

WANTAGE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2023 - 2031



Published by Wantage Town Council
Made Version 2025

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FOREWORD



This Neighbourhood Plan for Wantage is the Town's plan for land use.

The residents said that the best things about Wantage are:

- The sense of community and friendliness of the town and the people
- The local facilities, shops, schools, market, library etc.
- Its rural nature with surrounding countryside
- Its history (including King Alfred), heritage and character
- The accessibility of and proximity to Oxford, London, Newbury and Swindon
- The small market town feel.

The residents said that over the next 20 years they wanted Wantage to maintain the good things and resolve the problems of:

- The lack of good infrastructure
- The scale of development with insufficient thought for facilities required
- The lack of school places now and in the future
- The limited range of shops and excess of charity shops
- The traffic congestion, poor roads and parking
- The poor bus service (with the exception of the Oxford service)
- The state of the pavements and streets.

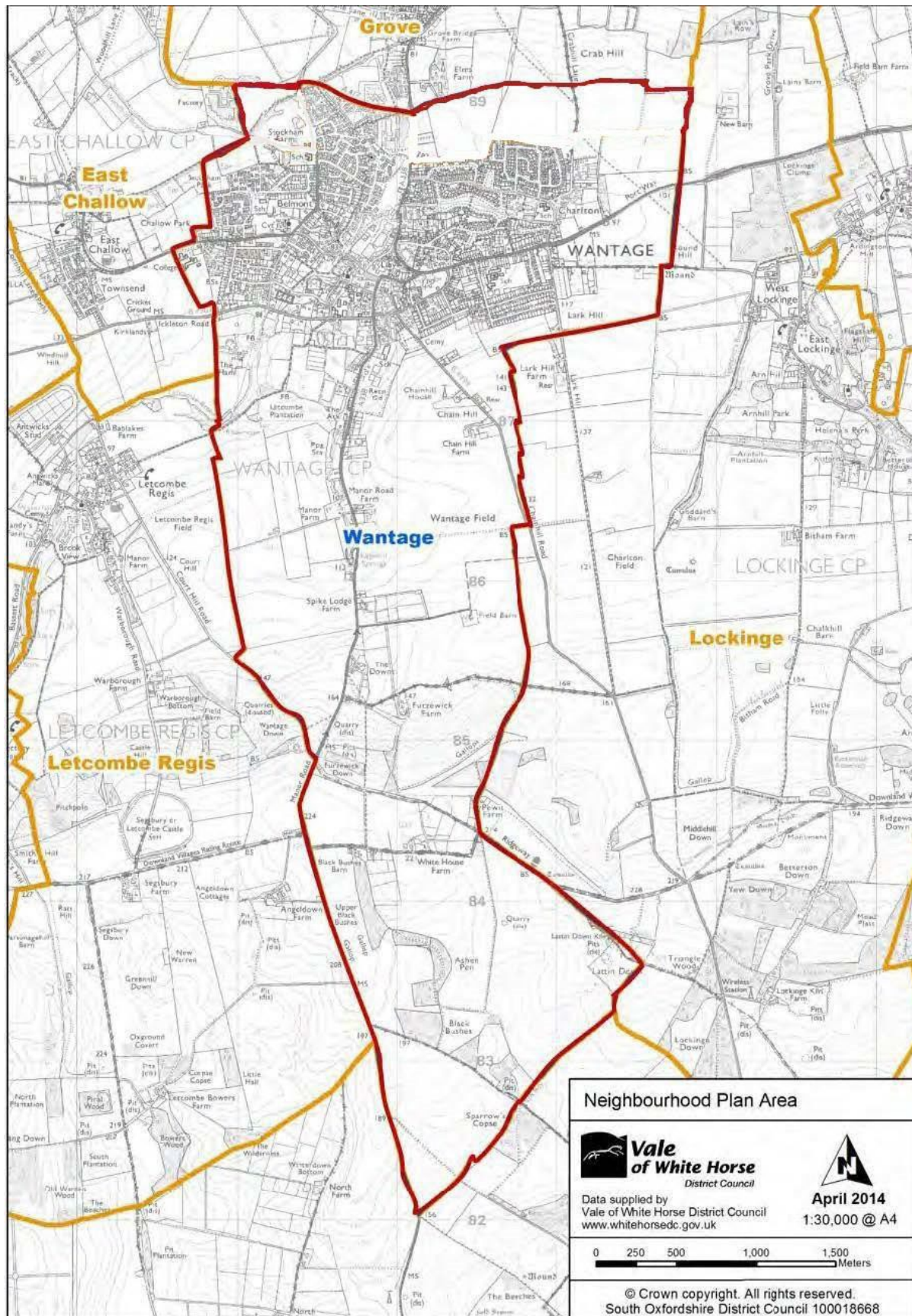
There is a limit on what this Plan can achieve. It can only influence planning decisions, but it also includes things that money from the developers can be spent on in the future. So, the policies concentrate on:

- Improving the Town Centre by creating more space for shops, cafes and restaurants
- Ensuring the design of any development creates enough parking and fits in with the character of the specific area of the town
- Improving and maintaining the green infrastructure of the town.

The residents wanted the development to take place sensitively, in an environmentally friendly manner, and sustainably, with roads and other infrastructure keeping pace with housing and matched by places of employment and education. They want more cycle tracks and footpaths as well as improved roads and properties maintained and proper provision for the aged.

To achieve the things that they have asked for the Town Centre needs to be expanded to attract a greater variety of shops and restaurants. We need to look at ways of improving the Market Place for pedestrians and cyclists and improve connectivity by adding footpaths and cycleways. We also need to work with developers to enhance the green infrastructure and to build more bungalows, homes suitable for home workers and homes that fit with the character of our rural market town. Most importantly we need more parking including bus and coach parking, both in the Town Centre and on new developments.

Plan A: Wantage Neighbourhood Plan area



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Wantage Town Council has produced a Neighbourhood Plan for the area designated by Vale of White Horse District Council (VWHDC) under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The Plan has been prepared by volunteers, local residents, and members of the Town Council, in line with the wishes of the residents expressed through surveys and consultations.
- 1.2 The designated area covered by the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) is shown in Plan A opposite. The plan period is 2023 to 2031.
- 1.3 The purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to make planning policies that can be used to determine planning applications in the area.
- 1.4 Plans must meet five 'basic conditions. These are:
 - Does the Plan have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State?
 - Is the Plan in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan?
 - Does the Plan contribute to the achievement of sustainable development?
 - Has the process of making the Plan breached EU obligations as incorporated into UK law?
 - Have prescribed conditions been met in relation to the Plan?
- 1.5 In addition, the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan must be able to show that it has properly consulted local people and other relevant organisations during the process of making the Plan and has followed the Regulations.
- 1.6 As part of our consultations, we have included the entire area of OX12, which includes Grove and many of the villages around us, in the opportunities to comment. This is the major part of the catchment area of Wantage and the comments and feedback from people who use the facilities of Wantage have helped to inform our Plan.
- 1.7 The Neighbourhood Plan must be in line with national and local planning policies. At the national level these are set by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.8 At the local level these are set in the District Council's Local Plan.



2. WANTAGE - THE PLACE



- 2.1 Wantage is a beautiful medium-sized traditional market town that won a Great British High Street Award in 2014. It has a population in the region of 11,000. The built-up area of the town is concentrated in the northern part of the Plan area. Immediately to the south of the built-up area is land which forms part of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and the Letcombe Brook (a rare chalk stream) which flows through the centre of the Town.



- 2.2 Over the years, the built-up area of Wantage, outside the AONB, has grown to a point where there is little capacity for development on new sites within the Town itself, although some development could be accommodated through rebuild and change of use. Wantage, however, is viewed as the principal amenity provider for a large number of nearby villages, including Grove, bringing the population relying on its facilities and amenities closer to 30,000. The number of jobs locally available is insufficient to support this level of population and therefore a high proportion of the population is obliged to commute for employment. Those commuting mainly travel to the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, Milton Business Park, Oxford and by train to London.



- 2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the various working groups actively engaged with the local community in considering the scope of the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan. The working groups established were:

- Town Centre, businesses, economy and technology;
- Heritage, environment, conservation and design;
- Transport, infrastructure, education and health; and
- Youth, leisure, sport and art.

These groups identified several potential policy ideas which have been tested in a Residents' Survey, the summary outcome of which is included below. These policy areas may trigger further planning issues and/or spin-off stand-alone projects.

2.4 The top ten strengths of Wantage which have been identified by the working groups are:

- An attractive place to live;
- The rich cultural heritage of the town;
- Good road access (despite capacity issues);
- Easy access to attractive countryside;
- Breadth of skills, experience and expertise among local people;
- Good schools;
- Harmonious architecture and strong design character;
- Good range of clubs and societies;
- Regular markets and good independent shops; and
- A high quality natural environment worthy of preservation/enhancement.



2.5 Based on the Survey carried out in 2014 the key reasons that attracted residents to come and live in Wantage were overwhelmingly the local countryside, the historic character of the town and the quiet, peaceful environment. This suggests that these are important qualities to retain in terms of future development. Family connections to Wantage also came out fairly strongly, being mentioned by a third of respondents, as did the availability of local employment and housing at an affordable price. Easy access to Oxford was noted by many as a key strength of the town as well as the Science Vale and the Berkshire Downs. In addition the quality of the local schools was noted as a positive attribute.

2.6 The most common areas for improvement identified are as follows:

- car parking (availability, cost),
- lack of variety in shopping on offer,
- poor condition of roads and congestion,
- lack of a railway station,
- ensuring sufficient school places,
- limited footpaths and cycleways,
- lack of, loss of, and poor management of green spaces, and
- concerns about losing facilities/insufficient facilities for the expanding community.



2.7 Aspirations for the future centred on a vibrant, well-planned town with good community facilities and transport links, a thriving Town Centre and any new housing built sympathetically and in keeping with the existing historic nature of Wantage. All of this also presumes the background of a continuing well-preserved rural setting that promotes interaction with the environment.

3. VISION & OBJECTIVES

Vision

3.1 The vision for Wantage in 2031 is:

'Wantage will remain a thriving market town, with its retained historic and architectural character, busy town centre and attractive network of green spaces and links to the surrounding countryside and AONB. Emphasis will be placed on commercial and retail success to meet the demands of changing economic practices, greater accessibility and increased mix of housing and recreation whilst protecting the landscape setting, green infrastructure and community assets.'

Our view of what Wantage will be like in 2031:

- The town has retained its special historic and architectural character by carefully managing change within its built-up area and by protecting its setting and surrounding open countryside whilst allowing for sustainable development in appropriate locations.
- The market square and shops are thriving and have experienced an increased footfall of customers. The Town Centre has become more accessible for all providing a safe environment for all users of the space, including visitors, residents and businesses.
- There is a well-connected network of green spaces throughout and around the town.
- Letcombe Brook is protected and the biodiversity and landscape along the Brook is enhanced.
- There is a mix of high-quality housing, suitable for families and a diverse population, with adequate parking.
- It is a town where residents can move around easily with improved accessibility into the Town Centre by public transport, car, cycle and on foot. The cycling route network has been better integrated and now links up with green spaces, the Town Centre and public transport services.
- The transport and parking systems are sufficient to deal with the numbers of visitors to Wantage from the surrounding areas.
- Important views of local landmarks and landscape have been preserved within and around the town.
- Shopping, education, health, sports and leisure, entertainment, social, and cultural opportunities have been improved for the well-being of the community.
- It is a clean town with low levels of pollution.
- All residents have improved access both to community facilities and to green spaces and surrounding countryside.
- There is a vibrant and diverse economy from micro, small, and start-up businesses to medium and large businesses, and sustainable business and employment opportunities.



Objectives

- 3.2 For this vision to be realised, a number of strategic objectives need to be achieved by the Neighbourhood Plan over the next few years:



A Successful Town Centre

- To maintain the viability and vitality of the Town Centre serving a growing local population by resisting the loss of existing retail space in the key shopping frontages where possible, and by planning for new retail development where demand dictates and for transport management, improved car parking and use of shared space.

Green Infrastructure

- To conserve and improve the ecological, water management and recreational value of Letcombe Brook as an essential green infrastructure asset for the town.
- To create a viable green infrastructure network including green spaces and amenity areas, with enhanced connectivity through new and improved footpaths and cycleways.
- To conserve the special landscape and scenic beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB and its setting.



Maintaining Our Heritage

- To sustain and enhance the special significance of the variety of heritage assets in the town.
- To require high design standards in all future development that reflects the distinct character of the town.

Meeting Local Housing Need

- To provide housing types that focus on a wide range of requirements including affordability, first home buyers, downsizers, home workers and self-builders.

Viable Community Assets

- To protect and encourage the improvement of cherished community assets.

4. LAND USE PLANNING POLICIES

Introduction

- 4.0.1 Our vision and objectives can only realistically be delivered through the planning and development process. Land use planning policies are the means by which we can guide, influence, shape and help manage development proposals. The purpose of these policies is to either encourage planning applications to be made for things the local community wants to see happen or to discourage applications for developments that they do not want to happen. To be effective, policies need to be clear and unambiguous so they can be easily applied when considering planning applications.
- 4.0.2 We have included ten policies. Our policies are:
1. Town Centre Policy Area
 2. Protection of Employment Sites
 3. Design – General Principles
 4. Design – Character Areas
 5. Design – Housing Types
 6. Green Infrastructure Network
 7. Green Infrastructure – Letcombe Brook
 8. Green Infrastructure – Local Green Spaces
 9. Manor Road Memorial Recreation Ground
 10. Community Assets
- 4.0.3 This Neighbourhood Plan avoids repeating existing national or local planning policies. The policies therefore focus on a relatively small number of key development issues in the area. For all other planning matters, the National Planning Policy Framework and the Vale of White Horse Local Plan apply.
- 4.0.4 The policies of the Neighbourhood Plan are detailed in the next pages. Each policy has a number and title and the policy itself is written in bold coloured text for ease of reference. There is also a short statement explaining the intention of the policy and any other relevant background information. At the end of this Plan are the Policies Maps (pages 37-39) – where a policy refers to a specific site or area then it is shown on the Map.



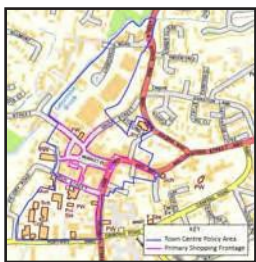
4.0.5 Where practicable, the existing landscape of the Neighbourhood Plan area should be protected for the sake of its own intrinsic beauty, its benefit to the rural character of the Vale of White Horse and for its biodiversity and geodiversity interest.

4.0.6 A large part of our Neighbourhood Plan area lies in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. Proposals for development in or affecting the National Landscape should aim to conserve and enhance this landscape and in particular its special qualities, landscape character and scenic beauty. Full consultation should take place with the relevant bodies on any such proposal, such as the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Board, Natural England and the Campaign for Protecting Rural England (CPRE).



4.0.7 Transport is also an important part of our spatial plan and we would look favourably on developments which help to reduce the amount of traffic on roads in the Town Centre and which provide:

- alternative parking for those employed in or visiting the town by car or by coach; and
- enhance our connectivity through the town through improved and extended footpaths and/or cycle ways.



Policy 1: Town Centre Policy Area

The Wantage Town Centre Policy Area is as defined in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031.

Development proposals for uses within Class E will be supported within the town centre boundary.

Elsewhere, proposals for new retail or other main town centre employment uses will be supported where they follow the sequential approach to site selection use as set out in the Local Plan and meet adopted car parking standards.

Where planning permission is required, proposals within the Town Centre Policy Area resulting in the loss of an E Class at the ground floor should demonstrate that:

- i. the unit has been proactively and appropriately marketed for at least 12 months and it has been demonstrated that there is no longer a realistic prospect of the unit being used for E Class uses in the foreseeable future.
- ii. the proposal meets the needs of the residents within the local neighbourhood; and
- iii. the proposal will not have an adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole.



4.1.1 To sustain and improve the retail and cultural value of the Town Centre the emphasis must be on not just resisting the loss of shops but to positively encourage the reuse of existing floor space and land in the area for retail and café/restaurant uses.

4.1.2 Responses to our survey and to our consultations have commented on the need for a greater variety of shops, cafes and restaurants in the town. This is important to the vitality of the town and should increase the footfall for existing retailers. The size and scale of any proposal will need to be considered against this desire to ensure there is no harmful impact on the Town Centre.



- 4.1.3 Our vision is to expand the shopping space and create more pedestrian space within the Market Place. Working with neighbouring parishes to find somewhere for long term parking will free up town centre parking for visitors. Also, ensuring that buses have an interchange outside the Market Place, so that the Market Place is simply a drop-off/pick-up point, will free up space. Development proposals which work towards delivering this vision will be supported.
- 4.1.4 To deliver this vision, further car parking is likely to be required. As such, development proposals which deliver additional parking would be supported.

Policy 2: Protection of Employment Sites



Proposals for the extension of existing commercial buildings or for the redevelopment of existing employment premises for other employment uses will be supported, where they comply with the development management policies of the development plan.

- 4.2.1 Wantage relies heavily on employment opportunities outside of the neighbourhood area. Employment uses within the Wantage development boundary should be encouraged and supported. Provision is made for companies to expand or relocate to other premises.
- 4.2.2 Policy 2 of the Plan seeks to consolidate the approach taken towards employment uses in the adopted Local Plan. Core Policies 15, 28 and 29 provide a context within which the District Council will determine proposals which involve the loss or the reduction of existing employment floorspace.





Policy 3: Design – General Principles

As appropriate to their scale, nature, and location, the design of development proposals should respond positively to the following principles:

- i. where relevant, they retain the distinction between the built-up areas of the town and the surrounding countryside including the North Wessex Downs; and**
 - ii. where appropriate and feasible, they deliver improved provision for cycling throughout the neighbourhood area having regard to Plan E: Wantage Proposed Cycle Routes. This may be in the form of financial contribution and/or appropriate design measures, including;**
 - a. Contributions to the improvement of existing bicycle lanes and paths;**
 - b. Contributions to the provision of safe and well designated cycle routes, especially on the main roads through the area. New cycle routes should be well overlooked wherever practicable;**
 - c. Contributions to the provision of new bicycle lanes and paths;**
 - d. Contributions to the provision of new bicycle stands in all parts of the area - and particularly in town; and**
 - e. The provision of appropriate bicycle storage.**
- It is important that any design measures meet the appropriate technical standard.**

4.3.1 This policy complements saved and forthcoming Local Plan design policies by emphasising three especially important design principles.

4.3.2 Firstly, the town occupies a prominent location at the foot of the North Wessex Downs on the edge of the Vale of White Horse. There are many opportunities within the town to glimpse the surrounding countryside, which help define its special character. Conversely, the town's edges to the countryside allow views into the urban area that also contribute to its character. Whilst it is not practical for development to avoid closing every such view, it is expected that the layout and building form of proposals will realise opportunities to maintain and frame important views from and to the town from its edge.



- 4.3.3 Secondly, that the cycling policies of the District Council and County Council are supported and enhanced in Wantage. With more and more journeys in the area being made by bicycle, better facilities and infrastructure are needed to accommodate and ensure the safety of such journeys. New developments often fail to make 'spatial' allowance for cycling in their design, and sometimes obliterate existing potential 'space' for cycling. Consideration should be given to 'permeability', i.e. wide gaps between properties in key locations (e.g. between cul-de-sacs, and around perimeters of development) and adequate cycling lane provision to provide through cycling routes. No amount of development-related funding can deliver quality cycle infrastructure when the prerequisite space is lost forever.



- 4.3.4 All developments for more than 10 homes should provide a specific cycling plan which should address connectivity, permeability, and technical compliance.

Policy 4: Design – Character Areas



Development proposals will be supported provided their design is in accordance with the Development Plan and reflects the character of that part of the town within which the land is located, as shown on the Policies Maps on pages 39-41, taking account of the specific design criteria for each character area as set out below and the Wantage Local Character Assessment.

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals within the Town Centre Conservation Areas should reflect the following principles:

- i. be architecturally in keeping with adjacent buildings and appropriate in scale and massing; and**
- ii. utilise materials for buildings, shop fronts and boundary treatments which reflect the historic character of the character area, for example brick, render, clay tile, slate, stone and lime-based mortars.**
- iii. ensure any new shop signs, where practicable, reflect the historic town centre and the historic character of the character area and be made of wood and not illuminated; and**
- iv. seek to retain existing on-site mature trees and hedges and, where appropriate, should include the planting of new trees appropriate to the growing conditions of the site.**

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals within the Charlton Village Conservation Area should reflect the following principles:

- v. be architecturally in keeping with adjacent buildings and appropriate in scale and massing.**
- vi. The density of any housing scheme or development should be informed by local circumstances and site constraints, including the required housing mix, and need to protect or enhance the local environment, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, heritage assets, and important landscape, habitats and townscape.**
- vii. utilise materials for buildings, shop fronts and boundary treatments which reflect the historic character of the character area, for example brick, render, clay tile, slate, stone and lime-based mortars**
- viii. Development should preserve or enhance the local character of the landscape and not have an unacceptable impact on the identified important views; and**
- ix. seek to retain existing on-site mature trees and hedges and, where appropriate, should include the planting of new trees appropriate to the growing conditions of the site.**



As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals within the Charlton, South East, North West and West Wantage Character Areas should reflect the following principles:

- x. provide sufficient amenity open space and enhance the overall quality of the area, with respect to open spaces.**
- xi. respect the character of the relevant area in its architectural style, scale, massing and materials.**
- xii. The density of any housing scheme or development should be informed by local circumstances and site constraints, including the required housing mix, and need to protect or enhance the local environment, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, heritage assets, and important landscape, habitats and townscape; and**
- xiii. seek to retain existing on-site mature trees and hedges and, where appropriate, should include the planting of new fruit trees appropriate to the growing conditions of the site.**

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals within the South West Wantage Character Area should reflect the following principles:

- xiv. maintain the open character of this important natural landscape;**
- xv. preserve or enhance the local character of the landscape and not have an unacceptable impact on important views;**
- xvi. The density of any housing scheme or development should be informed by local circumstances and site constraints, including the required housing mix, and need to protect or enhance the local environment, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, heritage assets, and important landscape, habitats and townscape; and**
- xvii. seek to retain existing on-site mature trees and hedges and, where appropriate, should include the planting of new trees appropriate to the growing conditions of the site.**

Innovative design is encouraged in all character areas, provided that it positively responds to and enhances where possible the local character of the surrounding area.

4.4.1 This policy complements the Joint Design Guide by identifying six different character areas in the town and setting specific design parameters for each area. Further details of the characteristics of each area are included in the Neighbourhood Plan Local Character Assessment report in the evidence base.

4.4.2 It also refines the Local Plan policy on housing density by indicating the appropriate densities for each character area of the town, based on the existing common densities. It is recognised that in the Town Centre Conservation Area some proposals for new housing may not be able to meet the required density standard and accommodate sufficient off street car parking spaces.



Policy 5: Design – Housing Types

Proposals for housing development should be in accordance with the character of the areas and meet the needs of current and future households in Wantage including home workers.

Proposals for housing development incorporating single level dwelling and opportunities for self-build and custom house building schemes will be supported where they otherwise accord with development plan policies.



4.5.1 This policy requires housing schemes to focus on delivering housing types that will meet the needs of the local community not just in terms of size to suit new entrants into the housing market but also downsizers. For example, the Joint Housing Needs Assessment produced as part of the evidence base for the emerging Joint Local Plan 2041, sets out the following housing mix for new residential development in the Vale of White Horse:

| | 1 bed | 2 bed | 3 bed | 4 bed |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Market | 5% | 10% | 70% | 15% |
| Affordable | 13% | 34% | 40% | 13% |



4.5.2 It also requires housing development to fit the character of the areas, which in Wantage is mainly two, or two and a half storey, semi-detached homes. New homes must be adaptable to enable home working in respect of the number and size of habitable rooms and to be able to access new broadband services infrastructure, notably fibre to the home technology.

4.5.3 In addition, the policy encourages housing schemes to make provision for bungalows within their mix of types. These types remain popular with older households. Development proposals for accessible and manageable homes specifically for older people will free up under-occupied local housing for other population groups.

4.5.4 The policy also encourages provision of plots for self-builders to help meet the growing demand for this form of housing delivery.



Policy 6: Green Infrastructure Network

The Plan identifies a Green Infrastructure Network, as shown on the Wantage Green Infrastructure Concept Map.

Development proposals on land within the Green Infrastructure Network should:

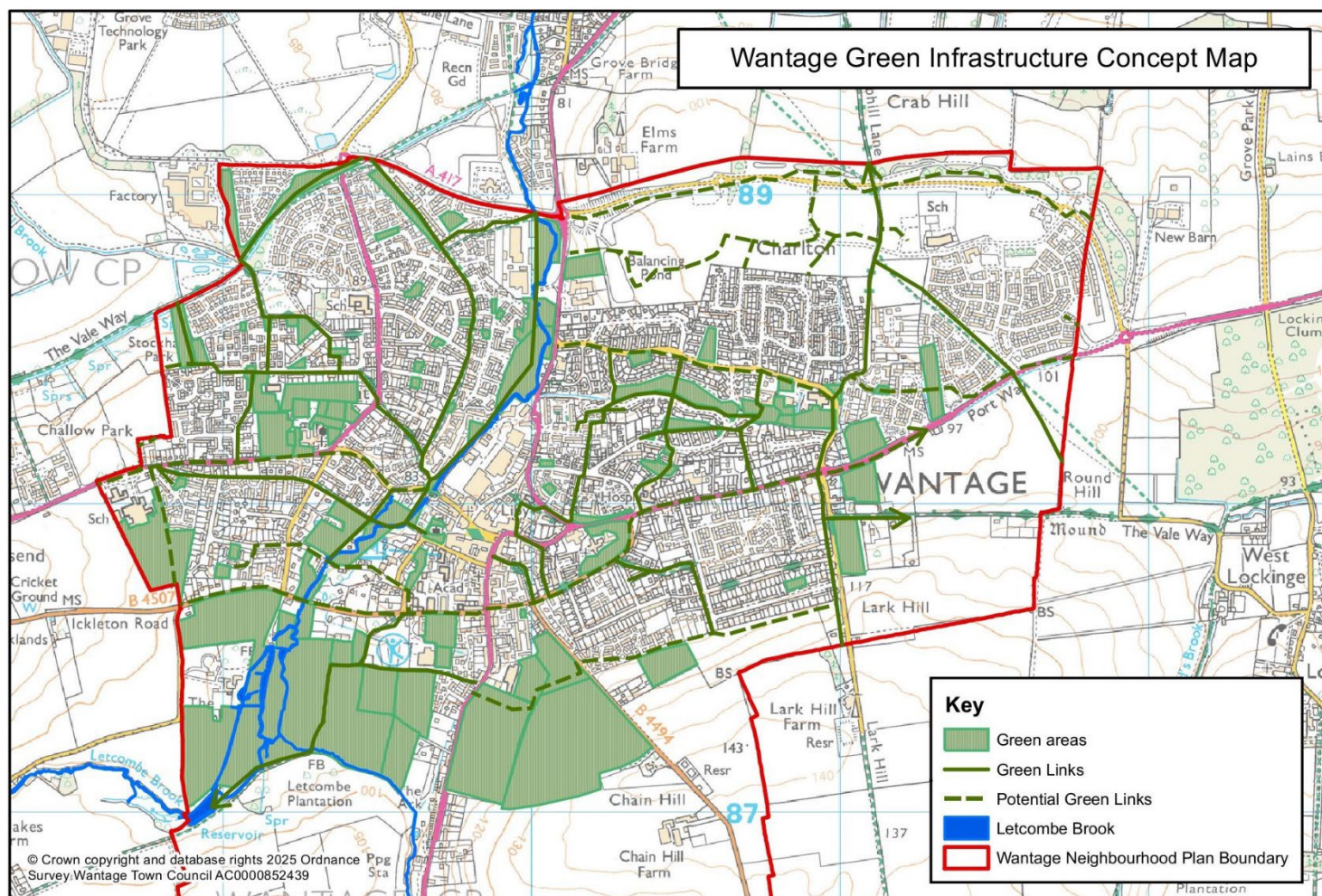
- i. respond positively to the character and appearance of the network; and
- ii. ensure that their landscape schemes, layouts, access and public open space provision and other amenity requirements contribute to the maintenance and improvement of the Network, and, where practicable, its enhancement.



- 4.6.1 The Purpose of the Network is to 'Conserve, enhance and improve both the green character of the town and its physical links for the benefit of residents, visitors and wildlife, in ways that are affordable'.
- 4.6.2 This policy proposes that a Green Infrastructure Network is established to aid the connection of green spaces, Letcombe Brook and other watercourses, with the Town Centre and countryside, using footpaths, cycleways and the Wilts and Berks Canal Towpath. Its purpose is to encourage development proposals that may affect the Network to contribute to its improvement and to assist in securing its connectivity, ecological or recreational value. The Green Infrastructure Plan on the following page and the subsequent Proposed Cycle Routes illustrate the connected Green Infrastructure Network that the policy is seeking to achieve.



Plan D: Wantage Green Infrastructure Concept Map





- 4.6.3 Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) recommends that every one, wherever they live, should have an accessible natural green space:
- of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes' walk) from home.
 - at least one accessible 20-hectare site within two kilometres (km) of home.
 - one accessible 100-hectare site within five km of home; and
 - one accessible 500-hectare site within ten km of home; plus
 - a minimum of one hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.



- 4.6.4 Our Green Infrastructure Network seeks to serve the interests of three parties: Local Residents; Visitors and Tourists; and Wildlife. In the case of all three, we are seeking to attract increasing numbers. Our aim is to improve the quality and quantity of natural green space where possible and avoid any further loss of connectivity.

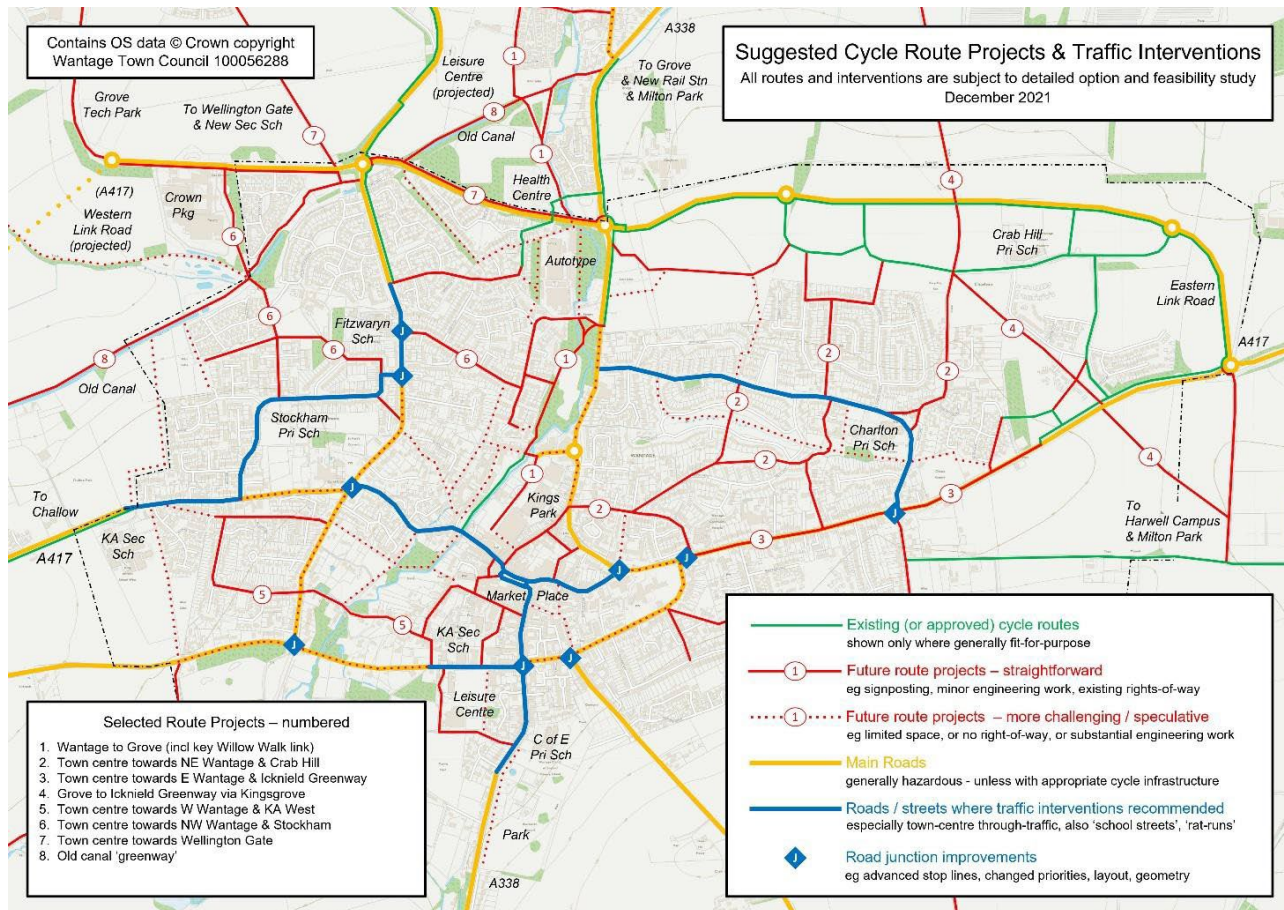
- 4.6.5 The central location of Letcombe Brook means that it forms the 'spine' from which links can connect the town to the Ridgeway, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and along the old canal. It's hoped to connect with new development areas via footpaths and cycling routes, and to allow wildlife corridors to be retained and enhanced.



- 4.6.6 Where development takes place adjacent to an existing part of the network layout design should be responsive to connecting into the existing green infrastructure. Allowing for a wildlife corridor to be enhanced or for increased links for pedestrians and cycleways would be fully supported.

- 4.6.7 Ideally, any green space on new developments would be accessible to all; however, the open space could take many forms, including formal sports pitches, open areas for views or informal use, linear corridors and country parks, or simply an area left for wildlife such as existing hedging or wildlife corridors on the edges of a development.

Plan E: Wantage Proposed Cycle Routes





Policy 7: Green Infrastructure - Letcombe Brook

When relevant, and as appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should:

- i. Minimize negative impacts on and provide net gains for the biodiversity value of the Letcombe Brook corridor.**
- ii. Conserve, restore and enhance the biodiversity, landscape and recreational value of the Letcombe Brook and its tributaries including Manor Road Spring and the Humber Ditch and avoid any harmful impacts on the landscape and recreational value of these waterways.**
- iii. Include a long-term landscape and ecological management plan for the Brook, buffer strip and corridor;**
- iv. Provide or retain a minimum 10m natural green buffer between the top of the river-bank and the development in urban areas adjacent to the Letcombe Brook; and**
- v. Have regard to the landscape and design guidance set out in the 'Letcombe Brook – Planning Guidance for landowners and developers' in Appendix 1**

4.7.1 The Letcombe Brook and its tributaries are a key strategic asset flowing through the heart of Wantage and an important natural feature that has shaped the history and development of the town over many centuries and are of great importance to the character and landscape of the town.

4.7.2 It is a vital element of the Green Infrastructure and has several important functions – as a landscape feature, for biodiversity especially as a green corridor to allow movement of species, flood alleviation, for recreation, as a water resource and to allow access for river maintenance.

4.7.3 The Letcombe Brook is a chalk stream, a globally rare habitat confined mainly to England and North West Europe. In recognition of their international importance, chalk streams have been designated as UKBAP priority habitats and NERC Habitat of Principal Importance. The Letcombe Brook is important for biodiversity, supporting a healthy wild brown trout population, priority species such as otter and the UK's fastest declining species, the water vole.



4.7.4 The diversity and character of the Brook has been shaped and changed by centuries of human endeavour and changes in land use. Over time, habitats and the river corridor landscape have deteriorated and been faced with many environmental issues and development pressures. Few developments sited along the Letcombe Brook and its tributaries have made the most of the riverside setting, most tending to back onto the river rather than incorporate it as a design feature. Modern developments have been built very close to the river, ignoring its setting in their overall design. The close proximity of development to the river's edge also makes maintenance very difficult and public access impossible in areas.

4.7.5 The 10m buffer should be maintained as a natural or semi-natural habitat free from built development, parking areas, private gardens and formal landscaping. A buffer should be provided on both sides of the Brook that runs through a development.

4.7.6 Provision of a 10m buffer may not be achievable in some situations, for example on some town centre sites where there is already significant built development infringing on the river corridor. Detailed design of the buffer zone will be considered on a site-by-site basis in consultation with the VWHDC, Letcombe Brook Project and the Environment Agency.

4.7.7 In future, full advantage must be taken of a riverside setting with attractive designs, which visually enhance the area, contribute to creating a high-quality environment, offer refuge for wildlife and improve public access where this does not negatively impact on the Brook.



4.7.8 The Letcombe Brook Project aims to ensure that all future opportunities are taken to protect and enhance this river environment by:

- Careful design of development proposals which will serve to enhance the landscape, enhance biodiversity, protect water quality, the channel and corridor.
- Restoring the Brook and its corridor and incorporating natural features into the design of new development.
- Incorporating public access without causing disturbance to the Brook.

4.7.9 Further details on landscape and design and developers and landowners' responsibilities, are set out in the 'Letcombe Brook – Planning Guidance for landowners and developers' in Appendix 1.

4.7.10 Developers and future landowners should be made aware that if the land boundary is next to a water course then it is assumed that you own the land up to the centre of the watercourse. Riparian owners have responsibilities towards the Brook including maintenance of the channel and banks. The design of the development needs to incorporate good access for maintenance. See Environment Agency's 'Living on the Edge Guide' on the web for further details.



Policy 8: Green Infrastructure – Local Green Spaces

The Neighbourhood Plan designates Local Green Spaces in the following locations, as shown on the Policies Maps on pages 37-39:

- a) Alfred's Well**
- b) Betjeman Park**
- c) Humber Ditch and the adjacent green spaces**
- d) Letcombe Brook Wildlife Corridor (including Willow Walk Nature Reserve)**

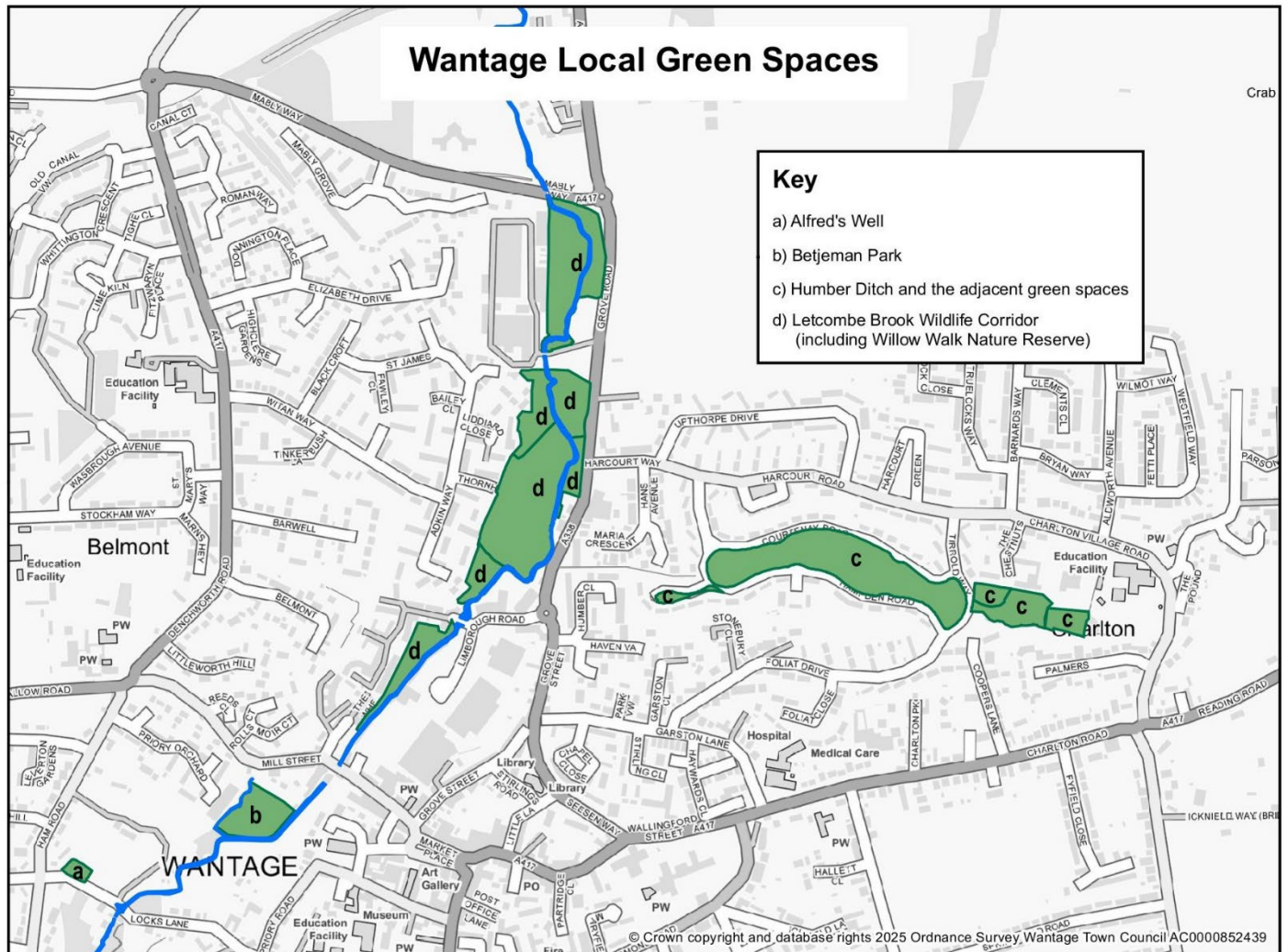
Development proposals on land designated as Local Green Space will only be supported in very special circumstances.



- 4.8.1 This policy proposes a number of important green spaces in the town to be protected from development by their designation as Local Green Spaces in accordance with paragraphs 105-107 of the NPPF. These are shown on Plan F Wantage Local Green Spaces on the following page and in more detail in Appendix 2.

Plan F: Wantage Local Green Spaces

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4.8.2 In each case, these green spaces are an integral part of the town. Local Green Spaces have an equivalent planning policy status to that of a Green Belt and therefore development will only be supported in very special circumstances.

4.8.3 A Green Spaces matrix was applied to each open space identified from the original surveys and subsequent consultation stages. This was used to identify if each space met the criteria for a Local Green Space as set out in the NPPF. Those that met the criteria were then subsequently assessed for their value to the community and their local significance. This significance could range from the number of people served by the space and whether it was local in character, to its beauty, tranquillity, landscape character, historic significance, recreation or arts contribution, or its biodiversity.



4.8.4 Government policy dictates that school property is considered differently to most other space and consideration must be given to ensuring good schooling. We therefore specifically excluded school property from the green space policies to ensure that the school can expand to meet the future educational requirements and to ensure that we can continue or improve the outstanding services that schools provide.

Policy 9: Manor Road Memorial Recreation Ground

- 1. Proposals to improve any of the existing leisure or recreational facilities on the Recreation Ground (as shown on Plan G) will be supported. Proposals that would result in the provision of additional leisure or recreational facilities or services on site will be supported where such proposals are in accordance with other development plan policies and do not generate any unacceptable amenity, environmental or traffic impacts.**
- 2. Proposals that result in the loss of open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, within the Recreation Ground (as shown on Plan G) will not be supported unless:**
 - a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or**
 - b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or**
 - c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.**

4.9.1 This 6.8ha space comprises a children's playground, tennis courts, bowling green, mown grass, trees, shrubs. The northern boundary of the park is adjacent to Wantage Church of England Primary School and the southern boundary is adjacent to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. The Park is home to both the Bowling Club and the Tennis Club. This is the only recreational park in Wantage and is therefore demonstrably special to our local community.

4.9.2 Policy 9 protects the open space, sports and recreational buildings and land located within the Manor Road Memorial Ground as defined on Plan G. It was initially proposed during the development of the WNP to designate this area as a Local Green Space. However, Vale of White Horse District Council raised concerns that a Local Green Space designation would be overly restrictive and limit the future redevelopment of any of the leisure or amenity facilities on the site. It was therefore agreed that it would be more appropriate to create a specific policy for this site which protects the open space, sports and recreational buildings and land within it.

Plan G: Manor Road Memorial Recreation Ground





Policy 10: Community Assets

Proposals to improve the viability of a designated Asset of Community Value, or of any other established community use by way of the extension or partial redevelopment of buildings and land will be supported, provided the design of the scheme and the resulting increase in use are appropriate in design terms and will not harm the amenities of adjoining residential properties.

Development proposals that will result in either the loss of or significant harm to a designated Asset of Community Value will be resisted, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the operation of the asset, or the ongoing delivery of the community value of the asset, is no longer financially viable.



4.10.1 This policy serves two purposes.

- First, it seeks to protect designated Assets of Community Value from unnecessary loss. For clarity, the policy does not seek to designate assets in the first instance (this cannot be done through the Neighbourhood Plan but rather through another legal process); it only applies to assets once they have been designated.
- Secondly, the policy is supportive of the improvement and extension of these Assets and of other community buildings and associated land in ways that are suitable to its location. This is to enable them to remain in viable use and to continue to meet the needs of the local community.



4.10.2 A building is an Asset of Community Value if its main use has recently been or is presently used to further the social well-being or social interests of the local community and could do so in the future. The Localism Act states that "social interests" include cultural, recreational and sporting interests.

4.10.3 Once designated, the inclusion of a site on the register of Assets of Community Value will provide the Town Council or other community organisations within the parish with a six-month opportunity to bid to acquire on behalf of the local community the asset once placed for sale on the open market. In addition, the designation of an Asset will enable it to benefit from the protection of this policy.

4.10.4 However, the policy requires that proposals avoid increasing the use of community facilities to the extent that they may harm the amenities of adjoining residential properties, for example through traffic movements, on-street car parking and noise or light pollution.



Community Aspiration: Community Facilities

It is an aspiration that development proposals will be required to make proportionate financial contributions to key local services and infrastructure improvement projects through planning obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy as appropriate.

The following key projects are anticipated to be the main focus of this investment in the plan period:

- i. Traffic Management proposals, including improvements to the Market Place;**
- ii. Green infrastructure network including maintenance and enhancement of existing green spaces and improvements to pavements and footpaths;**
- iii. Cycle ways within and linking Wantage to adjacent areas;**
- iv. Provision of education from pre-school to secondary;**
- v. Provision of healthcare and dental care facilities;**
- vi. Community and/or other projects that may be deemed relevant at the time, such as for youth provision or recreation.**



- 4.11.1 This aspiration identifies the most important infrastructure projects to support the development proposals of the Neighbourhood Plan. Each project has been identified and described in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 4.11.2 This list in the Neighbourhood Plan is not exhaustive but provides the local community with an indication of how the Levy will be invested in local priority projects.

5. IMPLEMENTATION



- 5.1.1 The Neighbourhood Plan will be implemented through a combination of the District Council's consideration and determination of planning applications for development in the town, and steering public and private investment into a series of infrastructure proposals contained in the Plan.
- 5.1.2 Our vision as stated earlier in this document is for Wantage to remain a thriving market town, with its retained historic and architectural character, busy town centre and attractive network of green spaces and links to the surrounding countryside and National Landscape. This will enable it to remain an attractive place to live with a rich cultural heritage.
- 5.1.3 This chapter sets out aspirations and actions that cannot be addressed by planning policies within the neighbourhood plan, but which are of importance to the town and which the Town Council and community would like to address through alternative processes. These aspirations and actions address matters which are outside of the planning system and will not form part of the statutory development plan or impose any requirements on developers and landowners.

Development Management



- 5.2.1 Most of the policies contained in the Plan will be delivered by landowners and developers. In preparing the Plan, care has been taken to ensure, as far as possible, that the policies are achievable.
- 5.2.2 Whilst the District Council will be responsible for development management, the Town Council will use the Plan to frame its representations on submitted planning applications. It will also work with the District Council to monitor the progress of sites coming forward for development.
- 5.2.3 The Town Council is mindful of the number of development projects that either straddle its boundary with adjoining parishes or are just beyond its boundary but may have important impacts on the town. For example, the Western Relief Road, the Grove Station, the green corridors separating Wantage from surrounding villages, the continuation of Letcombe Brook and the Wilts & Berks Canal are all projects or existing assets that are important to Wantage. The Town Council will therefore want to work collaboratively with developers and the District and County Councils, as well as the neighbouring Parish Councils, to ensure that these important assets are protected, and new projects are well designed to meet the needs of the town's residents, businesses and visitors.

- 5.2.4 Given the increase in population, the need for increased health care and dental care facilities in the area is also important, but we are mindful that the medical centre is outside our boundary. The aspiration would be to have a minor injuries clinic or similar facility as part of the health services for the area in the future.

Infrastructure Projects

- 5.3.1 The Town Council aspires, finances allowing, to some or all of the following projects for investment of future Community Infrastructure Levy funding allocated by the local planning authority to the Town Council:
- i. Traffic Management proposals, including the MarketPlace pedestrianisation and long stay car and coach parking.
 - ii. Green Infrastructure Network.
 - iii. Cycle ways both within the town and linking Wantage to adjacent areas.
 - iv. Community or other projects that may be deemed relevant at the time.



- 5.3.2 This series of local infrastructure projects will be prioritised for investment.

- 5.3.3 In addition, other policies of the Plan require some planning obligations to be entered into as part of planning consents to finance and deliver specific infrastructure projects relating to the development scheme in order to make the scheme satisfactory in line with paragraphs 55 - 58 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).



- 5.3.4 Art, culture and leisure in the town are already supported by various funding bodies including the Town Council and we would expect this to continue and be included in the "Community or other projects" referred to in 5.3.1.

Town Centre Improvements

- 5.4.1 The Town Centre is an important focus for the Plan's land use policies. There are, however, many complementary actions that the Town Council wishes to pursue with traders and other commercial interests in future years, funding permitting.

- 5.4.2 The provision of family-friendly evening entertainment and activities (such as extended shopping hours, special markets and events) will continue to be promoted through pro-active management and an enhanced public realm, including lighting, and support of events and activities appropriate to a town centre. The organisation of a series of seasonal events will be encouraged, for example focussing on local produce (e.g., bread, meat, eggs, cheese, wine, crafts), heritage, and promotion of sustainable travel, as well as strengthening the regular farmers' market.



- 5.4.3 Although pedestrianisation of the Market Place has been the subject of a long-term debate in the town, the Town Council will continue to support creating more space for pedestrians in the Market Place and reduce the impact of traffic on its historic streets and buildings.
- 5.4.4 We could consider replacing the surfaces on the roads in the Town Centre to slow traffic and improve road safety. This is, of course, dependent on rerouting through traffic around the Town and strongly supporting the development of the Western Relief Road, which with the Eastern Relief Road and Mably Way, creates an effective route around the Town Centre. As any resurfacing of pavements and roads within the town takes place, we will look at the need for further dropped kerbs to increase accessibility for those less mobile.



Transport Management

- 5.5.1 Wantage has grown from early beginnings where the Icknield Way running along the base of the Ridgeway (probably an ancient drovers' road running from Avebury or Stonehenge to Icklingham in Suffolk) crossed Letcombe Brook. Now our location is defined by the intersection of the A417 and A338 trunk roads, surrounded by the larger conurbations of Oxford, Reading, Newbury, Hungerford and Swindon. We are close to the M4, A34 and M40. As our nearest rail station is almost 10 miles away at Didcot Parkway, most traffic through this area travels by road. The Local Plan and planning approvals to date suggest that our residential area will grow by more than 65%, yet most employment is in the Science Vale (at Harwell, Milton Park or Culham), in one of the larger conurbations, or further afield. This means that transport management is a key issue in this area.
- 5.5.2 Management of transport through the town requires investment in both the Western Relief Road and the Eastern Relief Road. Management of transport within the town requires sufficient provision of car and coach parking, good realm, including lighting, and support of events and activities appropriate to a town centre.
- 5.5.3 The organisation of a series of seasonal events will be encouraged, for example focussing on local produce (e.g. bread, meat, eggs, cheese, wine, crafts), heritage, and promotion of sustainable travel.
- 5.5.4 Support is required to develop an overall transport strategy and business case for infrastructure funding to improve the transport network needed to connect the housing in Wantage and its adjacent villages with the employment centres in the Science Vale to ensure that Wantage remains an attractive place to live and work as defined in the Local Plan.





Education Provision

- 5.6.1 Notwithstanding the special designation applied to land for schools by National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), this Plan acknowledges the importance of outstanding educational institutions with a drive to improve outcomes for all children while managing public finances appropriately. Where possible a reasonable portion of development-related funding should be directed to help enhance capital projects for local schools from Pre-school, through Primary, on to Secondary and beyond. Applications to expand school premises should be considered in collaboration with educational institutions and the County Council, to ensure that high quality places for children are made available now and future provision keeps up with demand.

Cycleway and Pedestrian Infrastructure Investments

- 5.7.1 Funding from developer contributions, the District Council, the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and other funding bodies will be required to support the development and implementation of an integrated cycle and pedestrian strategy. We wish to improve accessibility and connections to key locations such as the Town Centre, schools, leisure facilities, green spaces, the major employment centres, neighbouring villages and rail stations as shown in Plan E: Proposed Cycle Routes on page 22. This will include:



- Developing and improving the cycling network by creating more links segregated from heavy traffic, as well as safer and better facilities on the main roads within the town, through the development of a cycling action plan.
- Developing and improving the walking network by creating more direct links and footways where these are missing, widening footways to a standard appropriate to the purpose and demand, and improving the quality of surface materials, landscaping and street furniture, both through the planning application process and through the development of a walking action plan.
- Expanding and maintaining a network of waymarked recreational circular walks.

Green Infrastructure Improvements



5.8.1 Many of the most beautiful and economically successful settlements are strongly related to the landscape within which they have evolved. If Wantage is to retain the rural market town character which we all love, we have to ensure that the environmental heritage which surrounds us is linked firmly to the town, and the green infrastructure of the town and its environs is maintained and enhanced by the growth which we expect. We need a Green Infrastructure Strategy which extends and enhances connectivity between different parts of the town and the surrounding countryside and enhances the lives of all inhabitants.

5.8.2 The establishment of a Green Infrastructure Network to 'Conserve, enhance and improve both the green character of the town and its physical links for the benefit of residents, visitors and wildlife, in ways that are affordable is a key part of our plan.



5.8.3 Green Infrastructure can provide many social, economic and environmental benefits close to where people live and work including:

- Space and habitat for wildlife with access to nature for people;
- Places for outdoor relaxation and play;
- Climate change adaptation - for example flood alleviation and cooling urban heat islands;
- Environmental education;
- Cultural, archaeological and scenic attributes;
- Leisure facilities;
- Improved health and well-being – lowering stress levels and providing opportunities for exercise, and
- Local food production - in allotments, gardens and through agriculture. (MEBIE - the Micro-Economic Benefits of Investment in the Environment Review produced by Natural England in 2012 provides an evidence summary of the benefits of Green Infrastructure.)



5.8.4 Whilst most of the labour and professional skills required to complete the initial work will be volunteered, there will be some costs entailed: maps/plans, satellite imagery etc and meeting/consensus building/reporting costs. Funding from developer contributions and other sources will be required to create the infrastructure and co-ordinate and maintain the network over time.

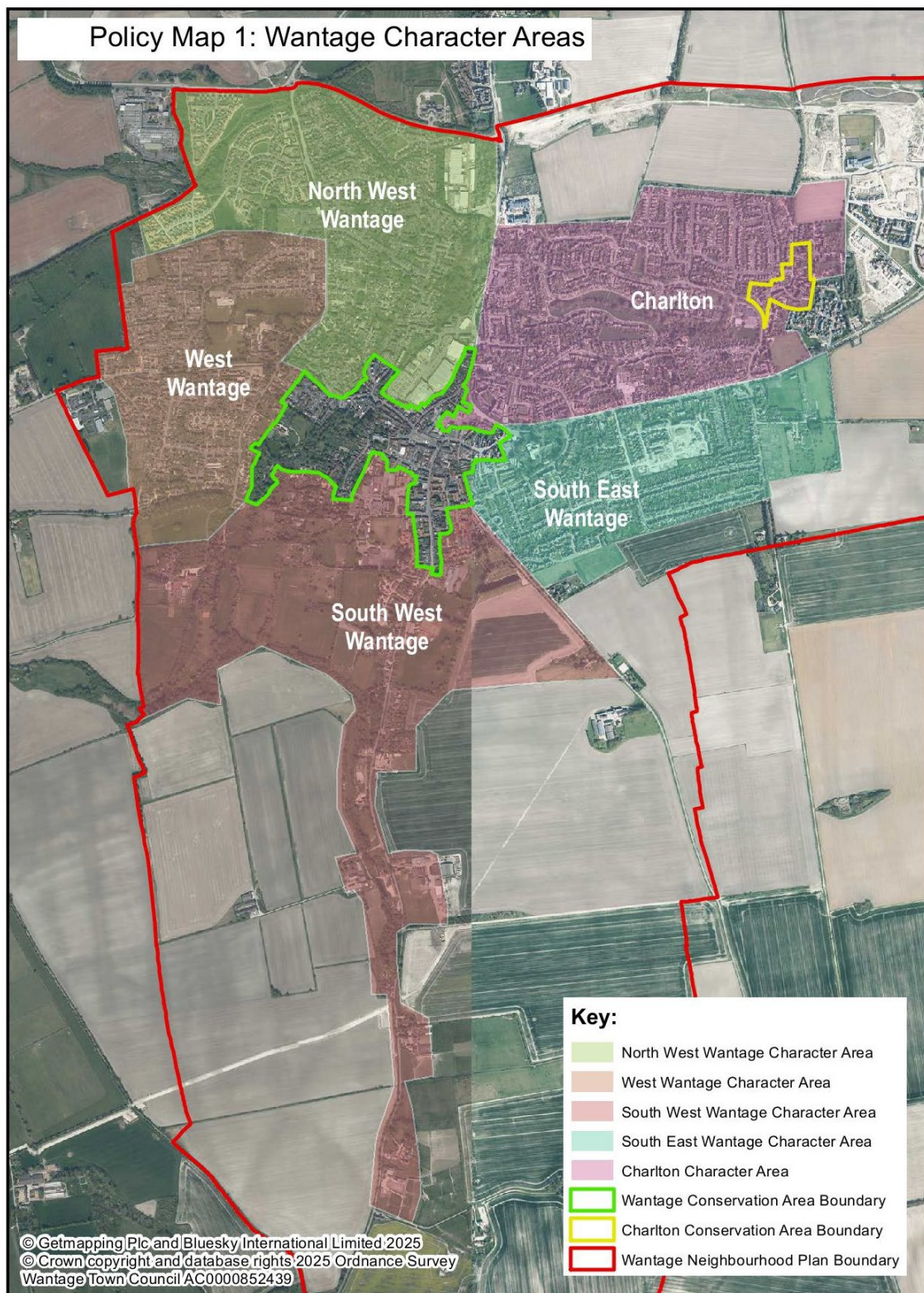
Community Assets



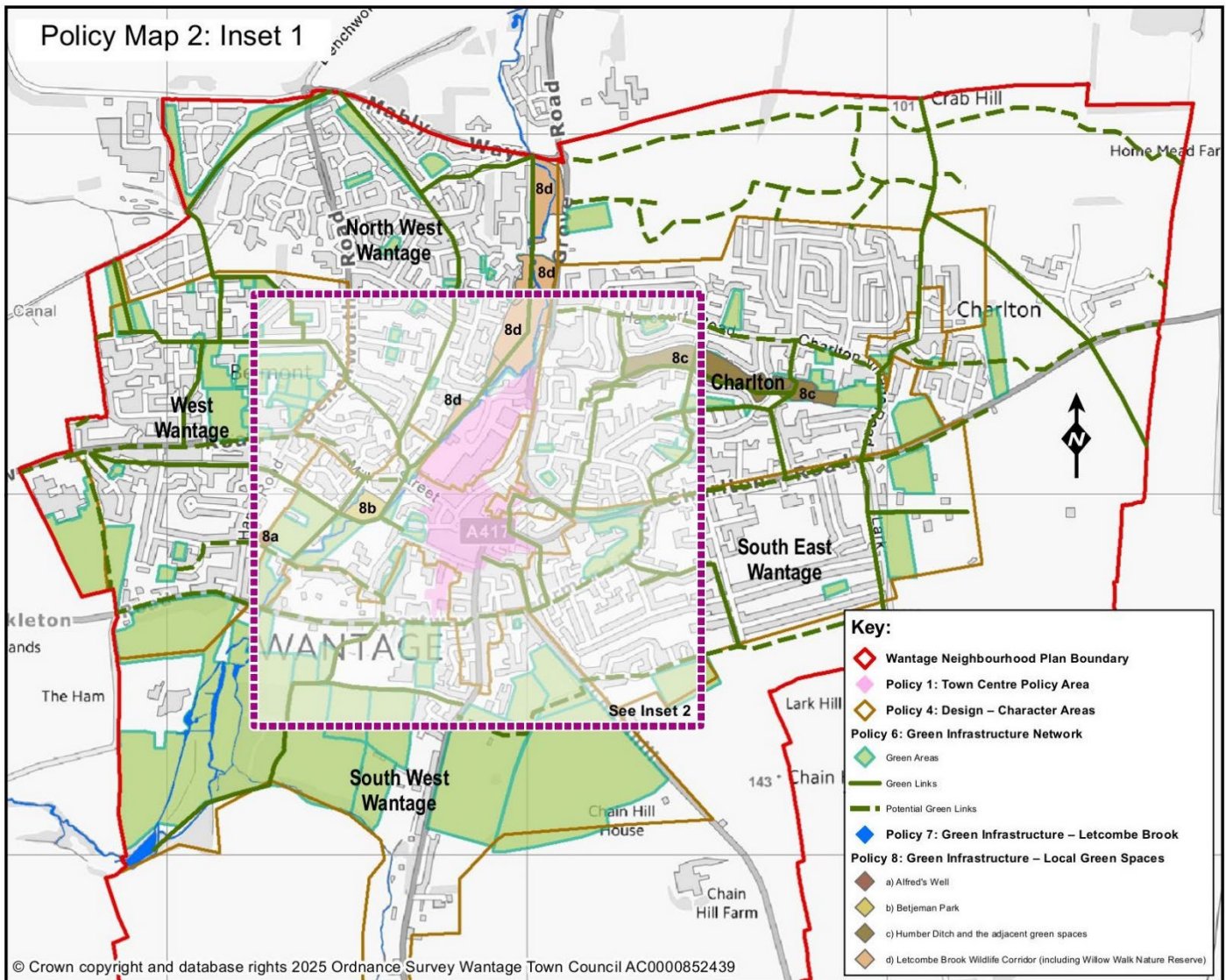
- 5.9.1 Community assets are land and buildings owned or managed by community organisations. These assets cover a wide spectrum and include town halls, community centres, sports facilities, affordable housing and libraries. Our ambition is that the land and buildings provided as community assets have clear restrictions such that ownership must remain within the community, and the assets must be used within the scope of the original founding purposes. We understand that, over decades, how that should be interpreted might need to change.
- 5.9.2 Depending on the ownership, we expect that the assets could be leased over a longer term (>99 years) to a Community Trust established for the purpose of overseeing them. This Community Trust will:
- i. Ensure that the facilities are used in line with their intended purposes.
 - ii. Manage the strategic development of the land and buildings.
 - iii. Set the ground rules for how the facility is run in practice, using the established guidelines as a framework.
 - iv. Ensure the landlord responsibilities of the land and buildings are fulfilled. This could well be contracted-out to an appropriate community or charitable body.
 - v. Contract-out tenant responsibilities and the day-to-day management. This contract, in particular, would have to be of sufficient duration (min 50 years) to ensure stability and long-term development, but must include break points to allow robust oversight.
 - vi. Be run by a body comprising elected officials, local elected representatives and user groups. This should be structured so that none of those three groups can also control any of the other two groups' voting.

6. POLICIES MAPS

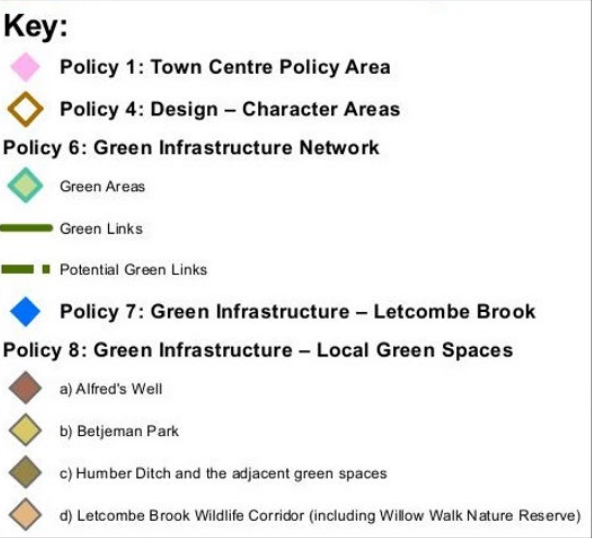
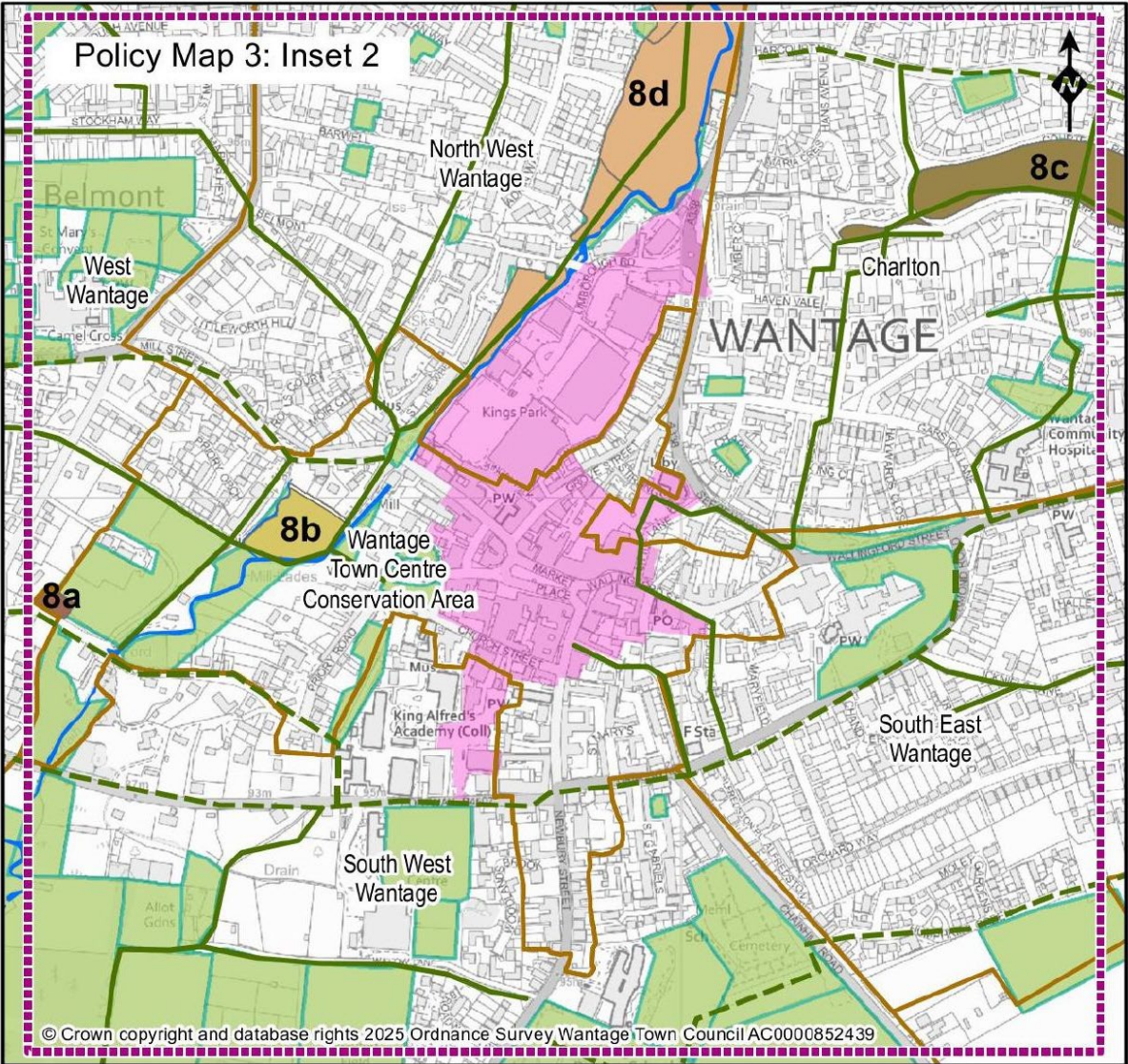
Policy Map 1: Neighbourhood Plan area



Policy Map 2: Inset 1



Policy Map 3: Inset 2



7. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

| Subject | Description |
|--|--|
| Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard | <p>Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) originally developed by English Nature, now part of Natural England. ANGSt recommends that everyone, wherever they live, should have accessible natural greenspace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes' walk) from home; • at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometres of home; • one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home; and • one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home; plus • a minimum of one hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population. <p>ANGSt is a powerful tool in assessing current levels of accessible natural greenspace, and planning for better provision. The three underlying principles of ANGSt are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Improving access to greenspaces, b) Improving naturalness of greenspaces, c) Improving connectivity with greenspaces. |
| Affordable Homes | <p>Housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers); and which complies with one or more of the following definitions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Social Rent: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the government's rent policy for Social Rent; (b) the landlord is a registered provider; and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. (b) Other affordable housing for rent: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the Government's rent policy for Affordable Rent, or is at least 20% below local market rents (including service charges where applicable); (b) the landlord is a registered provider, except where it is included as part of a Build to Rent scheme (in which case the landlord need not be a registered provider); and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For Build to Rent schemes affordable housing for rent is expected to be the normal form of affordable housing provision (and, in this context, is known as Affordable Private Rent). (c) Discounted market sales housing: is that sold at a discount of at least 20% below local market value. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Provisions should be in place to ensure housing remains at a discount for future eligible households. |

| Subject | Description |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Affordable Homes (continued) | (d) Other affordable routes to home ownership: is housing provided for sale that provides a route to ownership for those who could not achieve home ownership through the market. It includes shared ownership, relevant equity loans, other cost homes for sale (at a price equivalent to at least 20% below local market value) and rent to buy (which includes a period of intermediate rent). Where public grant funding is provided, there should be provisions for the homes to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for any receipts to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision, or refunded to government or the relevant authority specified in the funding agreement. |
| ANGSt | Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (see above) |
| CIL | Community Infrastructure Levy (see below) |
| Community Infrastructure Levy | The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a levy that local authorities can choose to charge on new developments in their area. The money can be used to support development, by funding infrastructure that the council, local community and neighbourhoods want. |
| Conservation Area | An area designated by the District Council under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as an area of special architectural or historical interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Designation gives control over the demolition of buildings and provides the basis for policies designed to preserve or enhance all the aspects of character or appearance that define an area's special interest. |
| Evidence Base | The Evidence Base is a collection of reports which have been used to inform the Neighbourhood Plan policies. The evidence can come from a wide range of sources including public consultation, research documents, other Strategies, National Policy, and monitoring. |
| Examination | An independent review of the Neighbourhood Plan carried out in public by an independent examiner. |
| Green Infrastructure | Green Infrastructure (GI) is a network of multi-functional green space which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Green Infrastructure includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens. |
| Independent Examiner | The role of the Independent Examiner is to evaluate the Neighbourhood Plan. It could be anyone with appropriate qualifications and skills who meets certain requirements set out in the Localism Act. This could be a planning consultant or other planning professional. The examiner will be appointed by Vale of White Horse District Council as the local planning authority, but only with the agreement of Wantage Council. |
| Infrastructure | The basic facilities, services, and installations needed for the functioning of a community or society, such as transportation and communications systems, water and power lines, and public and community buildings including schools, community centres, leisure services, health services etc. |

| Subject | Description |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Local Green Spaces | <p>The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Designating land as Local Green Space should be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or updated and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. b. demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and c. local in character and is not an extensive tract of land. <p>Policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts.</p> |
| Localism Act | An Act of Parliament that became law in April 2012. The Act introduces a new right for local people to draw up 'Neighbourhood Development Plans' for their local area. |
| National Landscape | Areas legally designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. |
| National Planning Policy Framework | The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published by the government in March 2012, and revised in July 2018, February 2019, July 2021, September 2023 and December 2023. It sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied in development planning documents, including neighbourhood plans, and in decisions on planning applications. |
| Natural England | Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide. It is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs |
| Neighbourhood Plan | Neighbourhood Plans are a new way for communities to decide the future of the places where they live and work. The government has introduced the right to do neighbourhood planning through the Localism Act, which gained Royal Assent on 15th November 2011, with its latest revision on 20th July 2021. |
| NPPF | National Planning Policy Framework (see above) |
| Open Market / Market Housing | Houses for sale or rent where prices are set in the open market. |
| Open Space | All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity. |

| Subject | Description |
|--|---|
| Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) | The Authority of the County of Oxfordshire responsible for services such as education, transport, emergency services and waste disposal. |
| Plan Period | The period for which the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan will set policy for the Town. This will be from 2021 to 2031. |
| Planning Obligation | A legally enforceable obligation entered into under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to mitigate the impacts of a development proposal. |
| Primary Shopping Area | Defined area where retail development is concentrated (generally comprising the primary and those secondary frontages which are adjoining and closely related to the primary shopping frontage. |
| Public Open Space | Open space which is open to the public and is normally owned or managed as part of a Management Companies (MANCO) system. |
| Referendum | A general vote by the electorate on a single political question that has been referred to it for a direct decision. With regard to the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan, a public referendum will decide whether to adopt the Plan. |
| Sustainability | The creation or maintenance of conditions that fulfil current and future economic, environmental and social requirements. |
| Sustainable Development | Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The National Planning Policy Framework places a requirement on local planning authorities to positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and guide development to sustainable solutions. |
| Town Centre Policy Area | Area defined on the local authority's proposal map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. |
| Vale of White Horse District Local Plan 2031 | <p>The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 provides a policy framework for the delivery of sustainable development across the district up to 2031 and also sets out development management policies for the district.</p> <p>The plan sets out the Spatial Strategy and strategic policies for the district to deliver sustainable development. It identifies the number of new homes and jobs to be provided in the area and makes provision for retail, leisure and commercial development and the infrastructure needed to support them.</p> |
| Vale of White Horse District Council (VoWHDC) | Vale of White Horse District Council (VoWHDC) is the Local Planning Authority for Wantage. |
| Wantage Neighbourhood (Development) Plan (WNP) | The full title in the Localism Act is 'Neighbourhood Development Plan' but this is commonly shortened to Neighbourhood Plan. The WNP is a plan document for Wantage that is subject to examination in public and approval by referendum. |
| Wildlife Corridor | A wildlife corridor is a link of wildlife habitat, generally native vegetation, which joins two or more larger areas of similar wildlife habitat. |

Appendix 1:

Letcombe Brook Planning Guidance



This guidance is for developers and landowners whose land adjoins the Letcombe Brook and its tributaries, Manor Road Spring and Humber Ditch. It supports the policy and objectives set out in Wantage Neighbourhood Plan. Specific guidance on responsibilities, development and landscape design are found in sections 2, 4 and 5.



Bullhead

1. Introduction

River corridors are of great importance to biodiversity, water resources, water quality, fisheries and recreation. They make a significant contribution to landscape character and form green links between habitats which are crucial for the conservation of biodiversity and enhancement of wildlife habitats.

The Letcombe Brook Project therefore aims to ensure that all future opportunities are taken to protect and enhance this river environment by:

- Careful design of development proposals which will serve to protect water quality, the channel, corridor and its wider environment.
- Incorporating natural riverside settings into the design of new development.
- Incorporating public access without causing disturbance to the habitat and wildlife.



Water Vole

The Letcombe Brook is a chalk stream. Chalk streams are a globally rare habitat confined mainly to England and North West Europe. In recognition of their international importance, chalk streams have been designated as UK BAP priority habitats and NERC Habitat of Principal Importance.

The Letcombe Brook is important for biodiversity, supporting a healthy wild brown trout population, Priority Species such as otter and the UK's fastest declining species, the water vole and birds on the RSPB's Amber List of conservational importance including kingfishers and little egrets.

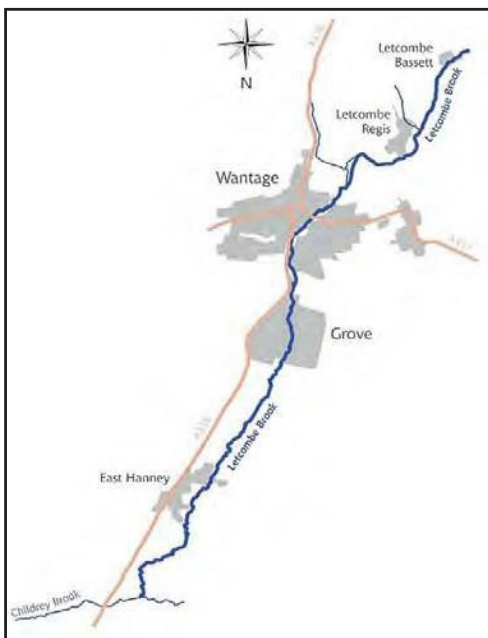
Chalk streams are fed from 'groundwater' held in the underlying chalk bedrock. Chalk soaks up rainwater rather like a sponge, and a chalk stream is formed where the water emerges at ground level. Flow in chalk streams is stable and constant in temperature, providing ideal conditions to support a rich diversity of invertebrate and fish life.

Chalk streams are naturally narrow and fairly fast-flowing. They possess a clean gravel bed, vital for invertebrates like mayfly and caddis fly larvae that live amongst the gravel, and for fish like the bullhead and brown trout.

Plants also thrive in the clear, mineral-rich waters. Species such as starwort and water crowfoot grow in the main flow, whilst watercress and lesser water parsnip are found along the margins.

Chalk streams also support some of our rarest mammals and birds such as otter, water vole, and water rail and kingfishers.

Groundwater levels in the chalk can drop in summer and flow throughout the river reduces. Winter rainfall replenishes the groundwater store (aquifer) and the water table rises, re-starting springs higher up the valley. This seasonality of flow in chalk streams is an important factor to bear in mind when considering development since flow in spring can be up to ten times that of flow in autumn.



It is for this reason that anyone considering new development close to the river should observe the requirements set out in this document.

Reinstatement of the buffer zone on previously developed land should also be considered so as to protect and improve this rare habitat. This advice note can also be used by those already living and working by the river who have an opportunity to create a better habitat at the edge of their land.

Letcombe Brook Project

The Letcombe Brook Project arose from public concern about pollution, low water levels and general neglect resulting from litter, erosion, poor bank treatments and unsympathetic development.

The Environment Agency's 'River Corridor Survey of 1999' noted that in places the Letcombe Brook was no longer a chalk stream in character, that there had been much realignment over the years to accommodate housing, industry, roads and the railway, and it had been over-widened and deepened. Aquatic and marginal vegetation was extremely sparse with some stretches devoid of any plants. They noted numerous negative changes including reinforced banks, numerous low weirs and impoundments. It was heavily silt-laden in places and over shaded with trees, with much rubbish in the Brook. Other problems included urbanisation of the environment along with over-tidying of banks and grass cutting in gardens and on amenity grassland immediately adjacent to the Brook.

The Letcombe Brook Project was established in April 2003 to enhance and protect the natural beauty of the Brook and to help people appreciate and enjoy the environment. By working in partnership with local people, riparian owners, the district, parish, and town councils along with other organisations, the LBP has been able to bring about positive environmental benefits for both wildlife and the people that live and work along the Brook.

Letcombe Brook Project objectives:

- To conserve and enhance the biodiversity and landscape of Letcombe Brook.
- To promote environmentally responsible land management practices amongst landowners and land managers.
- To increase awareness of countryside and environmental issues through education and interpretation.
- To involve all sectors of the community in caring for and appreciating the Letcombe Brook.

2. Responsibilities

Environment Agency and Local Authority responsibility

The Environment Agency is the government's environmental regulator, and its role includes ensuring the proper management of rivers and streams by their riparian owners. It should be noted that the Environment Agency does not generally own watercourses. Normally, where a watercourse forms a boundary between adjacent landowners (riparian owners), such ownership extends to the centre line of the watercourse. Fence lines at the top of banks, even if shown on deeds, are not in themselves proof of actual boundary location. Ultimate responsibility for the upkeep of a watercourse rests with the riparian owner including clearing obstructions, repairing the banks, protecting vegetation/ trees and removing rubbish.

Flood Defence Consent

All rivers or streams are classified as either "main rivers" or "ordinary watercourses".

Main Rivers:

Main rivers are covered by the Water Resources Act 1991 and are defined on maps held by the Environment Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). In broad terms, main rivers include all watercourses of value for strategic arterial drainage, whereas ordinary watercourses may have more significance on a local scale.

Consent under the Water Resources Act 1991 is required from the Thames Region of the Environment Agency for any works in, over, under or within 8 metres of a main river. Footbridges, tree planting, fences, bank repair and restoration, or even digging a ditch all therefore need consent. Early consultation with the Environment Agency is recommended.

Ordinary watercourses:

In addition, consent is also needed for the construction of any control structure, such as a culvert, or weir that would affect the flow of an ordinary watercourse. Planning permission may also be required. Land drainage consent may be required from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as the lead Local Flood Authority. Consent for certain other works may also be necessary within a designated floodplain. Early consultation with OCC is recommended.

The Letcombe Brook is ordinary watercourse from its source in Letcombe Bassett and Letcombe Regis and becomes main river at Locks Lane in Wantage.

Landowner responsibility

Developers and landowners should be made aware that if your land boundary is next to a watercourse then it is assumed that you own the land up to the centre of the water- course.

Riparian owners have responsibilities towards the maintenance of the channel and the banks including clearing obstructions, repairing the banks, protecting vegetation/trees, and removing rubbish. The design of the development needs to incorporate good access for long term maintenance.

For further details about your rights and responsibilities of riverside ownership see the Environment Agency's 'Living on the Edge Guide' on the internet.



3. The Importance of River Corridors

Over the years there have been particular development pressures experienced within the urban areas of Wantage. This has resulted in the encroachment of development into the river corridor, resulting in their partial or complete loss. However, it is now appreciated that river corridors represent an extremely rich resource deserving protection in their own right.

A careful balance must therefore be struck between allowing development to take place whilst conserving and enhancing river corridors. Ideally, river corridors should be as wide as possible, preferably at least 50 metres wide in rural areas to retain the character of the river corridor in the landscape. Clearly in urban areas this is rarely possible although even narrow corridors are much better than none at all.

The key is to protect, reinstate and enhance existing riparian habitat and other wetland features so that wildlife found naturally in these environments will be encouraged to use and live in these areas.

Why are River Corridors important?

Visual:

- Rivers and river corridors are attractive in themselves.

Recreation:

- Riverside walks reduce mistreatment (dumping, etc.) and encourage interest in the maintenance and enjoyment of a valuable community asset.
- In urban areas they also provide an important link between areas of open space and are interesting in their own right (simply for walking or observing wildlife).

River Ecology:

- There are important links between water and land ecology.
- Watercourses can provide a range of habitats for wildlife: within the water itself, on riverbanks and also associated areas such as reedbeds and wetlands.
- The preservation of river corridors allows the stability of channel banks and the protection of habitats created on/in them.
- This provides a natural habitat for increased wildlife species.



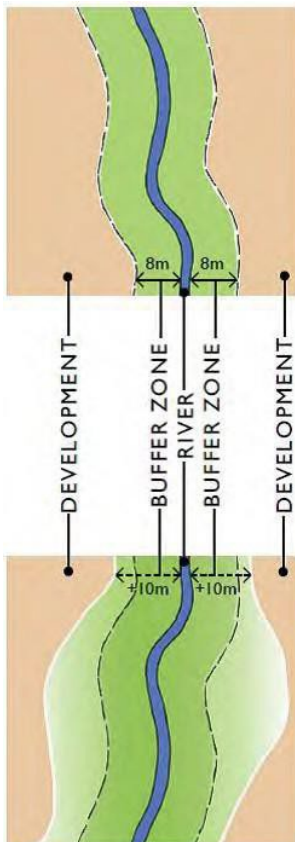
- Appropriate bank-side management will prevent loss of riparian habitat by overshading and/or crowding out by unmanaged bankside trees, scrub or brambles or the loss of riparian habitat due to “gardening” right to the waterline. Riparian vegetation is critical in providing habitat for wildlife but also in protecting riverbanks from erosion and improving water quality.
- Watercourses provide important links between animal and plant populations and habitats, which might otherwise be isolated and fragmented.

4. Design of new Riverside Development

Few buildings sited along the Letcombe Brook, or its tributary Manor Road Spring, have made the most of the riverside setting, most tending to back onto the river rather than incorporate it as a design feature. The close proximity of development to the river’s edge also makes public access impossible in many areas.

Modern developments have been built very close to the river ignoring its setting in their overall design. In future, full advantage must be taken of a riverside setting to produce more attractive designs, which visually enhance the area, improve public access and offer refuge for wildlife. The construction or reconstruction of bridges must, wherever possible, take into account the importance of maintaining an obstruction-free bank for wildlife. Bridges should be designed so that there is ample room for the movement of wildlife along the edge of the watercourse.

In essence, development must focus around the river corridor rather than the river fitting around the development.



Buffer Zones

- Wider buffer zones are encouraged as they create more effective “green” corridors. Such areas are essential as research has proved how valuable these strips are to both the water environment and the conservation of riverside wildlife.
- The Environment Agency recommend that for ecological and conservation purposes, the requirement should be a minimum distance of 10 metres (measured from the top of the river bank to the development) for all new development (buildings, car parks, paths etc.) should be set back from a riverbank.
- The 10m buffer should be maintained as a natural or semi-natural habitat free from built development, parking areas, private gardens and formal landscaping. A buffer should be provided on both sides of a watercourse that runs through a development.
- This width of buffer provides the minimum width of habitat needed to provide for the functioning of wildlife habitats, while being able to facilitate informal access for enjoyment of the river. This width also ensures that the river is buffered from land-based activities, e.g. reducing the levels of diffuse pollution reaching the watercourse.
- Provision of a 10m buffer may not be achievable in some situations, for example on some town centre sites where there is already significant built development and infringement of the river corridor. Detailed design of the buffer zone will be determined on a site-by-site basis in consultation with the Environment Agency and Letcombe Brook Project.
- In terms of setting, large buildings should not be closer to the river than their

height, irrespective of the 10m buffer. In all circumstances Land Drainage Byelaws dictate that an 8 metre buffer zone is maintained, and the Environment Agency will oppose development within 8 metres of a main watercourse which compromises their ability to carry out their statutory duties of flood defence. This ensures adequate access for river maintenance and it is therefore the width within which Land Drainage Consent is required.

Planning Permission

Buildings or hard standing will not normally be permitted within 10 metres of the riverbank for the reasons given above.

Every watercourse should ideally have continuous habitat, in-channel and along both banks.

5. Landscape Design of the Riverbank

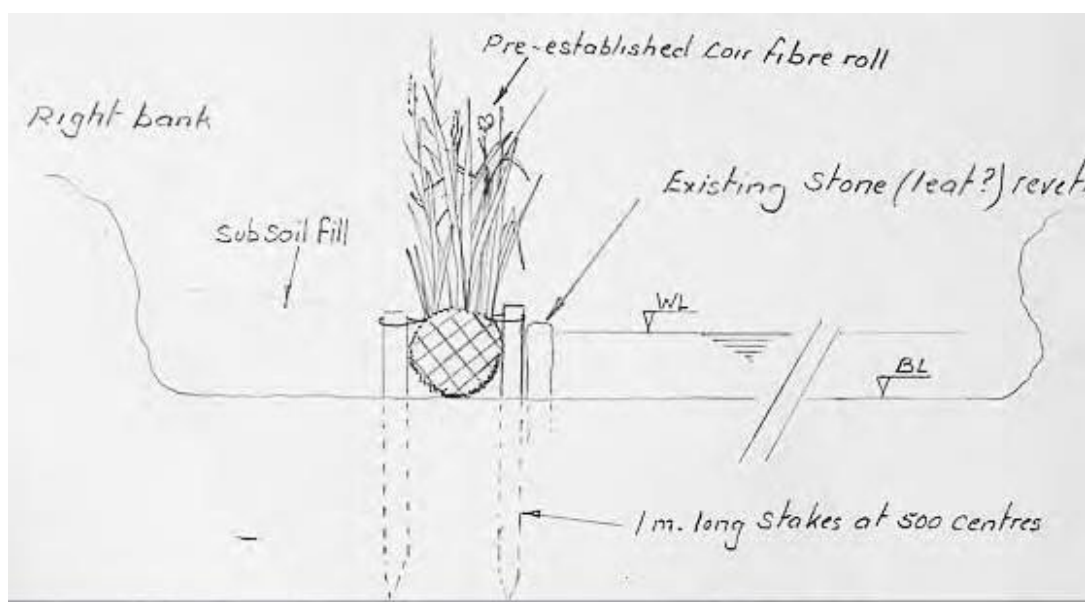
The buffer zone between the riverbank and new development must be adequately landscaped, ideally using locally sourced native plants that are naturally found by rivers to maintain the riverside ecosystem. This can include the creation of ponds/small wetland areas, use of herb-rich riverside grassland and appropriate native tree planting (such as alder, ash, willow, hawthorn or blackthorn). Any ponds should not be connected to the watercourse and should be set back from the top of the bank.

Bank Improvements

Over the years, many riverbanks in urban areas have been straightened and canalised using artificial material such as breeze blocks, concrete or metal. This usually results in an unattractive appearance and a riverside habitat with little value to wildlife.

- Where property or statutory rights of way are threatened there will be occasions where bank protection works will be unavoidable to contain flood flows and to direct water away from built-up areas, particularly in urban areas.
- Such measures will only be considered as a last resort and even then, “soft” engineering techniques should be used, i.e., by encouraging plant growth, faggoting and where appropriate willow spilling.
- Where natural methods of protection are not possible, high-quality materials in keeping with the character of that part of the river should be used.
- Where they do not exist, new areas of marginal vegetation can be created by the construction of gradual banks, beaches, and shallows.
- In some stretches of the river, it may be possible to screen unsightly areas of banking, which cannot be easily replaced, by planting suitable vegetation in the margins of the river or by the creation of a two-stage channel.
- Wherever possible banks should be regraded to form gentle earth slopes which can then provide an area for planting and seeding of marginal vegetation which can give a more natural appearance to the river. Steep riverbanks are also difficult to access and manage.
- Small groynes can be used to encourage collection and stabilisation of silt along the edges of the river, which will then colonise with marginal plant species.

- Such planting will however require formal consent from the Environment Agency, because within urban areas such as Wantage and Grove channel, capacity is crucial, and the narrowing of the channel could cause flooding problems.
- The Environment Agency and the Letcombe Brook Project can provide further advice on a site-specific basis (Flood Defence Consent will be required for works to main river).



In some cases tributaries of the Brook have been culverted and this has led to flooding problems and has destroyed the potential for wildlife. Where possible steps should be taken to reverse sections of these tributaries which have been culverted and return them to open streams or "ditches".

Hedges, Fences & Boundary Improvements

There are many examples where poor fencing or other boundary treatment can have an adverse impact on the riverside environment. To make the most of their riverside setting many properties will benefit by being left open to their river frontage without any boundary treatment.

- Properties which require some form of boundary for security or privacy reasons should consider natural landscape strips or hedging. If more secure treatment is necessary, then fences or walls must be set back from the riverbank to allow for access for maintenance and for the establishment of screen planting.
- Where fence options are used, those with wide gaps/ spaces are encouraged to allow uninterrupted access to the watercourse and along the river corridor for wildlife.

6. Public Access

Opportunities for increasing public access to the Brook should be taken, providing that this would not result in conflicts with other key interests e.g. the conservation value of the riverside area. Public access and uncontrolled dogs can cause disturbance to areas providing habitats for Protected Species such as otters and water voles.

Some riverside areas are inaccessible to the public because they fall within private land ownership. However, in many cases public access to riverside areas could be made possible and such access may be able to link-up with existing rights of way.

7. Improving Water Quality

In some reaches of the river it may be possible to improve the quality of the water by introducing additional oxygen to it. This can be done by creating small water features such as riffles (rough water).

Detailed consultation should however take place with the Environment Agency before any feature is introduced into the watercourse, as it may affect river flows and flood control.

Where barriers to fish movement are present in a watercourse adjacent to development proposals, the design should include measures to allow for the natural movement of fish within the watercourse, such as fish passes.

8. Surface Water Run-off and the Avoidance of Pollution

All development should be designed to minimise any possible pollution or escape of chemicals/oil into the watercourse and further information is available from the Environment Agency.

The following are examples of measures which can prevent river pollution and/or avoid flooding:

- The bunding of oil tanks.
- Oil/chemical storage away from the river.
- Oil traps and wetlands or reed beds on surface drainage systems.
- Soakaways and infiltration for clean surface water run-off.
- Permeable surfaces to replace tarmac and concrete.
- Construction of surface water storage ponds separate from the watercourse; to reduce flooding and/or allow additional treatment of run-off.

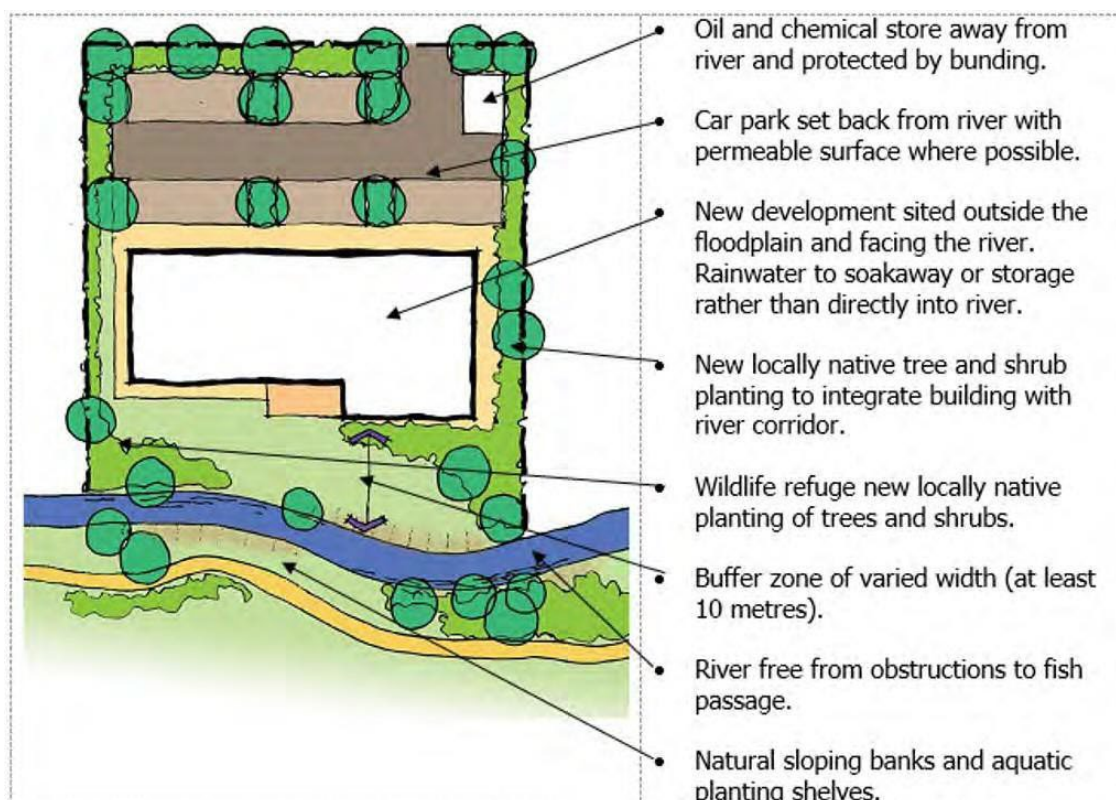
It should be noted that some of the sustainable drainage system options detailed may not be possible on some previously developed sites where there is contamination, unless remediation/decontamination works are carried out beforehand. Further advice should be obtained from the Environment Agency.



Discharge consent is required from the Environment Agency for discharges either into the river, or into the ground. It is important that developers obtain the necessary consents prior to commencing any building work.

The Environment Agency should be consulted for advice; particularly on the measures necessary to prevent pollution of surface and groundwater. They also provide free pollution prevention advice at all stages of a project from design to construction in order to avert the likelihood of costly pollution incidents in the future.

Summary of Good Practice



9. For Further Information Contact:

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Wantage Oxon OX12 8BL

01235 771447
letcombebrook@hotmail.com

Environment Agency
West Area, Thames
Red Kite House
Howbery Park
Wallingford
Oxon
OX10 8BD

Conservation and Fisheries Tel: 01491 828344
Development Control & Flood Defence Consent Tel: 01491 828442
Pollution Control and Waste Matters Tel: 01491 828373

Appendix 2: Local Green Spaces

