

APPENDIX C2: TOPIC PAPER ON KIDMORE END LOCAL VALUED LANDSCAPE

This paper provides background evidence and justification for the Kidmore End Neighbourhood Development policy for a Local Valued Landscape as per NPPF 170 a). It sets out the relevant legislation and policy guidance and details of the methodology used to determine the Local Valued Landscape. It is intended that this paper demonstrates how evidence has been applied in order to formulate Policy LPLV in defining the area of the Valued Landscapes in Kidmore Parish.

Policy Background

National policy

Our approach follows that of NPPF Chapter 15:

- 170: *Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*
- a) *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
 - b) *recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland; and*
 - d) *minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.*
171. *Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.*
172. *Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of: a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy; b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.*

South Oxfordshire Local Plan

SODC's Core Strategy and emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan (SOLP 2034) also set out the vision and strategy for development in the District. Outside of the 'smaller village' of Kidmore End and 'other village' of Tokers Green, the SODC Settlement Assessment Background Paper 2018 does not include either Chalkhouse Green in its list of settlement types and therefore this village is part of Countryside as set out in Core Strategy Policies CSS1 v) and CSEN1 and in relation to these areas. The whole of the Study Area is therefore subject to the following: (what does the colon relate to?)

This document is currently being scrutinized by the inspector. The only changes from the previous settlement hierarchy are Gallowstree Common has been changed from smaller village to other village and Cane End which has been removed from the hierarchy.

Core Strategy

The following policies apply:

CSS1 v): Proposals for development in South Oxfordshire should be consistent with the overall strategy of (v) outside the towns and villages, and other major developed sites, any change will need to relate to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment.

CSEN1: The district's distinct landscape character and key features will be protected against inappropriate development and where possible enhanced. Where development is acceptable in principle measures will be sought to integrate it into the landscape character of the area. High priority will be given to conservation and enhancement of the Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and planning decisions will have regard to their setting.

SODC Local Plan Saved policy

SODC Local Plan Saved policy C4 also applies: *Development which would damage the attractive landscape setting of the settlements of the district will not be permitted.*

SODC Local Plan 2035

The Emerging SODC Local Plan supports different levels of growth in Smaller Villages and Other Villages but, subject to certain qualifications, not within the surrounding open countryside. This accords with what our Community have told us about the value of the countryside and in maintaining distinction from Reading' urban character and a strong wish to establish policies that conserve and enhance the countryside within the AONB and between the AONB and Reading.

The Local Plan specifically excludes any strategic development within the Parish and sets out policies for appropriate development within the smaller and other villages and open countryside. Landscape Policy ENV1 applies here.

ENV1

1. *The highest level of protection will be given to the landscape and scenic beauty of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBS):*

- *Development in an AONB or affecting the setting of an AONB will only be permitted where it conserves, and where possible, enhances the character and natural beauty of the AONB;*
 - *Development in an AONB will only be permitted where it is appropriate to the economic and environmental wellbeing of the area or promotes understanding or enjoyment of the AONB;*
 - *Major development in an AONB will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest;*
 - *Development proposals that could affect the special qualities of an AONB (including the setting of an AONB) either individually or in combination with other developments, should be accompanied by a proportionate Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. AONB management plans will be a material consideration in decision making.*
2. *South Oxfordshire's landscape, countryside and rural areas will be protected against harmful development. Development will only be permitted where it protects and, where possible enhances, features that contribute to the nature and quality of South Oxfordshire's landscapes, in particular:*
- i) *Trees (including individual trees, groups of trees and woodlands), hedgerows and field boundaries;*
 - ii) *Irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland;*
 - iii) *The landscapes, waterscapes, cultural heritage and user enjoyment of the River Thames, its tributaries and flood plains; [N/A]*
 - iv) *Other watercourse and water bodies; [N/A]*
 - vi) *Topographical features;*
 - vii) *Areas or features of cultural and historic value;*
 - viii) *Important views and visually sensitive skylines; and*
 - ix) *Aesthetic and perceptual factors such as tranquillity, wildness, intactness, rarity, scale, enclosure.*
3. *Development which supports economic growth in rural areas will be supported provided it conserves and enhances the landscape, countryside and rural areas.*
4. *The Council will seek the retention of important hedgerows. Where retention is not possible and a proposal seeks the removal of a hedgerow, the Council will require compensatory planting with a mixture of native hedgerow species.*

Reading Borough Local Plan Adopted November 2019

The parish of Kidmore End abuts the boundary of Reading Borough, with none of the NDP area within Reading Borough. The Reading Local Plan places considerable emphasis on the fact that for 'most of its length, the northern part of the Reading Borough boundary follows the exact urban edge' and on the value of the landscape within and beyond its borders: 'The 'dry valleys' typically found in the Chilterns also extend into Caversham, and there are a number of wooded and undeveloped areas that help to link the area into the wider Chilterns landscape beyond.' A Key Principle is: e. Areas of landscape and heritage importance will be preserved, including the edge of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.'

The overall Strategy for the area of Emmer Green and Caversham includes: 'Of particular importance in Caversham and Emmer Green are potential effects on landscape, heritage and infrastructure. The

relationship of the landscape with the Chiltern Hills and River Thames, described in paragraph 8.1.6, and of the townscape with the former separate settlements of Caversham and surrounding hamlets, will be preserved.’ This embraces the southern part of the land within the KENDP Designated Area.

The importance of this landscape to Reading Borough is set out in Policy EN13: Major Landscape Features and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which reflects the Borough’s aim to protect the AONB and its setting: Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would detract from the character or appearance of a Major Landscape Feature. The following areas, as shown on the Proposals Map, are defined as Major Landscape Features:

- *The North Reading dry valleys and Chilterns Escarpment.*
- *Development which affects the setting of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will be accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that demonstrates that there is no detrimental impact on the North Wessex Downs or Chilterns AONBs in terms of scale, design, layout or location. None of Reading Borough falls within an AONB, but where the urban area meets the Chilterns AONB is shown on the Proposals Map.*

Community Value

One of the many aspects of living in Kidmore End Parish which was valued by our residents was proximity to Reading and the amenities therein. However, it was even more strongly felt that the danger of sprawl from this significantly larger settlement was significant and potentially erosive of the character and setting of Kidmore End Parish as a whole.

It was widely indicated in concerns expressed at both Community Engagement Events and in the open sections of the 2018 Household Survey that the nature and scale of such speculative developments might blur the natural countryside boundaries of our Parish with Reading, enabling seepage into our cherished rurality and eroding our overall local character and distinctiveness, subsuming it into Caversham, Mapledurham or Emmer Green (suburbs of Reading).

Supporting Evidence

In response to these concerns, in September 2018 Terra Firma Consultancy Ltd was engaged to carry out a Landscape Analysis of the rural countryside land between Chalkhouse Green and Reading, and between Tokers Green and Reading (outside of the AONB), in order to develop and test the concerns raised by our Community. The resulting Kidmore End Parish Landscape Sensitivity Study September 2018 updated 2020 (see Appendix x) confirms the landscape value of the area and pointed towards three key aspects: the presence of landscape and visual elements that contributed to the setting of the AONB; the value of open land between the settlements closest to Reading and Reading itself; and the high value and quality of the landscape as a whole.

The Landscape Analysis concluded that the Study Area has a high landscape sensitivity which is defined as:

The landscape is of higher sensitivity and of higher value and therefore could not accommodate areas of new development without a significant and adverse impact on the landscape character and visual amenity. Only a very small-scale development may be possible, such as on any small areas of brownfield land, providing it retains the important landscape features and their landscape setting of the area and has regard to the setting and

form of existing settlement and the character and the sensitivity of adjacent landscape character areas.

It also concluded that this area forms the landscape and visual setting of the Chilterns AONB, sharing many of the special qualities of the AONB. It is also important in providing local gaps of open countryside between the small settlements of Tokers Green and Chalkhouse Green and the urban area of Reading.

Supported by this strong evidence, in 2020 we asked Terra Firma to update their Study to bring it up to date regarding NPPF, the Local Plan and Chilterns Management Plan. There had been no changes to the area physically and almost no development has been permitted. On the contrary most development proposals to date through both planning applications and housing sites submitted to South Oxfordshire for inclusion in the Local Plan have been rejected.

Furthermore, on the basis of best current practice, we also appointed Terra Firma in 2020 to undertake a further assessment of the value of the landscape. The Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Revision 3, 2013) provides a summary of the range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes. These factors are widely used when considering the value that can be attached to landscapes, and are set out in Box 5.1 from the GLVIA below.

Box 5.1

Range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes

- **Landscape quality (condition):** A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
- **Scenic quality:** The term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily but not wholly the visual senses).
- **Rarity:** The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare Landscape Character Type.
- **Representativeness:** Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples.
- **Conservation interests:** The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of the landscape as well as having value in their own right.
- **Recreation value:** Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important.
- **Perceptual aspects:** A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness and/or tranquillity.
- **Associations:** Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.

Based on Swanwick and Land Use Consultants (2002)

Further to this range of factors, planning appeal decisions and court rulings/judgements can provide additional information on how to interpret national policy and guidance.

The updated Kidmore End Parish Landscape Sensitivity Study August 2020 is included in Appendix e. The results of the Box 5.1 assessment are set out in Appendix d.

The assignment of a Local Valued Landscape is therefore supported by a robust professional study by landscape architects, Terra Firma, who have extensive experience of this work and are familiar with the area. They have also carried out the above Box 5.1 exercise which confirms the identification of a Valued Landscape in the area. Both studies show that the area as a whole has demonstrable, landscape, visual, historic, bio-diversity, recreation and perceptual attributes of value.

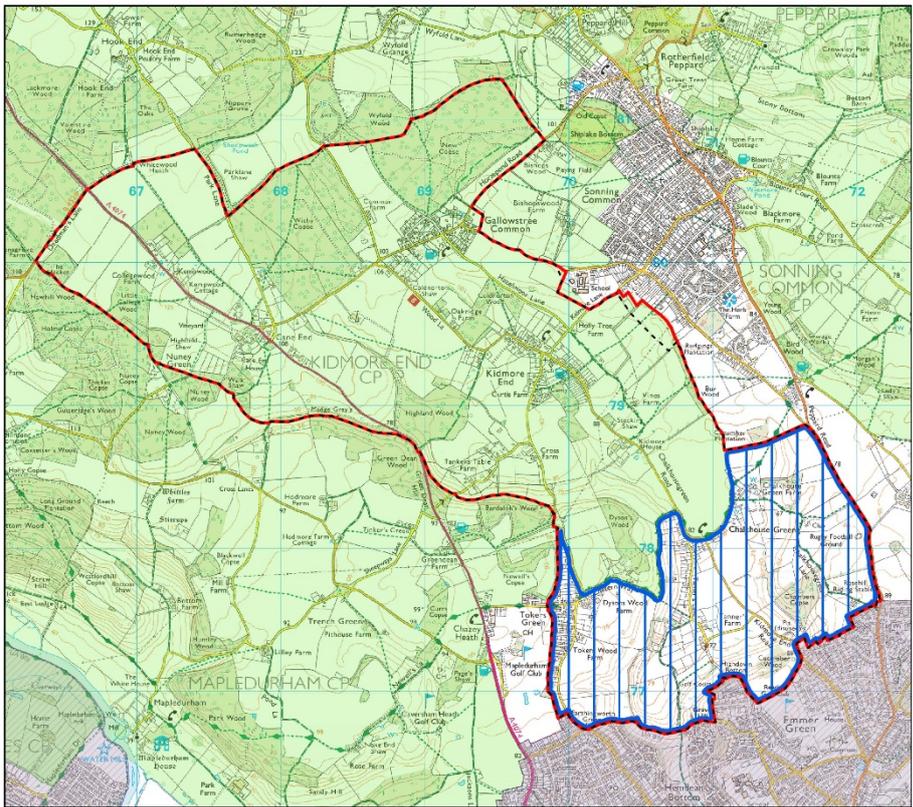
The boundaries of the Local Valued Landscape are shown in Map 4, following features on the ground. The northern boundary follows the boundary of the AONB. To the west the boundary follows the line of trees along the Parish boundary up to the boundary of Reading Borough. The southern boundary then continues along the boundary of the Parish with Reading Borough. This is also a well defined edge formed by Gravel Hill and the urban edge of Caversham and Emmer Green; with one exception where the character of this area extends into Reading Borough at the Reading Golf Course and there is no boundary feature along the Kidmore End Parish/Reading Borough boundary. The eastern boundary follows the Parish boundary along Peppard Road and then along field boundaries to the west of Sonning Common to return to the AONB in the north. With the exception of at Reading Golf Course all the above boundaries follow well defined features on the ground: roads, tracks, urban edges, hedgerows or woodlands.

Careful consideration of these boundaries was undertaken to see if any area would not meet the criteria for a Local Valued Landscape. Recent appeal decisions show that a parcel of land should not be seen in isolation from its context. For example the Aylesbury Road, Wendover Public Inquiry Inspector's Decision Letter (dated 9th October 2017) states:

When assessing what constitutes a valued landscape I consider it more important to examine the bigger picture in terms of the value of the site and its surroundings. That is not to borrow the features of the adjoining land but to assess the site in situ as an integral part of the surrounding land rather than divorcing it from its surroundings and then to conduct an examination of its value¹.

On this basis, one part of the area cannot be considered in isolation. The area demonstrably has a unity of character, with each part contributing to the setting of its neighbour. Internal well defined boundaries were examined but in every case it was evident that the landscape quality continued beyond the boundary. Areas of non agricultural use, such as equestrian paddocks and recreation grounds, still retain their rural character with little or no built form, retaining the key characteristics of this valued landscape. Whether the character of the area extends beyond the Parish is not the concern of the NDP.

¹ Appeal decision APP/J0405/W/16/3158833 Land north of Aylesbury Road, Wendover, Buckinghamshire



1:20,000

Map x
Kidmore End Neighbourhood
Development Plan

Local Valued Landscape

- Neighbourhood Plan Area
- Parish Boundary
- Local Valued Landscape
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Reading Borough Council

0 200 500 1,000 Meters
© Crown Copyright and Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved. 2018
Faith Council PSM (Member Licence No. 10009029)