

Part Three: Policies

Housing policies

Housing distribution

There have been 15 public meetings and 9 site specific meetings with our residents. The principal message from the feedback has been the desire to see the allocation of new homes spread across several small sites rather than concentrated on larger ones. This has resulted in two clusters of sites, one in the north west and the other in the south.

New housing developments have been allocated and will be sufficient to meet the minimum of 138 currently allocated to Sonning Common, plus a further likely allocation as a result of Oxfordshire's Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2014.

Objective: 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.

Policy H1: Housing distribution

Planning permission will be granted for a minimum of 138 homes to be distributed across the sites listed below and shown on Map 3.1:

Allocated sites

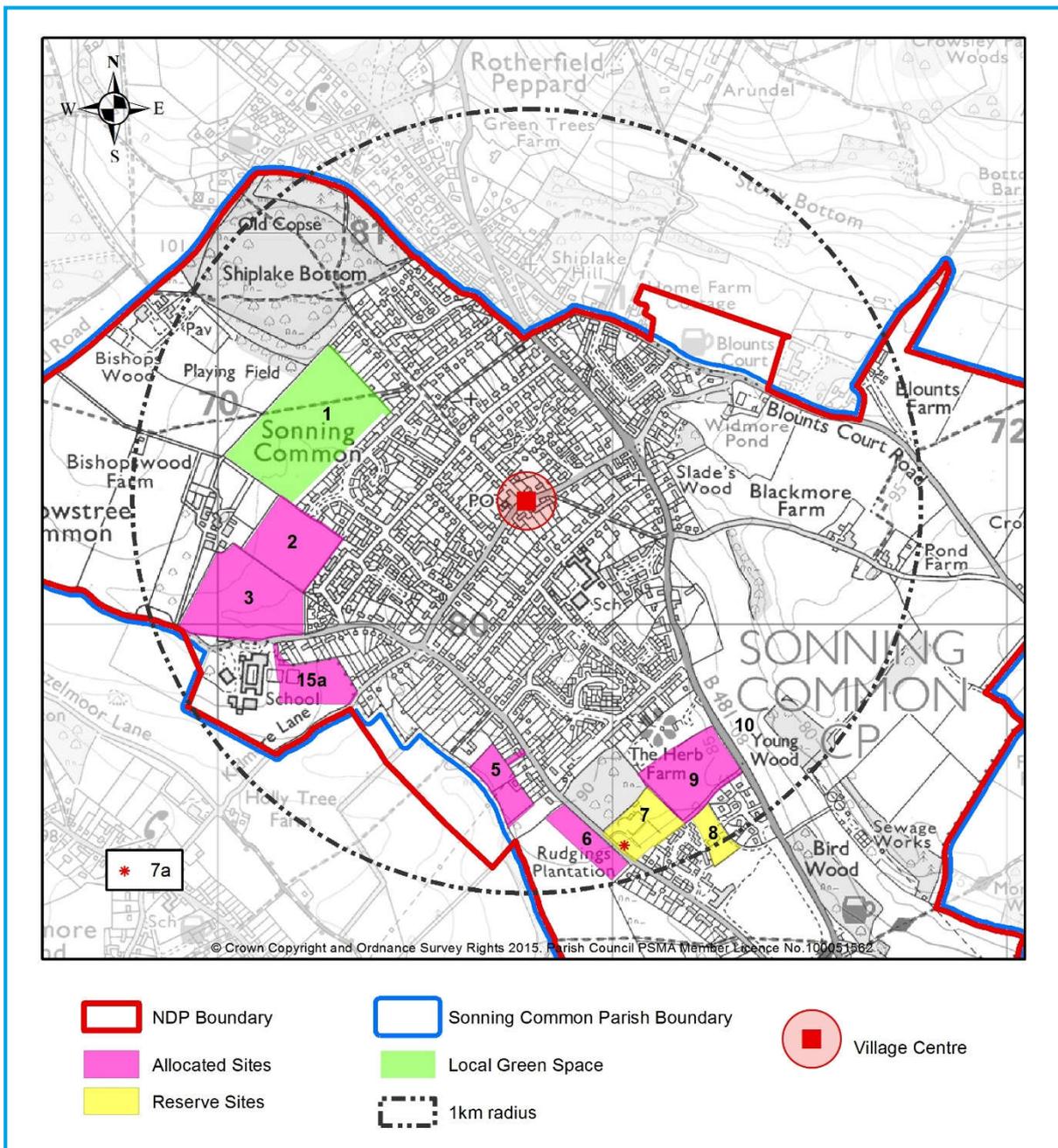
SON 2/3 = 50 homes SON 5 = 22 homes SON 6 = 26 homes SON 9 = 60 homes
SON 15a = 37 homes

Reserve sites

SON 7 = 25 homes
SON 7a = 5 homes
SON 8 = 4 homes plus 10 homes (Phase 2)

Map 3.1 shows the location of the allocated sites. These are spread across the village and the map shows their distances from the village centre. It is an important requirement and intention of this Plan to support the sustainability of Sonning Common's retail outlets.

Map 3.1: Distribution of sites within 1km radius of village centre



Housing mix

The Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC) was commissioned by the Parish Council to conduct a housing needs survey for Sonning Common.²⁶ The subsequent report concluded that affordable (social rented, affordable rented and intermediate, such as shared ownership) housing ranked as the most important housing need. The lack of affordable housing restricted residents from moving within the village, forced others to leave and prevented families from living near each other.

Affordability is a serious problem for South Oxfordshire. Lower end house prices are over ten times higher than lower end incomes. This is much higher than the Oxfordshire and national averages.²⁷

The table below shows that the mix of Council Tax Bands in Sonning Common is weighted very strongly towards high end, larger properties.²⁸

Table 3.1: Sonning Common Council Tax Bands

Bands	Sonning Common	South Oxfordshire	SE England	England
A-C	22.0%	39.3%	39.3%	66.2%
E-H	53.5%	37.7%	28.5%	18.5%

Over the last three years (2011-2014), average house prices in Sonning Common, Reading and Oxfordshire have risen between 17% and 18%. However, the average house price in Sonning Common is 22% higher than across Oxfordshire and 33% higher than Reading.²⁹

Many residents commented that affordable housing was needed to encourage young people in particular to stay in the village to ensure that “it didn’t become a village of elderly people.”

Census 2011 data highlights the imbalance of housing stock in Sonning Common. Table 3.2 shows that 1 bedroom households account for only 3.7% of Sonning Common households, as compared to 7.7% for SODC and 11.8% across England.

The trend is similar in respect of 2 bedroom households which account for 20.6% of households in Sonning Common, compared with 23.7% for SODC and 27.9% for England. In contrast, the data in respect of 3 and 4 bedroom households shows a mix which is higher than SODC, SE England and England.

²⁶ Source: ORCC - Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan Housing And Housing Needs Survey Report – October 2012

²⁷ Source: South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 – Sustainability Scoping Report (June 2014)

²⁸ Source: Census 2011

²⁹ Source: www.zoopla.co.uk/house-prices

Table 3.2: Sonning Common households - bedrooms per occupied dwelling³⁰

	Sonning Common	South Oxfordshire	South East England	England
All household spaces with at least one usual resident	1,547	54,104	3,555,463	22,063,368
0 bedrooms	3 0.2%	82 0.2%	8,531 0.2%	54,938 0.2%
1 bedroom	57 3.7%	4,154 7.7%	413,761 11.6%	2,593,893 11.8%
2 bedrooms	319 20.6%	12,802 23.7%	932,994 26.2%	6,145,083 27.9%
3 bedrooms	703 45.4%	21,581 39.9%	1,383,662 38.9%	9,088,213 41.2%
4 bedrooms	355 22.9%	11,215 20.7%	603,887 17.0%	3,166,531 14.4%
5 or more bedrooms	110 7.1%	4,270 7.9%	212,628 6.0%	1,014,710 4.6%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3.3: Dwelling type³¹

Dwelling type	Sonning Common		South Oxfordshire		South East England	England
	Number	%	Number	%	%	%
Detached house or bungalow	792	50	20,279	36	28	22
Semi-detached or terraced house or bungalow	666	42	29,082	51	51	56
Flat, maisonette etc	137	8	7,302	13	21	22
Total	1,595	100	56,663	100	100	100

This census data shows that half of the village's housing stock is detached or bungalows which is 14% higher than South Oxfordshire and almost double the other areas of the country. Meanwhile semi-detached or terraced properties are lower than the others indicated.

³⁰ Source: Census 2011³¹ Source: Census 2011

In the comparison table below privately-rented property in Sonning Common is a smaller percentage than in SODC and much lower than the rest of the country. Owner occupation is very high.

Table 3.4: Tenure of property ³²

Households	Sonning Common		South Oxfordshire		SE England	England
	Number	%	Number	%	%	%
Owner-occupied	1,236	80	39,461	73	68	63
Rented – council/HA (including Equity-Hybrids)	211	14	6,622	12	15	19
Rented – private landlord	100	6	8,021	15	17	18
Total	1,547	100	54,104	100	100	100

The data presented in this section thus far gives an overall position of the housing stock in Sonning Common at the time of Census 2011. It provides clear evidence that there are a large number of 3, 4 and 5 bedroom homes currently in the village equating to 75.4%.

The conclusions drawn from this information are that the provision of more 1 and 2 bedroom homes, and rented accommodation, would help balance housing provision in Sonning Common.

The ORCC housing needs survey for Sonning Common ³³ provides similar information namely the need for:

- 1 and 2 bedroom homes and also
- 'Affordable' housing

The emphasis and bias towards this housing mix would enable a re-balancing of the housing stock and encourage younger persons and families to move into or indeed to remain in the village, thereby helping to regenerate the population. The data presented in this section of the Plan, together with the ORCC survey have helped to inform Table 3.5 below, which sets out an aspirational housing mix.

Table 3.5: Sonning Common housing mix ³⁴

Housing mix	Market housing 60%	Affordable 40%
1 bedroom	5%	25%
2 bedroom	40%	35%
3 bedroom	45%	35%
4 bedroom	10%	5%

It is recognised that affordable housing has to meet the needs of the wider district and this mix must be based on that wider need.

³² Source: Census 2011

³³ Source: ORCC – Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan Housing and Housing Needs Survey Report – October 2012

³⁴ Source: SCNDP Working Party

Objective: 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.

Policy H2: Housing mix

Within allocated sites, support will be given to schemes where the majority of dwellings comprise one, two and three bedroomed homes.

Policy H2a: Extra care homes

Development proposals that provide housing for extra care/senior living accommodation are encouraged.

Development will be encouraged to contribute towards local needs housing, especially that for older people. The Parish Council is keen for developers to adopt Building to National Optional Technical Standards and to integrate affordable housing with market housing.

Extra care homes

The ORCC report also indicated that supported housing needs should be addressed. When asked what type of supported housing was required 23.5% of respondents considered private (warden assisted) was required, 21.5% considered housing association sheltered (warden assisted) housing, and 26% considered independent accommodation with care support. In consultation with SOHA the local provider of social housing, their view was that there was a much greater need in Sonning Common for affordable housing, so senior accommodation could not be considered.

Following feedback from the Sonning Common Health Centre on the Plan it was decided to investigate their suggestion for extra care homes. These would be privately purchased homes with some support.

Assisted Living/Extra care housing falls either into Use Class C2 or "Sui Generis":

- use Class C2 is defined as: *"Use for the provision of residential accommodation and care to people in need of care (other than a use within a class C3 (dwelling house). Use as a hospital or nursing home. Use as a residential school, college and training centre"*

The Use Class Order does not require all land uses to fall within particular classes and the recognition of a sui generis class therefore allows flexibility for development.

Given the growth in our elderly population of over 65 year olds from 788 in 2001 to 962 persons in 2011, a small scale development of extra care housing would be a welcome addition to the Sonning Common housing stock. The over 65s comprise 25% of the current Sonning Common population and while 80% of the entire population are home owners, many of whom will be amongst the senior group.

Housing infill

Any development must enhance the local character and distinctiveness, including its woodland and rural dimensions.

Objective: To support infill development providing that it does not have an adverse impact on the character of the surrounding area.

Policy H3: Infill

Development proposals on infill sites (the infilling of a small gap within an otherwise built-up frontage or group of houses where they are surrounded on all sides by other buildings) will be supported where they are of a design which:

- positively responds to, where appropriate, the prevailing size, height, scale and mass, materials, layout, density and access of the surrounding area;
- reflects the existing character of the village;
- demonstrates that the amenities of neighbouring residential occupiers will not be adversely affected through overbearing development and loss of light;
- includes an appropriate amount of landscaping which complements and enhances the green and wooded character of the local area.

The Sonning Common Character and Design Assessment³⁵ provides additional relevant background to Policy H3.

Design policies

Good design is applicable to all new development, including but not limited to housing. Local character is rural with a strong woodland character. Trees are prevalent and often large – right into the centre of the village. Aerial photographs illustrate the extent of trees and this nature is of course sustainable and supportive to the wider environment. Hedges and plot enclosures, together with well planted rear gardens, add to the rural feel. The form of properties is generally quite mixed within streets thus avoiding a bland identikit character. Most development sites are ‘green field’, possessing low existing use values.

Sonning Common is a rural area with virtually no development originally built as more than 2 storey in form. Clearly there have been some reasonable loft extensions with dormer windows where this does not cause adverse effects for neighbours or the street scene. Generally flat roofed dormers have only been approved at the rear of properties and where they do not intrude on the street scene nor harm the amenity of neighbouring properties. High rise buildings which would urbanise and harm local character will not be appropriate.

³⁵ Source: Sonning Common Character Assessment and Design Statement 2013

Objective: To ensure that new housing and development is designed and built to a high quality and respects the existing character of Sonning Common.

Policy D1: Design

All new development within Sonning Common must demonstrate good quality design. This should include respecting the scale and appearance of the existing built environment, responding to and integrating with local surroundings and landscape context. The development of the residential allocations should use soft boundary treatments such as trees, hedges or planting to enclose the front of plots and be in keeping with the character of the village street scenes, unless viability or other material considerations show a compelling justification for a different treatment. Every effort should be made to avoid harsh urban parking courts. Design should ensure that parking is provided in a discreet and sensitive manner.

Policy D1a: Design – storeys

In order to respect the rural character of Sonning Common, new buildings should be no more than 2 storeys plus roof (pitched or as normally acceptable) unless there is a robust justification for a taller building. Such a justification will need to include evidence to demonstrate how the proposal addresses local character and residential amenity.

Policy D1b: Design on allocated and infill sites

Proposals to develop infill sites and the sites allocated in this Plan must be accompanied by a **design brief** that demonstrates how the proposal:

- reflects and positively responds to the good quality existing character of Sonning Common taking careful account of the Sonning Common Character Assessment and Design Statement and SODC Design Guide;
- complies with the relevant site specific allocation policy in this Plan.

Nothing in Policy D1a is intended to restrict loft extensions or dormer windows in roofs where a planning application to do so would be acceptable or where permitted development rights allow a laissez-faire regime. The style of roofing for any dormer windows in roofs should respect the local rural character and flat roofs for such dormer windows should be avoided where they will be visually prominent or cause adverse amenity impacts.

In Sonning Common good design means:

- achieving high quality design that respects the scale, coverage and character of existing and surrounding buildings
- respecting established building set back and arrangements of front gardens, walls, railings or hedges
- using soft boundary treatments such as trees, hedges or planting to enclose the front of plots and be in keeping with the character of the street scene
- incorporating street lighting on new sites at a level compatible with the rural environment
- avoiding harsh urban parking courts
- ensuring proposals relate to established plot widths within streets where development is proposed, particularly where they establish a rhythm to the architecture in a street
- using good quality materials that complement the existing palette of materials used within Sonning Common
- adopting the principles of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), where appropriate
- meeting the requirements of ‘Secure by Design’ to minimise the likelihood and fear of crime and
- using innovation to achieve low carbon sustainable design

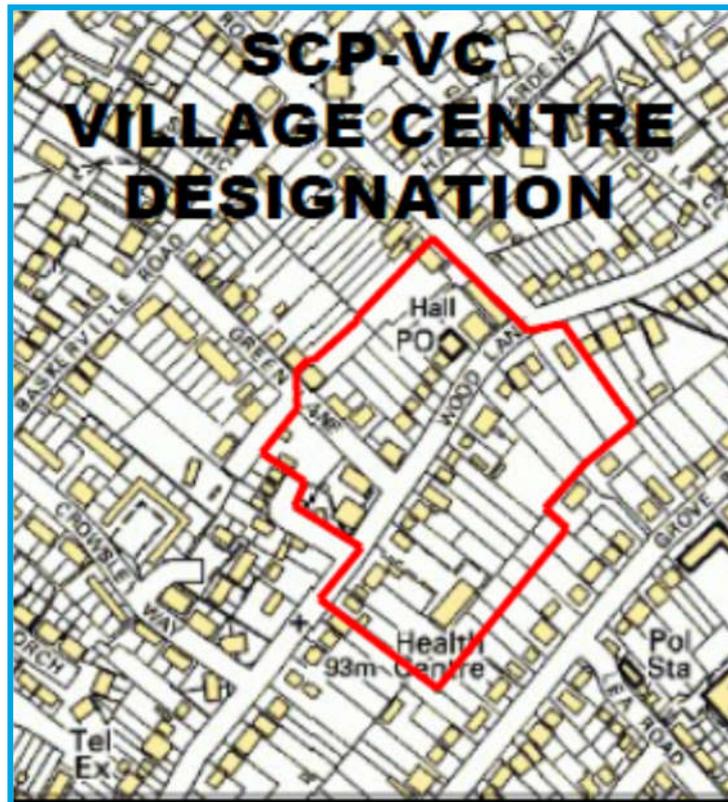
Village centre policies

Sonning Common as a larger village

Sonning Common’s village centre, as defined by Map 3.2, performs well in terms of the number and range of shops, the fact that it includes a health centre, dental surgery, post office and village hall, and because it includes several small offices. This undoubtedly makes it very lively and thriving to the extent that it acts as a local centre for many people from nearby areas. It is for this reason that the village is identified as a larger village in the SODC Core Strategy.

In order to conserve and enhance its vital sustainability role as a district centre, this Plan explicitly designates the area of the village centre, including as suggested by the NPPF (paragraphs 21 and 23) adjacent areas of land that are likely to be important for its future role.

Map 3.2: Village centre



The core roles of the village centre are:

The shops and facilities in Wood Lane are regarded as the centre of the village offering residents and neighbouring villages a wide variety of services including a butchers, pharmacy, Co-op supermarket, florist, post office, hairdressers, a variety of eating houses, haberdashery, estate agent, drycleaners, and an ironmongers.

Along the B481 Peppard Road, there is a petrol station, car showroom, off-licence, newsagent, barbers, estate agent and until recently an electrical shop and a small branch of NatWest Bank. These outlets have contributed to village life for a number of years.

Objective: 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.

Policy VC1: Village centre – use of scarce land for sustainable development

Regarding applications and proposals within the designated area of the village centre as shown on Map 3.2, the following development will be supported:

- 'centre uses': retail, leisure and office on the ground floor;
- applications to extend and/or improve existing centre uses subject to the provision of suitable off street parking.

Village centre accessibility

The lack of public parking spaces and inconsiderate parking on Wood Lane and alongside the retail outlets on the Peppard Road have long been concerns of residents. The village centre currently lacks parking capacity. Its wider district service role, and the additional housing allocated in this plan, some of which will be more distant from the centre, places ever growing demands on car access and parking. There are only 32 spaces in the village hall car park with others on-road or in front of shops.

There is an ongoing problem of misuse of the health centre and dentistry car parks - causing difficulties of access for patients. The Sonning Common Health Centre already serves 8,500 registered patients and during the Plan period this is likely to increase to some nine thousand people.

On-road parking causes difficulties for access by delivery vehicles and for Reading buses seeking to get through the centre. The extension of the Co-op store in Sonning Common some 5 years ago and increasingly limited options in other villages have heightened demand – a sustainability success. However, there is anecdotal evidence that some shoppers are finding parking problems irksome and choosing instead to go to Emmer Green.

Should sites become available in the designated area of the village centre or on sites close to it, applications for increased car parking capacity would be welcomed.

Objective: 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.

Policy VC2: Parking

Applications for public car and cycle parking within the designated village centre will be supported.

Support will be given to proposals to improve disabled access and make more efficient use of car parking spaces.

Economic and employment policy

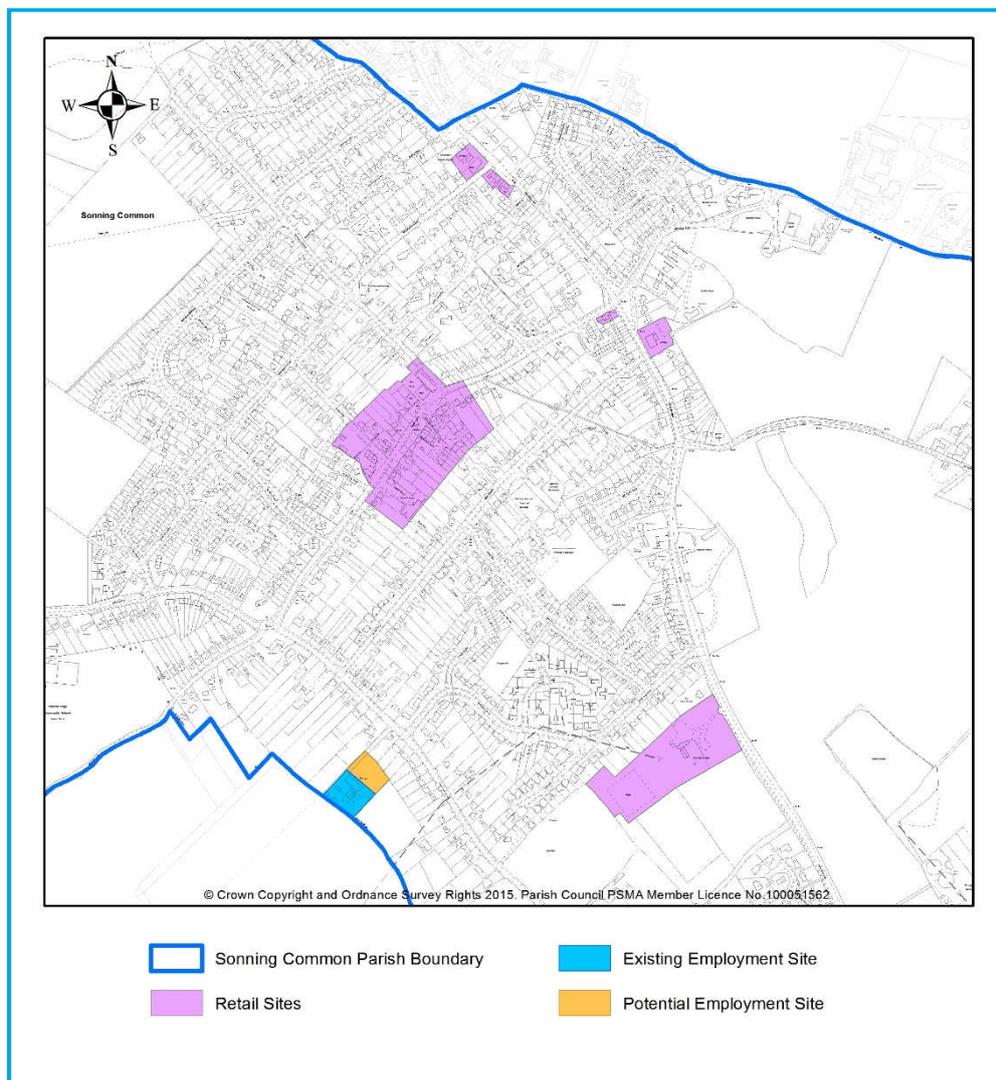
The core roles of the village centre and retail also apply here because they provide evidence of a high level of local employment, notably at the three schools, health centre, dental practice, the Vauxhall Garage and Abbeycrest Care Home. The 20 or so smaller outlets, pubs and offices, the light industrial site at Kidby's Yard and The Herb Farm (garden nursery, shop and café) also provide further opportunities.

Given the scarce land and congested nature of the village centre, one of the existing employment sites at Kidby's Yard could provide additional employment potential. The majority of the Sonning Common work force travels by car out of the village for employment.

Map 3.3 shows current retail and employment sites and the one possible area for expansion namely Kidby's Yard.

Every effort has been made to find new employment sites. Landowners appear reluctant to offer their land, possibly due to the fact that post 2008 banks have been unwilling to fund commercial development, or indeed to help finance commercial property thus limiting demand.

Map 3.3: Current retail and potential employment site



Objective:

To increase local employment and new business opportunities by securing new employment sites and by enabling appropriate intensified use of existing sites.

Policy EE1: Employment sites

This plan designates the site identified in Map 3.3 as one which should remain in employment use. Applications to intensify and extend the use of this site, into the yellow area highlighted on Map 3.3, will be supported. Proposals to change the use of this site to non-employment uses will not be supported.

Sonning Common, like the District, suffers from too much 'out-commuting' as it is termed in the Core Strategy. Thus extra scope for employment would have merit. There exists a limited scope for small to medium size companies and for branches of larger ones to operate here and benefit from excellent connections to Reading, the Thames Valley and beyond. B1 office provision would fit well to those needs. More local employment would be sustainable and help reduce commuting pressures.

Clearly any development needs to relate well to its surrounding area and not have adverse impacts on the landscape, wildlife or be a nuisance to neighbours. Details of the employment use for any extension of Kidby's Yard can be found in Site policy, EMP1 in Part 4 of the Plan.

The allocation obligation of this Plan places more pressure on the south of the village. It will be important to retain the specified site both for employment and to provide a service role, if pressures on the village centre diminish its capacity to support the sustainability of Sonning Common. For these reasons the identified employment site would not make sense as a residential site.

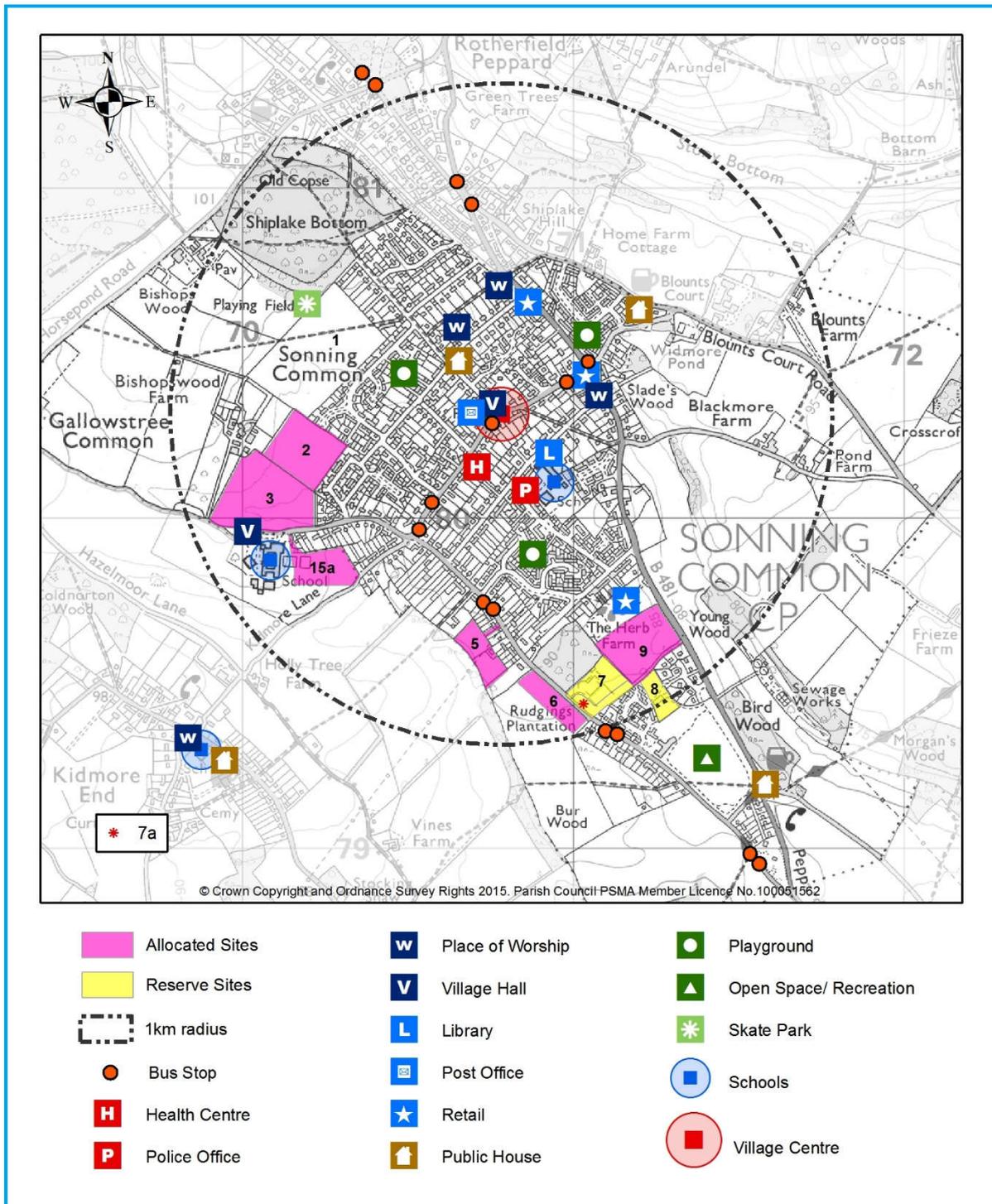
Similarly, The Herb Farm contributes to the sustainability of the village with its retail role. It is important to Sonning Common as it attracts many visitors from other areas and is highly valued within the community. Its Saxon Maze is listed as one of the few recreation sites and its location to the south of the village provides enhanced retail potential. For this reason, it is the wish of the Plan to retain The Herb Farm as a garden centre with its supporting retail facilities.

Community, social and health policies

The overriding principle here is to support the schools in the village and other essential facilities as well as improving the provision for sport and recreation. One of the aspects of Sonning Common life, which is frequently commented upon by residents is its “community spirit.” This needs to be sustained and developed alongside the population growth.

The current facilities and amenities in Sonning Common are shown on Map 3.4.

Map 3.4: Village amenities



Education

Schools

Clearly the increase in the number of new homes will bring with it a requirement for more school places. Advice was sought from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) which supplied the following estimates. It was emphasised that at this stage of the Plan these could only be regarded as approximations because school places are generally identified having regard to the Plan's housing mix:

- 25 primary pupils per new 100 homes over 7 years (4-11)
- 18 secondary pupils per new 100 homes over 5 years (11-16)

The current capacity of Sonning Common Primary is 409 pupils, although the roll in January 2015 was 394. The school would like to increase the capacity to 420 pupils. OCC's view is that the current layout and accommodation at the primary school are not suitable for any increase in numbers as there are two small classrooms which do not accommodate classes of 30 pupils. The school have asked for and been given half of the old caretaker's garden. This could accommodate two new classrooms of a suitable size but cannot be paid for by OCC. Therefore, developer contributions will be sought to ensure that it can effectively deliver its current 60 per year school place entry.

Investment in and refurbishment development of Sonning Common Primary School and Chiltern Edge Secondary School are required and to be welcomed. In each case a lack of investment over a sustained period has left both requiring significant improvement and modernisation of the fabric and core services of their premises. Development to resource educational facilities will be supported, subject to the provision of an enhanced community facility (paragraph 74 NPPF).

Objective: 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.

Policy CSH1: Community education

Applications for the enhancement and/or refurbishment of Sonning Common Primary School and Chiltern Edge Secondary School will be supported.

Policy CSH1a: Community facilities

Developments that enhance existing local public services, community services and facilities will be supported. Any that undermine or detract from these will be resisted.

With regard to the enhancement of community facilities and local public services used by groups these would include the village hall (Nottakwire and Luncheon Club) and the Scout hut as examples.

Sport and recreation

It should be noted that Sonning Common is largely a construct of the 20th Century. It is not a traditional village with a green to support public events and fetes. New provision could address this deficit. Financial contributions that offer particular benefits to community well-being and provide missing resources will be encouraged and supported. In this way the local public interest will be taken into account. As a first key step, the priority is to acquire **land**, including for appropriate and accessible Local Green Space, provision for sports pitches and potentially for a future community sports hall.

Objective: 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.

Policy CSH2: Land for recreation

The provision of land to address the identified shortfalls in sports pitches and facilities, as set out in the NDP, will be supported.

In particular, there is an identified clear need for at least 3.26 hectares of amenity green space, based on the Census 2011 population and potentially 0.6 hectares more with the Core Strategy allocation of homes and expected new windfall dwellings.

Identified sports shortfalls:³⁶

- amenity green space 3.26 ha
- community sports hall 30m x 30m (without full height roof)
- floodlit AGP – 60m x 40m
- full sized MUGA/tennis facility
- senior 9 – strip cricket pitch 111.84 x 115.58
- a mix of youth and mini football pitches
- space for other activities (fitness trail/outdoor gym)
- sufficient parking for all necessary community use

These deficits are substantial and likely to affect the sustainability of Sonning Common. Sport England standards indicate that sports pitches and sports halls should be integrated within an appropriate area of land. It is likely that increases in population as a result of the development outlined in this plan will require attention to provision.

Furthermore, such sports and recreation facilities as currently exist are not fully open to the public, being within Chiltern Edge School or in privately-run clubs at Rotherfield Peppard Football Club and Kennylands Gymnastics; these also face qualitative and quantitative investment challenges. The existing provision for younger players meets the standard needed for them but not for adults. Though there is anecdotal evidence that some residents currently go elsewhere for some of their sport and recreation, there is a need for retention of all existing facilities and new provision within the village which is accessible to all, by foot or cycle.

³⁶ Source: Sonning Common: Local Needs Report, June 2015 by Nortoft

Movement, road safety and parking policies

Traffic

Detailed data is not available on traffic movements, speeds and volumes either along the main roads, Kennylands and Peppard Roads, or along the two main village link roads, Wood Lane and Grove Road. At present the bus route uses Kennylands Road, Wood Lane and Peppard Road.

However, local community consultation regularly generates serious concerns:

- traffic speeds along the two main roads
- congestion along Wood Lane in and near the village centre
- parking problems in and around the village centre
- congestion and parking problems in Grove Road linked to the Primary School
- congestion and parking problems in Reade's Lane linked to the Secondary School
- safety in relation to all of the above

A brief study was undertaken by a consultant, Ben Hamilton-Baillie³⁷ on how to address all of the above issues. This study looked at the principles and use of 'shared space' and highlighted specific issues in relation to the points above.

Objective: 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.

Policy MRP1: Traffic calming

Proposals for traffic calming treatments along Kennylands Road and the B481 will be supported.

Policy MRP1a: Footpaths and cycle ways

Proposals for the provision or improvement of footpaths and cycle ways will be supported.

Suggestions to calm the traffic on Peppard Road and Kennylands Road include 'gates' at the village entry points and red tarmac on the boundary to alert drivers that the 30mph zone is ahead. Speed ramps are generally considered unfavourably. Further details appear in a traffic report.³⁸

Pedestrian and cycle movement within the village is generally good although community concerns have been raised about pavement conditions and lighting. There are a number of particular problems for disabled users with wheelchairs and scooters who cannot access some of the footpaths and pavements. The layout of the village roads is also such that some potentially valuable links cannot be made and some others are poor and in need of improvement. However, links out into the countryside are generally good and highly valued by local people.

As regards cycle ways, there would be particular benefit in a new and safe cycleway to Reading which is not on the B481 roadway.

³⁷ Source: www.scp-ndp.co.uk

³⁸ Source: Interim SCNDP Traffic Report (November 2012)

Environmental policies

Protect AONB

Sonning Common is bounded by the Chilterns AONB to the north, east and west and is thus significantly affected by it. Even though the existing built area of the parish is largely outside of the AONB, the policy to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB is highly relevant.

Sonning Common sits on the southern edge of the Chiltern Hills and is located on a semi-enclosed dip slope; gently sloping ground cut through by two dry valleys which trend through the area from NNW to SSE. The elongated shape of the village has been formed by the valleys and the land rises gently on each side of the Peppard and Kennylands Roads. Multiple footpaths link from the village outwards towards adjacent settlements and beyond. They are well maintained and used with gates/stiles recently replaced by volunteer conservationists. The residents value their local environment and are determined that new housing developments will respect the AONB through careful structured planting and screening to mitigate the impact.

The village is set within the Chilterns AONB and largely surrounded by it. As shown in the landscape and character assessment reports undertaken by external consultants³⁹ and other community consultation evidence, the environment within the village and in the surrounding landscape is greatly valued by local people and considered to be highly distinctive. The generally green and wooded character of the surrounding landscape continues into and throughout the built settlement. The area has a strong structure of woods, hedgerows and trees enclosing open arable fields.

Objective: To conserve and enhance the Neighbourhood Area's countryside and open spaces, in particular those areas of natural beauty, sensitive ecology and landscape designation.

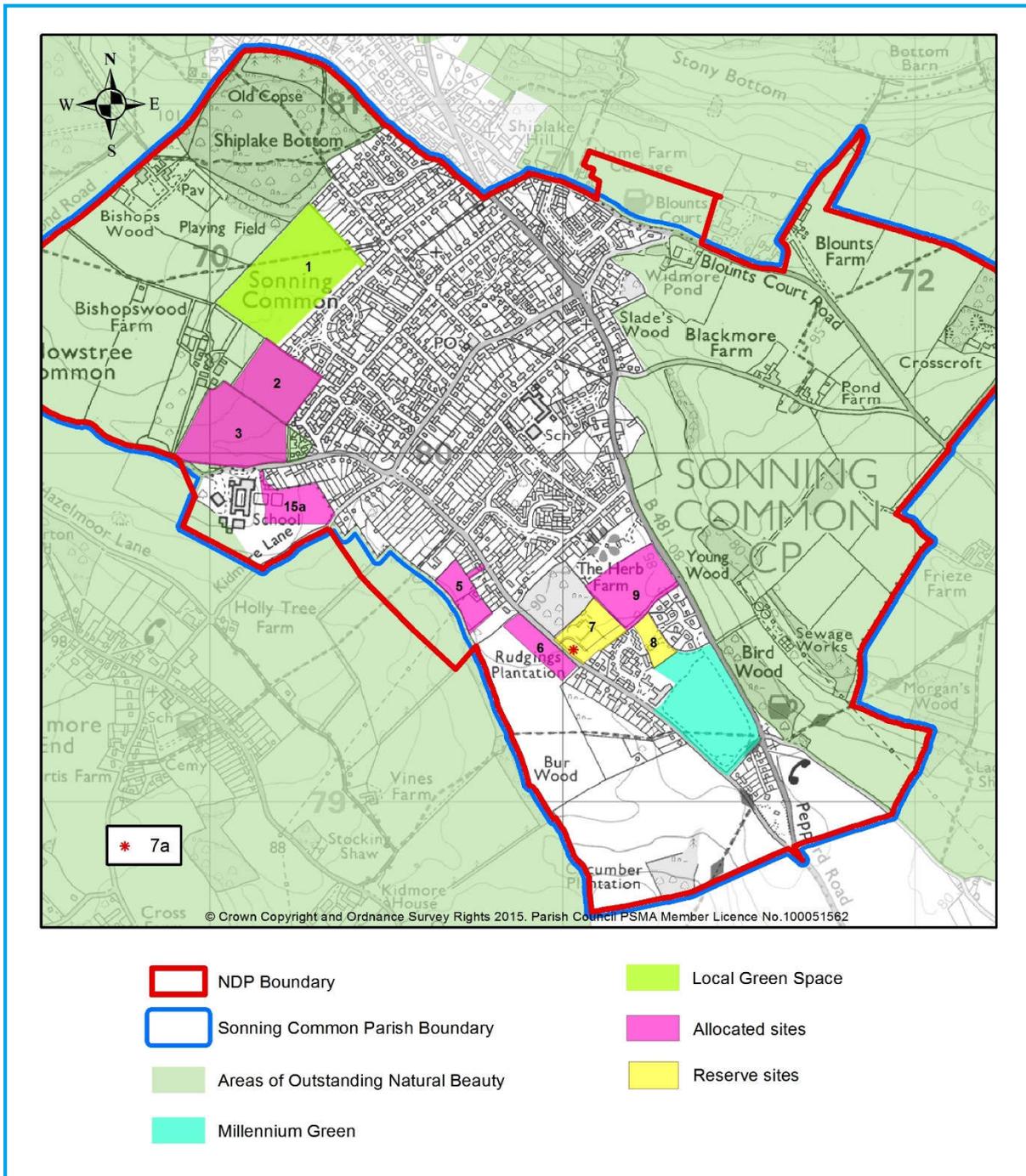
Policy ENV1: Protecting the AONB

New development in the Chilterns AONB must demonstrate how it conserves and enhances landscape and scenic beauty. Major development in the AONB will not be supported except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest.

³⁹ Sources: SCNDP Landscape Assessment – Potterton Associates Ltd; Sonning Common Character Assessment and Design Statement 2013

Map 3.5 illustrates Sonning Common, its relationship to the surrounding countryside and woodland with particular reference to the AONB and the location of sites.

Map 3.5: Chilterns AONB around Sonning Common



Within the designated Neighbourhood Area, there are no Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation, National Nature Reserves or Conservation Target Areas. There are currently no local level designations although the Parish Council and residents value the Millennium Green,⁴⁰ Old Copse Wood⁴¹ and Widmore Pond.⁴² This value has been demonstrated by the community's involvement in the purchase of Millennium Green and establishing a trust for its upkeep, assisting with the purchase of the Old Copse Wood and its transfer to The Woodland Trust in 1995 for ongoing management, and the sub-committee of the parish council which is responsible for maintenance of Widmore Pond.

Rural 'look and feel'

It is important to residents that the existing woodland and rural character of the village is maintained. The planting of screening, trees and hedging is considered to be a vital part of any new development. Sonning Common is particularly characterised by its wooded and leafy character. Trees are abundant and this is clearly illustrated in aerial images and photographs. An ecology report commissioned by Sonning Common Parish Council⁴³ reinforces the point about the 'green feel' within the village by highlighting a good quality of biodiversity both within and close to the village. This has been supported anecdotally by local community comments about specific sites being considered.

To maintain the woodland and rural character of our district and to behave responsibly with respect to our environment, the impact of new development on the surrounding countryside, environment and ecosystem must be minimised. This will include not only the particular priority of protected species, but also minimising and mitigating any potential impact on significant habitats and hedgerows generally.

⁴⁰ Sonning Common Millennium Green Trust established 1998

⁴¹ Ancient semi-natural woodland taken over by The Woodland Trust in 1995

⁴² SC Parish Council - Widmore Pond Heritage Site

⁴³ Source: Ecological Survey, Sonning Common 2014

Objective: 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.

Policy ENV2: Environment – landscape setting

Development proposals should take account of the locally valued landscape setting of the village and include landscape buffers where this would enhance the setting and help integrate the development into its surroundings.

Policy ENV2a: Green environment – pre-existing trees

Development proposals should seek to retain mature or important trees, groups of trees or woodland on site. Where removal of a tree(s) of recognised importance is proposed, a replacement of similar amenity value should be provided on site.

Policy ENV2b: Green environment – new planting

As part of new developments the planting of additional trees and hedging, in keeping with local character, will be supported. Applications for major development (as defined by the Town & Country Planning Act) should be accompanied by an indicative planting scheme to demonstrate that a suitable level of sustainable planting can be achieved.



Wildlife corridors

A network of wildlife movement corridors has been identified in the wider area around and through Sonning Common as shown on Map 3.6.

Sonning Common and its surrounds support a variety of habitats including woodland, open part-wooded habitats, hedge or other field boundaries, grassland and agricultural land including a large element of arable. Most of the possible sites are on the periphery of the village in open countryside but there are some more centrally located sites wholly or partially hemmed in by existing development. The landscape east and north of the village tends to be more open with larger fields and fewer hedges or similar field boundaries – with a more structured landscape of smaller fields and hedges to the west and south. Much of the land is subject to intensive management with the better wildlife habitats generally being less intensively or occasionally managed.

There is good connectivity of wooded habitats – especially west and south of the village. Most of the woodlands proper are linked by a network of linear wooded habitats such as hedges and/or lines of trees. In addition, the village itself has numerous trees and hedges – including some large wooded gardens. Some of the best habitats identified in the ecological survey⁴⁴ are the more mature hedge/boundary banks such as those in west of village (SON 1, SON 2, SON 3 and SON 4) - these being much more than simple low hedges containing some large/old trees potentially of high conservation value.

Towards the south of the village, there are some more open habitats perhaps remnants of a previous parkland type landscape (SON 6, SON 7) including a possible ‘old green lane’. These sites are adjacent to Hagpits Wood (one of several woods in or around the parish) and together they form an area of continuous habitats.

“Good open habitats such as grassland are more restricted, in the areas surveyed at least, being dominated by arable land with only small fragments of more herb rich open grassland. In the event of any development it is important to retain this variety and connectivity of habitats in and around the parish. Where possible, existing habitats should be improved and new wildlife habitats created appropriate for the local area and conditions.”⁴⁵

Particular attention should be paid to the maintenance and development of wildlife corridors around and through any new housing site.

Objective: To conserve and enhance the environment, ecosystem and biodiversity, ensuring that new development protects biodiversity including habitats and provision of appropriate wild life, bio-diversity and movement corridors.

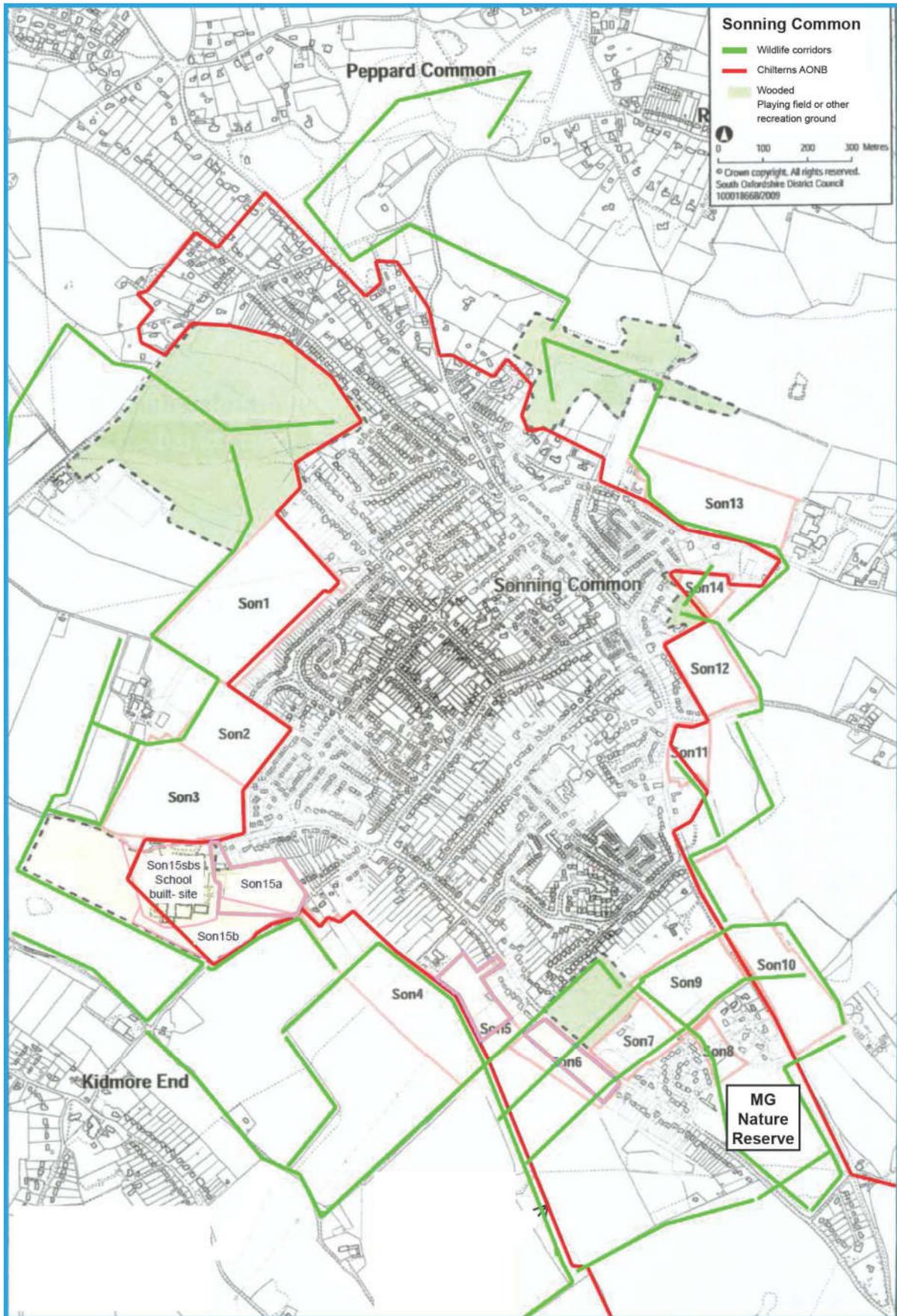
Policy ENV3: Green and wildlife movement corridors

The conservation and enhancement of ecological networks will be supported. Where appropriate, development proposals should seek to connect existing wildlife corridors and provide new ones to enhance biodiversity and provide for freedom of movement for species through the site.

⁴⁴ Source: Ecological Survey, Sonning Common, 2014

⁴⁵ Source: Ecological Survey, Sonning Common, 2014

Map 3.6: Wildlife corridors through and around Sonning Common



Delivery policy

Objective: To encourage potential applicants for development to work with the community of Sonning Common, via its Parish Council, in preparing their proposals.

Policy DE1: Delivery and Pre-Application engagement on significant development proposals

In order to ensure a positive and structured Pre-Application engagement, potential applicants bringing forward a significant development proposal are encouraged to follow the Pre-Application Protocol set out at the end of Part Four.

Significant development proposals are defined as being:

- on a site allocated in the Plan
- or any application for
 - more than 10 new homes
 - a site in the village centre area designated in the Plan or
 - an employment site likely to have 5 or more employees

The above policy, together with the protocol, facilitate a structured approach whereby Sonning Common Parish Council will provide a means to enable effective involvement of the local community in any development application.

Actions for the Parish Council

This section includes the non-land use actions and it is intended that the Parish Council will monitor and implement these actions. These were identified as important concerns, by the residents of Sonning Common, resulting from the extensive consultation process conducted throughout the emergence of the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Housing

In the ORCC housing needs survey strong views were expressed that local people and younger family members needed homes in Sonning Common. It also highlighted the limited scope for older people looking to downsize and release larger family homes, but to remain in their community.

Objective: 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.

Action: Preferential access to housing

The Parish Council will seek to work with other bodies to encourage 20% of all new affordable housing in Sonning Common provided by the Plan to be subject initially to a local connection, meaning that people with a strong local connection to the parish and whose needs are not met by the open market will be the first to be offered the tenancy or shared ownership of the home. In this context a strong local connection means an applicant:

- who has lived in the parish for 5 of the last 8 years and is currently resident there or
- who has lived in the parish for at least 5 years and whose parents or children are currently living in the parish and have at least 10 years continuous residency there.

This will not be a condition of granting planning permission but could give some initial priority to young people who have grown up in, and want to set up home in Sonning Common and to those older residents in under occupied properties seeking to downsize whilst remaining in their community. Discussions with landowners and potential developers have shown support for this aim.

Economic and employment

Objective: 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.

Action: Broadband infrastructure

The Parish Council will monitor to ensure the continuous improvement of the provision of high speed broadband within the village.

Community, social and health

A new public library building is expected to be required. The library is located on the primary school site which supports the wider community and it also plays an important role in supporting the children in their learning. Since late August 2014, the library has been run with one professional librarian assisted by a team of more than 30 volunteers for 25 hours per week. Time is also allocated specifically for school use. The building's location on Grove Road at the front entrance to the school is viewed as appropriate by the community as it is valued by both pupils and residents. Due to its location the running costs of power, light and water are paid for by the school.

The grounds are more than adequate for the school's needs but there is no front entrance to the school as the library occupies the frontage onto Grove Road. Outline plans have been drawn up to rebuild a new learning centre/library on the existing building studio site. Any increase in the population will require an extended library and it is a requirement that any replacement and enlarged building should be on the school site.

Objective: To retain and enhance existing local community services and facilities ensuring that public services are aware of and can support growth from new housing.

Action: Community library

The Parish Council by working with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) would welcome applications for a new library building and/or applications that would resource the provision of a new library building on the existing primary school site.

OCC has advised that any future development of the library will be based on the Library Service delivery strategy. Furthermore, contributions which are collected from new housing development within the ward-based catchment will go towards any library development.

Objective: To support the full range of educational facilities in Sonning Common.

Action: Investment for collaboration

To enhance and develop a mutually beneficial programme of collaboration between the educational facilities in Sonning Common and the community.

It is clear that the schools in Sonning Common are in urgent need of investment. However, beyond that covered in Policy CSH1, it is appropriate for there to be an active collaboration and partnership between the community and our schools. This is worthwhile for its own sake within an integrated and inclusive community but also offers scope for gains that are only possible in partnership.

Movement, road safety and parking

The bus service, number 25, runs through the village to and from Reading. The weekday service operates every 30 minutes from 5.26am to 9pm, slightly reduced on Saturdays and every hour on Sundays.

Objective: To retain the bus service and its stops, on its existing route along Peppard Road, Wood Lane and Kennylands Road.

Action: Retention of the bus service to Reading

The Parish Council will work with Reading Bus Company to retain the bus service in its current form, both its regularity and route.

The Reading Bus service is the only significant and reliable public transport service in Sonning Common. As a rural community it is of vital importance to many residents. Issues have been reported of challenges for the buses in navigating parts of the village. This has affected Kennylands Road, Wood Lane and Peppard Road, but particularly in the congested village centre area of Wood Lane.

Objective: 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.

Action: Traffic measures

The Parish Council by working with Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council, would welcome the following measures which are considered necessary given developments in Sonning Common:

- a reduction in the 40 mph speed limit along the Peppard Road passing Millennium Green and Lea Meadow (SON 9)
- a reduction in the speed limits on Reade's Lane leading to and past Chiltern Edge Secondary School to 20 mph
- a reduction in the speed limits on Grove Road and Lea Road around Sonning Common Primary School to 20 mph
- car-sharing schemes for commuting to Reading
- actions to support the measured and steady flow of traffic along the arterial thoroughfares of the village including, Peppard Road, Kennylands Road, Wood Lane and Reade's Lane
- studies to apply 'shared space'/'Streets for All' principles to some key areas of the village

A number of these changes are long overdue, but their importance is greatly increased both by the anticipated volume of development and by its expected location. Sonning Common is presently used as a cut-through for traffic from the Caversham Park and Emmer Green areas to join the A4074 in order to head north towards Wallingford and Oxford; this traffic travels along Kennylands Road and Reade's Lane, often at speed. Whilst calming is important, it is also important to retain the rural character of the village and this should inform the approach.

Historic England's publication 'Streets for All' describes traffic management projects and this advice will be used in future plans for Sonning Common's traffic/parking issues.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Source: 'Streets for All' – Historic England

Environmental

Objective: To maintain and enhance the wooded and rural character of the village by encouraging the integrity of soft landscaping in new developments and where appropriate screening any adjacent AONB.

Action: Environment – Wider planting

A programme of green infrastructure, green networks and substantial tree and woodland planting should be undertaken throughout the designated Neighbourhood Area. To replace what has been lost over time from development and lack of replanting as well as to protect existing and provide new areas of planting, hedgerows and habitats.

The intention will be to conserve, replace and enhance. The parish council will encourage, if the necessity arises 'to cut down a tree then plant another one.' All residents will be encouraged to do so. This would ensure a continuity of the rural look and feel across the village.

This is a vital part of maintaining the character of Sonning Common over the Plan period. It is expected that the parish council will orchestrate efforts but it will need support from the wider community of property owners.

Financial contributions

Objective: To ensure that all financial contributions from developments (s106 and/or CIL) are used on projects and initiatives that meet the identified needs of the community.

Action: Application of s106 and/or Community Infrastructure Levy funds

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.

To this end, development applications which confer benefits to identified community services and facilities will be supported. The following investment needs are not listed in order of priority:

- car park, sports grounds, pitches works
- traffic calming investment
- upgrades and extension (2nd floor) to village hall
- village centre enhancement
- car parks (including land)
- footpaths and cycle ways (including land)
- library
- pre-school
- primary school refurbishment
- secondary school refurbishment
- health and dentistry facilities
- Widmore Pond
- youth club
- green infrastructure, green networks
- tree and woodland planting