

Joint Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan

Viewing Corridors

February 2015



Views and landscape goes to the heart of the Neighbourhood Plan, in that it hinges on the fact that this is a Joint plan, combining two very different areas, town and country, and the differing parishes of Henley and Harpsden.

This is not the first time that important views have been selected for Henley. The SODC Henley Conservation Area Character Appraisal of 2004 listed ten key views, albeit focused on the Henley area. The viewing corridors in the JHHNP are intended to work alongside those of the Character Appraisal, with a certain amount of overlap but primarily to supplement each other by fulfilling their different briefs.

Viewing corridors have been selected by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group due to their local importance to the character of the area.

In terms of development, sites within the viewing corridors should show, how through a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment, that harm is not being caused. Development bordering the Chilterns AONB, and indeed on any rural areas, must be well screened and appropriately integrated to respond to the setting of the AONB, with styles of housing carefully chosen to feel rural in tone and soften the impact on surroundings. Building designs should correspond to the Chilterns Building Design Guide and the Supplementary Technical Notes on local building materials.

The viewing corridors are fully described and set out in the supporting evidence base. The diagram summarises the viewing corridors, being:

- Along the river
- Town Centre
- Fair Mile
- Harpsden Valley/Drawback Hill

Challenges:

Although described by the Chilterns AONB as “some of the finest landscapes in the country”, the rural beauty lies in its low, wooded hills, which manage to be both open and cosy. Woodlands intrinsically limit views, yet they can be stunning; similarly a series of open fields may look like nothing much in a photograph but be exhilarating to walk across. To some extent this is as true for a medieval market town as for a Chiltern landscape.

THE VIEWS

Along the river: from Henley bridge both upstream (north towards the Regatta site) and downstream (southwards); and from north and south towards the bridge and church. These are the classic, best-known images of Henley, echoing its longstanding historical role as a bridge town, with its Conservation Area waterfront, as well as its ongoing Regatta fame and its “messing about in boats” lifestyle. The river can be peaceful but is often busy with pleasure boats and oarsmen in training; bustling or quiet, it is a beautiful scene and a historic one.

Town Centre: The main views here are up the Market Place/Hart Street to the Town Hall and down it towards St Mary’s Church and the bridge. Lying within the Conservation Area, this is the town’s central crossroads and reflects

modern Henley's medieval origins. There are many other views of the streets that could also be chosen, however, these have been described at greater length in the Conservation Area Character Appraisal so it was felt that we could limit the number here. We also add an overview, looking down on the town from Greys Road/Makins playing field.

Fair Mile: The northwest approach to Henley, along the A423 from Nettlebed and ultimately Oxford, goes by the name of Fair Mile. Much of its valley floor is within the Conservation Area and contains listed buildings, while the upper slopes on both sides lie in the Chilterns AONB. Described as "a stunning entrance to the northern side of Henley" in the 2004 Conservation Area Character Appraisal, the Fair Mile is a long, straight sweep of road running between wide grass verges lined with avenues of trees. The first trees – elms – were planted between 1750 and the 1840s; these were replanted in honour of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953, with commemorative spadework by Princess Margaret. The valley vista ends in a picturesque grassy hillside, while in town the road leads to some characterful brick-and-flint buildings. As on other edges of Henley, urban becomes rural very suddenly, and the special atmosphere of the Fair Mile has elements of both. Because of its openness, its views can be appreciated by drivers as much as by pedestrians.

When it comes to views across the valley, looking from south to north, all views are along public rights of way although tend to be partially impeded by hedges and trees. Looking from north to south (from the Oxfordshire Way), the most eligible view is from The Mount.

Harpsden Valley/Drawback Hill: Immediately to the south of Henley, the town becomes countryside and a rural atmosphere pervades. The north slope of the valley is steep, open farmland; the southern slope, which is AONB, is partly ancient woodland and partly golf course, with the small village of Harpsden nestling beneath.

Looking north and northwest from the well-used public footpath that runs across the golf course, near the ruins of the Roman villa, there are panoramic views extending as far as the woods above the Fair Mile and nearly to Nettlebed (with Henley rooftops barely visible). Looking south across the valley from Drawback Hill, the view is less far-ranging but offers a dappled blend of woods and grassland. These views are particularly valued for their panoramic quality, easy accessibility and peaceful sylvan ambience.



1. Fair Mile looking south east



2. Fair Mile looking north west



3. To the bridge from the north



4. From the bridge to the north



5. Hart Street/Market Place to the west



6. Market Place / Hart Street looking east



7. River by Mill Meadows looking south



8. From Marsh Lock looking south



9. Harpsden and golf course from Drawback



10. From golf course