



**Benson Parish Council**  
Serving Our Community

# **Benson Neighbourhood Plan Plan Revision 2022-2035**

**Submission Version - Sept 2022**

## **Appendix B - Design Statement**

Appendix B has been updated in this Plan Revision to provide reference to current national and local policy and guidance. The Text and Design Principles in Sections A to P remain substantially unchanged, but new sections have been added for Design in the Countryside and Design to address Climate Change. A more detailed account of the changes is provided on the new front page.



## Update for the 2022 Revision of the Benson Neighbourhood Plan

Since the Benson Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in 2018 there have been updates to the NPPF and the government has issued a National Design Guide and a National Model Design Code. The South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Design Guide was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in June 2022 and is now a material consideration when making planning decisions. This web-based guidance replaces the South Oxfordshire Design Guide of 2016.

The Design Statement for Benson as originally produced presents no conflicts with these new national and local guides. It supports the same premise that good design takes account of the context, character and needs of the locality, and provides local evidence to inform the design process as the NPPF advocates. This revised version remains substantially as before but has been amended to take account of the new national and local guidance and address new circumstances as follows:

- The need to mitigate and adapt to climate change has become more urgent, as recognised by changes in national and local policy and by the conclusions of COP 26. The Design Statement is therefore amended to reflect this and to encourage measures that are particularly relevant to this locality. There is a new section R on climate change, minor changes to Design Principle C2 with regard to the use of roof panels; to Section F with regard to street trees; and to text at M: New Housing around Benson.
- In association with the revision of the Plan, the Parish Council have commissioned a Conservation Area Appraisal for Preston Crowmarsh. This will provide independent assessment of the character of the hamlet and better understanding of those aspects which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Sight of initial drafts suggest that the Design Principles for Preston Crowmarsh remain compatible. This revised version does, however, clarify N6 with regard to the association between the conservation area and Crowmarsh Battle Farmhouse.
- New Landscape Character Assessments have been made to support policy but also to inform design. New Design Principles have accordingly been added in a new section Q to reflect those aspects of the landscape that are most valued.
- Section 0.3 on Benson and the Airfield has been amended to highlight potential concerns within the various safeguarding zones, including those regarding the installation of wind turbines or solar PV cells.

# APPENDIX B: DESIGN STATEMENT FOR BENSON

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## 0.1 Introduction

This Design Statement sits behind the Benson Neighbourhood Plan in detailing design principles for future development.

It stems from the Vision promoted within the Plan to promote sensitive development that respects Benson's rural setting beneath the Chiltern Hills and alongside the River Thames, and that integrates well with the rest of the village, with design standards to ensure that Benson retains its distinctive character.

The Statement aims to define Benson's distinctive character and setting, and determine key principles for fulfilling the Vision. It derives from the views of the community as expressed in response to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey and other consultations of 2016, and from an assessment of different character areas carried out by means of visual survey in the summer of 2016. These assessments are included in Appendix E, and are now extended to cover landscape within the Plan Area.

One of the key messages from the consultation process is that the community values the character of Benson as a village, and as a rural village of historic character. There is strong support for the principle that new development should take account of that character, and that design should reflect the character of existing buildings, structures, layouts and landscape setting<sup>1</sup>.

The Design Statement should be seen as an integral part of the Benson Neighbourhood Plan. It was originally produced in accordance with the principles set out in paragraphs 56 to 68 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) current at the time. In particular, it followed the guidance in paragraph 59 to the extent that it established design principles in order to help deliver high quality outcomes. It remains consistent with Chapter 12 of the NPPF 2021 and provides the assessment required by Local Plan Policy DES2. At the same time, it avoids unnecessary prescription or detail. Creative and innovative approaches that respect local character and detail will be actively supported.

The Statement addresses a series of key elements that are at the heart of its distinctive character and appearance. Each section in turn sets out its own design considerations and leads onto related design principles. The Statement is however designed to be read as a whole. On this basis it is likely that many developments that are proposed throughout the lifetime of the Plan will impact on a series of Design Principles included in this wider Statement.

It is intended that the Statement should be used in conjunction with the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Design Guide issued in June 2022, with the National Design Guide and Model Design Code, with the Chilterns Building Design Guide, or with any future national or local replacement guidance.

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<sup>1</sup> Neighbourhood Plan Survey: In answer to Q26 306 out of 558 respondents strongly agreed with this principle, and 179 agreed. 43 agreed with exceptions, of which 10 cited the need to be in keeping with or complement existing surroundings, and others sought improvement. 30 disagreed.

## 0.2 Benson’s Rural Setting

### A. Benson’s close association with the River Thames



**View from across the lock to Rivermead and the church tower**

Benson is located in the Thames valley and the close association with the river is of high importance to the character and identity both of the main village and to the hamlet of Preston Crowmarsh. Both owe their location to the river, and the view from the lock across the river to the church tower is one of the defining views of Benson. The river offers leisure facilities in the form of the amenity open green space at Rivermead, the Waterfront Café and the marina, while the Thames Path leads out to open countryside through river meadows with distinctive willows, alders and habitat for wildlife. These attractions enrich community life<sup>2</sup> and bring day visitors, while the marina and the campsite/cabins cater for holiday makers. It is important that the riverside remains attractive for all.

#### Design Considerations:

- The buildings and cabins at the Waterfront/marina address the river and are low structures of recreational character. They do not intrude strongly on the river setting.
- The houses between Rivermead and the path to the lock are also low-rise and set well back from the river. It will be important that these buildings maintain the degree of set-back, along with the low height and an attractive appearance. Otherwise they will become more dominant in the riverscape.

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<sup>2</sup> Neighbourhood Plan Survey: In answer to Q45, 374 out of 551 respondents said that they used Rivermead, some specifying its use as a base for walks and others just as a place in which to sit.

- Preston Crowmarsh is seen in views from the opposite bank as a highly attractive rural hamlet with historic cottages and houses set well back from the river behind deep green gardens and trees that complement the river setting. (For Preston Crowmarsh see also Section N of this Statement.)
- The location of the buildings as set back from the river is respectful of the flood plain. It will be important that any development avoids flood risk and the potential to exacerbate that risk, and that drainage can be achieved without prejudice to the dispersal of surface water or the disposal of waste. This issue is addressed by Policy NP30 of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Access is all-important. While the network of public footpaths allows for pedestrian access, the volume of traffic on the A4074 makes use hazardous, with only one surface crossing by means of an unguarded island at the end of Church Road. A permissive path under the road is impeded by a large pipe. A safer crossing would help particularly in the context of a significant increase in the population of the village. This issue should be considered in relation to Policy BEN NP9.

The following set of design principles relate specifically to development in the vicinity of the river and flow from the above considerations in seeking to ensure respect for the special character and circumstances of this important part of the Plan area:

#### **Design Principles: The Riverside**

- A1:** New development should avoid having a detrimental impact on riverside meadow and natural areas valued for their wildlife and biodiversity;
- A2:** New development should preserve public views of the church tower as seen from the lock;
- A3:** Any development should enhance the appearance of the riverside;
- A4:** Any development should preserve the greenness of the riverside within the existing built envelope by respecting the predominant pattern of set-back and alignment away from the river edge;
- A5:** New residential development should respect the existing pattern of low-rise building in this vicinity;
- A6:** Any development at the marina or the Waterfront Café should address the river and comprise buildings of single storey height with an attractive riverside character.

### **B. Benson and the Ewelme Stream (Benson Brook)**

The Benson Brook is important to an understanding of the history of Benson: as a chalk stream issuing from a spring in nearby Ewelme it allowed for very early settlement in providing well-filtered water, and later served as a power supply for the mill in Mill Lane. The village grew in linear fashion along it in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



**The Benson Brook  
at 46-54 Brook Street**



**The brook through  
St Helen's Way**



**The brook between the  
Materials Store and the  
nursery/allotments**

#### Design Considerations:

- The brook is of considerable value as a feature along Brook Street.
- The brook is of greatest value where it is visible to and accessible by the public.
- The use of the Brook and of its green verges and trees as a frontage has added to the attractive character of modern terraced housing at 46-64 Brook Street, and has helped to integrate the new housing into the traditional streetscape. The 1960 development at St Helen's Way also celebrated the Brook with chalet bungalows and gardens fronting onto winding paths that run alongside it. These examples highlight the scope for future development to benefit in similar ways, but new regard for wildlife and biodiversity will now be required in accordance with Biodiversity Policies NP24 and NP26.
- Between St Helen's Avenue and the lane into Preston Crowmarsh the Brook runs in a more natural state between a disused plant nursery and former road maintenance materials store (Assessed Site BEN9). Biodiversity Policy NP26 requires that development avoids any deterioration in the ecological status of the brook here, and that a buffer must be provided between the brook and any adjacent building, parking, private garden or formal landscaping. The banks on the nursery side and the Brook's onward course through a naturalised marsh area at Millbrook Mead are protected by designation of those areas as a local green space.
- The path alongside the latter section of the Brook is valued as a permissive path that passes below the A4074 giving access to Preston Crowmarsh and the river. Any enhancement that promotes use of the path by removing the impediment of the large pipe below the road deck will be welcome.
- As a chalk stream fed by the water table in the Chiltern Hills the brook can be subject to significant variation in level and has its own flood zone. As with the Thames it will be particularly important to consider flood risk management and drainage.

The following design principles relate specifically to development in the vicinity of the Brook and take account of the above matters in seeking to ensure that the relationship between the Brook and the village is preserved and enhanced:

#### **Design Principles: The Ewelme Stream (Benson Brook)**

**B1:** Development should recognise the pre-eminence of the brook in providing a spacious and attractive layout for any new housing adjacent to or alongside it;

- B2:** Development should preserve the surviving natural character of the brook and allow for sustainable green margins compliant with the Benson Strategy for People and Nature(see Appendix L);
- B3:** Development should preserve, enhance and promote attractive public access to and alongside the Brook.

### C. Benson in the wider rural landscape



**Benson in the landscape as seen from Eyre's Lane**

Responses to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey indicate that the rural landscape setting, and ready access to it, is highly valued<sup>3</sup>. Respondents' comments suggest that it helps to define Benson as a village, and that it is one of the major factors that encourage people to live in the village.

The geography and land use of the landscape setting is described in the Green Infrastructure section of the Plan. There is a policy provision for retention of landscape space to distinguish between the extended village and the hamlets of Preston Crowmarsh and Rokemarsh, and for planted green buffers to mitigate the visual impact of new development on the landscape. The Plan also identifies significant views of the landscape and of the settlement within it, and seeks to minimise potential for harming the visual character. The views are illustrated in Appendix E of the Plan, and are subject to Policy NP28.

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<sup>3</sup> Of 561 respondents to Q44, 452 rated the value of Benson's setting in the rural landscape at the highest possible rating, and 442 gave similar high ratings to the ability to access the surrounding countryside easily on foot or by bicycle.

These views form part of the distinctive character of Benson. Aspects of particular relevance to design of the built environment include:

- The breadth and spaciousness of the landscape as rural and primarily agricultural;
- The perception of the settlement as lying distinctively low in the landscape, in the valley bottom, with hills rising in the distance behind;
- The perception of Benson from the north east as a band of low-rise buildings, the abrupt edge of the settlement softened by the low profile of the bungalows along Blacklands Road;
- The perception of Benson from the north west as a low settlement glimpsed between the trees and hedging of field boundaries;
- The perception of the settlement as comprising buildings with roof forms that are predominantly plain and simple, and with mellow construction materials that harmonise with the natural seasonal colours and tones of the landscape;
- The topography of the land as rising gently towards the north east, from the low line of Brook Street to a brow occupied by the B4009 and site NP4 (Assessed Sites BEN3 and 4). As seen from the north west this brow appears at markedly higher level than the rest of village and extends away from the existing settlement.



**The Meer and Sands Way from the path to Rokemarsh (2017)**



**The Cedars from the B4009, with the Chiltern Hills beyond**

The agricultural use of the landscape, and the survival of buildings of agricultural use or appearance, is important to the rural character of the settlements and to understanding of their past as farming communities. The historic farmsteads within Benson village have been subject to considerable change, and care is needed to preserve their surviving attributes. Historic farmsteads at Fifield and Crowmarsh Battle retain impressively large barn complexes, converted to residential or office use, but still of strong rural character. These buildings and their settings are protected by Grade II listing. The mid 19<sup>th</sup> century working farmstead at Hale Farm is of more local historic interest. If that interest is to survive there will be need for development at sites NP2 and 3 (Assessed Sites BEN1 and 2) to respect its setting and working character.

Other businesses within the rural hinterland of the village have premises of agricultural origin or rural appearance and do not have signage that intrudes into the character of the landscape.

The following set of design principles relate to all development within the Plan area and flow from the nature of the landscape and its importance to the setting and character of Benson:

### **Design Principles: Benson in the wider landscape**

- C1:** All new built development should maintain a low profile with standard provision for two storeys or less. Further occasional second-floor accommodation in the roof space may be acceptable but not where buildings stand on higher ground or adjacent to the landscape setting;
- C2:** All new built development should avoid complexity in appearance where visible as part of the landscape setting and allow for outer roof slopes that are plain and uncluttered by multiple cross gables or dormer windows. Sensitivity will be required with regard to any roof lights or panels to be installed in this situation;
- C3:** Outer buildings should be constructed using natural local materials that harmonise with the landscape setting.
- C4:** Development should avoid the use of high fencing or walls along the outer boundaries adjacent to the landscape (e.g. by using hedges as part of the planted buffers required by Green Infrastructure Policies) and provide simple field fences for any outer boundary between the landscape and open green space.
- C5:** Street lighting should be contained within any major development at the lowest effective height so as to contain light spill and minimise visual impact on the surrounding countryside.
- C6:** New development should respect the setting and character of historic farm buildings.
- C7:** Any new business development should respect the landscape setting with the construction of buildings of discreet rural appearance. If signage is required it should be designed and positioned so that is not intrusive within the rural character of the landscape.

## 0.3 Benson and the Airfield

### D. RAF Benson

The proximity of the airfield and its use by RAF Benson will require special consideration in bringing forward development proposals, given the need to ensure that there is no adverse impact on the operation of the air base or the safety of those in and around it. Anyone proposing development within the various safeguarding zones around the base should consider the relevant criteria and consult the MOD Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) Safeguarding Team at an early stage. Safeguarding issues include height, precautions to avoid birdstrike, danger of explosion within the Inhabited Building Distance and the Vulnerable Building Distance, and impact on radar and air traffic management. There are particular concerns regarding the installation of tall wind turbines, which both impede low-flying aircraft and degrade radar and other signals, and photovoltaic panels, which likewise degrade signals and cause glint and glare. The MOD have highlighted introduction of a new safeguarding zone relating to the Central WAM Network, which feeds into the air traffic management system for central areas of England and passes through the Benson Neighbourhood Plan area.

Proposals will also need to be designed to mitigate noise and other environmental effects arising from use of the airfield. The importance of so doing has been highlighted by the dismissal at appeal in August 2017 of proposals for the development of Assessed Site BEN7 on grounds of the unacceptable impact of noise on the living conditions of occupiers. Developers should demonstrate that they have considered these issues and that they are able to resolve issues without compromising the attraction and viability of any future housing.

The following design principle relates to any new development that will be affected by the operation of the airfield and follows from the above consideration:

#### **Design Principle: Development in proximity to the airfield**

**D1:** Where development is otherwise acceptable in proximity to the airfield it must be shown that design will be effective in mitigating operational noise without prejudice to the living standards of the future residents. Solutions that do not allow for natural ventilation or for reasonable enjoyment of garden amenity space will be resisted.

## 0.4 Local Commerce

### E. Shops and Businesses

Benson owes much of its community spirit to the ability to shop locally and meet fellow residents while doing so. For this and other reasons of sustainability the Plan seeks to sustain local shops and businesses, and to promote the vibrancy of the village centre by ensuring ready pedestrian access. This Statement addresses design issues for related retail and commercial development and advertising. It is not anticipated that there will be major development but there may well be change. There is also likely future requirement for further parking provision.

#### Design considerations for the village centre:

- The shops and business premises within the village centre form part of the Conservation Area (see plan in Appendix C), and their vibrancy and appearance are important to its character. National policy requires the preservation and enhancement of that character.
- Some shops occupy listed or other historic buildings and have small-scale traditional shopfronts and signage. Others are compatible with the traditional character in reflecting similar village scale. This character is maintained with the Co-op. Whilst it is the largest shop in the village centre it has a narrow frontage to the High Street. It will be desirable that any further provision or change maintains this sense of modest scale.
- Signs are simple in appearance and conservative in style. They aim to inform rather than compete. There are no deep fascias or eye-catchingly large fonts and most signs have only two or three colours. There is no internal illumination and little external illumination. Blinds are few in number, and functional rather than branded.
- There are no external metal shutters. The Co-op does have a security shutter but it is internal.
- The brick paving scheme in front of the 1960s parade of shops to the north of the High Street has enhanced the appearance of the village centre as suggested in the SODC Conservation Area Study of 1999, and has helped to create the impression of a small village square. This gives visual focus to the village centre, while the provision of a circular seat and noticeboards at “Bob’s Corner” gives greater social focus. The orange-red and blue paving brick reflect the colours of historic brickwork within the village.



**Benson Village Butchers**



**Derry's Den and the Co-op**



**Paving scheme in front of the parade**

Many small businesses operate within the village from private houses but few with any street presence other than small-scale signage. The BP filling station, shop and MacDonald's by the Elm Bridge roundabout are markedly greater in scale, with prominent internally illuminated signs. However, they differ totally in context in that they address the A4074 and do not associate immediately with the village. The character of businesses in the rural hinterland is considered above in relation to Design Principle C7.

The following set of design principles relate to any retail or commercial development within the settlement envelope of the Plan area, and flow from the character of existing provision and the desirability of respecting the village character of Benson:

**Design Principles: Shops and Businesses within the settlement envelope**

- E1: New development shall preserve and enhance the character of the Benson Conservation Area;
- E2: New or altered shop and business units should appear small in scale and compatible in character with the village context;
- E3: Advertisements/signs should be designed and scaled to be compatible with the village context and the host building, and avoid use of internal illumination;
- E4: Wherever possible shops and businesses should seek security solutions that do not entail the use of external metal shutters.

## 0.5 The Layout of Benson

Benson has an irregular layout that is distinctive of its history and village character. Archaeology has uncovered evidence of Prehistoric, Roman and Saxon settlement on the gravels just above the river, and it is believed that settlement spread from this area around the church along the course of the brook, extending down Brook Street in the medieval period and later. The route of the Oxford – London coaching road via Henley became particularly important as a source of wealth in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the most prosperous buildings are ranged along its course, with fine inn buildings giving particular focus to Castle Square. This route is not straight – diversions around bogs and land holdings have introduced significant bends - and the acute angles with more rural side routes, particularly with the winding route from Watlington, make for awkward junctions. The historic settlement at Preston Crowmarsh is distinct as a rural hamlet, but that at Littleworth is more of an outlier to the main village, probably originating as a squatter settlement comprising humbler cottages along a strip of waste that is now Littleworth Road.

Housing at Port Hill was provided by the local authority in the 1920s in a separate rural location towards Hale Farm. Residents still describe it as being “out in the country”. Housing has, however crept towards it. That at Sunnyside, built in the late 1940s, has been highly successful in incorporating the recreation area as a village green, but has a sense of formal layout that is unusual in Benson. Later extensions of the village envelope around Westfield and Blacklands Roads adopted a gently curving layout, while infill to the south and along Brook Street in the main comprises irregular cul-de-sacs or closes. The exception is the 1960s development of chalet bungalows at Castle Close and St Helen’s Way, formerly known as the Castle Brook development. This seeks intimacy in laying out houses and front gardens to face communal pathways and the brook, whilst allowing for service roads to the rear.

### F. Roads and Streets

The Plan sets out a strategy for an edge road to run to the north of the village to relieve anticipated increase in traffic through the village on the narrow B4009, and provide more efficient connection with the A4074. The design of the new road will be subject to the advice of the Highways Authority. It will be essential that it provides safe crossings for the residents of housing beyond, and continued working access to Hale Farm. It is expected that it will also allow for associated footways, a cycle path, green verges and pollinator planting.

Technical matters for the design of roads will be covered by national and local highway advice. This Statement considers only the design of the streets that will be required to access new development and connect with the existing road system. It takes account of guidance provided by the SODC Design Guidance 2016 and the Department of Transport’s Manual for Streets 1 of 2007 and Manual for Streets 2 of 2010, and considers how new streets might best establish a sense of place and identity that relates to the existing and historic built environment of Benson.

#### Design considerations:

- The varied character of the historic road network, including the bends and narrow carriageways of the coaching route and the simple rural character of the narrow lanes, contributes positively to the character of both Benson and Preston Crowmarsh Conservation Areas and to the historic character of the other older

parts of Benson. It is desirable that this character is preserved and enhanced where possible and respected in integrating access to new development.



**Historic roads at High Street/Castle Square and Mill Lane**

- Whilst the historic streets in Benson are narrow and have buildings that hug the road, modern development has typically been laid out in more spacious manner. Carriageways are still of village scale, but more generous footways have been allowed, and there are verges and front gardens that provide a much greater sense of breadth and openness. The layout at Westfield and Blacklands Roads provides a good example. The degree to which the houses are set back appears greater than suggested in the SODC Design Guidance, and the spaciousness of the layout contributes to the impression of low village density. This is valuable to the relaxed rural character of the extended village. New development on the outskirts of the village will associate most closely with these types of layout.
- The bends and curves typical of both the historic and modern road layouts curtail views and enhance the intimate character of the village and the sense of neighbourhood. They also contribute to an informal village character. Development will integrate better with the existing character of the village if it adopts similar principles.
- Cul-de-sacs are common in Benson and have proved very effective on a small scale. Some of the larger cul-de-sac complexes, however, are more divorced from the main road network and do not connect so well with the rest of the community.
- The layout of the chalet bungalow development around Castle Close and St Helen's Way has created highly attractive pathway frontages for the houses there, but has had little regard for the service roads to the rear. The aspect here can be severe and unwelcoming, with bare roads cluttered by parking and hemmed in by gaunt rear fencing, noticeably diminishing the sense of public safety.
  - Character Assessment, particularly for the historic core of Benson, points to the value of trees and hedges as part of the street scene. This is noted in Section 0.6 K below, and the desirability of providing trees, hedges and green verges as part of new development is encapsulated in Design Principle M1. Such provision tallies with the Plan aim for biodiversity enhancement. Since this Design Statement was first issued in 2018, the need to address climate change has become a priority, and trees are now recognised as particularly valuable for their capacity to capture carbon and provide shade in increasingly hot summers. The community has supported amendment of Policy NP23 of the Plan to require developers to demonstrate how they have considered opportunities for the inclusion of street trees. As part of this requirement it will be necessary for developers to show that they have allowed verges adequate for appropriate

planting that is viable in the long term. Verges widths, depth of soil and relationships with buildings will need to be considered alongside highway safety requirements.



**Verges and open gardens at Westfield Road**    **Closed “rear” boundaries at St Helen’s Way**

The following set of design principles on this matter pertain to the whole of the Plan area. They flow from the particular character of the existing street layout, the importance of integrating new development with it, and the desirability of avoiding the negative design outcomes:

### **Design Principles: Roads and streets**

- F1:** The design of accesses for new roads and streets should, within safety guidelines, respect the character and scale of the existing roads with which they connect. Particular regard should be had for preserving and enhancing the character of the various historic roads and the character of the Conservation Areas in general;
- F2:** New streets should be laid out such that carriageway widths, pavement provision and verges are proportionate to the scale of the housing, and that housing is sufficiently set back to reflect the current spacious character of modern development around the historic village core;
- F3:** New development should adopt road layouts that use gentle bends and curves to reflect the current informal and intimate character of the village;
- F4:** New development should ensure that secondary and tertiary roads and cul-de-sacs provide pedestrian through routes to allow ready connection with the village centre, amenities and countryside setting;
- F5:** New streets should be overlooked by active frontages with low front boundaries that allow for natural surveillance and that maximise the sense of openness and space. In practice this is likely to mean that private rear gardens will be set back-to-back.
- F6:** The layout of new streets should allow space for planting to permeate development, providing green environs that enhance the built character and encourage biodiversity. Particular allowance should be made for street trees, with verges of sufficient size and depth to cater for planting that will be viable in the long term.

## G. Parking

Parking in the village centre is important to the use of the shops by those living outside the village, and to the general ability to “pop in”. The Plan notes that demand will increase with the occupation of new development. Given the location of the shops at the heart of the historic village, it will be important that the design of any new parking facilities preserves and enhances the character of the Conservation Area. At present, the parking area beside the parade is formally marked out to maximise use, including the cross-overs, but planters have been used to provide a sense of definition and screening. The Millstream car park is more discreet behind the shops and houses along the south of the High Street. As it is part of the strategy for the Plan to encourage access to the centre by pedestrians and cyclists, it will be expected that parking for bicycles will be provided.

Residential parking is a problem for many Benson residents. The historic layout means that many residents within the historic core have no access to private parking, and 20th century garages and drives are now too narrow for most modern cars. Many residents only use their garage for storage<sup>4</sup>, and garage courts can often have a poor appearance. It is noted that more recent garage provision, though larger, does not necessarily solve the problem given the incidence of alternative use. The consequent dependence on street parking leads to over-crowding that causes friction within the community and disfigures the historic character, while the paving of front gardens and long cross-overs is detracting from the appearance of the 20th century developments.

These deficiencies highlight the need for more holistic and long-term future provision that does not exacerbate the demand for existing street space or prejudice the future practicality and appearance of new development. Allowance for wider parking spaces to the sides of and between houses, or for street-side parking bays, may be appropriate, but it will be essential that parking is integrated into street landscaping and does not detract from the overall appearance.

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<sup>4</sup> The Housing Needs Survey indicates that only 117 out of 546 respondents parked their primary car in a garage, and that 319 out of 422 respondents used their garage for storage or other uses than parking.



**Crowded parking at Castle Close**



**Parking Bays in Hale Road opposite Sunnyside**

The following design principles pertain throughout the Plan area. They flow from the character of existing parking provision, and seek to avoid the repetition of past deficiencies in design.

#### **Design Principles: Parking**

- G1:** New parking for users of the shops and businesses in the village centre should be designed to appear unobtrusive in the street scene and the Conservation Area, and should incorporate parking for cyclists.
- G2:** New residential development should incorporate off-street parking spaces that are designed to be effective in the long term and that do not detract visually from the appearance of the development. Provision should not require or anticipate the future hard-surfacing of any land designated in the design as front garden. Provision that does not depend on garages that may be converted for alternative residential use will be particularly welcome.

#### **H. Paths**

Benson benefits from a distinctive network of footpaths. Some preserve historic rights of way to neighbouring settlements, the agricultural landscape and the river, while others service modern residential areas and connect to the historic core and main facilities. Their layout does not always appear logical to current needs, and can lead to difficult crossings or narrow roads without pavements, but almost everywhere there are possibilities for pedestrians. The paths link the community and invite exploration on foot.

**Design considerations:**

- The most inviting paths are those that are attractive, open and add to the sense of space. Examples include the historic Littleworth paths that offer a charming and intimate route to school between diminutive 18th-19th century cottages and their gardens, and the paths along the Brook through the chalet development at St Helen's Way. Low or green boundaries are important to the enjoyment, as is the sense of tranquillity. Paths through allotments and fields are more naturally open and attractive.



**Littleworth Path**



**Paths alongside the brook at St Helen's Way**

- By contrast, some of the paths through the mid and later 20th century developments are narrow and hemmed in by tall close-board fencing. These are uninviting and do not provide any sense of community safety.
- Most existing paths do not cater adequately for those with mobility issues. Narrow or non-existent pavements along the historic roads, and a limited number of crossing points, exacerbate the problem to the extent that some users of mobile scooters resort to driving along the roads. These concerns will be of increasing importance given the high proportion of elderly residents indicated by the Neighbourhood Plan Survey<sup>5</sup>.
- The modern paths are also bare of any planting that might provide through-passage for wildlife. In the light of Benson's Strategy for People and Nature it will be desirable that paths are designed to contribute to a network of green corridors.



**Natural path along the brook by the allotments / Materials' Store**



**Flush path at corner of Brook Street**

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<sup>5</sup>Q1 of the Survey indicates that 39% of the members of those households who responded were aged 65 or over.

- The requirement for a footpath within the narrow roadway at the west end of Brook Street has been addressed by installing a path at the same level as the street and paving it with contrasting brick. While this gives some differentiation from the road surface, the space is shared with traffic, and pedestrians do not feel safe. This measure has been adopted as a last resort and it is not intended that it should set a precedent.
- The only path designated as a cycle way is a path alongside the A4074. A path past Fifield Manor is also used by some cyclists as a route to Ewelme, but use of other footpaths as cycle ways is discouraged, and cyclists have to use the road network. Policy NP9 of the Plan seeks to improve connectivity and safety for cyclists by provision of off-road routes. The design of such routes will need to show regard for the safety of pedestrians.

New and improved paths are required by Policy NP9 of the Plan in the interests of ensuring connectivity. The following set of design principles pertain to new and improved paths throughout the Plan area, and flows from the character of the current path network and opportunities for enhancement:

#### **Design Principles: Paths and cycle ways**

- H1:** New development should be laid out with paths that permeate the built environment and contribute to a sense of communal space;
- H2:** Paths should be designed to be of adequate width and ease of access to allow use by all;
- H3:** Paths should be designed to have low, open or green boundaries that allow outlook to and natural surveillance by neighbouring properties or open spaces;
- H4:** Paths should have an attractive and inviting appearance that associates with the surroundings, including the rural setting of the village where adjacent;
- H5:** Paths should have verges that are planted and maintained in sustainable manner with species that encourage pollination and use as a wildlife corridor in line with the Benson Strategy for People and Nature;
- H6:** Paths should be constructed to allow safe use by pedestrians and cyclists where the route is to provide a cycle way.
- H7:** Paths alongside roadways should be raised and kerbed to provide a safe walkway for pedestrians. Pathways that are flush with the roadway should be exceptional, and should be provided with additional measures to ensure that drivers are well aware of the need to share the space.

## J. Spaces



Castle Square



Bob's Corner at the village centre

Benson is a traditional country village in which most spaces have evolved rather than been planned. The “square” at the village centre and the road junction at Castle Square, with imposing historic inns, vicarage and the War Memorial, have become village focal points. The only formal space has been created by the layout of Sunnyside around the recreation area-cum-village green. The green spaces at the churchyard and at the school playing field are significant to the history of Benson, and contribute visibly to the open green feel of Benson as a rural village, as does the riverside green amenity area at Rivermead. Other green spaces have arisen from the provision of allotments or play areas, or have been bequeathed by former Benson residents. They are important for the facilities they provide, and for opening up green areas within the village. These areas are valued, and the community gives high priority to the provision of more green spaces as one of the benefits of new housing<sup>6</sup>.



School playing field



Sunnyside



Rivermead

- Design Considerations:
- The most used open space, according to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey<sup>7</sup>, is that alongside the Benson Brook. This space is not defined or formal, and the high rate of use points to the value of incidental space that offers amenity to all passers-by.

<sup>6</sup> Benson Neighbourhood Plan Survey: Responses to Q30 indicate that from a list of potential benefits to the village, the provision of additional green space and trees was the third most popular, and was chosen by 319 out of 575 respondents.

<sup>7</sup> See responses to Q45.

Spaces that connect and permeate the settlement in this way are of particular value.

- Green spaces at Rivermead and Sunnyside are also very highly used. They are multi-functional spaces. The first offers riverside relaxation for adults and children, a paddling pool, access to the Waterfront Café and a start point for walks along the river. The second provides sports pitches and pavilion, play facilities, general space for exercise and strolling, a village green for events, and access to the parish hall. The range of use and the flexibility of the spaces is important to their attraction, as is the ready access and the possibility of parking.
- The space at Sunnyside is a community space, associated with and overlooked by the houses that surround it. The absence of fencing around the playing field and the lack of high boundary structures along the fronts of the houses is important to this character, and fosters a sense of intimacy, belonging and safety. Trees, and the current views between the houses to the countryside beyond, add to the attraction.
- Spaces that are hidden from mainstream public view are less used. The combined space of the allotments and the play area at St Helen's Avenue is a major asset but is hidden behind houses. The play area at Green Close, hidden at the heart of the Westfield and Blacklands Road development, is also indifferently used.
- Seclusion can be beneficial: it is necessary to the function of Millbrook Mead as a nature reserve, and allows for a sense of discovery. The Bertie West Field, however, is so secluded that few people are aware of its attractions as a wild play space for older children, and its lack of vehicle access hinders maintenance.



**Millbrook Mead**



**Bertie West Field**

- The natural character and the trees of these latter spaces are of particular value to the rural character of Benson. Policies in the Green Infrastructure section of the Plan seek to ensure that the design of new green space incorporates and allows for the maintenance of at least some element of planting that is similarly wild, and that caters for biodiversity and wildlife corridors. The aim is to achieve no net loss in biodiversity terms. Guidance is provided in the Benson Strategy for People and Nature, and in Section P of this Statement.

The following set of design principles applies to the development of any new housing of a scale that allocation of green space is appropriate. They flow from the character and functionality of the existing green spaces and the importance of further green space to the Plan area:

**Design Principles: Green spaces**

- J1:** Green spaces should be designed to cater for their intended purpose and where possible, provide for flexible and multi-purpose use, with scope for changes in future needs;
- J2:** Green space should permeate new housing development and contribute to the character of the extended village as spacious and rural;
- J3:** Green space should integrate with new housing and should be associated with open residential frontages;
- J4:** Green space should be landscaped and planted in sustainable manner. Provision should be made for its future management to reflect the local character of the village and its rural surroundings, and provide for biodiversity in accordance with the emerging Benson Strategy for People and Nature and Section P of this Statement;
- J5:** Green space should connect openly with accessible public rights of way;
- J6:** Green Space should have vehicle access for maintenance;
- J7:** Green space should have access to nearby parking as necessary to fulfil its intended use.
- J8:** Green Space should be accessible by all.

## 0.6 The Layout and Design of New Housing

### K. Housing development within the historic core of Benson

This section relates to the Benson Conservation Area and to areas of more dispersed historic settlement along Brook Street, Old London Road and Mill Lane. Development here will be subject to national<sup>8</sup> and local<sup>9</sup> policy and Policy NP6 of this Plan. These policies have regard to the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of listed buildings and their settings, other heritage assets, and the character of the conservation area as a whole. It is the aim of such policy that new development should make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, and draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of the village<sup>10</sup>. Any erosion of that character will be resisted unless there is an overriding degree of public benefit. Design should be led by the Character Study of the Conservation Area produced by SODC in 1999<sup>11</sup> (or by any future re-appraisal), by the Character Assessments for Areas 1 – 4 in Appendix E, and by assessment of the significance of the listed buildings and other buildings of local heritage note.

Opportunities for development in the historic core of the village will be limited. The Character Assessments note that this area is already intensively developed, with historic buildings lining the pavements almost continuously along High Street and into Castle Square and Brook Street. Gaps here, and where the historic settlement became sparser along its outer reaches, have modern infill, mostly set further back behind the historic building line, with deeper front gardens maintaining a sense of the former space. This pattern of contrasting set-back is of value in respecting the distinction between the old and more modern builds, particularly where more recent development is greater in scale or consistency.



**Horse chestnuts at  
Castle Square/Oxford Road**



**Trees along Brook Street**

The notable incidence of gardens and planted boundaries also helps to reinforce the character of the village as green and rural, particularly where the historic settlement

<sup>8</sup> NPPF Chapter 12: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment (Chapter 16 NPPF 2021)

<sup>9</sup> South Oxfordshire Core Strategy 2012 p. 99: Policy CSEN3 Historic Environment; South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (struck through) pp. 33-46, Section 3 Protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment: Policies CON1-CON15 (2022 Revision – Now Policies ENV6-10 of the Local Plan 2035)

<sup>10</sup> NPPF paragraph 126.(2022 – Paragraph 190)

<sup>11</sup>

[http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Conservation%20Area%20Study%20Benson\\_0.pdf](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Conservation%20Area%20Study%20Benson_0.pdf)

began to peter out along Oxford Road and Brook Street. The survival of mature trees and field hedging is particularly important in this respect, with tall specimen trees punctuating street scenes and leading the eye out of the built-up areas to space beyond. Instances are too numerous to mention, but the cluster of horse chestnuts on the corner of Castle Square and Oxford Road is particularly impressive.

While the pattern of historic settlement appears dense as seen from the street, it is also linear and shallow, with gardens and yards behind. Where these original plots survive, they are of relevance to the lifestyle of the former farmhouses, cottages and other historic premises, and development should have regard to that interest, including in the formation of any new access. At Littleworth the pattern of gardens that extend beyond the path in front of the historic cottages is particularly distinctive.

The size and scale of the historic buildings, and the variety of design, are of value to the special interest in denoting differences in age, role and status within the village hierarchy. It will therefore be important to respect the distinctions in extending or developing alongside, and avoid competition or intrusive new prominence. While the inns and prime residences may have three storeys and more elaborate architectural form and detail, the Character Assessment noted that the majority of houses present a simple and dignified façade to the street. Many of them, particularly along Littleworth and Brook Street are very modest in scale.



**Meaningful scale: Brook Street cottages and the former Red Lion Inn, High Street**

Benson's historic building materials



**Chalkstone rubble with brick dressings**



**Lime-washed chalkstone rubble and orange/red clay tiles**



**Timber frame with rendered masonry front**



**Chequer brickwork**



**Orange/red brick with vitrified blue/grey headers**



**Grey headers with red dressings (special)**



**Standard flint and brick**



**Pure knapped flint - special**

The variety in the use of local traditional building materials is one of the most distinctive aspects of the historic character of Benson and is highly valued by the community<sup>12</sup>. In summary materials are characterised as follows:

- While many buildings retain early timber framing, the framing is rarely exposed to the exterior, and the appearance of timber framing is not typical of the village.
- Stone was heavily used from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, but is a chalky rubble limestone of local origin, and not the same as Cotswold or other common natural or reconstituted building stones. It is highly soft and porous, and was usually strengthened with brickwork dressings, and occasionally with bands of flint. The contrast is highly attractive but often shows how the stone has worn more quickly with exposure to the rain and frost. A render coat was frequently added in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to protect the stone. These cement renders can be harmful, and a lime render or lime coat will allow better breathability and damp control. Re-exposure of the stone may look attractive but may not be viable in the long-term without lime wash protection.
- In Benson flint was historically used mainly for boundary walls. The only buildings constructed primarily with flint were the Victorian vicarage (now The Old Vicarage) and an outlying cottage down Old London Road. The flint is structural and properly bonded.
- Local orange/red brick was used for dressings and chimneys from c.1600, the earlier brick being narrow. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries brick was used more widely for the whole façade, with a particular fashion for contrasting blue/grey header brickwork with red quoins and window surrounds. Brick band courses and header detail at the eaves are common, while the finest buildings have gauged brick window heads and moulded brick cornices.
- Historic roofs are clad in local orange/red clay tiles or, to a lesser extent, in natural Welsh slate, with one thatched cottage at Littleworth.
- Doors and windows are painted timber, the windows mostly with small panes. Doors tend to have small timber hoods on brackets that fit over the doorway alone.
- Historic walls and railings are distinctive to the streetscape of this area, and also vary according to the status of the main building. Few walls or railings, however, have elaborate features, and elaborate gateways are not typical of the village.



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<sup>12</sup> Neighbourhood Plan Survey: See Q27 – What is particularly distinctive or valuable about the existing built environment of Benson? Of 140 respondents: 64 quoted the historical village character and style; 26 flint and limestone; 24 local brick style; 11 traditional, locally distinctive materials.

**Blending in – small-scale cottages at  
Birmingham Yard**

**Careful flint and brick in Crown Lane**

The following Design Principles flow from the desirability of preserving and enhancing the very distinctive character of this particularly important part of the Plan area:

**Design Principles: The historic core of Benson**

- K1:** Development should respect the historic character of this part of the Plan area.
- K2:** Development should respect the green character of this part of the Plan area by: retaining viable mature trees that are of value to the historic street scene or views out from it; minimising impact on field hedges; and providing new planting to suit the established character of the immediate locality.
- K3:** New development should respect the layout of historic buildings and their associated historic curtilage plots when extending or building adjacent to them, or forming new accesses.
- K4:** Extensions to historic buildings should be subordinate in scale and of high quality design that is sympathetic to the character of the host building.
- K5:** New development in gaps between historic buildings should be set back behind the historic building line to preserve the distinction between old and new, unless it can be shown that the development is of a scale and design that would enhance the streetscape setting.
- K6:** New development adjacent to a historic building should avoid any new prominence in scale, height, massing or complexity of design that would intrude on or diminish the significance of the historic building or its appearance in the streetscape.
- K7:** New development should be of high quality design that complements the historic character and should look to use materials that harmonise in appearance and integrate with the existing context. Use of local brick, or brick of equivalent appearance, render, clay tiles and, to a lesser extent, natural slate will be particularly appropriate. Other local materials should be used with care and respect for their local quality and context. False timber framing, stone cladding and pre-cast flint panels will not be appropriate within the Conservation Area or the settings of historic buildings.
- K8:** New boundaries along the street frontage should respect historic precedent and context, and avoid elaborate gateways.

## **L. Infill Housing Development in modern Benson**

This section relates to that part of the Plan area occupied by 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century extensions to the built envelope of Benson. The scope for infill development here is limited. Whereas past village appraisals have sought housing on brownfield land, it is now recognised that no significant sites remain. It is therefore likely that development here will take the form of extension, back-plot development or replacement housing. The community wishes to ensure that development does not result in over-crowding, over-development, exacerbated parking problems or adverse impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties, including overlooking and loss of light. It also wishes to ensure that development is in keeping with existing styles and building materials<sup>13</sup>.

The area varies in character according to date and circumstances of construction. The main considerations for future design are as follows:

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<sup>13</sup> See responses to Q24 of the Neighbourhood Plan Survey.

- Mid 20<sup>th</sup> century layouts tend to be low density, as seen at Sunnyside. Small-scale developments of the 1950s-70s around the historic core are also relaxed<sup>14</sup>, often with bungalows on deep plots. Larger planned developments of the later 1960s and 70s tend to be at a greater density<sup>15</sup>, but continue to appear spacious and not inappropriate to the village character because of the use of wide road verges and front gardens with low or no boundaries. Nowhere in the Plan area has a density that might be considered urban.



**Semi-detached houses and bungalows at Sunnyside**



**Small-scale flats at Aldridge Close**

- To the south of the historic core the housing is mostly detached houses or bungalows, with a large number of chalet bungalows at Castle Close/St Helen's Way. To the north, at Sunnyside, Port Hill, Sands Way, and the Blacklands/Westfield Road area, the development style is semi-detached housing, with bungalows provided alongside two-storey units. There are a small number of compact terraces, and only one block of purpose-built flats, at Aldridge Close. This block is of two-storey domestic scale.
- The high number of bungalows and of two-storey buildings with shallow roof pitches gives a general impression of low-rise design that is consistent with the landscape setting of the village. Roofs are also distinctive in being of narrow span and simple design, with end gables and plain ridges between. Cross-gabled roofs are not common. These factors have helped to limit mass. By contrast more recent developments of more traditional design have steeper pitches over deeper spans, thereby increasing the height and mass significantly, and giving greater prominence in landscape and streetscape views. Cross gables and dormers can exaggerate this prominence.

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<sup>14</sup> An exercise to calculate the density of houses in the triangle between St Helen's Avenue and the Old London Road gave a result of only 15 houses per hectare.

<sup>15</sup> The development at Blacklands and Westfield Roads is the densest, at about 30 houses per hectare.



**Lower shallow roofs at Sands Way**



**Steeper taller roofs at The Meer**

- The architectural style of the houses built in the 1960s and 70s is variable across the extended village but noticeably consistent within neighbourhoods, and particularly within the larger housing developments at Blacklands/Westfield Road and the chalet bungalow development at Castle Close/St Helen's Way. The styles used here are plain and of their time, and are not specific to the village. The integrity of these developments is important in maintaining their attractive appearance. Set patterns of extension, such as the addition of lean-to front extensions at Westfield Road have been of value in preserving this integrity.
- More recent housing developments have adopted a more traditional approach, using brick, render and tiles, set off by brickwork details and small-pane timber windows. These houses are admired for their prettiness and architectural interest, but harmonise best where they reflect true local character.



**Gravel Close**



**Millar Close**

- Landscaping varies. At Sunnyside surviving trees around the edges of the open green help to enclose the space and soften the formality. In the Blacklands/Westfield Road area trees are more incidental and important to relieve the regularity. Ornamental planting in front gardens adds valuable colour and texture, but this area is not strong in landscape focus. Recent development at Millar Close takes good advantage of a long established willow to focus attention on a green area in front of the housing.

The following set of design principles relate to infill development within the more modern parts of Benson village, and flow from the character of the different neighbourhoods within the Plan area:

### **Design Principles: Infill housing in modern Benson**

- L1:** New infill development shall respect the amenity of neighbouring properties.
- L2:** Extensions to existing buildings within areas of consistent architectural design should have particular regard to the appearance of the extended building as part of the street scene, and should seek to avoid harm to the character of the neighbourhood.
- L3:** Infill development should respect the existing pattern and density of settlement within the immediate neighbourhood, and maintain a spaciousness of layout consistent with the character of Benson as a village.
- L4:** Infill development should respect and complement the appearance of the existing neighbourhood in terms of scale, height, mass, materials and simplicity/complexity of design.
- L5:** Infill development that seeks to appear traditional in design should have particular regard to the distinctive character of historic Benson in terms of scale, height, and mass, and should seek to complement the local use of materials and design detail. Use of brick, tiles and slates that are harmonious in colour with local types, and of render, will be particularly appropriate. Other more specialist local materials should only be used with care and respect for their local quality and context.

### **M. New Housing around Benson**

This section considers the design of new housing on greenfield sites around the edge of Benson. It recognises that development here will be substantial, and that each site will need a new sense of place. Nevertheless it puts forward design principles to aid the integration of new housing as a future part of the existing village.

As stated in the introduction, one of the key messages from consultation is that the community values the character of Benson as a village, and as a rural village of historic character. There is strong support for the principle that new development should take account of that character, and that design should reflect the character of existing buildings<sup>16</sup>, not necessarily in detail but in essential spirit.

Matters arising from assessment of the existing character have been considered in the above two sections and will also be pertinent here.

Further design considerations:

- New development on the outskirts of Benson will impact on the rural setting of the village. It will be important to ensure continued links with the countryside and maximise rural character. Site policies and the principles set out above require the retention of field hedging, the provision of green buffers around sites, and the provision of green space, but it will also be important to maximise perception of green planting throughout the site as is typical of the existing village. Landscaping that provides green verges, green boundaries and significant trees to punctuate and give focus to new street scenes, and lead the eye out beyond the buildings, will be required. Policy NP23 of the Plan now also requires that developers demonstrate how they have considered inclusion of street trees, to provide space

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<sup>16</sup> Neighbourhood Plan Survey: In answer to Q26 306 out of 558 respondents strongly agreed with this principle, and 179 agreed. 43 agreed with exceptions, of which 10 cited the need to be in keeping with or complement existing surroundings, and others sought improvement. 30 disagreed.

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for nature and shade in a warming climate. Further benefits of carbon capture are also noted. This will require consideration of the space necessary to ensure that planting is appropriate and viable. (See also Section F above.)

- The community has commented that layouts and densities should be efficient in providing new housing, but is concerned that development should be true to the character of Benson as a village, and that high-density layouts should not introduce an urban feel. Care will be needed to provide compatible density and a sense of spacious layout as is typical of the rest of the village.
- The Plan requires the provision of different housing types. It is anticipated that these will be delivered by means of an orderly mix as elsewhere in the village, without the creation of distinct social areas, and with care to locate any retirement housing in a position that gives easy access to the village centre.
- Bungalows have been extremely popular in the past, and their large numbers contribute to the distinctive character of the village. The Neighbourhood Plan Survey makes clear that there is still demand for such accommodation<sup>17</sup>. The community has, however, questioned whether detached bungalows are efficient or sustainable, given the current tendency to raise the eaves and/or roof to secure upper-storey space<sup>18</sup>. There is some support for the principle that detached bungalows should be purpose-built with accommodation in the roof space.
- Flats will be required as part of the affordable housing provision. Current provision has relied on conversion of larger buildings to multiple units, and on one very modest two-storey block of flats at Aldridge Close. There are no large blocks of flats in the Plan area. It is considered that the examples illustrated in the South Oxfordshire Design Guidance therefore bear no relationship to the village context at Benson, and that there will be a need to accommodate flats in buildings of more domestic residential character and village scale.
- The height of new development has been discussed above in the section on Benson in the wider rural landscape and is subject to Design Principle C1. The perception of Benson as a low-rise settlement sitting low in the landscape, and the predominance of two-storey buildings with low roofs, highlights the need for care regarding the use of any attic storey at second floor level. It is noted here that the full three-storey provision of historic former inns and status houses is particular to their historic interest and does not set a precedent for such high buildings elsewhere.
- Existing buildings in Benson are of village scale and do not have concentrated mass or bulk. New housing should avoid any significant mass or bulk, and should be designed such that roofs cover modest spans or are fragmented over greater depths. There should be no new requirement for crowned roofs.
- The new development proposed in the Plan presents opportunities for high quality design that finds new ways of reflecting the particularly distinctive architectural character of historic Benson. Prime characteristics are discussed above in section K on the historic core of the village, and include reference to the rich variety of historic building materials. The use of chalky limestone and flint would require care, in order not to debase high quality historic craftsmanship, but the use of plain or decorative brickwork and render is more appropriate.

<sup>17</sup> Q16: out of 557 respondents to this question as to which types of accommodation were needed in Benson, 131 ticked 'detached bungalow', 186 'semi-detached bungalow', and 76 'terraced bungalow'.

<sup>18</sup> See account of the "Drop-In session" held on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> June 2016

- The community notes local and national policies to promote design for energy efficiency and considers it important that development meets national goals. Where installation affects roof slopes that face out towards the landscape there will be need to consider options that minimize prominence in views of the settlement in its landscape setting.
- The appearance of past development in Benson has been marred by overhead cabling. It is anticipated that future cabling will run underground.

The following set of design principles relate to new housing development around Benson village and flow from the desirability of integrating efficient modern-day housing into the distinctive village character of Benson:

### Design Principles: New housing around Benson

- M1:** New housing development should seek to maximise rural character by ensuring that planting pervades the site and relieves the eye. Existing field hedges and significant trees shall be retained, and new green buffers, boundaries and verges should be planted in accordance with Benson’s People and Nature Strategy and the principles on planting set out in Section P below. Provision should be made for the planting of appropriate large-scale trees that will soften and punctuate the new street scenes, provide focal points within the development, and lead the eye outwards. These trees will also provide essential benefit in terms of space for nature, shade in a warming climate and carbon sequestration. Layouts should allow space for growth that is viable in the long term.
- M2:** Where new housing development adjoins existing housing, it should respect the existing prevalent pattern and density of settlement, and maintain throughout a spaciousness of layout consistent with the character of Benson as a village. Density should reduce towards outer margins of such development with the landscape setting. Urban layouts and densities should be avoided.
- M3:** New housing development should provide different housing types as required by the Plan. These types should be delivered by means of an orderly mix as elsewhere in the village, without creating distinct neighbourhoods that might be socially divisive. Care should also be taken to locate any retirement housing in a position that gives easy access to the village centre.
- M4:** New housing development should allow for provision of semi-detached and terraced bungalows where they would be consistent with the policies of this Plan. Detached bungalows should be designed to incorporate accommodation within the roof space without need for future alteration.
- M5:** Flats should be accommodated in small blocks of domestic village scale and character. Blocks of flats that are taller or appear more massive than adjacent housing should be avoided.
- M6:** New housing development should be designed with regard for Design Principle G2 in relation to the provision of off-street parking spaces.
- M7:** New housing development should be designed with regard for Design Principles C1-C6 with reference to height and appearance within the landscape setting of Benson.
- M8:** The design of new housing development should respect the scale of existing housing within the village and avoid exceeding their existing mass and scale.

**M9:** New housing development should be of high quality design that seeks to complement and build on the distinctive architectural character of Benson, whether by use of a traditional style based on the architectural vocabulary and materials historically used in the village, or by re-interpreting the style for the present day. Use of brick, tiles and slates that are harmonious in colour with local types, and of render, will be particularly appropriate. Other more specialist local materials such as flint and chalky limestone, should only be used with care and respect for their local quality and context.

**M10:** The design of new housing development should accord with national and local policies that promote energy efficiency. Where houses will appear in landscape or other significant views, their design should ensure that the appearance is not cluttered by energy-generating equipment, and that alternative energy-saving measures are incorporated into construction.

**M11:** Power cables should be run underground.

## N. Preston Crowmarsh



**View south down the lane past The Old Mill House**

Preston Crowmarsh is part of this Neighbourhood Plan Area and shares community facilities with Benson, but has its own separate identity as a distinct hamlet of more riverside character.

It has been identified as an “other village” in the settlement hierarchy set out by SODC in Appendix 7 of the Local Plan 2035. Text at 4.39 of this Local Plan states that it is not generally expected that “other villages” will be a significant source of housing supply, and that possible proposals such as for single dwellings, infilling and conversions from other

uses will be considered against relevant policies. No sites at Preston Crowmarsh are allocated for development as part of this Neighbourhood Plan, but it is noted that there have been several recent instances of infill, replacement build and increases in height. Care will be needed to ensure that future such development does not detract from the attractive character of the hamlet.

Part of the settlement has been designated as a conservation area, to be sustained and enhanced in accordance with national policy, and an appraisal of the conservation area is now at last underway in 2022 to inform future management.

The Revised Plan introduces a Riverside Buffer to address Design Principle N2.

The following design considerations and principles derive from the Character Assessment of Areas 8 and 9 included in Appendix E.

**Design considerations:**

- The spatial separation from Benson village is important to the identity of the hamlet. Currently this separation is highlighted by the A4074 but also, more positively, by the survival of green landscape space and hedgerows between the settlements.
- The green landscape spaces to the south and east, along with the paddocks and open spaces to the west, the views of fields across the river, and the hedges and trees are important to the rural character and setting of the hamlet.
- The relationship with the river, including access to the Thames Path and views (some of which are seasonal) of the hamlet from the far bank and weir, is important to the attraction of the hamlet for both residents and visitors. The set-back from the river, maintaining green space and riverside vegetation contributes to this attraction and derives from avoidance of the main flood zone.



**View from the Thames Path**

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- The narrow width and informality of the lane, with its distinctive bends, green verges, and trees contributes to the rural character of the hamlet. It also limits traffic and allows for a relatively tranquil environment. These qualities, and the pleasant views up, down and out of the lane, attract use of the lane as a walking/exercise route for residents and visitors.



**View north up the lane**



**View north from Crowmarsh Battle**

- Settlement is thinly spaced along the lane with little development of rear plots. Views between buildings show close connection with the rural setting.
- The buildings that are most prominent in views down the lane south of the weir are the historic ones. 20<sup>th</sup> century and modern development is for the most part set back, even north of the weir, where houses to the east side of the lane are also well screened.
- The appearance of the historic buildings as country buildings, traditionally constructed using local brick, chalkstone, flint, render, tiles and thatch, is highly attractive. It is also of value in illustrating the hierarchy of farmhouses, mill and cottages, and the primary past function of the hamlet as an agricultural community. Some of these buildings are listed. It is suggested as part of this Plan that others are of local heritage note (See Appendix C).



**Crowmarsh Battle Farm**



**View across the paddock towards the farmhouse and dovecote**

- The listed farmhouse and farm buildings at Crowmarsh Battle Farm, originally established as a grange for Battle Abbey, are particularly impressive and significant to the early history of the hamlet. While they stand slightly apart to the south, their omission from the conservation area fails to acknowledge their importance to the character of the hamlet. The retention of farmland around them, including the remnant of paddock to the north, is of value to their setting. The current use of the farm buildings is beneficial to their conservation.

- Road and footpath connections with Benson village are important to the vitality and enjoyment of the hamlet, but are prejudiced by the A4074. The need to maintain access and improve opportunities to cross this road safely will become more pressing as traffic continues to increase.

The following design principles flow from the above considerations and the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the distinctive historic character of the hamlet and its rural and riverside setting in accordance with its conservation area status:

### **Design Principles: Preston Crowmarsh**

- N1:** New development should respect the separate identity, rural setting and linear layout of the hamlet by avoiding significant encroachment into the fields, paddocks and plantation to the east, south and west.
- N2:** New development should respect the existing alignment of buildings away from the river's edge in the interest of minimising impact on Flood Zone 3 and preserving the green riverside areas that are, or could become, visible from the Thames Path.
- N3:** New development should not exceed the capacity of the narrow lane or require upgrades that would alter its rural character, and should not entail any new requirement for parking along the lane.
- N4:** New development should avoid prominence in views up and down the lane and should have front boundaries that accord with the existing pattern of hedges, low walls or railings, or rural fencing.
- N5:** New development should retain viable mature trees that contribute positively to views along the lane and to the character of the area.
- N6:** New development should respect the close association between the conservation area and the listed historic buildings at Crowmarsh Battle Farm, but also their slight separation and the surviving distinction between the main residential area of the hamlet and the rural setting of the farmstead.
- N7:** Design should take account of the rural character of the hamlet, and avoid references that are overtly urban or suburban.
- N8:** Extensions to historic buildings should be subordinate in scale and of high quality design that is sympathetic to the character of the host building.
- N9:** New development adjacent to a historic building should avoid any new prominence in scale, height, massing or complexity of design that would intrude on or diminish the significance of the historic building or its setting, or its contribution to the character of the conservation area. Where adjacent to the larger farmhouses, new development should respect their historic status and avoid emulating or competing with their greater scale.
- N10:** New development should be of high quality design that enhances the character of the conservation area and its setting, and should look to use materials that harmonise in appearance and integrate with the existing context. Use of local brick, or brick of equivalent appearance, render, clay tiles, thatch and, to a lesser extent natural slate, will be particularly appropriate. Other local materials should be used with care and respect for their quality and local context. False timber framing, stone cladding and pre-cast flint panels will not be appropriate within the Conservation Area or the setting of historic buildings.

## 0.7 Planting

### P. Planting

Benson has much to cherish in its green spaces and wildlife interest, and the community has told us that it values contact with wildlife as a feature of life in the village. New development can play a role in helping to deliver the objectives set out in Benson's People & Nature Strategy through provision of new green infrastructure and biodiversity enhancements that take account of locally relevant priorities.

#### Design Considerations:

The People and Nature Strategy sets out to maintain and enhance Benson's Ecological Network. It seeks the following:

- maintenance of existing green assets;
- continued permeability of the village to a range of wildlife through incorporating green infrastructure and biodiversity enhancements into the fabric of new developments;
- provision of nectar sources for a range of locally important pollinator species;
- the creation of new wildflower meadows and enhancement of amenity grassland areas for biodiversity, including by building in wildflower margins.

#### Design principles: Planting

- P1:** Hedges - Existing hedges should be preserved as far as possible, but where new or replacement hedges are proposed, a diversity of species should be planted rather than single species hedging. The hedge should comprise a mix of native species - hawthorn (local varieties), blackthorn, buckthorn, spindle, and crab apple. It is important that the varieties chosen do not have double flowers as those are of limited value to the pollinators we are seeking to encourage.
- P2:** Hedges shall be planted as double rows of whips, staggered in a zig zag pattern so gaps are filled, with approx 50cm between rows. A margin of at least 3m should be provided at the base to buffer the hedge and provide space for a range of species (see wildflower margin text below).
- P3:** Woodland Planting: The choice of species depends on the purpose of the woodland (eg landscape screening or biodiversity interest). Sites in the proximity of RAF Benson's runway approach and departure points should seek specialist advice. For small copses, the following species will provide nectar in the spring and berries in the winter: Spindle, Buckthorn, Bird and/or Wild Cherry, Crab Apple, Guelder Rose and Service Tree. These are all fairly low growing - using 1m spacing creates a copse.
- P4:** For landscape screening or larger trees designed to grow as standards, ecologically appropriate species should be chosen, including consideration of disease-resistant elms to replace those lost to Dutch Elm Disease.
- P5:** When planting community orchards, consideration should be given to striping off 100mm of topsoil before commencing planting. Locally relevant varieties of fruit trees should be planted, with a spacing of c4.5m. Trees will need to have vigorous

rootstocks as Benson is prone to heavy frosts, and cages should be provided to prevent damage by rabbits/deer. To increase the wildlife value of the site, a wildflower meadow mix should be sown between the trees. A path and benches should be provided to encourage community use. A sound management plan, with community support, is required for such proposals so that the orchard is successfully established and maintained in the long term. Regular watering is likely to be required for the first few years, along with annual pruning, weeding around the tree bases, and mowing and removal of meadow vegetation. (Further technical advice is provided in this Natural England leaflet:

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/97004>)

- P6:** Wild flower margins on amenity grass areas should have a well-defined curved edge to mown areas. This adds interest for both humans and wildlife, is visually pleasing, and helps manage any concerns that the area is messy or unmanaged. Margins should be a minimum of 3m in width but preferably 6m.
- P7:** Wild flower meadows should be sown with a butterfly and bee wildflower or standard general purpose meadow mixture of seed, providing wildflowers that are likely to be robust, such as knapweed, vetches, bird's-foot trefoil, yarrow, selfheal and red clover. (WFG18 may be appropriate). Ryegrass in the mix should be avoided. Basic meadow mixes are readily available from seed companies. The margins will need more management in the first couple of years but then should be fairly low maintenance.

## 0.8 The Countryside

### Q. Development in the Countryside

The value to the community of the countryside and access to it, as recorded in the Neighbourhood Plan Survey of 2016, has already been noted in Section C of this Design Statement.

The Revised Plan now makes clear distinction between built-up settlement and countryside, with separate policies for each. Policies for the countryside include a Riverside Buffer at NP5, Distinctiveness of Settlements at NP27, and Landscape and Views at NP28. One of the key threads of Policy NP28 is that development should demonstrate regard for the character and local amenity value of the landscape as assessed in Appendix E, and avoid or minimise adverse impact on positive and particularly distinctive features. Particular regard is required for identified views and the settings of rural farmsteads, and improved public access to the countryside is encouraged.

The Plan otherwise defers to Local Plan Policies and recognizes that various types of development may be permissible.

Design Principles in Sections A and C of this Design Statement deal with the Riverside and the setting of Benson in the wider landscape. This new section deals specifically with development in the wider countryside and takes account of the Landscape Character Assessments now included in Appendix E.

Features of value that have not already been considered elsewhere include:

- The importance of rural footpaths in connecting settlements and providing access to the countryside
- The importance in the landscape of the pattern of willow-lined drainage ditches and hedges in defining the low-lying riverine fieldscape and the patterns of historic enclosure
- The value of the historic layout of the parish as encompassing river meadows, agricultural fields and hill-top woodland, still recognisable in current land use and in surviving tree-lines and woods seen in views across the parish towards the Chilterns
- The contrast in scale between the large open fields towards Warborough and on the rising slopes of the downs, and the smaller historic enclosures around Preston Crowmarsh, Hale Farm and Oakley Wood
- The value of surviving open land and rural character around historic farmhouses that remain separate from the main residential settlements
- The prominence of large modern farm buildings in the open agricultural landscape, and the desirability of materials and finishes that make them appear recessive in landscape views
- The desirability of avoiding an urban appearance for any residential development e.g. on Beggarsbush Hill
- The existence of landfill and scrapyards sites near Goulds Grove and Oakley Wood, within the AONB, and the desirability of appropriate restoration and/or re-use.

The following set of Design Principles flow from the Assessments and the above considerations, and from the desirability of protecting, and where possible enhancing, features that contribute to the enjoyment, nature and quality of the landscapes in the Plan Area, and the appearance of settlement within it.

### **Design Principles: Development in the Countryside**

**Q1:** Any development permitted in the countryside should ensure that the network of public rights of way is preserved and that public paths are accessible and well-marked, with surfacing appropriate to the rural locality.

**Q2:** Any development permitted in the countryside should be laid out so as to minimize loss of, and where practicable enhance, distinctive natural infrastructure and features, including drainage ditches, lines of willows, long-standing hedgerows, woodland and tree lines, all of which may be valued for their biodiversity and visual attractiveness within the landscape, and as a record of historic land use.

**Q3:** The scale of rural development within the agricultural landscape should be appropriate to the scale of existing enclosure and allow for a strong sense of retained openness. The use of natural materials that tone with the landscape and appear recessive within it will be desirable, particularly where buildings are large and prominent in the landscape.

**Q4:** Development within the setting of historic farmsteads should take account of the historic function and character of the existing buildings, and of the value to their setting of surviving farmland.

**Q5:** Any residential development (e.g. replacement, redevelopment, conversion, rural workers' dwellings etc.) in the countryside should be of appropriate rural design and scale, and should avoid any urban appearance or density.

**Q6:** Where new development would be prominent in the landscape, natural tree or hedge screening, comprising appropriate local species, should be provided to soften the appearance in the landscape. Boundaries with the rural landscape should otherwise be rural in character, e.g. with stock-proof or post and rail fencing, or rural estate railings.

## 0.9 Climate Change

### R. Designing to address Climate Change

The original Neighbourhood Plan reflected community support for measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. The Revised Plan responds to heightened concern and to new national and local policy and guidance that calls for urgent action to address the matter. This section of the Design Statement looks to encourage all developers and householders to play their part, and examines how the guidance might best apply within the Plan Area.

For national and local guidance, please use the following links:

National Design Guide, 2021 – sections on Resources and Lifespan  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide/national-design-guide-accessible-version>

Guidance in the South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 Technical Documents: Section 4  
<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/08/South-Oxfordshire-Design-Guide-Technical-documents.pdf>

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Design Guide 2022 – Last chapter on Climate and Sustainability

<https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/SAV/JDG.html#gsc.tab=0>

SODC advice for homeowners Action on Climate and Nature: What you can do  
<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/tackling-the-climate-emergency/what-can-you-do/>

Historic England: Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings, 2018  
[https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/eehb-how-to-improve-energy-efficiency/](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/eehb-how-to-improve-energy-efficiency/hea094-how-to-improve-energy-efficiency/)

National and local strategies to tackle climate change involve a wide range of measures that permeate the planning framework as a whole, and that can work together in many different combinations. They can range from major undertakings such as managing flood risk, renewable energy generation or passive layouts for new estates, to individual initiatives to install solar panels, convert to a hydrogen-ready boiler, boost loft insulation or provide a charging point for an electric vehicle. As technology develops it is hoped that this range of options will increase and become more effective. Few measures are prescribed as few will suit all situations, and guidance still requires a balance with regard to local character, particularly where historic buildings are concerned. It is expected, however, that all development, large and small, will incorporate a mix sufficient for us to become carbon-neutral, and better protected from the effects of climate change, by 2050.

The Local Plan 2035 reflects this approach, and sets ambitious targets that exceed current building regulations. Policy DES10 sets a scale of increasing requirement for new-build housing to achieve a 40% reduction in carbon emissions, with targets increasing to 50% by 2026, and 100% reduction by 2030. Policies DES7-9 set out more general

requirements for efficient use of resources, sustainable design and renewable energy. These policies set high expectations that will influence design across the board.

The application of the policies, however, will require continued respect for local character and distinctiveness. The South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Design Guide, for instance, states that “Development should demonstrate a balanced design approach to achieve sustainability, factoring in both passive and active solutions whilst considering local character.” This new section of the Design Statement therefore looks more closely at how these requirements affect design considerations relevant to the Plan Area.

### Community Initiatives

The Climate Statement in the Benson Neighbourhood Plan sets out the framework that SODC provides for working with parish councils to encourage climate action initiatives. Benson Parish Council has already set up a Climate Emergency Working Group to consider action that can be taken by the parish, and aims to evolve a climate action plan that will work in conjunction with the plan for Benson People and Nature.

One of the matters for the Working Group to consider will be the potential for a community scheme or schemes to generate power by low-carbon means. Any proposals for solar array or wind generation will need to take account of MOD (DIO) concerns about potential for impact on the operation of RAF Benson (see Section 0.3 D). There is perhaps clearer potential for hydro-electric power generation from the River Thames using the difference in water levels by the weir. While this has not so far been viable in economic terms, the heightened priority of developing low-carbon sources of energy may well make it more attractive in the future. Any proposals will need to have regard to Environment Agency requirements, Local Plan policies and NP5, including the importance of protecting, and where possible enhancing, the natural beauty of the river and local strategies for managing flood risk. It will be important that any installation appears in harmony with, or unintrusive in the riverside landscape.

### Large-scale development

The large-scale developments at BEN 1 and BEN 3/4 were approved before the Local Plan 2035 came into force. While these developments have/will have increased insulation in line with building regulations, they have not been subject to current policy expectations, and the current level of requirement cannot be applied retrospectively. The development at BEN 2 is having to make a greater commitment.

No further large-scale developments are envisaged for the duration of this Plan. It will be expected, however, that any future proposals for substantial building will need to have particular regard to flood risk management, and make the required provision for energy efficiency. These factors may affect the suitability of sites.

The desirability of measures such as passive layouts, tree shading, water harvesting and communal energy schemes will have bearing on the capacity of a site, while increased insulation requirements, low carbon materials and microgeneration will influence the architectural appearance of the buildings. Better outcomes will be achieved by tackling the opportunities and requirements at the outset, and designing in an innovative but balanced manner as appropriate as possible to local character, including landscape setting, than by tacking solutions onto conventional stereotypes. Up-to-date expert advice will be essential, and it is likely that an imaginative approach will be required if design is not to lose its sense of local distinction and harmony with the appearance of existing village buildings and/or their rural landscape setting as described in Appendix E.

Smaller infill developments, extensions to existing buildings and DIY improvements

In this smaller-scale context there is clear need for design to respond both to the climate change challenge and to local character. Local Plan Policy DES8 states that the Council will not refuse planning permission for buildings of outstanding or innovative design that promote high levels of sustainability “as long as they fit with the overall form and layout of their surroundings”. This policy promotes innovation but prompts consideration as to how to make it in sensitive manner. The following points will be relevant to the Benson Plan Area:

- There are many small-scale measures that can make a difference at household level, particularly when used in combination. These include: draught-proofing, thermal curtain linings and internal insulation to improve retention of heat or cool; awnings to shade from summer sun; dual flush toilets, saver taps and water butts to save water; and soak-aways and permeable garden/drive surfaces to reduce flash flooding. At a more ambitious level, the installation of heating systems such as air source heat pumps or hydrogen-convertible boilers will help to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. Double glazing may be helpful, but will need careful consideration where it might reduce essential ventilation or destroy significant historic character (see Historic Buildings below). Secondary glazing may present a more suitable alternative.
- Small-scale generation of renewable energy will clearly be desirable, and opportunities should be sought for installing solar thermal and/or photovoltaic panels wherever they would be efficient and appropriate. In the best instances panels will be built-in and form part of new design, but it may also be possible to install panels on existing buildings if roofs are suitably aligned. It will be important, however, to consider the visibility and appearance of the panels and their effect on local character. A regular pattern of installation will help to assimilate panels into the street scene in areas of consistent modern development, such as described in Section L of this Statement. Greater care will be needed, however, in the historic cores of Benson and Preston Crowmarsh, and in relation to listed buildings and buildings of local heritage note elsewhere, where panels may harm more significant historic character. Raised grey-black panels will diminish the attractiveness of historic roofs with old clay tiles, but may be less noticeable against slate or against an added roof arrangement. Alternatives in sensitive situations might include mounting panels on less prominent roofs, such as behind parapets, in hidden roof valleys, over garages, sheds or other outbuildings, or turning to other forms of mitigation.
- Special care is also needed in this Neighbourhood Plan Area that panels do not interfere adversely with the operation of RAF Benson. The MOD have raised concerns about the use of panels, particularly but not exclusively within safeguarding zones, because of glint and glare, and because of the impact of electro-magnetic fields on communications. If there is any doubt, the MOD should be consulted.
- Facing materials are important to local character as discussed in Section K of this Appendix. In this respect the aims of achieving a harmonious appearance and of meeting the climate change agenda are complementary. Local natural building materials will have a lower carbon footprint than distant ones, and are more likely to blend with neighbouring buildings in the older parts of the settlements. Of these materials, stone, gravel and aggregate are extracted from the ground and contain least embodied energy. Local stone is very soft and porous, and should only be used with care, but harder compound

substitutes of similar appearance are becoming available. Clay bricks and tiles have to be fired but still rank as low carbon compared with more modern materials, and the distinctive local orange/red brick is fired at lower temperature than the darker reds or engineering blues. Render is also reasonably carbon efficient, particularly if lime-based rather than cement-based, and can incorporate insulation if required. Re-used materials have least carbon footprint of all.

### Historic buildings

The NPPF remains unchanged in requiring that local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets (Paragraph 197). Local Plan Policy DES8 accordingly requires a “sensitive approach ... to conserve the special character of designated and non-designated heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance”, even in the climate change context.

This is not intended to discourage alterations to adapt to or mitigate climate change, but does require careful consideration of options that are appropriate both to significant external and internal historic character, and to the nature of the historic construction. Historic England’s advice on Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings (see link above) points to the difference between modern buildings designed to be sealed against damp and heat loss, and traditional buildings that are naturally more permeable and only function well where there is adequate ventilation and flow. This will be relevant to all historic buildings in the Plan Area, but particularly to those built of the local soft, porous chalkstone. The advice stresses the need to understand and take account of the character and fabric, take a balanced approach appropriate to each particular situation, and minimise intervention that is not reversible. It is particularly helpful in listing possible actions complete with pros and cons and a traffic light “risk” system. Most of the “green” and “amber” actions are readily achievable.

Consent may be required where buildings are listed.

The following principles stem from the intention of the Plan to encourage measures to adapt to and mitigate climate change whilst taking account of local character, and to address the particular concerns raised above.

### **Design Principles: Climate Change**

**R1:** Any above-ground/above-water structures or plant for hydro-electric generation should be designed to meet Environment Agency and local policy requirements, and to minimize harm to the visual and environmental character of the riverside landscape. It is likely that use of natural materials that harmonise visually with local structures, or of matt finishes that appear recessive in the landscape, will be most appropriate.

**R2:** Any future large-scale development should be designed from the outset to address climate change in an ambitious and holistic manner that responds imaginatively and positively to the local character of Benson and Preston Crowmarsh and their rural landscape settings.

**R3:** Developments within the existing settlements of Benson and Preston Crowmarsh should maximise opportunities to address climate change in a manner that shows regard for the local character of the surroundings, and particular regard for the character of the historic core settlements.

**R4:** Modifications to the fabric and appearance of historic buildings within the Neighbourhood Plan Area, to increase thermal efficiency and/or introduce renewable energy, should avoid harm to significant historic character and the well-being of the historic fabric.