

Part Two: Vision, objectives, development strategy

Vision

Sonning Common will grow and renew itself while enhancing and protecting its village character.

“In 2027, Sonning Common parish will be at the hub of a thriving community, where the total settlement will extend to some five thousand people all living within a beautiful and valued AONB woodland area. It will have a modern service centre, providing a good range of retail and healthcare, and modern recreation, sports, youth and care home facilities all serving a total of some nine thousand people from the community and surrounding villages.

Our neighbourhood **will provide a more even mix of housing**, which is accessible to each segment of a balanced and inclusive community. We will recognise that **changing demographics, longevity and smaller average household** sizes require a modest increase in numbers of homes locally. We will plan for and support the **construction of our allocation of homes** resulting from the SODC Core Strategy of 2012 and subsequently for the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2014.

Sonning Common will be a healthy place where everyone of all ages can live, learn, shop, access healthcare, travel, work and engage in active recreation, sports and cultural pursuits with modern community facilities. Provision of opportunities for all-year activity will recognise the risks inherent in more sedentary lifestyles and work environments.

The **village centre will thrive and suffer less from congestion** if we can succeed in providing an appropriate new car park, maintain a good bus service and enable free-flowing traffic through the main internal artery (along Kennylands Road and Wood Lane). We also aspire to see a remodelling of the village centre to focus on its key retail and healthcare service role and to allow modernisation and expansion of these facilities so that they remain of appropriate scale to meet future demands. (Ideally this would include the supermarket having direct trolley access to an appropriately sized car park.)

We aspire to have a **new modern community sports hall**, surrounded by appropriate provision of playing pitches and car parking to provide a venue where the wider community can come together and engage in a wide range of social, charitable, cultural and healthy sporting activities. Ideally, we would like this facility to be close to our **secondary school to allow shared use of these facilities**. We also see these facilities as giving proper scope, locally, to a friendly community spirit.

Sonning Common will continue to be a key nexus of educational facilities with excellent nursery, preschool, library, primary school and secondary school facilities. We would aim for there to be a genuine partnership between the community and these vital facilities so that all can achieve the highest standards.

We recognise that Sonning Common, like much of South Oxfordshire, presently suffers a high degree of out-commuting for employment. By 2027, we aspire to have a **new small office park** close to, but out of, the village centre with modern ICT enabled buildings and dedicated parking facilities.

Ideally, we would like to encourage a situation where existing office users in the congested village centre choose to migrate their operations to the new office park. We will positively support the **provision of broadband and** communications infrastructure to both local business and **appropriate home working**. We will encourage a positive employment environment generally with a more sustainable pattern of travel and less commuting.

In embracing development, Sonning Common will actively seek to ensure that change benefits the whole of the local community. We will encourage **preferential access to new homes** for families and people with **strong local connections**. Where possible, we will ensure that employment opportunities arising from development benefit local skills and capabilities.

Sonning Common will continue to protect and respect its cherished woodland character and its setting within a beautiful AONB rural environment and ensure that the existing open countryside between the village and neighbouring settlements is maintained; particularly as regards Reading, where there is a very different urban character and density.

As part of the necessary housing development we will have ensured **appropriate landscaping and tree-planting to maintain the woodland character and rural feel** of our neighbourhood.”

Objectives

Table 2.1: SCNDP Objectives

Development strategy objectives
To avoid the coalescence of Sonning Common with neighbouring settlements and protect the character of the countryside setting of the village.
To produce a coherent overall strategy for the sustainable development of Sonning Common over the plan period.
To deliver development and other changes that conserve and enhance the sustainability of Sonning Common in a balanced approach to social, economic, and environmental factors.
Housing objectives
To allocate sites for the number of new homes expected to be apportioned to Sonning Common by SODC, with an appropriate contingency of reserve sites.
To deliver a mix of new housing which will rebalance the existing housing stock and will better meet local needs for smaller starter and downsizing homes in future.
To support infill development providing that it does not have an adverse impact on the character of the surrounding area.
To seek viable means whereby families with meaningful local connections to this area can be given some preferential access to new housing – including social and affordable housing.
Design objective
To ensure that new housing and development is designed and built to a high quality and respects the existing character of Sonning Common.
Village centre objectives
To protect and support the vitality and viability of our village centre, based on its diverse mix of retail and public services, as a vital component of the sustainability of our settlement and district.
To ensure the village centre is accessible to all users with particular reference to buses, the disabled and delivery vehicles and to reorganise parking provision around the schools.
Economic and employment objectives
To increase local employment and new business opportunities by securing new employment sites and by enabling appropriate intensified use of existing sites.
To seek and support continuous improvements in the provision of high-speed broadband and communications infrastructure to support home working, providing that the siting and appearance of the proposed apparatus seek to minimise impact on the visual amenity, character or appearance of the surrounding area.

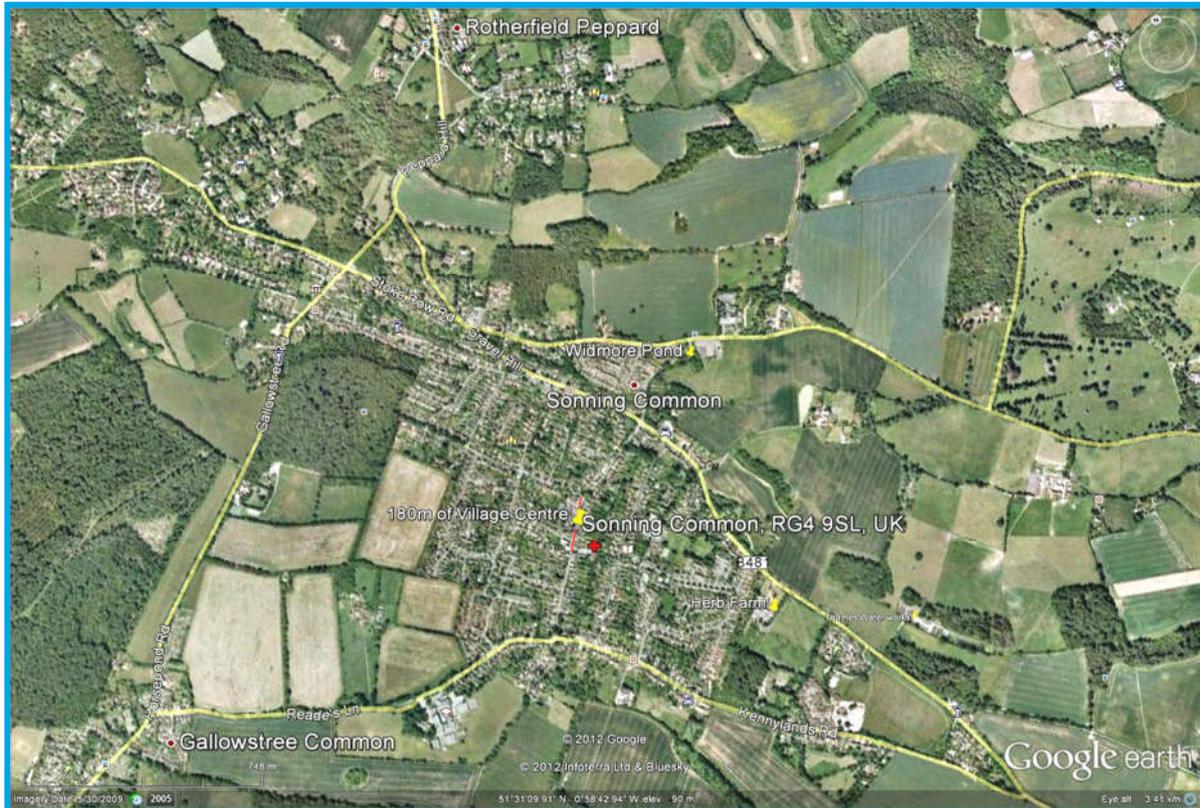
Table 2.1: SCNDP Objectives continued

Community, social & health objectives
To retain and enhance existing local community services and facilities, ensuring that public services (including medical, educational, public transport, utilities and amenities) are aware of and can support growth from new housing.
To secure land for and encourage the provision of identified shortfalls in healthy recreation facilities for all age groups, and particularly for older children and adults.
To support the full range of educational facilities in Sonning Common.
Movement, road safety and parking objectives
To retain the bus service and its stops, on its existing route along Peppard Road, Wood Lane and Kennylands Road.
To undertake a programme of traffic calming and management both generally and specifically for the village centre and along Peppard and Kennylands Roads and for both school roads.
To ensure that all new developments bring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locally appropriate car parking and cycling provision • connecting pedestrian routes through and around the village • road safety
Environmental objectives
To conserve and enhance the Neighbourhood Area's countryside and open spaces, in particular those areas of natural beauty, sensitive ecology and landscape designation.
To maintain and enhance the wooded and rural character of the village by encouraging the integration of soft landscaping in new developments and where appropriate screening from any adjacent AONB.
To conserve and enhance the environment, ecosystem and biodiversity, ensuring that new development protects biodiversity including habitats and provision of appropriate wildlife, biodiversity and movement corridors.
Heritage objective
To conserve and enhance the historic environment in relation to buildings, landscapes and places of local cultural value.
Delivery objectives
To encourage potential applicants for development to work with the community of Sonning Common, via its Parish Council, in preparing their proposals.
To ensure that all financial contributions received by Sonning Common Parish Council from developments (S106 and/or CIL) are used on projects and initiatives that meet the identified needs of the community.

Development strategy

This section lays out a strategy for how the village as a whole will grow and change over the period of the Plan. The development strategy aims to permit appropriate development whilst retaining the distinctive character of the village in its rural and woodland setting, as shown on the Google Map 2.1.

Map 2.1: Sonning Common and surrounding areas ²³



Guiding principles

We have adopted these guiding principles to inform the development strategy of our Plan:

- protecting and enhancing the setting in a rural landscape
- promoting overall sustainability
- strengthening the village centre
- promoting 'walkability' – accessibility of development to local services
- protecting the character of the NDP designated area

These guiding principles have informed the strategy right from the outset. The structured site surveys of all of the fifteen SHLAA sites, conducted by volunteers from the village, used sustainability criteria covering views and setting; green space and wildlife; neighbouring character; walkability; public transport; ecology; archaeology; heritage; AONB proximity; flood risk and community facilities. The full coverage of these aspects can be viewed on an exemplar site survey form and the results in a 'traffic light' grid on the website (www.scp-ndp.co.uk).

²³ Source: 'Imagery ©2015 DigitalGlobe, Getmapping plc, Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky, The GeoInformation Group, Map data ©2015 Google'

A careful selection of the potential development sites (as identified in the SHLAA or nominated subsequently) made available to the Neighbourhood Development Plan, takes into account all the relevant factors including the extent that particular sites and land prices offer scope for investment in much needed community facilities.

Setting in a rural landscape

Almost all of the 15 sites identified in the SHLAA exist on the periphery of the village, on green mostly arable fields and many are in the AONB – see Map 2.2. Great attention has been paid to ameliorate the impacts upon the landscape, ecology and wildlife corridors and on the character of the village. This is reflected in the development of the Plan’s objectives and policies, including the individual site policies.

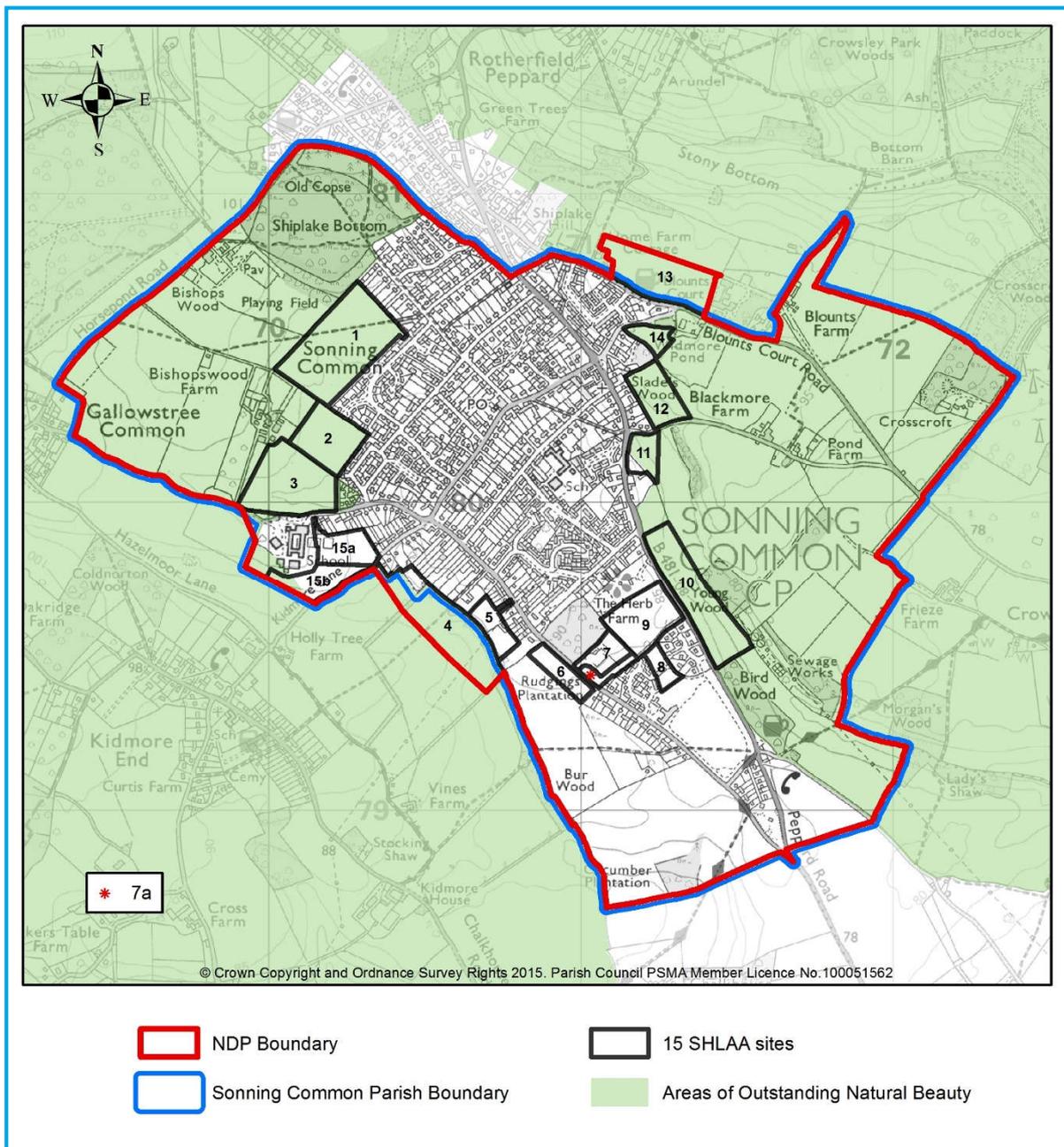
Except to the north east, where existing development blurs into Rotherfield Peppard, Sonning Common is surrounded by landscape which is mostly in the AONB. The existing settlement shape in between the dry valleys is a defining feature of the village. This very important overall setting is to be retained as follows:

- the edge of the village to the east is AONB and not to be developed, as advised by an officer of The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB)
- to the west of the village the aim will be similar – to preserve the gap between the edge of the village and Kidmore End
- to the south to retain the gap from Reading

In each of the site allocation policies considerable attention has been paid to reducing the impact on the AONB. SONs 5, 6, 7 (at the highest point overlooks the AONB) 9 and 15a which exist alongside the AONB, have policies which emphasise the need for extensive structured planting in order to lessen the effect on the rural setting. This has impacted on the amount of land available for the new homes and on all sites has reduced the number and allocation of dwellings in order to provide the requisite mitigations. Reduced ridge heights of homes will lessen the effect on the rural landscape and AONB and many of the site allocation policies include this recommendation. Furthermore, developers should consider the impact of the colour used in building materials. Bricks are far less noticeable from the AONB as are brown gable ends, gutters and window frames.



Map 2.2: SHLAA sites within the rural landscape



Overall sustainability

Use of the available and suitable sites in the southern and north western areas of the village will satisfy the strongly expressed community desire for several small developments. Map 2.3 illustrates that the sites in the north west are closer to the village centre offering more accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists than those in the southern areas and as such are more likely to support the sustainability of the village centre.

Importantly, this distribution will ensure a balanced growth of the village and make it better connected for pedestrians, thereby potentially enhancing general health and sustainability. This in turn will support local services and minimise the need for car use.

Of the sites nominated through the SHLAA not all remained available. Three were withdrawn by their owners, another three to the eastern edge of the village were not to be considered for development after advice from The Chilterns Conservation Board officer. All of these sites have been surveyed by residents and the evidence collected and shown on the 'traffic light' grid, which made it clear that they were not deemed sustainable. The exceptions were part of SON 13, which had been withdrawn by the landowner and part of SON 11. The latter is a very sustainable site with regards to its location to the village centre, walkability and bus service but was not much favoured by residents when the site scenarios for development were presented at a public meeting. Also it is mostly in the AONB.

None of the sites considered in the previous paragraph were offered by their owners for recreation land, to satisfy the recognised deficit in Sonning Common. However, SON 2/3 was offered by the landowner partly for housing and partly for recreation land. This was deemed to be the ideal location for formal recreation given that it is opposite the secondary school and that the space could be shared.

It is, however, in the AONB. Using the NPPF guidance a submission has been made to the CCB and can be found on the website (www.scpc-ndp.gov.uk).

Evidence from the Nortoft report²⁴ commissioned by SODC, identifies the lack of recreation space in Sonning Common, and it also supports recreation on SON 2/3.

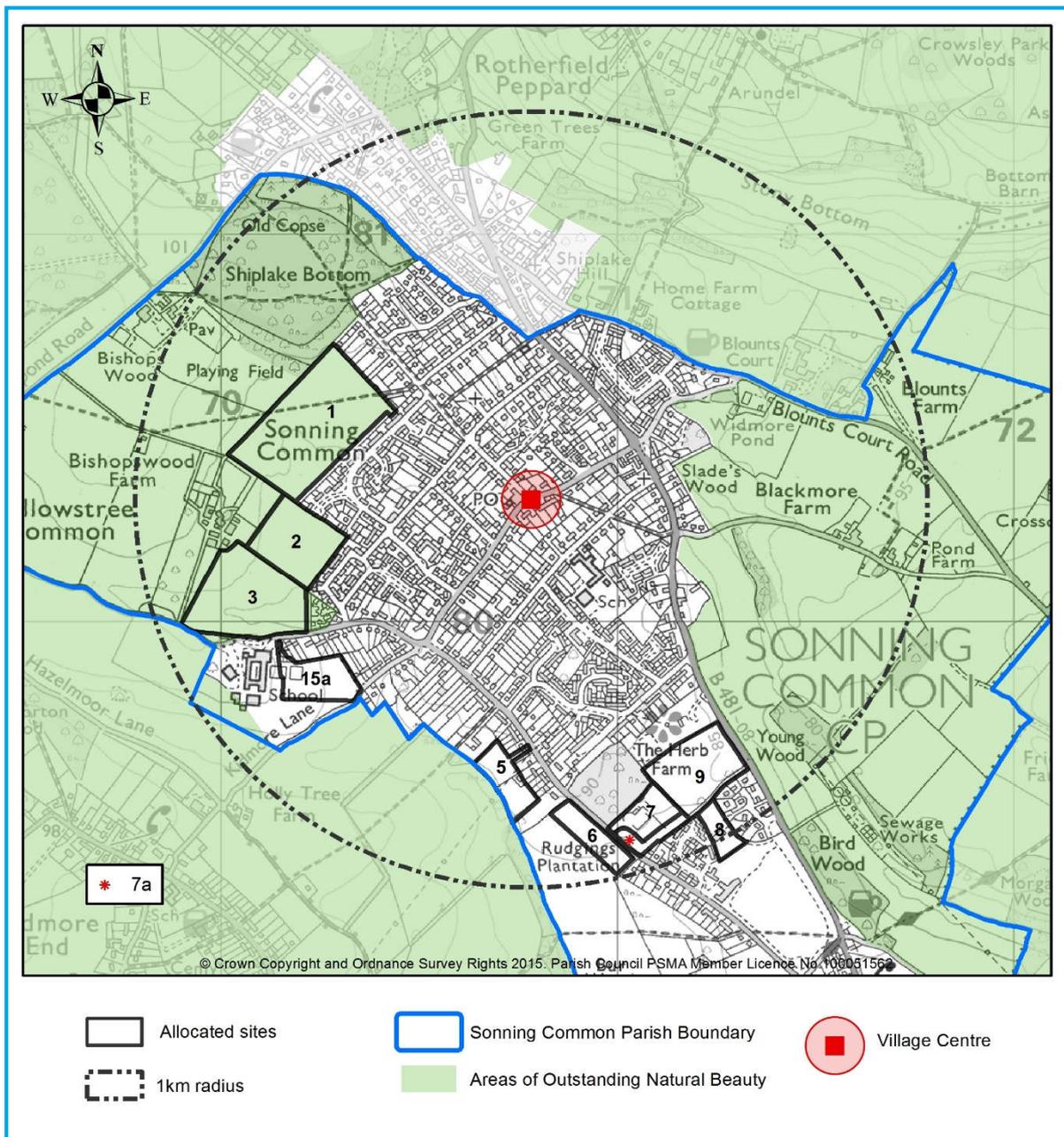
A recent landscape and visual impact survey in respect of the larger villages in South Oxfordshire,²⁵ which was also commissioned by SODC, reinforces the view that currently the north western built boundary of the village is mostly rear garden fencing. A principle for the proposed development in this part of the village is to redress this hard, poor quality boundary to the AONB through large areas of structured planting and landscaping.

The 'traffic light' grid demonstrates that SON 2/3 is the most sustainable site across a whole range of planning criteria. The distance of each site from the village centre is an important consideration and the proximity of SON 2/3 can be seen clearly on Map 2.3.

²⁴ Source: Sonning Common: Local Needs Report, June 2015 by Nortoft

²⁵ Source: www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/evidence-studies

Map 2.3: Area within 1km radius of village centre



Strengthening the village centre

While the village centre can be accessed by foot or cycle from all sites, those in the north west are closer than those in the south where residents may be more likely to use public or private transport to reach the village amenities.

Little physical change is anticipated for the village centre, the emphasis being on improvements to bolster its economy, retaining the number and range of existing retail and business/employment and community uses. The parish council will work with residents and developers to improve pedestrian accessibility and to seek parking solutions.

The focal point of the village centre is the village hall situated in the midst of the core retail and service providers; behind it is the only public car park (32 spaces). Built in the early 1970s when the population was half its current number, the hall, which seats 120 people, is now too cramped to fulfil the increasing demands of a growing 21st Century community.

A future decision by the parish council, based on financial information, will decide whether the village hall should be enlarged with a second floor or some of its uses could be transferred to a community sports hall.

Development potential

SODC has recommended that our Plan includes some flexibility in order to address the possible outcomes arising from consultation with communities on Oxfordshire's 2014 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). These results will inform SODC's emerging Local Plan 2031 which could lead to the SCNDP having to accommodate an additional allocation of new homes through to 2031.

There is, therefore, some uncertainty about the precise number of new homes the village may be required to satisfy by 2031 and the sport and recreational land likely to be provided for community use.

The evidence base provides details of how all the SHLAA sites were assessed and options considered, leading to the identification of sites suitable for some form of development. The number of homes per site is as follows:

SON 2/3:	50
SON 5:	22
SON 6:	26
SON 7:	25 (Reserve)
SON 7a:	5 (Reserve)
SON 8:	4 (Reserve) + 10 (Phase 2) – subject to a covenant from 1983 specifying recreation use
SON 9:	60
SON 15a:	37

The SCNDP is seeking to provide some further amenity green space and SON 1 is designated as Local Green Space.

Further information about the site selection process can be found on www.scpc-ndp.co.uk under Evidence base and also in the Appendix to this document.

Each of the allocated site policies include a requirement for a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to be commissioned by the developers. As part of this work a further view about housing densities on each of the sites will emerge.

The development proposals for SON 2/3 are required to satisfy National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) tests (paragraphs 115 and 116) in relation to development in an AONB. The SCNDP Working Party believes that the selection of this site satisfies the relevant NPPF tests.

Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where they can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

Test: ‘The need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy.’

Rationale:

- The need for new homes is both a national and local issue. Denying appropriate levels of new housing could damage the wider local economy and impact on the delivery of housing targets across the wider district.
- The need for locally targeted sports and recreation, which SODC acknowledges is in deficit, could impact negatively if not provided in Sonning Common.

Test: ‘The cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way.’

Rationale:

- The Chilterns Conservation Board and the Sonning Common Character Assessment and Design Statement 2013 conclude that development to the east or west of the village could have a serious negative impact on the Chilterns AONB. The evidence also shows that the boundary to the AONB in the north west is in need of additional screening.
- Given that any recreational provision which is focused on local community use would also require provision for parking, there is no other suitable site within the designated neighbourhood area.

Test: ‘Any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.’

Rationale:

- If appropriate landscaping is delivered as this Plan requires for both new homes and the provision of sports/recreation, the quality of the AONB boundary to the north west will be enhanced.
- Far from having a detrimental effect on recreational opportunities, the addition of sports facilities could have a positive impact on the AONB boundary in the north west as well as improving people’s health and well-being.

A submission has been made to The Chilterns Conservation Board to present the SCNDWP case for the development of SON 2/3. This background paper can be found on the website www.scpc-ndp.co.uk.

Spatial strategy

The spatial strategy is our concept for coherent development, providing for a clear, natural boundary between the village and the AONB countryside. The key principle for the spatial strategy is to maintain the separate village of Sonning Common within the AONB landscape. Detail appertaining to the individual site policies follows in Part Four.

Map 2.4 shows the current shape of the built up area within the wider AONB landscape. There are few remaining opportunities for development within this boundary. Consequently, development will focus on land towards the southern part of the village and in the north west. In the north west, the inclusion of SON 2/3 would move the built area towards the parish and NDP boundaries. The inclusion of this site will provide improved screening to the AONB and allow the deficit in recreational facilities to be addressed. The map also shows Millennium Green in the south and a designated Local Green Space in the north, which is intended to increase the public space in Sonning Common.

Map 2.4: Spatial strategy

