHMA 2014 or updated versions identifying housing need and the Community Questionnaire Report (Housing Needs Survey);
- Delivery of 40% of the total housing numbers to be Affordable Housing;
- A (5 ha) nature reserve (as proposed in the P16/S1139/O planning application) must be provided on the area falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3. Detailed design of the nature area will reflect the locally specific aims and ambitions of Benson's strategy for People and Nature. The nature area will connect with the green buffer to be created along the edge of development on land off Hale Road (BEN2), land to the north and north east of The Sands (BEN4) and;
- A new connection for pedestrians must be provided from the nature area opposite Warwick Spinney via a footbridge across 'Berrick Stream and Ladybrook' to the public right of way Footpath 392/17 (WB17) running north towards Warborough;
- Development proposals must incorporate measures that avoid the risk of causing any deterioration in the ecological status of 'Berrick Stream and Ladybrook' (also known as Elm Brook).
- As far as possible, existing hedges and trees should be retained, and where removal is necessary, compensation for the loss of the biodiversity asset must be incorporated into plans.

Land off Hale Road (Site BEN2)

- 6.8.10 This site is located adjacent to Hale Road and to the north of Sunnyside. It is the smallest of the strategic housing allocations proposed in the Plan. It is rectangular in shape and sits to the immediate west of Hale Road. It is one of four allocated sites both to provide new housing in the village to meet strategic housing needs and to provide a Relief Road to the village. The Relief Road provision will be fundamental to any approval. Its junction with Hale Road will need to be implemented in accordance with Highway Authority guidance. It is anticipated that the site will yield approximately 80 dwellings.
- 6.8.11 During discussions with the developer promoting this site they have advised they typically build smaller housing units (2 or 3 bedroom units) which aligns well with the Community Questionnaire Report which identified a desire of 33% current residents to downsize and a need for some bungalow accommodation.
- 6.8.12 Play space on the site will be required and in a proportionate fashion to number of dwellings. This reflects the need to secure a sustainable development in its own right and the stretched nature of existing facilities in the village..
- 6.8.13 Residential development should allow for views out to Vale, Chiltern Hills and North Wessex Downs (Wittenham Clumps). It is important that new residential development reflects its position within the wider landscape. This matter is addressed more generally in policy NP28 of this Plan.
- 6.8.14 This and other sites will increase the demand on the usage of the GP surgery in the village. The Parish Council has included the expansion of the Doctors Surgery as a potential recipient of CIL funding from the developments planned within Benson (see Appendix I).
- 6.8.15 The existing hedge to the north of the site is important in its own right. It will also serve to provide an important buffer between the new housing and the open countryside to the immediate north. Policy NP3 proposes that it is reinforced with a landscape buffer incorporating public access to its immediate south within the development site.
- 6.8.16 Development of the site will be expected to respect and safeguard the residential amenities of the properties to the immediate south of the site (in Sunnyside).

- 6.8.17 This policy identifies a series of obligations on the land owner and/or developer concerned. These obligations reflect the overall strategy of the Plan and its ambition to secure high-quality, sustainable development in Benson. There are two principal obligations. The first is for the developer to construct the relevant section of the relief road as part of the development of the site. The second is for the provision of affordable housing to development plan standards.
- 6.8.18 The Parish Council recognises that the costs of delivering the relief road may be beyond those normally associated with the development of a housing site of this scale. It also acknowledges that viability is a key consideration in national planning policy. Nevertheless, any proposals to reduce the scale of contributions associated with this site will only be considered in the event that they are supported by a full justification underpinned by robust evidence and a clear reasoning for the proposed reduced contributions. Such matters should be included with the wider package of information submitted with the eventual planning applications.

NP3

Proposals for residential development of land off Hale Road as shown as BEN2 on the Housing allocation sites and proposed Relief Road map will be supported subject to delivery of a comprehensive proposal which addresses the following criteria:

- Provision of a Relief Road connecting land off Littleworth Road (NP2) to land north and north-east of The Sands (NP4);
- The Relief Road within the allocation site should be fully constructed and adopted before occupation of more than 50% of the total houses on the site;
- Provision of open space and allotments plus associated parking and access as set out in Policy NP19;
- The housing mix for this site should predominantly focus on 2 and 3 bedroom units with some bungalow provision on site;
- Delivery of 40% of the total housing numbers to be Affordable Housing;
- Delivery of a layout that safeguards residential amenities of the properties to the immediate south of the site in Sunnyside;
- Retention of the existing hedge forming the northern boundary of the site and its consolidation with a 3 metre wide landscape buffer to its immediate south.

Land North and North East of The Sands (Sites BEN 3 / BEN4)

- 6.8.19 This site is located to the north and north east of The Sands. It is one of three allocated sites both to provide new housing in the village to meet strategic housing needs and to provide a Relief Road to the village. The Relief Road provision will be fundamental to any approval. Its junctions with Hale Road and the B4009 are to be implemented in accordance with Highway Authority guidance.
- 6.8.20 It is anticipated that the site will yield approximately 240 dwellings.
- 6.8.21 A green/landscape buffer will need to be provided such that the settlement of Rokemarsh remains distinct and separate from Benson. The buffer must be designed such that it acts as a wildlife corridor and offers a safe route for pedestrians and cyclists, in particular providing improved access to the Local Green Space at Sunnyside
- 6.8.22 Residential development should allow for views out to Vale, Chiltern Hills and North Wessex Downs (Wittenham Clumps). It is important that new residential development reflects its position within the wider landscape. This matter is addressed more generally in policy NP28 of this Plan.
- 6.8.23 A well-used public footpath cuts through the centre of the site. A pedestrian route to Roke through the site must be maintained, but with enhancements (widening, planting) such that the routes performs as a wildlife corridor and as a dual-purpose footpath/cycleway. The policy requires the provision of allotments with parking and vehicle delivery access (at northern edge next to Port Hill). This is an important factor which reflects community feedback.
- 6.8.24 This and other sites will increase the demand on the usage of the GP surgery in the village. The Parish Council has included the expansion of the Doctors Surgery as a potential recipient of CIL funding from the developments planned within Benson (see Appendix I).
- 6.8.25 There is a shortage of allotments in the Plan area with uptake consistently running at over 90% with, at times, a waiting list in operation. Play space on the site will be required and in a proportionate fashion to number of dwellings. This reflects the need to secure a sustainable development in its own right and the stretched nature of existing facilities in the village.

- 6.8.26 The development of the site will be expected to respect and safeguard the residential amenities of the properties to the immediate south of the site (in Sands Way).
- 6.8.27 The existing hedge to the south east of the site which forms its boundary with The Sands (B4009) is important in its own right. It will also serve to provide an important buffer between the new housing and the open countryside to the immediate south. Policy NP4 proposes that it is reinforced with a landscape buffer to its immediate south within the development site.
- 6.8.28 This policy identifies a series of obligations on the land owner and/or developer concerned. These obligations reflect the overall strategy of the Plan and its ambition to secure high-quality, sustainable development in Benson. There are two principal obligations. The first is for the developer to construct the relevant section of the relief road as part of the development of the site. The second is for the provision of affordable housing to development plan standards.
- 6.8.29 The Parish Council recognises that the costs of delivering the relief road may be beyond those normally associated with the development of a housing site of this scale. It also acknowledges that viability is a key consideration in national planning policy. Nevertheless, any proposals to reduce the scale of contributions associated with this site will only be considered in the event that they are supported by a full justification underpinned by robust evidence and a clear reasoning for the proposed reduced contributions. Such matters should be included with the wider package of information submitted with the eventual planning applications.

NP4

Proposals for the residential development of land to the north and north east of Sands Way as shown as BEN3/4 on the Housing allocation sites and proposed Relief Road map will be supported subject to the delivery of a comprehensive proposal that addresses the following criteria:

- Provision of a Relief Road connecting land north of Sunnyside (NP 3) and the B4009;
- The Relief Road should be fully constructed across the combined BEN3/4 site before occupation of more than 50% of the total housing permitted for the combined site;
- A housing mix to meet local needs as informed by the SHMA 2014 or updated versions identifying housing need and the Community Questionnaire Report (Housing Needs Survey) balanced against the need to protect local character and reflect prevailing market conditions;
- Delivery of 40% of the total housing numbers to be Affordable Housing;
- Provision within the site of a dedicated pedestrian route to Roke through the site;
- Provision of open space, allotments plus associated parking as per Policy NPI9 and access adjacent to Port Hill Road;
- Delivery of a layout that safeguards the residential amenities of the properties to the immediate south of the site in Sands Way.
- Retention of the existing hedge forming the south east boundary of the site and its consolidation with a 3metre wide landscape buffer to its immediate north subject to securing safe access and visibility.
- Layout of green space within the site to provide a significant separation between Benson and Rokemarsh

Land to the south of St Helen's Avenue (Site BEN7)

- 6.8.30 This site is located to immediate south of the village off St Helen's Avenue. The community has a strong preference to see the site provide a new burial ground in the village. The existing burial ground is close to capacity and this proposed site is both reasonably central to the village and close to the church.
- 6.8.31 Several public footpaths run from St Helens Avenue to the A4074 through the site. These will either be retained or repositioned in a sensitive fashion. They provide an opportunity to provide permeability into the site in general and also have the opportunity to provide safe and convenient access for village residents to the burial ground.
- 6.8.32 The field hedges surrounding the site are a significant feature in its own right. The policy requires their safeguarding. This complies with policy NP22 in the Plan. The Plan recognises that elements of the hedge facing St Helen's Avenue will need to be removed to secure appropriate access to the site. Nevertheless, the community's view is that this should be limited to the minimum necessary for standard vehicular access to the site.
- 6.8.33 The northern part of the site consists of semi-improved unmanaged grassland, and local records indicate that it supports good populations of butterflies, including species associated with the wider countryside whose habitat is declining. The species recorded include Small Heath, a species of principal importance for conserving biodiversity (under S41, NERC Act 2006). Consideration must be given to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, in accordance with Policy NP23, when delivering NP5.

NP5

Proposals for the development of a burial ground will be approved, subject to delivery of a comprehensive proposal addressing the following criteria:

- Provision of a burial ground of a minimum of approximately 0.25 hectares and associated parking and access adjacent off St Helen's Road;
- Retention or the appropriate repositioning of the public footpaths that run through the site from St Helen's Avenue to the A4074;
- Retention of the existing hedges surrounding the site and with any removal along St Helen's Avenue limited to the minimum necessary for standard vehicular access to the site;

Conservation and Heritage²

- 7.1 This section summarises the principles that drive the following policies. More detailed information regarding the historic character and development of the village is to be found in Appendix E Character Assessment. More detailed information on heritage assets within the Plan Area is to be found in Appendix C: Heritage Study. Appendix E Character Assessment includes a Schedule of Buildings of Local Heritage note that has been compiled for the Plan.
- 7.2 Part of the vision for Benson is that development will respect its history. The Benson Neighbourhood Plan Survey indicates that historic buildings are highly valued by the community for their attractive traditional appearance, with distinctive use of red and blue-grey brickwork, flint and chalky stone³. There is a very strong interest in local history. This recognises the way in which historic farmhouses and cottages tell of the original agricultural livelihood of the village, and the (former) inns, large houses and shops of the 18th-19th century tell of prosperity in the coaching era. The history of the village is also evident in the surviving relationships with the fields, the brook and the River Thames and in the evolution of the winding road layout, diverted first around bogs and then around the airfield. The war memorial is an important focus for remembrance ceremonies shared by the village and RAF communities.
- 7.3 Earlier history is preserved in place names and in the records of archaeological discovery, and it is evident that the river gravels were particularly attractive to early settlers. Finds are widespread, but there is particularly significant evidence of a Neolithic cursus and other Prehistoric enclosures below the airfield, and of Prehistoric and Early Saxon settlement at Saxon Close, the latter likely to have been associated with Benson's known importance as a Saxon royal villa. Investigations carried out in connection with recent applications for development continue to demonstrate the frequent incidence of Prehistoric, Roman, Saxon and medieval settlement within and around the perimeter of the present village.

² See Appendix C Heritage Study for details of the four local history publications by The Bensington Society

³ See: The Benson Neighbourhood Plan Community Questionnaire Report 2016 at Appendix D. Q 26 asked whether there anything that respondents wished to highlight as particularly distinctive or valuable about the existing built environment of Benson. 140 respondents raised 178 themes, of which 139 related to the historic village character and its traditional building materials.

- 7.4 Consultation⁴ makes clear that there is strong support for policies to ensure that such heritage is preserved to allow future understanding and enjoyment, and that development is sensitive to its significance.
- 7.5 The plan area has 74 listed buildings, and both Benson and Preston Crowmarsh have conservation areas. The following policies take account of the statutory obligation to preserve and enhance these assets, as set out in national and local policy. The formal designations do not, however, fully capture the historic character of the long linear settlements extending beyond the conservation areas, and the current appraisals do not elaborate on relationships with the fields, river or brook. It is considered that these matters should be taken into better account.
- 7.6 Historic England's response to the SEA screening options in May/June 2016 expressed concern regarding the impact of development at Littleworth Road on the character of the Conservation Area and called for suitably detailed and robust policies to identify how development should respond to this key consideration as set out within paragraph 58 of the NPPF. As Phase 1 of this development is already approved such policies will not be relevant. Any re-design or new proposals affecting the Conservation Area will, however, be subject to the design principles set out in the Design Statement.
- 7.7 Many historic buildings along Brook Street, Littleworth Road and elsewhere are not listed. Nevertheless, they are valued as having local interest because of their traditional construction and historic interest. While there is as yet no formal local list there is a desire to ensure that the contribution of such buildings is recognised and respected, with significant buildings retained and only appropriate development permitted between.
- 7.8 No archaeological assets in the plan area are Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and protection relies on desk-based assessment as required by national policy, with field evaluation where required. On the basis of past and emerging evidence it is considered that there is high potential for finds of archaeological significance, and that it is highly likely that field evaluation will be critical in informing both proposals and the determination of applications. Furthermore, Historic England have noted that the public benefit of development may not

⁴ Draft policies displayed at "drop-in" sessions held on 10th and 11th June 2016 were strongly supported. See account of this session within the Consultation Statement.

outweigh the loss of important archaeological remains. This would occur where for instance the development might be accommodated less harmfully on an alternative site, and where there may therefore be a requirement to preserve such remains in-situ. Historic England have recommended that this Plan should include policies that require provision for flexibility and open space that would allow for this eventuality.

NP6

Development should respect the history and heritage of Benson in accordance with national and local policy by:

- Conserving and enhancing the significant special architectural and historic interest of listed buildings and their settings;
- Conserving and enhancing the special interest, character and appearance of the two conservation areas at Benson and Preston Crowmarsh, with regard for their setting and context as parts of longer linear historic settlements, and for their wider relationships with the River Thames, the Ewelme Stream (Benson Brook), and the agricultural landscape. Development that would restore traditional design details and window styles or route cables and services underground, and that accords with other policies in the Plan, will be supported;
- Conserving and respecting, in proportion to their importance, the significant character and setting of historic buildings that are not listed but are of local note for their heritage value. This shall apply to buildings included in the Schedule of Buildings of Local Heritage note set out in Appendix E . Developers should assess the significance of these buildings prior to application, and should provide a public record of any significance that is lost. Demolition of these buildings, or major alterations that would destroy or obscure their historic interest, will not be supported where it is judged that the significance of the building outweighs the scale of harm or loss;
- Where appropriate taking account of the high potential within the Plan area for discoveries of significant archaeological note, and ensuring that proposals reflect the outcome of an appropriate range of prior investigations including field evaluation. Any impact on archaeological remains should be mitigated to reflect the significance of those remains, by maximising potential for preservation, recording any loss and including provision for the preservation in situ of important remains where the loss is not outweighed by the public benefits of the development.

Design

- 8.1 The Vision underpinning this Plan requires sensitive development that integrates well with the rest of the village, and design standards that ensure that Benson retains its distinctive character. It also looks to respect Benson's rural setting beneath the Chiltern Hills and alongside the River Thames.
- 8.2 The community considers these matters to be important and places high value on Benson's character as a village. There is high regard for the local traditional character of the historic buildings and their distinctive use of local brick, tiles, flint and chalky stone, and for the green spaces, gardens and hedging. The extensive footpath network is also valued. There is a desire that new development should complement the existing surroundings and be of good design, practical and sustainable, whether traditional or modern. There is also an expectation that it should provide off-street parking and that it should allow for a sense of space and greenery. There is also strong feeling that design should call for the use of sustainable materials and look to save energy⁵.
- 8.3 South Oxfordshire District Council issued Design Guidance in November 2016. This outlines urban design processes for assessing and responding to the character of the locality and the needs of development. Given the diversity of settlement within the District, however, the Guidance does not offer advice on specific localities. This Plan therefore looks to identify particular requirements for Benson by reference to a specific Design Statement set out in Appendix B. The Design Statement is based on assessment of the distinctive qualities of different character areas in and around Benson and Preston Crowmarsh, and on assessment of the way in which Benson and its rural landscape setting are seen in different views. The assessments are set in Appendix E Character Assessment.
- 8.4 Some of the main conclusions of the Design Statement are as follows:
- Benson's rural character as a low-lying village surrounded by and associated with the agricultural landscape;
 - The close association with the River Thames and the Ewelme Stream (also known as the Benson Brook);

⁵ See the Benson Neighbourhood Plan Community Questionnaire Report 2016 (Appendix D), Q 22-29. These priorities were also strongly supported at the Drop-in sessions held on 10th and 11th June 2016.

- The informality of Benson's character deriving from the historic evolution of the irregular street pattern and the changing styles of building, from the mix of housing types and from the relatively spacious layout of 20th century housing;
- The village scale;
- The predominance of two-storey buildings with low ridge height and modest mass;
- The highly distinctive use of local building materials;
- The contribution to the village character made by green spaces, gardens and trees, together with opportunities to enhance biodiversity;
- The lack of off-street parking in the historic core;
- The need to retain and improve on the existing footpath and cycle-way network as a means of connecting the growing population with more accessibility to village facilities and each other.

8.5 In the Design Statement these considerations are reflected in Principles regarding the layout, scale, height and mass of new development, the desirability of complementing existing materials, and the design of green spaces and paths. The Design Policy requires respect for those principles.

NP7

All new development, including infill development, should be of a high-quality design that respects the distinctive character of the locality. New development should be in accordance with the Principles set out in the Design Statement that accompanies this Plan.

Infrastructure Policies

- 9.1 This section of the Plan addresses three of the identified objectives of the Plan, namely:
- To ensure that new development contributes towards the free and safe flow of traffic whilst having a minimum impact on the existing roads system and on parking in the village.
 - To ensure that new development encourages sustainable transport and specifically includes adequate walking and cycling routes to access the village centre
 - To ensure that there are adequate facilities to serve our growing local population
- 9.2 To address these objectives this section of the Plan will examine the current situation regarding those elements of the infrastructure in Benson which are provided by external agencies – usually Oxfordshire County Council. It will then assess the potential impact of possible growth on the existing and future infrastructure.
- 9.3 The remaining section of this chapter addresses transport, education and other community facilities

Transport

- 9.4.1 Benson is located in central south Oxfordshire with good road links to Oxford, Reading, Henley and the M40. Benson has two major roads within the parish, the A4074 and the B4009. The A4074 runs past most of the parish adjacent to the river and provides direct links with Oxford and Reading, whilst the B4009 cuts through the village and provides a link to Watlington and the M40 to the east.
- 9.4.2 Some of the village roads are historic whilst others are more modern. However, Benson has never benefited from a modern relief road. The result is that modern traffic flows have to be accommodated in an environment ill-suited to current circumstances. Providing a Relief road or securing the land for such a road in the future is a key objective of this plan.
- 9.4.3 The village is served by regular bus services to Oxford, Reading and the nearest town of Wallingford.

9.4.4 Benson has no direct access to the rail network. The nearest stations are in Didcot, Oxford, Cholsey, Henley and Reading.

9.4.5 The river provides a seasonal tourist service on an infrequent basis. RAF Benson is an operational RAF station with no commercial services.

Transport Policies

9.5.1 The policies set out in this section of the Plan are designed to ensure that new and existing residents of the Parish are not entirely reliant on the private car, have realistic sustainable transport options, and are provided for in terms of access & highways safety. This is a core pillar of sustainable development.

9.5.2 These aspects are now addressed in detail

Traffic Flow & Pinch Points

9.5.3 The following junctions have been identified as key points in the traffic flow through Benson. A Transport Assessment can be found at Appendix F, data on traffic Pinch Points at Appendix F1 and Traffic Flow information is available in Appendix F2.

Castle Square

9.5.4 Traffic converges from the Watlington Rd, Oxford Rd and Church Road. Parked cars, a severe bend and a very narrow carriageway on B4009 produce congestion at this point, especially at peak times. It is possible that this junction may need a weight restriction in the future. This is a prime route for children accessing the Primary School.

Church Road

9.5.5 Traffic converges from the main A4074 and Benson village/Watlington Rd/Oxford Rd. This causes severe congestion especially at weekends when the church is in use or when events are taking place in church premises during week. Traffic into/out of the public library further complicates the traffic flow. The southern end has a severe pinch point at the junction with the A4074, with public parking down St Helens Avenue for Bus Stop and Riverside Café and School Pick Ups.

Highway A4074

9.5.6 This is a busy main road with safety issues, several accidents having occurred at junctions into Preston Crowmarsh. Any increase in traffic flow onto the A4074

has the potential to increase congestion for traffic entering the main carriageway and thus to cause congestion along Church Road and St Helens Avenue due to the high incidence of casual parking from Riverside, Church and Bus stop. Recent increases in traffic parking on grass verges on either side of the road and the bus stop has the effect of severely restricting visibility of traffic exiting village to main road.

St Helen's Ave

9.5.7 The Church Road entry/exit point allows cars to be parked on both sides of the road. As a result, entry/exit can be difficult (see Figure 5 below). There is also cycle way/pedestrian path exit/entry point.



Figure 5 - St Helen's Avenue junction with Church Road

Watlington Road

9.5.8 The two junctions that create hazards are the entry/exit point into Castle Square and the blind bend at the junction with Chapel Lane and Littleworth Road. Proposed changes to Littleworth associated with new development and a consequential sharp rise in traffic will not improve the position.

Oxford Road

- 9.5.9 This road is a bottleneck, which during school times always has parked cars, including on the pavement, making progress difficult. It is particularly dangerous when parents drop off children for nursery and school and with cars parked for the Three Horseshoes Public House. Parking space is limited and this causes overspill into adjacent roads such as Horseshoes Lane (See Figure 6 below).



Figure 6 - Oxford Road

High Street

- 9.5.10 Traffic enters from Brook Street, Castle Square, Oxford Rd and Church Road. From the Brook Street direction the road narrows, with road views restricted. This is the main village through road which is affected by parked cars and delivery lorries to shops. Pedestrian safety is an issue, with no crossing currently available (See Figure 7 below).



Figure 7 - High Street Benson

Traffic Flow

9.5.11 Benson's location is supported by road links to the main district towns as well as to the cities of Oxford and Reading. These road links have to cater for a growing amount of through traffic as well as traffic generated by Benson.

NP8

Major housing development will be supported which:

- Improves existing road links or provides new ones to the main district towns and cities;
- Demonstrates that it does not detrimentally increase traffic flow conditions at the sensitive points listed above (para 9.5.4 to 9.5.10);
- Results in improvements to the free flow of traffic through the Housing Allocation sites (Policies NP2 – NP4).

9.5.12 Furthermore, Benson's road structure is historical and is not conducive to high volumes of traffic or to large individual vehicles. Many roads have seen no significant changes and a significant amount of heavy traffic uses them out of

necessity. Many of the issues raised would be addressed by the creation of a new through route for traffic avoiding the village pinch points.

- 9.5.13 When considering future traffic flows, it is necessary to consider planned local infrastructure improvements and to take them into account, if at all possible. These have been identified as the planned Park & Ride at Sandford and the proposed Relief Road around Watlington.
- 9.5.14 It can only be considered that a new large Park & Ride at Sandford will encourage more vehicle journeys to / from Oxford, but quantifying the precise effect on Benson is not possible at this stage. However, it would seem that strategic developments in Culham and Berinsfield might benefit more from this new facility than Benson, whilst Chalgrove traffic intending to use it would seem unlikely to route via the B4009 and Benson when a more direct route to the north is available. As far as Benson traffic is concerned, the route will likely remain northbound on the A4074 as is currently used for Redbridge.
- 9.5.15 It is understood that the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan will also be proposing a Relief Road around the village designed to route traffic away from the village centre. We judge that the main effect of this on Benson would be to possibly attract more traffic onto the B4009, with drivers hoping to make use of an easier journey along this route. However, we understand that the existing weight limit in Watlington itself will remain, such that there should not be a dramatic increase in HGV traffic,

Parking

- 9.6.1 Benson is a historic village, with some old narrow roads, a Conservation Area in its centre and limited central parking as a result.
- 9.6.2 On the village extremities, more modern developments have also resulted in parking issues, with sites adjacent to the Marina and the School having problems at certain times of day. A strategy is needed therefore to mitigate existing problems whilst avoiding future ones when future development takes place.

The strategy is to:

- a) Optimise existing parking capacity in the village centre
- b) Promote & encourage village centre access by non-vehicle means of transport
- c) Encourage the use of sustainable transport

- d) Provide additional parking facilities wherever possible
- e) Ensure future developments provide sufficient on-site parking facilities for residents and visitors

The Strategy should be implemented by various means

- A Parish Council Parking Plan – see Appendix G
- This Plan being clear on what parking facilities are required from future development
- The gradual implementation of the Plan over a period of time

9.6.3 There is a serious shortage of parking in certain key locations in Benson as shown in The Parking Plan (Appendix G). It is likely that future demand for parking will increase, not only from local traffic but also from traffic generated out of the immediate area. In order to prevent this issue becoming more pressing, off-site parking should be discouraged, whilst every effort should be made to maximise existing parking capacity.

9.6.4 Specifically, the planned improvement in service of the Oxford/Reading route may well attract more passengers from the new developments in Benson and surrounding villages (such as Watlington) but it is judged that this will see an increase in demand for local park & ride with vehicles being parked near the A4074. This has already happened in Lewknor with the Oxford/London bus service, and it seems logical that a similar situation will arise to some degree in Benson. Such a trend does nothing to help with traffic flows at the critical pinch points in Benson whilst simultaneously increasing the parking issues.

Sustainable Transport

9.7.1 The principle of sustainability is well established in national & local policies including the NPPF. Of particular importance are strategies that secure the provision of services that people can access easily without resorting to private car travel, and the provision of infrastructure which encourages and supports the use of sustainable transport modes including walking/cycling. Recently published guidance from Public Health England on air quality emphasises the importance of planning development such that walking and cycling are

encouraged. The guidance also encourages measures that separate pedestrians and cyclists⁶.

- 9.7.2 Pedestrians currently use a network of paths that are a legacy from the past, and are not necessarily always relevant to modern day requirements. Whilst the number of paths is adequate in some parts of the parish provision for pedestrians in many parts of the village is non-existent or inadequate. It is vital that future development is planned so as to provide adequate facilities from the outset.
- 9.7.3 At present, Hale Rd, part of Watlington Rd, part of Brook St, Castle Square, Crown Square, parts of Oxford Rd and Church Rd all have inadequate provision for walkers in that the walkways are non-existent or inadequate.
- 9.7.4 There is an established system of public footpaths. Some may not appeal to users because they are narrow and enclosed. However other more open and attractive examples add to the distinctive rural character of the village by providing valuable short cuts. They help to preserve Benson's historic links with adjacent settlements. A map showing these paths in in Appendix H.
- 9.7.5 As new development is being planned, it is important that the connectivity aspect is prioritised as a design consideration. New paths need to not only connect to the existing village centre as much as possible, but they also need to connect one with the other. They should take account of the existing paths, and desire lines as much as possible to encourage pedestrian activity. They must also take into account the need to access public transport.
- 9.7.6 Circular routes, taking in valuable views and routed so as to allow pedestrians to enjoy areas of value for wildlife or having aesthetic appeal are particularly popular and offer the additional opportunity to support and encourage understanding and appreciation of the local environment. Other measures to address this objective are presented elsewhere in this Plan.

Accessibility

- 9.8.1 Benson still has several sites where a dropped kerb is not provided, which creates difficulties for anyone with mobility issues. These existing issues have the potential to be improved where they will be used by newly created paths leading to/from development sites.

⁶ <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng70>

- 9.8.2 The present facilities to assist potential cyclists are not extensive. Many of Benson's roads are narrow and not conducive to cycling in busy traffic. Installing cycle lanes would seriously affect the road capacity. There is only currently one designated cycle path in the parish – and that is a shared use with pedestrians and skirts the village alongside the A4074.
- 9.8.3 The provision of new cycle paths will be expected in all significant development proposals. Cycle facilities such as storage and security points will also be expected and improvements to the present infrastructure will be sought.
- 9.8.4 Other areas of this section of the Plan will comment on the need for encouraging pedestrian/cyclist activity to reduce vehicle usage. This needs to be done in a managed programme, taking account of with both physical and psychological approaches to inducing and supporting use. Improved awareness of facilities by signage and education will be a priority, and concerns over safety should be addressed to encourage use.
- 9.8.5 If the future use of paths is to be improved and then maintained, it is also important that their nature and availability are addressed. Paths need to look attractive to encourage use. They should not make users feel threatened by closed in surroundings and should be sited so as to build in natural surveillance in developments. Space for bio diversity should be designed in from the start, recognising the role that footpaths need to play as corridors for wildlife as well as people. Equally though, they must be fit for purpose, with long term maintenance also addressed.

Public Transport

- 9.9.1 The Plan considers that public transport is important to the future of the Plan area. This section will assess the existing distances to the current transport stops, and future suggestions to improve the required walk distance will be encouraged.
- 9.9.2 Currently Benson is served by just one bus company - Thames Travel [TT]. This company provides Benson with two commercial services.
- 9.9.3 The Plan area benefits from being between two major towns Reading and Oxford and as a result it enjoys a regular and frequent service in either direction. The service is split between the X39 that calls in at Wallingford and the X40 that calls in at Wallingford and Woodcote. The most useful stop for Benson residents is at

the Benson Marina, with a further stop at the end of Benson Lane, both on the A4074.

- 9.9.4 Thames Travel also run a regular service between Cholsey - Wallingford – RAF Benson, the 136 service. This service runs through the centre of Benson with stops at Church Road, College Farm, Blacklands Road and The Cedars before heading off to Ewelme and the RAF Base. This is a much-used service as it gets passengers to Wallingford, which is used as an exchange hub to allow transfers for Reading, Oxford, Didcot and Abingdon.
- 9.9.5 The changes following the loss of the County subsidy have seen the dropping of several small less used routes, and also the direct service to Henley.
- 9.9.6 In summary, Benson is well served for public transport. However, much needs to be done to encourage residents to use the bus more. A recent limited community user survey showed the service to Wallingford was well used at certain times and especially by the older persons taking advantage of bus pass travel and by young persons. The survey also suggested that none of these services are run at anywhere near peak capacity.
- 9.9.7 Benson currently has a reasonable bus service to local towns, but the future of these services is uncertain. The County subsidy for the key local service has ended and any future commercial operation will stand or fall on usage. This is illustrated by recent reductions in service by Thames Travel on the 136 service, with the likelihood of further reductions in the near future.
- 9.9.8 Benson is well served by strategic bus services to Oxford & Reading. The County Transport Plan proposes to improve these services which are expected to result in more commuting traffic parking inside Benson to access the services, as discussed in para 9.6.4 above.

NP9

Major housing developments will be required to:

- **Provide on-site footways to encourage access to public transport routes;**
- **Contribute towards measures designed to encourage access to strategic bus services;**
- **Set out in their Travel Plans measures to invest in existing and new bus services to enable commuters, school children and other users to access Oxford, Reading and Wallingford.**

River Transport

9.10.1 There is only one company running river transport on the Thames through Benson – Salters Steamers. This service is limited and operates three days a week (Monday, Friday & Sunday), with one boat per day to/from Abingdon and only operates during the summer. It is plainly designed for leisure use rather than regular transport

Air Transport

9.11.1 The local Airfield is RAF Benson, an operational RAF base with no commercial services.

Pedestrians & Cyclists

9.12.1 Benson is located in relatively flat terrain that lends itself to walking, but there are currently insufficient arrangements for pedestrians. Furthermore, Benson's

NPI0

Major housing developments should provide on-site footways & pedestrian safety measures to facilitate pedestrian access to the village centre and community facilities and to surrounding countryside and settlements. These footways should incorporate and link with existing footway networks, and should be in accordance with principles H1 – H6 of the Design Guidance.

New development should provide on-site cycle paths both in general, and to facilitate access to the village centre and community facilities, and to surrounding settlements. They should also contribute where relevant to improvements to existing cycling facilities.

Where possible, footpaths should be routed so as to provide separation between road traffic and people.

historic road structure does not lend itself easily to establishing new cycle routes on existing roads.

Sustainable Travel

9.13.1 There is a local view that provision is not being made for future sustainable modes of transport. Such provision is important to secure sustainable and environmentally acceptable solutions to transport in the Plan area. Policy NP12 takes account of the recent government decision to move away from fossil fuel cars to electric cars by 2040. Whilst this is beyond the Plan period it is likely that manufacturers will

bring forward more electric vehicles well before this deadline. This has already been reflected in the various 2017 car scrappage schemes for cars registered before 2009 and operating at EU1-4 emissions standards.

NPII

Proposals for new residential developments which include EV charging points that are appropriate to the scale and nature of the development concerned will be supported.

Road Safety

- 9.14.1 The recent Community Survey indicated that a large proportion (95%) of the respondents had concerns over road related issues. This section of the Plan will seek to identify safety concerns reported and then assess them in the light of possible future development. It will not examine other issues reported such as parking or traffic flow since they are examined elsewhere in this Plan.
- 9.14.2 A high proportion (89%) of respondents also reported believing there are road safety issues in Benson, with the following identified as safety related: Speeding, Busy Junctions, Heavy Lorries and Pedestrian/Cyclist issues
- 9.14.3 Several specific sites were mentioned by those reporting safety issues, including Benson High St, Watlington Rd, Oxford Road, Church Rd/A4074 Junction and Castle Square
- 9.14.4 The judgement of speeding is of course very subjective, with many factors – traffic flow, road design, surroundings – playing a part in the assessment as well as the actual speed of the vehicle.
- 9.14.5 The perception of high speed (and hence of a lack of safety) is completely different and it could well be that in certain places and/or certain times the existing limit is too high. The Plan's focus is on Benson High St, Watlington Rd, Oxford Rd and the A4074 Marina area.

High Street

- 9.14.6 This road does not have a high average speed where measured (20 mph) nor a high 85% Quartile Speed (25 mph), but it has many other factors which combine to affect safety when combined with the current legal limit. The high numbers of

vehicles parked or manoeuvring, the constant turning of vehicles onto/off the road, the need for pedestrians to cross the road and the likelihood of them doing so in between parked vehicles all have a bearing on the speed limit. Further, the incidence of illegally parked vehicles, both on restricted yellow lines and in the immediate vicinity of junctions, has a significant impact on safety.

- 9.14.7 The High St would fit well with National & County Guidelines on a 20mph limit, and hence it is felt that consideration be given to reducing the speed limit along the High St to 20mph.

Oxford Rd

- 9.14.8 The Traffic Survey Data show a different picture for Oxford Rd alongside Benson CofE School. Average speeds are much higher, whilst parked/manoeuvring vehicles are only an issue at particular times.

- 9.14.9 However, during these times – when children are being dropped off/picked up – the road becomes a basically one lane road with relatively high speeds. Future development in Benson is likely to exacerbate the problem, with more children and more parked cars.

- 9.14.10 It is not uncommon to find a part time lower speed limit outside schools, and indeed OCC Highways are recommending a 20mph limit for the proposed new Littleworth Rd on the other side of the school. It is therefore suggested that consideration be given to lowering the speed limit in Oxford Rd in the vicinity of the school to 20mph when the school is active.

Specific Issues – Busy Junctions

- 9.14.11 At the sites identified by survey respondents, the most common threat to road safety would seem to be in crossing highways with a high traffic count at certain times of day. Church Rd/A4074, Watlington Rd and Castle Square all fall into this category.

Watlington Rd

- 9.14.12 A new crossing is scheduled for Watlington Rd near the tennis courts as part of an already approved development. This will do much to improve safety. However, nothing is planned as yet to assist pedestrians at the eastern end of the revised Littleworth Rd. Some form of crossing here is a high priority.

Castle Square

9.14.13 This is a very busy junction at peak traffic times, and also another important point on the walk to school for parents & children. However, the restricted visibility problems associated with the various roads here make any potential crossing very difficult. This also not helped by the incidence of parked vehicles in the Square.

9.14.14 It could well be that encouraging traffic to route away from this point is more effective and rewarding. This would be best done by a new Relief Road designed to take heavy traffic and thus avoiding the narrow entry point into the square.

A4074 Junction

9.14.15 The junction of Church Rd/A4074 is a very busy junction in peak traffic times, and the A4074 has a higher speed limit (40mph). Pedestrians seek to cross the busy highway here for many reasons, to access Preston Crowmarsh, to access the riverside for recreation and to access the main Oxford bus service.

9.14.16 On this basis there would seem to be a case for installing a controlled crossing such as exist now in Berinsfield and Shillingford. This would tend to slow the traffic flow down, thus improving the current perception of high speed.

9.14.17 The other issue reported in this area concerns the traffic accessing the A4074 from Church Rd. This access needs improvement. There are several possible improvements possible, including the prohibition of traffic making a right turn across the A4074 in the Oxford direction. Such traffic blocks visibility for traffic in the left-hand lane and inhibits that traffic from turning left safely. Alternatively, a light controlled junction with an associated crossing might be considered.

Heavy Lorries

9.14.18 Benson does see a great deal of what is perceived to be heavy goods traffic, with several major operators in the Parish. However, this traffic has a legal right to access.

Specific Issues – Pedestrians/Cycles

9.14.19 The vast majority of the comments received from the Community Survey in this category are involved with road crossings and/or high speeds. These have been addressed above and an improvement in public perception would follow any implementation.

Community Facilities' Policies

- 10.1 This section addresses three of our identified objectives namely items:
- (a) Ensure Benson has a modern, vibrant village centre.
 - (b) Ensure there are adequate facilities to serve our growing local population.
 - (c) Ensure sustainability of economic activity in the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 10.2 Benson is fortunate in having an extensive range of local infrastructure facilities that help make the village both an attractive place to live and one that supports its residents. The key facilities that currently support the Benson community are shown in the table below and those within the village centre and wider community are shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9 below.

LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES			
1 Retail outlets	2 Health Services etc	3 Community meeting places	3 Service providers
Co-operative convenience store	Millstream GP Surgery	Parish Church & Canon Room multi-purpose hall	Outreach post office
Butcher	Dentist	Parish Hall	2 Pubs
Greengrocer and Florist	Veterinary surgery	Youth hall	2 hairdressers
Cards, stationery & gift shop	Chiropractor	Scout hut	2 garage/car repair facilities
Pharmacy and chemist	Day Centre for elderly	Library	Estate agent
M&S convenience store (at Elm Bridge roundabout site)			Café and 2 take-away food outlets
Recycled furniture & gifts			Café beside River Thames
Delicatessen			Fuel station
Health & beauty items			Charity Shop
Fishing tackle & outdoor clothing shop			



Retail and service facilities in village centre; note the large number of parked cars

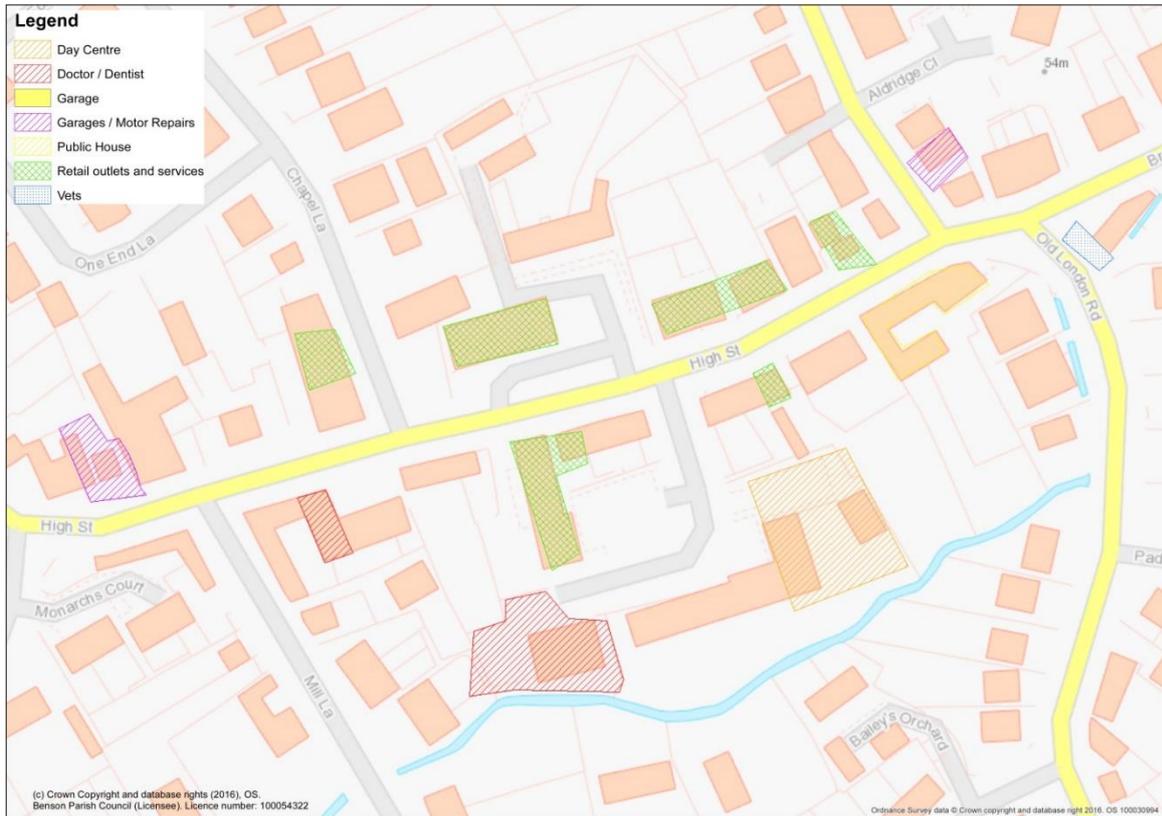


Figure 8 - Village Centre Services

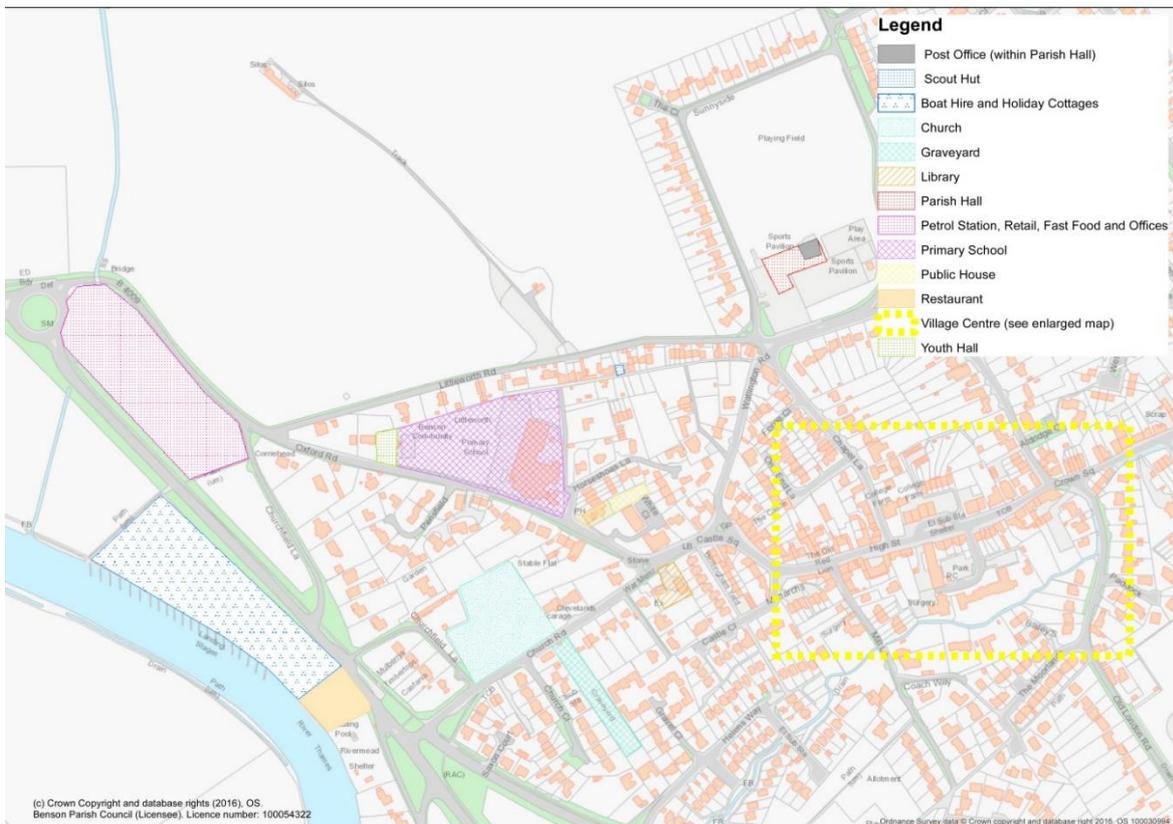


Figure 9 - Wider Community Facilities

- 10.3 With the exception of the post office (which is located within the Parish Hall, some 300 metres from the High Street), all the above facilities are located either in or very close to the village centre and are important assets that are used by Benson residents, staff and families from RAF Benson and residents of the smaller outlying villages.
- 10.4 However, because of the compact nature of the village centre, parking can be difficult (see Section 9.6).
- 10.5 On the outskirts of the village at the Elm Bridge roundabout site there is a petrol station with attached convenience store, a fast-food outlet and a commercial office facility. The complex adjacent to the River Thames also has a café/restaurant, a fishing tackle shop and a boat hire and holiday chalet facility.
- 10.6 More extensive retail and other service facilities, for example banks, solicitors, opticians etc. are located in surrounding towns (Wallingford, Abingdon and Didcot, and Oxford and Reading somewhat further away) that are accessible by car or via current bus services.
- 10.7 The village survey showed that the retail facilities were well supported with 80% of 584 respondents using the local supermarket/convenience stores either daily or several times a week and 93% used the pharmacy. At least once a week 63% of respondents used the greengrocers and butchers and 71% used the outreach post office. Village cafes/restaurants were used at least once a week by 19% of respondents and over 70% of respondents used them sometimes. Pubs were used at least once or twice a month by 37% of respondents.
- 10.8 The Millstream Surgery was used by 89.5% of 579 respondents, the dentist by 48%, the veterinary surgery by 42% and the various garages and fuel station by 87% of respondents. These figures indicate that the existing retail and services facilities in the village are all well supported and contribute to a vibrant and economically dynamic village centre.
- 10.9 The village also has a well-supported Parish Church and a well-appointed Parish Hall with sports changing rooms that are well used by a number of sports clubs, groups and societies. There is also a Youth hall and a Scout hut within the village. Nevertheless, both of these buildings are out-dated and need new investment to enable them to be upgraded / relocated.

- 10.10 Benson residents welcome and make good use of the range of facilities that are available to them within the village and are keen that they are both continued and where necessary enhanced. However, should the village population grow significantly, the need to improve/increase facilities particularly in respect of the Millstream Surgery, primary school, dentist, post office, library, Parish Hall, youth club and scout hut will need to be addressed.
- 10.11 Large scale development will require improved community facilities in many areas of Benson. Some of these facilities will not directly be associated with particular developments. It is important that such improvements are identified and listed for future action.

NPI2

Proposals which assist with the delivery of new or extended community facilities or infrastructure improvements will be supported. Delivery of community facilities listed in Appendix I – Community Facilities will be particularly supported.

Education

- 10.12.1 The provision of education for children in Benson Parish is important to its community function and sustainability.
- 10.12.2 Provision generally is made by Benson Church of England School, RAF Benson and by Scamps. Within 5 miles of Benson there are currently between 21 nurseries (www.childcare.co.uk) and 8 nurseries (fisd.oxfordshire.gov.uk) along with 24-34 registered childminders depending on the search engine used.
- 10.12.3 General provision and the allocation of places is the responsibility of the County Council. There are two state primary schools within Benson Parish – Benson CofE School and the RAF Benson School. There are another seven Primary Schools within three miles of Benson

Currently, the capacities of the two schools within the Parish are:

	Capacity	On Roll (2016)
Benson CoE	210	179

	Capacity	On Roll (2016)
RAF Benson	246	180
Combined	456	359

10.12.4 The current (and approved) planning applications for land adjacent to Littleworth Rd in Benson involve a proposal to extend the Benson CoE School on the existing site's playing fields, whilst providing new playing field facilities for formal games and PE off site (on the Littleworth Rd development across the road from the school). The current County Council intention is to expand the school to 1.5 FE (315 places) with 2 FE (415) places a possibility. This situation will be kept under review as the scale of expected housing growth is clarified.

10.12.5 RAF Benson School is in the catchment area of Watlington, and many pupils go to Icknield Community College. Benson CofE School is in the Wallingford catchment area and is a Partner school, and hence most pupils go there.

10.12.6 Wallingford School is already operating at its capacity of an intake of 190 pupils per year and is heavily over-subscribed with a waiting list. However, the school regularly accepts late arrivals with a result that nobody from the catchment area has been forced elsewhere in recent years.

10.12.7 Consideration is being given to extend the school in line with the growth of local population and a recent study has indicated there is capacity for the site to cope with expansion. However, the details are a matter for the school and the County Council. The figures below were given by the School earlier:

Year	Yr7	Yr8	Yr9	Yr10	Yr11	6 th Form	Total
2016	192	202	192	191	190	210	1163

10.12.8 Icknield Community College is an 11-16 school with no sixth form currently and an admission number at present of 140 pupils per year. Current figures for pupils are:

Year	Yr7	Tr8	Yr9	Yr10	Yr11	Total	Capacity
2016	142	128	122	100	120	612	700

10.12.9 The situation regarding secondary education is clearly volatile. To take Icknield Community College as an example, potential housing growth in Chinnor, Chalgrove, Watlington, Stadhampton as well as Benson, means that the future demand for places will undoubtedly be high but the detail is unknown and the future is therefore uncertain.

10.12.10 As there is no secondary school within Benson, transporting children to school is a necessity. The challenge is to find the safest and most sustainable practical method to transport the children to a school with the capacity to accept them.

10.12.11 The exact number of children resident in Benson requiring a school place will depend on the mix and numbers of dwellings proposed. Recent figures from County suggest the following projected requirement:

Dwellings	Primary Places Needed	Secondary Places Needed
175	35	25
240	65	50
400	100	75
600	150	105
800	200	150

10.12.12 Whilst the details of the planned expansion of Benson CoE School are not currently known, it has been confirmed by OCC that there is a limit to possible expansion, and that this will only support a maximum of 750 to 800 new houses. This figure must take into account the small number of houses built as infill (about 25) as well as the houses currently approved for site Ben 1 (about 425). Hence the houses proposed for all other sites within the Benson NP should not exceed the range 290 to 340.

Key Issues

- 10.12.13 Given that Primary school places & allocations will inevitably be critical, it is suggested that the County's placement system needs to ensure that the best use is made of all available educational resources within the parish to ensure they are effectively utilised.
- 10.12.14 Most Benson parents want their children be educated to an acceptable standard in a local school without the need for excessive travelling. In this respect, there are two key issues involved - school capacity and transport.
- 10.12.15 The provision of sufficient school places, both Primary and Secondary is currently a County Council responsibility. However, the NP recognises that the speed of delivery of the land for school use as well as the land for the houses will be critical. This is likely to be a lengthy programme and it must be expected that OCC will need to regulate the timescales.
- 10.12.16 However given that the traffic on Benson's roads will increase with new development, it is important that the Plan supports measures that minimise the use of vehicles to transport children to school.
- 10.12.17 Hence this Plan acknowledges and supports the need for school expansion on sustainability grounds. However, the Plan strongly encourages that the School Trustees retain as much as possible of the existing School Field as green space to allow easy access to green space for informal break-time recreation. It is understood that a feasibility study for the expansion has been commissioned by OCC which will determine the area required.

Benson Library

- 10.13.1 Benson Library is a modestly sized building (approx. 128m²) on a small plot near the centre of Benson village. It currently has limited car parking facilities, a difficult access and has no immediate prospect of improvement. The library is run by Oxfordshire County Library Services (OCLS) in a Partnership Working Agreement with the Friends of Benson Library (FOBL)
- 10.13.2 In their submission to a major recent successful planning application, the County stated that the library is "significantly undersized in relation to its catchment area" and this development will fund an increase in size to cater for the increased

population generated. The County Council has no current plans to move the library from its present site. However, it is understood that OCLS will consider any proposals that come forward to move the library to another suitable location within the community.

10.13.3 It is unlikely that the current library site can accommodate a large increase in building size, not least over the loss of car parking which this would cause. Such car parking is regarded by FOBL as important for the future of the library given that a large proportion of library customers (over 40%) live outside Benson village.

10.13.4 Furthermore, it is anticipated in any event that a larger library building will be required in the village to accommodate the level of growth promoted in this Plan.

10.13.5 One possible way forward would be to locate the library with or alongside a Community Facility such as a Heritage or Local History Centre. Benson is an historic village especially when the local RAF Base is taken into account. FOBL, having discussed the matter with OCLS, has submitted a scoping paper for the future of the library which includes incorporating a Heritage or Local History Centre. FOBL advise that OCLS is supportive of a more detailed review of the future of Benson Library and has forwarded this scoping paper to OCC's Property Services for comment.

10.13.6 On this basis it is not possible at the moment to draft a detailed policy for the Plan. Nevertheless, a general policy is set out below at NP13

10.13.7 It is likely that the current site of Benson Library will be unsuitable for future expansion and a new site will be required.

NP13

Proposals to extend the existing library or to provide a new facility elsewhere in the village will be supported where they comply with other policies in this Plan and the wider development Plan.

Village Centre

10.14.1 The maintenance and ongoing development of Benson village centre, based around the present retail properties in the immediate vicinity of the High Street,

is a prime requirement of the Plan. Earlier sections of this chapter have set out the use of the local facilities in the village centre. They are a critical part of the character and function of the Plan area. The retention of a strong village centre is at the very heart of sustainable development in Benson. A key element of the vitality and viability of the centre is based on its attractiveness as a shopping centre. Policy NP14 has been designed to retain retail units unless it can be demonstrated that for viability or other commercial reasons that it would be unreasonable to do so. Policy NP 15 takes a similar view with regards to residential and other commercial units. These will assist in reinforcing the central role that the centre plays in village life.

NPI4

In so far as planning permission is required proposals for a change of use from A1 retail shops to other uses in the identified village centre or at the Elm Bridge roundabout site as shown on the Figures 7 and 8 will only be supported where one of the following conditions is met:

- **It has been satisfactorily demonstrated that it would be neither economically viable nor feasible to retain the existing or previous retail use in the property concerned and that there is no reasonable prospect of securing an alternative retail use; or**
- **The proposed non-retail use meets an identified community need and does not affect the integrity of the retail area concerned.**

NPI5

Insofar as planning permission is required proposals for the change of use of residential or commercial buildings within the identified village centre (see the Figure 8) to retail (Class A1), to financial and professional services (Class A2), to café/restaurant (Class A3) or to business use (Class B1) will be supported subject to the following criteria:

- The proposal respects the character and appearance of the Benson conservation area and conforms with the principles EI-3 and KI-7 in the Benson Design Statement;
- The proposal does not cause an unacceptable impact on the amenities of nearby residential properties;
- The proposal provides adequate servicing and access arrangements in accordance with the most recently published standards of South Oxfordshire District Council;
- The proposal does not conflict with Policy NP14.

10.14.2 Any significant increase in population within the Neighbourhood Plan area will have major impact on the services and facilities available within the village. To ensure that both existing and new residents continue to enjoy community infrastructure, it will be necessary to put in place an infrastructure plan detailing what facilities will need to be enhanced, what the time-frame is for those changes and who will be responsible for meeting any costs incurred (including agreed contributions from developers).

Assets of Community Value

10.15.1 A register of Assets of Community Value has been set-up and maintained by the Parish Council. The register includes three facilities – The Crown Public House, The Three Horseshoes Public House and the Benson Library. These assets are also formally recorded on the local planning authority's register of such assets. The major areas where enhancements will be required include the Millstream Surgery, primary school, post office, library, Parish Hall, Youth hall and Scout

NPI6

Any proposal that will result in either the loss of an Asset of Community Value or in significant harm to an Asset of Community Value will not be supported.

hut. Car parking within the village is already difficult; additional provisions need to be identified, and plans put in place for its enhancement.

Burial Ground

10.16.1 The existing burial ground opposite the Parish Church will be full within the next few years, and suitable space for a new burial ground needs to be identified and set aside. The Church and the Parish Council have established that the best site for this is on the southern side of St Helens Avenue because of proximity to the Church, availability of good parking and where there is no risk of flooding. It is proposed that an area of approximately 0.25ha be set aside on site BEN7, land off St Helens Road, for this purpose (see Policy NP5).

Doctors Surgery

10.17.1 Existing healthcare facilities in the village will not be able to meet the needs of an enlarged population. Based in the village centre the existing GP practice is an integral part of the community and the doctors would like to grow and expand the building and staff to support the housing growth planned in Benson. Therefore the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group would look to both the Parish Council to consider supporting this new population from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions.

10.17.2 The potential projects identified in Appendix I will be developed into specific projects that will be costed and phased and will be secured either through CIL or S106 contributions where this is directly related to a development proposal. Other sources of funding (e.g. Grants) will also be investigated. The projects identified at Appendix I are based on current circumstances. The list will be maintained and reviewed annually by the Parish Council.

10.17.3 Economic activity within the Neighbourhood Plan area is primarily linked to the retail and service facilities within the village, although the RAF base also employs many people who use village facilities. At Preston Crowmarsh, parts of Battle Farm have been converted into office units and a conference centre with parking. Limited local employment opportunities exist within the Elm Bridge roundabout complex and at the riverside. Many residents travel out of the village to places of employment, some of which are local within Wallingford and environs or at Abingdon, Didcot, Reading and Oxford. Because of reasonable access to the

M4 and M40 motorways and to Didcot and Oxford railway stations there is access to employment beyond the immediate area.

Phone and Broadband Provision

- 10.18.1 There are a number of farms and small commercial operations throughout the Plan area. Some local residents work from home, assisted by the recent introduction of improved fast fibre-optic broadband connections to the village. The benefits to the community of home-working are considerable as it reduces traffic and enhances support of village facilities.
- 10.18.2 Although current mobile phone signal strength within the Neighbourhood Plan area is generally adequate there is a risk that increased demand from new homes may overload existing facilities. The Parish Council should monitor the situation and put pressure on service providers should residents report deteriorations in the system.
- 10.18.3 The following policies have been developed to deliver the sustainable economic activity objective:

NPI7

Developers should provide appropriate telecommunication infrastructure , to all new dwellings within the Plan area. All applications for residential development must demonstrate how they will provide suitable ducting to enable more than one service provider to provide a fibre connection to individual properties from connection chambers located on the public highway.

NPI8

Proposals that deliver the expansion of electronics communication networks and high-speed broadband and improvements to connectivity will be supported where:

- the applicant has fully explored the opportunities to erect apparatus on existing buildings, masts or other structures; and
- the number of radio and telecommunication masts are kept to a minimum consistent with the efficient operation of the network; and
- the development has been sited and designed to minimize the impact on the character and appearance of the Benson Conservation Area.

Allotments

10.19.1 Benson currently has 109 allotment plots (2.43 ha for 4754 people), and Parish Council usage data (see Appendix J) over the past 5 years confirms high uptake (between 94 and 100%). Development in the parish is expected to increase demand so this Plan provides for additional allotments in NP2 and NP5 to complement the existing provision on the south-western edge of the settlement. SODC standards⁷ require 0.3 ha of allotment space per 1000 people, reflecting average provision in the larger settlements in the District. This is less than the current scale of provision in Benson, which is calculated as 0.51ha per 1000 people and considerably less than the national allotment standard suggested by The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG). The SODC 2013 analysis acknowledges that demand for allotment space is rising, and the evidence of high uptake in Benson indicates that above average provision of 0.51ha per 1000 people is justified as it is in proportion with Benson's apparent needs.

NPI9

Provision should be made for allotment space (at a rate of 0.51 ha per 1000 people) in the green spaces within the new residential developments as proposed in policies NP2 and NP4 in this Plan.

⁷http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Standards_summary_with_justification.pdf

Outdoor Recreation

- 10.20.1 There are four formal recreation grounds in Benson. The primary site is Sunnyside which provides a playground, tennis courts (restricted to club use so inaccessible to casual users), a sports pavilion and amenity grassland put to a variety of uses including football. There are two smaller playgrounds at Green Close and St Helen's Avenue, and Rivermead (adjacent to the River Thames) provides a small paddling pool.
- 10.20.2 The Plan area also benefits from the recreational opportunities offered by good access to the wider countryside and its network of footpaths and bridleways including the Thames Path National Trail. Safe pedestrian crossings where public footpaths intersect with busy roads around the village are particularly important.
- 10.20.3 Community views on provision of youth facilities were assessed by a sub-group of the Parish Council in February 2015. With respect to play facilities, that survey indicated that the community believes that:
- there is a need for a greater variety of equipment at the existing playgrounds, including 'adventure' type equipment (e.g. zip wire);
 - some of the current play facilities need to be updated; and
 - there is currently no provision at all for older children and teenagers.
- 10.20.4 The lack of informal recreational facilities for older children in Benson is a gap in provision when compared with other settlements in the area, and some Benson families travel elsewhere to access these facilities. Any new residential development is only likely to increase demand. This plan allocates land for the provision of a recreational facility for older children/young people in the village e.g. skate park. ..
- 10.20.5 In terms of formal sport, Benson United Football Club provides boys' and girls' football training for a range of ages. The club has 80 members. It operates on a Saturday morning, running up to four matches concurrently at Sunnyside. The adult section of the club is not currently active but as the village grows, the club expects to expand to serve the needs of a larger community. Sunnyside cannot be expected to provide sufficient capacity, given the diverse range of purposes it currently meets, so additional playing field capacity is proposed through this Plan. This additional playing field also serves to compensate for the loss of

recreational space at the School Field, part of which may be built on to enable essential primary school expansion (see para 10.12.15).

- 10.20.6 There is an active running club, Benson Striders, membership of which has expanded steadily to 98 members. The club has a qualified coach, and meets three times per week. In an assessment of its current and future needs, the club anticipates continued expansion as the village grows, given the popularity of running. It notes that facilities for mid-week winter training are particularly limited, and seeks the provision of a Fitness Trail with safe, established and level paths to meet that need.
- 10.20.7 Over this plan period, Benson is proposing to allocate land for approximately 565 new homes. This Plan aims to promote recreation for the physical and mental health benefits that it brings so additional amenity greenspace and associated facilities such as a Fitness Trail will be needed to provide adequate extra capacity to meet the village's recreational needs.

NP20

New residential development must make provision for play facilities in accordance with South Oxfordshire District Council standards in place at the time of the determination of the application concerned.

Environmental Policies

Introduction to Green Infrastructure

- 11.1 Green Infrastructure is the natural physical environment that lies both within and between built areas. It takes the form of a network of multifunctional green spaces, providing a wide array of benefits to society, wildlife and the economy. In particular:
- it contributes to physical and mental well-being in the community through both its intrinsic value and aesthetic appeal and by meeting recreational needs;
 - it provides 'space for nature' and ecological networks that act as nature's highways; and
 - it is part of a healthy natural environment, providing valuable services to society such as flood capacity, space to grow food, and climate regulation.
- 11.2 In built areas, green infrastructure such as private gardens, public green spaces, watercourses, hedgerows and trees, paths and bridleways and verges can all help wildlife and nature to survive and thrive. Green infrastructure is important in all of our lives, and in a development context, paying attention to it helps to create sustainable and beautiful places in which people want to live. There is a growing evidence base demonstrating tangible economic, social and health benefits from investment in the Environment⁸.
- 11.3 As development is planned and executed, the NPPF (notably para 109, 117, and 118) requires that we plan for ecological networks, recognising our green (and blue i.e. water) assets, planning for their maintenance and protection, and finding opportunities for enhancement. Enhancement can involve improving management of existing sites or creating new ones, particularly where they connect up existing green spaces.
- 11.4 These general principles are addressed in the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy 2012 (Policy CSG1 Green infrastructure) and the South and Vale Green

⁸[NERR057 – Microeconomic Evidence for the Benefits of Investment in the Environment 2](#)

Infrastructure Strategy 2017, published as part of the evidence base for the draft Local Plan⁹.

- 11.5 Benson has much to celebrate in the green spaces and wildlife interest in the parish; there is also scope for enhancements that will play a part in meeting government targets for biodiversity. This section of the plan explains how development will make a meaningful contribution to the delivery of objectives for the natural environment in Benson, and sets policies accordingly.

Benson Community Views on Green Infrastructure

- 11.6.1 The community expressed support for a vision and objectives that included the following commitments:

- to safeguard and enhance existing green infrastructure and secure the provision of additional green space connected to the wider countryside, and
- to ensure that new development is sited, planned and executed in a way that takes account of the needs and challenges of the natural environment.

- 11.6.2 Through consultation, community views were further tested in Benson, asking respondents to rate how valuable or important the four aspects of green infrastructure below were to them (on a scale of 1 to 5). An overwhelming majority stated that the following matters were of high or very high importance or value to them (ratings in brackets):

- The village's ability to sustain wildlife and nature within its boundaries through retaining green infrastructure; (88%)
- The ability to access the countryside surrounding the village easily on foot or bicycle; (93%)
- Benson's setting in the rural landscape (between the Chilterns, Wittenham Clumps and the River Thames) including the long open views around the village and out to the surrounding countryside; (91%)
- Public parks and open green areas within the village. (88%)

⁹ <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/evidence-studies>

Benson's Approach to Green Infrastructure

- 11.7.1 The Plan sets policies so that development is undertaken in a way that safeguards existing green assets. It sets out to create multifunctional green spaces that deliver multiple benefits for wildlife and people in line with the locally specific objectives set out in Benson's Strategy for People and Nature (see below for key points).
- 11.7.2 The plan further requires the maintenance and enhancement of on-site biodiversity assets and the creation of multifunctional wildlife corridors. It also requires developers to provide Green Infrastructure management plans and the funding to deliver appropriate maintenance.

Strategy for People and Nature in Benson

- 11.8.1 Benson has developed a Strategy for People and Nature¹⁰. The document recognises the Parish's existing green assets, and sets out management, enhancement and creation actions (by a range of parties) to deliver local, regional and national priorities for the natural environment. The strategy follows the well-established principles of 'Protect, Maintain, and Enhance', seeking a net gain or increase in biodiversity value from development in line with SODC requirements¹¹. It seeks to build and celebrate Benson's Ecological Network, making the most of opportunities to enable people to experience nature and reap the benefits of good green space.
- 11.8.2 The Strategy has a scope beyond the Plan's remit however the policies in our Neighbourhood Plan aim to ensure that development contributes to the aims of that Strategy. The key focal points which have informed our policies are:
- Action for Pollinators - undertaking habitat management, creation and enhancement to encourage butterflies, moths and bees, focusing particularly on meeting the needs of countryside species that decline as their habitats are replaced by gardens or intensive agriculture. The Plan aims to provide a diversity of habitats, including the addition of nectar sources for specific species, through the creation of wildflower margins and other habitats in

¹⁰ See Appendix L – Benson's Strategy for People and Nature

¹¹ <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/evidence-studies>

suitable places. This will result in a wildflower highway around the parish creating a network of connections and 'stepping stones'.

- Maintenance and creation of high quality access opportunities so the community benefits from engagement with their local natural environment including through associated recreation.
- Creation of built settlements that are 'permeable' to wildlife, connecting up green spaces where possible and maximising the chances for nature to thrive and move around.
- Safeguarding 'Benson Brook' (Ewelme Stream) for its interest as a globally important habitat supporting a range of wildlife, a natural capital asset, its cultural value and aesthetic appeal while maintaining and enhancing its role in flood protection.

Local Green Spaces and Connections to the Wider Countryside

11.9.1 Public green spaces are vital community assets. They provide a wide array of benefits such as recreation, including formal sports and natural play facilities. They provide associated health benefits, space for hosting community activities, space for growing food in allotments and meeting the needs of wildlife; and, increasingly, providing for services such as flood attenuation and carbon capture.

Protecting Existing Green Spaces

11.9.2 The Plan protects Benson's existing green spaces from development (other than for needs that are key to their function) by designating them as Local Green Spaces. Appendix K1 provides an assessment against the criteria in the NPPF for each of the proposed local green spaces.

NP21

The following areas as shown on Figure 10 are designated as local green space. Built development will not be permitted on these local green spaces unless that built development is of a limited nature and provides facilities that support the function and use of the local green space concerned.

- Sunnyside
- Aldrige Triangle - a Diamond Jubilee meadow
- Green Close play area
- St Helen's Avenue Play area
- Bertie West's Field
- Allotments at Mill Lane and St Helen's Avenue
- Millbrook Mead (the fen and meadow by A4074)
- Land adjacent to Benson Brook around the Cuckoo Pen nursery and path under A4074
- Rivermead (area by the River Thames with paddling pool)

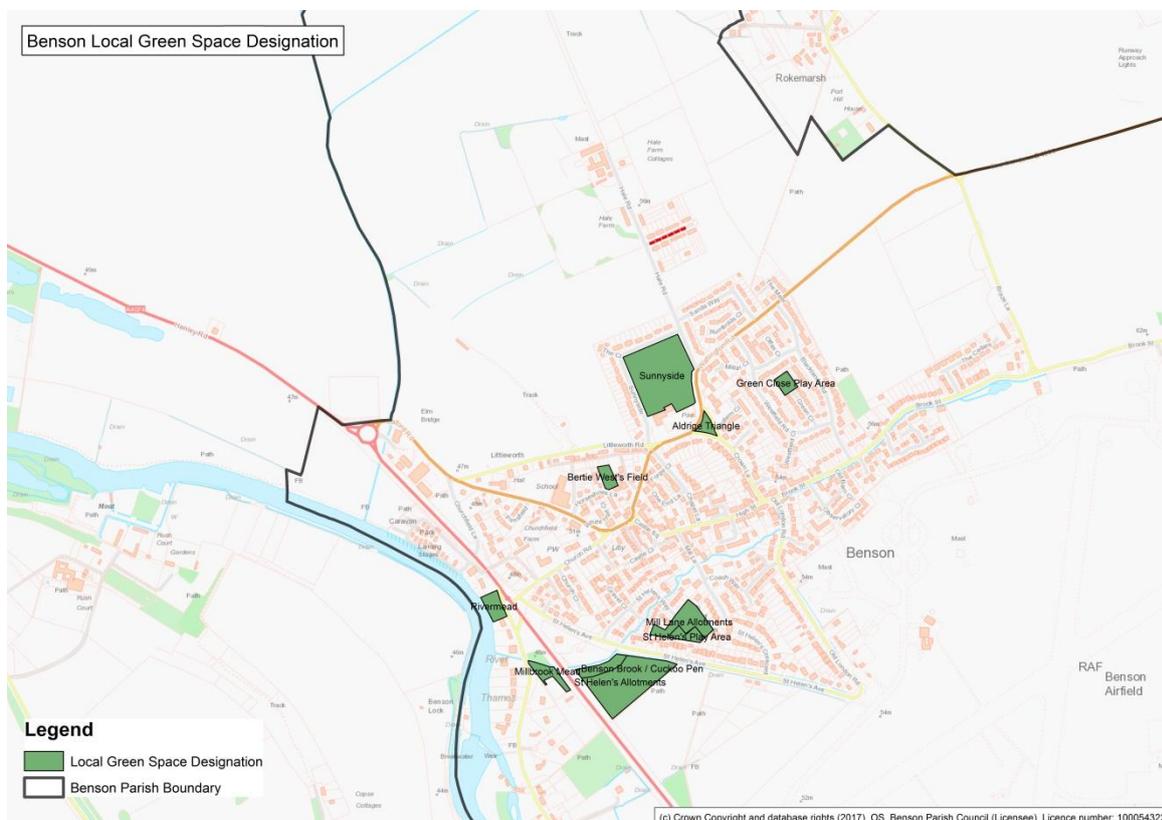


Figure 10 - Local Green Space designation in Benson

Creating New Green Spaces

- 11.9.3 The District Council's Green Infrastructure Strategy (published March 2013 and updated July 2013) identified a deficiency in Benson's area of public parks and gardens of 1.2 hectares for the size of population at 2011¹². A significant increase in population will follow with the development of the strategic housing sites identified earlier in this Plan. The District Council adopted standard of provision for public green space in large villages is 1 ha per 1000 people within 1000m of all homes in the settlement.
- 11.9.4 Within this strategic context the Plan requires the provision of adequate additional green space to take account of the increase in population resulting from development.
- 11.9.5 Community consultation has advised that access to local open countryside is important to residents of this parish both for recreation and for pedestrian/cyclist access to other settlements. It also demonstrated that the community values its connection with the River Thames. This Plan promotes the use and enjoyment of the countryside both for its well-being benefits and to encourage sustainable means of transport. New green spaces must connect with existing green spaces and with the wider countryside.
- 11.9.6 New green space in the village is also proposed as mitigation for the additional recreational disturbance at the nearby 'honeypot' European designated site at Little Wittenham Special Area of Conservation generated by development in Benson (as identified in initial screening against the 'Habitats Regulations' by SODC). The green space needs to be of adequate scale and interest to offer a reasonable alternative in order to serve as suitable mitigation. Thus two substantial new areas of green space with suitable connections to wider countryside are proposed to the north of the village as part of a new vegetated edge (see Section 11.11.5)..
- 11.9.7 Public green spaces are often multifunctional and it is not always possible to achieve all aims in the same green space. For example, allotments, whilst often offering wildlife benefits if managed correctly tend not to be suitable for other community uses. In addition, recreation is sometimes incompatible with the needs of certain wildlife and meeting people's needs for space for quiet

¹² <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/evidence-studies/evidence-base-revisions-j>

reflection. The new green spaces in Benson should be designed to meet a range of distinct uses that are appropriate for the topography and the ecological significance of each site.

NP22

New development should make appropriate provision of green space in accordance with South Oxfordshire District Council standards in place at the time of the determination of the application. The design of green spaces shall take account of the needs identified in Benson's 'People and Nature Strategy and this plan's biodiversity policies, and must link where practicable via public footpaths to other public footpaths/bridleways connecting to the rest of the village and the wider countryside. Where possible, pedestrian links should be positioned to provide separation from road traffic.

Biodiversity – Nature in Benson

Context

11.10.1 Benson has much to cherish in its nature conservation assets. It is a parish with a rural setting, and the presence of wildlife is a notable feature both within and around the village. Herons and kingfishers fish along the chalk stream that forms the spine of the village; tawny owls hoot in the evenings; swifts scream and career over rooftops and pockets of natural green space support a surprising diversity of butterflies and moths. Red kites soar overhead in significant numbers, orchids appear in abundance in the village nature reserve at Millbrook Mead and the fields surrounding the built settlements are important for populations of farmland birds. Many of Benson's residents take joy from their day to day contact with wildlife.

11.10.2 Oxfordshire County Council's 'Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study' (2014) makes specific recommendations for Benson. This plan takes account of those that are relevant to planning in shaping the green infrastructure commitments required where development is proposed:

- Ensure that all surviving 'priority' (i.e. those identified by the government as being a priority for conservation action) habitats are safeguarded, in favourable condition and management, and enhanced to satisfy the actions and targets identified within the relevant habitat and species action plans.

- Safeguard, maintain and enhance all locally important habitats in a way that is appropriate to the landscape character of the area.
- Strengthen and enhance pattern of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourse.

Summary of Assets

11.10.3 A comprehensive study of the natural environment assets in the parish, ‘Conservation Plan for the Parish of Benson, Oxfordshire¹³’, was compiled and published in 2001 by the Benson Ecological Survey Team, (now known as Benson Nature Group). A summary audit at Appendix K identifies the key biodiversity assets in Benson and important features in the wider landscape setting. The latter represent an important part of the wider green infrastructure network, particularly when considering local recreation and wildlife needs.

11.10.4 The parish has no SSSIs or European Sites designated for wildlife interest. Nevertheless, there are several specific areas of habitat within or adjacent to the main built settlements that are of conservation interest. Ewelme Stream (also known as Benson Brook), which forms the ‘spine’ of Benson village, is a chalk stream, a globally endangered habitat, and a biodiversity and aesthetic highlight. Populations of butterflies, including countryside species (as opposed to garden species), are thriving (See Appendix K Part 4)

11.10.5 The Plan recognises Benson’s biodiversity assets. As the village grows, the Plan policies seek to expand its ecological network, such that wildlife has the opportunity to thrive and people have the opportunity to enjoy it. The plan aims to secure built settlements that are ‘permeable’ to wildlife, connecting up green spaces where possible, creating space for nature and enabling it to move around. The Plan policies will:

- i. protect existing assets, particularly trees, hedges and associated margins,
- ii. influence the location and type (i.e. planting etc.) of green space secured through development (See the Benson Design Statement at Appendix B Section P) and

¹³ <http://best.bensonbulletin.com/report/introduction.htm>

- iii. require developers to build biodiversity enhancements into their developments. In particular, the Plan seeks to provide wildlife corridors and habitat for pollinators including butterflies and moths.

11.10.6 In support of biodiversity objectives, the Plan requires new paths to be designed to perform as wildlife corridors as well as routes providing pedestrian access. The Plan requires contributions from developers to fund the maintenance of green infrastructure within developments.

NP23

Development proposals should maintain and enhance existing on-site biodiversity assets, , and provide for wildlife needs on site, where possible. Where appropriate on-site biodiversity enhancements such as new roosting features for bats or nesting features for birds should be incorporated into the fabric of the development (See Appendix L – Benson’s Strategy for People and Nature).

NP24

Proposals for new residential development as proposed by Policies NP2, NP3 and NP4 should provide wildlife corridors that allow wildlife to move from one area of habitat to another.

The green space and landscape buffers provided through development and related planting schemes should, where ecologically appropriate to do so, reflect the locally-specific aims set out in Benson’s Strategy for People and Nature [See Appendix L]. Where ecologically relevant, fences and walls are encouraged to incorporate features that allow dispersal of wildlife through areas of green space and gardens.

NP25

Development proposals required to provide on-site green infrastructure must provide Green Infrastructure management plans, with proposals including funding for the long-term management of the assets.

NP26

Development proposals should be planned so as to avoid deterioration in the ecological status of the main watercourses of the River Thames, Ewelme Stream (Benson Brook) and Elm Brook (also known as Berrick Stream and Lady Brook).

Development should retain or provide a buffer adjacent to the watercourse of natural or semi-natural habitat, free from built development, parking areas, private gardens and formal landscaping.

Landscape Setting and Character

11.11.1 Benson is a managed rural landscape, with a mixture of agricultural, military, and small-scale commercial uses, and a number of built settlements of historic interest. To the west, the parish borders the river with low lying meadows. Further meadows, visible beyond the far bank, draw the eye into the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. North of the village, the land is flat and open, with fields extending towards Warborough, and paths providing very wide landscape views. An operational RAF airfield occupies the centre of the parish, but the bulk of it remains green and open. Beyond to the south-east, fields slope upwards towards the chalk scarp of the Chiltern Hills and some small patches of woodland. This south-eastern part of the parish lies within the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Distinctiveness of Settlements

11.11.2 Within this landscape, the hamlets of Preston Crowmarsh to the south-west and Rokemarsh to the north-east on the border of Berrick Salome Parish are separate rural settlements, distinct from Benson village. The open agricultural land or green space between these hamlets and Benson is important to their rural setting and separate identity, as well as to the rural character of the area and the setting of the AONBs. This plan therefore requires that development

NP27

Development should maintain adequate open landscape space, rural in character, between Benson and other neighbouring settlements to allow perception and experience of the settlements in the area as separate, distinct and rural.

shall retain rural landscape space between the settlements adequate to maintain this distinction and character.

Important Views

11.11.3 There are a number of views from public vantage points that are particularly distinctive of the rural landscape setting, the village lying low within it, and the context of the two AONBs, and the Plan requires that development proposals recognise and take account of these. These views are identified on the map below Figure 11 (see also Appendix E for photographs) and have been grouped according to their relevance to the plan:

Group A - The association between Benson, Preston Crowmarsh and the River Thames, as relevant to design principles for any future development of the riverside.

View 1. View from Benson Lock towards St Helen's Church;

View 2. Seasonal views from the Thames Path towards the historic settlement at Preston Crowmarsh;

Group B - Views out from the village showing the village's connection with the wider landscape

View 3. the views from the end of Hale Road/Lane towards the North Wessex Downs AONB, specifically the Sinodun Hills (including the Wittenham Clumps) and beyond towards Warborough;

View 4. View from the footpath behind Blacklands Road, south east towards Brook Street and the Chiltern Hills beyond;

View 5. Views from Preston Crowmarsh across the river, towards the river meadows and the North Wessex Downs AONB;

Group C - Views showing the distinctive character of the village as low-lying and partially screened in its landscape setting, a characteristic this plan seeks to safeguard:

View 6. The views towards the village from Shillingford from the A4074 with the backdrop of the Chiltern Hills;

View 7. The view from the footpath from Warborough towards Hale Farm and surrounding fields, with the Chilterns rising behind;

View 8. The view west towards the village from the B4009 and Eyres Lane, looking towards the North Wessex Downs AONB;

View 9. Views looking towards the village in the foreground of the Chiltern Hills and North Wessex Downs AONBs as seen from the footpath to Rokemarsh.

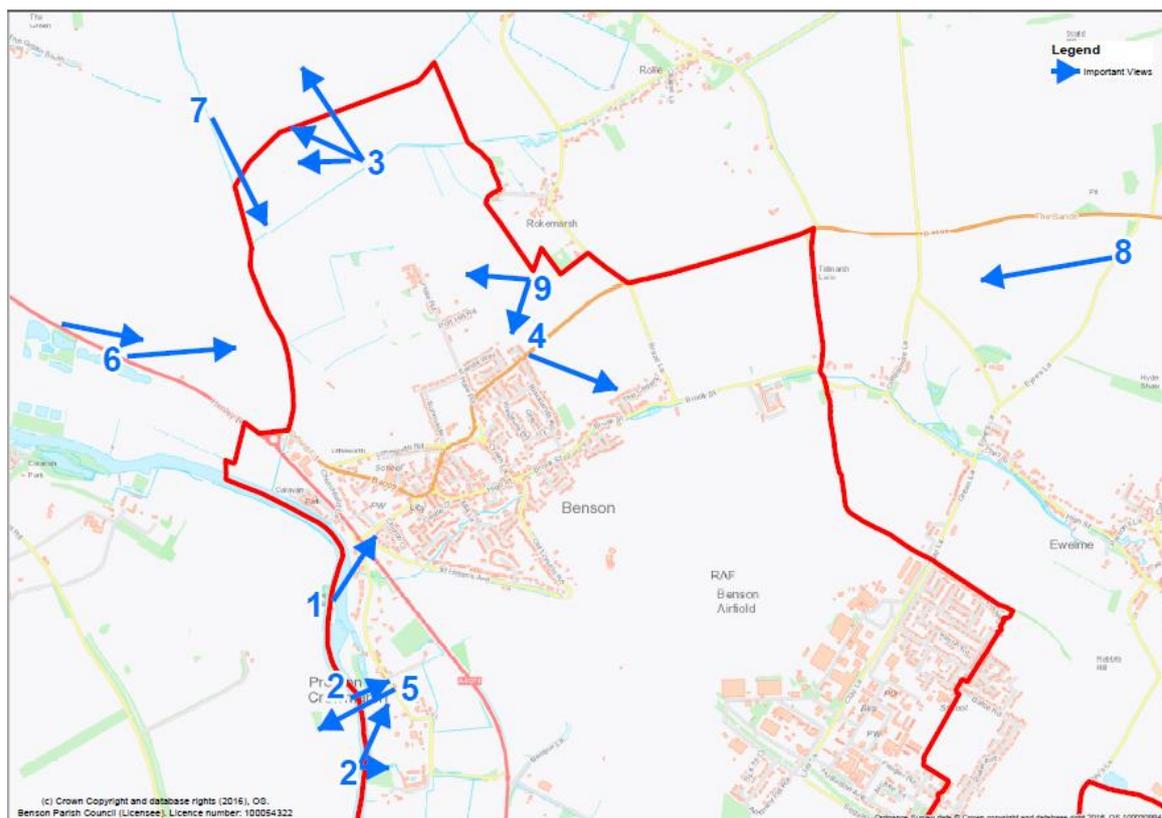


Figure 11 - Important Views

NP28

Development proposals should take account of the important views shown on Figure 11.

Planning applications affecting the riverside area and on the fringes of the built-up area of Benson should be accompanied with the necessary technical information to demonstrate how the proposal has incorporated the Design Principles AI-6 and CI-7 in the Benson Design Statement to mitigate any potential or identified harmful effects.

Scope for development

11.11.4 The Landscape Capacity Assessment¹⁴ for sites on the edge of the larger villages in South Oxfordshire (conducted on behalf of the District Council in 2014) considered the landscape impacts of the then eight potential development sites around Benson. Although the parish's main settlements (Benson and Preston Crowmarsh) lie outside the AONB boundaries, the assessment noted their proximity and thus the potential for harm through 'unsympathetic incremental expansion of the settlements of and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB, detracting from the surrounding countryside'. This Landscape Capacity Assessment ruled out development of the site to the north east of the village due to the risk of coalescence with Rokemarsh, but concluded that some development would be possible on some of the other seven sites considered at the time, subject to mitigation to take account of landscape and visual constraints. The housing allocation described in Section 6 however recognises the importance of a relief road in order to support sustainable development in Benson, the only feasible route for which involves development to the north east of the village. The Plan therefore addresses the need for landscape mitigation to offset the impacts of development.

11.11.5 Taking into account all of the needs outlined in the Green Space and Landscape Character sections above, and in the light of more recent planning permissions,

¹⁴

https://consult.southandvale.gov.uk/portal/south/planning/pol/lp2031/ro/south_oxfordshire_landscape_assessment_part_one

this plan prioritises the creation of a substantial new multifunctional vegetated edge, to include local native trees and hedging, around the extended settlement.

This meets multiple aims including:

- maintaining the distinction between Benson, Rokemarsh and Preston Crowmarsh, guarding against coalescence of settlements by providing open rural landscape between them to ensure they remain separate;
- providing a permeable green vegetated buffer between development and the wider landscape, one that allows for a connection between the two but softening hard edges and breaking up the visual impact of new built mass on the fringes of the village so as to respect the setting and the context of the two AONBs;
- contributing to reducing the identified shortfall in open accessible public green space, providing for the community's needs for recreation and space for nature, whilst also mitigating visitor pressure on European protected sites in the vicinity;
- providing new public rights of way, linking to the wider footpath network;
- creating links to existing Green Infrastructure features i.e. the Thames Path.

This will align with our built design policies which seek to avoid harmful impacts of development on important views.

NP29

Major residential development on the fringe of Benson village should respect the rural character and setting of the village by incorporating a vegetated landscape buffer of an appropriate depth to take account of the topography of the site and its location within the village to include local native trees and hedging, around the outer edge where development meets and connects with the rural landscape.

The landscape buffer concerned should be designed so as to accommodate appropriate habitats for wildlife (as guided by the Benson Strategy for People and Nature and the principles in the Benson Design Statement) and suitable pedestrian access connected to the wider footpath network, and maintaining separation where possible between traffic and pedestrians / cyclists.

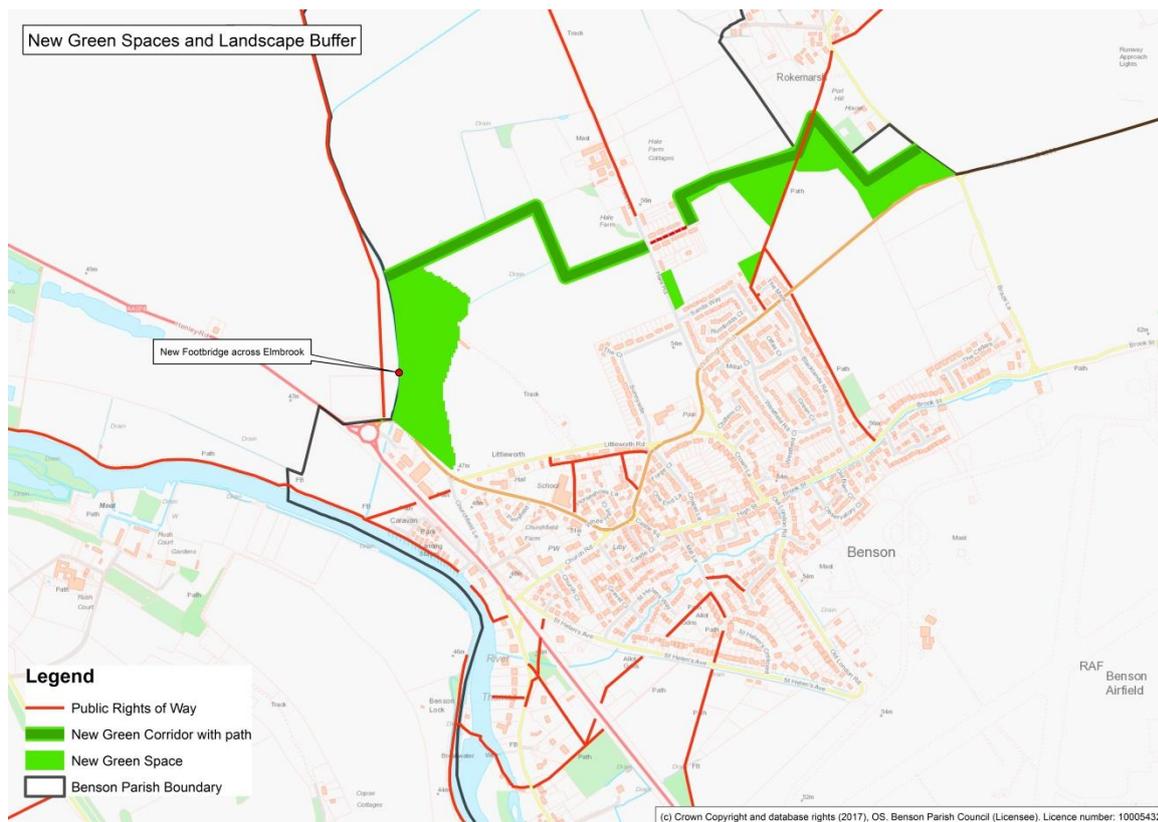


Figure 12 - Indicative position of new green spaces and buffer

Drainage and Flood Risk Management

11.12.1 Thames Water's Benson Drainage Strategy (2013, and updated for 2015-2020) indicates that Benson has a significant problem with the foul sewerage system being overloaded by both surface water and groundwater infiltration. The Strategy states that both urban creep (more building and loss of permeable surfaces) and climate change (which is predicted to increase the number of adverse weather events) are expected to exacerbate the problem. Thames Water quantified the rate of urban creep in Benson as 'average' in 2013 at 0.0879%, but flagged that their intention to escalate with the County Council if that figure increased. Furthermore, the Water Cycle Study for South Oxfordshire District Council (2016) confirmed that there is minimal or no Wastewater treatment works capacity at Benson.

11.12.2 Developers must work with statutory bodies to plan for the necessary wastewater management infrastructure to accommodate growth in Benson to avoid unacceptable deterioration of water quality in parish watercourses and quality of life for residents.

- 11.12.3 Flows in Benson Brook are influenced by the level of winter rainfall infiltrating down into the chalk aquifer and flowing out from late winter onwards, mainly entering the brook in a series of springs in Ewelme. During periods of peak flow, some residents along Brook Street report water rising up through their floors.
- 11.12.4 Developers must take account of these specific flood risks in Benson and avoid exacerbating the issue by providing adequate on-site drainage proposals. The detail of Sustainable Drainage System proposals must take account of advice from RAF Benson on the need to manage the risk of bird strike.

NP30

Where it is appropriate development proposals should include Sustainable Drainage Systems within their boundaries designed to manage the risk of surface water flooding and foul water sewer overload, and that they will not increase flood risk elsewhere in Benson.

Sustainable Drainage Systems should be designed to maximise the benefits of the features, taking account where possible of the Benson's Strategy for Nature and People (See Appendix L).

Note on Agriculture

- 11.13.1 Benson is a rural parish and agriculture plays a significant part in its land use. There is a strong link between how agriculture is undertaken and the achievement of good environmental outcomes, but this generally falls outside the scope of neighbourhood planning. Benson's Strategy for People and Nature considers opportunities to work with local farmers to further its aims and objectives.

Appendices

Appendix A – Sites Assessment

Appendix B – Design Statement

Appendix C – Heritage Study

Appendix D – Community Questionnaire Report

Appendix E – Character Assessment

Appendix F – Transport Assessment

Appendix F1 – Traffic Pinch Points

Appendix F2 – Traffic Flow Summary

Appendix F3 – Local Development Sites

Appendix F4 – Watlington Road Traffic Growth

Appendix F5 – Traffic Data

Appendix F6 – Flood Zone Assessment

Appendix G – Parking Plan

Appendix H – Map of Sustainable Transport

Appendix I – Community Facilities

Appendix J – Parish Allotment Usage Data

Appendix K – Green Infrastructure & Biodiversity Audit

Appendix K1 – Local Green Space Designation

Appendix K2 – Benson’s Green Infrastructure Assets

Appendix K3 – TVERC Biodiversity Report for Benson

Appendix K4 – Benson Nature Group Butterfly Survey

Appendix K5 – Butterfly Conservation Priorities Advice

Appendix L – Benson’s Strategy for People and Nature