

**LONG WITTENHAM CHARACTER ASSESSMENT REPORT
DECEMBER 2016**

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Long Wittenham

The village of Long Wittenham is located in South Oxfordshire, 3.9 miles north of Didcot, 5.4 miles west of Wallingford, 5.5 miles east of Abingdon and 10.6 miles south of Oxford.

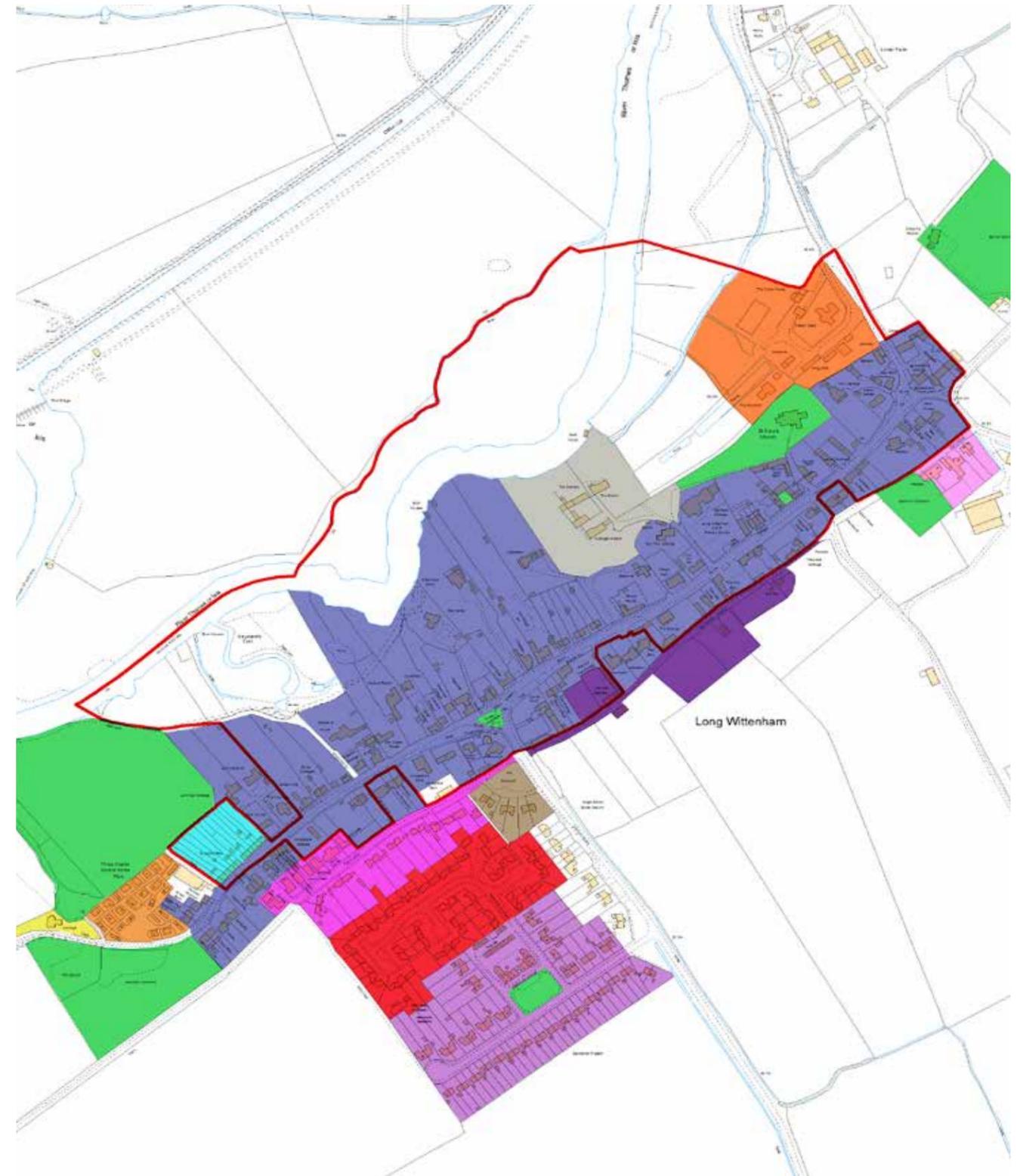
The village is located on the border of the North Wessex Downs, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural beauty of which the Wittenham Clumps form a part. The Clumps afford 360 degree views of the surrounding countryside and can be seen from several locations within the village. Also known as the Sinodun hills, they form a unique backdrop to the village and are integral to the spirit of the place.

The village is predominantly linear in nature and historically it has developed along the High Street. The linear nature of the village is further defined along its northern edge as the length of the original village runs parallel to the River Thames. The main road through the village now forms part of a main route from Didcot in the south to the river crossing of the Thames at Clifton Hampden, connecting the village with principle routes to Oxford and beyond. The original geometric form of the village has changed from a simple linear form to a 'T' shape as the village as more recent housing development has grown along the main road towards Didcot.

The organic growth of the village has been determined in recent years by the surrounding physical geography, the movement of people between the principal urban areas in South and Central Oxfordshire and connections to major transport links. The river Thames to the north and the flood plain precludes development in this direction as does the agricultural land to the west, but the road leading from Didcot and the A34 in the south to the river crossing at Clifton Hampden is perhaps the principal determining factor in the way in which sites for recent development have been chosen.

For the purposes of assessing the character of Long Wittenham, a scoring system was implemented in order to identify those elements which the group found to contribute to the character in a positive way and those which were felt to detract from the character of the village. The scoring represents the collated views of the group and is, as is inevitable with such an ethereal concept as defining the spirit of the place, subjective. However, it can be roughly defined as follows: a positive score might be attributed to exemplary buildings of their period; the arrangement or relationships of those buildings to their surrounding landscape; the landscape itself be it private gardens or public space ranging from grass verges and ditches, to hedgerows and mature trees to the surrounding fields and countryside, all of which could be thought of as constituent parts which when considered together define the spirit of the place. Following the review of each area, the group attributed a rating to each aspect of the built environment from each location to ascertain whether it contributed positively or detracted from the spirit of the place that makes Long Wittenham unique. A rating of either -1, 0 or +1 was given; -1 seen as making a negative contribution and +1 a positive contribution to the village. Identifying the positive and negative attributes of the village in this way can be used to help inform any new developments with regards to what the community would encourage in prospective new developments and those things, be they materials, scale, density, style, which they would feel would detract from the existing character of the village.

As might be expected in a village which has had an organic development, there are a range of architectural periods evident in the village of Long Wittenham ranging from the 13th century Cruck Cottage through numerous examples of thatched cottages to Georgian and Victorian properties up to 20th century buildings. Although there is building stock from a range of historical periods, it is still possible to identify a palette of materials from these buildings which contribute to make a local vernacular architecture, materials such as; red brickwork in a Flemish bond especially with traditional lime mortar pointing; blackened timber cladding such as is found on agricultural buildings; traditional timber casement or sliding sash windows; red roof tiles, slate or traditional thatched roofing and white painted render walls. There is also a common sense of scale within with houses, irrespective of their period, being no more than 2 1/2 storeys in height. The above material palette forms a local vernacular architecture specific to the area. Together with its unique setting, these attributes define the unique character of Long Wittenham.

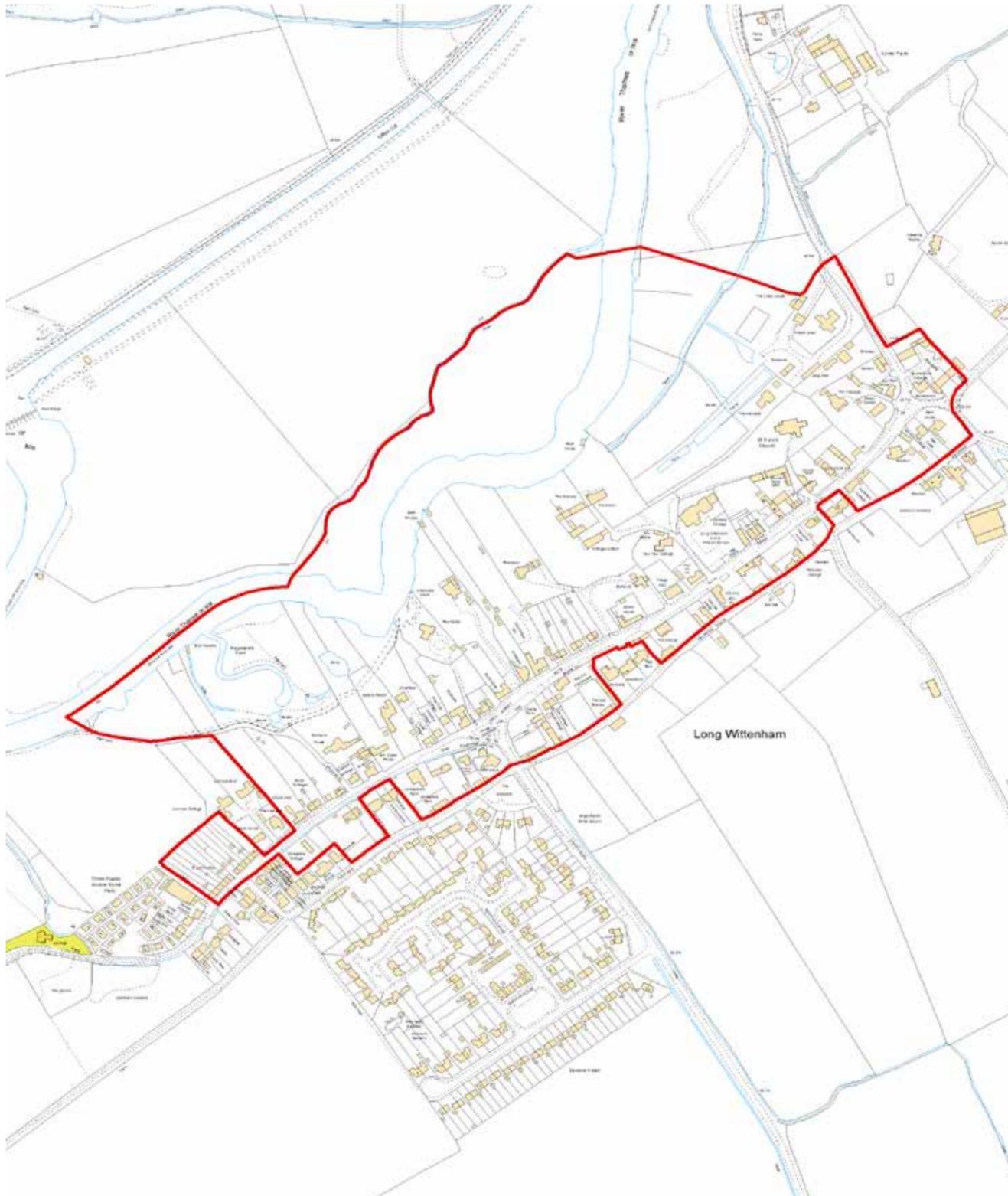


Aim of Character Assessment

The aim of this document is to collate the findings of an independent and diverse group of local residents which identified those features within the built environment that contribute to the unique and distinctive character of Long Wittenham.

For the purposes of this report, the village was considered as being composed of a number of distinctive areas, each with its own identifiable character. The character of each area was assessed with regard to building type and scale, density, streetscape, distinctive features etc. The group has also considered open green spaces, views into and out of the village, spaces in between buildings, topography and landscape, gardens and planting, grass verges etc. The red line on the map shows the boundary of the conservation area.

The following pages list out the various merits of each area found by the group, moving from the west of the village to the east.



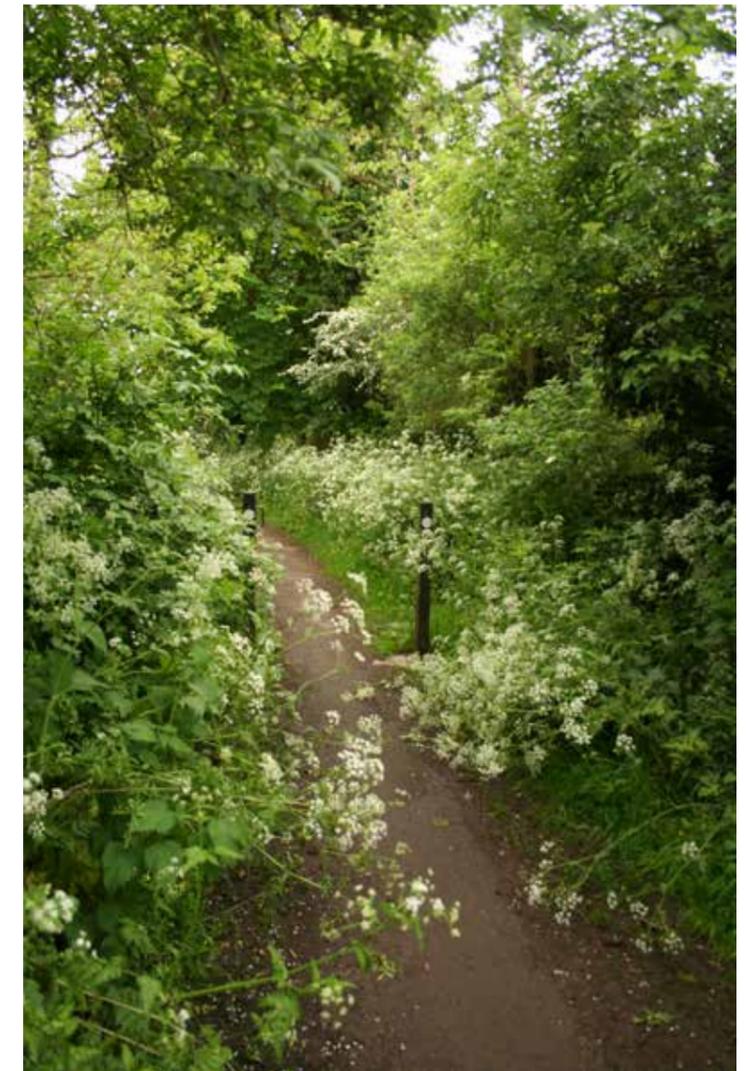
MAP SHOWING AKLINGS

ACKLINGS

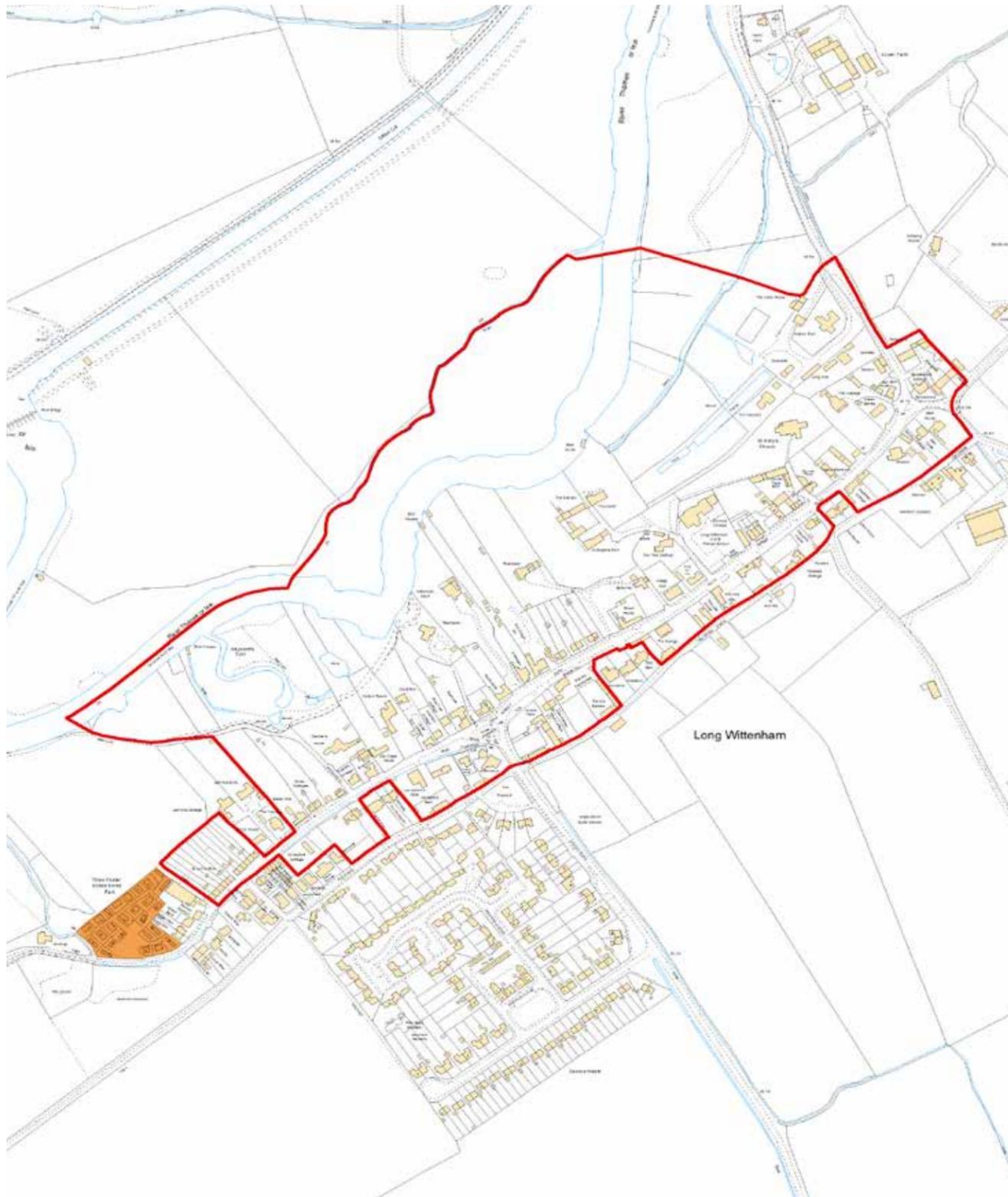
The area is identified by the name of the house that sits at the western boundary and gateway into the village from the NCR (National Cycle Route) 5. The property itself is a large detached house built in the later part of the last century. The house has no immediate neighbours and sits on a detached plot of mature gardens surrounded by tall trees. The house neither detracts from nor contributes to the village as a whole given its isolated position in relation to the rest of the village, however it does serve as a landmark to one of the entry points of the village. The property is the last in the village before the made road of the High Street becomes a bridle way and footpath that runs between fields and open countryside and eventually joins up to the Ladygrove estate in Didcot. When viewed from above, this part of the village can be seen as part of the original linear structure of the village, but the route of the road, which turns towards the south at the Cross, has redirected development towards the South, directing traffic away from this area.

Rating: 0. The house at Acklings does not have any architectural elements which are specific to Long Wittenham

or that could be said to be typical of a south Oxfordshire vernacular. In this way it doesn't contribute to the character of the village; it's location is removed from the heart of the village and as such doesn't detract from the older period properties which do have architectural elements of merit. The immediate surroundings of the property do contribute to the rural character of Long Wittenham with its hedgerows, mature trees and proximity to open countryside and agricultural land.



WESTERN ENTRANCE TO LONG WITTENHAM



MAP SHOWING Poplars Park

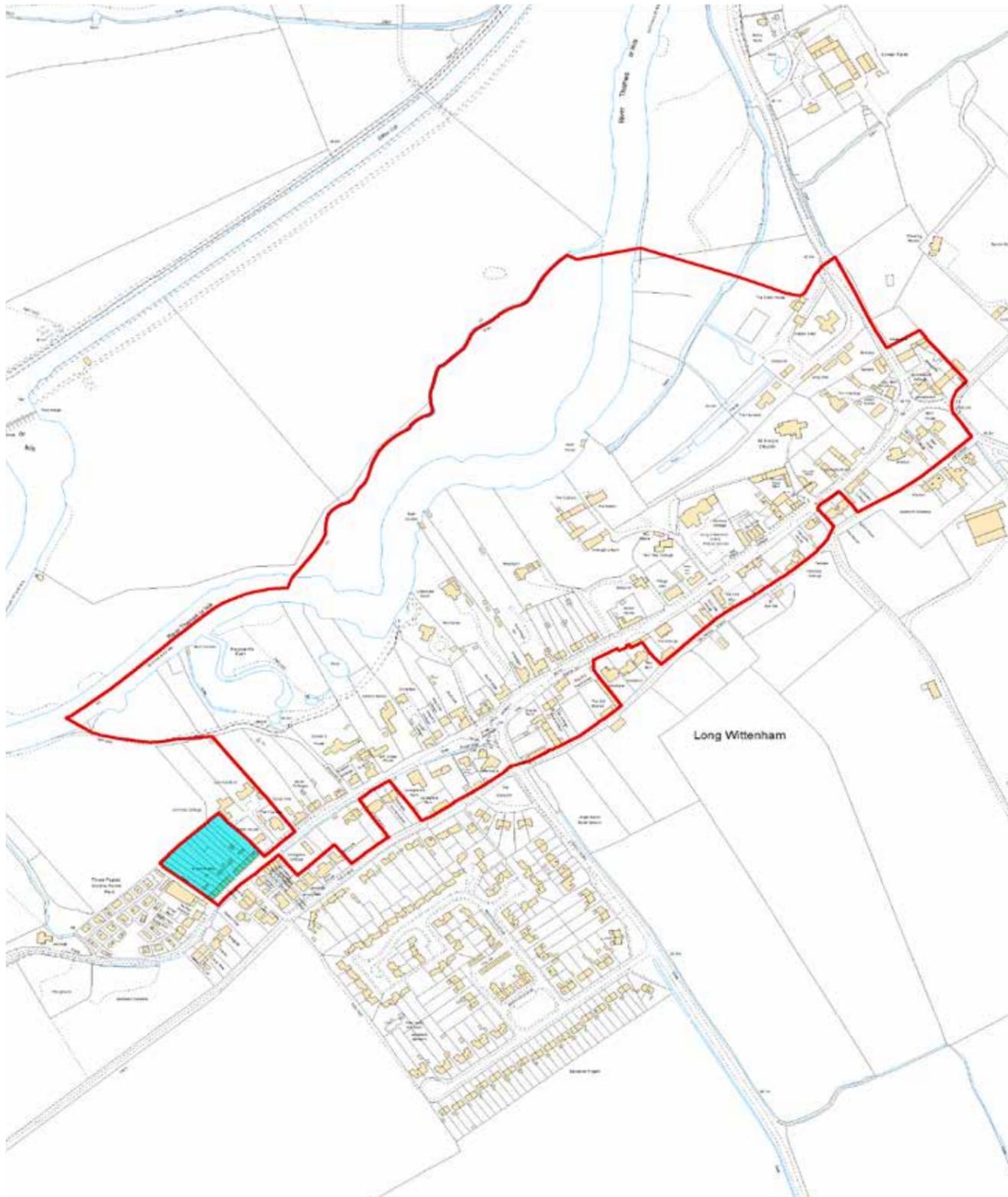
Poplars Park

Poplars Park is a mobile home park located at the western end of the village. Its location, the local topography and the change in direction of the High Street shield it from view from the neighbouring buildings on the High Street. The site appears well managed and enjoys views across the adjacent Ward's Field towards the river. The mobile home park sits in isolation from the rest of the village by its intrinsic nature and as such neither contributes nor does it detract from the village as a whole.

Rating: 0.



Poplars Park SITE



MAP SHOWING ST John's ROW

ST JOHN'S ROW

St John's Row is located at the western end of the village. The row is formed of two separate terraced rows of houses which are divided by a small gap. The houses were most likely originally built to serve as farm or railway workers cottages and are Victorian in period. The scale of the houses are typical of two storey terraced houses of this period, but most of the houses have been modified since their original construction (among the first concrete shuttering constructions in the UK) with front porch additions and evidence of the roof spaces having been converted into additional accommodation.

The character of the terrace is further enhanced by the variation in colour of the houses bringing individuality whilst still remaining a cohesive whole. The High Street in this location widens to provide an opportunity for on street parking that still permits traffic to pass by unhindered. There are no front gardens to the properties but the gardens to the rear are long. The built environment fosters the sense of a concentrated community within the wider village context.

Rating: +1. The group felt that St John's Row positively contributes to the urban environment of Long Wittenham.

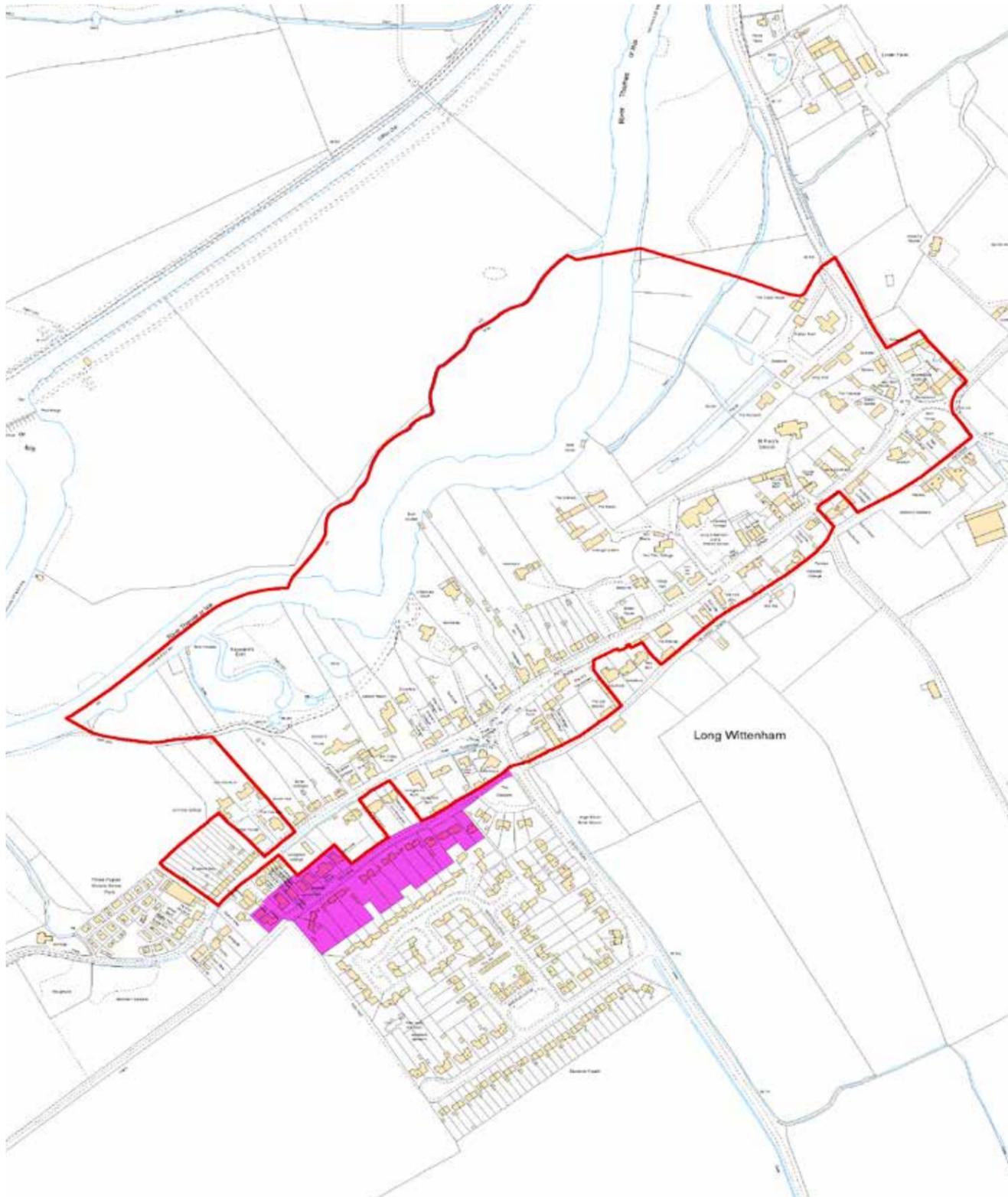


ST JOHN'S ROW

FIELD SIDE WEST

Fieldside runs parallel with the High Street along the majority of its length through the village. The nature of properties along the length of the road vary in type and scale and the materials used in the buildings. The nature of the road surface also changes. The properties at this end of the village are a mix of semi detached ex local authority properties, detached bungalows from the late twentieth century and some larger two storey detached houses. The majority of houses have front gardens which enriches the urban environment. The street itself is wide but suffers from a poor quality broken concrete road surface which detracts from the quality of the space. The westerly end of the road turns into one of the many public footpaths within the village, which runs along the edge of a field. From this point there are good views across fields to distant hills, but given the orientation of the street, very few of the properties on the street will benefit from the view directly.

Rating: 0. The group could not agree that the poor road surface was a negative influence; some saw this as a mechanism for reducing the volume of traffic.



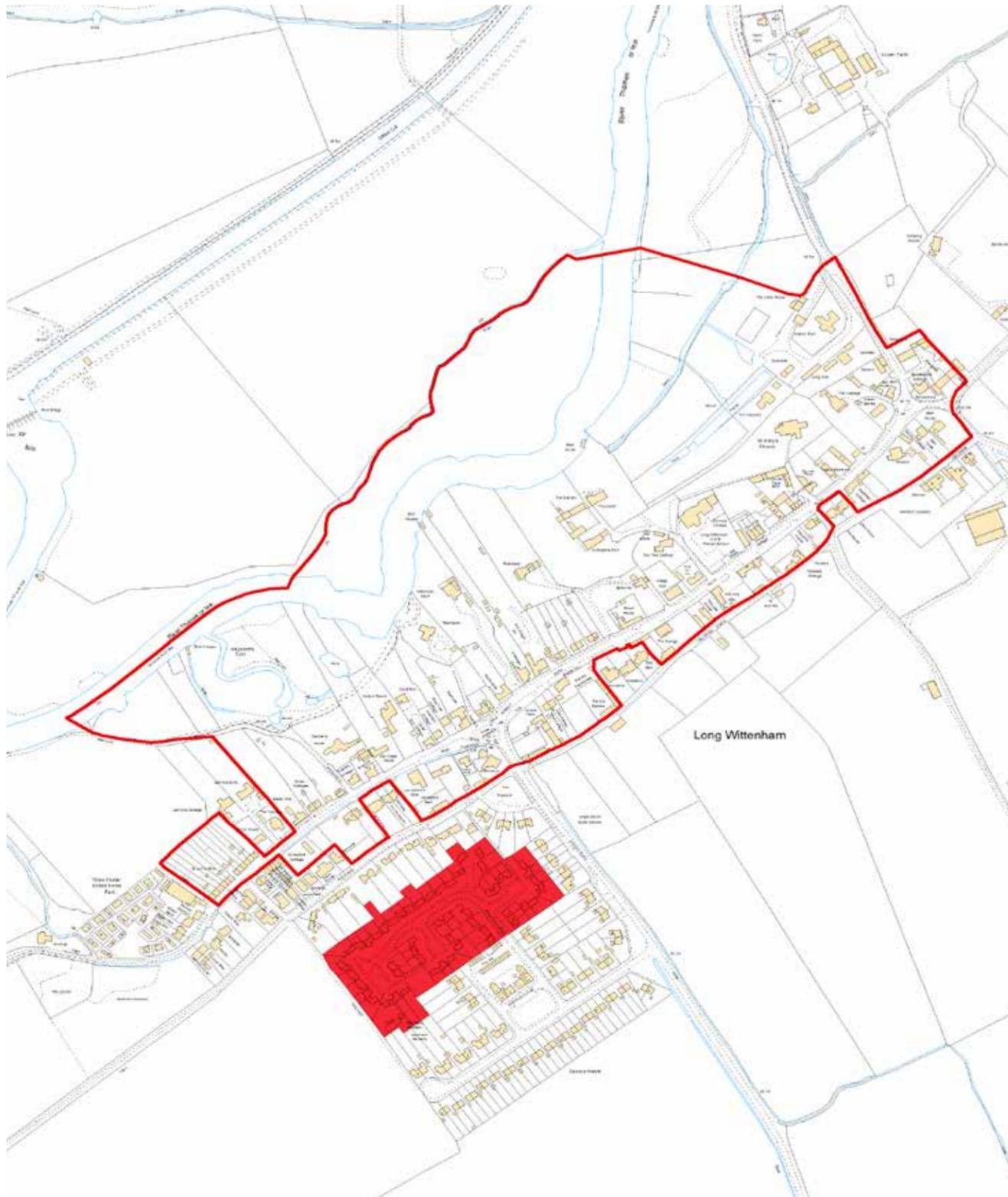
MAP SHOWING FIELD SIDE WEST



FIELD SIDE WEST



VIEW OF FIELDS FROM FIELD SIDE WEST



MAP SHOWING WESTFIELD ROAD

WESTFIELD ROAD

Westfield Road is situated to the south west of the centre of the village and the High Street in Long Wittenham and is accessed from Didcot Road. Westfield Road was built in the early to mid 1970s and marks the last time that the village saw any significant residential development. There are a limited number of types of houses at Westfield Road; some are detached and some are 'linked'. When the areas of Westfield Road and particularly Saxons Heath are viewed on a map it becomes apparent that these two most recent areas of development in the history of the village are not knitted into the existing fabric of the village but rather form more of a satellite development. The approach which has been taken when planning these areas and the siting of them relative to the existing village make it difficult for them to integrate with the rest of the village, despite them falling within the envelope of what is considered the limits of the village.

The houses are two storey and are predominantly built from a pale brick with elements of painted plastic cladding boards. Each house has space for off street parking but there are a number of cars parked on the street also. Although the layout of the development is designed to provide a sense of spaciousness, it was felt that the area can feel cluttered. All houses benefit from front and rear gardens and in some locations the area benefits from mature plants and trees.

Rating: 0. It was felt that the materials of the houses were not in keeping with the local materials of the village and that the type of houses were very uniform, not respecting the local vernacular and setting the area apart from the properties within the conservation area.

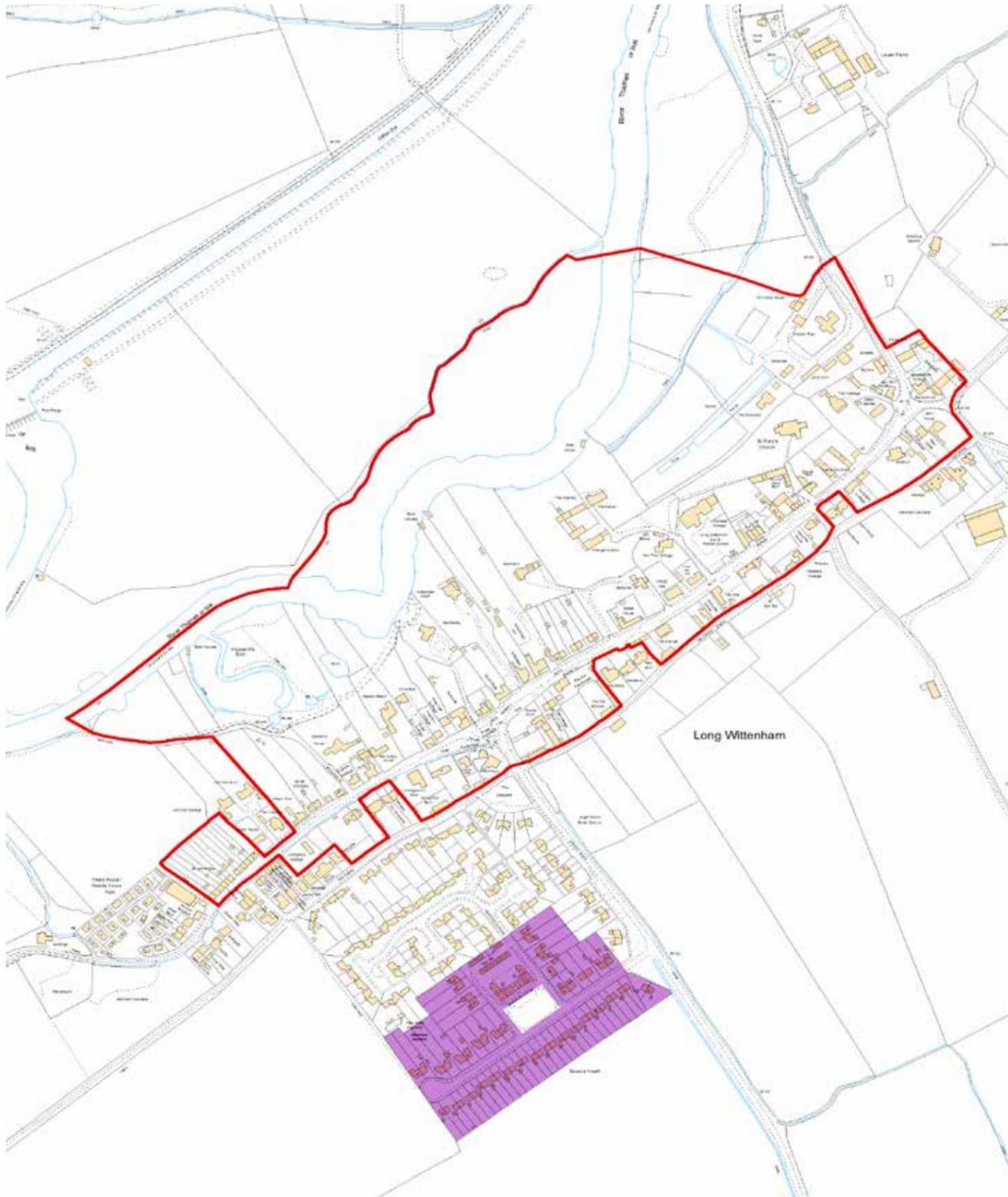


WESTFIELD ROAD

SAXONS HEATH

The houses at Saxons Heath are at the edge of the southern point of the village and borders onto fields. The semi detached properties are ex local authority houses and are uniform in nature. The properties are one and a half storeys high, with dormer windows in the roof space providing additional accommodation above the ground floor rooms. The houses have been improved upon since their original construction with new cladding to the facades. The urban environment is dominated by the houses to the south of the road which are set out in a single uniform line. There is a pocket of green space at the heart of Saxons Heath which serves as a focal point for the local community. The properties enjoy good views across open countryside to the rear. As with Westfield Road, the properties at Saxons Heath seem remote from the heart of the village and there is little attempt in the planning of the area to connect them with the wider fabric of the village.

Rating: 0. In spite of the good views to open country at the end of the road it was felt that the parking of vehicles on the verges and the road detracted from this positive aspect.



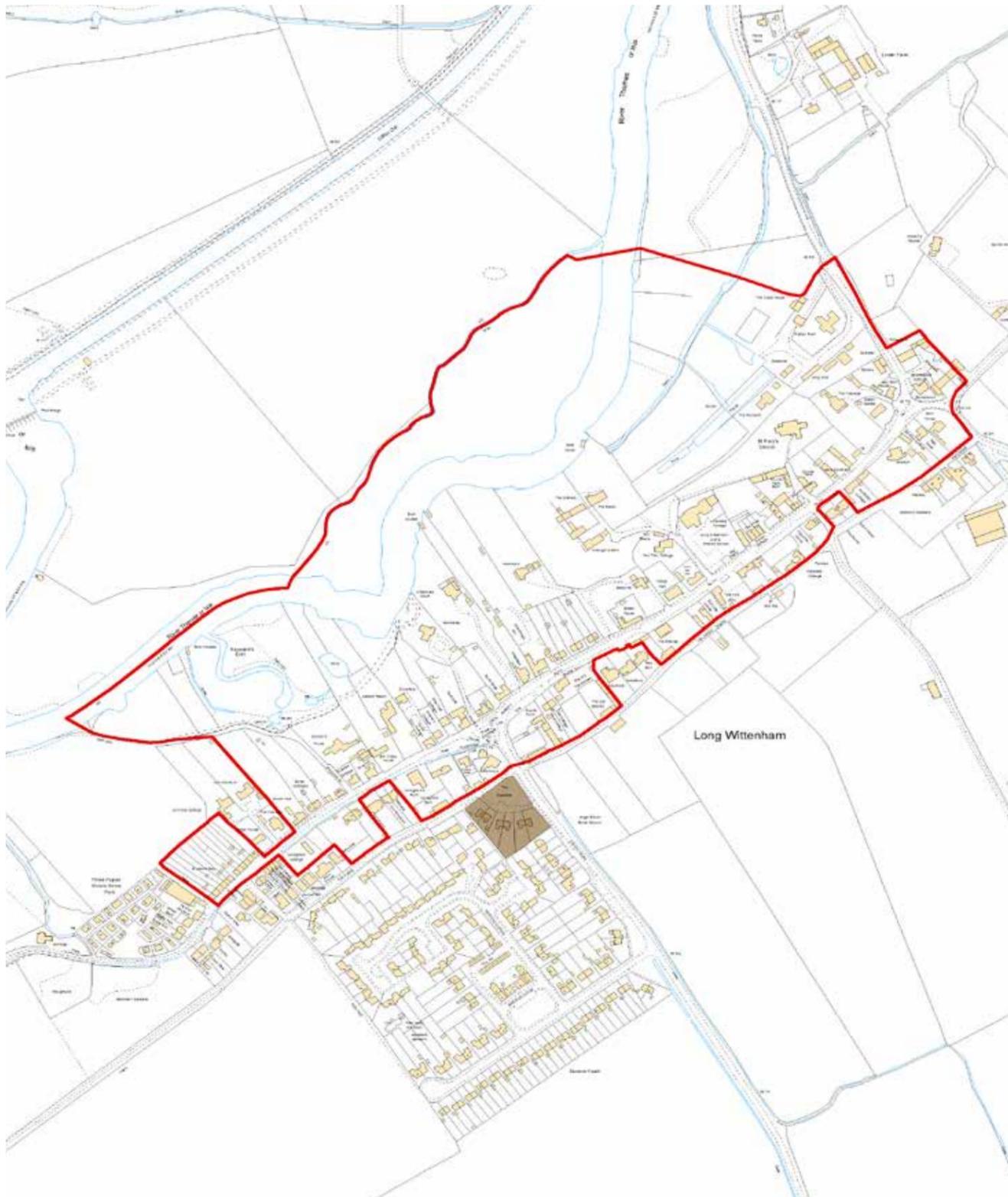
MAP SHOWING SAXONS HEATH



SAXONS HEATH



GARAGES AT SAXONS HEATH



MAP SHOWING THE CRESCENT

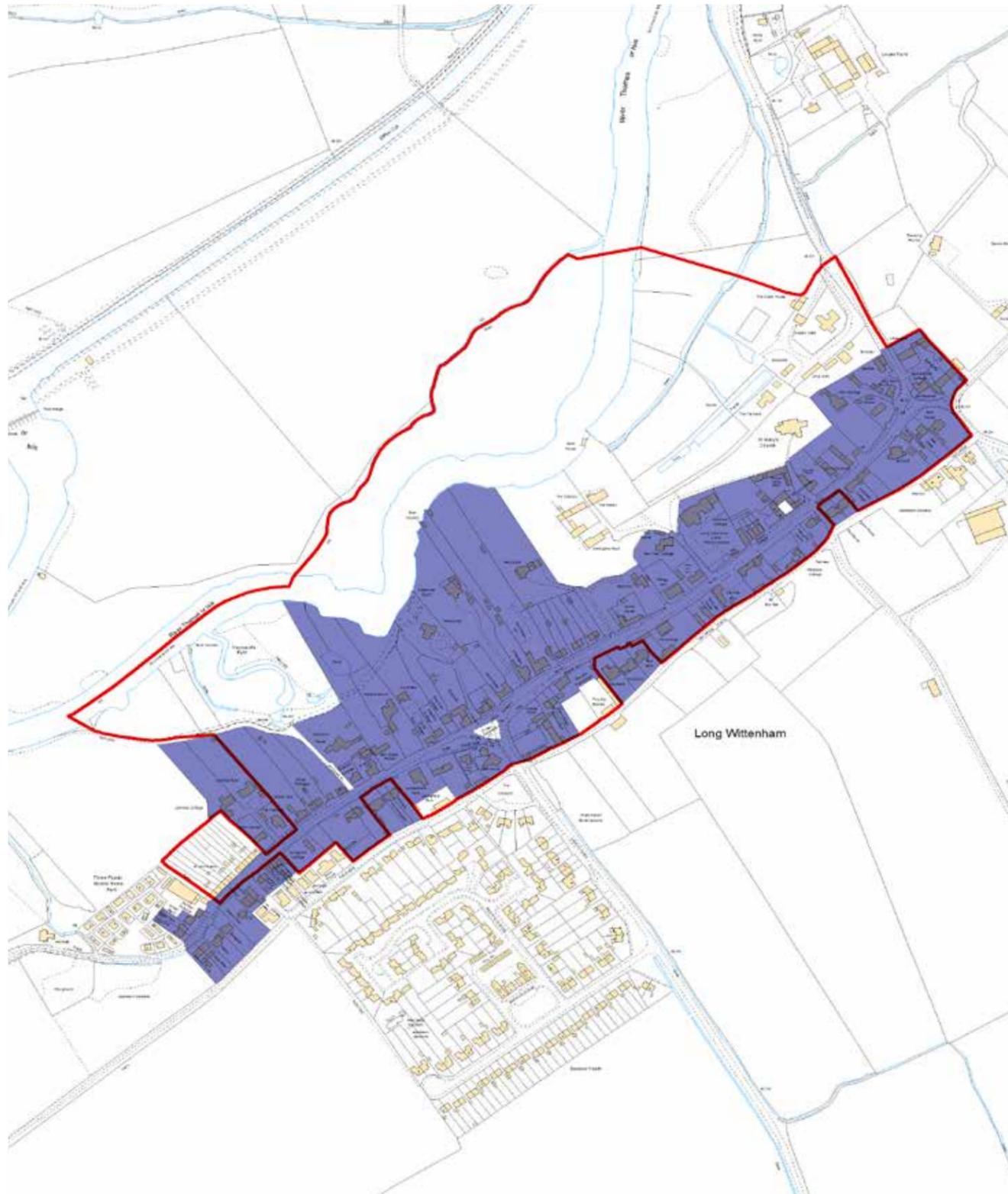
THE CRESCENT

The Crescent is a small development of six semi detached houses located at the corner of Fieldside Road and Didcot Road. The houses are arranged such as to provide generous front and rear gardens and two access points to the properties; either via Didcot Road or Fieldside. There is also an informal space in front of the properties which is owned by the Parish Council and rented by residents of The Crescent. The space is well maintained and planted and contributes positively to the public realm. It was felt that while the green space contributed in a positive way to the character of the village, the properties themselves were less inspiring and did not reference the local vernacular.

Rating: 0.



ADOPTED SPACE AT THE CRESCENT



MAP SHOWING THE HIGH STREET

THE HIGH STREET

The High Street forms the largest and central part of the village; the majority of the properties of the High Street sit within the conservation area. The type of properties vary greatly from Cruck Cottage, thought to date back to the 13th century, thatched detached cottages, Victorian detached houses and semi detached cottages through to late 20th century detached properties. Despite the great variation, the scale of the properties are all similar with no property being above two to two and a half storeys tall at the most.

The urban grain of the High Street is varied which adds great interest to the built environment. The High Street has a very permeable nature with very few hard boundaries along the edges of the properties; most boundaries are composed of either fencing or planted with hedges which contributes to the open feel of the area. The High Street also benefits from numerous public rights of way and gaps between buildings which give an increased sense of depth and interest to this area of the village.

There is strong evidence of a vernacular architecture among the properties of the High Street where there is a consistent use of a limited palette of materials. The use of thatch, white painted render, red brick, timber frames, clay tiles and black timber weather boarding all contributes positively to the aesthetic of the urban environment. The variety of buildings along the High Street and their setting within the landscape contribute positively to the character of the village.

The High Street benefits from mature planting and incidental green spaces, including the war memorial which is situated in front of the village school and is flanked on either side by mature trees. The memorial provides a focal point within the village. The road is bordered for most of its length by grass verges. In places the verges are a positive asset as they are able to thrive, however, in a number of locations the verges are used for parking cars which damages the verges. In places the damage is quite significant and detracts from the appearance of the High Street. Poor quality signage also has a negative impact on the built environment.

Rating: +1; with both positive aspects but areas which detract from the rural environment.



CRUCK COTTAGE ON THE HIGH STREET

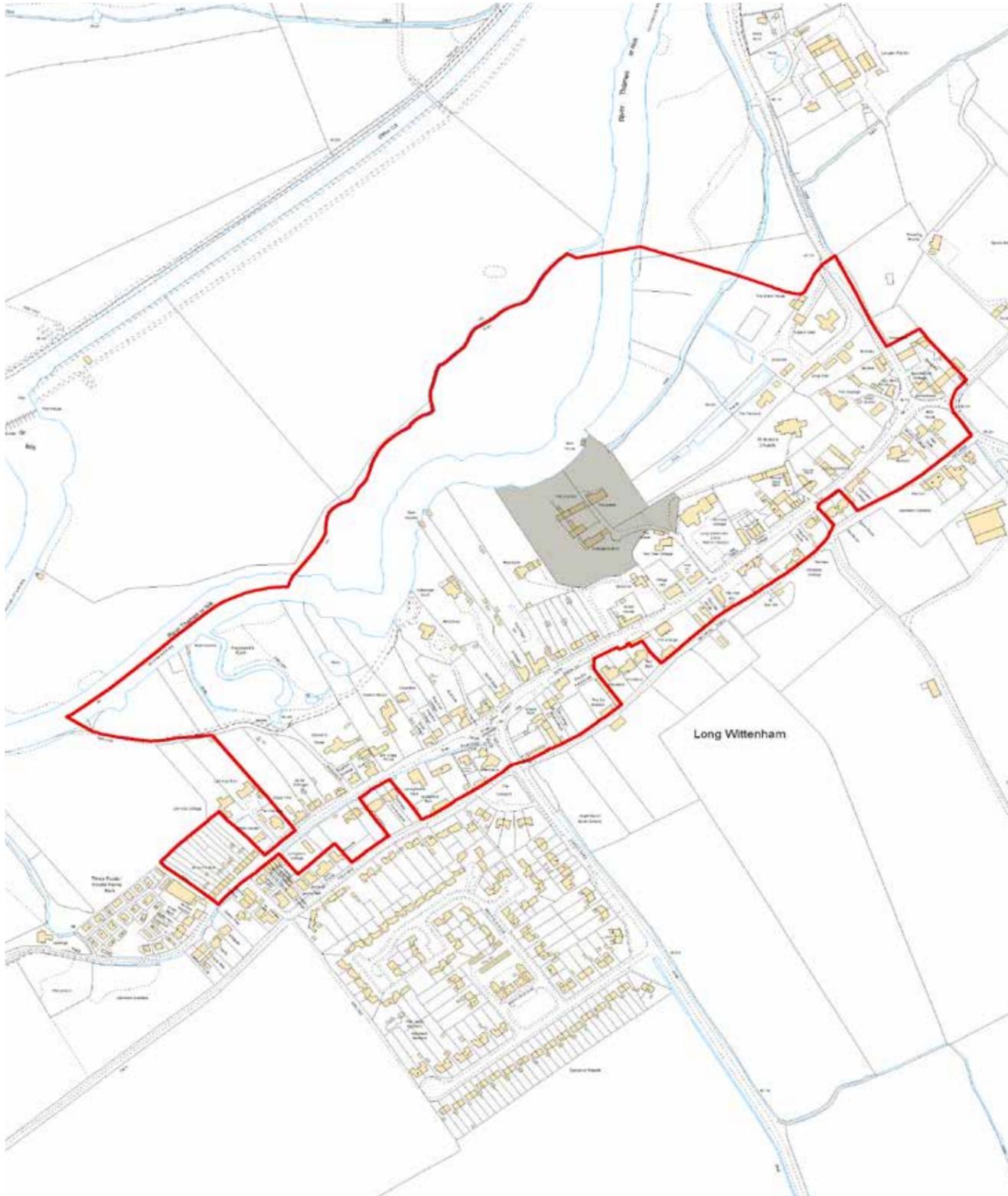


THE CROSS ON THE HIGH STREET

GRANARY AND MANOR

The Manor house, Granary and barn buildings are set back from the High Street and sit apart from the rest of the properties of the High Street. The buildings exhibit many of the characteristics of the properties on the High Street and could be considered to be of the vernacular architecture, using black timber boarding, red brick and clay tiles. The setting of the buildings, the local surroundings and the landscaping all contribute positively to the character of the village.

Rating: +1.



MAP SHOWING THE MANOR



THE MANOR AND THE GRANARY

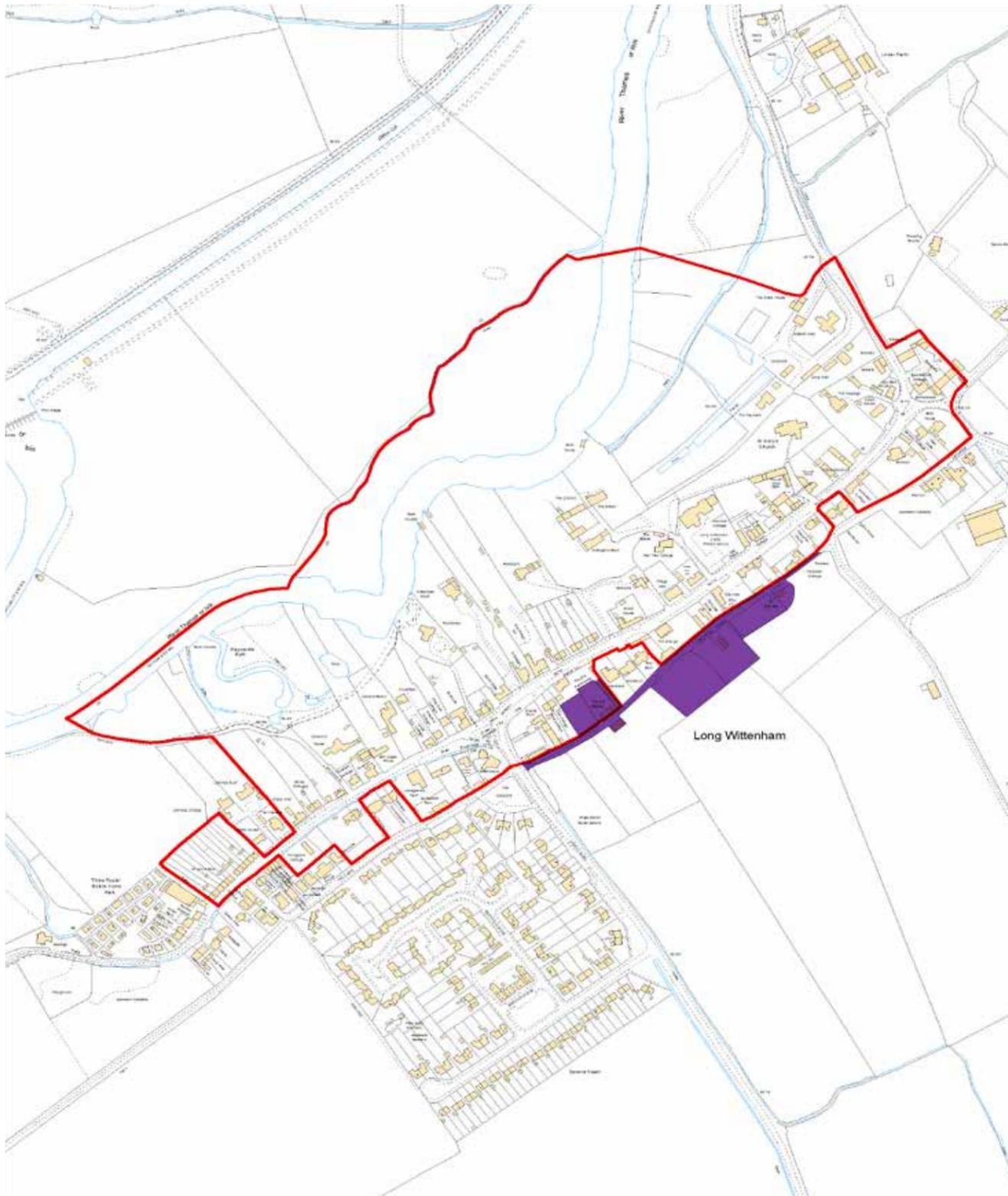
CENTRAL FIELDSIDE

The area is the setting for only a handful of residential properties but they enjoy uninterrupted views across open fields towards the Wittenham Clumps. The style of the properties evoke their earlier use as agricultural buildings.

The area mirrors the linear nature of the central portion of the High Street conservation area and acts as a boundary to the southern edge of the village in much the same way as the river does to the north. It is served by a track rather than a made road, which was seen by many as a positive factor as it would appear to discourage high traffic volumes, which further encourages pedestrian priority and use. The location currently affords all residents a progressive series of changing views out of the village towards the Wittenham Clumps and is accessed via four separate public rights of way along its length, which contributes to the permeable sense of the village. The edge of the track is bordered by a simple wire fence which gives the sense that the edge of the village gently dissolves into the surrounding countryside.

This area benefits greatly from the special nature of the conservation area and the views out to the Clumps. The public right of way, the sense of openness and the distant views all contribute greatly to the local environment and character of the village, attributes which would be encouraged in any new development.

Rating: +1.



MAP SHOWING FIELDSIDE CENTRAL



FIELDS AND PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY



CLUMPS FROM FIELDSIDE

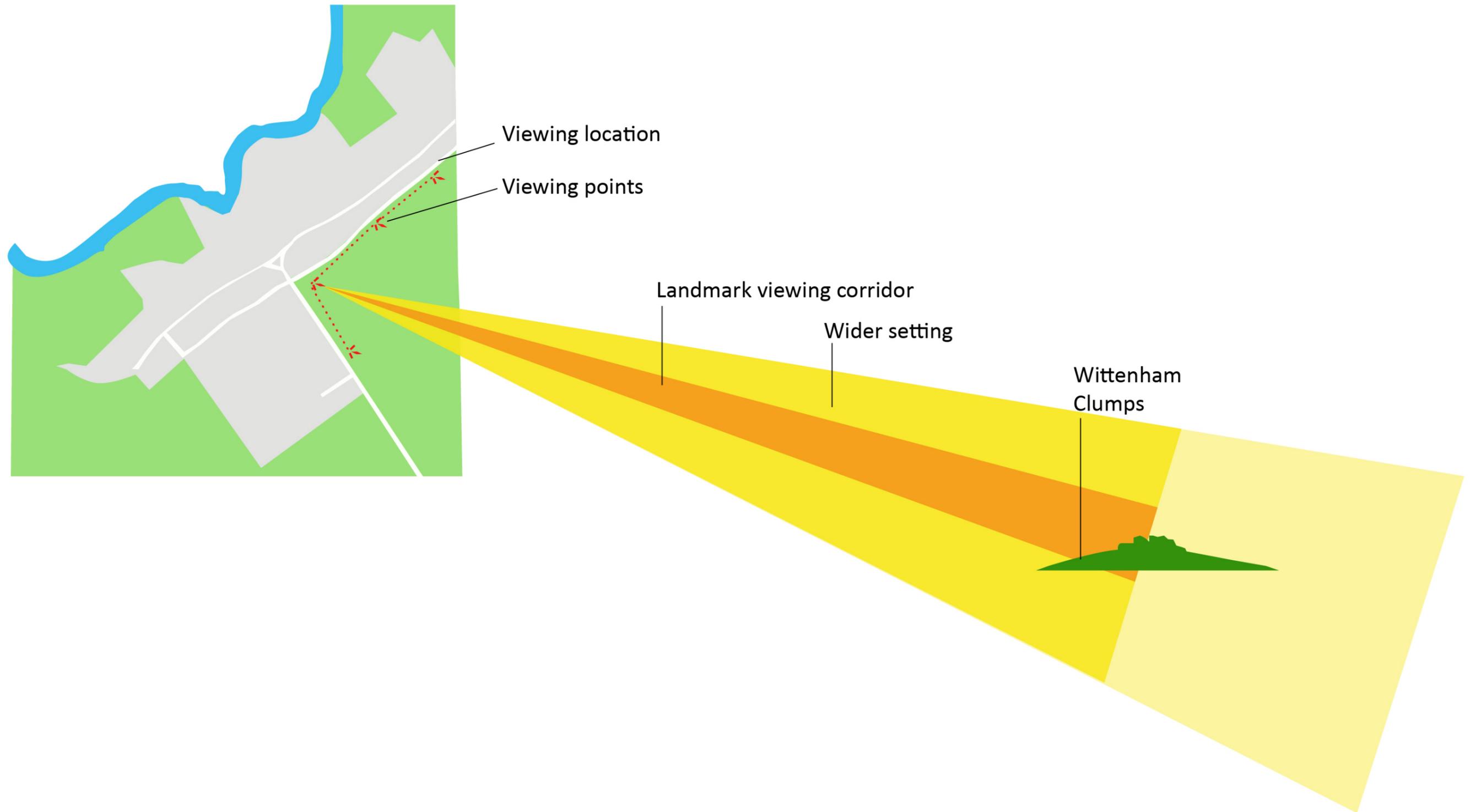
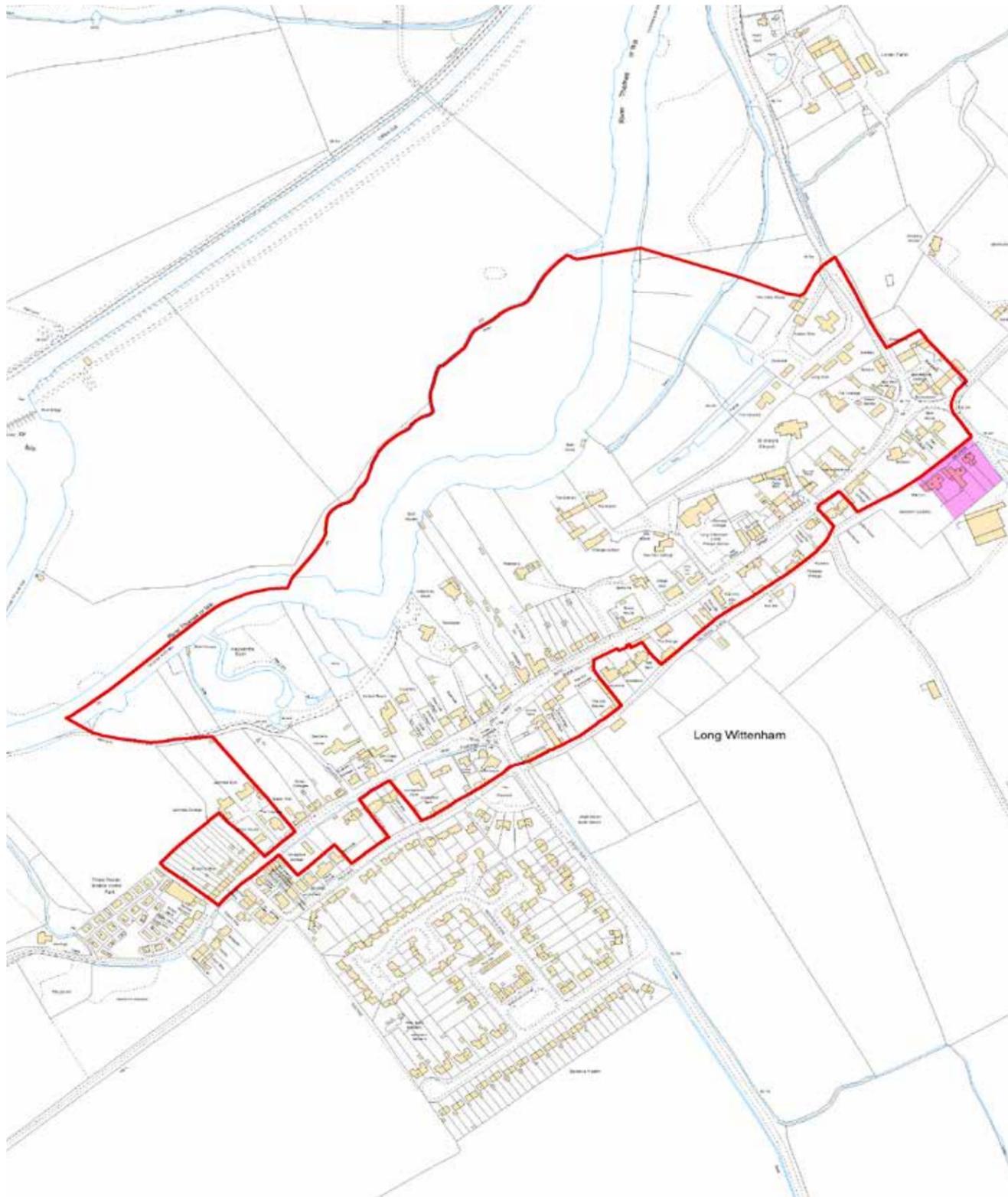


DIAGRAM SHOWING PRINCIPAL VIEWPOINTS AND VIEWING CORRIDORS ALONG FIELDSIDE IN LONG WITTENHAM TOWARDS THE WITTENHAM CLUMPS



MAP SHOWING FIELDSIDE EAST

FIELDSIDE EAST

Located at the eastern end of the village parallel to and behind the High Street, vehicular access to Fieldside East is gained via the road to Little Wittenham; it is also possible to access the area on foot via the public right of way. The area exhibits a mix of terraced cottages and larger semi detached and detached properties which back onto open agricultural land. A few of the properties have front gardens but the majority sit directly on the street; the street however is a no-through road and has a quiet and small community feel. The area benefits from large mature trees and is in close proximity to a set of allotments, further enhancing the green feel of the area. The presence of parked cars on the street detracts from the environment but the numbers are low owing to the small number of houses.

Rating: +1.



FIELDSIDE EAST

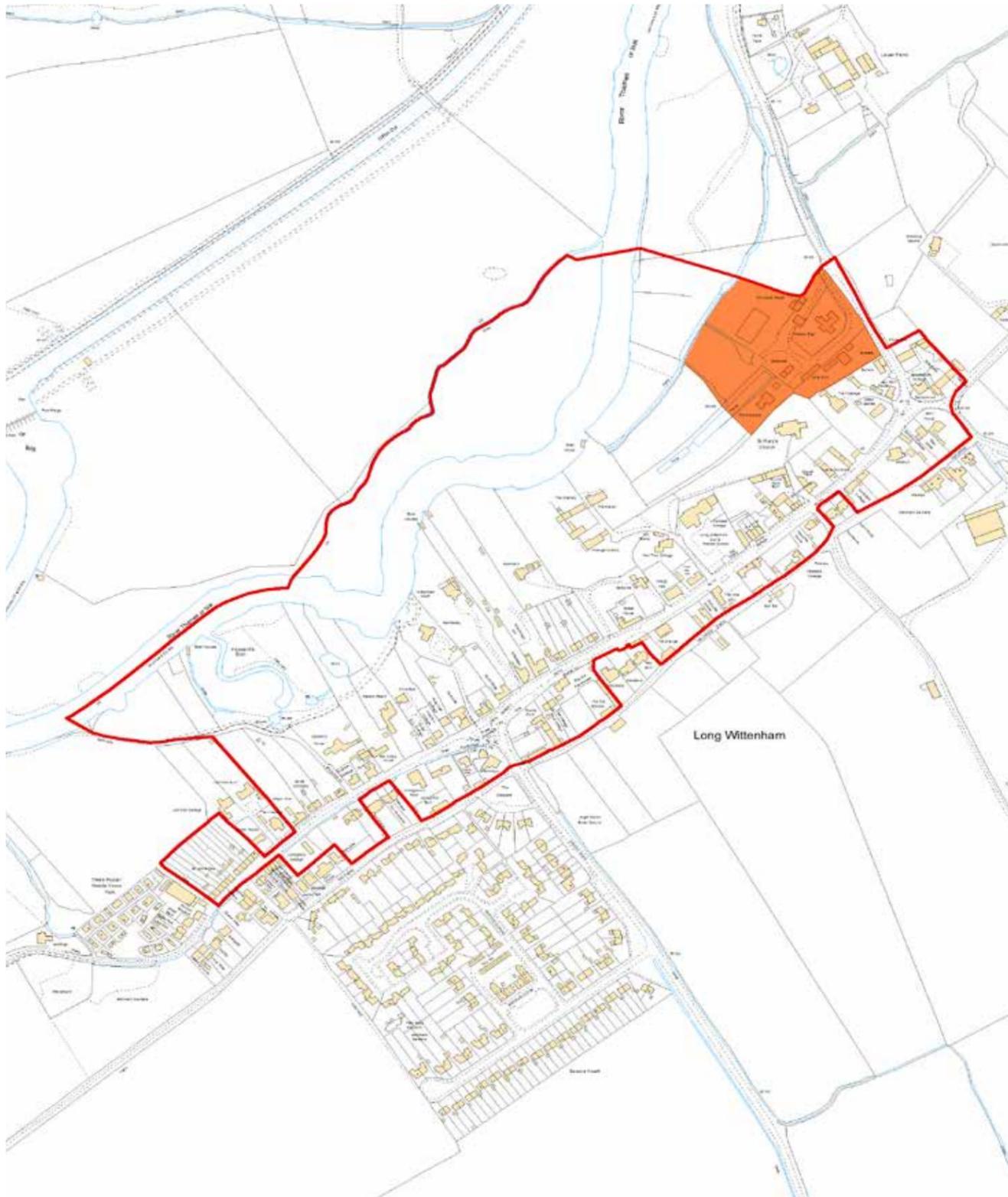


FIELDSIDE EAST AND SYLVA FOUNDATION

CLOCKHOUSE AND BUILDINGS AT THE OLD MANOR HOUSE SITE

The buildings at the old manor house site are located at the northern boundary of the village as the High Street leaves the village on its route toward Clifton Hampden. The buildings sit on the site of the earlier manor house, which burnt down in 1965, and have been sympathetically restored in recent years. The Clockhouse and The Dovecote are original buildings, as is the wall which encloses the site, but Longwall, Walden East and Haywards are all modern houses. The buildings use a palette of materials found elsewhere in the village which speak of a vernacular architecture. The wall itself is constructed from a red brick and has a great character to it. In contrast to much of the village, the houses here sit behind a wall and feel less permeable than the majority of the village; this is perhaps due in part to the lack of pavement access from the rest of the village.

Rating: +1.



MAP SHOWING CLOCKHOUSE AND WALL



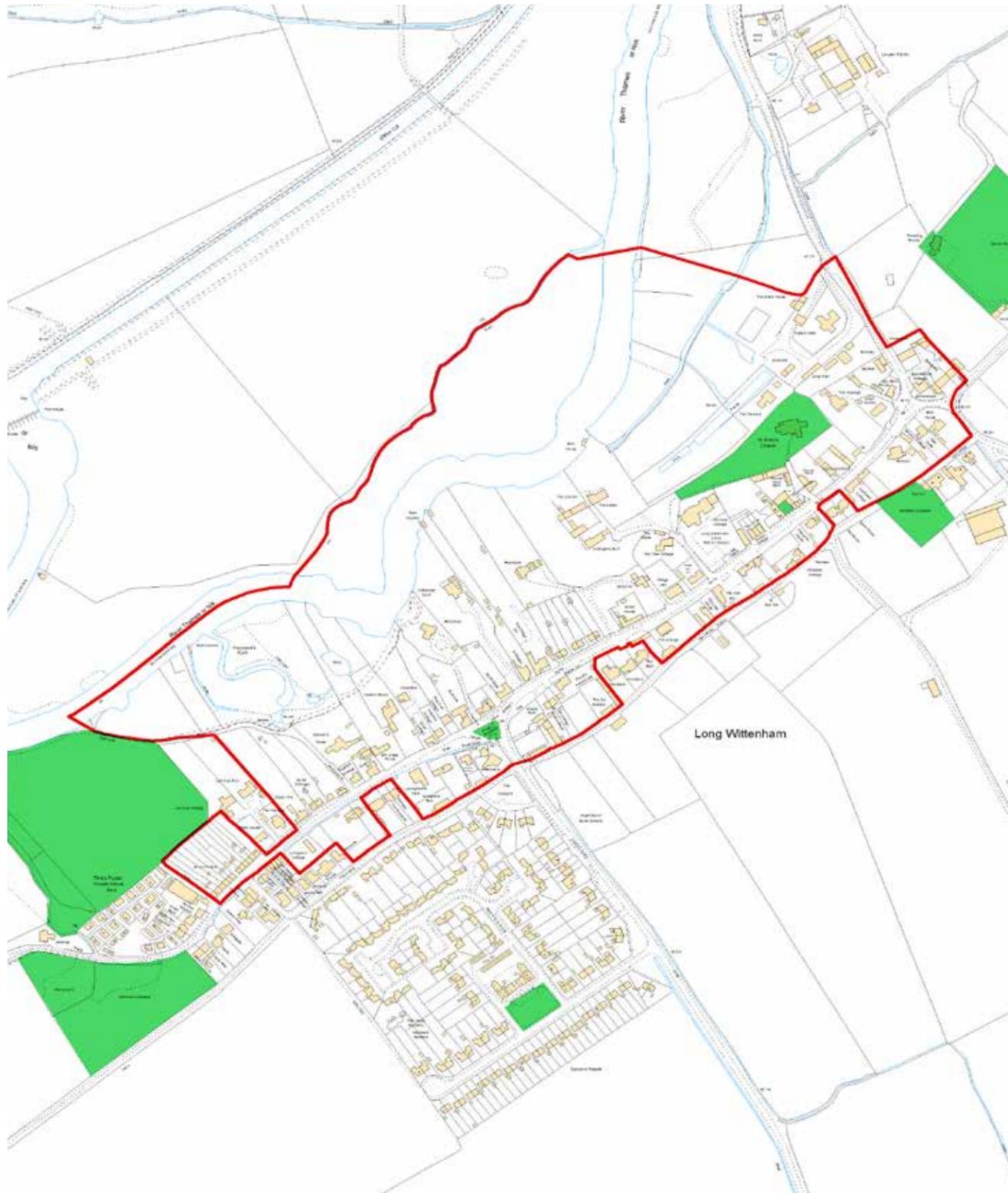
VIEW OF CHURCH SHOWING LONGWALL HOUSE

GREEN SPACE

The village benefits from a number of public green spaces throughout the village. There are allotments at the end of the High Street and Fieldside; playing fields at both the west end of the High Street, where there is also a Forest School used by the village pre-school, and the large sports field and playground known locally as Bodkins at the far eastern edge of the village; a natural meadow like field next to the river called Ward's field where it is possible to cross the river and walk across farmland to the neighbouring village of Appleford; the open green space at Saxons Heath; the churchyard and the historic location of the village cross and the pound. There are also a number of private green spaces which provide visual amenity to the village. Each of these spaces contributes in a unique way to the character of the village and offers different opportunities to the local population. The village also benefits from the large playing field to the front of the existing Victorian village school. Whilst the playing field isn't accessible to the public on a day to day basis (although it is open for school and village fetes) it does provide a visual amenity and widening of the High Street, making it a focal point within the village.

There are also a number of public footpaths which connect the village to the wider rural context including Neptune Wood and the Wittenham Clumps or Sinodun Hills. The views of the Clumps from the village help to define the village and should be protected. Likewise, the view from the Clumps towards the village forms part of the wider rural landscape of this part of Oxfordshire.

Rating: +1. The group found the green spaces within the village invaluable.



MAP SHOWING GREEN SPACE



VIEW OF CLUMPS FROM BODKINS



VIEW OF CHURCH FROM BODKINS



CARPENTER'S COTTAGE AND WORKSHOP



THE POUND



FIELDSIDE



VERGES



THE RIVER AT WARDS FIELD



ALLOTMENTS



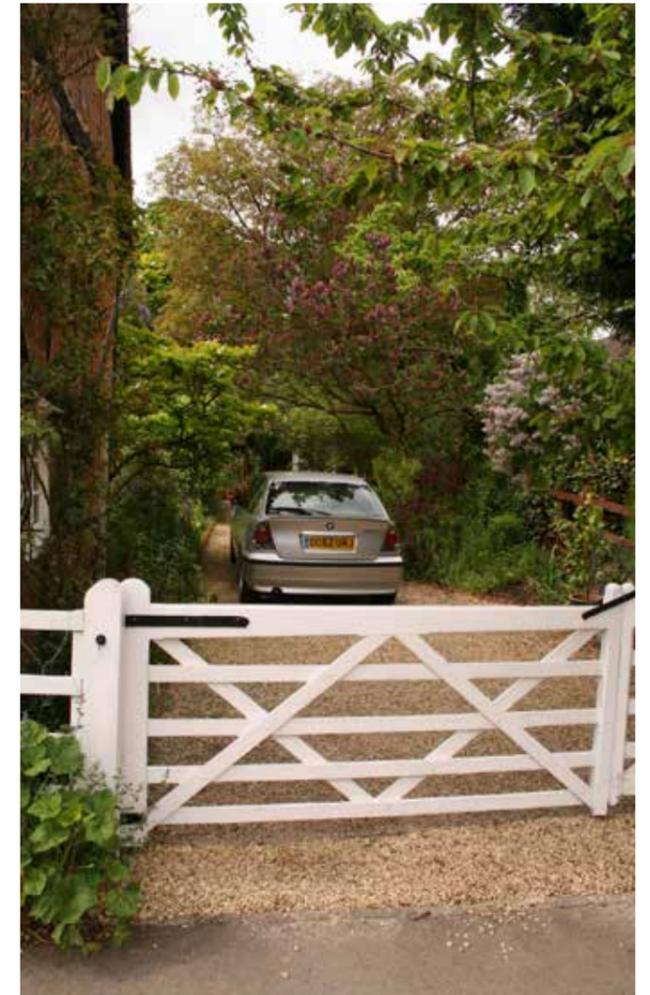
WOODS AT WARD'S FIELD



PLAYING FIELDS NEXT TO BODKINS



PLAYGROUND AND FOREST SCHOOL

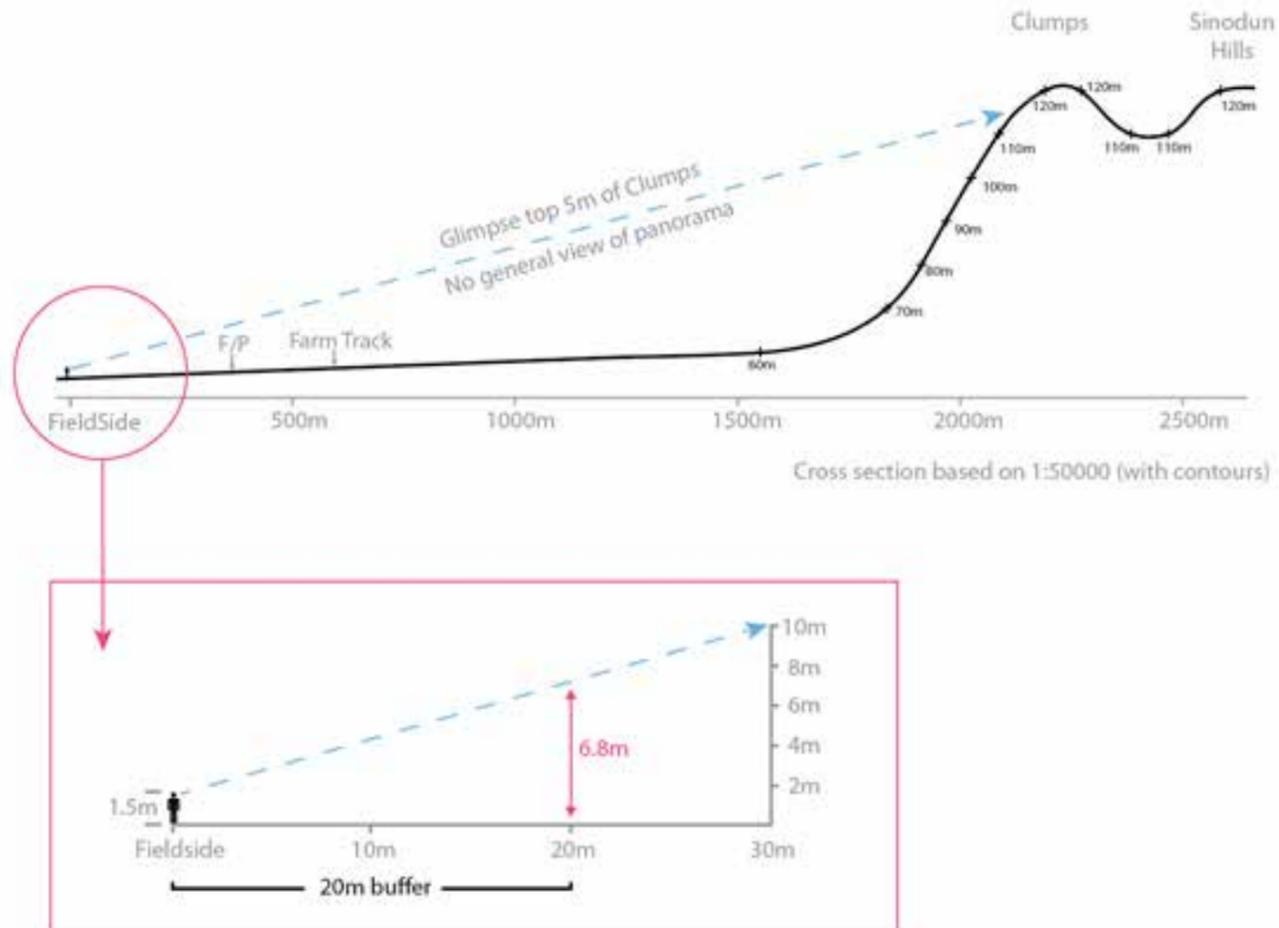


PERMEABLE GARDENS

GREEN SPACE

SIGHTLINES TO WITTENHAM CLUMPS

Views from Fieldside towards the Wittenham Clumps are particularly valued by residents. The diagram below shows uninterrupted sightlines from Fieldside towards Wittenham Clumps. If any new development were to be considered along Fieldside it should take into account the sensitivity of these views. This could be achieved by setting any new buildings back from Fieldside or by restricting the height of the new buildings as shown in the diagram so that they do not bisect the sightline. The local vernacular architecture within the village supports buildings of a scale not more than two and a half storeys in height.



SIGHTLINES TO WITTENHAM CLUMPS

SUMMARY

Having undertaken the review of the character of Long Wittenham and attributed both positive and negative ratings to the varying aspects within the distinct areas which make up the village, it is possible to identify those attributes that would be welcomed and those which would not be received as favourably were a new development to be proposed for Long Wittenham. Those areas which yielded positive ratings were:

St John's Row, whose scale of houses and their arrangement and grouping within the landscape give rise to a sense of a microcosm of community within the wider village context. The community feel is further enhanced by the individualism of each house that the owners have bestowed upon it through various sensitive extensions and the use of colour on the external render;

The High Street, whose permeable nature, disposition of buildings, urban grain and views out towards the surrounding countryside define the spirit of the place. The palette of materials used in the buildings of the High Street, ranging from brick, to the timber cladding to the traditional thatched roofs all contributed in a positive way;

The Granary and Manor, whose green space and arrangement of buildings and their materials add depth and intrigue and a sense of permeability to the village;

Central Fieldside, further enhancing and reinforcing the permeable nature of the village and the views across to the Sinodun Hills, the open green space which runs parallel to the High Street gives further depth to the village and affords residents a semi-private route through the urban fabric away from the traffic on the High Street;

Fieldside East, like St John's Row fosters its own sense of a smaller community within the wider village community thanks in part to the planning of the houses between the Little Wittenham Road to the East and the community allotments which offer views towards the Sinodun Hills;

Clockhouse and Wall, for the rich red brick material of the listed wall whose character provides a richness and unique character to the entrance of the village when approached from the north;

Greenspace, which is prevalent in Long Wittenham and evenly dispersed across the village. The green pockets serve as recreation, refuge, visual delight and as a set of lungs to the urban environment of the village. They further enhance the permeable nature of the village.

Taken together the attributes as described in the above areas form a palette and a toolbox for creating any new development which would compliment and enhance the existing environment and contribute to the urban fabric of the village in a positive way.