

Tuesday, 4 October 2022

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## CABINET

You are summoned to a meeting of the Cabinet which will be held in the Council Chamber, Woodgreen, Witney OX28 1NB on **Wednesday, 12 October 2022 at 2.00 pm.**



Giles Hughes  
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Cabinet

Councillors: Andy Graham (Leader), Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader), Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Duncan Enright, Andy Graham, Dan Levy, Mathew Parkinson, Andrew Prosser, Carl Rylett and Geoff Saul

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Cabinet, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted. By participating in this meeting, you are consenting to be filmed.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Democratic Services officers know prior to the start of the meeting.

# AGENDA

1. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 5 - 10)  
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2022.
2. **Apologies for Absence**
3. **Declarations of Interest**  
To receive any declarations from Members of the Committee on any items to be considered at the meeting
4. **Participation of the Public**  
Members of the public may ask a question at a meeting of Cabinet for up to three minutes on any item of business for decision at the meeting or on any issue that affects the district or its people. Members of the public wishing to speak at a Cabinet meeting must notify [democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk), including their name and the agenda item or topic they wish to speak on, by 2.00pm two clear working days before the meeting (e.g. for a Wednesday meeting, the deadline would be 2.00pm on the Friday before). If the topic of the question is not within the remit of the Council, advice will be provided on where best to direct the question. The relevant Cabinet Member will either respond verbally at the meeting or provide a written response which will be included in the minutes of the meeting.
5. **Receipt of Announcements**  
Purpose:  
To receive any announcements from the Leader of the Council or Members of the Cabinet.
6. **Recommendations from Scrutiny Committees**  
Purpose:  
To consider a recommendation arising from the Climate and Environment Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting on 29 September 2022.  
  
Recommendation:  
That the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary Of State for the Environment calling on him to:
  - Ensure the Environment Agency is fully funded to carry out flood protection and 'river cleanliness' works,
  - Ensure legislation is light enough to bring forward successful prosecutions of breaches to river pollution,
  - Alter Planning Legislation to make the Water Authorities statutory consultees in planning applications.

A proposed response to the recommendation will be circulated prior to the Cabinet meeting.



7. **Commercial Solar Photovoltaic Installations on Council Estate (Pages 11 - 18)**

Purpose:

To seek agreement to proceed with a procurement to obtain costs which will inform a full business case for the installation of solar PV on the roofs of buildings owned and leased by the Council. To agree to proceed with investment subject to the proposal being in line with the Councils Investment Strategy.

Recommendations:

That Cabinet resolves to:

- (a) Agree that the Council should proceed with an open procurement process to identify costs and income potential to inform a business case for investment, and that,
- (b) Agree that the Council explore implications for selling energy generated to tenants.
- (c) Agree that viable business cases in line with the Councils Investment Strategy, are submitted to the Council's Capital Investment Board for consideration before a formal decision is brought before Council to allocate capital to undertake the works.
- (d) Delegate Authority to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Finance and Climate Change, to appoint a contractor as it may be necessary for the selected contractor to carry out more detailed financial analysis before business cases can be formally considered.

8. **Data Retention Policy (Pages 19 - 38)**

Purpose:

This report seeks approval for an updated Data Retention Policy to ensure compliance with the Council's statutory obligations whilst at the same time being open and transparent in relation to records management.

Recommendation:

That Cabinet resolves to approve the Data Retention Policy attached at Annex A

9. **Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Policy (Pages 39 - 48)**

Purpose:

To consider and approve the implementation of an Exception Hardship Policy to ensure additional financial assistance is available to help with Council Tax payments to those residents who are in severe financial hardship

Recommendation:

That Cabinet resolves to:

- a) Approve the Revenues spend to support this scheme;
- b) Approve the implementation of the Exceptional Hardship Policy as a matter of urgency;
- c) Note the additional revenue given by Oxfordshire County Council in support of

this Policy; and,

- d) Grant delegated authority to the Group Manager for Resident Services to approve all payments made under the Exceptional Hardship Policy.

10. **Combe Village Design Statement (VDS) (Pages 49 - 92)**

Purpose:

To consider the Combe Village Design Statement (VDS) and agree that it should be subject to a 6-week period of public consultation prior to it being potentially adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.

Recommendations:

That Cabinet resolves to:

- a) Note the content of the report including the consultation summary report attached at Annex A be noted;
- b) Agree that the Combe Village Design Statement attached at Annex B and prepared by Combe Parish Council, be published for a 6-week period of public consultation; and
- c) Agree that the District Council's current Local Development Scheme (LDS) published in July 2022 be updated as per the LDS addendum attached at Annex C.

11. **Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (Pages 93 - 102)**

Purpose:

To provide an update on the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme and the transition to a process focused on Local Plans

Recommendation:

That Cabinet resolves to note the content of this report including Annex A

12. **Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan Proposed Main Modifications (Pages 103 - 110)**

Purpose:

To agree the District Council's formal response to consultation on proposed Main Modifications to the Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan (AAP).

Recommendations:

That Cabinet resolves to agree the suggested draft response attached at Annex A for the purposes of submission to the AAP examination

(END)

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Cabinet**

Held in the Charlbury Community Centre, Enstone Road, Charlbury, OX7 3PQ at 2.00 pm on  
**Wednesday, 21 September 2022**

### PRESENT

Councillors: Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development), Joy Aitman (Cabinet Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities), Dan Levy (Cabinet Member for Finance), Mathew Parkinson (Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery) and Geoff Saul (Cabinet Member for Housing and Social Welfare).

Also present Councillors: Hugo Ashton, Mike Cahill, Colin Dingwall, Gill Hill, Charlie Maynard, Michelle Mead and Alaric Smith.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Susan Sale (Monitoring Officer), Mandy Fathers (Business Manager, Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service), Andrew Turner (Business Manager, Assets & Council Priorities), Murry Burnett (Strategic Housing & Development Officer), Elizabeth Stacey, Georgia Jones (Communications Officer), Anne Learmonth and Janet Eustace (Democratic Services).

#### **55 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meetings held on Wednesday 17 August 2022 and 14 September 2022 were approved and signed by the Deputy Leader.

#### **56 Apologies for Absence**

Councillors: Andy Graham (Leader), Lidia Arciszewska (Cabinet Member for Environment), Andrew Prosser (Cabinet Member for Climate Change) and Carl Rylett (Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development).

#### **57 Declarations of Interest**

Declarations of Interest were received as follows:

Councillor Levy (Cabinet Member for Finance) declared an interest in item 68 and after introducing the paper, took no part in the decision making process.

#### **58 Participation of the Public**

The Deputy Leader reported that Michael Anderson (Chair of Chilson Parish Meeting) had submitted three written questions. Councillor Arciszewska (Cabinet Member for Environment) had provided the following answers:

Q1. The removal of recycling facilities in local car parks has proved a real inconvenience (given the distance to our nearest recycling centres) and appears to have increased fly tipping. Given the increasing importance of the need to meet recycling targets, will the Council reconsider its position on this issue?

A1. The council provides an extensive doorstep recycling service to residents of West Oxfordshire, it is in the top 10% of local authorities in the country for recycling. Levels of fly tipping in West Oxfordshire have reduced during the last year. The council has commissioned a review of its waste and recycling services that is scheduled to report to the Cabinet later

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this year and I have asked Officers to review recycling provision in West Oxfordshire following the removal of community recycling sites by the previous Administration.

Q2. In order to support the area's town centres, can the Council confirm that it has no plans to stop free on street parking, and in Council car parks?

A2. We have no current plans to introduce Parking Charges in Council (off street) Car Parks. The management of On Street Parking transfers back to the County Council in April next year.

Q3. What actual action can the Council take to prevent the regular discharge of sewage into the Evenlode?

A3. The Council is working closely with Thames Water on the issue of raw sewage discharges into the Evenlode. Thames Water will be attending a Council meeting in September where they will be providing an update on their current performance as well as what their detailed plans are for the Evenlode catchment, which is included in their smarter water catchment initiative / scheme.

The Council is also demanding that this government reverse its recent legislation that allows water companies to continue to pollute our rivers without any legal sanctions and that the regulators insist on proper investment to upgrade the current infrastructure which is clearly not 'fit for purpose'.

## **59 Receipt of Announcements**

Councillor Enright (Deputy Leader) recorded his thanks to officers who had facilitated activities which had enabled residents of West Oxfordshire to pay tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II during the period of mourning.

The meeting observed a short silence to reflect on the life of HM Queen Elizabeth.

## **60 Hackney Carriage Fare Review**

Councillor Enright (as Cabinet Member for Economic Development) introduced the report on the Hackney Carriage Fare Review. He explained that fares were reviewed from time to time and that recent increases in the cost of living made this review timely.

Councillor Mead asked why only 10% of taxi drivers had been consulted and flagged up concerns that increases in fares could result in increased social isolation particularly in rural areas. Councillor Dingwall noted that fuel costs were going down and said he hoped drivers would charge lower fares where possible. Mandy Fathers ((Business Manager, Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service) explained that these were maximum fares and that all drivers had an opportunity to comment on the proposals.

**Resolved by Cabinet to**

- a) Agree the proposed increase to the hackney carriage table of fares is advertised as a public notice in accordance with the requirements of Section 65, of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976; and
- b) Agree subject to there being no objections received in accordance with the statutory provisions within 14 days of publication of the notice, the proposed fare increase will

take effect from 12 October 2022. If objections are received within the 14 days, the matter will need to be considered further by Cabinet within two months of the first specified date.

**61 Implementation of Local Connection Criteria and Fee Regime for the Self-Build Register**

Councillor Saul (Cabinet Member for Housing and Social Welfare) introduced this item. He explained that Regulations now allow for the Register to be split to identify those with a local connection. It was proposed to apply a local connection test similar to the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme which would require the applicant to demonstrate residence, employment or a family connection in the District. Councillor Aitman supported the proposals saying that it was important to be ready for the increased demand that was expected.

Councillor Dingwall expressed concerns that the financial capability test might exclude those people who could not provide the upfront finance needed. Murry Burnett (Strategic Housing & Development Officer) confirmed that the intention was to be as flexible as possible and that the absence of upfront finance would not necessarily prevent an applicant joining the list.

**Resolved** by Cabinet to

- a) approve the introduction of a local connection and financial capability criteria for entry on to the Council's Self & Custom Build Register be agreed; and
- b) approve a review of the Register and the creation of Part 1 and Part 2 of the register. With Part 1 being formed of those who meet local connection criteria set and Part 2 to be formed of those who conform with all criteria except the local connection test; and
- c) approve that the fee structure set out within Section 5 of this report for new applicant to join the register is adopted from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and that this fee can be monitored and varied if necessary with the agreement of the Cabinet Member;

**62 Review of Monitoring Officer Arrangements**

Councillor Enright (Deputy Leader) introduced this item. He paid tribute to the support provided by Susan Sale who is the Council's interim Monitoring Officer. He emphasised the importance of the Monitoring Officer role and explained that the proposal was to appoint a full time Director of Governance and Development who would also be the Council's Monitoring Officer. Other posts would be converted from temporary to permanent to support the Council's emerging priorities.

In discussion it was agreed that the Job Description for the Director of Governance and Development should be amended so that key responsibility 3 reads 'Develop an innovative and commercial approach across the Council' deleting reference to 'within your specific service areas'.

**Resolved** by Cabinet to

- a) Support the recruitment of a full time Director of Governance & Development to act as the Council's Monitoring Officer.
- b) Request that the Performance and Appointments Committee be requested to consider the terms and conditions for the Director of Governance & Development and any consequential amendments to those of the retained officer structure.
- c) Support the conversion of the following temporary roles into permanent roles into permanent roles in light of the central role they will play in delivering the Shared Prosperity Fund and the Council's emerging priorities:

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- Market Towns Officer
  - Climate Change Manager
- d) Review other temporary roles relevant to West Oxfordshire through the 23/24 budget process to consider permanent contracts for those roles that are needed on an ongoing basis.
- e) Give consideration to extending the temporary contract for the Biodiversity/Countryside Land Management Officer role to allow this role to be considered through the 23/24 budget process.
- f) Note that the funding for the roles set out in (c) above be in the first instance financed from the New Initiatives Funding Reserve previously approved by Council pending any permanent funding being approved in the 2023/24 budget process.

**63 Performance Monitoring Report Q1 - 2022/23**

Councillor Levy (Cabinet Member for Finance) introduced this item and reported that most of the indicators demonstrated that performance continued to improve. The report served to highlight those areas which needed more work.

There was discussion around the collection of green waste where fewer households were buying licences. It was felt that efforts should be made to find out why this was happening. It was noted that changes in central government policy could have a big impact on the number of enquiries to the Council. The Chief Executive explained that a small number of key planning indicators were being reported on. Other data would be available within the systems but it was noted that pre application discussions did not follow set timescales and would be difficult to measure. Councillor Enright noted that the Council would shortly begin work on a new waste contract.

**Resolved** by Cabinet to note the 2022/23 Q1 service performance

**64 Financial Performance Q1 2022/23**

Councillor Levy (Cabinet Member for Finance) introduced this report. He explained that Q1 showed an overall overspend compared to budget largely due to inflation and the increase in fuel prices. He warned that the position would become more difficult as the cost of living crises bites. Various services, including green waste, trade waste and car parking enforcement had been identified as areas to keep under close review. Also officers were looking to renegotiate the current high bank charges. The Chief Finance Officer explained that there were a number of reasons why recycling costs were increasing including that some materials were very expensive to recycle.

**Resolved** by Cabinet to note the 2022/23 Q1 finance performance.

**65 Exclusion of Public and Press**

Cabinet **resolved** that, in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the public were excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business.

**66 Write Off of Unpaid Business Rates in Excess of £5,000**

Councillor Levy (Cabinet Member for Finance) explained that business rates to the value of £5,170.74 had been incurred on a property in the District. The proposed write off would

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result in a deficit in the business rates which will form part of the Collection Fund Surplus or Deficit at the end of 2022/23.

**Resolved** by Cabinet to approve the write off of £5,170.74.

**67 New Lease at Unit 1 Talisman Business Centre, Bicester**

Councillor Levy (Cabinet Member for Finance) introduced this item. He explained that the previous tenant had agreed a dilapidations payment of £165,000. He confirmed that a new tenant had been found and would be paying the same rent as the previous tenant. It was encouraging that a new tenant had been found so quickly.

**Resolved** by Cabinet to

- (a) approve the granting of a lease of Unit 1 Talisman Business Centre, Bicester on the terms contained in this report;
- (b) approve the funding of works recommended within the report from the £165,000 dilapidations payment from the previous tenant and £154,000 from the Investment and Incentive Fund, with the tenant to carry out the works as a preference as detailed in the report;
- (c) approve delegated authority be given to the Group Manager for Property and Regeneration in consultation with the Head of Legal Services and the Deputy Chief Executive to approve the final terms of the lease.

**68 S13A Discretionary Council Tax Discount Appeal Application**

Councillor Levy (Cabinet Member for Finance) introduced this item. He explained that he had considered the original application under delegated decisions and had decided against awarding a rebate. The applicant had now appealed and the matter was being considered by Cabinet. Councillor Levy said that he would take no part in the decision regarding the appeal.

Councillor Enright asked whether this case would set a precedent and was assured that each application was considered on a case by case basis.

**Resolved** by Cabinet to

- (a) Consider the appeal for Council Tax Section 13A Discretionary discount submitted under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992; and,
- (b) Approve the award of a Council Tax discount under S13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as detailed in paragraph 2.9 of this report

The Meeting closed at 2.47 pm

CHAIR

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 <b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>CABINET 12 OCTOBER 2022</b>
Report Number	<b>Agenda Item 7</b>
Subject	<b>COMMERCIAL SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC INSTALLATIONS ON COUNCIL ESTATE</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance Email: dan.levy@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andrew Turner, Business Manager for Assets and Council Priorities Email: andrew.turner@publicagroup.co.uk
Summary/Purpose	To seek agreement to proceed with a procurement to obtain costs which will inform a full business case for the installation of solar PV on the roofs of buildings owned and leased by the Council. To agree to proceed with investment subject to the proposal being in line with the Councils Investment Strategy.
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	<p>That Cabinet resolves to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Agree that the Council should proceed with an open procurement process to identify costs and income potential to inform a business case for investment, and that,</li> <li>(b) Agree that the Council explore implications for selling energy generated to tenants.</li> <li>(c) Agree that viable business cases in line with the Councils Investment Strategy, are submitted to the Council's Capital Investment Board for consideration before a formal decision is brought before Council to allocate capital to undertake the works.</li> <li>(d) Delegate Authority to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation</li> </ul>

	with the Cabinet Members for Finance and Climate Change, to appoint a contractor as it may be necessary for the selected contractor to carry out more detailed financial analysis before business cases can be formally considered.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.</li> <li>• Climate Action - Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Public consultation on Climate Change May 2020

## I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency in June 2019, with the aim of making the District carbon neutral by 2030. Following public consultation in May 2020, the Council adopted a Climate Action Plan in October 2020 and subsequently a Climate Change Strategy was adopted in February 2021.
- 1.2 The Council has identified a number of Priorities within its Corporate Plan which include climate action, supporting local businesses and ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.
- 1.3 The Council owns a number of buildings which are let commercially to provide a return on investment which underpins the delivery of core services to the public. A number of these office and warehouse buildings have large roofs which could be suitable for the installation of Solar PV and could generate energy to power the activities within the buildings.
- 1.4 Tenants are responsible for paying their own utility bills but the Council could sell energy to tenants and/or explore other opportunities for using or selling the energy generated.
- 1.5 Whilst there will be a considerable capital investment required, there could be a significant return on that investment and this commitment to decarbonisation would align well with the Council's Climate Strategy.
- 1.6 As a landlord, the Council will have a responsibility to meet Government's Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) for non-domestic buildings. The current regulations require all tenanted non-domestic buildings to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of no lower than a rating of E. From 1st April 2018 any commercial property that has an EPC of lower than an 'E' cannot be rented out to new tenants, or renew any existing tenancy contracts until at least an 'E' rating is obtained. From 1st April 2023 all tenanted commercial properties must have an EPC rating of no lower than 'E'. There are exemptions to the MEES for properties such as listed buildings. The buildings identified for PV installations do not all meet this standard, with two units at Swain Court rated G and four units at Newman Court rated F or G. The installation of Solar PV would therefore make a notable contribution to lowering the EPC. The Council is currently preparing a plan to consider the works required in non-compliant buildings.
- 1.7 Initial feasibility work has identified the following buildings may be suitable for Solar PV and could provide a suitable return on investment:
  - Talisman Business Centre, Bicester
  - Des Roches Square, Witney
  - Carterton Industrial Estate, Carterton

As the July Council decision on agile working included decarbonisation measures to both Woodgreen and Elmfield, the Solar PV for these buildings would also be included in the procurement.

- 1.8 Viability will depend on roof size, structure and orientation so the initial focus is on larger buildings but smaller properties could be considered in a second phase.
- 1.9 The procurement will allow the addition of further buildings within the contract. The Council owns the head lease of some buildings, however the head leases will be due for renewal within the potential payback period of the PV installations. The Council will therefore seek to secure a renewal (if appropriate) before investing in Solar PV. In addition, the Council may acquire additional properties in line with its Investment Strategy and wish to install Solar PV on those new assets.
- 1.10 It is proposed a procurement tender is now undertaken seeking capital costs for installation, ongoing revenue costs and income potential. The procurement would include Solar PV and battery storage.
- 1.11 An open procurement tender would be used, allowing any interested contractor who can meet the requirements to submit a tender. This enables local contractors to bid and evaluation criteria will include points for social value which includes local employment and reduced transportation and travel.
- 1.12 A joint procurement tender for the Council and its partners Cotswold District Council and Forest of Dean District Council, listing properties across this broader portfolio, should achieve better buying power and reduced costs for each Council. However, prices will be on an individual building basis, so that a decision can be made on each business case.
- 1.13 Following consideration by the Capital Investment Board, a report will be brought back to Cabinet for recommendation to Council to draw down on funding identified within the Commercial investment strategy.

## **2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 2.1 The initial feasibility work undertaken was provided to the Council for free by Solar Sense. The specification and tender documents will be prepared in-house so there are no additional costs involved in this process.
- 2.2 A business case will be brought back for decision once the procurement has been completed.

### **3. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 The responsibilities of the Council as landlord and its ability to alter buildings whilst tenants are in occupation will vary depending on individual lease agreements. This, along with the scope to sell electricity to the incumbent tenants will be explored alongside the business case preparation.

3.2 Save from the above there are no other legal implications arising directly from this report.

### **4. RISK ASSESSMENT**

4.1 There is a risk that capital installation costs are high and there are not viable business cases for Solar PV installation, however this will be considered at the next stage.

4.2 The volatile energy market may make the preparation of an accurate business case challenging as it is difficult to predict energy costs into the future. The risk of fluctuation will be considered when the report is prepared.

### **5. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

5.1 There is no identified Equalities Impact from this proposal.

### **6. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 Installing Solar PV will reduce the use of fossil fuels in the Councils estate. It will provide tenants with a renewable form of energy, which may also offer them cost savings.

6.2 Information on the estimated carbon savings from the commercial PV installations will be shared with Members once the procurement has been completed.

6.3 Estimates for the installations at Woodgreen and Elmfield have already been scoped and agreed as part of the Agile working project (agreed at Cabinet and Council July 2022). They indicate the following:

Site	Est cost	CO2e saving t/yr	Energy cost saving/yr 2022/23*	Payback 2022/23
Woodgreen	£13.5k	4.010	£1,540	8.8
Elmfield	£31,050	9.803	£3,780	8.2

### **7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

7.1 The Council could decide not to procure Solar PV for its commercial estate.

## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 8.1 The Council's approach to Carbon Reduction can be found on the Council's website:  
<https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/environment/climate-action/>

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 <p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>	<p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p><b>CABINET – 12 OCTOBER 2022</b></p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p><b>AGENDA ITEM NO 8</b></p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p><b>DATA RETENTION POLICY</b></p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Cllr Andy Graham, Leader of the Council Email: <a href="mailto:andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk">andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Claire Hughes, Business Manager for Corporate Responsibility Email: <a href="mailto:claire.hughes@publicagroup.uk">claire.hughes@publicagroup.uk</a></p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>This report seeks approval for an updated Data Retention Policy to ensure compliance with the Council's statutory obligations whilst at the same time being open and transparent in relation to records management.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – Data Retention Policy October 2022</p>
<p>Recommendation(s)</p>	<p><i>That Cabinet approve the Data Retention Policy attached at Annex A</i></p>
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<p>Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance: Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council</p>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>No external consultation required</p>

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** Information is one of the Council's greatest assets and its usage is a major responsibility. Records should be kept for as long as they are needed to meet the operational needs of the Council, together with legal and regulatory requirements. It is essential that the Council stores only the information that it needs to and increases its ability to deliver value for money, customer focused services for the benefit of the District, its customers and the Council.
- 1.2** A Data Retention Policy is a key document in the management of records and information. Disposal schedules will generally fall into two main categories:
- Destroy after an agreed period - where the useful life of the records can be easily predetermined (for example destroy after two years)
  - Automatically select for permanent preservation – where the records/information can be readily defined as worthy of permanent preservation and transferred to an archive
- 1.3** The Data Retention Policy attached as Annex A covers all areas of the Council and all information, documents and data that is created and collected in paper and electronic format and accessed by the public, staff, elected Members and partners.

## **2. MAIN POINTS**

- 2.1** To ensure compliance with Data Protection legislation, data retention must be applied across the whole Council and to all types of record. Without due process in place the Council could be at risk of fines from the Information Commissioners Officer.
- 2.2** Retention periods vary depending on the type of data being processed, the purpose of the processing and any legal requirements that apply to that particular data. Therefore to assist in the Council's proper management of data the attached Policy sets out the retention periods that should be applied.
- 2.3** The Data Retention Policy aims to define the Council's obligations and responsibilities in the handling and storage of data. It establishes and verifies retention periods for the Council's data depending on the type of data and the purpose of the processing to ensure that the Council:
- Creates and captures accurate, authentic and reliable records;
  - Maintains records to meet the Council's business needs;
  - Disposes of records that are no longer required in an appropriate manner;
  - Protects vital records;
  - Conforms to any legal and statutory requirements;

- 2.4** The Retention Schedule which forms part of the Policy is based on the Local Government Classification Scheme and Retention Guidelines for Local Authorities. It will be for all officers and elected Members to have responsibility and accountability for the maintenance and use of information.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.1** The revised Data Retention Policy updates previous versions to ensure that the Council remains compliant with all relevant legislation and is open and transparent around its processes for the retention of data.

### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1** There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1** There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

### **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1** Failure to adhere to the statutory retention periods could result in the Council being subject to fines from the Information Commissioner.

### **7. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 7.1** There are no equality implications arising from this report.

### **8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1** There are no climate change implications arising from this report

### **9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 9.1** Cabinet could choose not to approve the updated Policy. However, this would increase the Council's risks around data management.

### **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1** The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100 D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- Current Data Retention Procedures: <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/about-the-council/council-data-and-information/data-protection/>

These documents will be available for inspection online at [www.westoxon.gov.uk](http://www.westoxon.gov.uk) or by contacting democratic services [democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk) for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.

(END)



## **WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **DATA RETENTION POLICY**

**OCTOBER 2022**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 West Oxfordshire District Council recognises that its records are an important public asset, and are a key resource to accountability and effective operation. They require careful management and this Policy sets out the Council's responsibilities and activities in regard to the management and retention of its records.
- 1.2 In the course of carrying out its functions and activities, the Council collects information from individuals and external organisations and generates a wide range of data and information. This can be retained as hard copies or in electronic form.
- 1.3 Retention of specific documents may be necessary to fulfil statutory or other regulatory requirements, evidence events in the case of a dispute and preserve documents of historic and other value.
- 1.4 The untimely destruction of documents could cause the Council to face difficulties in defending litigious claims, meeting operational requirements or failing to comply with the Freedom of Information or Data Protection legislation.
- 1.5 Conversely, the permanent retention of data and information is unfeasible and appropriate disposal is necessary to allow for adequate storage space and compliance with Data Protection legislation.
- 1.6 The effective management of records in all formats depends as much on their efficient disposal as well as their long-term preservation. As a Local Authority we must be consistent in the way we handle and dispose of our information. These guidelines will assist the Council by ensuring a consistent approach to record keeping across the organisation.

## **2. SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide a corporate framework to govern how particular documents (or sets of documents) should be: -
  - Retained – and if so, in what format, and for what period of time; or
  - Disposed of – and if so, when and by what method.

## **3. THE RETENTION/DISPOSAL PROTOCOL**

- 3.1 Any decision whether to retain or dispose of a document should be taken in accordance with this Policy, including the key disposal/retention considerations criteria checklist, set out in Appendix 1 and the retention schedules set out in Appendix 2.

## **4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 4.1 Responsibility for determining (in accordance with the Retention/Disposal checklist and schedule) whether to retain or dispose of specific documents rests with each individual Business Manager.
- 4.2 The Business Manager for Corporate Responsibility can advise on whether minimum retention periods are prescribed by law. However, they cannot be expected to possess the operational or background knowledge required to assess whether a

particular document may be required by the department concerned for operational need. This is the responsibility of the relevant service Business Manager.

- 4.3 The Business Manager for Corporate Responsibility and the Data Protection Officer are available to provide guidance on effective records management practices.
- 4.4 The Lead responsibility for records management has been assigned to the Business Manager for Corporate Responsibility.

## **5. DISPOSAL**

- 5.1 Disposal can be achieved by a range of processes:

- Confidential waste;
- Physical destruction onsite (shredding);
- Deletion – where computer files are concerned;
- Migration of documents to an external body.

- 5.2 The following considerations should be taken into account when selecting any method of disposal:

- Under no circumstances should paper documents containing personal data or confidential information be simply deposited in non-confidential bins. If steps are taken to make data virtually impossible to retrieve then this will be regarded as equivalent to deletion.
- Migration of documents to a third party (other than for destruction or recycling) will be relevant where documents or records are of historic interest and/or have intrinsic value. Migration can include the transfer of data to a third party service provider – prior to any migration taking place care should be taken to ensure that any personal data is removed

## **6. UK GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS**

- 6.1 All staff need to be aware that under the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) personal data processed for any purpose must not be kept for any longer than is necessary for that purpose. In other words, retaining documents or records that contain personal data beyond the length of time necessary for the purpose for which that data was obtained is unlawful. If legislation is silent on this provision; it is a matter for reasonable judgement and common sense as to how long personal data (which falls outside legislative guidance) should be retained.

## **7. FORMAT OF RECORDS**

- 7.1 This Data Retention Policy is relevant to records which are electronic, paper or record which have been transferred to another format such as microfiche.

## **8. REVIEWING THE SCHEDULE**

- 8.1 These guidelines prescribe minimum and permanent retention periods. The guidance will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure it is still fit for purpose.



## **APPENDIX 1: KEY DISPOSAL/RETENTION CONSIDERATIONS**

No document should be earmarked for disposal unless due regard has been given to the five Key Disposal/Retention considerations detailed in this Appendix and with reference to the Retention Schedules at Appendix 2.

### **Key Consideration 1:**

Has the document been appraised?

1. As a first step, the nature/contents of any document being considered for disposal should be ascertained. No document(s) should be earmarked or designated for disposal unless this has been done. Insofar as existing documents are concerned it follows that the above can only be achieved by the carrying out of physical inspection and appraisal. The process may only take a few minutes – perhaps even seconds. Nonetheless it can be a skilled task – depending on the complexity of the document(s) concerned – and should only be undertaken by officers who possess the sufficient operational knowledge to enable them to identify the document concerned and its function within both the individual Department and corporate frameworks. Any decision to the effect that future documents of a specified description be disposed of on expiry of a specified retention period should be an informed one i.e. taken with a full appreciation and understanding of the nature and function of such documents.
2. The above is largely common-sense, and hardly needs to be stated. However, if appraisal is inadvertently overlooked or carried out negligently, or by an employee who lacks the necessary background operational knowledge, the Council runs the risk of important documents being destroyed in error.

### **Key Consideration 2:**

Is retention required to fulfil statutory or other regulatory requirements?

There is, in fact, very little specific legislation that stipulates mandatory retention periods for documents in Local Government. The pieces of legislation which do, either directly or indirectly, impose minimum retention periods are as follows:

**Tax Legislation:** Minimum retention period for certain financial records are imposed by statutes such as the VAT Act 1994, and the Taxes Management Act 1970. The relevant retention periods are identified in the Retention Schedules Document.

**Statutory Register:** Various Local Government statutes require to be kept of certain events, notifications, or transactions. It is implicit with such legislative requirement that these records be maintained on a permanent basis, unless the legislation concerned stipulates otherwise.

**The Audit Commission Act 1998:** This provides auditors with a right of access to every document relating to the Council that appears necessary for the purpose of carrying out the auditor's function under the Act.

The Local Government Act 1972, s.225: Any document deposited with “the proper officer” of the Council in accordance with Statute should be retained permanently.

Part VA of the Local Government Act 1972: This governs public access to certain documents relating to Council and Committee meetings. Certain documents that form part of the public part of the agenda are required to be available for inspection by members of the public.

Employers' Duties Regulations 2010 (regulations 5, 6 and 8): employers are required to keep information / documents regarding their employees' pension and remuneration

### **Key Consideration 3:**

Is retention required to evidence events in the case of dispute?

On occasions, the Council becomes involved in disputes with third parties. Such disputes, if not satisfactorily resolved, can result in the dissatisfied party bringing legal proceedings against the Council, usually (but not always) with a view to obtaining monetary compensation. Conversely, the Council may wish to institute legal proceedings against an individual or organisation e.g. to recover an unpaid debt, or in respect of faulty workmanship. Where a dispute arises, or litigation has been commenced it is important that the Council has access to all correspondence and other documentation that is relevant to the matter. Without such, there is the danger that the Council's position will be compromised, and the possibility that an unmeritorious claim might succeed, or that the Council may be unable to assert legal entitlements. The Limitations Act 1980 specifies time limits for commencing litigation. The starting point therefore, is that the retention period is the length of time that has to elapse before a claim is barred.

### **Key Consideration 4:**

Is retention required to meet the operational needs of the department?

In some cases retention may be desirable (whether permanent or otherwise) even though no minimum retention period applies. Business Managers (or designated officers) should be open to the danger of discarding documents or records that might be useful for future reference purposes (e.g. training), as precedence, or for performance management (performance indicators, benchmarking and comparison exercises). A professional judgement needs to be made as to the usefulness of a particular document.

### **Key Consideration 5:**

Is retention required because the document or record is of historical interest or intrinsic value?

In most cases this consideration will not be applicable. However, it is certainly possible that some documents may be of historic interest and/or even have some monetary value. Where it is suspected that the document falls within this description, appropriate enquires should always be made before taking any further action. Even if the document is of historical or monetary value, disposal rather than retention by the Council may well be the appropriate option.

## APPENDIX 2: RETENTION SCHEDULES

Where no period for retention is specified the document can be destroyed 3 years after its use has concluded.

All retention periods commence from the date on which the use of the document was concluded, unless otherwise stated.

Retention periods marked with a \* indicate a statutory requirement

Except where required to meet a statutory period all emails should be deleted after 3 years

DATA	RETENTION PERIOD
<b>ADDRESS MANAGEMENT (STREET NAME &amp; NUMBERING)</b>	
New address & address change request	7 years
Large development numbering plans, new street name request, and change of street name request	Permanent
Address query and confirmation requests	3 years
<b>COMMUNITY WELLBEING SERVICE</b>	
Referrals received from third party	3 years
Referrals from the Council to a third party	3 years
Payment records	7 years
<b>CORPORATE</b>	
Corporate/Council plans	Permanent
Community plans	Permanent
Public consultations where the consultation relates to the development of significant scheme or policy	6 years
Public consultation where the consultation relates to the development of a minor scheme or policy	1 year
Business discussions, debates, resolutions etc. e.g. management meeting notes and agendas	3 years
Complaints	3 years
Press Releases	3 years
Details of organising ceremonial/civic events	6 years

Recording of civic events e.g. video footage	Permanent
Reports of major incidents in the community, whether or not emergency plan was activated	10 years
Reports of minor incidents in the community	6 years
Civil Contingency notes of meetings, training records etc.	6 years
Business Continuity Plans	Until superseded
Statutory returns to Government	7 years
Freedom of Information requests and responses	1 year
Data Protection - Subject Access Requests	3 years
<b>DEMOCRATIC</b>	
Committee minutes and agendas	Permanent
Draft minutes and notes	Destroy when minutes confirmed
Partnership, agency and external meetings (where the Council is required to retain the official record)	Permanent
Partnership, agency and external meetings (where the Council is NOT required to retain the official record)	3 years
Declarations of Acceptance of Office	Following end of term of office
Councillor Register of Interest Forms	6 months following end of term of office
<b>ELECTIONS</b>	
Electoral Register	Permanent
Ballot papers (local elections)	1 year from close of poll
Declaration of results (local elections)	6 months from announcement of result
Staff personal details & proof of entitlement to work in the UK (includes date of birth, national insurance number, evidence of proof of work eligibility and address)	2 years after end of employment.
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGULATORY SERVICES</b>	
Application process e.g. gaming licenses, animal registrations etc.	2 years after registration* (or 5 years if the

	application is revoked or refused)
<p>Application process for Taxi and Private Hire Licensing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information submitted as part of an application</li> <li>Information held in respect of a Licence</li> <li>Information received as part of an enforcement investigation</li> <li>Information held on the NR3 database</li> </ul>	<p>6 years after the date in which the application is refused</p> <p>6 years after the date from which the licence ceases to be held</p> <p>For a minimum of 6 years and then for only so long as may be necessary to inform a decision to protect the public</p> <p>25 years</p>
Contaminated land, health and safety licenses etc.	Permanent*
Abandoned Vehicles Documentation	6 years*
Statutory Enforcement Notices	6 Years
<p>Other general filing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food safety e.g. inspection notes</li> <li>Health and Safety e.g. inspection notes</li> <li>Environmental Protection investigations</li> <li>Housing grant work</li> </ul>	7 years after case closed
Temporary event notices and road closures	1 year
Building control files	15 years
<b>FINANCE</b>	
Annual reports, financial statements	Permanent
Annual Budget	Permanent
Draft budgets	2 years after final budget adopted

Audit investigations	7 years from end of financial year to which it relates*
Arrangements for the provision of goods and services	7 years from end of financial year to which it relates
Receipts, invoices, credit card statements, bank statements, cheque counterfoils etc.	6 years from end of financial year to which it relates*
Loans	7 years after repaid
Disabled Facilities Grants (£30,000 maximum)	<p><b>10 years</b> if there is a charge placed on the property and/or the applicant paid a contribution towards the works.</p> <p><b>5 years</b> for all other applications (WODC) and <b>7 years</b> for all other applications (CDC &amp; FOD).</p>
Taxation documents	6 years from end of financial year to which it relates*
Employee pay and tax records	7 years from end of financial year to which it relates*
Insurance registers	Permanent
Insurance policies and renewals	6 years after expiry
Insurance claims	6 years (but allow the Claimant to reach the age of 25)
<b>PROCUREMENT</b>	
Tendering – Successful tender – ordinary contract Successful tender – contract under seal	6 years 12 years

Contract management and monitoring	2 years after expiry of contract
Contracts: The process of developing a specification	6 years after expiry or termination or 12 years if under seal*
Contracts: The process of issuing tenders	1 year after start of contract*
Contracts: Expressions of interest	2 years after contract let or not proceeded with*
Contracts: Evaluation of tenders	6 years after expiry or termination or 12 years if under seal*
Contracts: Successful tenders	6 years after expiry or termination or 12 years if under seal*
Contracts: Unsuccessful tenders	1 year after start of contract*
Contracts: Process of awarding the contract including the signed contract	6 years after expiry or termination or 12 years if under seal*
<b>HOUSING</b>	
Homeseeker Plus applications – permanent housed status	3 years
Homeless applications – Duty accepted	3 years
Homeless – Temporary Accommodation arrangements	3 years
Homeless – Relief/discharge of homeless duty	3 years
<b>HUMAN RESOURCES</b>	
Individual personnel records	6 years after date of termination of employment
Major Industrial actions	Permanent
Minor Industrial actions	2 years
Disciplinary records	Oral warning - 6 months Written warning - 1 year Final warning - 18 months*

Discipline/grievance documents where the matter was unfounded	1 year
Recruitment e.g. adverts, unsuccessful applications, interview notes etc.	1 year after recruitment is finalised
Performance reports e.g. probation records and performance plans	5 years
Leave and absence monitoring e.g. sick records, flexi time records	2 years for paper records
Financial rewards	6 years after actioned
Termination documents e.g. resignation, redundancy, dismissal records	6 years after termination
Staff training records	2 years
Appointment of statutory officers	Permanent
Selection details for statutory officers	2 years
<b>ICT</b>	
<b>IT – Monitoring</b> Records relating to usage of systems	1 year
<b>IT – Security</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Records relating to breaches or attempted breaches of ICT security</li> </ul>	6 years
<b>IT – Users</b> Records relating to the provision of IT function for all service areas allowing them to store personal data and custodians for all business software used across the council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opening, maintenance &amp; closure of user accounts</li> <li>Reported faults with IT user groups and action taken to resolve issues</li> </ul>	3 years
<b>IT – Emails Journals</b> Emails can act as evidence of the Councils / Public's activities, i.e. in business and fulfilling statutory duties, so all relevant emails.	3 years
<b>INTERNAL AUDIT</b>	




Records relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assurance work:</li> <li>Audit reports (draft &amp; final)</li> <li>Testing Index</li> <li>Testing Summaries</li> <li>Work Programme/Matrix</li> <li>Working papers (which may contain personal data)</li> </ul>	Current year and last files after accounting period/close of audit
Records relating to annual reports	Retain for 5 years after accounting period/close of audit
Records relating to fraud reports (& file)	Retain for 6 years (where offence identified/proven) Retain for 3 years (if unproven) after accounting period/close of audit
Records relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consultancy work (including member requests)</li> <li>System development reviews</li> </ul>	Retain for 3 years after accounting period/close of audit
Records relating to permanent audit file (standing information)	Retain until superseded
Records relating to contract final accounts	Retain for 12 years after accounting period/close of audit
<b>LAND AND PROPERTY</b>	
Asset Register	Permanent
Process of managing the Council's property portfolio	12 years
Maintenance records e.g. works orders etc.	12 years
Management of disposal of assets process	12 years
Management of acquisitions	Retain for life of asset plus 12 years
Management of leased properties	Retain for life of Lease plus 6 years
Acquisition and disposal of vehicles	7 years after disposal
Records of vehicle usage	3 years
Parking - records of enforcement of parking e.g. charge notices, correspondence, receipts etc.	6 years
CCTV footage	31 days

<b>LEGAL</b>	
General Legal Advice	6 years
Conveyancing	12 years after closure*
Tenancy Agreements	6 years after expiry or termination or 12 years if under seal*
Leases	12 years after the expiry of the lease
Mortgages	12 years from date of last payment
Right to Buys	12 years after sale
RIPA Authorisations	3 years after cancellation
Tree Preservation Orders, Footpath Orders and other Statutory Orders and Notices	Permanent*
Investigation files	3 years
Penalties e.g. cautions, administrative penalties	7 years
Prosecutions/Litigation	7 years*
Contracts	6 years after expiry or termination or 12 years if under seal*
<b>PLANNING</b>	
Planning Policies e.g. Core Strategy, Allocations Plans etc.	Permanent
Consultations on planning policies e.g. objections, public inquiries etc.	Permanent
Listed building register	Permanent
Planning register (Application files)	Permanent (paper files destroyed 6 months after conclusion e.g. decision notice or appeal)
Planning enforcement files	Permanent
Planning enforcement notices (includes all notices such as breach of conditions, section 215 etc.)	Permanent

Planning Agreements	6 years after expiry or termination or 12 years if under seal
<b>REVENUES AND BENEFITS</b>	
Valuation Lists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Tax</li> <li>• Business Rates</li> <li>• General Rates</li> </ul>	Permanent
Court Lists – Council Tax and Business Rates	6 years
Liability Orders	6 years
Correspondence with council tax and business rate payers in relation to valuations, rates, charges, liability, submissions, appeals etc.	6 years
Housing Benefit & Council Tax support Records relating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application forms/Details</li> <li>• Copies of personal documents</li> <li>• Assessment</li> <li>• Payment/Backdated claims</li> <li>• Discretionary housing payments</li> <li>• Appeals</li> <li>• Claims</li> <li>• Fraud cases &amp; prosecution</li> </ul>	From 1/04/2019 - 7 years
Correspondence with debtors in relation to invoices, liability, outstanding debt, etc.	6 years
Benefit application forms, supporting evidence, correspondence in relation to claims, appeals, etc.	From 1/04/2019 (paper records to be destroyed after 6 months)
Government Returns e.g. DLUHC, DWP	7 years

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 <b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>CABINET – 12 OCTOBER 2022</b>
Report Number	<b>AGENDA ITEM NO 9</b>
Subject	<b>EXCEPTIONAL HARDSHIP POLICY</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Dan Levy – Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance Email: dan.levy@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Operations and Enabling Email: mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider and approve the implementation of an Exception Hardship Policy to ensure additional financial assistance is available to help with Council Tax payments to those residents who are in severe financial hardship
Annexes	Annex A – Exceptional Hardship Policy
Recommendation(s)	<p>That the Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>a) Approve the Revenues spend to support this scheme;</i></li> <li><i>b) Approve the implementation of the Exceptional Hardship Policy as a matter of urgency;</i></li> <li><i>c) Note the additional revenue given by Oxfordshire County Council in support of this Policy; and,</i></li> <li><i>d) Give delegation to the Group Manager for Resident Services to approve all payments made under the Exceptional Hardship Policy</i></li> </ul>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Portfolio Holder, Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer, Head of Legal Services, Finance Business Partner, Group Manager, Director of Finance (Publica)

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** The Council has a local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme in place to support low income, working age residents with their Council Tax.
- 1.2** The scheme is approved by Council annually and runs from 1 April to 31 March in each financial year. No amendments to the scheme are allowed under legislation during any given year.
- 1.3** The Council has no discretion in relation to the calculation of CTS in respect of the Pension Age Scheme. That scheme is defined by Central Government.

## **2. MAIN POINTS**

- 2.1** The Council recognises that with the cost of living crisis, and increasing energy bills that some residents will be struggling financially to make ends meet.
- 2.2** As in-year amendments to the CTS scheme are not permitted under legislation and in order to support those residents who are struggling to pay any remaining Council Tax following the application and award of CTS an Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF) will be implemented.
- 2.3** The EHF will be available to any applicant, whether pension or working age, where the daily award of CTS does not meet 100% of the Council Tax liability.
- 2.4** The intention is for the EHD to be a last resort for exceptional situations. It is not intended to replace any discounts, exemptions or CTS awards that are already available.
- 2.5** The EHF Policy is detailed in Annex A, attached, but in summary when considering an application for EHF the Council will consider:
  - The shortfall between CTS and Council Tax liability
  - Whether the applicant has engaged with the Exceptional Hardship Payment process
  - The personal circumstances, age and medical circumstances (including ill health and disabilities) of the applicant, their partner, any dependents and any other occupants of the applicant's home
  - The difficulty experienced by the applicant, which prohibits them from being able to meet their Council Tax liability, and the length of time this difficulty will exist
  - Shortfalls due to non-dependant deductions
  - The income and expenditure of the applicant and their partner
  - How reasonable expenditure exceeds income

- Any savings or capital that might be held by the applicant or their partner
- The exceptional nature of the application and/or their family's circumstances that impact on finances
- The amount available in the EHF at the time of the application.
- The amount outstanding is not as a result of wilful refusal or culpable neglect

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1** The Council will commit £50,000 for the EHF from the Council Tax surplus generated in 2022/23.
- 3.2** Oxford County Council, as a major precepting authority and beneficiary of any surplus Council Tax receipts have also pledged match funding in support of this fund.

### **4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1** There are no legal implications associated with this report.

### **5. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1** There is a risk of the scheme being oversubscribed due to the cost of living crisis. To mitigate this, the scheme will be closely monitored; ensuring support is only given to those who meet the eligibility criteria within the Policy.

### **6. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 6.1** To ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out which concludes there is no negative impact on any of the protected characteristics.

### **7. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1** None

### **8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 8.1** The Policy as detailed in Annex A of this report is specifically to support those residents that are in receipt of CTS. Members may want to consider including those residents who are not in receipt of CTS but are still considered on a low income. For these purposes, a low income should not exceed the following:

- £29,120 for a family with one child
- £36,244 for a family with two children
- £43,992 for a family with three or more children

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## **Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Policy**

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Fraud	6

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 An Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF) has been set up by the Council to assist applicants with Council Tax who are facing 'exceptional hardship'. The fund has been created to provide further assistance where an applicant is in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS) but the level of support being paid by the Council does not meet their full Council Tax liability.
- 1.2 The EHF will be available to any applicant (whether pension or working age) where their daily award of CTS does not meet 100% of the Council Tax liability (less any appropriate discounts and non-dependant deductions)
- 1.3 The main features of the fund are as follows:
- The EHF will be cash limited;
  - The operation of the Fund will be at the total discretion of the Council;
  - The Fund will be operated by Publica's Revenues and Benefits team on behalf of the Council;
  - There is no statutory right to payments from the Fund although the Council will consider all applications received;
  - EHF payments are not payments of CTS (as defined within S13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992);
  - EHF will not be available for any other debt other than outstanding Council Tax;
  - A pre-requisite to receive a payment from the Fund is that an amount of CTS must be in payment for any day that an EHF payment is requested;
  - Where an EHF payment is requested for a previous period, Exceptional Hardship must have been proven to have existed throughout the whole period requested;
  - EHF payments are designed as a short-term help to the applicant only and it is expected that payments will be made for a short term only;
  - Any EHF awarded will be credited to the applicants Council Tax account; and,
  - All applicants will be expected to engage with the Council and undertake the full application process. Failure to do so will inevitably mean that no payment will be made.

## **2. Equalities**

- 2.1 The creation of an Exceptional Hardship Fund facility meets the Council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.2 The Council recognises the importance of protecting our most vulnerable customers. This policy has been created to ensure that a level of protection and support is available to those applicants most in need. It should be noted that the EHF is intended to help cases of extreme financial hardship and not support a lifestyle or lifestyle choice. Whilst the definition of 'Exceptional Hardship' is not exactly defined by this Policy, it is accepted that reductions to income and/or benefits generally will cause

financial hardship. Exception Hardship should be considered as 'hardship beyond that which would normally be suffered'.

### **3. Purpose of this Policy**

- 3.1 The purpose of this policy is to specify how the Council will operate the scheme, to detail the application process and indicate a number of factors, which will be considered when deciding if an EHF payment can be made.
- 3.2 Each case will be treated on its own merits and all applicants will be treated fairly and equally in the accessibility to the EHF and the decisions made with applications.

### **4. The EHF Process**

- 4.1 As part of the process of applying for additional support from the EHF, all applicants will undertake all of the following:
  - a) Make a separate application for assistance;
  - b) Provide full details of their income and expenditure;
  - c) Accept assistance from either the Council's Client Support Officer or third party, such as the CAB to enable them to manage their finances more effectively, including the termination of non-essential expenditure;
  - d) Assist the Council to minimise liability by ensuring that all discounts, exemptions and reductions are properly granted; and
  - e) Maximise their income through the application for other welfare benefits, cancellation of non-essential contracts and outgoings and identifying the most economical tariffs for the supply of utilities and services generally.
- 4.2 Through the operation of this Policy the Council will look to:
  - a) Allow a short period of time for someone to adjust to unforeseen short-term circumstances and to enable them to 'bridge the gap' during this time, whilst the applicant seeks alternative solutions;
  - b) Enable long term support to households in managing their finances;
  - c) Help applicants through personal crisis and difficult events that affect their finances;
  - d) Prevent exceptional hardship; and
  - e) Help those applicants who are trying to help themselves
- 4.3 It cannot be awarded for the following circumstances:

- Where full Council Tax liability is being met by CTS
- For any other reason, other than to reduce Council Tax liability
- Where the Council considers that there are unnecessary expenses/debts that the application has not taken reasonable steps to reduce
- To pay for any overpayment of CTS caused through the failure of the applicant to notify changes in circumstances in a timely manner, where the applicant has failed to act correctly or honestly or has committed fraud.
- To cover previous years Council Tax arrears.

## **5. Awarding Payment**

5.1 The Council will decide whether or not to award an EHF payment, and how much any payment award might be.

5.2 The intention is for the scheme to be a last resort for exceptional situations and circumstances. It is not intended to replace any discounts, exemptions or CTS awards. When making a decision in respect of an application the Council will consider:

- The shortfall between CTS and Council Tax liability
- Whether the applicant has engaged with the Exceptional Hardship Payment process
- The personal circumstances, age and medical circumstances (including ill health and disabilities) of the applicant, their partner, any dependents and any other occupants of the applicant's home
- The difficulty experienced by the applicant, which prohibits them from being able to meet their Council Tax liability, and the length of time this difficulty will exist
- Shortfalls due to non-dependant deductions
- The income and expenditure of the applicant and their partner
- How reasonable expenditure exceeds income
- Any savings or capital that might be held by the applicant or their partner
- The exceptional nature of the application and/or their family's circumstances that impact on finances
- The amount available in the EHF at the time of the application.

- The amount outstanding is not as a result of wilful refusal or culpable neglect

5.3 The above list is not exhaustive and other relevant factors and special circumstances may be considered.

5.4 An EHF payment may be less than the difference between the Council Tax liability and the amount of CTS paid. The level of payment may be nil if the Council feels that, in its opinion, the applicant is not suffering 'exceptional hardship', or where the applicant has failed to comply with the Exceptional Hardship process.

5.5 The Council may revise an award of EHF where the applicant's circumstances have changed which either increases or reduces their CTS entitlement.

5.6 Awards will be made directly by way of a discount applied to the Council Tax account thereby reducing the amount of Council Tax payable.

## **6. Notification of Award**

6.1 The Council will notify the outcome of each application for EHF payments in writing.

## **7. Appeals**

7.1 EHF payments are not part of CTS and are therefore not subject to the statutory appeal process.

7.2 If the applicant is not satisfied with the decision in respect of an application for an EHF payment the applicant can ask for a reconsideration. Such requests must be made in writing, giving reasons why they believe the original decision was incorrect.


7.3 Any request for a reconsideration must be made within one calendar month of the date of the notification letter confirming the original decision.

7.4 The outcome of the reconsideration will be set out in writing, detailing the reasons for the decision or upholding the original decision.

## **8. Fraud**

8.1 The Council is committed to protecting public funds and ensuring funds are awarded to the people who are rightfully eligible to them.

8.2 The Council will not accept deliberate manipulation and fraud. Any person caught falsifying their records to gain an EHF payment may face prosecution. The Council will seek recovery of any payment made as a result of fraud or payments made in error.

 <b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>CABINET – 12 OCTOBER 2022</b>
Report Number	<b>AGENDA ITEM NO 10</b>
Subject	<b>COMBE VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT (VDS)</b>
Wards affected	Stonesfield and Tackley
Accountable member	Cllr Carl Rylett Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development Email: <a href="mailto:carl.rylett@westoxon.gov.uk">carl.rylett@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager Tel: 01993 861686 Email: <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk">chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To consider the Combe Village Design Statement (VDS) and agree that it should be subject to a 6-week period of public consultation prior to it being potentially adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.
Annexes	Annex A – Consultation Summary Report Annex B – Combe Village Design Statement (VDS) Annex C – Local Development Scheme (LDS) Addendum
Recommendation/s	<p>a) <i>That the content of the report including the consultation summary report attached at Annex A be noted;</i></p> <p>b) <i>That Cabinet agree that the Combe Village Design Statement attached at Annex B and prepared by Combe Parish Council, be published for a 6-week period of public consultation; and</i></p> <p>c) <i>That Cabinet agree that the District Council's current Local Development Scheme (LDS) published in July 2022 be updated as per the LDS addendum attached at Annex C</i></p>
Corporate priorities	Taking forward the Combe VDS as a supplementary planning document would be consistent with a number of aspects of the current Council Plan (2021 – 2024) including healthy towns and villages, strong local communities and protecting and enhancing the environment.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	The Combe VDS has already been subject to public consultation as summarised in the consultation summary report attached at Annex A. Subject to the agreement of Cabinet, the VDS will be the subject of a further 6-week period of statutory public consultation. Depending on the outcome of that consultation, the District Council will then be in a position to decide whether

	or not to formally adopt the Combe VDS as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
--	--



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. Combe Parish Council have prepared a Village Design Statement (VDS) the stated purpose of which is to *'provide design guidelines that can help to shape any future development so that it blends in with Combe's distinctive rural landscape and heritage'*.
- 1.2. Work on the VDS began in 2019 through a series of informal discussions and events, followed by a questionnaire survey and consultation on a draft version of the VDS.
- 1.3. The VDS was finalised in November 2021 and submitted to the District Council for consideration, with the Parish Council seeking a view on whether it would be possible for the VDS to be formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.
- 1.4. Since then a number of Officers have reviewed the document and all have been supportive of its content. As such, it is now suggested that the VDS should be taken forward through further public consultation, with a view to it then being formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

## **2. COMBE VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT (VDS)**

- 2.1. Members will be aware that the primary purpose of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is to build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted Local Plan.
- 2.2. In this instance, the Combe VDS if adopted as SPD would effectively provide additional guidance on the application of Local Plan Policy OS4 – High Quality Design more specifically in relation to development proposals that come forward within Combe Parish. In doing so it would sit alongside the District Council's overarching Design Guide which was adopted as SPD in 2016.
- 2.3. Annex A is a consultation summary report which provides an overview of the consultation which has been undertaken on the VDS to date and the key issues arising.
- 2.4. A copy of the Combe VDS is attached at Annex B. It is a comprehensive and well-written document which follows a logical structure, providing a detailed overview of the parish including its landscape setting, settlement pattern, green and built environment, including the public realm.
- 2.5. Building on this context, Section 10 of the VDS sets out a series of design guidelines including a number of general and specific principles.
- 2.6. The expectation is that these principles would be considered alongside the policies of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 and the West Oxfordshire Design Guide (2016) when development proposals in Combe Parish are being considered.

## **3. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (LDS) - ADDENDUM**

- 3.1. The Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) provides information on planning policy documents that the Council already has in place and those it intends to prepare over the following 3-year period.
- 3.2. The Council's current LDS was recently published in July 2022, however it makes no reference to the preparation of a Village Design Statement SPD for Combe and so if it is to be taken forward as SPD a minor update to the LDS is needed to reflect that intention.
- 3.3. A suggested minor addendum to the July 2022 LDS is therefore attached at Annex C.

#### **4. NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1.** Subject to the agreement of Members, the next steps are for the Council to undertake a statutory 6-week period of public consultation on the Combe VDS and for the Council's current Local Development Scheme (LDS – July 2022) to be updated, as per the addendum attached at Annex C.
- 4.2.** Following the close of consultation on the VDS, Officers will consider the responses received and liaise with Combe Parish Council as appropriate in order to agree any necessary changes.
- 4.3.** A final version of the VDS will then be brought back before Members to consider whether or not it should be formally adopted as SPD. It is anticipated that this would be in the new-year.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1.** The report raises no direct financial implications other than some very modest costs to be incurred by the District Council in facilitating the proposed 6-week public consultation.

#### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1.** The proposed route forward for the Combe VDS will ensure that all legislative requirements for adopting a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) have been met.

#### **7. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1.** The report raises no significant risks.

#### **8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 8.1.** The report raises no specific implications for any particular equality strand.

#### **9. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1.** The Combe VDS recognises the importance of climate change with one of the general design principles contained therein being to ensure that new development has regard for community cohesion, sustainable living, biodiversity and the implications of climate change.

#### **10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 10.1.** The alternative option would be for Members to decide that the Combe VDS should not be consulted upon with a view to becoming a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). It would then carry limited, if any, weight in terms of guiding future planning decisions within the parish.

#### **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1.** None.

# COMBE VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT (VDS)

## VILLAGE CONSULTATION AND QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY FINDINGS



**Steering group:**

Deborah Phillips (898627), Paul Coffey, Jen Hurst, Margaret Moore, Alan Revell, Julia Sharpe, Elena Softley.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Why do we need a Village Design Statement?

Given potential threats to Combe from increasing development in West Oxfordshire, the Parish Council decided to embark upon writing a Village Design Statement (VDS). A VDS is a community-led planning document that seeks to protect and enhance the visual character of a village and its surroundings. This is achieved by devising a set of design principles that will guide future planning decisions. A VDS aims to reflect the views of all local residents.

### This report

The first step in this process has been to consult widely with residents to find out what they feel about the character of Combe, what makes it special, and what priorities people have for the future. This report gives a summary of the findings from a six-month period of consultation over the summer and autumn of 2019.

The consultation began with informal discussions and activities across the village, and ended with a household questionnaire survey. Over half (53 per cent) of the households in Combe responded to the survey, giving us a total of 169 questionnaires. We heard from people across different age-groups living in all areas of Combe.

### What's next?

The VDS Steering Group is working with West Oxfordshire District Council planners to come up with planning design principles that reflect the values and priorities of Combe residents based on these findings. These principles will be incorporated into a formal planning document.

### Acknowledgements

A big thank you to everyone who participated in the consultation process. We enjoyed talking to people of all ages at the cricket match barbeques held at the recreation ground, to children at Combe School, and to those walking the parish boundaries of Combe - thank you to Jonathan Ford for leading the walks and to David O'Brien for a photographic display in the Reading Room. We are also very grateful to everyone who completed the household survey and to the team of volunteers who helped to distribute and collect the questionnaires.

June 2020

## 2. CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF COMBE



**What words did residents use to describe Combe in the questionnaire?**

*peaceful*

*unspoilt*

*quintessential Cotswold village*

*picturesque*

*open spaces*

*outstanding natural beauty*

*beautiful*

*delightful*

*pretty*

*bucolic*

*charming*

*a gem*

### **How would residents describe Combe to someone who didn't know it?**

*The best of English country living. Friendly, maintained with love and pride, beautiful, sleepy (on the surface), quiet.*

*[Combe is] high above the Evenlode valley, so there are lovely views – rural, fields. Many walks towards Blenheim. Lovely river and river views. Quiet, dark and peaceful. Not too big a village.*

*Rural village in Cotswold stone, around a village green. Steep sided river valley with flat meadows to the south of the parish. Intensive arable large fields to north of parish.*

*Beautiful small Cotswold village..... set in beautiful countryside surrounded by well managed farm land and woodland.*

*Small old English Cotswold village with a medieval church and cricket grounds in the centre and quaint cottages surrounded by farmland and countryside.*

*It is a real English village wrapped inside beautiful scenery.*

### **What do people feel contributes most to the appearance and character of Combe?**

*The village green, the playfield/sports ground, the Cock Inn, the Reading Room, the way most homeowners take pride in the appearance of their homes and gardens, the spaciousness of the village (not built up), the history of the village with its old houses and buildings, the fact that it's so close to Blenheim.*

*The mixture of houses, old and new, and how they seem to fit together. The open airy feel of the village. Hearing the trains in the distance, the planes flying overhead, the church clock and bells, the cricket in the summer, and the football in the winter.*

### **What did young people say about Combe?**

*The fields are lovely. It wouldn't be Combe without footpaths and endless fields. The wildlife in Combe plays a big role in its friendly and caring reputation ... [age 13]*

*Combe is nice, but I don't want them to build all over it. [age 12]*

*I love the surrounding unspoilt countryside, traditional buildings and the field in the middle (Alma Grove). [age 18]*

### 3. FINDINGS - WHAT DO PEOPLE VALUE ABOUT COMBE?

The people of Combe told us that they value the following aspects of Combe's character and appearance, and would like to see them preserved and/or enhanced.

#### LANDSCAPE SETTING

##### ***Rural vistas***

There was a strong desire to retain and preserve the rural integrity of the village and the surrounding landscape, with its open, uninterrupted views across the countryside. Views across the fields towards Blenheim and Long Hanborough, and across the Evenlode Valley, were particularly valued. This is captured in a quote from one survey respondent:

*[I like] the views across the playing field towards the church clock tower, with the green of the countryside beyond, together with the wide endless view of the sky.*

##### ***Approaches to the village***

The wooded approaches to the village, together with the surrounding fields, were highlighted as important to the rural feel of the village and its special character. One participant during our informal consultations described the approaches as a 'portal into paradise' and another referred to them as 'setting the scene' for the village.

##### ***Settlement pattern***

People would like to minimise settlement expansion in order to preserve the separate rural identity of Combe. Recurring comments highlighted the fate of surrounding villages (e.g. Stonesfield, Long Hanborough and Church Hanborough) that have succumbed to rapid development.

Survey respondents commented:

*It would be nice if Combe could avoid becoming part of the extended conurbation around Oxford - a fate rapidly overtaking places like Church Hanborough.*

*Combe is a beautiful village, largely unchanged in visual character over many decades, yet still very much a living village. The most important thing is that it doesn't lose the glorious ring of rolling fields and woodlands that surround it. And that it does not succumb to the urban/suburban creep that is changing the nature of so many surrounding villages.*

##### ***River and river walks***

The river, river valley walks and historic water meadows were valued by all age-groups.

##### ***Landscape and wildlife/biodiversity***

There was an interest in retaining and managing copses, hedgerows and field margins, using native species. This was valued for appearance and biodiversity (see section on biodiversity).

***Footpaths through the surrounding countryside***

People wanted to preserve, maintain and, where possible, extend the network of footpaths.

***Dark night skies***

With very few exceptions, people appreciated the dark skies of Combe and did not wish to see street lighting.

***Proximity to Blenheim estate***

Residents of Combe value, and are sensitive to, the role of the Blenheim estate in the surrounding landscape. The management of the estate and farmland within the parish has implications for Combe in terms of landscape appearance, traffic flows, the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity, and potential future housing development.

**VILLAGE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE*****Old village heart, with village green***

The heart of the village is highly prized for its history, tranquility and spaciousness, and traditional features (e.g. stone cottages, village pumps, stone trough etc.). This historic heart is regarded as generally well-maintained and the key feature contributing to the appearance and character of Combe.

92 per cent of survey respondents (Table 1, appendix) thought that it was ‘very important’ to preserve the village green in the future. The Green was commonly described as the ‘*heart of the village*’ and is spoken of with affection by many residents. Respondents told us that:

*Protecting the village green and other open spaces is central to the character of the village.*

*[The village green is] essential to the character of the village - a precious resource.*

*It is a space for community events and celebrations. This helps to build relationships, unity and a sense of belonging and identity. It also brings all generations together.*

***Rurality of the village***

Combe was described as a traditional, largely unspoilt, well-kept Cotswold village, comfortably integrated into its surrounding rural landscape. One person described it as ‘*nestling in the landscape*’. Another commented: ‘*It looks like it belongs in its landscape*’.

***Green open spaces within the village***

There is a widely held desire to preserve green spaces, such as the two village greens, Alma Grove field, the recreation ground, private gardens, allotments and the few remaining orchards within the village. People valued the proximity of grazing animals to the heart of the village (especially on Alma Grove field). Children emphasised the importance of nearby woods and open green spaces for the freedom to roam and play.



In answer to the question 'What do you like best about the appearance of Combe?', several respondents captured wider sentiments when they referred to:

*The beautiful green open spaces in the very heart of the village; the Green, Alma Grove field and the playing field. They are like green lungs.*

*The scattered nature of the village with fields, orchards and trees interspersed between groups of buildings.*

*The open, rural aspect at the centre of the village, with its large, usually animal occupied field, village green, playing fields and the undulating countryside beyond.*

### **Density of building**

The emphasis on the importance of green spaces within the village is consistent with the traditional character of Combe as a dispersed village settlement. The importance of this characteristic is captured in the following comment:

*It is important that in small villages such as Combe, infilling is really limited. The spaces that exist between areas of residential development are just as important as the buildings themselves in their contribution to the overall character of the village. They allow glimpses between spaces, views in and out of the village and enable the countryside and large trees to penetrate into the centre of the village. Areas such as the remnants of orchards, the village pound and allotments are all part of the historical character of the village and deserve to be retained.*

This, and other comments, indicate support for maintaining low densities of building. For example, one person commented:

*Combe is the perfect balance between old buildings and newer built ones in the traditional style. It is not over dense, with green spaces and the preservation of the 'building line' along the main roads, avoiding a 'closed-in' feeling.*

### **Iconic views within the village**

Respondents cited a wide range of favourite views, both within the village and across the surrounding countryside. Iconic views (in order of popularity) were:

- the view across the recreation ground towards the church (54 per cent of respondents mentioned this);
- the view from Akeman Street, across Alma Grove field, towards the church;
- views in all directions across the village green;
- the view along Church Walk.

### **Iconic buildings**

The church and church yard, the Reading Room, the pub, the Cotswold stone cottages, Church Walk cottages, buildings clustered around the historic village green, and other historic buildings (e.g. the old chapel/Hub, the old school building, Old Vicarage and Combe House) were singled out for their contribution to the distinctive character of Combe.

### ***Boundaries - dry stone walls and hedges***

The preservation of traditional boundary walls and hedges was seen as integral to the distinctive character of the parish. Table 1 (see appendix) indicates that 75 percent of survey respondents think that it is 'very important' to preserve Combe's stone walls for the future and a similar proportion (74 per cent) regard hedgerows as 'very important'.

One respondent described the special character of the boundaries:

*[I like] the mixture of stonewalls, hedges and boundaries and the different degree of colour they give through the seasons.*

### ***Tree cover***

Trees, especially the oaks in the centre of the village, are regarded as an important visual component of Combe's landscape. The cedar tree in the grounds of the Old Vicarage is greatly admired and is felt to be integral to the landscape of the historic village centre. Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of respondents regarded protecting trees as 'very important' for Combe's appearance (Table 1) and for wildlife. As one respondent observed:

*Trees and hedgerows help keep our wildlife and add to the beauty of Combe.*

## **ARCHITECTURE AND MATERIALS**

### ***Traditional vernacular buildings***

The Cotswold stone cottages and other historic vernacular buildings in the centre of Combe are highly valued for their contribution to what makes Combe special. Some people also appreciated the good mix of old and newer housing in the village, although there were some examples of newer housing developments that were less well received.

### ***Materials***

Use of materials that complement existing buildings was favoured. Table 1 indicates that 65 percent of survey respondents think that it is 'very important' to build with traditional, or similar, building materials in the future. Only 6 per cent thought it was 'unimportant'. Some people were happy to see the use of more modern materials, if of high quality.

### ***Views on new development***

People were realistic about the need for more housing, but stressed the importance of affordability and sympathetic scale and design. It was felt that any future housing development should be:

- in character/sympathetic to the existing mix of housing and historical legacy of the village;
- of modest scale, to protect the rural appearance and feel of the village.

One recent development in particular was frequently cited for its inappropriate scale and style, whilst three new houses on Akeman Street were appreciated for their sensitive design.

Tables 2 and 3 (see appendix) indicate that two-thirds of the survey respondents felt that it was 'very important' that the scale and design of any new developments should blend in with the surrounding buildings, particularly in the case of 'in-filling'. It should also be noted that, given the above comments on the importance of green spaces and low-density building, the idea of 'in-filling' in Combe is unlikely to be popular.

Comments by one respondent summed up the feelings of many people on development:

*Villages such as Combe should be treated with sensitivity so as to keep that character, not as museum pieces, but as living villages that grow and expand in a sympathetic way, so that in years to come they still represent the history of our countryside and people.*

## **HIGHWAYS**

### ***Traffic***

Many people had observed an increase in the volume and speed of traffic in recent years. Just over half of the survey respondents (52 per cent) supported additional traffic calming measures, although there was ambivalence about the addition of more street furniture.

### ***Verges***

These were regarded as important for the visual appearance of Combe and as green spaces for wildlife. 62 per cent of survey respondents felt that it was 'very important' to preserve verges (Table 1).

### ***Parking***

Parking presents many challenges in the village, especially in its historic centre, where there is little off-street parking. This drew many adverse comments about the effect of parked cars on the appearance of the village and the destruction of grass verges in particular.

### ***Pavements and footpaths***

Just over one third (35 per cent) of respondents would like to see more designated pavements and footpaths. There were particular concerns about the absence of a safe path to Combe Halt. Others would like to see existing pavements and paths better maintained.

## **BIODIVERSITY**

Although no specific questions were asked about biodiversity during the public consultations, several biodiversity-related themes emerged during informal discussions and in the questionnaire survey responses. People expressed a wish to:

### ***Preserve open spaces for biodiversity***

This was seen to be important both within the village and in the surrounding countryside areas (see comments on verges above).

### ***Protect the countryside***

References were made to the importance of trees, meadows, the river, field margins and hedgerows as eco-systems for biodiversity. Three-quarters of the questionnaire respondents thought it was 'very important' to preserve hedgerows and trees, both for the village's appearance and wildlife. Hedgerows were described '*as wildlife corridors*' and '*living barriers [that] provide home and protection and food to a diverse amount of wildlife*'.

Looking to the future, one survey respondent commented:

*It will be important to retain the green and semi-wild spaces in order to maintain the range of wildlife (birds and mammals) that are so much a part of the magic of the village.*

Younger residents showed particular concern for Combe's environmental wellbeing in their comments:

*The fields are lovely. It wouldn't be Combe without footpaths and endless fields. The wildlife in Combe plays a big role in its friendly and caring reputation. It would be nice to add information boards in the woods to explain the wildlife and what grows. [age 13]*

*The environment of Combe is of unrivalled importance in this modern age of climate change. [age 15]*

### ***Enhance the river and river walks***

There was some concern over the loss of water quality in the Evenlode river following adverse media reports, and a desire to enhance both the quality of the river and river walks.

### ***Restore lost habitats***

There was regret over certain habitat losses, particularly in areas of surrounding farmland. A few people favoured a policy of 'rewilding' and minimal trimming of verges.

### ***Reduce lighting at night***

Although many praised Combe's dark night skies, there were some who would like to see lighting levels reduced further, both for reasons of appearance and nocturnal wildlife. The light pollution from LED lighting at Combe Halt was singled out for particular criticism, and some would also like to see people's domestic external lighting arrangements moderated.

In summary, these concerns fit with Blenheim Estate's stated policy commitment to enhancing the area's 'natural capital' (i.e. nature, with its social, economic and cultural benefits) and biodiversity. This is encapsulated in Blenheim's 'Land Strategy' (launched in 2019), which has implications for the evolving landscape in and around Combe.

## **CONCLUSION – WHAT WERE THE MAIN MESSAGES?**

People told us that they loved the wide-open views across the countryside, the wooded approach to the village, river walks, the dark night skies, and the generally well-kept appearance of Combe. The church, the stone cottages, the village green with its oak trees, and the traditional Cotswold buildings at the heart of the village stood out as particularly special.

One of the clearest messages from the findings was how much people value, and wish to protect, green open spaces within the village. This included not only the larger green areas, such as the village greens, Alma Grove field, the recreation ground, the church yard etc., but also the smaller spaces and verges that make up the open character of our village and provide a haven for wildlife. This links closely with people's growing concerns about protecting the countryside, the river and green spaces for the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

Residents were less happy with the impact of traffic and parked cars on the village's appearance. Overall, there was support for traffic calming measures. Respondents were realistic about the possibility of future housing development, but if this happens, most people would prefer affordable housing, built on a small scale, and in sympathy with the existing character of the village. The preservation of hedges and traditional dry-stone walls was seen as integral to the distinctive character of the parish.

## APPENDIX

**Table 1 Looking to the future, how important do you think it is to .....**

	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not important	Unsure
Protect verges	62%	21%	12%	4%	1%
Protect the village green	92%	6%	2%	<1%	-
Preserve traditional stone walls	75%	19%	4%	1%	<1%
Protect hedgerows	74%	20%	5%	1%	<1%
Protect existing trees	74%	20%	5%	1%	<1%
Build with traditional, or similar, building materials	65%	19%	9%	6%	1%

### Which of these, if any, is the most important?

95 respondents picked out one of the above as particularly important to them, as follows:

Verges	9
Village green	48 - commonly described as the 'heart of the village'
Stone walls	2
Hedgerows	8
Existing trees	14
Traditional materials	14

**Table 2 Where new housing is built between existing houses (so called in-filling), how important do you feel it is that the new housing blends in with the surrounding houses in terms of (i) design and (ii) scale?**

	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not important	Unsure
(i) Design	66%	20%	9%	4%	<1%
(ii) Scale	63%	22%	11%	4%	<1%

**Table 3 Where new housing is built at the edge of the village (so called linear development), how important do you feel it is that the new housing blends in with the surrounding houses in terms of (i) design and (ii) scale?**

	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not important	Unsure
(i) Design	66%	20%	9%	4%	<1%
(ii) Scale	60%	22%	11%	5%	1%

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Combe

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

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November 2021



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# 1. INTRODUCTION



## What is a Village Design Statement (VDS)?

Combe's Village Design Statement is a planning document that has been prepared by residents of the parish, under the auspices of the Parish Council. The aim of the VDS is to provide design guidelines that can help to shape any future development so that it blends in with Combe's distinctive rural landscape and heritage. The VDS details Combe's landscape characteristics, the form and shape of its settlement, and its vernacular architecture.

If the VDS is adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document by the West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC), it will become a 'material planning consideration' for determining planning applications within the Parish of Combe. This means that those applying for planning permission would have to demonstrate that they have taken the VDS

design guidelines into account, alongside those embedded in local, regional and national statutory planning policies. Although many small changes to dwellings within the village will not require planning permission, the VDS can also provide helpful guidance to householders by highlighting a number of design principles that can be incorporated into the smallest of developments.

The VDS is not about whether development should take place (this is one of the purposes of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031), but rather about how changes should be undertaken so as to respect the identity of the locality. It seeks to capture what is valued about the past and present landscape, whilst giving people a say in how Combe will evolve in the future.

## How was our Village Design Statement produced?

This VDS has been produced through an extensive process of consultation and engagement with those living and working in the parish of Combe. The consultation aimed to document what local people feel about Combe, what makes it special, and what priorities people have for the future. We gathered information in several ways:

**Informal events:** we began in the summer of 2019 with informal discussions and events designed to reach different groups of residents. Activities included walks around the parish boundary, informal conversations at village events, and activities with children at Combe Primary School.

**Questionnaire survey:** we carried out a household survey in late 2019. A questionnaire was delivered to every household in the parish of Combe (a total of 321 occupied households). The questionnaire was also available online. Over half (53 per cent) of Combe's households responded to the questionnaire; 169 households in total. All responses were anonymous.

We received a good distribution of responses across age-groups, length of residence and geographical areas of the parish. This gives us confidence that the findings in this VDS represent the views of many in the local community.

**Consultation on design guidelines:** the draft Village Design Statement was posted online, and comments invited. Residents also had the opportunity to review, and comment on, the proposed design guidelines at a drop-in session held in the Reading Room. The final document reflects this consultation, and enshrines the values and priorities of the people of Combe.

## Combe as a place – summary of community consultation findings

Local people see Combe as a special place, and they have a strong sense of identity, community and attachment to this Cotswold

landscape. The church, the stone cottages, the village green with its oak trees, and the traditional Cotswold buildings at the heart of the village stand out as particularly special.

Residents told us that they love the wide-open views across the countryside, the wooded approaches to the village, river walks, the dark night skies, and the generally well-kept appearance of Combe. One of the clearest messages from the findings was how much people value, and wish to protect, open green spaces within the village.

If development were to take place in the future, most people would prefer affordable housing, built on a small scale, and in sympathy with the existing character of the village.

*A report on the consultation findings can be found at <https://combepc.org/2021/02/24/vds/>*

## Design guidelines for Combe

The distinctive character of Combe is shaped by its rural setting, dispersed layout, historic village core and architectural heritage. The design guidelines that have emerged from the process of local consultation broadly seek to ensure that:

- the current harmony between buildings and physical landscape, in terms of scale, location and design, provides a guide for future development;
- any new development has regard for community cohesion, sustainable living, biodiversity and the implications of climate change.

*Full details of the design guidelines may be found in Section 10 of this document.*



## 2. REGIONAL PLANNING AND CONSERVATION CONTEXT

The rural parish of Combe is located 12 miles north-west of Oxford and falls within the administrative district of West Oxfordshire. It comprises the village of Combe, the small hamlet of East End, scattered farm buildings, and a small business park on the site of the Blenheim Palace Sawmills on the River Evenlode. The parish falls within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

### Planning framework

At this regional scale, the special character of the area already benefits from protection and sustainable development guidelines enshrined in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, the West Oxfordshire Design Guide (2016) and

the West Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (1998). These regional guidelines sit, for planning purposes, within the wider national statutory planning, policy and design framework.

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 outlines a hierarchy of local settlements, in which Combe is classified as a 'village'. This means that some development is permissible, but this will be limited to that which 'respects the village character and local distinctiveness' (Policy OS2). In addition, the Plan notes that Combe is in an area that has been designated for 'special landscape protection, conservation and enhancement' as part of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Wychwood project.

### Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Combe's distinctive limestone landscape heritage is protected through its location within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the purpose of which is to conserve the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural legacies of the region through the work of the Cotswolds Conservation Board. The West Oxfordshire Design Guide builds on this to provide more specific guidance for landscapes, settlements and buildings typically found in West Oxfordshire. Any proposed development has to be assessed within this context.

### Combe's VDS

Combe's VDS must be read within the broader statutory planning and conservation framework outlined above. The merit of the additional guidelines specified in this document lies in their focus on the distinctive features of the Combe landscape, and the value placed by residents on particular characteristics that they wish to see preserved and/or enhanced.

Quotations, shown in green, in the following sections of this document have been taken from the questionnaire survey responses.

### Wychwood Project

The parish of Combe lies within the area covered by the Wychwood Project, which seeks to conserve and restore the natural landscape and wildlife habitats associated with the former royal hunting Forest of Wychwood.

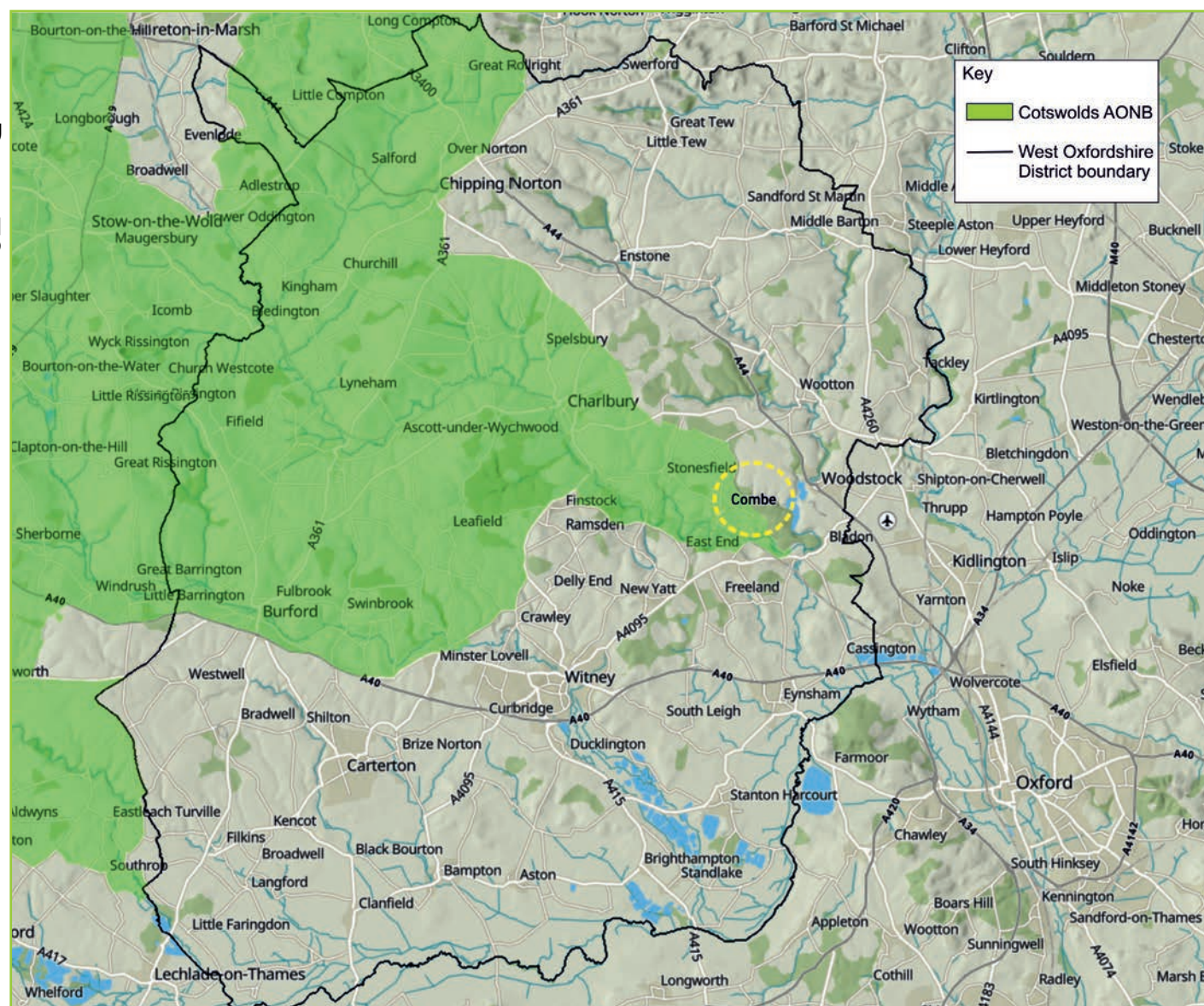


Fig. 1 West Oxfordshire administrative district and AONB boundary. Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. License no: 100060856





### 3. THE PARISH OF COMBE - THE PLACE

The parish of Combe is bounded by the River Evenlode to the south and south-west, and, in part, by the course of the Roman Road of Akeman Street to the north-west. The Great Park of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage site lies to the east. The hamlet of East End sits in a quiet, narrow cul-de-sac bordering the ancient oak woodlands of the Great Park. Since much of the parish is farmed or managed by the Blenheim estate, their strategic vision for the area will play a role in how Combe's landscape evolves.

The parish was home to 768 people at the time of the 2011 census, but this has now

risen to over 800 residents. Most people are permanent residents, and there are few second homes.

Combe has one pub, a pre-school and a primary school, but is dependent upon nearby settlements for other key services. The parish is served by a limited rural bus service and the nearby Cotswold Line, but most residents rely on private transport for access to amenities.

The village community is thriving and dynamic, with a strong sense of identity and community spirit. The presence of the primary school ensures a well-balanced age

structure. A wide range of community organisations, operating from three community spaces and the church, span all age-groups and provide strong support for vulnerable elderly people and the young.

The cohesion of the village was clearly evident with the onset of the Covid-19 crisis of 2020, when local people quickly mobilized to run a pop-up shop, provide a village-wide support network and raise emergency funds for those in financial need.

“A small old English Cotswold village with a medieval church and cricket grounds in the centre and quaint cottages surrounded by farmland and countryside”



Fig. 2 Combe with parish boundary. Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. License no: 100060856





## 4. LANDSCAPE SETTING

The parish of Combe is set within an undulating landscape of Cotswold Oolitic limestone scenery, characterised by hills, valleys, woodland and meadows.

### Geology and physical geography

The village of Combe is located on a hill rising to 120 metres above sea level, and is surrounded by farmland and remnants of ancient woodland. South of the village, the ground declines to the top of Grintley Hill and Combe Cliff, before descending steeply to a glaciated valley floor. The western edge of the parish is defined by similar slopes. The River Evenlode runs along the bottom of this escarpment, and a narrow, stone arched bridge (built 1825) (see photo on page 7) carries the main road out of the village towards Long Hanborough. The river is subject to regular flooding in winter and at other periods of sustained heavy rainfall, making the road impassable at times. Localised bands of Oxford clay also present a drainage challenge, and give rise to

intermittent surface water flooding across the locality.

Rough, unmade paths weave their way down the steep scarp slopes to the river and adjacent meadows on the floodplain. This peaceful landscape is greatly prized for its tranquillity and as a place for recreation and wildlife. The Blenheim Palace Sawmills business park is located in a secluded site on the river and has been sensitively designed, in terms of scale and materials, to blend into its setting. The Cotswold Line passes nearby, along the valley bottom.

The underlying geology (Jurassic Limestone, Oxford and Kellaways clay, and glacial sands and gravel) has given rise to the widespread use of limestone and slate in the vernacular architecture of this area. Stone-built workers' cottages are a distinctive feature of Combe's historic centre, and traditional Cotswold field and property boundaries of dry-stone walls thread their way through the landscape.

### Iconic views

Combe's geographical location on a hill spur affords a number of long vistas across the surrounding countryside, which are greatly appreciated by residents. Sites on the southern and western edge of the village have commanding views across the Evenlode valley, and to the north and east lie farmland and the wooded fringes of the Blenheim Palace Great Park. Sites along the eastern approach to the village from Combe Lodge Gate offer long views across arable fields to the church spire in the neighbouring village of Church Hanborough. These views are largely uninterrupted by development, and farm buildings and scattered houses nestle into the landscape in a largely unobtrusive way. In addition, there are unspoilt views from East End across the countryside toward Long Hanborough and Bladon.

In a recent Management Plan, Blenheim acknowledges the special qualities of the open countryside bordering the Great Park, which it describes as contributing 'high scenic value to the setting of the World Heritage Site because of its character and

topography' (Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Management Plan, 2017). The panoramic view over the countryside from Combe Lodge Gate, and the remnants of ancient woodlands to the east and south of the parish, are highlighted as particularly special.

### Landscape and quality of life

It is important to recognise the contribution of the Combe's physical landscape to people's quality of life. Our consultation findings indicated that the tranquillity, beauty and biodiversity of the extensive open countryside within the parish were appreciated and enjoyed by all age-groups, for recreational, educational and therapeutic purposes.

The attractiveness of the landscapes does, however, present challenges in terms of the management of visitor parking and its impact on the locality. Traffic congestion, littering and the destruction of verges can blight the quality of local life, especially in the east of the parish where visitors seek access to the Blenheim Great Park via Combe Lodge Gate.

“Combe looks like it belongs in its landscape”



Fig. 3 Aerial view of Combe. Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. License no: 100060856





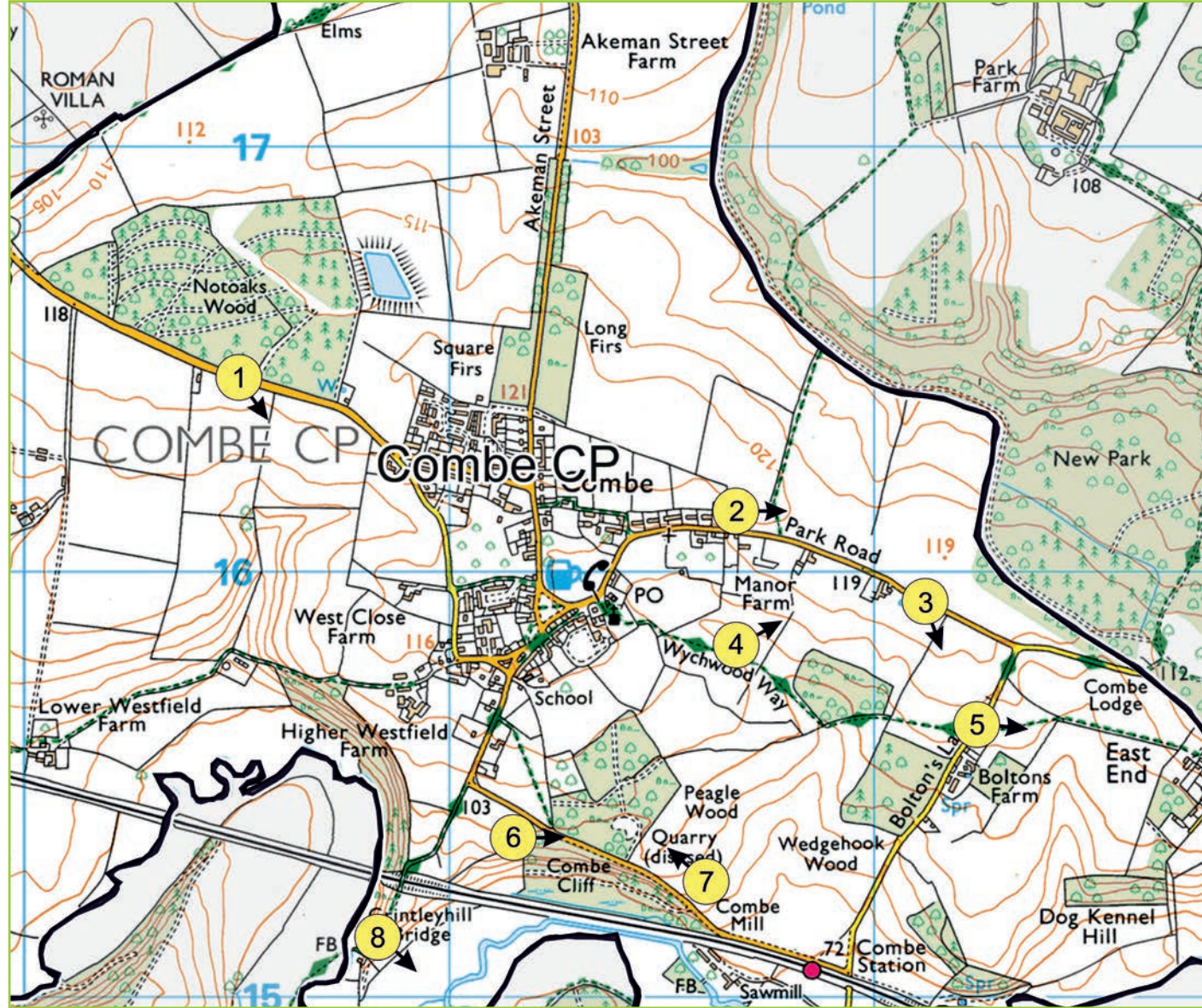


Fig. 4 Iconic views across surrounding landscape. Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. License no: 100060856



1 View from Notoaks Wood towards west Combe



2 View from Park Road towards Blenheim woods



3 View from Park Road towards Church Hanborough



4 Fields near Frogden Wood



5 View towards Blenheim woods and East End



6 Woods at Combe Cliff



7 View from Combe Cliff towards Peagles Wood



8 The Evenlode valley from Grintley Hill



## 5. SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The settlement pattern in Combe reflects a combination of topography, history of growth, changing local economies and development decisions by landowners and residents. The layout is characterised by dispersed settlement, interspersed with open green spaces. The historic centre of Combe, however, is tightly clustered around the village greens and other iconic buildings. The 14th century church, with its gothic tower, is the most prominent architectural feature in the village landscape.

### Settlement evolution

#### Early history

It is thought that the village's early site on the banks of the River Evenlode was abandoned in the late 13th/early 14th century for its current hilltop location. Population numbers in the parish have fluctuated greatly as a result of changing employment opportunities, migration and varying mortality rates, but Combe's origins lie in a predominately agricultural community of small farmers, labourers and rural trades people.

There are still scattered dwellings, particularly former farmhouses, that date back to the 15th - 17th century, e.g., The Old Farmhouse, Green Close, Horns Close and Higher Westfield Farm, but most of the historic workers' cottages, seen in the centre of the village, were constructed as the population expanded in the mid-18th century. The hamlet of East End also grew in the 1700s, but only a handful of cottages from this time remain.

The current nuclear layout of the heart of Combe village, centred on the site of St. Laurence Church Combe Longa, Alma Grove and the main village green, is largely consistent with this early period of development, as depicted in the 1778 map of Combe (see Fig 5). The triangular green sits at the junction of several roads leading in and out of the village, and linear development has gradually spread along these.

The 1778 map shows common lands and open fields, cleared of trees ('assarts'). This open landscape was, however, set to change as the process of enclosure got underway in 1792. Piecemeal enclosure subdivided the extensive Combe Green, and smaller parcels of land were consolidated into 'closes', usually bounded by walls and hedges.

The legacy of enclosure may still be seen in the field patterns (although smaller plots have been amalgamated over time) and in the names of houses, for example, Green Close, Horns Close and West Close Farm. The parcel of enclosed land received by the church, located on the southern edge of the village, was later subdivided and gave rise to Combe's allotments (dating back to 1845).

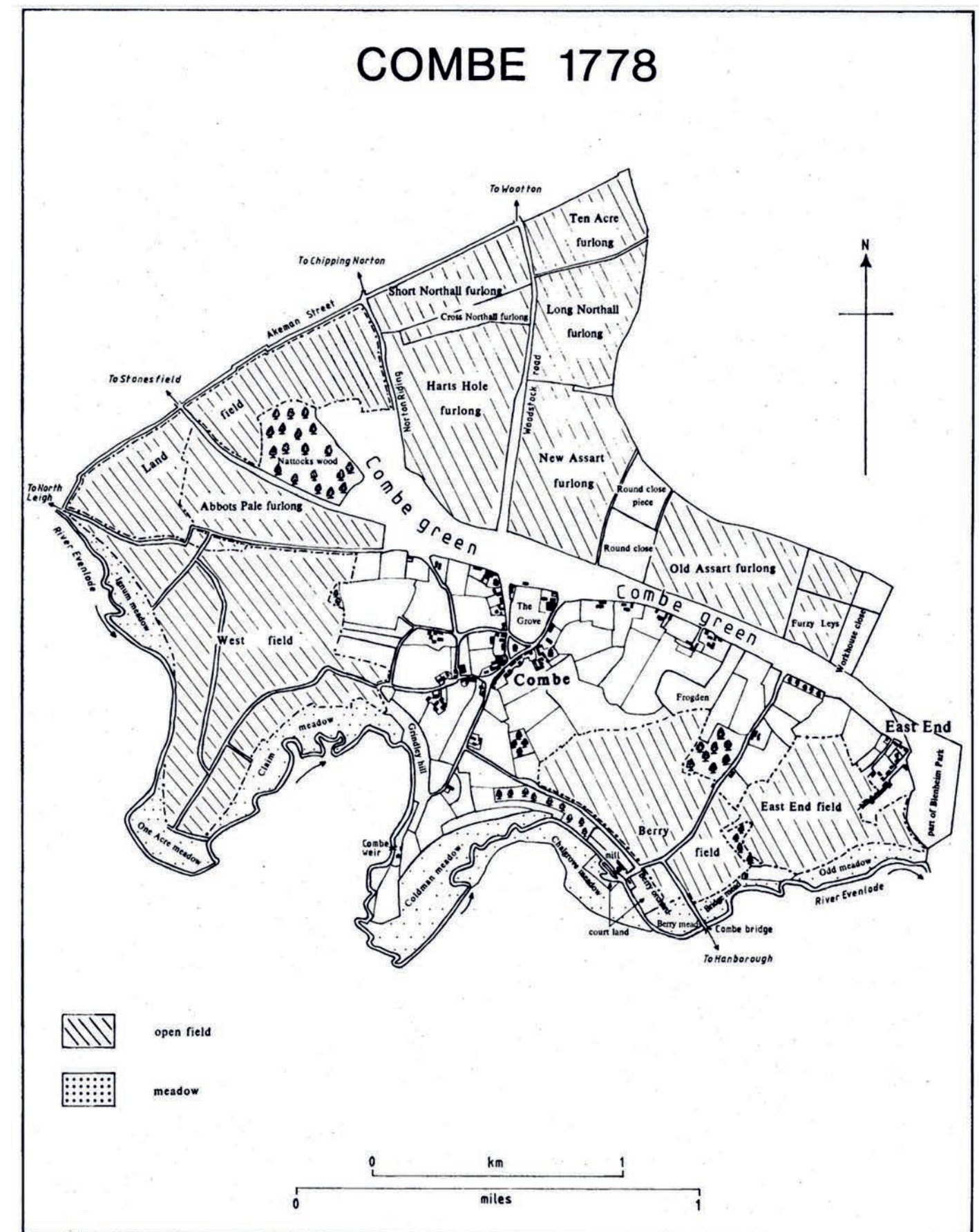


Fig. 5 1778 map of Combe. Source: British History Online: Combe. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol12/pp75-82> [accessed 19 September 2021]



### Twentieth century onwards

The 20th century saw an amalgamation of farms, a decline in traditional rural trades and a changing employment structure, especially with the influx of commuters. The construction of several post-war housing developments on green field sites provided an opportunity for some local residents to move out of unimproved stone cottages into more modern accommodation. This set the stage for the renovation, and often amalgamation, of small, older properties in the historic heart of the village.

The majority of 20th century development lies on the northern side of the village on land that was previously Combe's common grazing land, and was enclosed as part of

the Blenheim Estate. Key phases of public and private housing development include the construction of housing along Akeman street, Stonesfield Road, Chatterpie Lane and the northern side of Park Road (mainly in the early-mid 20th century), the addition of an estate of affordable, mixed tenure housing in the north-west of the parish in Knott Oaks in the 1980s, and infilling along Horns Lane and the southern side of Park Road.

Small centrally-located housing developments were also permitted, notably, the 1960s Orchard Close development (on former farmland, once owned by Orchard Cottage) and Combe Gate (built on land released by the Old Farmhouse and Green Close in the 1980s).

Housing affordability in Combe, as elsewhere in the District, remains a challenge, although house prices in Knott Oaks remain lower than some newly built 'affordable' accommodation in neighbouring villages. The village also benefitted from a small development of rented/shared-ownership homes on Stonesfield Road in the early 2000s.

The different phases of expansion of Combe have generally respected the architectural heritage of the place. Residents describe it as a traditional, largely unspoilt, well-kept Cotswold village, comfortably integrated into its surrounding rural landscape.

“Combe is a real English village, wrapped inside beautiful scenery”





# 6. COMBE'S HISTORIC HEART AND CONSERVATION AREA

The historic heart of Combe village is highly valued by residents. The traditional Cotswold stone cottages, Grade I listed church, the Victorian brick buildings of the Old Vicarage and Reading Room, pub, Church Walk, together with the village greens, oak trees and Cedar of Lebanon, combine to give a distinctive sense of place.



for dairy farming and currently home to a small number of livestock, remains in the centre of the village and offers striking views across some of Combe's most charming and distinctive landscapes.

“A quintessential Cotswold village ... a gem”

A number of relics from past centuries are embedded within this historic village landscape. There are two former hand-operated village water pumps and a stone horse trough near the Little Green. The village pound (West End) has been conserved and is maintained by the Parish Council. Many cottages have retained the stone structures that once housed the earth closets, and some residents have renovated the wells that were a source of domestic water. They now mostly serve as ornamental garden features.

Residents identified a range of iconic views within the village, which they felt captured its sense of place and cultural legacies. The most highly prized view was across the recreation ground towards the church, which is framed by a cluster of stone cottages in the foreground. Other favourite views were across Alma Grove field towards the church, across the main village green, and the view down the narrow passageway of Church Walk.

Alma Grove field



## Conservation measures in the historic heart

### Conservation Area status

Combe's historic centre is protected by Conservation Area status (designated in 1989). This status does not preclude development, but serves to manage and protect the special architectural and historic character of the village centre through the implementation of additional planning controls. There is no Conservation Area Appraisal document for Combe.

### Listed Buildings

Combe has 38 entries in Historic England's Listed Buildings, which affords protection when development is proposed. Most are

houses of architectural interest, or assessed to be integral to the historic character of Combe and its cultural heritage, as explored in Section 8. The remaining listings are important public buildings (see Section 9), key features of the heritage landscape (e.g., the old telephone box, the Combe war memorial and the chest tomb in the churchyard), or reflect part of Combe's economic past (e.g., Combe Sawmill Mill, Grade II\* listing).

The full list of Combe's Listed Buildings can be seen on the Historic England website: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>, or at: <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/england/combe-west-oxfordshire-oxfordshire#.YBl3suj7SUK>

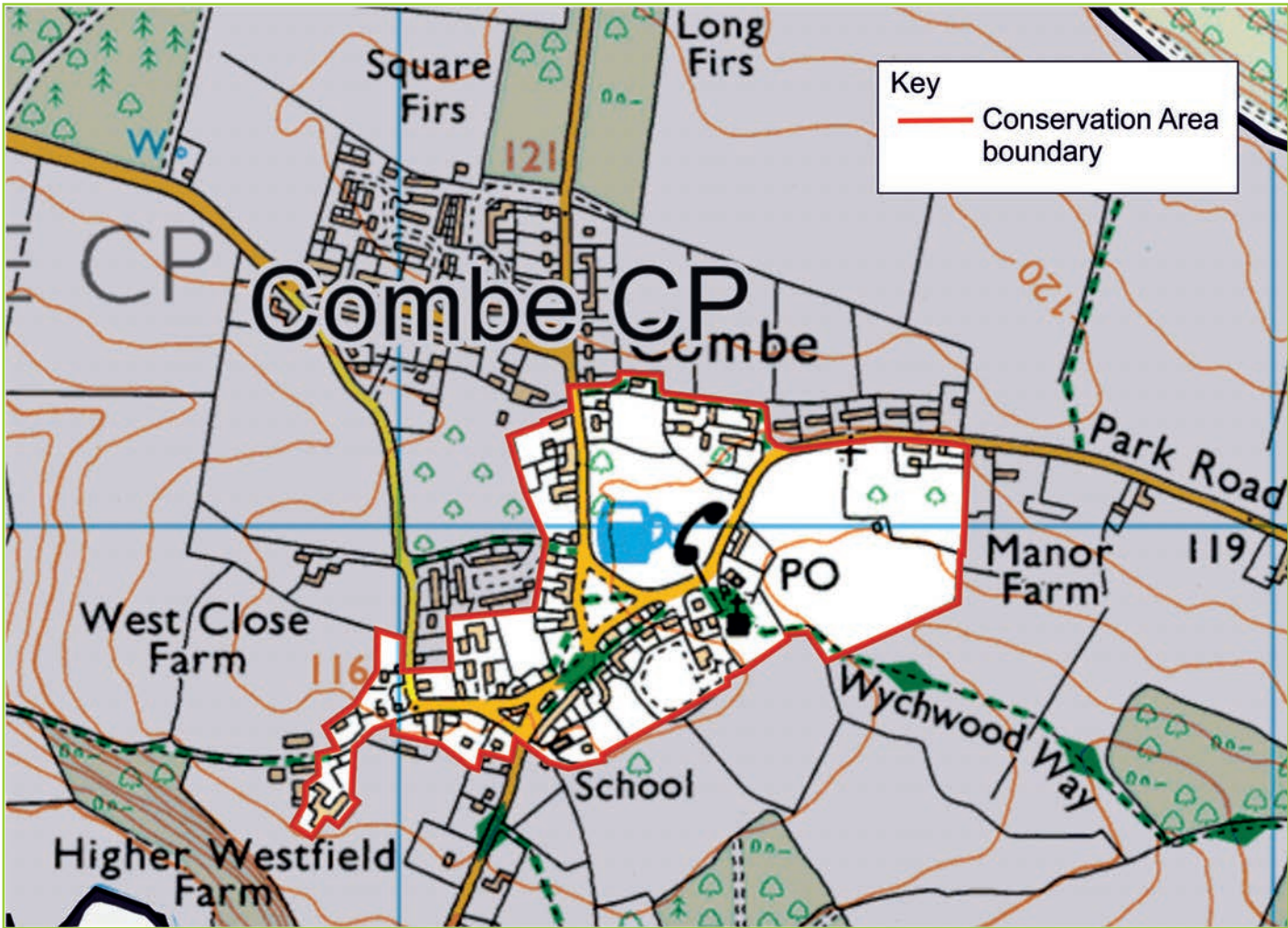
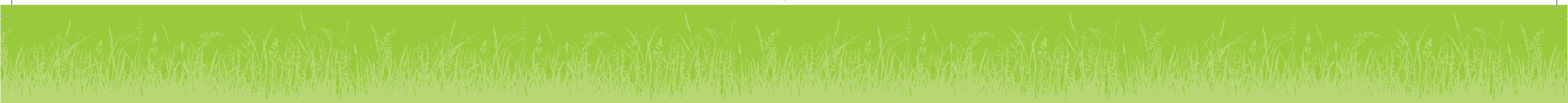


Fig. 6 Combe's Conservation Area.  
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## 7. GREEN SPACES, LOCAL GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND BIODIVERSITY



Fig. 7 Highly valued green spaces in the village of Combe. Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. License no: 100060856

Both the natural and cultural heritage of the area is embodied in Combe's open green spaces and green infrastructure; mostly notably in its historical field patterns, gardens associated with its vernacular architecture, hedgerows, and the remnants of ancient woodland from the Wychwood Forest. The village's tree landscape was significantly affected by Dutch Elm disease in the 1970s, and has undergone extensive re-planting, although native oaks remain a distinctive local species.

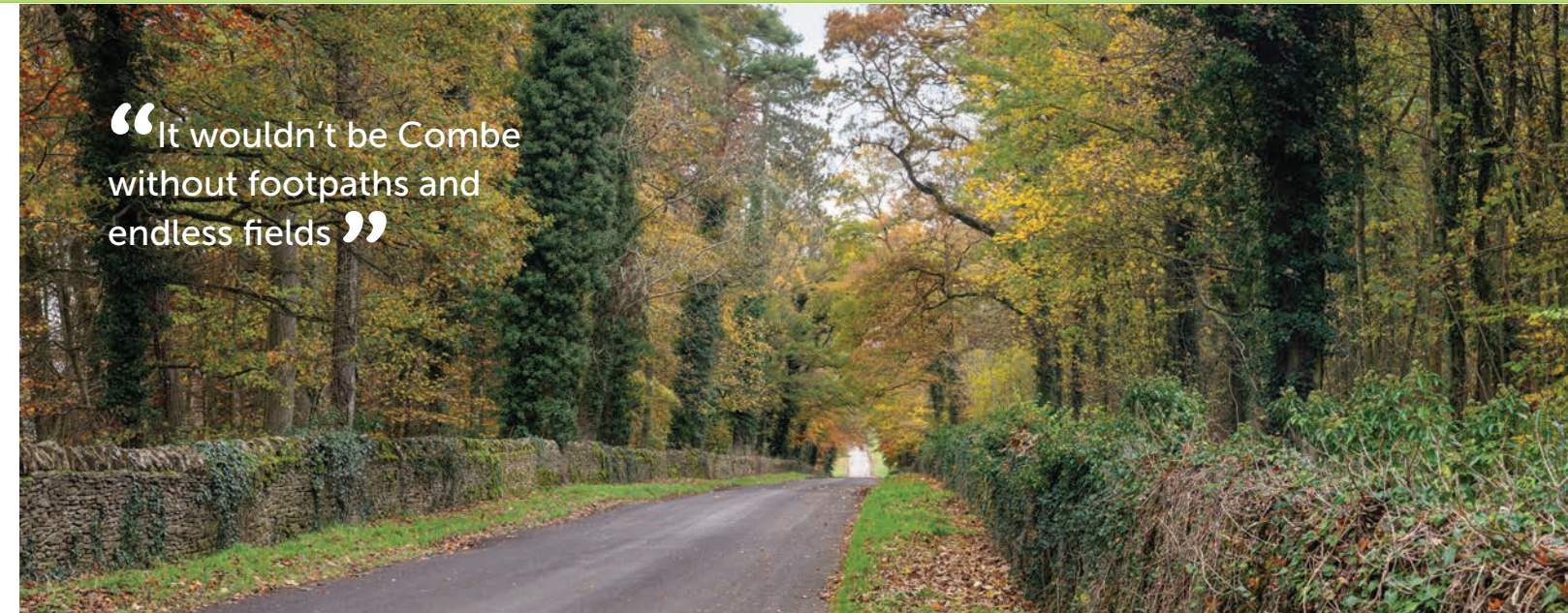
In line with the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, which advocates enhancing the District's environmental assets and biodiversity, we seek to take action locally in order to protect and improve the green infrastructure of Combe and restore natural ecosystems. We define green infrastructure as a network of multifunctional green spaces

that have potential benefits for biodiversity, and people's health and wellbeing.

Our survey indicates that there is a strong desire amongst Combe's residents to retain and preserve the rural integrity of the village and its surrounding landscape.

### Valued green spaces within the village

Five key spaces were identified within the village as particularly important to its rural appearance and feel - Alma Grove field, the recreation ground, the village green/s, the churchyard, and the allotments. In addition, people highlighted the charm of private gardens and the few remaining orchards, as well as the smaller spaces and verges that make up the open character of Combe.



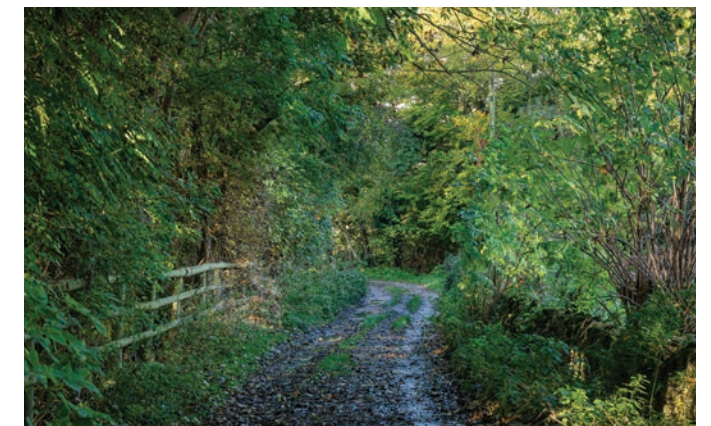
“It wouldn't be Combe without footpaths and endless fields”

The main village green, commonly described by residents as the 'heart of the village', has been registered (along with other centrally located green spaces) under the Commons Registration Act 1965. This provides a measure of protection from encroachment and development. The oak trees on the green are seen as integral to its historic character. People felt that the presence of grazing animals in the centrally located Alma Grove field, on land adjacent to the green owned by the Blenheim Estate, captured the rural sense of this place.

### Valued green spaces beyond the village

Residents placed high value on access to the open countryside. Wooded copses of deciduous trees are dotted throughout the landscape, and the bluebell woods of Peagle Wood and Frogden Wood are particularly enjoyed by local residents.

In addition, the scenery associated with wooded approaches to the village, notably those leading into the village from the south-east, via Combe Cliff, and from the north, via Akeman Street, are highly valued and are seen as intrinsic to the rural character of the place. One resident described them as 'setting the scene' for the village. The historical antecedents of these approaches are evident on the first Ordnance Survey map of Combe,



published in 1882-87 (British Online History, sheet 26), in the plantations of Square Firs and Long Firs to the north, and the ancient woods of Combe Cliff to the south.

Beyond the village, tracks and 'rights of way' weave across a rural landscape that is appreciated for its beauty and tranquillity. Important attributes of these open green





spaces include: low noise levels, woodland areas, hedgerows, dispersed settlement, networks of narrow country lanes, the peacefulness of the river valley to the south, and the backdrop of the dense woodlands of the Blenheim Palace Great Park to the north.

Several sites in the parish have been designated for special protection because of distinctive species characteristics or sensitive habitat status:

- the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) has identified the northern banks of the Evenlode Valley, with its limestone grasslands, riverside fens and Combe Cliff ancient woodlands, as a Conservation Target Area.
- Coombe (sic) Fen, a rare fen meadow habitat, is specifically recorded as a protected Local Wildlife site by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC).
- Sturt Copse and the Stonesfield Common - Bottoms and Banks (which extends across the north-west parish boundary) are protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 (Policy EH3).
- Baggs Bottom (on the boundary of Combe and Stonesfield parishes) is particularly important for butterflies, insects and wild flowers.
- the designated ancient woodland copses of Notoaks Wood, Wedgehook Wood, Combe Cliff woods, Peagle Wood, and Brice's Wood are all protected under the West Oxfordshire Local Plan.

## Biodiversity

Residents' enthusiasm for the preservation of large and smaller open spaces and green corridors is entwined with growing concerns for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, and the restoration of natural ecosystems. Although sensitive wildlife habitats have already been afforded special protection through the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and other conservation initiatives, our concern extends more widely to consider the amenity value and biodiversity implications of all land management, farming and development practices across the parish. There is an eagerness to get involved in greater stewardship of the parish's natural capital, which will help, for example, to restore the quality of verges, hedgerows, woodland, soil and water as rich and productive habitats for a diversity of wildlife.



Fig. 8 Registered common land in Combe. Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. License no: 100060856



Fig. 9 Ancient woodlands in Combe parish. Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. License no: 100060856



## 8. THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT – ARCHITECTURAL STYLES AND MATERIALS

Our VDS follows the tenets of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 and West Oxfordshire Design Guide (2016), which seek to achieve outstanding design standards for everyday enjoyment and as a material legacy for future generations.

The idea of 'outstanding design' must be understood in a local context, not only reflecting standards for West Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds AONB, but the special character of Combe itself. The village currently nestles within its rural landscape, and most buildings blend-in well to their surroundings. Building materials reflect the local geology, and Combe's character owes

much to the consistent use of local materials and styles of construction in both past and recent developments.

### Historical dwellings: style and materials

The historic core of Combe village is characterised by a mix of small workers' cottages, former farmhouses and a few larger properties. A number are Grade II Listed buildings. All have been modified to some extent in subsequent centuries, but retain their distinctive characteristics. Good examples of architectural styles and use of material are:

**Workers' cottages/vernacular architecture**  
Fern Cottage, Rose Cottage and End Cottage are highlighted by Historic England as a group of dwellings that form an integral part of the historic centre of the village and strongly define Combe's vernacular tradition. This row of small, 18th century, workers' cottages lies in Church Walk, the narrow lane previously known as the Passage or Tchure.



Other Grade II Listed cottages are scattered throughout the village. Notable examples located beyond the Conservation Area include Whitton's (Park Road), an early 17th century thatched cottage, with possible





medieval origins, and Mosses and Rose Cottages (18th century) on Park Road. There are also four cottages at East End that date back to the 17th – 18th century.

Most of Combe's older dwellings are built from the rough coursed limestone rubble that is intrinsic to the character of the parish. Many have steep pitched roofs, typically constructed from natural Stonesfield slate. Some Welsh slate may be found on shallower pitched roofs. Red Oxford brick chimneys are characteristic of this area. Timber lintels over doors and windows, mostly small-paned, are common. Many of the stone cottages would once have been thatched, but now only a handful of thatched roofs remain.

Two notable 19th century additions to the historic central village landscape are unusually characterised by red brick construction – the Old Vicarage and the community facility known as the Reading Room. Both were designed by H. W. Moore of the firm of Wilkinson and Moore in Oxford, a highly distinguished firm of architects and developers, responsible for many of North Oxford's houses. Both of these Combe buildings are regarded as fine examples of Moore's work.

#### Larger properties

There are also a number of larger properties that local people feel are an integral part of Combe's historic architectural landscape. Notably,

- Combe House, a former rectory, and now a private house, that dates from the 16th century/early 17th century;
- Green Close, a late medieval hall house, remodelled and extended in the 17th century and early 20th century; and
- The Old Farmhouse, a former farmhouse dating from the mid/late 16th century, with 17th and 18th century additions.

*Further details of these three properties, together with Combe's other larger Grade II Listed dwellings, may be found in Appendix 1.*

#### Recent developments: style and materials

For the most part, more recent housing constructions have been modest and blend-in well, without detracting from the overall character of the village.

Apart from the detached new houses of the early 20th century, which are of varied styles, the majority of newer building in Combe is of simple generic housing styles, and developments have largely used materials in keeping with vernacular traditions. A few of the larger early 20th century detached houses were built in stone, although this was

“Combe is the perfect balance between old buildings and newer built ones in the traditional style”

a dressed stone rather than the traditional coursed random rubble of the cottages, and some had red brick details, as in Horns Lane. Others were rendered or pebble-dashed blockwork.

Some of the earliest council properties were built in an unusual type of concrete brick, an early attempt at reconstructed stone. The later council and Blenheim Estate houses on Akeman Street are built either of rendered blockwork, or buff brickwork similar in colour to new Cotswold stone, with roofs generally constructed of concrete plain tiles.

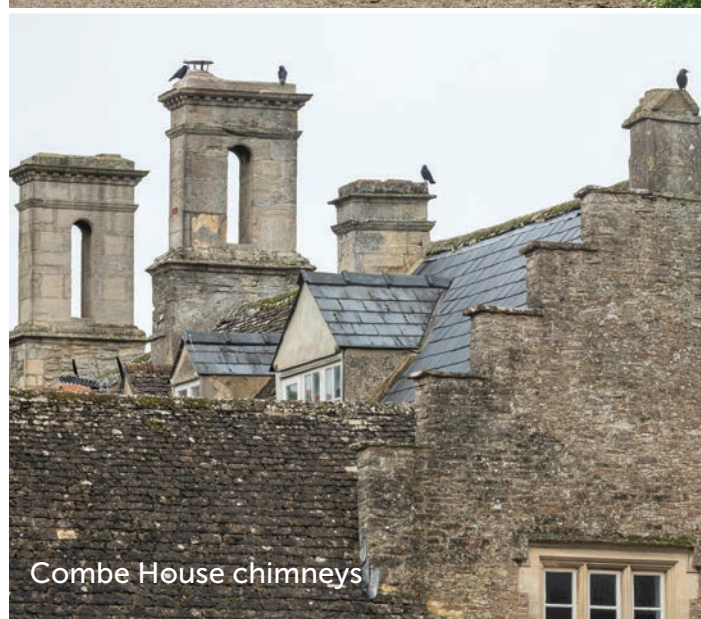


Some details, such as windows and porches, gave a nod to the local vernacular style. For example, two of the early council houses on Akeman Street were constructed with window mullions and drip mouldings over the windows and canopies over the doors.

The Park Road bungalows and newer housing are again predominantly built of buff brickwork and of render, pebbledash and reconstructed stone, with larger concrete tiles on the shallower pitched roofs. More recent, larger new houses have been constructed of coursed Cotswold stone blocks, with reproduction stone roofing slates, as in Combe Gate.



Combe House



Combe House chimneys



Green Close



## Boundaries and curtilages

Property boundaries in Combe's Conservation Area and beyond typically take the shape of dry-stone walls, traditionally built of Cornbrash Limestone, or hedges. Our residents' survey found strong support for the retention of dry-stone walls as an integral feature of Combe's village landscape. Other boundary materials often reflect the local character outlined in the West Oxfordshire Design Guide, for example, willow hurdles and open panel fencing.



More recent developments in Combe have tended to preserve the 'building line' along the roads. This has helped to provide a visual unity between the older and newer building forms and preserved the spacious feel. Many properties are served by gravel drives, which are not only consistent with the rural vernacular, but also help to moderate run-off from rainfall in this flood prone area.



## Implications for future architecture and design

The Cotswold stone cottages and other historic buildings in the centre of Combe are highly valued for their contribution to what makes Combe special. The West Oxfordshire Design Guide provides clear guidance on architectural details and building materials sensitive to the local character of the Limestone Wolds. It also highlights the sorts of construction and development decisions that can harm the appearance and erode the cultural heritage of villages such as Combe.

Our survey gave insights into how residents would like to see Combe's built environment evolve in the future:

### Materials

The use of materials that complement the traditional building style was favoured; 65 percent of survey respondents thought that it was 'very important' to build with traditional, or similar, building materials in the future. Some people were happy to see the use of more modern materials, if of high quality.

### Scale and character

People stressed the importance of affordability and sympathetic scale and design in any new development. It is generally felt that there is a good mix of old and newer housing in the village, although the recent development on the eastern approach to the village was frequently cited for its inappropriate scale and style. In contrast, three new houses on Akeman Street were



appreciated for their sensitive design, and the way in which they blend into the surrounding built environment.

Residents were of the opinion that any future housing development should:

- be in character/sympathetic to the existing mix of housing and historical legacy of the village;
- be of modest scale, to protect the rural appearance and feel of the village;

- have regard for more sustainable living and the implications of climate change, with the goal of moving the parish towards carbon net-zero. This objective is in line with West Oxfordshire District Council's Climate Change Strategy, 2021-25.

It should also be noted that, given the value placed by residents on green spaces and low-density building, the idea of 'in-filling' in Combe is unlikely to be popular and may be seen as a threat to the intrinsic character of the place.





## 9. PUBLIC REALM



Modifications to the street scene should enhance local distinctiveness and aim to maintain a sense of place, with particular attention paid to the rural character and open nature of Combe's settlement pattern. The character and appearance of Church Walk should be conserved.

New street furniture, such as street signage, bins and seats, should be kept to a minimum and should complement the rural character of the village.

### Public buildings

Several historic public buildings in Combe provide a focus for community life and help to forge a sense of local identity and belonging. All are centrally located, within, or close to, the Conservation Area, and reflect Combe's social and economic past.



**Church of St. Laurence, Combe Longa** - Grade I Listed Building, built for Eynsham Abbey in 1395, in the Perpendicular style.

**Cock Inn** - Grade II Listed Building. The Cock Inn started life as a public house in the 18th century on the site of Church Cottage, before it was moved in the early 19th century to its current location on the village green. It was first listed as an Asset of Community Value in 2014, and re-registered in 2019.

**Combe Temperance Reading Room and Coffee House** (locally known as the



Reading Room) - the architecture of this public building is distinctive because of its construction using high-quality red bricks. The building was opened as a Temperance Reading Room in 1892. It now serves as one of Combe's community centres.

**Combe Community Hub** - the Community Hub is located in a former Methodist Chapel, built in 1893 of Cotswold limestone. The building was registered as an Asset of Community Value in 2015, and bought by the village in 2017. It serves as a community centre and houses Combe's Pre-School and After-School Club.



“It's largely unchanged in visual character over many decades, yet still very much a living village”

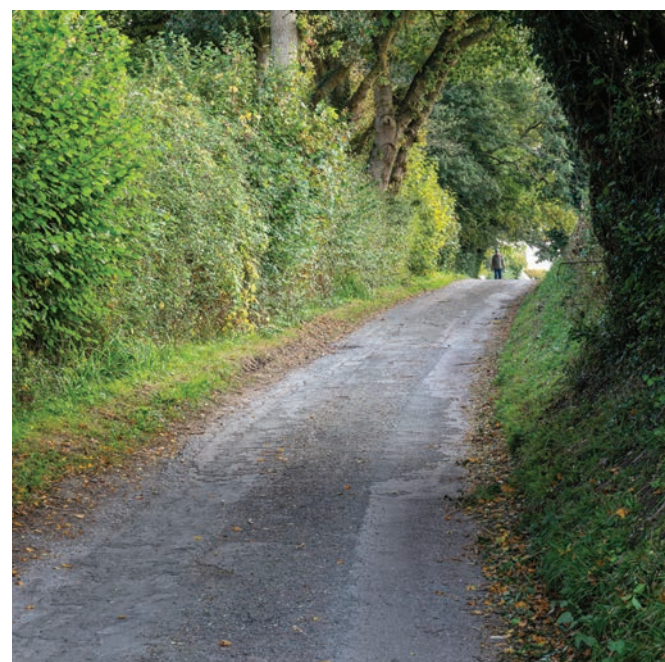
The condition of the public realm is integral to the visual character of the area. It also impacts on residents' quality of everyday life and others' experience of a place. Although the management of public spaces falls under the control of a number of different organisations and authorities, including, for example, Oxfordshire County Council Highways department and various utility companies, this VDS presents an opportunity to outline residents' preferences for the maintenance and improvement of this part of the parish landscape.

### Street scene

The peaceful and well-maintained street scene in Combe's historic heart is central to its Cotswold village character. The exceptional charm of the narrow passage of Church Walk, with its red and blue paviers, adds to the unique appearance of Combe. The mottling of the dark red bricks suggests that they originated from the Blenheim Estate brickworks on Boltons Lane.







**Village Hall and Recreation Ground Pavilion** – the Pavilion is located in Combe's recreation ground, a field previously owned by the Blenheim estate. The building provides a community space and offers iconic views across the cricket ground towards St. Laurence Church.

### Rural road network

The parish's narrow, rural road network contributes to the village's appeal and reflects its long agricultural past. The hedgerows, dry-stone walls and native trees that line the lanes enhance their distinctive character. Residents picked out Chatterpie Lane, in the west of the parish, with open fields along its western boundary, as particularly evocative of Combe



as a place. The narrow approach to East End also captures the settlement's cultural heritage.

The restricted rural highways nevertheless present challenges in terms of parking, congestion and erosion of the verges, as well as safety concerns for walkers, cyclists and equestrians. Innovative solutions to restrict speeding traffic, provide cycle lanes and improve footpaths, particularly to transport hubs, are to be sought.

### Utilities and drainage

Combe's landscape is blighted by utility poles and overhead power cables. Further cabling should be placed under ground. The parish is not served by gas. Domestic oil tanks can be an intrusive part of the landscape.

Drainage in Combe has been an on-going challenge. Surface water flooding occurs within the village, which can accumulate downhill, under the railway bridge. This is exacerbated by occasional flooding of the River Evenlode across the main road from Combe to Long Hanborough, which makes this road impassable at times. The potential for flash flooding has been compounded over



the years by the infilling of former 'holding ponds' and additional stormwater run-off generated by new developments. A flood plan for the village, prepared in 2007, included a recommendation that Alma Grove pond should be enlarged.

Mains foul drainage was installed in Combe village in the 1960s. Population growth, associated with new housing development, has stretched this drainage infrastructure beyond capacity, as evidenced by the overflow of foul water in, for example, Horns Lane and Park Road at times of heavy rain.

### Dark skies

There is wide appreciation of the intrinsic value of the dark skies above Combe for the enjoyment of people and benefits to wildlife. This is consistent with the CPRE initiative to reclaim dark skies (<https://www.cpre.org.uk/what-we-care-about/nature-and-landscapes/dark-skies/>).



Combe has no street lighting, and our survey results indicated that the majority of Combe residents do not wish this to change. Some residents would like to see lighting levels reduced further, both for reasons of appearance and nocturnal wildlife. The light pollution from LED lighting at Combe Halt was singled out for particular criticism, and some would like to see domestic external lighting arrangements moderated.

### Tranquillity

The value of Combe's spacious and tranquil environment is underlined by recent population growth and accompanying noise and traffic congestion across the local region. The peacefulness of the Combe landscape is highly valued by residents and visitors, for reasons of health, well-being and the wildlife environment.



# 10. DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING DEVELOPMENT IN THE PARISH OF COMBE

## Context

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 seeks, amongst other things, to 'conserve and enhance the character and significance of West Oxfordshire's high quality natural, historic and cultural environment' (Policy CO14). Enshrined within this Plan is the principle that development in villages, such as Combe, will be

'limited to that which respects the village character and local distinctiveness and would help maintain the vitality of the local community.'  
(Policy OS2, section 4.22)

Elsewhere, it states that:

'... villages will accommodate growth of an appropriate scale and type to help ensure their future prosperity and that of the rural areas around them without compromising their intrinsic character, appearance and setting.'  
(Our Vision, section 3.2)

This section of our VDS sets out design guidelines that seek to ensure that Combe's intrinsic character, appearance and setting is conserved and enhanced in light of future development. These guidelines reflect the physical, historical and cultural legacy of Combe, and have been devised through extensive consultation with local people. They should be considered within the national, regional and local statutory planning framework, and set against the backcloth of guidance offered by the Cotswolds AONB, Combe Conservation Area status and West Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016.

## General principles

- The current harmony between buildings and physical landscape, in terms of scale, location and design, should provide a guide for future development.
- New development should have regard for community cohesion, sustainable living, biodiversity and the implications of climate change.

## Surrounding countryside and landscape setting

- New development should not have a detrimental impact on vistas from within the village, nor on distant views across the surrounding rural landscape.
- Woodland copses in the surrounding countryside, and on entrance routes into the village of Combe along Akeman Street and Combe Cliff, should be preserved.
- The River Evenlode and its local environment should be preserved, and the water quality enhanced.
- Developments should not exacerbate the risk of flooding, either in terms of frequency or intensity, within the village or from the River Evenlode.
- Historic landscape features, such as the stone bridge, should be conserved.
- Development which threatens access to the countryside or wildlife-rich sites should not be permitted.

## Settlement pattern and historic core

- The dispersed settlement pattern should be preserved to retain the spacious, open, rural character of the village.
- Development within the Conservation Area should adhere to the pattern and character of existing settlement, and respect the historic heart of Combe.
- Vistas along Church Walk, the approach to St. Laurence's Church, across the village greens, and across Alma Grove field should be preserved as part of the historic street scene.
- New development at the margins of the settlement should respect the form and character of the village of Combe and Combe's East End so as to blend-in with the scale, density and rural appearance of the parish.
- Development in the open countryside, beyond the current settlement area, should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with the principles of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan and the Cotswolds AONB.



## Green spaces, local green infrastructure and biodiversity

- The open green spaces between the village of Combe and East End should be preserved and protected from development that is inappropriate in scale and character for this rural setting.
- Fields in and around the village should be conserved as part of the traditional pastoral landscape of Combe. The centrally located Alma Grove field in Combe village is highly valued by residents.
- The village green, and the oak trees in the heart of the village and beyond, are integral to the historic character of Combe and should be sensitively preserved.
- Open spaces, verges and hedgerows present green corridors that should be maintained as wildlife habitats and part of the rural landscape. Measures are needed to protect these from the adverse impact of traffic and parking.
- Green spaces between houses should be retained to reflect the character of the settlement and provide spaces for recreation and wildlife. Infill should be discouraged.
- The allotments are an important green space that contribute to the health, well-being and open habitat of Combe. New development on this site should be excluded.
- Green spaces associated with historic relic features, notably, the stone horse trough and water pump on the approach to the Church, contribute to the intrinsic character of the village and should be preserved.
- Mature trees make a positive contribution to Combe's landscape. Where retention is not possible, replacement trees of native species should be planted.



- All landscape management, and every new development, should seek a net gain in biodiversity and create opportunities to restore natural ecosystems.

## Building form and materials

- New developments should be sensitive to Combe's architectural heritage, and aim to be environmentally sustainable and low energy.
- New build should (i) take into account the height of surrounding buildings, (ii) the density of settlement, and (iii) reflect, and blend-in with, the local building materials and architectural designs, as recommended in the West Oxfordshire Design Guide.
- New development should be considered in terms of its visual impact and aim to avoid harmful effects on the built environment and wider setting. Property frontages should aim to retain the traditional charm of East End and Combe.
- Existing dry-stone wall boundaries should be preserved as far as possible, within and beyond the village settlement.



- Fencing materials should follow the West Oxfordshire Design Guide, and avoid close board panel fencing for aesthetic and wildlife reasons. Where possible, any new development should incorporate dry-stone walls rather than fencing.
- The use of traditional materials and native planting is to be encouraged as part of any new development.
- Any new development should include, where possible, provision for well-integrated off-road parking. Driveways



should be constructed of water permeable material.

- Proposed developments should minimise encroachment on important views.
- Proposals for new-build housing should have regard for the need for good quality, affordable dwellings.
- All management of buildings and landscape, and any new development, should seek to move the parish towards carbon net zero as an essential step in the fight against climate change.



## Public realm

- Changes and repairs to country lanes (especially Chatterpie Lane) should seek to maintain the rural charm of the parish and not encourage additional traffic use that could damage their character.
- Networks of footpaths and public rights-of-way should be preserved, well-maintained and, where possible, extended.
- Utility companies and statutory bodies should seek to minimise the visual impact of new installations on the appearance of the parish.



## REFERENCES

- Care should be taken to preserve the distinctive character of Church Walk, with its red and blue paviers.
- Any new development should have regard for the effect of surface materials on stormwater run-off, which might increase the risk of flooding.
- The location, layout and design of new parking areas, public and private, should seek to minimise their visual impact on the public realm, and consider the use of permeable materials to moderate the effects of run-off.
- Careful consideration should be given to the design and layout of developments that might disturb the tranquillity of Combe.
- Efforts should be made to conserve the dark night skies above Combe, keeping light pollution in public and private settings to a minimum for safety.

Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Management Plan, 2017.

Combe: British History Online, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol12/pp75-82>

Conservation Target Areas, <https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/biodiversity/conservation-target-areas/oxfordshires-ctas-to-download/>

Landscape Character Assessment (Architecture), <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/3qcnesrd/4-design-guide-local-character.pdf>

Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation, <https://oxfordshire.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=373201dd651c410bacef130ffb3d8d11>

Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre, <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/lyxlf5wd/list-of-local-wildlife-sites-in-west-oxfordshire.pdf>

VeloCity, Emerging Vision for Blenheim Estate, 2020, [velocity\\_blenheim-sketchbook-200729.pdf](https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/velocity_blenheim-sketchbook-200729.pdf) (sustainablewoodstock.co.uk)

West Oxfordshire Design Guide, <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/supplementary-planning-documents/>

West Oxfordshire District Council, 2021, Climate Change Strategy for West Oxfordshire 2021-2025, <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/32wj4oq1/wodc-climate-change-strategy-24-03-21.pdf>

West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/feyjmpen/local-plan.pdf>



### Details of Combe's larger Grade II listed dwellings

**Combe House** - former rectory, now private house. Dates from the 16th century/early 17th century, with early 19th century additions in the Tudor/Gothic Revival style.

**Green Close, The Green** - late medieval hall house, which was remodelled and extended in the 17th century and the early 20th century. The fenestration was altered in the 20th century.

**The Old Farmhouse, Chatterpie Lane** – former farmhouse, mid/late 16th century, with 17th and 18th century additions. The property was remodelled extensively in the early 20th century for the renowned sculptor Hamo Thornycroft.

**The Old Post Office, Park Road** – former post office, mid/late 17th century, thatched roof.

**Horns Close, Horns Lane** – former farmhouse. Early 17th century, remodelled in the mid-18th century.

**Higher Westfield Farm** – former farmhouse. Early 17th century, with 18th century additions.



This document was prepared by Combe residents. We should like to thank all those volunteers who gave freely of their time to help with the village consultation, household questionnaire distribution and collection, and the production of the report. Special thanks go to the following, for their particular contributions.

#### Steering group members

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Margaret Moore		

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All images © David O'Brien

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#### WODC planners

Sincere thanks are due to Astrid Harvey, Janice Bamsey and Tara Hayek for their help and guidance throughout the process of producing this Village Design Statement.







Combe

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

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November 2021

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## West Oxfordshire Local Development Scheme (LDS) – July 2022

### Addendum

#### **Introduction**

The District Council's current Local Development Scheme (LDS) was published in July 2022 and covers the 3-year period July 2022 – July 2025.

The LDS makes no reference to the preparation of a Combe Village Design Statement (VDS) including its potential adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

As such, if Members are minded to agree that the Combe VDS should be taken forward for further public consultation with a view to it being formally adopted as SPD, some minor changes to the currently published LDS are needed.

These are set out below.

#### **Section 4 – Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)**

The following text is proposed to be inserted into Section 4.

##### *Combe Village Design Statement*

Combe Parish Council has prepared a Village Design Statement which was the subject of initial public consultation in 2019/2020 and was submitted to the District Council in November 2021.

The stated purpose of the VDS is to '*provide design guidelines that can help to shape any future development so that it blends in with Combe's distinctive rural landscape and heritage*'.

The Council's intention is to subject the VDS to a further, statutory period of public consultation with a view to the VDS then being formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

It is anticipated that the public consultation will take place from November – December 2022 with a view to the Council then deciding whether to formally adopt the VDS as SPD in March 2023.

Further information on the anticipated purpose, scope and timing of the SPD is set out at Appendix 1.

## Appendix 1 – Document Profiles


The following template to be included at Appendix 1:

Combe Village Design Statement (VDS)	
Status	Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)
Overview	Intended to provide design guidelines that can help to shape any future development so that it blends in with Combe's distinctive rural landscape and heritage.
Geographical coverage	Combe Parish
Timetable	Informal consultation – <b>2019/2020 (COMPLETE)</b>  Further consultation – <b>November / December 2022</b>  Adoption – <b>March 2023</b>
Conformity	Prepared in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) West Oxfordshire Local Plan (2031) and West Oxfordshire Design Guide (2016).
Management arrangements	Document production led by Combe Parish Council. West Oxfordshire District Council to facilitate formal public consultation.
Resource requirements	Combe Parish Council have led on the preparation of the VDS to this point. West Oxfordshire District Council to facilitate formal public consultation.
Community engagement	Public consultation has already taken place in respect of the VDS in 2019/2020. Further statutory consultation will take place in accordance with the requirements of the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

## Appendix 2 – Overall Timetable

The GANTT chart at Appendix 2 to be amended to include reference to the Combe VDS and to reflect the anticipated timetable outlined above i.e.

- Further consultation – **November / December 2022**
- Adoption – **March 2023**

 <b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>CABINET – 12 OCTOBER 2022</b>
Report Number	<b>Agenda Item 11</b>
Subject	<b>OXFORDSHIRE PLAN 2050</b>
Wards affected	<b>ALL</b>
Accountable member	Cllr Carl Rylett Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development Email: <a href="mailto:carl.rylett@westoxon.gov.uk">carl.rylett@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager Tel: 01993 861686 Email: <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk">chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To provide an update on the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme and the transition to a process focused on Local Plans.
Annexes	Annex A – Report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership 27 September 2022
Recommendation/s	a) That the content of this report including Annex A be noted
Corporate priorities	The cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme means that Local Plans for the City and Districts will provide the framework for the long term planning of development in Oxfordshire. The emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 will help to deliver the spatial elements of a broad range of corporate priorities as set out in the Council Plan.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 has been the subject of several previous stages of public consultation. Further public consultation will take place as part of the preparation of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. Members will be aware that as part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, the City and District Councils have been working collaboratively on the Oxfordshire Plan to provide a strategic planning framework to guide future development in the period to 2050.
- 1.2. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 has been in preparation since 2018 with several stages of public consultation carried out and more planned ahead of formal submission and independent examination.
- 1.3. However, in August a joint statement was issued from the leaders of Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, and West Oxfordshire District Council announcing that because the authorities had been unable to reach agreement on the approach to planning for future housing needs within the framework of the Oxfordshire Plan, that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme will end with a transition to a process focused on Local Plans.
- 1.4. Attached for information at Annex A is a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership of 27 September 2022 which sets out in more detail the background to the Oxfordshire Plan, the decision to no longer progress it and the proposed way forward.
- 1.5. These next steps include the agreement of a number of principles outlining how the partners will take forward the Local Plan based approach (see paragraph 16 of Annex A) and turning the Oxfordshire Plan Advisory Group into a Planning Advisory Group with a new terms of reference and broader remit (see paragraph 17 of Annex A).

## **2. IMPLICATIONS FOR WEST OXFORDSHIRE**

- 2.1. The main implication of the decision to no longer progress the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is on the emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041. Members will be aware that an ambitious timetable for the new Local Plan was agreed in July 2022 with the aim being to submit the final draft plan for examination by December 2023.
- 2.2. The rationale for this was that many of the important decisions on key issues such as housing and employment numbers and strategic locations for growth would have been determined through the Oxfordshire Plan with the Local Plan then effectively adding in more detail at the local level.
- 2.3. In the absence of the Oxfordshire Plan, it will be for the Local Plan process to determine many of these more significant strategic issues, with additional evidence likely to be needed – either commissioned individually by West Oxfordshire or jointly.
- 2.4. This creates a risk that the timetable set out in the current Local Development Scheme (July 2022) may not be able to be achieved. The LDS may therefore need to be updated at some point as the implications of the Oxfordshire Plan decision are better understood and worked through in practice.

## **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1. This report raises no direct financial implications.

#### **4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1. None arising from this report.

#### **5. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1. In the absence of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, there is a risk that the current timetable for taking the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 through to submission and examination may not be achieved. As set out above, this may necessitate a revision to that timetable through a future update of the Local Development Scheme (LDS).

#### **6. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 6.1. This report raises no specific implications for any particular equality strand.

#### **7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. This report raises no direct implications. It will be for the new Local Plan to establish an appropriate policy framework for tackling the climate and ecological emergency.

#### **8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 8.1. None.

#### **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 9.1. None.

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**To:** Future Oxfordshire Partnership

**Title of Report:** Update on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Programme

**Date:** 27 September 2022

**Report of** Giles Hughes: Senior Responsible Officer Oxfordshire Plan

**Status:** Open

### **Executive Summary and Purpose:**

To provide an update to the Partnership following the announcement of the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme and the transition to a process focused on Local Plans.

### **How this report contributes to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision Outcomes:**

Planning has a key role to play in delivering well-designed infrastructure and homes, sufficient in numbers, location, type, size, tenure, and affordability to meet the needs of our county, as set out in the Strategic Vision [here](#).

### **Recommendations:**

1. Note that Local Plans for the City and Districts will provide the framework for the long-term planning of development in Oxfordshire.
2. Support the principles set out in paragraph 16 of this report outlining how the partners will take forward the Local Plan based approach.
3. Note that the end of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme requires a review of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group's name and terms of reference.
4. Request that Officers develop draft terms of reference for a refreshed Planning Advisory Group of all six principal authorities for consideration at a future meeting.

**Appendices:** None

## Introduction

- 1) The following statement was issued from the leaders of Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, and West Oxfordshire District Council in August:

*“The five Local Planning Authorities in Oxfordshire have been working together on a joint plan for Oxfordshire to 2050. It is with regret that we were unable to reach agreement on the approach to planning for future housing needs within the framework of the Oxfordshire Plan.*

*“Local Plans for the City and Districts will now provide the framework for the long term planning of Oxfordshire. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme will end and we will now transition to a process focused on Local Plans. The issues of housing needs will now be taken addressed through individual Local Plans for each of the City and Districts. The Councils will cooperate with each other and with other key bodies as they prepare their Local Plans.”*

## Background

- 2) The Oxfordshire Plan was a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan that was being jointly prepared by the City and District Councils in their roles as local planning authorities. It was intended to focus on strategic issues leaving local matters for individual Local Plans.
- 3) Formal decision making on the Oxfordshire Plan lay with the City and Districts Councils as the relevant local planning authorities, and the final plan would have needed to be adopted by each of them.
- 4) Aspects that the plan needed to cover, in order to be consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, included identifying Oxfordshire’s future housing need, and the setting of the future housing requirements for the City and the Districts. These housing provisions would have needed to be agreed by all of the local planning authorities. Individual Local Plans would then set out how these housing requirements would be met and would allocate development sites.
- 5) During 2022 there have been a sequence of discussions and workshops to try and identify a commonly accepted approach between the local planning authorities to the evidence base needed to inform discussion on strategic housing issues. Unfortunately the local planning authorities were unable to reach agreement on the best approach to this. In the absence of an agreed approach to these central questions it was accepted that the Oxfordshire Plan programme will need to come to an end. Instead these issues will now be considered during the development of new Local Plans for the City and Districts.
- 6) Work on the Oxfordshire Plan was guided by input from the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group. This group included the relevant Cabinet Members from each of the Councils and provided a valuable forum to



discuss all aspects of the plan. While the group identified a wide range of issues on which there was common agreement it was not possible to reach an agreed approach on the evidence to inform strategic housing issues.

- 7) The City Council and all of the District Councils have adopted Local Plans currently in place, and the growth committed to in these plans is set. Oxfordshire's local planning authorities are all in the process of developing new Local Plans. These new plans will need to cover the housing questions and other matters that would have been addressed through the Oxfordshire Plan. There is a requirement on the local planning authorities in preparing these Local Plans to satisfy the Duty to Cooperate. The Duty to Cooperate is a legal test that requires cooperation between local planning authorities and other public bodies to maximise the effectiveness of policies for strategic matters in Local Plans. Discussions on strategic housing issues between relevant partners will be an important aspect of the Duty to Cooperate in Oxfordshire. Local Plan examinations will test whether the Duty has been satisfied and consider the soundness of submitted plans.

## **Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal**

- 8) A commitment by the Oxfordshire Councils to prepare a joint statutory spatial plan covering the City and all of the Districts was an element in the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal that was agreed with the Government in 2017/18 and runs until March 2023. The Housing and Growth Deal identified £215 million of government funding for Oxfordshire.
- 9) Discussions have taken place with officials from DLUHC to inform them that this element in the Housing and Growth Deal is now no longer being pursued. Further discussions with officials are due to take place in September on the implications of this decision. The decision to bring the Oxfordshire Plan work programme to an end does not affect the councils' commitment to delivery of the other aspects of the Housing and Growth Deal. There was a separate commitment to plan for and support the delivery of 100,000 new homes between 2011 and 2031. All of the City and District Councils have adopted plans in place which plan up to at least 2031 and these collectively plan for the necessary sites for Oxfordshire for the Housing and Growth Deal period.

## **Oxfordshire Strategic Vision**

- 10) The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, which was endorsed by the Partnership in March 2021 and approved by all of the Oxfordshire Councils, contains a vision which sets out a highly ambitious pathway for long-term change towards a more sustainable future.
- 11) The Strategic Vision includes a range of outcomes for Oxfordshire by 2050, defines what good growth means for the county, and includes guiding principles which form an overarching approach to long-term sustainable development.
- 12) The Strategic Vision will continue to help guide the development of Local Plans and other strategic documents in Oxfordshire. Local Plans continue to

provide an important vehicle for developing the spatial ambitions for the County linked to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.

## **Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy**

- 13) The Housing and Growth Deal also contained a commitment by the Oxfordshire authorities to implement and roll forward the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy.
- 14) A review of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy is taking place in two parts. The first of these was considered and endorsed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership at its January 2022 meeting. The second phase of the project was related to the Oxfordshire Plan. Officers are considering how this work will now sit alongside and support Local Plan processes. Discussions between officers from the County Council and the City and Districts can explore how to closely integrate the next phase of work with Local Plans. The delivery of the appropriate infrastructure to support development is a key issue for Oxfordshire.

## **Next Steps**

- 15) The bringing to an end of the Oxfordshire Plan work programme means that Oxfordshire's local planning authorities will revert to established mechanisms to bring forward plans for the long-term sustainable development of the County. The City, Cherwell, West, and Joint South and Vale Local Plans will address the key strategic matters set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 16) Discussions between officers from the Councils have identified a number of principles for the Local Plan focussed approach:
- That we collectively seek to deliver the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision
  - That we ensure a smooth transition from the Oxfordshire Plan back to Local Plans
  - That we continue to satisfy the requirements of the Duty to Cooperate
  - That we continue to work cooperatively and constructively in developing our respective Local Plans and other strategies, assisted by Statement(s) of Common Ground or memoranda of understanding where appropriate.
  - That we continue to work together on the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy.
  - That the understanding achieved of countywide and district issues and priorities, are utilised, where appropriate, to support the preparation of these plans and strategies.
  - That the benefits and learning gained by the Oxfordshire authorities, through their long history of joint working and collaboration on planning and infrastructure matters, continue to be valued in seeking to achieve both common and individual goals.

- 17) To help retain good communication between the Councils on strategic planning matters it is proposed that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group is renamed as the Planning Advisory Group and that its terms of reference are reviewed to set out a broader strategic remit around spatial planning. It would continue to report through to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and be chaired by a member of the partnership. It would involve relevant Cabinet Members from the City and District Councils as local planning authorities, and from the County Council as the mineral planning authority, waste planning authority and key infrastructure provider. The group would be supported by respective Heads of Planning/ Planning Policy Managers who would also attend meetings. This refreshed advisory group could be a useful forum for the Councils to update each other on their respective plans as they are prepared, and for discussion on strategic planning issues.
- 18) Officers from the Councils will continue to engage closely with each other as plans are prepared in order to satisfy the Duty to Cooperate. The terms of reference of the officer Heads of Planning meeting and the Oxfordshire Planning Policy Officers meeting will be reviewed and these meetings will continue to provide a forum for discussion and cooperation.
- 19) Although the Oxfordshire Plan project may have ceased, there has been a lot of background work that will continue to be of value to the planning authorities as they develop their local plans. A wrap up exercise is underway to address consultant contract and human resources matters and help from partners is appreciated on this.
- 20) It is important that Oxfordshire learns from the experiences of the Oxfordshire Plan project and that these lessons inform future strategic or collaborative planning as appropriate.

## **Legal Implications**

- 21) None arising from this report.

## **Other Implications**

- 22) The adoption of a constructive approach from the Oxfordshire Councils to engaging with each other, and with other partners, on strategic planning matters can help deliver the spatial ambitions of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and reduce any impacts from the ending of the Oxfordshire Plan work programme.

## **Conclusion**

- 23) This report outlines the shift in approach for the long-term strategic planning of development in Oxfordshire from the Oxfordshire Plan back to one focussed on district level Local Plans.
- 24) The report outlines principles for how the partners should take forward this new approach in order to help achieve the ambitions of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and to satisfy the Duty to Cooperate.

25) It is recognised that the name and terms of reference for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group are no longer valid, so it is recommended that the group remit be updated to cover a wider range of strategic planning matters involving the County, City and District Councils.

## **Background Papers**

None

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 <b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>CABINET – 12 OCTOBER 2022</b>
Report Number	<b>Agenda item 12.</b>
Subject	<b>SALT CROSS GARDEN VILLAGE AREA ACTION PLAN – PROPOSED MAIN MODIFICATIONS</b>
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Carl Rylett Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development Email: <a href="mailto:carl.rylett@westoxon.gov.uk">carl.rylett@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager Tel: 01993 861686 Email: <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk">chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To agree the District Council’s formal response to consultation on proposed Main Modifications to the Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan (AAP).
Annexes	Annex A – Suggested draft response to the AAP proposed Main Modifications
Recommendation/s	a) That the suggested draft response attached at Annex A be agreed for the purposes of submission to the AAP examination
Corporate priorities	In guiding the future delivery of Salt Cross Garden Village, the Area Action Plan (AAP) will help to ensure that a number of the priorities identified in the Council Plan are realised.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	The Salt Cross AAP has been the subject of extensive public consultation in accordance with legislative requirements. As part of the examination process, public consultation is taking place on proposed Main Modifications to the AAP over a 6-week period from 23 September until 4 November 2022.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. Members will be aware that land to the north of the A40 near Eynsham is allocated as a strategic location for growth in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 and is to be taken forward in the form of a new garden village known as 'Salt Cross'.
- 1.2. Salt Cross is one of a number of emerging garden communities recognised under the Government's 'Locally-Led Garden Villages, Towns and Cities' programme launched in 2016.
- 1.3. The detailed planning of Salt Cross will be guided by a separate Area Action Plan (AAP) which, once adopted, will sit alongside the Local Plan and carry the same statutory weight in plan making terms.
- 1.4. As part of the AAP examination, the District Council is facilitating a public consultation on a series of proposed changes to the AAP known as 'Main Modifications'. These are changes which the appointed Planning Inspectors have identified as being necessary to make the AAP 'sound' and thus able to be adopted.
- 1.5. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of that process and to agree a formal response to the consultation.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. Work on the Salt Cross AAP began in 2018 with extensive stakeholder engagement leading to the publication of a final draft version of the plan in August 2020. The draft AAP was formally submitted for independent examination in February 2021, with hearing sessions taking place a two-week period from 28 June – 8 July 2021.
- 2.2. Subsequently, the District Council was invited to undertake some additional work on infrastructure phasing and on 26 May 2022, the Inspectors wrote to the Council to confirm that the AAP can be made 'sound' through Main Modifications.
- 2.3. A total of 55 proposed Main Modifications have been identified and these are the subject of a 6-week period of public consultation running from 23 September – 4 November 2022.
- 2.4. The consultation material is available to view online at [www.westoxon.gov.uk/gardenvillage](http://www.westoxon.gov.uk/gardenvillage) with hard copies of the proposed Main Modifications also made available in local libraries and various other locations.
- 2.5. All representations received on the proposed Main Modifications will be provided to the Inspectors who will then consider them along with all other relevant information and considerations before issuing their final report.
- 2.6. At that point, it will be a matter for Full Council to decide whether the AAP should be formally adopted in accordance with the Inspectors' recommendations.

## **3. AAP - PROPOSED MAIN MODIFICATIONS**

- 3.1. Preparation of the AAP began has been ongoing for some time with a considerable amount of resources devoted to its progression to submission and through examination.
- 3.2. It is therefore extremely pleasing that the Inspectors have confirmed that the AAP can be made sound through Main Modifications.
- 3.3. A total of 55 proposed Main Modifications have been identified as being necessary to make the AAP sound and on the whole, these are considered reasonable.

- 3.4. Importantly, many of the core aspects of the submission draft AAP remain intact which will help to ensure the delivery of a highly sustainable new settlement based on garden community principles.
- 3.5. However, the Inspectors have indicated that they do not consider AAP Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon to be consistent with national policy or justified.
- 3.6. This is naturally disappointing as the policy is considered by many, including the District Council, to be something of a ‘flagship’ policy for the AAP. It is also being closely watched by a number of other local authorities taking forward similar policies through their own Local Plans.
- 3.7. In the opinion of Officers, Policy 2 as originally drafted is ambitious and comprehensive yet precise and specific in terms of the expectations of new development.
- 3.8. In short, development at Salt Cross would need to demonstrate net zero operational carbon on-site through ultra-low energy fabric specification, low carbon technologies and on-site renewable energy generation with specific KPIs and reporting requirements ensuring that the implementation of the policy can be properly monitored and understood.
- 3.9. In contrast, the proposed Main Modifications to Policy 2 which have been agreed with the Inspectors for the purposes of public consultation, are considered by Officers to introduce a much greater degree of subjectivity and interpretation with all of the specific KPIs and perhaps most importantly, the requirement for net zero operational carbon on-site, removed from the policy altogether.
- 3.10. It is for this reason that Officers are proposing the slightly unusual step of seeking to formally respond to the consultation with a suggested draft response attached in letter form at Annex A.
- 3.11. Subject to the agreement of Members, the letter will be provided to the Planning Inspectors who will then consider it along with all other representations received before issuing their final report.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1. This report raises no direct financial implications.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. None arising from this report.

#### **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1. No specific risks have been identified.

#### **7. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 7.1. This report raises no specific implications for any particular equality strand.

#### **8. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. AAP Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon and the AAP as a whole, are intended to address the climate and ecological emergency ‘head-on’.

#### **9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 9.1. The District Council could choose not to respond to the proposed Main Modifications consultation.

#### **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1. None.

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**Planning and Strategic Housing**

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**WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
 DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Mr Darren McCreery MA BA (Hons) MRTPI  
 Mr David Spencer BA (Hons) MRTPI

Your Ref:  
 Our Ref:  
 Date:

Dear Sirs

### **Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP) – Consultation on Proposed Main Modifications**

I write in relation to the above and with specific regard to the Main Modifications which are being proposed to the Salt Cross AAP Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon.

Whilst we welcome your overall conclusion that the AAP can be made sound through a number of Main Modifications, we are extremely disappointed at the preliminary view reached that Policy 2 is neither consistent with national policy nor justified.

This sense of disappointment has been further exacerbated by the fact that very similar policies appear to have been accepted, albeit with some relatively minor changes, through recent development plan examinations in Cornwall and Bath and North East Somerset.

As you know, Salt Cross was identified by central Government in January 2017 as one of a number of garden communities under the Locally-Led Garden Villages, Towns and Cities Programme.

The prospectus issued at the time was clear that the Government were not looking to support places which merely use ‘garden’ as a convenient label but rather local areas that embed key garden city principles to develop communities that ‘stand out from the ordinary’.

Furthermore, that local areas should adopt ‘innovative approaches and solutions to creating great places rather than following a set of rules’, including the use of quality design with ‘cutting edge technology’ (my emphasis).

These expectations are reflected in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 which identifies the garden village as a strategic location for growth and stipulates that development must be taken forward in accordance with key Garden Village principles including a strong emphasis on community engagement.

Preparation of the AAP has provided the District Council with the opportunity to work closely with the local community and other stakeholders to work through and define what those key principles should look like for Salt Cross.

The outcome of those conversations is a document which ultimately places the climate and ecological emergency at its core, forming a golden thread that runs through the entire document, underpinning the overall vision, objectives and the majority of policies.

The community-led view is helpfully summarised at page 32 of the submission draft AAP as follows:

***‘Climate change is the single most important issue for all of us to deal with and this must underpin the development and delivery of the garden village. There should be no reliance on fossil fuels with 100% use of renewable energy. All buildings should be zero-carbon or energy positive...’***

The aim of the AAP is therefore very clear – responding not only to the local community voice but also to the Government’s aspirations for garden communities. We are looking for an innovative and ambitious approach that sets a benchmark for other garden villages and new communities to follow in terms of deep green design principles that embed climate change mitigation and resilience.

The AAP is equally clear about what we are trying to avoid, which is a basic ‘do minimum’ approach which simply rolls forward past ideas and technologies in an unimaginative and unambitious manner.

In this respect, Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon is seen by many, including the District Council, as something of a ‘flagship’ policy for the AAP, with many other local authorities keenly following its progress through examination.

We believe we have made a strong case to support the policy both in the way it is framed and the evidence base which underpins it. As such, we are disappointed that you do not appear to share our view that net zero operational carbon on-site and 100% renewable energy generation should be a requirement of future development at Salt Cross.

We understand from your letter of 26 May 2022 (INSP 17) that your concerns are twofold – firstly that the policy is not consistent with national policy and secondly that the policy is not justified.

In terms of national policy, we believe AAP Policy 2 as submitted for examination, will help to deliver the broader objectives of the Government’s Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener (October 2021) and is consistent with the NPPF.

Paragraph 152 of the NPPF emphasises that the planning system should help to shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, with paragraph 153 emphasising the need for plans to take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change in line with the objectives and provisions of the Climate Change Act 2008 and the Planning and Energy Act 2008.

We assume that your concerns may lie in paragraph 154 (d) of the NPPF which states that ‘any local requirements for the sustainability of buildings should reflect the Government’s policy for national technical standards’. And also possibly in paragraph 12 of the Government’s Climate Change Planning Practice Guide which states that, local planning authorities can set energy performance standards for new housing that are higher than the building regulations, ‘but only up to the equivalent of Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes’.

On the first of these issues, as you will recall from our hearing statement for Matter 7 (paragraphs 7.11 and 7.12), the Council is of the firm view that it is not restricted in its ability to require energy efficiency standards above Building Regulations and has the power to set its own local energy efficiency standards for new homes.

Given the similar nature of policies being examined, clarification on this issue was recently sought from central Government by Bath and North East Somerset Council as part of the examination of their Local Plan Partial Update.

Notably, Jonathan Mullard at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy subsequently confirmed the following key points in writing:

- *The recent 2021 uplift to the Building Regulations will deliver a meaningful reduction in carbon emissions, while ensuring high-quality homes that are in line with our broader housing commitments.*
- ***Plan-makers may continue to set energy efficiency standards at the local level which go beyond national Building Regulations standards if they wish.***
- *Local planning authorities have the power to set local energy efficiency standards through the Planning and Energy Act 2008.*
- *In January 2021, we clarified in the Future Homes Standard consultation response that in the immediate term we will not amend the Planning and Energy Act 2008, which means that local planning authorities still retain these powers.*

On the second of these issues, we respectfully question whether paragraph 12 of the Climate Change Planning Practice Guidance (which was updated in 2019) remains of any current relevance, given that Code Level 4 was the equivalent of a 19% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction from Part L 2013 and has now been superseded by the new Part L 2021 requirement for new homes which requires a 31% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction.

In short, we are not aware of anything in national policy that prevents the AAP from being able to stipulate specific local standards to achieve net zero carbon. Indeed, we feel it is incumbent upon the AAP to do so for the reasons set out above.

The second concern set out in your letter of 26 May is that Policy 2 is not justified, by which we assume to mean not appropriate taking account of reasonable alternatives and not based on proportionate evidence.

Again, we are disappointed by this conclusion and feel we have a strong evidence base, including technical and viability studies which fully supports and justifies the approach being proposed through Policy 2.

We are aware that very similar policies are being taken successfully through examination at Bath and North East Somerset and Cornwall, supported by evidence prepared by the same consultants that we have used – Etude. It is therefore difficult to see how or why it can be concluded that our approach as set out in Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon is not justified.

Policy 2 as submitted for examination is clear and concise and most importantly measurable and enforceable. In contrast, the proposed Main Modifications which have been agreed for the purposes of public consultation have made the policy much looser, open to a greater degree of interpretation and therefore much less effective, contrary to the requirements of the NPPF.

I trust you find this letter helpful and understand why the District Council felt it had to take the slightly unusual step of responding to the consultation. We anticipate that given the level of interest in both the AAP and the zero carbon agenda more generally that a large number of representations on this issue are likely to be received.

We would respectfully urge you to carefully consider these representations along with our own in forming a final view on the soundness of Policy 2 as originally submitted and will await your final report with much interest.

Yours sincerely

Chris Hargraves

Planning Policy Manager  
West Oxfordshire District Council

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