

Reviewed Long Wittenham
Neighbourhood Development Plan
2018-2033

EVIDENCE PAPER COUNTRYSIDE

October 2018

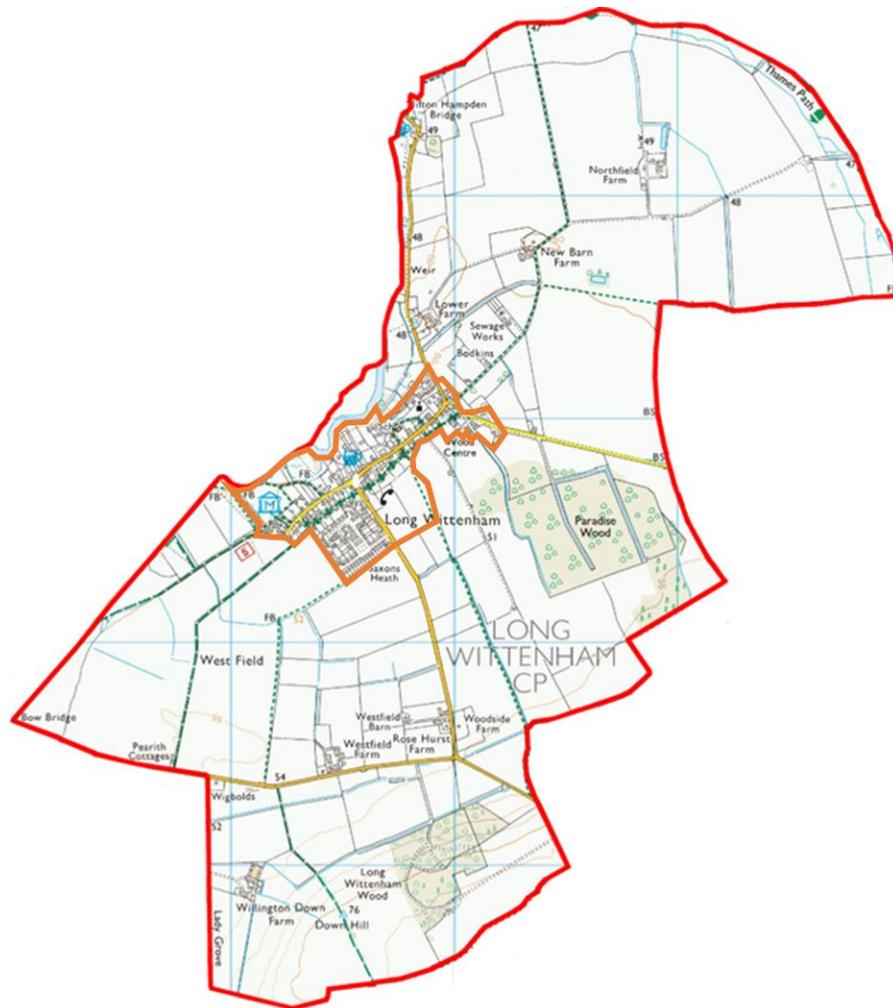
Submission Draft

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INTRODUCTION

1. This evidence paper considers policy and evidence regarding development in the countryside surrounding Long Wittenham Village. For the purposes of this paper, “countryside” is all land outside the currently built-up area or land allocated in the proposed NDP. **Figure 1** shows the notional village “boundary” outside of which is “countryside”. The notional boundary is not to scale but only an indication of the current village built-up area. Built development exists in the area outside the village built-up area, for instance farms, recreational facilities, and rural enterprises. The purpose of Figure 1 is to illustrate the land that will be discussed in this evidence paper.

FIGURE 1: BOUNDARY OF LONG WITTENHAM OUTSIDE OF WHICH IS “COUNTRYSIDE”.



The paper will be set out in chapters:

- Background
- Planning policy context
- Photographic Record
- Important Views
- Conclusions

BACKGROUND

Setting

2. Long Wittenham is a historic village surrounded by countryside on all sides which provides a buffer between it and other built-up areas (**Figure 2**). The countryside has multiple benefits for the village by providing local employment, recreational opportunities, tranquillity, and a green setting for the village itself which can be enjoyed from many viewpoints outside the village or from within, looking out to the countryside. The countryside in Long Wittenham Parish also benefits Didcot Garden Town.
3. The countryside separates Long Wittenham from Didcot to the south east, Appleford to the west and Culham, Clifton Hampden and Burcot across the River Thames to the north.

FIGURE 2: AERIAL PHOTO SHOWING LONG WITTENHAM VILLAGE IN RELATION TO OTHER BUILT-UP AREAS (BING, MAY 2018)



4. The River Thames and its 'cut' forms the north western boundary of the village. To the north of the Thames is Oxfordshire Green Belt. North of the Thames is the village of Clifton Hampden which provides a post office and doctors' surgery for Long Wittenham village. Other policies in the NDP seek to improve footpath and cycle path connections to Clifton Hampden.
5. To the east is a relatively wide gap of undeveloped countryside separating the village from the settlements of Little Wittenham and Dorchester.
6. Wittenham Clumps lie to the south east of the village and the south east boundary of the parish demarks the North Wessex Downs AONB. Wittenham Clumps is a SSSI and also home to The Earth Trust attracting many visitors throughout the year for country pursuits and farm visits.
7. To the south of the village is another relatively large open swathe of countryside.
8. Didcot now encroaches to the parish boundary to the south west of the village. As will be discussed below, the countryside between Didcot and Long Wittenham Village features in the consideration of the Didcot Garden Town proposals.

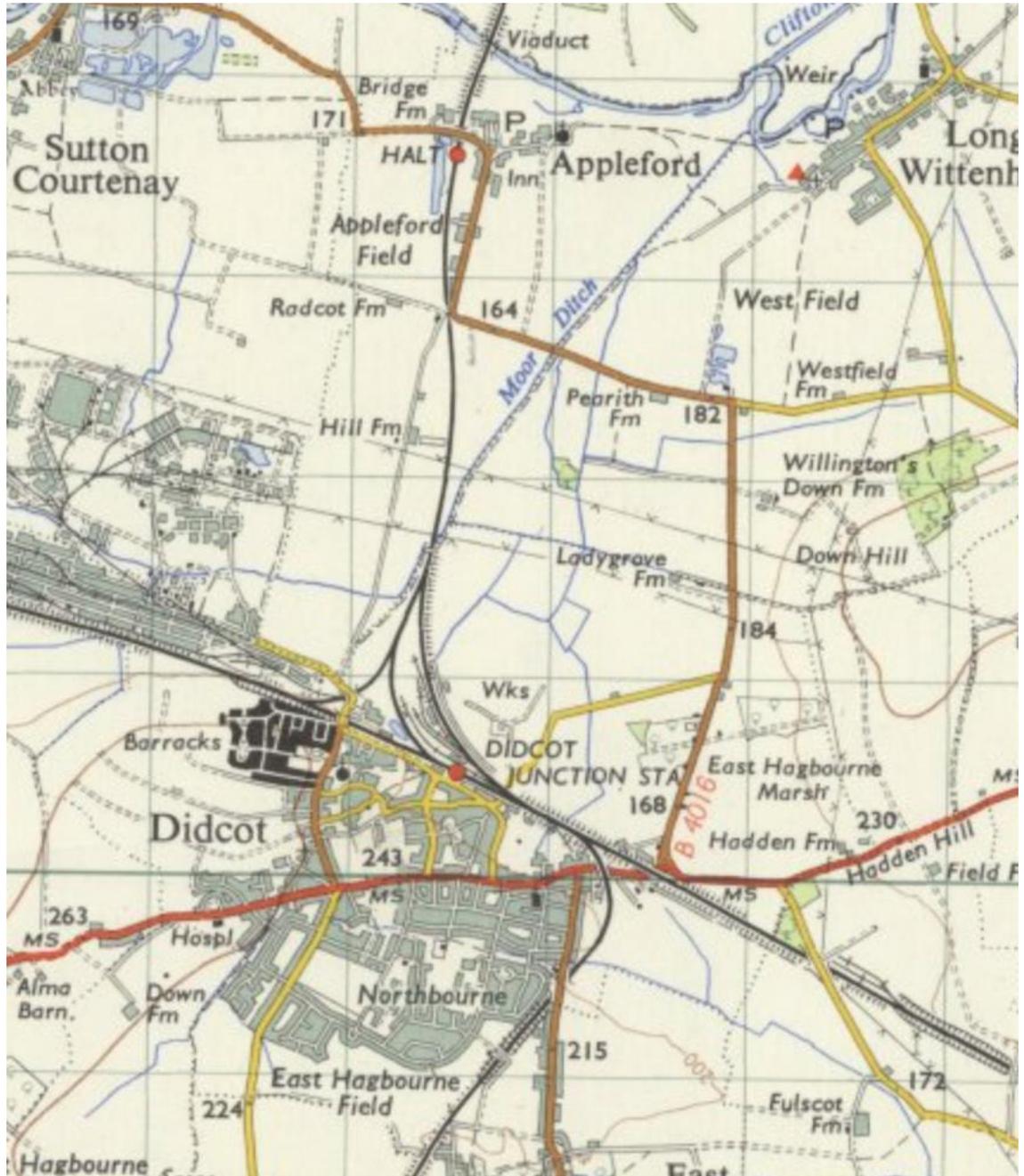
Development History

9. The village was once a relatively large settlement in the area, dwarfing nearby Didcot. **Figure 3** shows the relationship of the two settlements at the turn of the last century. **Figure 4** shows the relationship in mid-century. Figure 2 shows the current relationship. These maps indicate that, whilst Long Wittenham's built form has remained largely stable, Didcot has grown in size and influence in the area, and its borders are steadily encroaching on the parish. A recent planning permission resulted in a south western portion of Long Wittenham parish being transferred to Didcot Town Council, bringing Didcot's built up area and land allocations to the edge of the parish, now reduced in size.

FIGURE 3: OS MAP 1888 - 1913



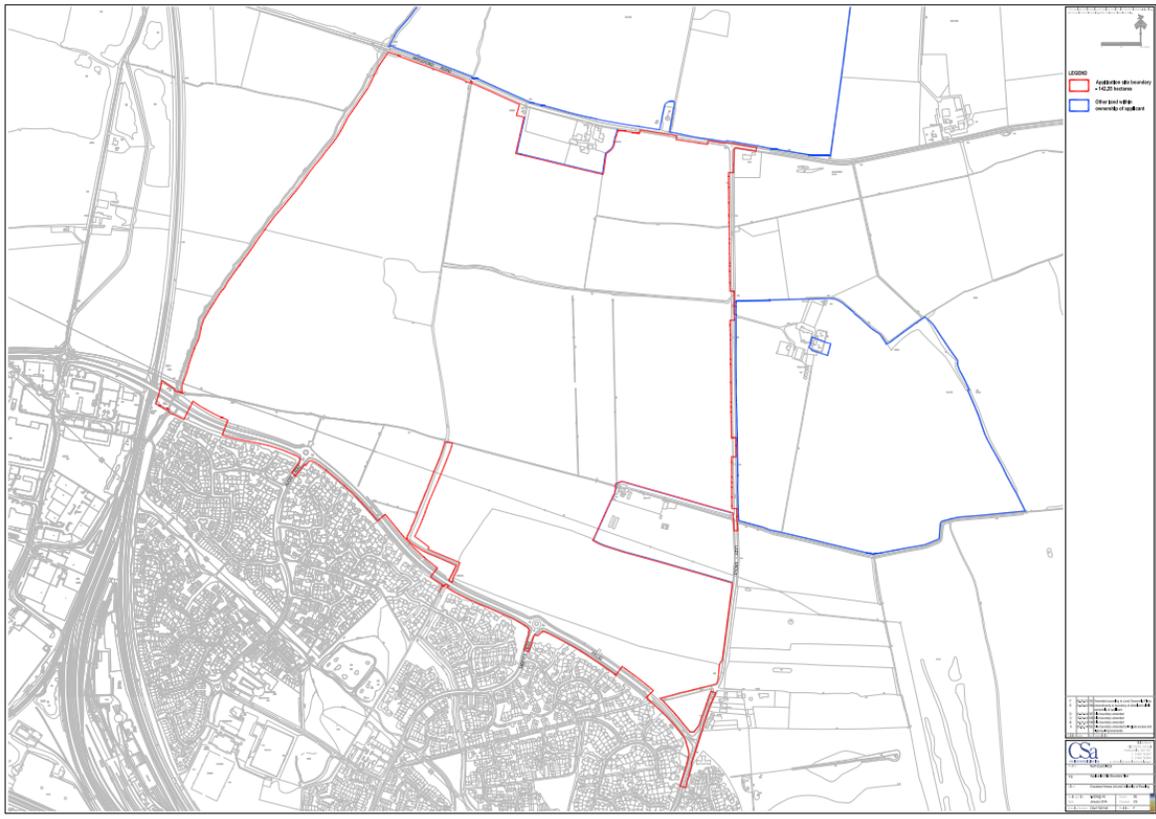
FIGURE 4: OS MAP 1955-1961



Recent planning permission at Didcot fringe

12. Outline planning permission was granted to a development (application reference P15/S2902/O) on 30th June 2017 to Croudace Homes and the University of Reading for

a new and integrated neighbourhood to the northeast of Didcot of up to 1880 homes (with up to 40% being Affordable Housing) and comprising: (i) two new primary schools; (ii) a new secondary school; (iii) a new leisure/sports facility and sports pitches, including a pavilion; (iv) a neighbourhood centre comprising: a 1500 sqm Class A1 (shop) use; up to 5 units, each up to 200 sqm, of small flexible units within Classes A1, A2, A3, A4 or A5; a Class A4 or A3 or mixed use Public House/restaurant; a Class C1 hotel; and a Class D1 non-residential institutional use (for example a creche or children's day nursery); (v) a new community hall; (vi) a Class C3 residential Extra Care Housing facility; (vii) new areas of green infrastructure including amenity green space, allotments and children's play areas; and (viii) a comprehensive suite of other supporting town-wide and site-specific associated infrastructure.



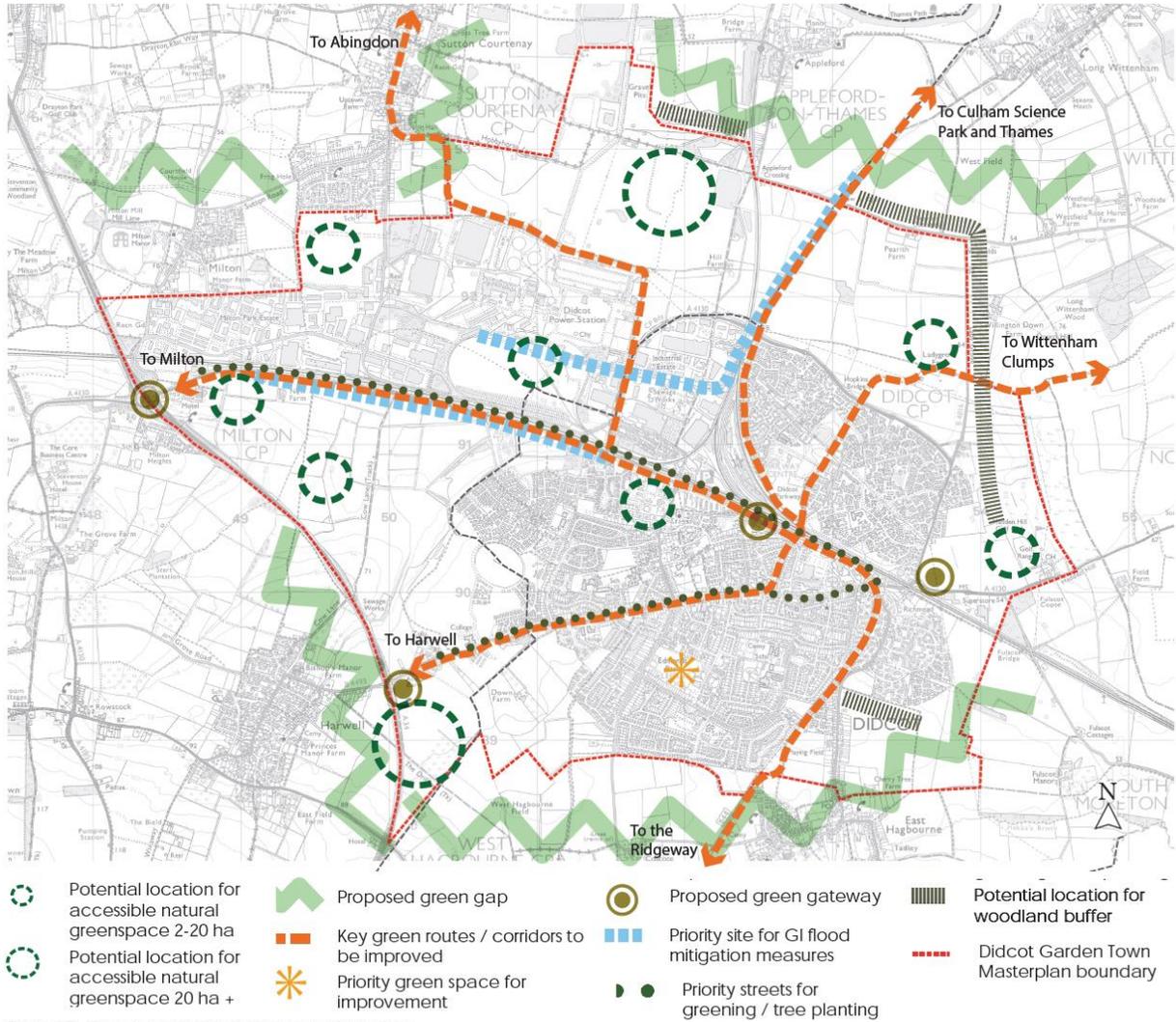
13. This proposal for nearly 2000 homes and infrastructure (known locally as NE Didcot) will have a significant impact upon the setting and character of Long Wittenham village because it brings the Didcot development boundary closer, taking up nearly half of the existing gap between the settlements.

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Science Vale and Didcot Garden Town

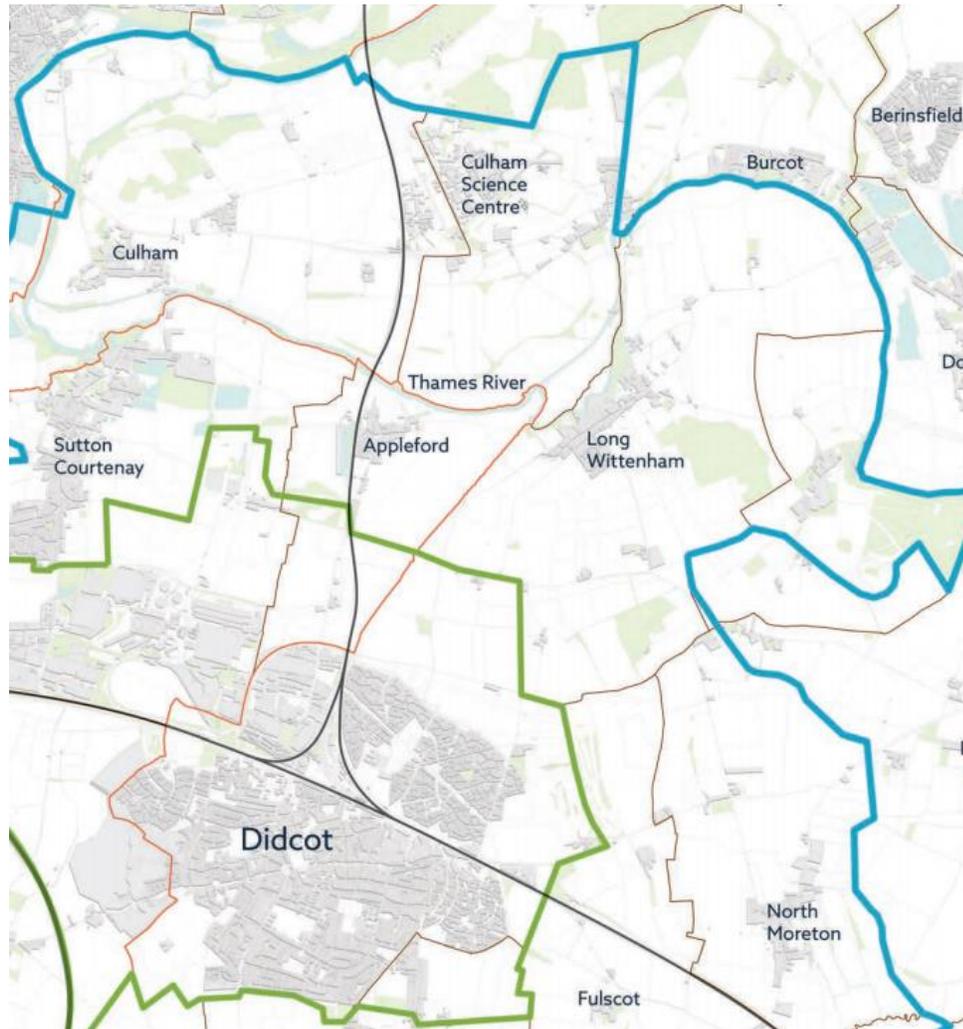
14. Didcot and the Parish of Long Wittenham are located within the Science Vale. The Science Vale Area Action Plan (February 2015) sets the scene for the economic, social and natural development of the area around Long Wittenham. Part of the Science Vale vision is to transform Didcot into a vibrant centre for the Science Vale. Didcot town centre and its new neighbourhoods will be a focus for regeneration and transformation. Didcot is the main service centre and gateway entrance for the wider Science Vale. It has the potential to be improved making it a place that will attract investment and one that the community will continue to be proud of.
15. Core Strategy CSS1 sets out the overall strategy of focusing major new development at the growth point of Didcot, so that the town assumes a significant role in providing homes, jobs and services.
16. In support of the Science Vale vision for Didcot, the Didcot Garden Town delivery plan (October 2017) sets out the SODC Council's aspirations for how Didcot will fulfil its role in the Science Vale.
17. The Science Vale and Garden Town documents are not formally part of the Development Plan for Long Wittenham, but they represent the considered and partnership-oriented intentions of the SODC council and are therefore relevant to planning. The Core Strategy seeks to link employment growth at Science Vale UK with growth in Didcot. The Core Strategy Vision states that Didcot will be a major centre in southern Oxfordshire, playing a key role in the Science Vale area and providing new housing and better services.
18. Core Strategy Objective 1 (Settlements) supports the character and distinctiveness of all SODC's towns and villages, recognising the need for all communities to thrive, and seeks to transform Didcot into a lively thriving town through regeneration of the central area and construction of greenfield neighbourhoods ensuring it meets the community's aspirations for positive change.
19. The action plans for the Science Vale and Didcot Garden Town therefore provide fundamental underpinning to the Core Strategy's Vision and objectives.
20. The Didcot Garden Town Principles, set out in Appendix 6 of the emerging Local Plan are that:

The Garden Town will establish a confident and unique identity, becoming a destination in itself that is distinctive from surrounding towns and villages whilst respecting and protecting their rural character and setting.
21. The Didcot Garden Town delivery plan sets out the planning authority's vision for Didcot and its hinterland. The plan identifies the Garden Town Boundary and the Area of Influence. Long Wittenham lies within the Area of Influence and the Wittenham Clumps and River Thames are identified as important features contributing to Didcot's natural setting and providing leisure and recreational opportunities for the expanding town.
22. The delivery plan sets out 10 key landscape priorities. Two, to protect key views to places such as Wittenham Clumps, and for a formalised green gap, are of direct relevance to the NDP. Figure 8.7 in the green infrastructure key recommendations, shows a woodland buffer on the north and east edge of the boundary which is also the Long Wittenham parish border. This figure also shows a proposed green gap or buffer around Long Wittenham village on its southern edge.



23. The garden town delivery plan encourages neighbourhood development plans to include green gaps between their settlements and the garden town boundary.
24. **Figure 5** shows the boundary of the Didcot Garden Town area in green. The Area of Influence is shown in blue.

FIGURE 5: DIDCOT GARDEN TOWN PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AND AREA OF INFLUENCE



Development in the countryside

25. The NPPF supports economic growth in rural areas and supports the growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas.¹ However, a more restrictive approach is presented towards housing. The NPPF seeks to locate housing in rural areas where it will enhance and maintain the vitality of rural communities for example, where there are a group of smaller settlements, or where development in one village may support another village.² The NPPF

¹ NPPF para. 83.

² NPPF para. 78.

- discourages new isolated homes in the countryside except in certain circumstances, or for rural exception sites which promote affordable housing³.
26. The Core Strategy also supports economic development in rural areas (CSR2), particularly agricultural schemes and the small scale reuse of buildings or infill and emerging Local Plan H19 supports the re-use of rural buildings in accordance with a range of criteria. Tourism development in the countryside is also supported. EMP 11 supports the growth of the rural economy and tourism but stipulates that this development must respect the character of the countryside.
 27. Emerging local plan STRAT1 supports smaller and other villages by allowing for limited amounts of housing and employment to help secure the provision and retention of services, and H1 states that housing development on other sites will only be permitted for affordable or infill sites. H8 states that NPDs that allocate housing, which is the intention of this proposed NDP, should only expect to provide a 5% increase in housing over the plan period. This objective has been met, as set out in **Evidence Paper: Site Allocations**. Infill development is normally expected to be within the existing built up areas of smaller villages. Emerging Local Plan policy H20 allows for the provision of rural workers' housing under certain circumstances.
 28. Emerging Local Plan EMP12 sets out that small-scale tourism development to support the visitor economy, including farm diversification and equine development, will be supported provided that proposals are in keeping with the scale and character of the locality and which would not adversely affect heritage assets or their setting. Larger developments will only be supported in exceptional circumstances, for example to sensitively re-use a historic building, or to proportionally support or enhance enjoyment of a significant and established visitor attractions where this cannot reasonably be achieved from a town or village location.
 29. The conclusion that can be drawn from these policies is that in the parish of Long Wittenham, where the village is classified as "smaller", it would be appropriate for small scale rural enterprise and necessary rural workers' housing to be developed outside the village boundary, but there is a general presumption that the countryside is not an appropriate location for individual houses or significant housing schemes. As is discussed in the **Evidence Paper: Policy Context** and **Evidence Paper: Site Allocations**, no strategic sites have been allocated or are proposed under the SHELAA (Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment) in keeping with this approach.

Tranquillity

30. An often overlooked amenity benefit of the countryside is the feeling of tranquillity and peace that it provides for visitors and recreational users. Countryside tranquillity is an important feature of local character, and NPPF para. 180 states that planning policies and decisions should aim to identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason.
31. A useful definition of countryside tranquillity can be found from the now abolished Countryside Agency:

³ NPPF para. 77, para. 79.

Tranquillity is considered to be a significant asset of landscape, appearing as an objective attribute in a range of strategies, policies and plans. ⁴

32. In a report on how to identify the importance and relevance of concepts of tranquillity, the Countryside Agency concluded from its research that “tranquillity” is linked:

to hearing, seeing and/or experiencing various aspects of perceived ‘nature’. These links to ‘nature’ had aural and visual aspects. Aurally, respondents noted the specific importance of ‘natural sounds’ – participants suggested that ‘hearing wildlife’ was important, and ‘wind through leaves’ was also a popular response.

Tranquillity was also considered to be extremely important by many respondents for a range of personal reasons. Respondents repeatedly suggested that tranquillity is about peace, calm and quietness, incorporating the notion of peace as an absence of noise, and about being ‘at peace’. As one respondent argued, ‘it’s a place where you feel at peace, that is a ‘feeling’ rather than absolute peace’; another described it as a ‘state of mind when in nice surroundings’ (ibid.)

33. It can be concluded that one of the amenity features important in the countryside is the feelings of tranquillity that it offers. For Long Wittenham and Didcot, the preservation of this important aspect of amenity will remain important and should be a consideration in future planning decisions.

Landscape

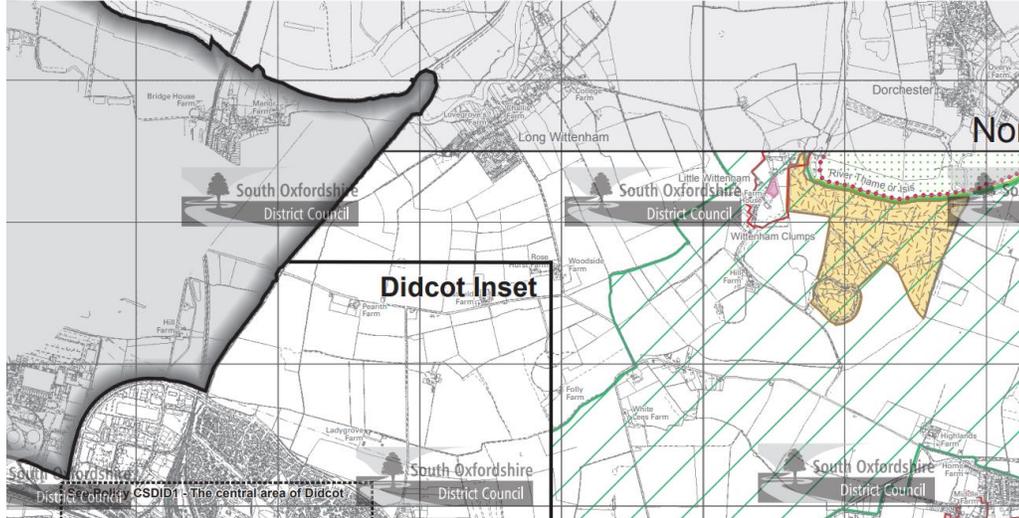
AONB

34. Long Wittenham parish is adjacent to the border of the North Wessex Downs AONB and as such, development in the parish’s countryside might affect its setting. Core strategy CSEN1 seeks to protect and enhance the AONB and planning decisions will have regard to its setting.
35. Emerging Local Plan policy ENV1 seeks to ensure that development protects and enhances the AONB and resists inappropriate development there. Planning permission will only be granted for major development in the North Wessex Downs AONB in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest. Development which supports economic growth in rural areas will be supported provided it conserves and enhances the landscape, countryside and rural areas. Development will only be permitted where it protects or enhances the landscapes, waterscapes, cultural heritage and user enjoyment of the River Thames and local landscape features that contribute to locally distinctive landscapes, amenity and biodiversity or have important historical value.
36. The South & Vale GI Strategy (September 2017), para. 3.6.57 seeks to reinforce and/or enhance local character and wherever possible, minimise the impact of visually intrusive/incongruous development or land use change on the special qualities of the Wessex Downs AONB (such as golf courses and electricity transmission lines) and where possible, minimise the impact of visually intrusive/incongruous development and land use change on the setting of the Wessex Downs AONB.

⁴ Countryside Agency, CRN92, March 2005.

37. The AONB boundary is illustrated in **Figure 6**. The figure shows the SSSI near Wittenham Clups which is a visitor attraction managed by the Earth Trust and is visited by many in the wider area.

FIGURE 6: SODC ADOPTED POLICIES MAP SHOWING AONB BOUNDARY TO THE SOUTH (GREEN HATCH).



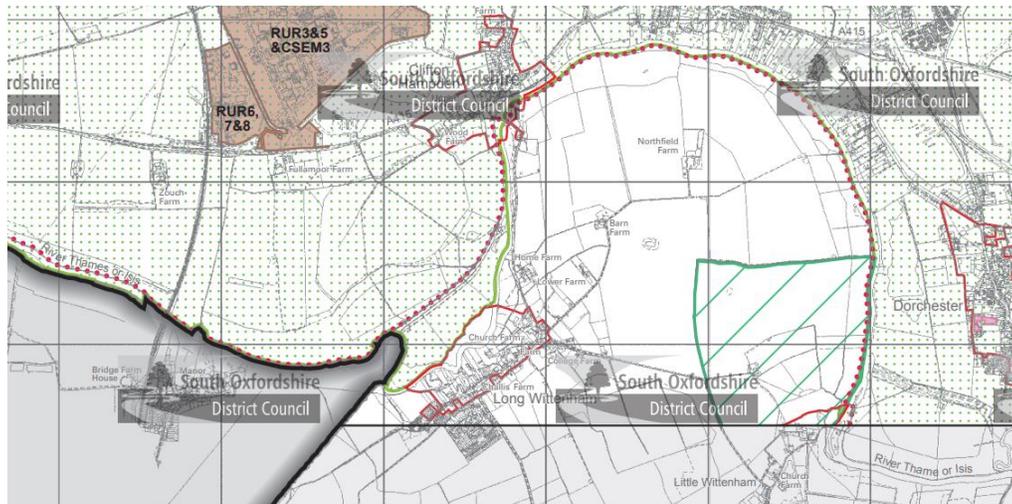
Green Belt

38. The NPPF para. 134 sets out the purposes of the Green Belt (the five purposes), two of which are relevant here:
- i. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - ii. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
39. The NPPF para. 133 states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. Planning authorities are asked to plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of Green Belts such as looking for opportunities to retain and enhance landscapes and visual amenity (para. 141).
40. Core strategy CSEN2 similarly protects the Green Belt which is not in the parish but abuts its northern boundary. The Green Belt surrounds Oxford but it could be argued that it also preserves the impact of the setting of other villages within and adjacent, such as Long Wittenham.

The River Thames forms a hard boundary between the Green Belt and Long Wittenham Parish. At present, the countryside south of the Green Belt is open and undeveloped except for the built-up area of Long Wittenham Village. The Green Belt to the north of the River Thames is also open and thus, the third purpose of the Green Belt “to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment” is met. The Green Belt north of Long Wittenham Village is open countryside which preserves the setting and special character of the historic village of Long Wittenham and of the Thames Path National Trail/River Thames Corridor.

41. One of the purposes of green belt is to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns. The SODC Green Belt Study (2015) shows how the Green Belt prevents the coalescence or appearance of coalescence between Long Wittenham and other settlements such as Dorchester and Clifton Hampden.
42. The Green Belt is outside the parish boundary and therefore outside the scope of consideration of this NDP. However, development in the parish could have an impact on the Green Belt and its functions. The Green Belt boundary is illustrated in **Figure 7**.

FIGURE 7: SODC ADOPTED POLICIES MAP SHOWING GREEN BELT BOUNDARY TO THE NORTH (GREEN DOTS)



River Thames Corridor

43. Core Strategy CSEN1 sets out that the landscapes and waterscapes of the River Thames corridor which also traverses the parish will be maintained and where possible enhanced as will the setting and heritage of the river for its overall amenity and recreation use.
44. Emerging local plan para 8.4 notes that the valley and tributaries of the River Thames are highly attractive features of the landscape and its special visual and environmental qualities are for the most part unspoilt. The Thames Valley is noted for its peace, tranquillity, biodiversity and cultural heritage, which is essential to preserve. The long-distance Thames Path and the river itself provide a focus for recreation and leisure activities.
45. Emerging Local Plan policy ENV1 states that development will only be permitted where it will have a positive impact on the landscape setting, rivers and riverbanks. ENV 4 protects watercourses generally. These policies are under revision at the time of writing.
46. The Landscape Character Assessment for the Local Plan 2033 (November 2017) describes the River Thames Corridor. In Long Wittenham, the dominant landscape types are types 5,6,7 – flat floodplain pasture, flat open farmland, flat semi-enclosed farmland. The character assessment gives the following advice on the overall approach to development in the River Thames Corridor:

<p>Development, expansion and infilling of settlements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses at the fringes of towns, villages and farms with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside. • Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements, and promote the use of building materials to maintain vernacular style and a scale of development and that are appropriate to <i>River Thames Corridor</i> (see also the South Oxfordshire Design Guide , November 2016). • Protect the sparsely settled character of the landscape and the integrity and vernacular character of the estate villages. • The siting, scale and materials used for the construction of new barns should be chosen to minimise visual intrusion. Where appropriate, they should be screened with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic to the area.
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47. The conclusion that can be drawn from these policies and evidence documents is that the countryside in Long Wittenham parish is highly sensitive, due to its setting within the context of Green Belt, AONB, and the River Thames Corridor., though not necessarily for its intrinsic value alone. The Green Belt and AONB boundaries abut the parish and any development should be carefully managed to avoid unwanted impacts. The parish lies within the River Thames corridor where again, development must be carefully managed to limit landscape impact. The intrinsic value of the countryside should be given a high degree of protection where it contributes to the local character. The nucleated pattern of settlements should be maintained. In addition, access through open countryside to these important leisure and recreational facilities is key and public rights of way through an open countryside setting encourages visitors out of their cars thus improving sustainability and health and wellbeing. This is set out well in the introduction paragraphs of Oxfordshire County Council’s adopted Rights of Way Management Plan:-

Oxfordshire’s urban and rural rights of way, the Thames Path and The Ridgeway National Trails, contribute to it being an outstanding place in which to live, work and visit.

These routes provide significant economic, health and well-being and environmental benefits. Economic benefits arise from the desire of people wanting to, visit, live and work in an area with such wonderful access to such beautiful countryside. Health and well-being benefits come from walking, riding and the many ways to actively enjoy the countryside as well as being able to connect with the natural environment. Environmental benefits come from attractive alternatives to encourage walking or cycling instead of using cars for short and longer journeys and therefore reducing congestion. Paths between fields, alongside hedgerows and watercourses, and along sunken lanes offer superb opportunities to protect and enhance wildlife and habitats. Many routes are also ancient highways that by themselves are evidence of times past and some give access to historic and prehistoric sites. All routes and green spaces in towns and countryside are part of the continually evolving cultural landscape of Oxfordshire.

Landscape Character

Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan

48. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan (2017) Appendix K, Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) identified landscape character areas around Didcot Garden Town. This included the Parish of Long Wittenham which lies within Didcot's area of influence and is identified in the LCA to be in the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs.

49. Page 5 of the LCA states of the landscape in Long Wittenham Parish:

The most important landscape feature to the north and west of the town [Didcot] is the River Thames, along with its floodplains and tributaries. The land is flat and lies almost entirely below 60m AOD. Along the course of the river and its immediate corridor heavy impermeable clay soil is liable to flooding and usually under permanent pasture. The raised, better drained, gravel ground is better suited to settlement and cultivation. The differences and shifts from the floodplain to the surrounding landscape types and character areas is subtle. There are no obvious valley slopes but instead the ground starts gently undulating and rising.

And on page 6 of the LCA the text states:

Isolated outcrops of greensand and chalk form prominent rounded hills at Wittenham Clumps and Cholsey Hill which are distinctive features within the flat vale landscape. Intensive arable farming is the predominant land use, with a sparse covering of trees and woodland, except on the steeper valley and hillsides of the downs and at Wittenham.

50. The LCA describes the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs near Didcot on pages 6-7 thus (emphasis added):

The Berkshire and Marlborough Downs comprise a mass of uplifted chalk which reaches as high as 295m AOD and falls gently south-east into the London basin. The chalk hills are prominent and stretch north east to meet the Chilterns at Goring Gap. The lower escarpment and plain grades into low hills.

The higher escarpment is almost bare of woodland, exposing a slope convoluted by combes. Steep slopes support the majority of the chalk grassland which can be vibrant with diverse flowering plants and butterflies. Traditional downland makes up the majority of the open access land.

*Across the sparsely settled uplands, huge arable fields offer vast skies and **high levels of tranquillity**. Post and wire fencing and grass strips bound fields, **with views interrupted occasionally by small woodlands and historic routeways** bordered by scrub. Gallops, racecourses and stables are particularly concentrated around the Lambourn Valley. Dew ponds, driveway verges and fallow plots create a mosaic of farmland habitat. Brown hare, harvest mouse, farmland birds including stone curlew and arable plants such as *Legousia hybrida* (Venus' looking glass) thrive where there has been a history of consistent cultivation.*

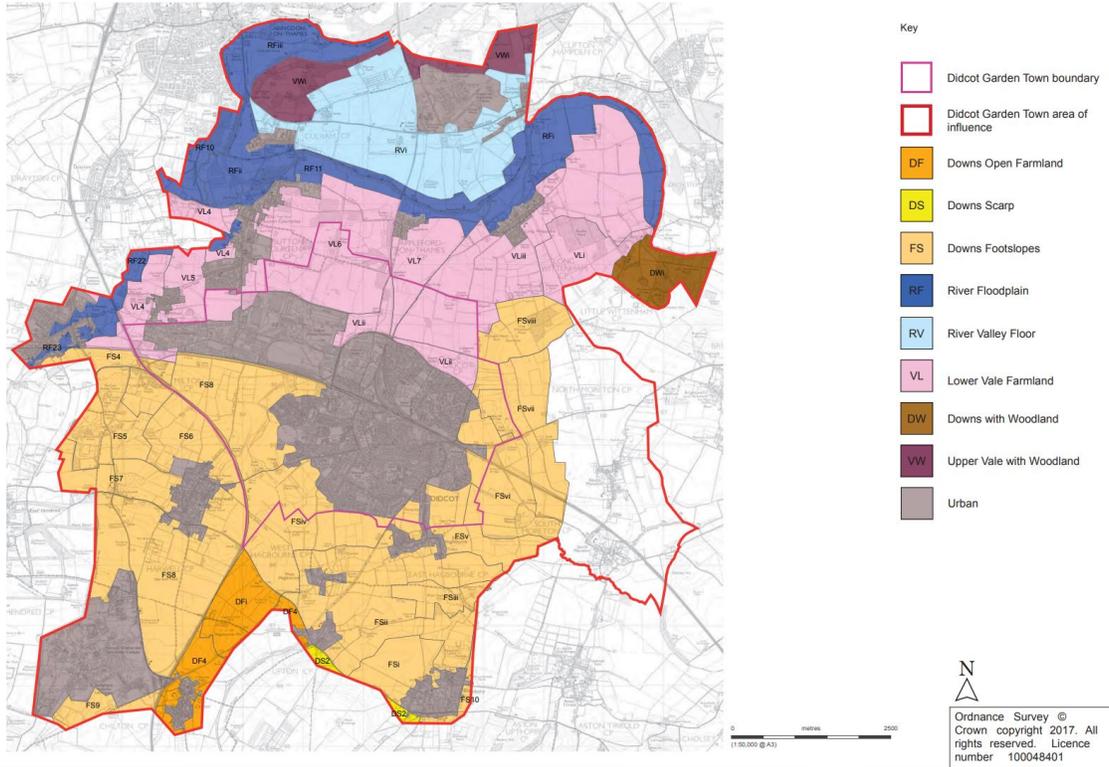
The Open Downland forms the backbone of the North Wessex Downs as an elevated plateau of the hard Middle and Upper Chalks. The landscape is of open, smoothly rounded downland dissected by dry valleys and long sinuous steep scarps, and is devoid of surface water. Tree cover is limited to distinctive beech clumps crowning summits and occasional linear shelter belts.

This is a remote, tranquil landscape of panoramic views where the sky forms a key part of the landscape, including the effect of cloud shadows on the ground and the wind creating swells through the crops. The dominant landform is of vast sweeping arable fields with small remnant patches of chalk

grassland on steeper slopes. Settlement is extremely sparse and limited to scattered farmsteads and racing stables.

51. The LCA identifies two dominant landscape types in Long Wittenham: Lower Vale Farmland and River Floodplain.⁵ This is shown in the figure below copied from the LCA (Figure 3 from the LCA).

→ FIGURE 3 - LANDSCAPE TYPES



52. The River Floodplain is described in the LCA on page 39 as (emphasis added):

RFi - CLIFTON CUT RIVER FLOODPLAIN Location And Boundaries The Clifton Cut River Floodplain Character Area is an area of low lying floodplain in the north-east of the study area. It is bordered both to the north, south and west by slightly higher arable farm land and to the east by the River Thames which forms the boundary of the study area.

Key Characteristics

- Floodplain underlain by the Gault Formation of mudstone and Lower Greensand formation of sedimentary sandstone. The bedrocks are overlain with superficial deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel from alluvial deposits;

⁵ Landscape Character Assessment, 2017, Figure 3.

- Flat landform at just below 50m AOD;
 - Consists primarily of small irregular fields usually pastures;
 - Tree cover is heaviest around the village of Long Wittenham but there is also plenty along the course of the river itself including alder and willow;
 - Limited hedgerows to field boundaries and what remains is fading, with field amalgamation an issue;
 - There are many streams and ditches discharging into the Thames but the most dominant feature, not to mention water feature of the area, is the Thames itself. North of Long Wittenham the river is divided into two; the existing meandering course which forms the edge of the village and the Clifton Cut which removes about a mile of the natural course of the river. The Cut, its weirs and Clifton Lock were constructed piecemeal in the first half of the 19th century but finally completed in 1835;
 - When the trees break, **some longer framed views across the area are possible but these are not extensive** as the area is lower than its surroundings. **Views along the river are possible but limited by trees and bends to the river.** Both high-voltage pylons and transmission lines are visible as they cross the area;
 - Formal vehicle access is limited to the High Street leading north from Long Wittenham to the road bridge at Clifton Hampden;
 - The Thames Path, a national trail, hugs the river across the area. It crosses the river from north bank to south bank and back again at Day's Lock, in the south-west corner, and the Clifton Hampden bridge in the centre;
 - Historic features in the area include the Culham Bridge, a mediaeval bridge built of stone between 1416 and 1422, which crosses the Back Water. It was of considerable strategic importance during the English Civil War;
 - This is a rural character area with minimal intrusion from vehicles and the villages, both well screened by tree cover. It is a generally peaceful, semi-enclosed natural environment with much high scenic quality landscape.
53. The Little Wittenham Lower Vale Farmland is described in the LCA on page 47 as (emphasis added):

VLi - LITTLE WITTENHAM LOWER VALLEY FARMLAND Location And Boundaries

The Little Wittenham Lower Valley Farmland Character Area is an area of semi-enclosed flat farmland west of Little Wittenham. The Area is defined by more open land to the north, east and west, while the southern boundary is dived between wooded downs and the study area boundary.

Key Characteristics

- *Farmland, underlain by the Gault Formation of mudstone. The bedrocks are overlain with superficial deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel from alluvial deposits;*
- *Generally flat landform at approximately 55m AOD;*

- Comprised of large scale, irregular, open arable fields and recently planted, forestry research woodlands;
- There is a considerable amount of tree cover along the field boundaries around the village of Little Wittenham and two forestry research woodlands;
- The two woodlands are Neptune Wood, a 4.5 ha combination of French, Spanish and British oak planted to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar, and Paradise Wood, the largest collection of hardwood forestry trials in Britain, where five species ash, beech, cherry, oak and walnut are bred and monitored to improve the tree species for timber productivity. Both sites were previously arable land;
- There is a good hedgerow network across the site, along field boundaries and farm tracks. This is mainly mixed native hawthorn dominated and well managed;
- There are a number of regular drainage ditches, mainly orientated south-east to north-west;
- When not screened by tall field boundaries to the roads **there are long panoramic views across the Area to the nearby Sinodun Hills to the south-east, Long Wittenham Wood to the south-west and Didcot to the west;**
- Road access is generally north south with Didcot Road to the west and Little Wittenham Road to the east. A number a smaller roads / lanes provide access to Little Wittenham;
- The Character Area is largely devoid of public rights of way. Those present exist on the eastern and western fringes, providing connections to the villages of Little and Long Wittenham respectively;
- The Area is unsettled bar one dwelling on the western boundary and the village of Little Wittenham on the eastern side. The village is small, generally linear in morphology and displays a mixture of the local vernacular building materials red brick and roof tile, timber frames, thatched roofs and timber barns;
- The church of Saint Peter at the eastern end of the village has a 14th century west bell tower;
- This Character Area is predominantly rural with almost no influence from the well-screened village of Little Wittenham. The large scale arable fields have limited enclosure by hedgerows and the woodlands to the north and long panoramic views are often possible from the public rights of way.

54. The Long Wittenham Lower Vale Farmland is described in the LCA on page 50 as (emphasis added):

VLiii - LONG WITTENHAM LOWER VALLEY FARMLAND Location And Boundaries

The Long Wittenham Lower Valley Farmland Character Area is an area of open flat farmland north and north-west of Didcot Town. The Area is defined by more enclosed and rolling land to the south and west, whilst to the north is the River Thames.

Key Characteristics

- *Farmland, underlain by the Gault Formation of mudstone. The bedrocks are overlain with superficial deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel all from alluvial deposits;*

- Generally flat landform at approximately 50m AOD;
- Composed of large-scale, irregular, open arable fields;
- There is a small piece of ancient woodland in the southwest corner of the Area. Other tree cover is limited to some of the field boundaries, usually oak, ash, maple and hawthorn, around the dwellings and village and poplars alongside some water courses;
- There is a limited network of hedgerows along the field edges usually hawthorn dominated but even these are often gappy and in decline;
- There are frequent straight drainage ditches which run parallel to the river to collect water off the fields and perpendicular to the Thames to drain into it. Moor Ditch, a canalised stream, crosses the entire western portion of the area from Didcot to the Thames at Long Wittenham;
- **Extensive panoramic views are visible across and out of the area, from the majority of the public rights of way the Sinodun Hills, the North Wessex Downs, Didcot power station and Culham Science Centre are all visible as are both high-voltage pylons and transmission lines;**
- There are numerous farms across the area in a variety of sizes and displaying both the materials and styles of the historic vernacular red brick and roof tile and timber barns, and also the bland metal and concrete of contemporary agri-sheds;
- **Infill development and small-scale agricultural uses along the southern edge of Long Wittenham are intruding on the open farmland;**
- This is a predominantly rural area, dominated by large open arable fields. Didcot town and infrastructure does intrude to the southern edge but within the area **a sense of exposure and remoteness is appreciable.**

55. The LCA suggests management proposals on page 56 for the River Floodplain as follows (emphasis added):

LANDSCAPE TYPE RF - RIVER FLOODPLAIN Landscape management issues

This area retains a predominantly rural character with some particularly unspoilt and attractive areas of landscape. The pastoral floodplain pasture landscapes in particular has retained a strong structure of hedgerows and trees, has a particularly rich, diverse and well managed character and are of high scenic quality. Outside these areas **the arable farmland and the landscape shows signs of deterioration in terms of both condition and quality.** Another land management issues include the impact of 'horsiculture' and somewhat ad hoc or intrusive land uses on the fringes of settlements.

Key landscape enhancement priorities should be to:

- **Maintain permanent pasture and riverside trees to reinforce the tranquil, pastoral character of the river corridors;**
- Encourage better management of field boundaries and discourage further hedgerow removal and replacement by fencing;

Planning and development issues

- **Development would generally be inappropriate within the unspoilt floodplain pastures landscapes;**

56. The LCA suggests management proposals on page 56 for the Lower Vale Farmland as follows (emphasis added):

LANDSCAPE TYPE VL - LOWER VALE FARMLAND

Landscape management issues

This predominantly arable farmland enjoys a rural quality. Some areas have retained a strong structure of hedgerows and trees while other areas have allowed the structure to fade as farming has increased its efficiency, resulting in a more open exposed landscape. This Area also experiences the problem of intrusive land uses on the fringes of settlements.

Key landscape enhancement priorities should be to:

- *Encourage planting and pollarding of willows and poplars along ditches and watercourses and less intensive management of ditch systems to promote semi-natural aquatic and riparian vegetation;*
- *Encourage better management of field boundaries and discourage further hedgerow removal and replacement by fencing;*
- *Improve landscape structure and land management on the fringes of built areas and along main roads to mitigate adverse impacts on the surrounding landscape.*

Planning and development issues

- ***Development within the visually exposed landscapes of the open flat farmland, will be highly prominent unless closely associated with existing built form or well integrated within new landscape structure;***
- ***Landscapes on the fringes of settlements are particularly vulnerable to change and special attention should be paid to creating strong landscape ‘edges’ to reduce the urbanising influences of development on adjacent landscapes and to prevent the coalescence of settlements.***

57. In conclusion, the LCA has identified a number of strategic views and the tranquil character of the countryside around Long Wittenham Village, but also that this is under threat of encroachment and urbanising influences. The LCA has not mentioned that the area between Long Wittenham and the Wessex Downs is also home to extensive wildlife with frequent sightings of deer. The plantation NE of Pearith Farm Cottages appears to be home to Muntjac deer which roam widely in the area between the proposed NE Didcot Development and Long Wittenham. Roe deer are often seen nearer to the Clumps.

Green infrastructure

58. Emerging Local Plan policy STRAT 4 states that proposals for development within the Didcot Garden town Masterplan Area (where Long Wittenhams sits within the “area of influence”) will be expected to demonstrate how they positively contribute to the achievement of the Didcot Garden town Principles as set out in its appendix 6.

59. Emerging Local Plan policy ENV5 states that new development will be expected to contribute towards the provision of additional Green Infrastructure and protect and enhance existing Green Infrastructure. Proposals should protect, conserve, enhance the district's green infrastructure and provide an appropriate level of green infrastructure where a requirement has been identified for additional provision either within the Green Infrastructure Strategy, or the relevant Neighbourhood Development Plan. All green infrastructure provision should be designed to meet the quality standards set out within the Green Infrastructure Strategy, the relevant Neighbourhood Development Plan, or the Didcot Garden Town Masterplan.
60. The GI strategy identifies the following opportunity regarding the parish of Long Wittenham: to investigate opportunities to maintain or improve the quality/accessibility of existing greenspaces, particularly around the main population centres such as Didcot and improve access by sustainable modes of transport to Wittenham Clumps (para. 3.6.54). There are several well used Public Rights of Way across open countryside between the NE Didcot proposals and Long Wittenham, the Thames Corridor and The Clumps. A new leisure/educational facility is being developed in Long Wittenham. The Sylva Foundation are working on a reconstruction of a Wessex Manor House and associated leisure trail which will provide new opportunities for recreational and educational visits. There is a longer term objective to join up the historic sites of Dorchester on Thames, Long Wittenham and Sutton Courtney with a footpath/trail.
61. The emerging Local Plan lists green infrastructure opportunities relevant to Long Wittenham parish:
- Explore opportunities to restore or create new greenspace to the north of Didcot (where Long Wittenham lies).
 - Explore opportunities through and around the town for enhanced recreational access links between existing and new greenspace, such as the Wittenham Clumps, which could be further enhanced with provision of improved pedestrian and cycling links to the town.
 - Seek opportunities to strengthen and enhance multi-functional 'greenway' links between new development proposals west of Didcot and existing GI assets, such as the National Cycle Network Routes 5 (which travels from Didcot to Long Wittenham).
62. These emerging local plan policies foresee an important role for the countryside in the parish of Long Wittenham regarding the furtherance of the objective for Didcot and the Science Vale as a whole. The matter of sustainable access is discussed in more details in the **Evidence Paper: Cycle and Footpath Network**. The countryside in the NDP area therefore serves a minor but strategic role within the Science Vale suite of policies and objectives in that it provides valuable green infrastructure for Didcot now, and should continue to do so in the future as development aspirations are realised.
63. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan (2017) Appendix K on Green Infrastructure concluded that Long Wittenham provides accessible green space to Didcot. This is set out in the extract below:

4.4.19. There is a complete deficit of Accessible Natural Greenspace sites 20 hectares and above within 2km from home in Didcot. The Earth Trust land at Wittenham Clumps is the only nearby site above 20 hectares but is over 2km away. See Figure 16 Natural and semi-natural green space accessibility – Sites at least 20 hectares.

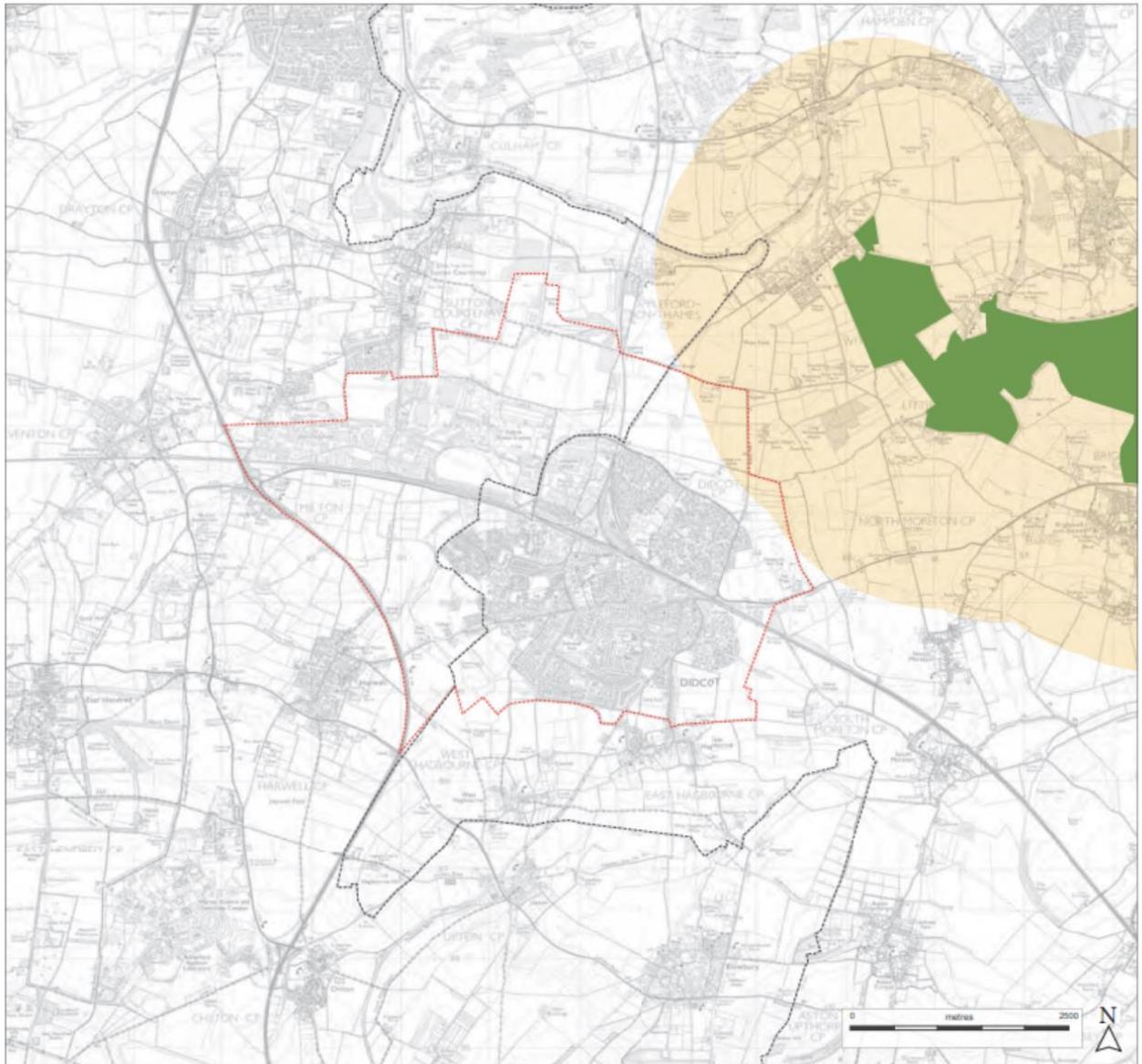
4.4.20. There is a partial deficit of Accessible Natural Greenspace sites Greater than 100 hectares within 5km from home in Didcot. The Earth Trust land at Wittenham Clumps is the

only site above 100 hectares and much of the south west of the town is further away from this site than 5km. See Figure 17 Natural and semi-natural green space accessibility – Sites at least 100 hectares

4.4.21. As it is unlikely that land would be available for a 100 hectare or larger site within 5km of the town, this has not been included in the recommendations for new Accessible Natural Greenspace. However it will be important to improve access to the countryside, in particular to key sites such as Wittenham Clumps and the AONB landscapes to maximize people's access to large areas of natural greenspace.

64. The accessibility of Long Wittenham's green infrastructure, and its importance for Didcot Garden town is illustrated in the Green Strategy's figure 16, reproduced below. The paragraphs quoted in this document and the figure below illustrate that Long Wittenham's green space serves a wider function than for the village of Long Wittenham alone. The large areas of accessible greenspace are also important to preserve to maintain accessibility to green infrastructure for Didcot Garden Town.
65. **Evidence Paper: Cycle and Footpaths** discusses the role that the Oxfordshire County Council Rights of Way Management Plan foresees for footpaths in the County and in the parish. Development on the currently open land between Didcot and Long Wittenham Village would seriously detract from the new residents at NE Didcot having convenient, attractive access to the countryside, Thames Corridor, and the Facilities in Long Wittenham Village and to the Clumps.

fig 16 - Natural and semi-natural green space accessibility - Sites at least 20 hectares



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KEY

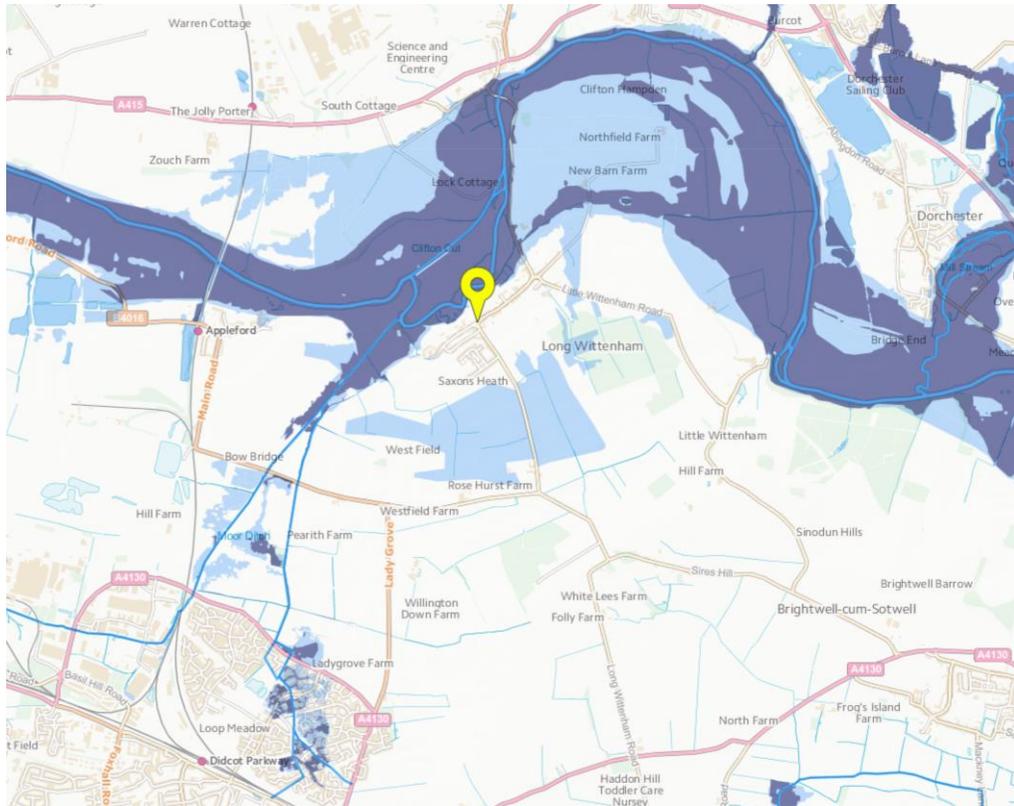
- | | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------------------|
|  | Accessible Natural Greenspace sites (>20 hectares) |  | Didcot Garden Town boundary |
|  | 2km catchment (Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard) |  | Local authority boundary |

Flooding

66. NPPF para. 155 states that inappropriate development in areas of at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk, and that local plans should be supported by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). A sequential test is provided to support development management decisions.
67. The SFRA in support of the emerging Local Plan (Sept 2017) identifies the River Thames as one of the largest catchments in the UK. It dominates the SODC area and has a well-documented history of flooding along its length. The Thames enters the SODC area south of Oxford at Sandford on Thames, and forms the district boundary as it flows south to Abingdon. Whilst the Thames frequently floods along this stretch there are few properties within the SODC area at risk, (most being within Abingdon). Several settlements lie within the flood plain of the Thames between Abingdon and Wallingford: Culham, Clifton Hampden, Long Wittenham, Burcot, Dorchester, Benson and Shillingford.
68. The SFRA encourages the council to work with NDP groups to use the most up to date information when applying the sequential test in the NPPF.
69. Emerging Local Plan policy ENV4 states that land that contains or is adjacent to a watercourse must protect or enhance the function and setting of the watercourse and its biodiversity. As a last resort development should provide mitigation for any unavoidable impacts.
70. Emerging Local Plan policy EP4 states that flooding will be minimised through directing new development to areas with the lowest probability of flooding; that all new development addresses the effective management of all sources of flood risk that development does not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere; and, ensuring wider environmental benefits of development in relation to flood risk.
71. The River Thames flows through Long Wittenham and a significant portion of the parish is classed as Flood Zones 2 and 3. This is illustrated in **Figure 8**.

FIGURE 8: FLOOD ZONES 3 AND 2 IN LONG WITTENHAM

Flood Zone 3 shown in dark blue, Flood Zone 2 shown in light blue



72. These policies and supporting evidence indicate that there are parts of the parish that are subject to flooding and which should not be priorities for development where other land, less susceptible to flooding, is available.

Historic environment

73. Core strategy Policy CSEN3 protects the district's designated historic heritage assets, both above and below ground such as listed buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, conservation areas. Their settings will be conserved and enhanced for their historic significance and their important contribution to local distinctiveness, character and sense of place.
74. Emerging Local Plan policy ENV6 ensures that proposals for new development that will affect heritage assets (designated and non-designated) must conserve or enhance the significance of the heritage asset and its setting.
75. Emerging Local Plan policy ENV9 states that development must protect the site and setting of Scheduled Monuments or nationally important designated or undesignated archaeological remains.

76. There are two large scheduled ancient monuments in and adjacent to Long Wittenham parish (settlement site at Northfield Farm in **Figure 9**, and Settlement site SE of church in **Figure 10**). Figures 8 and 10 also show listed buildings as red triangles.

FIGURE 9: SETTLEMENT SITE AT NORTHFIELD FARM

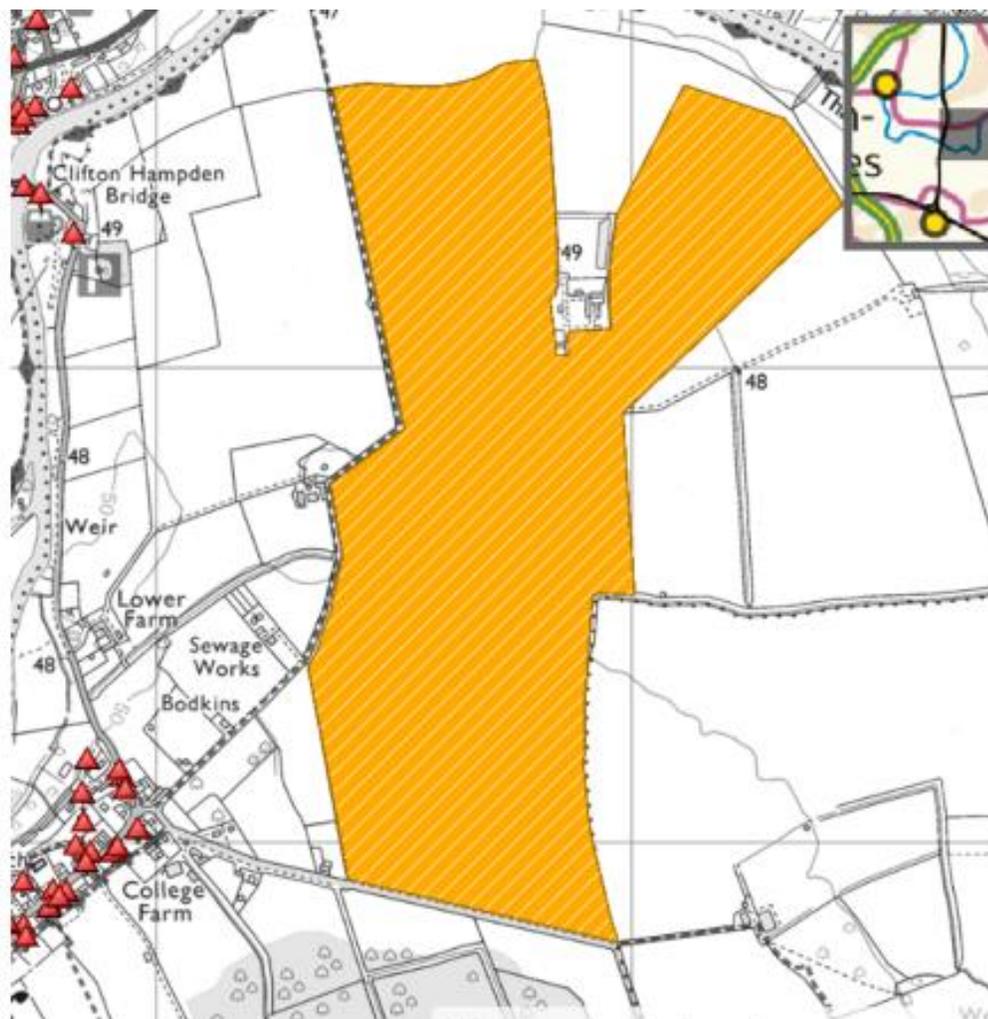
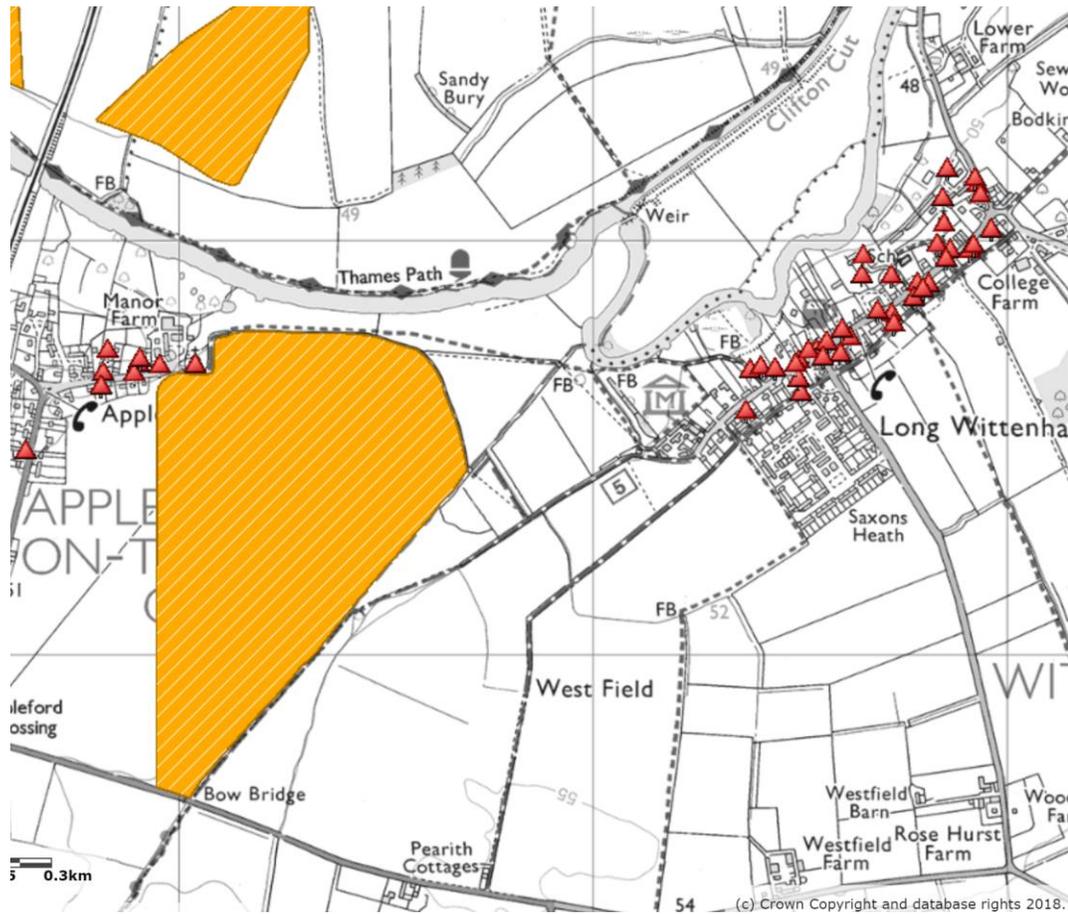


FIGURE 10: SETTLEMENT SITE SE OF CHURCH (NOT IN LONG WITTENHAM PARISH)



77. **Figure 11** shows the extent of the Long Wittenham conservation area as a solid red line. The boundary of the Green Belt, which lies outside the parish, is shown in green dots.

FIGURE 11: LONG WITTENHAM CONSERVATION AREA

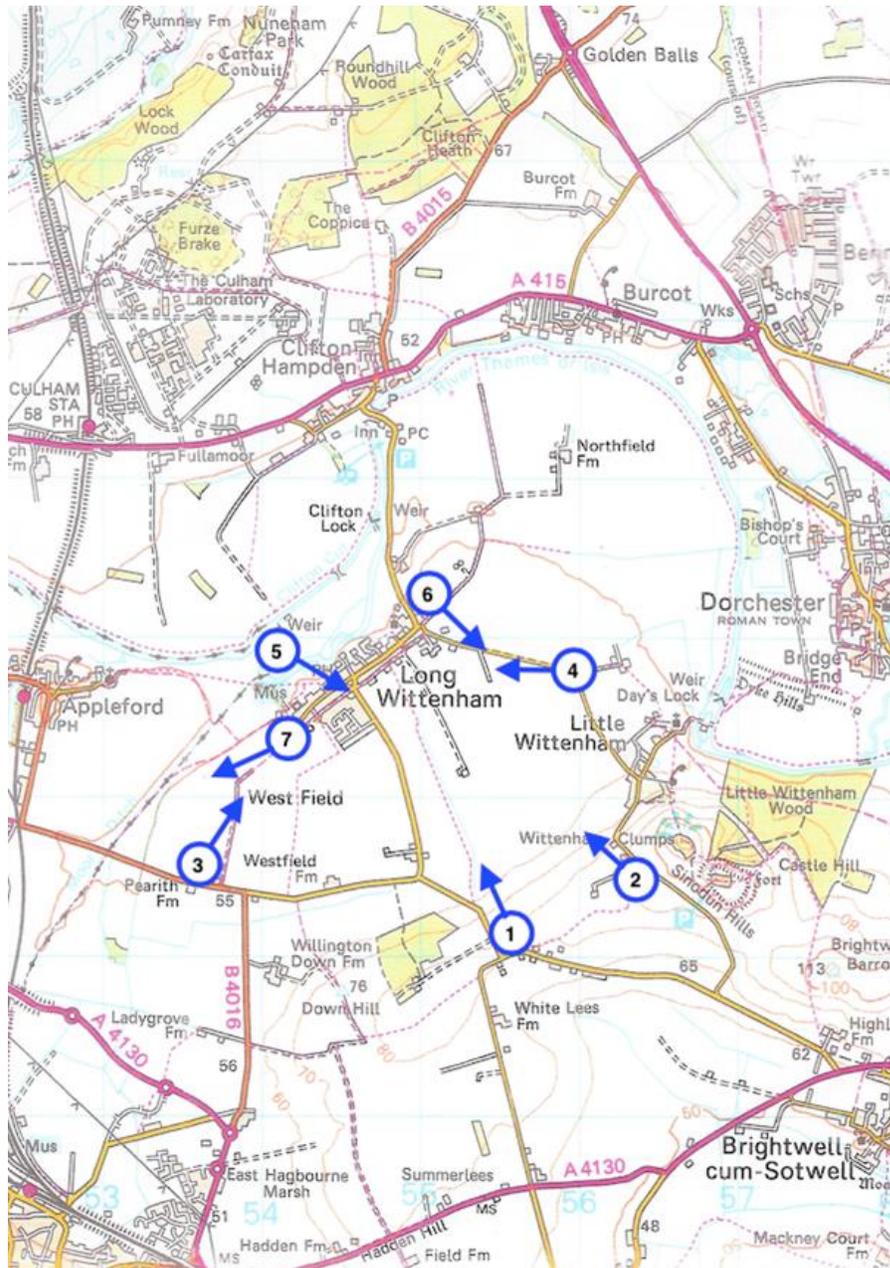


78. The conclusion that can be drawn from these policies is that development must avoid harm and should conserve and enhance heritage assets, particularly listed buildings, conservation areas, archaeology and Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

79. The steering group have taken photographs from strategic points on roads and footpaths around Long Wittenham to illustrate the nature and extent of the countryside around Long Wittenham. These photos clearly illustrate how the views into the village from the Public Right of Way (PROW) network and other public vantage points set off the village in its green surroundings.
80. **Figure 12** shows the vantage points used in this photographic study.

FIGURE 12: PHOTOGRAPHIC VANTAGE POINTS



Viewpoint 1- Sires Hill



West end of village from Sires Hill.



East end of village from Sires Hill

81. Sires Hill is an elevated piece of land south of Long Wittenham. The elevation provides good views into Long Wittenham over the intervening land comprising arable farmland with mature hedges. The first photo shows the east end of the village with the prominent church tower. The second photo shows the incline from Sires Hill and in the distance, the extent of the village, from Saxons Heath on the left and demonstrates well the linear nature of the village.
82. The photos show the green gap separation of the village to Didcot to the south. Didcot is not visible in the photos.

Viewpoint 2 View from road at the foot of Wittenham Clumps



View from road in front of Wittenham Clumps

83. This is the other elevated spot near the village- the Sinodun Hills being the outstanding feature of the whole local area. The land between Wittenham Clumps combines farmland and the area that is part of the Earth Trust. The Earth Trust land comprises an AONB, arable farmland and two recently planted forests- Paradise Wood and Neptune Wood. To the south east of the village and contiguous with Earth Trust land is land run by Sylva, the woodland charity. Sylvia land is not visible on this photo but comprises a large barn (workshops for businesses allied to wood), a 'future forest' and community orchard, both planted in 2017.
84. The view from the village to Wittenham Clumps is identified in **Evidence Paper: Character Assessment** as important. This photo illustrates that the view in the opposite direction from the Clumps to the village is also important. The Clumps is a local vantage point and the open nature of the countryside should be protected for its landscape value. There are other excellent views of Wittenham Clumps from within Long Wittenham, including views from the road approaching the village from Clifton Hampden and from Northfield Lane.

Viewpoint 3 - the Appleford Road adjacent to extent of the north east Didcot development

85. The first two photos from Location 3 show views from the road running east/west along the road from Sires Hill to Appleford along the northern border of the Didcot north east extension showing the open arable/ pasture farmland between the road and the western extent of Long Wittenham.

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These will be the views from the houses on the future NE boundary of Didcot will have uninterrupted views of Long Wittenham. These hedgerows provide for the safe movement of the Muntjac Deer that live in this area and travel widely the corridor from Pearith Farm to Wittenham Clumps.



Viewpoint 3



Viewpoint 3



Viewpoint 4 Little Wittenham Road



View to Long Wittenham from Little Wittenham Road

86. The road from Long to Little Wittenham passes over flat farmland in the meander of the River Thames. This provides excellent views into the village across the pasture (used for sheep and horses) and the woodland run by the Earth Trust/Sylva.

Viewpoint 5 - Footpath to Appleford/River Thames

87. The footpath from Long Wittenham leaves the village at St Johns Row, passes over Wards Field (A significant village asset owned by the Parochial Church Council), passes through a wood at the corner of Ward's Field, crosses Moor Ditch and then there is an elevated section towards Appleford.
88. The River Thames forms the northern boundary of the village. However, the meander in the Thames joined up with the Clifton Cut containing the lock at the east end and weir at the west end. This forms a small island between the Thames and the Cut on which cattle graze. The Thames Path runs north of the Cut.
89. There is a footpath between Long Wittenham and Appleford and walking from Appleford, there is a view over arable farmland to Ward's Field and the eastern end of Long Wittenham on one side and good views across the River Thames corridor on the other site. The path runs within 100-200 metres of the Thames for a significant distance. However, as the photos show, views from this footpath and the Thames Path give excellent views across the island and its farmland towards the ring of trees along the Thames but the village itself is mostly obscured by these trees.



View from the wier (viewpoint 8)



View from the wier (viewpoint 5)

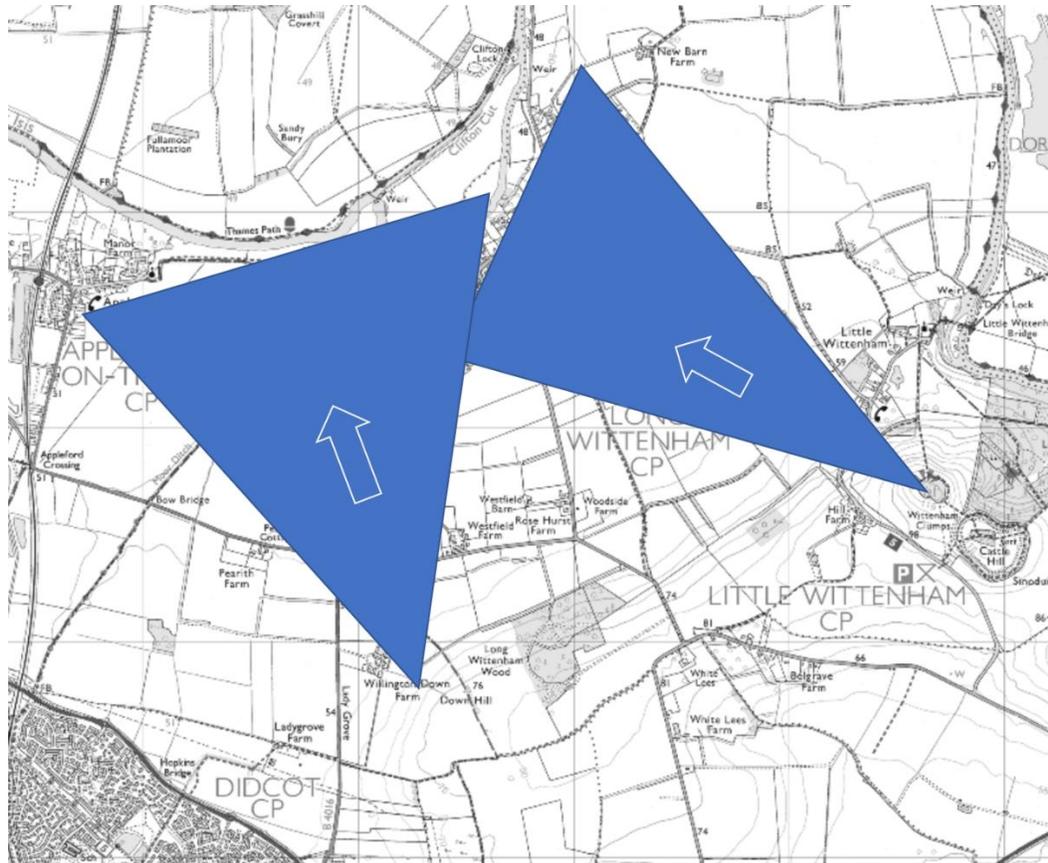


View from the wier (viewpoint 5)

IMPORTANT VIEWS

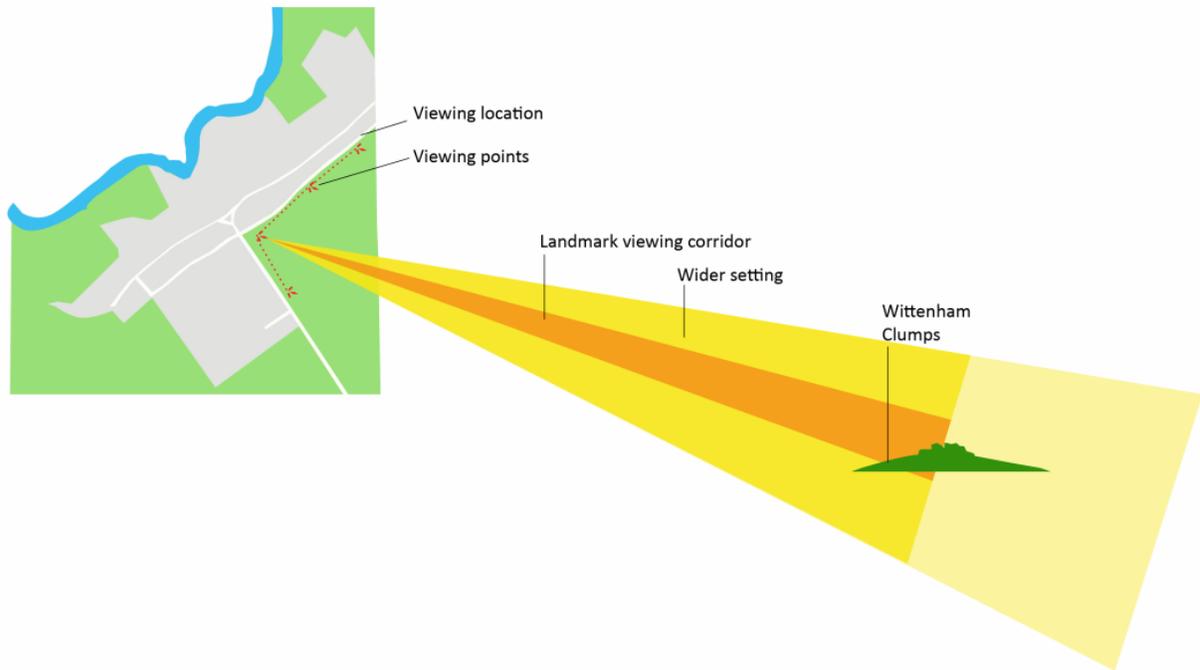
90. The photos above illustrate the importance of Long Wittenham's countryside setting which has intrinsic value as a landscape feature. The PROW (Public Rights of Way) from which the photos were taken are used by villagers and visitors for recreational and countryside walks. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan identifies the land between the Didcot border and Long Wittenham village as important and has indicated that better GI links are required between the garden city and its countryside hinterland. The Landscape Character Assessment supporting the delivery strategy identified open strategic views. The present PRoW network will provide easy and convenient access across open countryside for the approximately 2000 new homes planned in the NE Didcot Development. Paths in open land are significantly more attractive and hence likely to be better used than paths in developed areas.
91. **Figure 13** illustrates the main countryside views of importance in the parish (looking from the countryside into the village) drawn from the LCA and the photographic evidence from this document:
- The view from Wittenham Clumps over the countryside towards Long Wittenham village;
 - The view from Sire's Hill over the countryside towards Long Wittenham and Appleford villages;

FIGURE 13: IMPORTANT VIEWS FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE TO THE VILLAGE, FROM DIDCOT TOWN TO THE COUNTRYSIDE



92. In addition, the made Long Wittenham NDP policy LW4 identified and protected the view from the village to Wittenham Clumps. This is reproduced in **Figure 14**.

FIGURE 14: IMPORTANT AND PROTECTED VIEW FROM LONG WITTENHAM VILLAGE TO WITTENHAM CLUMPS.



93. There are other vantage points within the village that also provide excellent views of Wittenham Clumps including views looking south across open country as one enters the village from Clifton Hampden and views from Northfield Lane (viewpoint 6, Figure 12). Views of the church from Bodkins which were highlighted in objection comments to a recent planning application for houses on land adjacent to Bodkins and was subsequently withdrawn. Although not such a significant landscape feature there are also extensive views from the west of Long Wittenham looking beyond the Didcot Power Station towards the Wessex Downs at Harwell (viewpoint 7, Figure 12). These views will shortly be enhanced by the completion of the delayed demolition of the old coal fired power station and its associated buildings and cooling towers. These are due to be demolished in 2019 which will clear the way for better views from Long Wittenham to the west and south west.

TRANSPORT SAFEGUARDED LAND

94. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan identifies a proposed new Garden Line crossing between Didcot and Culham Science Park. The figure below is reproduced from the delivery plan.

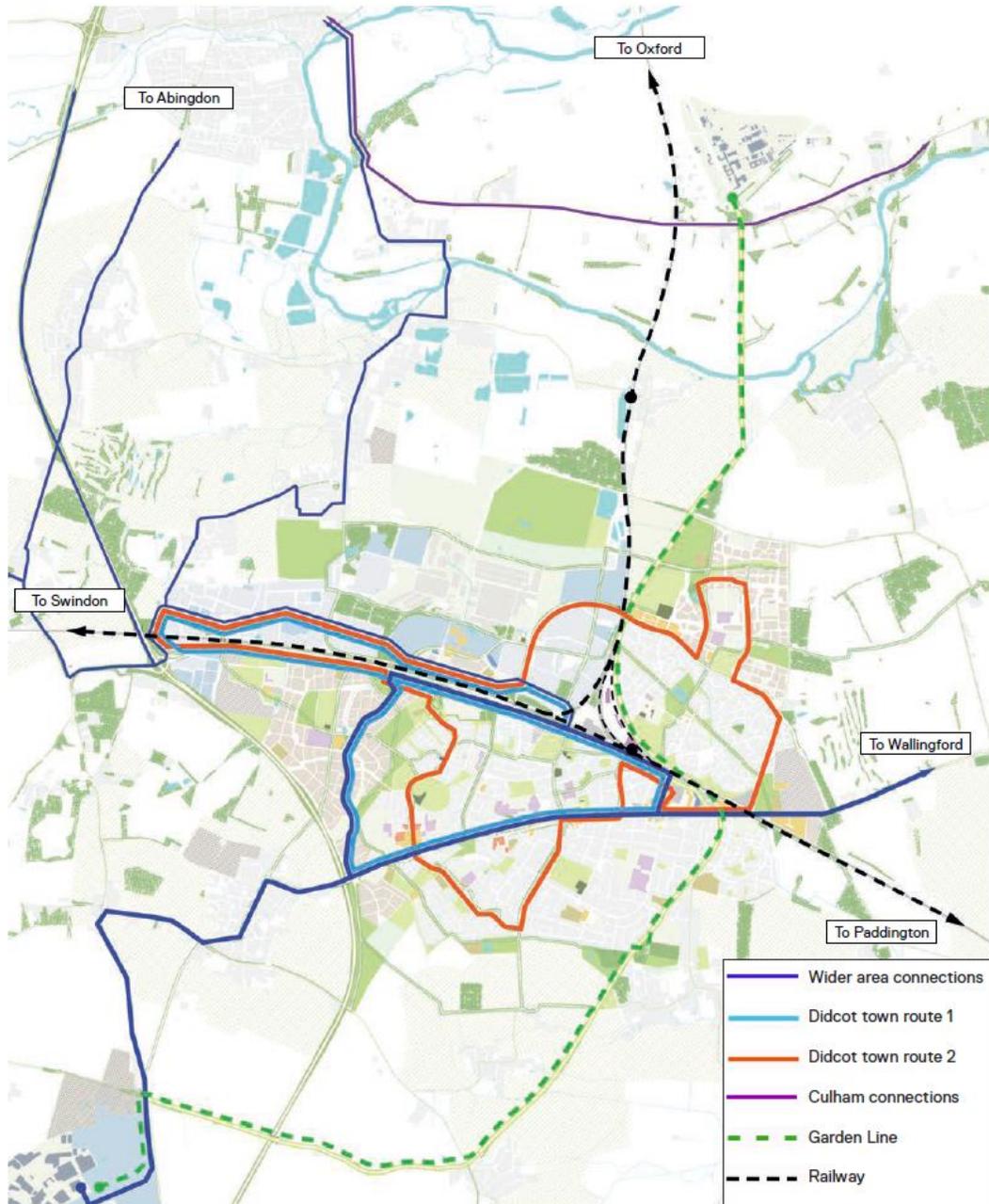
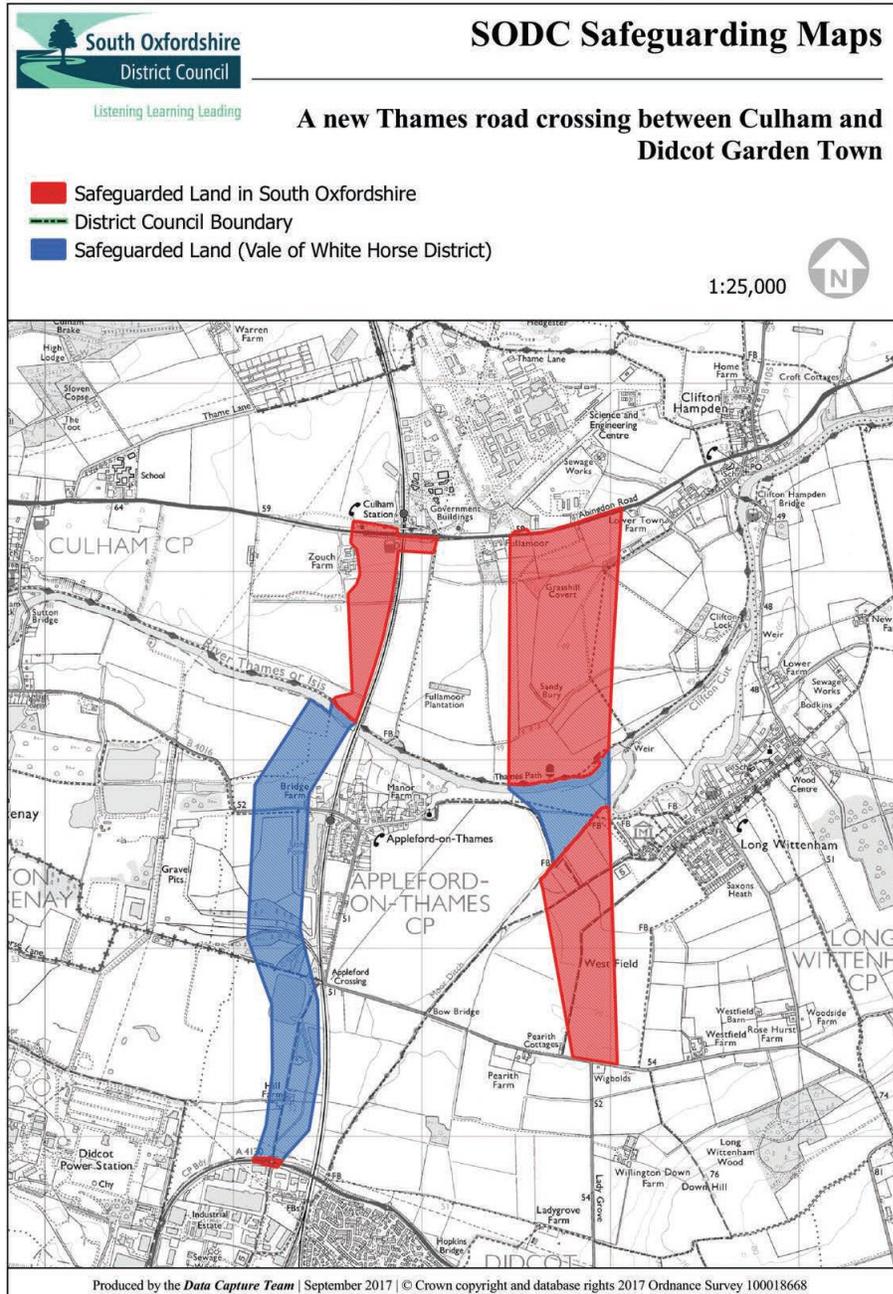


Figure 5.27 - Bus network

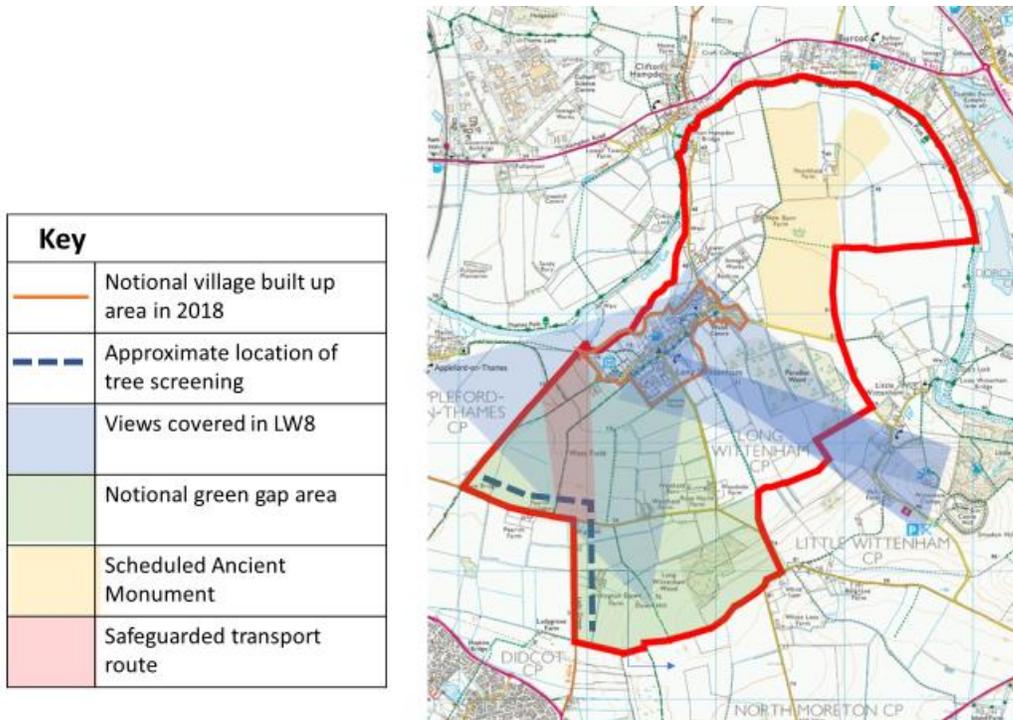
- 95. The emerging Local Plan has identified land for safeguarding for a new Garden Line Thames crossing between Culham and Didcot Garden Town.



CONCLUSIONS

96. Taken together, the constraints and features discussed above suggest that there are many areas in the parish where development will either be unsustainable or will need to be carefully managed to overcome the various highlighted constraints. **Figure 15** shows how the constraints might overlap across the parish. This figure is not a comprehensive review of all policy constraints discussed in this evidence paper: in the interest of clarity, it does not show designations outside the parish such as Green Belt or AONB, and it does not show areas subject to flooding. The omissions have been made because it is unlikely that policies in the NDP would impact upon them (though they would be impacted by them).
97. The Figure shows the notional built up area (which is comprised of the 2018 built up area and allocations proposed in this NDP), views that have been identified as worthy of protection, transport safeguarded routes, the approximate area where the Didcot Garden Delivery Plan recommends that tree screening and “green gap” be located. The delivery plan was not specific with regard to the green gap and tree screening and the annotations shown in the Figure are therefore approximate and will be tested through individual planning applications.

FIGURE 15: CUMULATIVE CONSTRAINTS (NOT TO SCALE)



98. NPPF para 28 states that non-strategic policies can be used by local communities to set out more detailed policies for specific areas which can include conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment. Para. 29 states that neighbourhood plans will be able to shape and direct sustainable development in their area.
99. The review of countryside policies set out above give an indication that there are already several constraints to development in the open countryside around Long Wittenham village. In addition, the Core Strategy and emerging local plan set out the framework of what is and is not appropriate in a countryside location.
100. The development plan and other policies and aspirations inter alia establish a set of countryside development principles that should guide the LWNDP's approach. The table below summarised the main points raised in the preceding analysis and considers what an appropriate policy response should be.

Countryside Development Principles

Policy Theme	Policy issues raised	Policy response
Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan	Green Gap between Long Wittenham Village and Didcot; Woodland buffer on edge of Didcot development boundary; Key green route to Wittenham Clumps; Long Wittenham in area of influence and provides necessary green infrastructure to the town.	Green Gap as proposed by DCTDP to include woodland buffer. Improved sustainable transport access between Didcot and Wittenham Clumps.
Housing	No isolated homes in the countryside (NPPF 123); No strategic housing allocations in SHELAA; NDP allocates development sites; Infill development along the southern edge of Long Wittenham Village are intruding on the open farmland; Development in the river floodplain would generally be inappropriate within the unspoilt floodplain pastures landscapes.	Current strategic policy does not support provision of additional housing outside Long Wittenham Village and in the river floodplain or open farmland.
Rural economy	Facilitate growth of rural businesses and enterprise; Small scale agricultural uses along the southern edge of Long Wittenham Village are intruding on the open farmland.	Rural enterprises should be allowed to grow and expand but should seek to avoid intruding into open farmland.
Tranquillity	NPPF 180 protects tranquillity in the countryside;	The tranquillity of the countryside in the parish of Long Wittenham

	<p>LCA identified significant areas of tranquillity;</p> <p>The sense of exposure and remoteness is appreciable in the Lower Valley Farmland south and east of Long Wittenham village;</p> <p>To reinforce tranquillity, landscape management priorities are to maintain permanent pasture and riverside trees.</p>	<p>should be preserved wherever possible.</p>
AONB	<p>Its setting should be protected and enhanced.</p>	<p>The setting of the AONB should be protected and enhanced.</p>
Green Belt	<p>Provides the setting for the historic settlement of Long Wittenham Village.</p>	<p>No response required.</p>
River Thames Corridor	<p>Development management should minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses with screening planting;</p> <p>Protect the sparsely settled character of the landscape.</p>	<p>Development should, when complying with Development Plan policies in the River Thames corridor, pay particular regard to managing visual impact and the need to protect the sparsely settled character of the landscape.</p>
Views	<p>Views along the river are possible but limited by trees and bends to the river;</p> <p>Extensive panoramic views from the lower valley farmland south and west of the village are visible across and out of the area from the majority of the public rights of way the Sinodun Hills, The North Wessex Downs, Didcot power station and Culham Science park are all visible;</p> <p>Development within the visually exposed landscapes of the open flat farmland will be highly prominent unless closely associated with existing build form or well-integrated with new landscape structure.</p>	<p>In addition to the view identified in the 2017 NPD, development should minimise impacts on inter-visible views between the conservation area in Long Wittenham Village and Wittenham Clumps; and between Sire's Hill and Appleford.</p> <p>Building in the view corridors should be closely associated with existing built form or well-integrated within the landscape.</p>
Urbanising influence	<p>Landscapes on the fringes of settlements are particularly vulnerable to change and special attention should be paid to creating strong landscape 'edges' to reduce the urbanising influences of development on</p>	<p>Urbanising influences should be limited with tree and plant screening at the edge of settlements and other major features such as transport infrastructure.</p>

	adjacent landscapes and to prevent the coalescence of settlements	The urban edge of Didcot Town should be screened with a woodland buffer.
Flood zones	Extensive coverage of parish with Flood Zones 2 and 3 which reduce the available development land.	Development should avoid being located in Flood Zones 2 and 3.
Historic Environment	Long Wittenham Conservation Area Listed Buildings; SAM: Settlement site at Northfield Farm; SAM: SE of Church (not in Long Wittenham Parish)	Impacts on the historic environment above and below ground should be avoided, and where necessary, new development should preserve and enhance these assets.
Safeguarded land for Garden Line	Safeguarded land cannot be development upon until released	Land safeguarded for the Garden Line shall be protected from alternative forms of development. In the event that the Green Line is built, its urbanising influences should be limited with tree and plant screening.

101. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Strategy indicated that there should be a Green Gap between the settlements of Didcot and Long Wittenham. However, it was not within the delivery strategy's gift to identify where the gap should be located and so, in Figure 8.7 from the Delivery Strategy (reproduced earlier in this document) the location of the green gap and recommended tree screening was only broadly indicated. It is for the planning authority and the NDP to refine that recommendation.
102. There is no Green Gap policy in the adopted or emerging Development Plan, i.e. the plan is silent on the matter. However, though silent, the policy approach advocated in the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Strategy is relevant.
103. Long Wittenham Parish Council, on recommendation from the Planning Authority, sought legal advice on the matter of a green gap policy and other matters. Timothy Jones stated in his Opinion⁶:

What is clear is that a policy in an NDP does not have to be supported by national or local policy: not being covered by policy is different from being contrary to policy. Provided it is not contrary to a basic condition or Convention rights, it meets the statutory tests. Hence NDP examiners have rightly upheld Gap policies in appropriate cases (sometimes with a recommended reduction in the area covered). Gap policies are not necessarily contrary to the basic conditions, although they must

⁶ 22nd October 2018

not be so extensive as to prevent sustainable development and they must genuinely relate to the gap that they seek to protect. It should be noted that among the differences between a green gap on the one hand and Local Green Spaces and Green Belts is that there is no requirement that they should be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. As with any policy they may be effectively overruled by a subsequent development plan policy.⁷ So, for example, if a safeguarded route for the new Thames Road crossing⁸ becomes a later Local Plan policy then any conflict between the NDP and the new Local Plan on this point would be resolved in favour to the latter.

104. The NDP allocates land for housing and has demonstrated that it has met and exceeded its local housing requirement as a result. There is therefore no compelling argument why additional housing land will be required over and above what has been identified. There will therefore not be a need for major development in the countryside in Long Wittenham parish and so it will be possible to introduce a notional Green Gap policy.
105. It is justified for the NDP to set out how development will occur outside the village built-up area.

GREEN GAP

A. Development will be permitted on the land identified on Figure 15 as the Green Gap that:

- a. Is for transport purposes relating to the proposed Green Line and to improve cycle and pedestrian access between Didcot Garden Town and Wittenham Clumps;
- b. Provides a woodland buffer between the built-up edge of Didcot Garden Town and the countryside.

COUNTRYSIDE INCLUDING THE GREEN GAP

B. Development will be permitted in the Countryside (defined as all land outside the built-up area of Long Wittenham Village on the date that the Long Wittenham NDP is made) that:

- a. Is not for housing other than rural exception sites or is infill development as defined in the Development Plan;
- b. Provides opportunities for rural business and enterprise to grow and expand whilst avoiding unnecessary intrusion into open farmland and countryside;

1. ⁷ This is as a result of PCPA s38(5) which states: *“If to any extent a policy contained in a development plan for an area conflicts with another policy in the development plan the conflict must be resolved in favour of the policy which is contained in the last document to become part of the development plan.”*
2. ⁸ Page 4 of the Barton Wilmore letter.

- c. Conserves and enhances the North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- d. Can demonstrate that it avoids harm to the tranquillity of the countryside;
- e. Complies with policy LW8;
- f. Closely associates with existing built form and is well-integrated within the landscape;
- g. Limits urbanising influences with tree and plant screening at the edge of settlements and other major features such as transport infrastructure.

LOCALLY IMPORTANT VIEWS

106. The planning policy and evidence review indicates that there are additional views of importance over and above what was included in the made LWNDP. The proposed NDP should include the following views for special protection.
- The view from Fieldside and other vantage points within the village over the countryside towards Wittenham Clumps;
 - The view from Wittenham Clumps over the countryside towards Long Wittenham village;
 - The view from Sire's Hill and the proposed NE border of Didcot Garden Town over the countryside towards Long Wittenham and Appleford villages.
107. The views represent large tracts of land and it is not possible to identify formal view corridors for protection within the NDP's available resources. Therefore, it will be necessary to inform development management decisions by setting out planning considerations for views identified as worthy of protection.
108. The views' value derives from the sense of openness that they provide. This is illustrated in the photo record set out above and the LCA which supported the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan. In order to retain this sense of openness, new development should not "obstruct" the views from important public vantage points such as PROW (as illustrated in the photos).
109. For the purpose of development management decisions, an "obstructed" view is where a view corridor was originally "wide", showing a broad vista over the view corridor. The view would be "obstructed" where the width of the viewable corridor becomes restricted either at the edges or within the vista to the extent that the difference is perceptible and noticeable to the viewer. There will inevitably be a range of how much "obstruction" takes place with regard to individual developments, and this will be a matter for individual proposals to address. Therefore, there may be some instances where the obstruction is imperceptible, or perceptible but acceptable, to the viewer. However, as the level of obstruction increases, there will be a commensurate increase in the perception of harm to the view and the viewer's enjoyment of the landscape.
110. Development proposals should pay due regard to the issue of obstruction of the views identified in this paper and should seek to avoid harm wherever possible. Where it is likely that a development will cause obstruction to an important view, it would be prudent to prepare a full Landscape and Visual Assessment to determine the level of harm and options for mitigation.

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