



Benson Parish Council
Serving Our Community

Benson Neighbourhood Plan Plan Revision 2022-2035

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Appendix M - Settlement Boundary Methodology

Appendix M is a new appendix created for this Plan Revision to document the methodology used to define settlement boundaries for Benson and Preston Crowmarsh.



APPENDIX M

Methodology for arriving at settlement boundaries for Benson and Preston Crowmarsh

Contents:

Purpose

Criteria for defining the settlement

How the criteria apply to Benson

How the criteria apply to Preston Crowmarsh

Settlement Boundary Maps:

- Benson
- Preston Crowmarsh

Purpose

This document sets out a methodology for arriving at boundaries that will differentiate between the countryside and areas of built-up settlement, and so clarify where different development policies will apply. It sets out criteria for determining what is “built-up”, and therefore forms part of a settlement, and what is not. It then applies those criteria to the settlements at Benson and Preston Crowmarsh.

In order to provide a strong rationale, the methodology takes close account of guidance published by East Cheshire and Herefordshire Councils, and of practice adopted in successfully compiling neighbourhood plans within the nearby locality at Berrick Salome, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Cholsey and Crowmarsh.

Criteria for defining the settlement

Guidance places emphasis on the strength and permanence of existing boundaries, and on the physical and functional relationships between buildings and the features and land around them. It also notes the need to take account of outstanding planning permissions. Local parishes have interpreted the guidance according to context, with Crowmarsh and Cholsey taking particular account of functional relationships and tightness to the built form where landholdings are extensive.

It is considered that the following criteria are the most relevant to Benson and Preston Crowmarsh:

- 1 The boundary will relate to concentrations of built form, patterns of settlement and the associated land immediately relevant to the primary function of the buildings.

- 2 Strong geographical and physical features will be used to define the boundary where these create a natural edge to the built-up area, but not to extend it into land that forms part of the countryside.
- 3 Where settlement is bounded by the road or footpath network the boundary shall follow the near edge of the road or path. Such route ways will not be used to connect areas of settlement in the absence of other development.
- 4 Where the settlement comprises formally planned development that backs onto or adjoins fields, the boundary shall follow the predominant outer line of gardens or commercial plots, ignoring any individual encroachment.
- 5 Where the settlement is more informal in pattern the settlement boundary will follow walls, fences or hedges that define the rear extent of gardens that associate closely with dwellings. However, where gardens are particularly large or extended beyond the main pattern of settlement, those parts that appear visually as part of the countryside setting, and/or that have few or no buildings, will be excluded from the settlement, without prejudice to their status as residential curtilage.
- 6 Areas of open field, paddock or other open countryside that adjoin the settlement shall not be included unless they form part of sites allocated for development as part of this Plan.
- 7 Green amenity space that is confined within the settlement shall be included as part of the settlement. Green space that is on the edge of the settlement and that contributes to the countryside setting shall be excluded.
- 8 All housing that forms part of the clear pattern of growth of the settlement, and that lies within the major physical boundaries referred to above shall be included as part of the settlement. Incidental and outlying houses that stand alone or in small groups outside the above boundaries shall be excluded.
- 9 Historic and working farmhouses and farmsteads that were originally built at a distance from the settlement, and that retain a separate countryside character, shall be excluded from the settlement.
- 10 Commercial and service buildings that are located within or adjacent to the settlement, and that relate economically and socially to it, shall be included within the settlement.
- 11 The boundary will take account of extant planning permissions.

How the criteria apply to Benson

Benson is a tight-knit village that has grown and is growing within relatively well-defined edges. In detail:

- Benson has a historic linear core influenced by the course of the Benson Brook and focussed along Oxford Road, Castle Square, High Street and Brook Street, with 18th-19th century development along Littleworth. These areas, and their commercial and community facilities, are clearly included at the heart of the settlement. The brook reinforces the road boundary along the far edge of Brook Street once the houses have ceased along the southern side.
- 20th-21st century growth into former fields to the north and east has dense housing on small plots, with areas of development confined by consistent fenced boundaries. These fence lines form an evident boundary edge for the built-up area along Blacklands Road and to the north of Brook Street, in part reinforced by the line of footpath 125/12/20.
- Similar development to the south is contained by the perimeter fencing of RAF Benson and by roads. The unusual width of St Helen's Avenue, constructed in the 1930s as a by-pass for Benson, provides a particularly definitive edge to the settlement, with its mature double hedge and ditch along the southern side.

- Further large developments, allocated in the original Neighbourhood Plan, are under way along the northern edge of the village. These sites are for the time being included within the settlement boundary in accordance with the revised outlines set out in the housing allocation policies, as they are subject to planning permission but incomplete. They will deliver housing in accordance with the Concept Plan, and are subject to policies that require provision of green spaces to connect with the countryside setting (most notably areas of amenity and nature park to the west of BEN 1 and to the north and east of BEN 3/4). Once developments are complete, the settlement boundary will be re-drawn at the next Revision to exclude these green spaces from the built-up areas as consistent with Criterion 7. The new Community Hall will be included as part of the settlement.
- Beyond these boundaries Benson enjoys a rural setting of open fields, with farms and former farmsteads at Hale Farm and Fifield Farm. Fifield Farm continues to be an outlier to the main settlement and remains outside it as part of the countryside. Hale Farm was originally a remote enclosure farm. While it will be near-touched by development at BEN 2, the farm buildings remain very rural in character, and the retained paddocks around the house preserve its rural setting. This farmstead is therefore also excluded from the settlement in line with Criterion 9.
- There has always been a strong relationship between Benson and the Thames, historically expressed in the proximity of the church and the use of riverside wharves for supply and export of produce. The marina and riverside restaurant on the site of those wharfs, along with the campsite and lodges, all continue to associate with the village, providing leisure services and economic benefit, and are included within the settlement in accordance with Criterion 10, extending it to the river bank.
- The BP Petrol Station gives onto the A4074 but it and its associated shop and restaurant are well used by the community. This commercial area is therefore included within the settlement in accordance with Criterion 10, along with the care home that now sits between it and the houses in Churchfield Lane.
- Areas of green amenity space that lie within the village and are surrounded by housing are included as part of the settlement in line with Criterion 7. Green spaces at the edge include the allotments to the south of St Helen's Avenue, the nature reserve at Millbrook Mead, the amenity area at Rivermead and the flood meadows to the north of the marina campsite. These spaces form part of the countryside setting of the village, and three of them help to preserve the distinction between Benson and Preston Crowmarsh. They are accordingly regarded as outside the settlement.

How the criteria apply to Preston Crowmarsh

In contrast to Benson, the hamlet of Preston Crowmarsh remains a rural settlement that extends more spaciouly along a single narrow lane. The settlement pattern, including the main phases of change and the past avoidance of flood risk along the riverside, need to be considered more closely. The character of the settlement as seen from the Thames Path National Trail across the river also needs to be taken into account. Working from north to south:

- Most buildings address the lane, a few address the River Thames, and no buildings address the A4074. In this context, the river itself is only of limited relevance to a boundary, and the A road is of no relevance. Instead, the settlement is bounded by the fields, pasture and

riverside landscape that surrounds and infiltrates the built-up area, and that is important to its rural character and setting.

- The northern part of the hamlet was developed in the later 20th century, with a line of 1960's houses built on the narrow strip of land between the west side of the lane and the river, and a planned development of 1970's houses built on a field to the east. The river, lane and public footpaths immediately beyond the field boundaries provide clear-cut edges except at the north and south ends of the riverside houses. At the north end the hedge of the amenity green space at Rivermead provides a cut-off line. At the south end there are two small open plots of marshy riverside, one with an area of parking for the lock-keeper/Environment Agency. These two small plots are excluded from the settlement in line with Criterion 6, as is the lock-keeper's house isolated on the island beyond the weir.
- In the central part of the hamlet, between Mill Cottage and the bend in the road, settlement is primarily characterised by historic buildings set close to the lane, mostly on its east side. This pattern of settlement has been strongly influenced by the extent of low-lying ground along the riverside and the experience of flooding. Flood water is known to reach high above the banks to north and south of Mill Cottage, and sometimes as far as the lane in front of The Old Mill House. Environment Agency Flood Maps show Flood Zone 3 extending also high up towards Ferry Cottage and well into the open field to the immediate south. Historic development has been careful to avoid the danger by choosing higher ground and the low ground remains open, barring jetties and simple boathouses. In this context it cannot be considered that this open land to the west of the lane constitutes built-up settlement, and the boundary is drawn close to the buildings to reflect this. As gardens here are large but mostly maintained as semi-natural riverscape, the boundary looks to comply with Criterion 5. The open field opposite Numbers 47 to 57 and Lower Farm is excluded in line with Criterion 6.
- The buildings along the east side of the lane in this central part of the hamlet were historically concentrated at the north end, around the former Swan Public House and the Old Mill House, but the former gap between them and Lower Farm has been loosely filled. While there are still small gaps and views between the buildings that are important to the character of the Conservation Area, there is now a sense of continuous settlement along this side of the lane through to the pair of thatched cottages at Numbers 75-77. The boundary to the rear of this settlement follows the historic rear garden line immediately associated with the buildings, and excludes additional areas taken in for tennis courts etc. in line with Criterion 5. It also excludes an area of open space formed when the farm buildings at Lower Farm (now Numbers 65-67 Preston Crowmarsh) were converted to residential use.
- The Edwardian villa at Greenhaye is set well back behind the main building line, about 170 metres from the road, with an avenue of trees along the drive. The layout suggests a conscious desire for the house to appear in its own grounds, detached and separate from the main run of the hamlet, in the green land behind it. For this reason, and because of the absence of other development along the drive, this building is excluded from the boundary in accordance with Criteria 8 and 3.
- To the south of the bend in the lane, beyond Monks Cottage, is an area of early 20th century development on the west side of the lane only, bounded by the lane to the east. Houses were initially built in a plot of orchard belonging to Crowmarsh Battle Farm, facing and close to the lane, but with two houses on small plots behind. It has since been subject to more recent and current redevelopment and expansion. Garden plots have been extended to the riverbank but have generally been maintained in a relatively natural manner as part of the riverside, excepting garden rooms and a decorated WW2 pillbox. The risk of flooding

accounts in part for this as in the central area described above. One of the rear houses has, however, been rebuilt significantly closer to the river and the flood plain, and permission has been granted for a new house behind Mansfield Cottage, thereby setting a new rear building line. The boundary here takes account of the new building line and planning permission, but excludes the extended gardens in line with Criteria 11 and 5. To the south this settlement group extends as far as the driveway to Number 76, beyond which is a narrow but open field. The boundary excludes this field in line with Criterion 6, and therefore marks the end of the built-up settlement at this point.

- Crowmarsh Battle Farm lies beyond the field, connected to the main built-up area only by a stretch of road, albeit a short stretch of road. In physical terms it therefore continues distinct and separate from the settlement in the way it always has done. Historically it was more separate before the development of the orchard plot above, and a degree of separateness remains important to the significance of the Grade II listed farmhouse and farm buildings as a historic farmstead in a rural countryside setting. The farm is therefore not included within the settlement boundary but forms part of the countryside in accordance with Criteria 3 and 9. Moreover, the historic function of its farm buildings has been largely superseded by office use that does not relate particularly to the nearby community. This is not to say that the farmstead does not belong to or associate with Preston Crowmarsh. Indeed the association is very important to the history and rural character of Preston Crowmarsh. As a grange to Battle Abbey, the farm would have been the most significant building in the neighbourhood, and part of the original reason for settlement in this neighbourhood. The boundary is not intended to imply any social division but simply to provide a definition for policy purposes between built-up area and countryside.
- The small cluster of buildings to the south west of Crowmarsh Battle Farm are separated from the built-up area by the farmstead buildings, and are not visible from it or the lane. In theory there are only three permanent dwellings here, and the group is not so substantial as to constitute a settlement in its own right. These buildings are held to be outside the settlement and part of the countryside in accordance with Criterion 8.