MATTER 5: RURAL COMMUNITIES (CHAPTER 13)
Session on: Friday 22\textsuperscript{nd} July 2011

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION

STATEMENT BY
THE CHILTERNs CONSERVATION BOARD

South Oxfordshire Core Strategy – Public Examination
Statement by The Chilterns Conservation Board

Matter 5: Rural communities (Chapter 13)

The Chilterns Conservation Board responses to Matters 5 (A), (B), (C), (D) and (E) are set out below.

(A) Larger villages: Are the identified ‘larger villages’ all soundly identified as such through the evidence base (CD08/03)? Are any inappropriately included or excluded from this category? Is Crowmarsh Gifford different from other villages by being so heavily linked to its nearest town (Wallingford) in terms of its proximity and functional links? Would this justify categorising it differently in some way?

1. The Board considers that the evidence base that is presented in CD08/03 is generally robust, though there will always be instances where, following assessment, some settlements are placed into categories that are not obvious or in some instances actually inappropriate. Nettlebed is considered to be one such example. The settlement has a very small population and despite the scoring has only a limited range of services and facilities that would be required in order to cater for everyday needs, and which includes only one shop.

2. To place Nettlebed into the larger villages category does not appear to be based on a proper consideration of the likely implications. In fact, the basis of the categorisation appears to be that it should be supported because it is in an area that is less well served by nearby towns.

3. However, the implication arising from Policy CSR1 is that the settlement could, in the future, be faced with a large amount of housing development through allocations, unlimited amounts of infill and rural exceptions sites (if the need is established) without any real provision for an increase in the services and facilities that would be required on a day to day basis. It is difficult to imagine that an allocation of, for example, 20 dwellings in
Nettlebed would lead to the provision of another shop or the expansion of the existing shop or the retention of another service or facility through the application of a planning obligation or community infrastructure levy. Without the augmentation of the existing services and facilities the needs of the vast majority of new residents are likely to be catered for in other locations thus, in essence, creating a dormitory settlement.

4. The Board considers that Nettlebed is inappropriately placed in the larger villages category and as such it should be removed from this category and placed in the smaller villages category and would therefore be subject to the policy constraints that would otherwise apply.

5. It appears that the stance the Council has taken with Nettlebed is one of seeking to push people to use the services and facilities in this location rather than seeking to provide the services and facilities that are required by the residents of those other locations. The Board considers that this would be a more sustainable approach.

6. In connection with Crowmarsh Gifford the Board has the following comments to make. Though Crowmarsh Gifford is in very close proximity to Wallingford it does have a somewhat separate identity due to the presence of the River Thames. Though crossed by a bridge this is a significant perceptual barrier and as a result the Board considers that Crowmarsh Gifford is appropriately identified as a larger village. If placed in a higher category (town) this could lead to a more significant level of development that would almost certainly be detrimental to the current character and appearance of the settlement, and with consequent pressures being placed on the Chilterns AONB.

(B) In what it says about ‘larger villages’ within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty does the CS stay within or go beyond (a) the concept of avoiding ‘major development’ and (b) the requirement to support ‘suitably located and designed development necessary to facilitate the economic and social well-being of the designated areas and their
7. The Board has previously objected to Policy CSR1 as well as paragraph 7.18 and Table 18.2 as they all apply to housing development in villages.

8. As currently drafted the policy and relevant supporting text would allow for allocations for housing purposes, unfettered infill development as well as rural exceptions sites in larger villages. There may also be significant amounts of infill development in smaller and other villages. In total the policy could bring about a significant amount of new development in rural areas. This is of particular concern to the Board because the Council is looking to allocate sites for up to 740 dwellings within the larger villages of the rural areas.

9. Despite the assertions in Policy CSR1 and the Settlement Assessment Background Paper (CD08/03) that all development should ‘respect the AONBs’ the Board considers that such development, potentially on a large scale, would be to the significant detriment of the character of many of the larger villages. The Board does not support an overarching policy that would provide for housing allocations within the larger villages because it is more than likely that this will lead to major developments within the AONBs that may well not respect their character.

10. In connection with this the Board must take issue with the policy as drafted. It states that such development should ‘respect the AONBs’ – in fact any development within AONBs should ‘conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the AONB’ (as detailed in PPS7). In order to bring about any development within AONBs great care is needed to ensure that the proposed development is of the right kind, in the right location, designed to the highest standard and uses locally distinctive building materials. This can only be achieved by a proper consideration of each site on its merits rather than taking a blanket approach.

11. The Board does not generally object to proposals that bring about housing to meet identified local needs (PPS7) provided: an appropriately located site is chosen; the housing is designed to the highest standard and that
there are adequate services and facilities to cater for the needs of any future residents. The Board considers this form of development to be the rural exceptions sites that are mentioned in Policy CSR1. PPS7 does not seek to bring about housing allocations and unfettered infill developments in AONBs and the Board therefore considers that the Core Strategy as drafted goes beyond both the concept of avoiding ‘major development’ and the requirement to ‘support suitably located and designed development necessary to facilitate the economic and social well-being of the designated areas (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and their communities, including the provision of adequate housing to meet identified local needs’ as detailed in paragraph 21 of PPS7.

12. The Board has also objected to the monitoring framework, as detailed in Table 18.2 (on page 119), due to the lack of any reference to the implications for the AONBs arising from the implementation of Policy CSR1.

13. The Board therefore considers that as drafted the Core Strategy fails to take proper account of the need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONBs and as such it does not comply with the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CD01/05), Planning Policy Statement 7 (CD03/06) and The South East Plan (particularly policy C3 AONBs).

14. To make the Core Strategy more sound the Board considers that it should be amended by deleting references to housing allocations and unfettered infill development in AONBs.

(C) ‘Smaller’ and ‘other’ villages: Are the smaller and other villages identified in Appendix 4 all soundly identified as such through the evidence base (CD08/03)? Are any inappropriately included in/excluded from these categories?
15. Please see comments above concerning Nettlebed and the Board’s opinion that this settlement is more properly identified as a small village and not a larger village.

16. The Board does not have any specific comments to make about the identification of other villages as smaller villages or other villages but is concerned that in both cases the policy as drafted allows for infill developments. Though individual sites may not be large it is quite possible that many such sites could be brought forward through the planning system when there is such a presumption in favour of development in place. The Board considers that the policy takes no account of the need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONBs and that this means that the policy as drafted is inadequate.

(D) How will the indicative site size limits in the smaller and other villages operate if larger brownfield sites are presented for development?

17. Though the size limits for individual sites are clearly identified there appears to be no mechanism in place within the Core Strategy to ensure that piecemeal developments on larger sites do not take place. Such developments tend to have a detrimental impact on the settlement within which they are located and often do not bring about more sustainable forms of development. Furthermore, it is often the case that the developments do not bring about the provision of any required community services and facilities.

18. Though each site and proposal should be treated on its individual merits the Board is very concerned that large brownfield sites could come forward for redevelopment thus placing pressure on the AONBs. The Core Strategy (and this policy in particular) should be explicit about what is to be expected.

(E) If any aspects of Chapter 13 are not sound, what specific changes would make it so and, if such changes were introduced, what would
be the implications in terms of consultation and Sustainability Appraisal?

19. The Board considers that the Core Strategy should be amended by: the removal of allocations from the AONBs; the removal of unlimited infill development potential from AONBs; the addition of some mechanism by which the size of potential infill developments is carefully controlled in smaller and other villages, and changing the text that currently refers to ‘respecting’ the AONBs to ‘conserves and enhances the natural beauty’ of the AONBs.

20. Such changes are likely to represent a more sustainable approach and are unlikely to result in any negative impacts, though as they are quite numerous it would be necessary for them to be the subject of consultation.