



Listening Learning Leading

**Stoke Row Conservation Area
Character Study**
12 September 2000

The information contained in this character study was chiefly collected during 1999-2000 and updated on various visits made during the public consultation process. It is believed to be correct at the time of printing in February 2001. It should be appreciated that the legislative background may change and that the omission of any feature or features from the text and accompanying maps is not to be regarded as an indication that the feature or features are necessarily without significance or importance in conservation and planning terms. None of the statements contained in the document can be held as binding on the Council in the determination of applications for planning permission, listed building consent or conservation area consent.

DATE OF PRINTING
FEBRUARY 2001

The Stoke Row Conservation Area Character Study which seeks to define the established character of the settlement and to identify areas for preservation or enhancement, was first published in draft form in April 2000. Between then and September 2000, when it was formally adopted as supplementary planning by the District Council, it was the subject of public consultation. The results of this consultation have, wherever possible, been included in the final document.

Further general information on this character study and others in the series can be found inside the back cover.

INTRODUCTION

The 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act places a duty on every local planning authority to determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The Act also states that the local planning authority should, from time to time, formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these conservation areas.

This document is an appraisal of the Stoke Row conservation area to give an overview of the established character to be preserved and to identify possible areas for future enhancement. It is intended to assist in defining what is of special architectural or historic importance, what should be protected and to give guidance as to the form, style and location of future change and development.

The document is divided into various sections as follows:

1) The History of the Area

This covers the period from prehistory to the present day. It includes significant architectural history, important dates and references to people and events that have helped to shape the area we see today.

2) The Established Character

This is an assessment of the existing character, including the topography of the area, the vernacular style, predominant building materials and natural or man-made features of local interest.

3) Possible Areas for Enhancement

These can range from major areas for environmental improvement, to very minor works of repair and redecoration.

4) Existing Conservation Policies

This is an extract from the South Oxfordshire Local Plan identifying policies relating to listed buildings and conservation areas.

5) Plan of the Conservation Area

This is a scale plan of the area which aims to identify the elements which contribute to the character. The plan includes the conservation area boundary, listed buildings (buildings identified by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport as being of special architectural or historic interest), former Grade III listed buildings (a now obsolete category but where the buildings may still be of architectural or historic interest) and other buildings of local note. This latter group consists of buildings that play a part in establishing the character of the street scene but have not yet been considered to be of sufficient importance to meet the current criteria for listing. Recent government guidance contained in PPG.15-**Planning and the Historic Environment** indicates, however, that there is a presumption against the demolition of such buildings.

Important trees are also identified. These are usually highly visible from public places and/or they contribute to the setting of a listed building. Important open spaces are identified as these are a vital element in the character of an area. Character is defined not just by buildings, walls and trees, but also by the spaces between them. These contribute to the setting of buildings. They allow views around the area and they are often an important element in the historical development of a settlement.

Important unlisted walls are identified. These are usually built of local materials and help to define spaces and frame views. Lastly, important views into, out of and around the conservation area are identified. It should be appreciated that a conservation area's character does not end with a line drawn on a map. Often the character is closely associated with attractive views out to surrounding countryside, sometimes via gaps between buildings. Views within an area such as that to a church or particularly attractive group of buildings are also important.

6) Archaeological Constraint Plan

The character and history of an area are closely linked to its archaeological remains. This plan identifies the location of ancient monuments, earthworks and known cropmarks, find spots, archaeological sites and linear works. If nothing has yet been identified within an area then this map will be blank, but this does not mean that the area is necessarily archaeologically sterile.

STOKE ROW

1) The History of the Area

The area occupied by the village of Stoke Row is not an obvious place for a settlement to develop and it probably originated simply as a woodland clearance. It is within the wooded hills at the southern end of the Chilterns and there was no natural source of water until the Maharajah's Well was dug in 1864.

There is little sign of prehistoric activity in the area. Neolithic flint axes have been found within the parish and a Roman coin was found near the Maharajah's Well, although there is no evidence of settlement in either period.

The earliest known boundary divisions, which are certainly pre-Conquest, have the land we now know as Stoke Row encompassed within the Parish of North Stoke. "Stoke" is Anglo-Saxon for "a place" or "farm", and "Row" comes either from the Anglo-Saxon word for a rough outback or from the French "rue" meaning "street".

There is, however, no definite evidence of Anglo-Saxon settlement in the area and very little associated with the Normans. Unusually, Stoke Row is not mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 and the first known reference to Stoke Row is in a document of 1435 recording a land transaction.

For several centuries there was very little expansion in Stoke Row beyond a few cottages at the eastern end of the modern village around the green. Agriculture and woodland industries were the principal activities in the area until the late 18th century when the deep underlying pockets of clay were opened up and encouraged a brick and tile industry to develop. The kilns and clay pits for the industry were located in the woods to the south and west of the modern village and many of the pits are still visible today. Several village buildings were built of local brick and the village underwent a period of expansion as the industry thrived.

The timber from the surrounding woodland encouraged other industries to develop in the 19th century, including tent peg making and chair leg turning, known as "bodging", and brush making. Fruit picking, especially cherries, was an important industry, the fruit being sent out to the nearby market at Reading.

Stoke Row did not have a parish church in its own right until 1848 when St John's Church was built, which is another sign of its 'late' arrival as a settlement. Before that, worshippers had to travel to North Stoke or Ipsden. A Dissenting Chapel had been built in the village in 1815 in accordance with the Five Mile Act which stipulated that such chapels had to be at least five miles from the nearest Anglican Church and is important evidence for nonconformity in the area at this period.

The most significant event in the Victorian development of the village was the sinking of the Maharajah's Well in 1864. This well was a gift of the Maharajah of Benares to the people of England as a token of his regard for Queen Victoria and a local man, Edward Reade, who had served in India where the two men met. The well shaft is 112 metres deep and became an important source of drinking water for the village. The

village expanded westwards at this time towards the well, the new Parish Church and the village school, all of which were built on available land beyond the existing settlement.

Brick-making and most woodland industries ceased in the early years of this century. The well was last used as a public water supply in 1939 and is now a well known tourist attraction. The village has continued to expand westwards and today is a thriving community with many people commuting to nearby Henley-on-Thames or Reading. The area around the village green was designated as a conservation area by the District Council in October 1993, with a small area being removed from the conservation area in December 2000.

2) The Established Character

Stoke Row is an attractive village with loosely spaced development in the historic core around the village green, which probably represents the extent of medieval clearance from the woodland. The village expanded considerably in the late 19th and 20th centuries and most of the modern development is to the west of the historic settlement outside the boundary of the conservation area. This extension of the village takes the form of linear development fronting onto the main road with pockets of later infill between.

The topography of the area is generally flat to the west of The Green, although the church is 175 metres above sea level. The land falls away in the wooded slopes to the east and farmland gently undulates to the north.

The area incorporated within the conservation area has a very different feel to the Victorian and modern linear development of the village to the west. Within the conservation area, the open spaces, particularly of The Green itself, and groups of trees predominate and the cottages and other buildings are subservient to this. Most buildings are small cottages of the late 18th and early 19th centuries but there are also larger properties with spacious grounds. There is a close-knit and attractive group of cottages to the north and east of the village green.

There are several buildings of historic interest within the conservation area and a few that have been listed for their special architectural or historic interest. The oldest of these include the Cherry Tree Public House, The Oak, Stag Farm and parts of Red Cow House, all of which date from the 17th century.

Most historic buildings within the conservation area are fairly simple in design and detailing. Many cottages are of two storeys beneath steeply pitched clay tile roofs, although some properties have dormers to the first floor within the roofspace. There is a range of walling materials, including timber framing, knapped flint, red brick, sometimes with flared headers to create a Flemish bond or decorative pattern, and painted brick. Examples of other materials include slate roofs and weatherboarded walls.

There are several stretches of wall which contribute to the character of the conservation area. These include the brick and flint wall to the north of the village green and the brick wall outside Clayhill.

As the conservation area is enclosed by woodland, there are few locations where open views can be gained into or out of the area. However, there is an important view to be gained across the village green which forms the focus of the conservation area towards the group of Victorian cottages.

There are many mature and semi-mature trees which contribute to the character of the conservation area and to the setting of its historic buildings. The most important groups are to be found to the south of Red Cow House and to the north of the Chapel, while several trees on the village green, to the front of Alma Green and within the gardens of The Cherry Trees, are significant in their own right.

There are several buildings of local interest within the conservation area which have not yet been judged to be of sufficient architectural or historic interest to merit listing, but which nevertheless still contribute a great deal to the

attractive quality of the area. These include Chiltern House, a large Edwardian house in spacious grounds and The Thatched Cottage in the southern part of the conservation area and several properties around the village green, including The Old Bakery with its ovens and distinctive tall brick chimney and Old Windmill Cottage, which was the site of the village windmill from 1840 to 1880. Other attractive cottages towards the northern end of the conservation area along Newlands Lane have also been identified, including Rose Cottage and Cherry Tree Cottage.

3) Possible Areas for Enhancement

Stoke Row is an attractive village that is obviously well maintained and cared for by its residents. Consequently, there is little scope for major environmental improvement work within the conservation area and attention should principally be focused towards maintaining the existing character. However, there are a few areas where improvements could be made.

The most important and dramatic improvement to the conservation area would be the laying underground of the existing overhead cables and wires by the statutory undertakers. These are particularly prominent and intrusive in attractive views. The work would, however, need to be carried out in a sensitive manner that does not destroy or damage other important amenities such as verges, kerbs and footpaths.

Granite setts have been used as an attractive kerbing material around Cherry Tree Close and parts of Alma Green and the opportunity should be taken to preserve them and extend their use where appropriate. Ugly concrete kerb has been used along part of the main village street and this should be improved upon. It is essential that kerbing is not introduced around the village green and other areas where it does not exist at present as this would introduce a hard urban edge to what is currently a very attractive and informal rural scene.

There is clearly a welcome and ongoing scheme of tree management on the village green and in other areas such as Cherry Tree Close, Alma Green and the garden to The Cherry Tree Public House and this should continue, with new planting where necessary and appropriate. It will, however, be necessary to respect the essentially open nature of The Green as part of this programme.

The use of traditional materials and detailing can have considerable effect in enhancing a conservation area's character. The owners of prominent and historic properties in Stoke Row are encouraged to remove unsympathetic modern materials, such as concrete tiles, UPVC windows and plastic rainwater goods and to reinstate traditional materials such as clay tiles, painted softwood windows and cast iron guttering.

Small amounts of financial assistance may be available in some instances from the Council for the repair and renovation of historic buildings within the conservation area and the reinstatement of lost original details and materials. Grants may also be available for appropriate schemes of environmental improvement.

4) South Oxfordshire Local Plan adopted by Council, April 1997

LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 1

Proposals for the demolition of any building included on the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest will not be permitted except in most exceptional circumstances.

POLICY CON 2

The council will make full use of its powers to serve repairs notices to prevent the wilful neglect of listed buildings.

ALTERATIONS TO LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 3

The use of modern materials such as aluminium and upvc will not normally be permitted for the doors or windows of listed buildings. Sealed double-glazed timber windows will not normally be permitted unless their mouldings precisely match those of traditional windows. The use of secondary glazing will normally be acceptable.

POLICY CON 4

Listed building consent will not normally be granted for proposals which involve the use of cement-rich mortars, abrasive cleaning methods and chemically-based sealants, nor for the painting of unpainted brickwork and stone or the use of unsuitable colour schemes on listed buildings.

POLICY CON 5

The alteration or removal of historic internal features in buildings included on the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

CHANGES OF USE AND EXTENSIONS TO LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 6

Any change of use of a listed building must be appropriate to its character, and any extension must be sympathetic to the original structure in design, scale and materials and must not dominate or overwhelm it.

THE SETTING OF LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 7

Proposals for development which would adversely affect the setting of a listed building will normally be refused.

CONSERVATION AREAS

POLICY CON 8

The council will use all its powers under the relevant acts to ensure that the character of individual conservation areas is preserved or enhanced.

POLICY CON 9

Consent to demolish a building in a conservation area will normally only be granted if the loss of the building would not adversely affect the character of the area, and if there are detailed and acceptable plans for the redevelopment of the site.

POLICY CON 10

When considering proposals for development in conservation areas, the council will require:-

- (i) the design and scale of new work to be in sympathy with the established character of the area;
- (ii) the use of traditional materials, whenever this is appropriate to the character of the area;
- (iii) the retention of existing walls, hedges, or any other features which contribute to the character of the area.

THATCHING STYLE

POLICY CON 11

In order to protect the traditional thatching style of South Oxfordshire the District Council will generally promote the use of long straw and resist the introduction of patterned block-cut ridges on thatched buildings.

ADVERTISEMENTS IN CONSERVATION AREAS AND ON LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 12

The council will not normally permit the display of signs on a listed building or in a conservation area which are in any way harmful to the character and appearance of the building or area. Where it is accepted that a sign is needed, its design and materials should reflect the best traditional practice.

POLICY CON 13

The installation of blinds or canopies of untraditional form or materials on buildings within conservation areas will not normally be permitted.

BURGAGE PLOTS

POLICY CON 14

In the historic towns of Henley, Thame and Wallingford the burgage plots to the rear of the principal streets will generally be protected from amalgamation and from development which would diminish their historic interest and value.

PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS

POLICY CON 15

In conservation areas, the council will take all available steps to ensure:

- (i) that the introduction or intensification of uses which conflict with the special character of the area is resisted;
- (ii) that existing walls, buildings, trees, hedges, open spaces and important views are retained, where they contribute to the character of the area;
- (iii) that whenever the opportunity arises, unsightly overhead wires and unnecessary signs are removed. The statutory undertakers will be urged to site their services underground;
- (iv) that where necessary, improvements are made to the visual quality of the floorspace, street furniture, lighting and signs; and
- (v) that development outside a conservation area would not have a detrimental effect on the conservation area.

ARCHAEOLOGY

POLICY CON 16

The council will not normally permit development which would adversely affect the sites or settings of nationally-important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, or those of monuments of special local importance.

POLICY CON 17

Before the determination of an application for development which may affect a site of archaeological interest or potentially of archaeological importance, prospective developers will be required, where necessary, to make provision for an archaeological field evaluation, in order to enable an informed and reasoned planning decision to be made.

POLICY CON 18

Wherever practicable and desirable, developments affecting sites of archaeological interest should be designed to achieve physical preservation in situ of archaeological deposits. Where this is not practicable or desirable, the district planning authority will impose conditions on planning permissions, or seek legal obligations, which will require the developer to provide an appropriate programme of archaeological investigation, recording and publication by a professionally qualified body acceptable to the district planning authority.

PARKS AND GARDENS OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST

POLICY CON 19

Proposals which would damage the character, setting or amenities of a park or garden of special historic interest, especially those contained in the English Heritage Register, will not normally be permitted.

COMMON LAND

POLICY CON 20

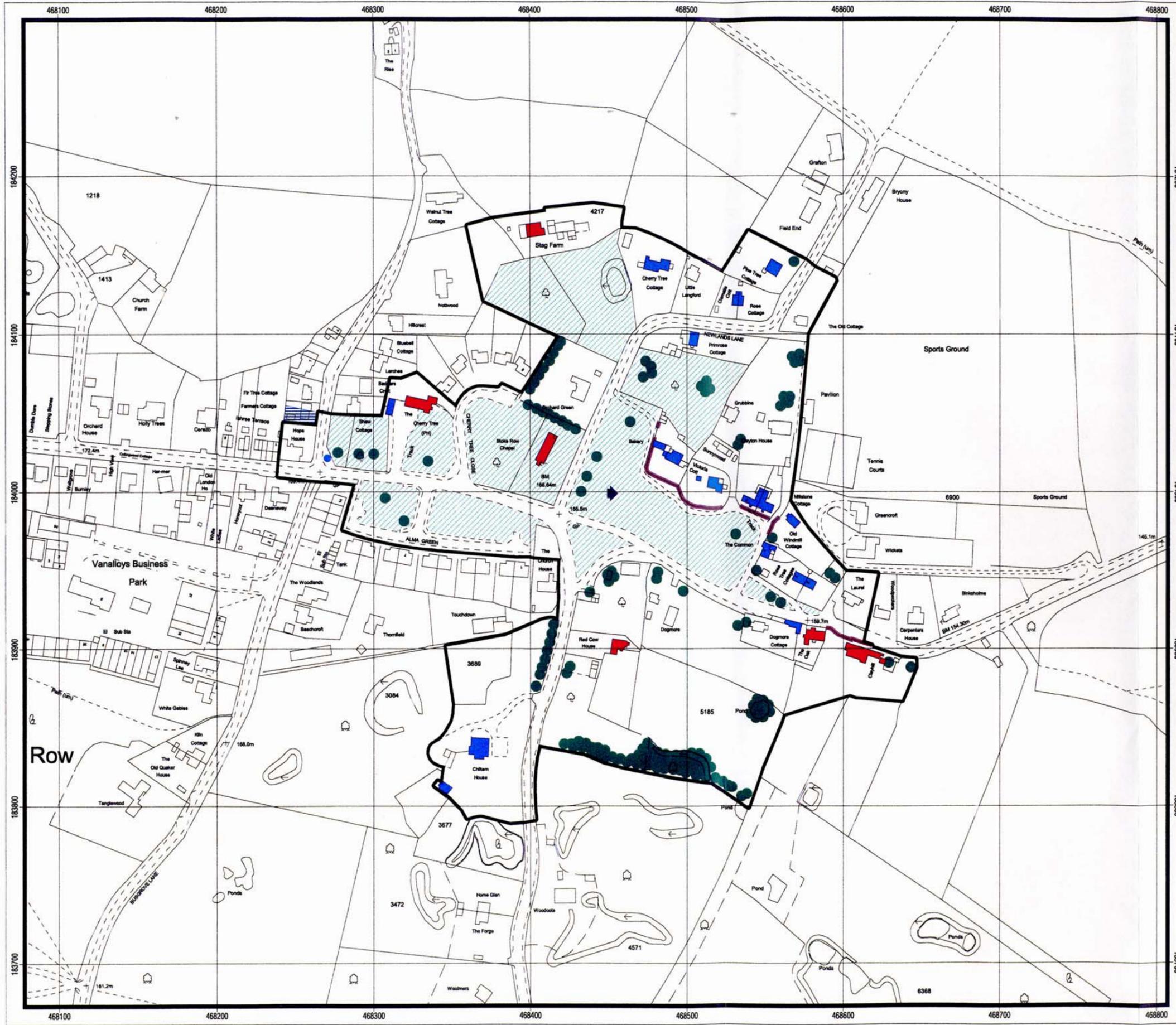
Proposals for development on or affecting common land, village greens and other important spaces within settlements will not normally be permitted.



South Oxfordshire District Council

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- Stoke Row Conservation Area
- Area deleted from Conservation Area (December 2000)
- Listed building
- Building of local note
- Former Grade III Listed Building
- Important wall
- Important views in, out and around
- Important trees
- Important open space

With the exception of views, only those features in the key that are located within the boundaries of the conservation area are defined on the plan.

5) Plan of the Conservation Area
STOKE ROW

6) Archaeological Constraint Plan

No known archaeological constraints
(See Introduction)

PUBLISHED CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STUDIES

(with date of adoption as Supplementary Planning Guidance by South Oxfordshire District Council in brackets).

1. Watlington (8 April 1997)
2. Greys Green (8 April 1997)
3. Forest Hill (25 November 1997)
4. Beckley (18 December 1997)
5. North Moreton (18 December 1997)
6. Warborough (18 December 1997)
7. Mapledurham (19 January 1999)
8. Benson (23 March 1999)
9. Waterstock (21 October 1999)
10. Britwell Salome (12 September 2000)
11. Brightwell Baldwin (12 September 2000)
12. Chalgrove (12 September 2000)
13. Stoke Row (12 September 2000)
14. East Hagbourne (14 November 2000)

Others in preparation include Stanton St John and Thame.

After the initial fieldwork and documentary research, each character study has been through a process of extensive public consultation (including a public meeting before it has formally been adopted by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance in accordance with Policy CON 15 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan.