

Sonning Neighbourhood Plan 2023 - 2040

Made Version November 2026

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1 Introduction

The Sonning Neighbourhood Plan has been developed to set out the vision, objectives and resulting policies for the village until 2040 and is consistent with Government's current approach to planning which is intended to involve local communities more directly in planning decisions that affect them.

The Sonning Neighbourhood Plan, or SNP, has been jointly developed by Sonning Parish Council (SPC) and the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society (SSES). The SNP has been produced by a steering group comprising representatives from the two organisations and village residents. The Steering Group has communicated with residents throughout the process by way of public meetings, maildrops and articles in the SPC newsletter, the SSES "*Bridge*" magazine and the "Sonning Buzz" Facebook group. To the extent possible, therefore, it reflects the views and aspirations of the majority of Sonning residents.

Sonning is a quintessential Thames-side village much loved by its residents and visitors alike. Located at a strategic crossing point of the River Thames it is steeped in history, surrounded by beautiful countryside and contains many historic listed buildings within its Conservation Area. The SNP recognises the importance of the village's heritage and natural environment but also takes account of the need for a sustainable future in which it can support appropriate economic development and respond to the call for the provision of additional housing.

The SNP articulates policies which deal with the vision and key objectives identified. Through the consultation and study process the main issues that have emerged have been the negative impact of through-traffic, the importance of protecting the environment and the need for new housing, particularly affordable housing and housing for the elderly, in a manner that enhances the quality of life in the village. The SNP recognizes the Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) emerging Local Plan that has been subject to examination in public, having been submitted to the Secretary of State in February 2025. A post hearings letter has been received from the Inspectors in August 2026 which sets out that the plan is capable of being found sound, subject to modifications. A limited number of sites have been proposed for allocation in the draft Local Plan Update within the Parish. Some of these sites were strongly opposed by residents, however the SNP reluctantly accepts the reality of recent planning approvals.

The SNP Steering Group is grateful to the support from consultants AECOM, facilitated by Locality, and ONH Planning for Good adding to the evidence base upon which the SNP is built. Evolving copies of the draft SNP have been shared with Wokingham Borough Council for feedback.

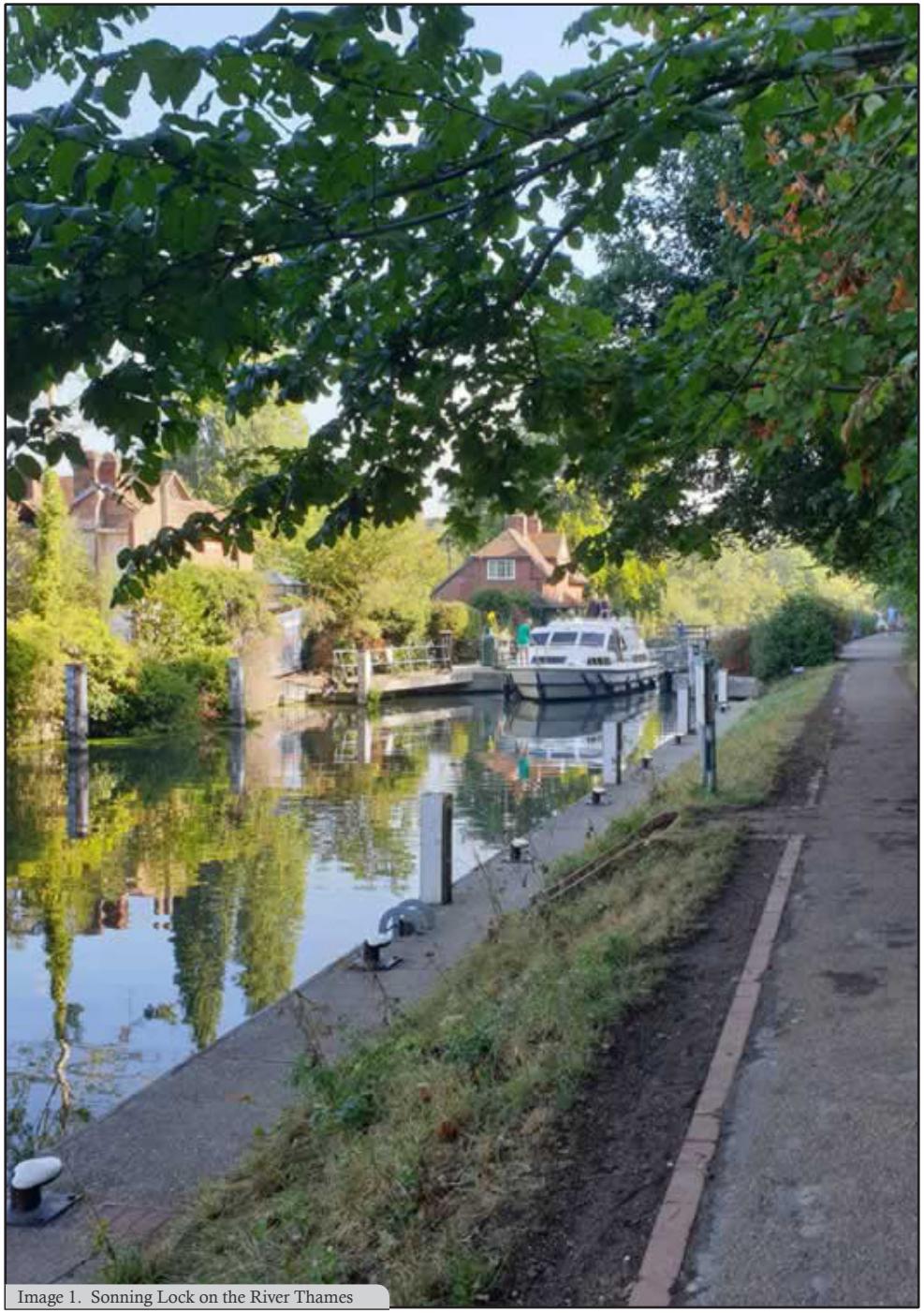


Image 1. Sonning Lock on the River Thames

2 Planning

2.1 The Overarching Planning Process

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), as the statutory authority responsible for planning matters in Sonning, has the following current planning policy documents that contain planning policies. These are:

- The Core Strategy (adopted 2010) – containing the overarching strategic policies (for example setting the number of new houses to be built to 2026)
- The Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan (adopted 2014), which includes adding extra detail to the policies within the Core Strategy
- Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals & Waste Plan (2023)
- Saved policy NRM 6: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area of the revoked South East Plan (2009)

The Plan period for the Core Strategy and MDD above runs until 2026 and consequently WBC embarked upon the update process with a series of consultations starting in 2016. Following consultation on the suggested Local Plan Update (LPU) in 2020 a new garden town at Grazeley was recommended which would have coped with a significant amount of the new housing numbers that WBC is obliged to cater for under the national quota. When it became clear that major development at Grazeley was unacceptable due to subsequent revisions in the emergency planning arrangements around AWE Burghfield, a revised plan was prepared which reallocates the housing requirements amongst the four existing SDLs (Strategic Development Locations), two new large scale development sites (Hall Farm and South Wokingham SDL expansion) and a series of smaller developments in other locations, including two in Sonning selected by WBC from the 12 "promoted" sites in Sonning that were considered by WBC in their LPU. A full list of the 12 promoted sites is included in Section 5.3.

WBC invited comments on the draft Local Plan Update in November 2021/January 2022. Of the two proposed development sites in Sonning, one is an allocated reserve site in the existing MDD and was included in previous LPU consultations, the other extends a recently approved development site that encroaches on Sonning Golf Course. WBC conducted a consultation on its Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Plan from September to November 2024 and submitted the LPU Update 2023 – 2040 to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government in February 2025.

A public consultation on changes to the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) was launched in December 2022 and closed in March 2023. The revised NPPF which was published in December 2023 incorporated several changes and confirmed that neighbourhood plans remain an important part of the Government's planning process.

The SNP has been drafted in compliance with the December 2024 version of the NPPF. This version includes several far-reaching changes to the planning system, the most pertinent to Sonning being those relating to increased housing requirements for WBC overall. Under the previous method for calculating housing requirements, WBC was expected to deliver 748 homes per year. Under the new standard method, this number has initially increased by 79% to 1,336. The latest calculated figure is 1,317, an increase of 76% over the previous 748 figure. This figure will continue to change periodically as new data underpinning the standard methodology is published. It is currently too early for WBC to provide any certainty around the kind of level of growth Sonning is expected to accommodate.

2.2 The Neighbourhood Planning Process.

Since April 2012 local communities have been given legal powers under the Localism Act 2011 to develop Neighbourhood Plans for their areas. The Government Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) website describes Neighbourhood Planning in the following way:

> *Neighbourhood Planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to guide where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided. Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to plan for the types of development to meet their community's needs and where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.*

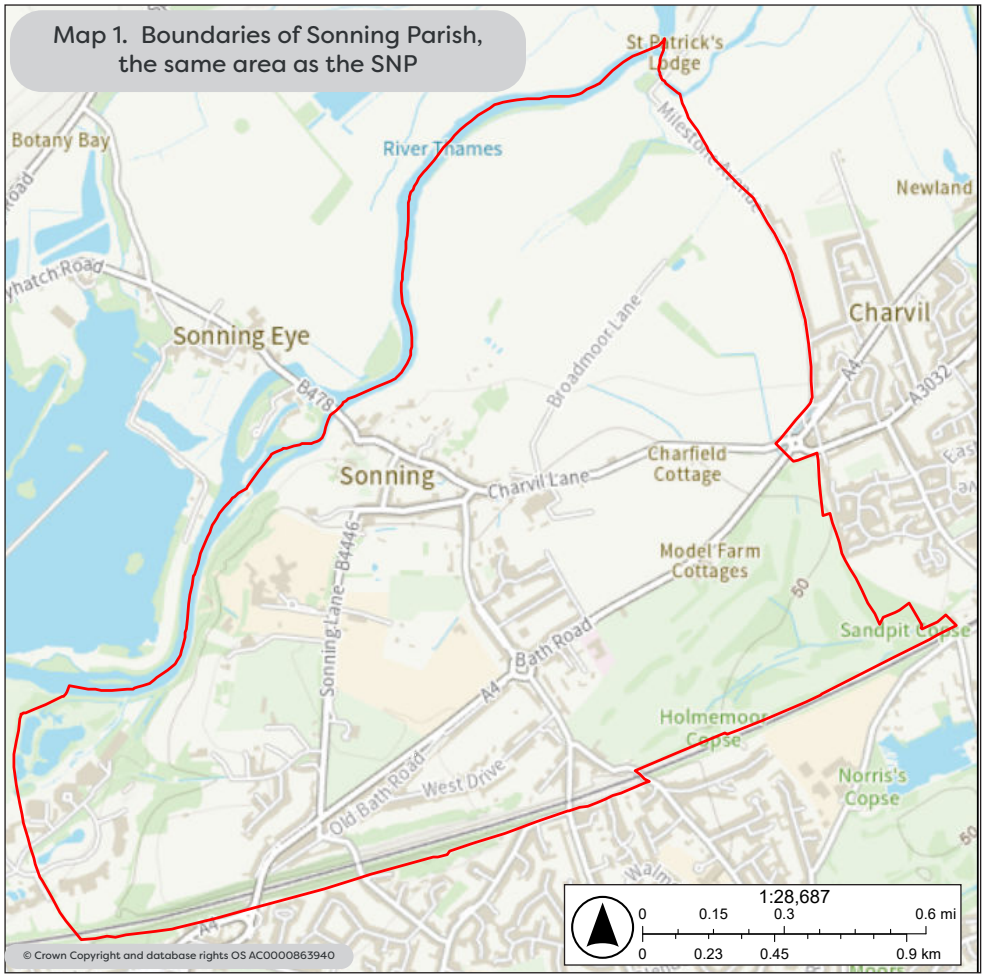
The SNP will be used to decide the future of the village and will:

- aim to protect the distinctive characteristics of the Parish and guide the growth and development of Sonning to 2040 and beyond;
- establish policies by which future planning applications will be guided;
- have legal weight in setting out what development is acceptable to the residents of Sonning. This is because the SNP, in conjunction with the WBC Local Plan, will be used in determining planning applications in Sonning;
- entitle the Parish Council to receive 25% (rather than only 15%) of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) revenues from any new development taking place in Sonning. It was decided by the Steering Group that it would be a good idea to envisage how the neighbourhood element of CIL should be allocated e.g., the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure or dealing with other demands a new development may place on the community. These aspects are covered in section 9 of this Plan.

2.3 Evolution of the Sonning Neighbourhood Plan

2.3.1 WBC Approval

Consideration had been given by SPC and SSES for several years to the need for Sonning to develop its own Neighbourhood Plan. Planning documents such as the Sonning Parish Design Statement (2004) and the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal (2017) have helped to define the character of the village and establish standards for future development, they are guidance documents whereas a neighbourhood plan has statutory status. It is for this reason that SPC and SSES decided in 2019 to proceed with drafting the SNP. A formal application was submitted by SPC requesting permission to proceed and approval was granted by WBC on 24th October 2019 for SPC to develop a NP covering the whole Parish of Sonning, the boundaries of which are shown on Map 1. The Plan period is 2023 to 2040 to coincide with the Plan period for the LPU.



Map 1. Boundaries of Sonning Parish, the same area as the SNP

2.3.2 Public Meeting



Image 2. The Public Meeting to launch the Sonning Neighbourhood Plan

A public meeting, held in Pearson Hall on 18th February 2020 at the beginning of the SNP process, attracted over 100 residents. A joint SPC and SSES team outlined the NP process to the attendees and then answered the many questions that came from the floor. Many volunteers gave their contact details and a Steering Group was formed to address the different aspects that need to be covered in the SNP, such as the demand for new housing, the impact on the conservation area and the local environment and the resulting visions, objectives and policies that need to be established to guide the process. As Sonning has grown in the past 100 years and now spreads well beyond the boundaries of the conservation area it was necessary also to ensure that the voices were heard from all sections of the community. Once established the Steering Group met physically and online (as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic) and prepared a questionnaire to elicit the views of the community.

2.3.3 Questionnaire

The 28-page Questionnaire was issued to all residents in hard and soft copy format in April 2021 with a closing date of 10th May 2021. The questionnaire comprised the following sections:

- ◊ Section 1 - About You (demographics)
- ◊ Section 2 - Housing (current, future, views on proposed development sites)
- ◊ Section 3 - Local Environment (importance, green spaces)
- ◊ Section 4 - Social & Community Facilities (importance and needs)
- ◊ Section 5 - Local Facilities & Businesses (usage and needs)
- ◊ Section 6 - Sonning Conservation Area (importance)
- ◊ Section 7 - Infrastructure, Travel & Transport (adequacy & needs)
- ◊ Section 8 - Allocation of CIL (suggestions).

A copy of the questionnaire can be downloaded from the SNP website at https://sonning.info/snp.

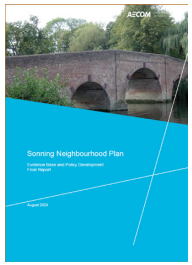
Residents were notified by a maildrop of the imminent delivery of the questionnaire. A hard copy was delivered by volunteers to each household, the names of the local representatives who delivered the questionnaire were provided in case residents had any questions. Residents could fill in and return the hard copy provided or complete the questionnaire

online and if more than one return was desired to be made this was also encouraged in order to give as wide a coverage of views as possible.

The questionnaire elicited a very good response with 53% of the households in the Parish submitting a return. The results, collated and analysed by the Steering Group, are described in the respective sections of this plan providing support to the resulting objectives and policies.

2.3.4 Consultancy Support

The SNP Steering Group, acting through SPC, took advantage of the support provided by MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) - previously the DLUHC (Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) - that was provided through Locality and obtained technical assistance from consultancy firm AECOM in the following areas:

Housing needs assessment	Design codes	Evidence base and policy development
		

In addition to funding the expenses incurred in the preparation of the draft SNP, the DLUHC grant was also used to appoint consultants ONH Planning for Good to provide overall support to the steering group and specific input to the sections on Local Environment and Infrastructure.

Local Gap Study


One of the policies incorporated in the draft SNP related to proposed local gaps and the Steering Group decided to appoint a specialist landscape architect, Briarwood Landscape Architecture, to carry out a study in order to add weight to the evidence base supporting this policy.

2.3.5 Drafting the SNP

Progress on the development of the draft SNP was reported through publications such as the SPC newsletters and the quarterly "*Bridge*" magazine published by SSES.

This version of the SNP takes account of feedback from residents over the period since February 2020, when the first public meeting took place in Pearson Hall. Most significantly it encapsulates feedback to the questionnaire that was circulated to all residents in the Spring of 2021 and the local consultation which ended in July 2025.

As the draft SNP evolved WBC recommended that it should be screened for compliance with SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment) and HRA (Habitats Regulation Assessment) requirements. This was facilitated by WBC in late 2024 and confirmation was received from Historic England and Natural England that full assessments were unlikely to be needed.

Regular and effective contact between the SNP Steering Group and WBC was established to facilitate exchanges of ideas and the resolution of queries, the Steering Group would like to thank James McCabe and Ian Church of WBC for their guidance and help in this respect.

2.3.6 Consultation Statement

A statement detailing the thorough consultation process that was followed throughout the preparation of the SNP can be found on our website: Consultation Statement and Appendices. This statement lists the persons and bodies consulted and the manner in which this was done. It also lists the comments received during the consultation process and the ways in which these comments were addressed in the final version.



Image 3. Discussing the SNP with residents at the Village Show, September 2022



Image 4. Junction of Pearson Road with the High Street



Image 5. St. Andrew's Church and surroundings



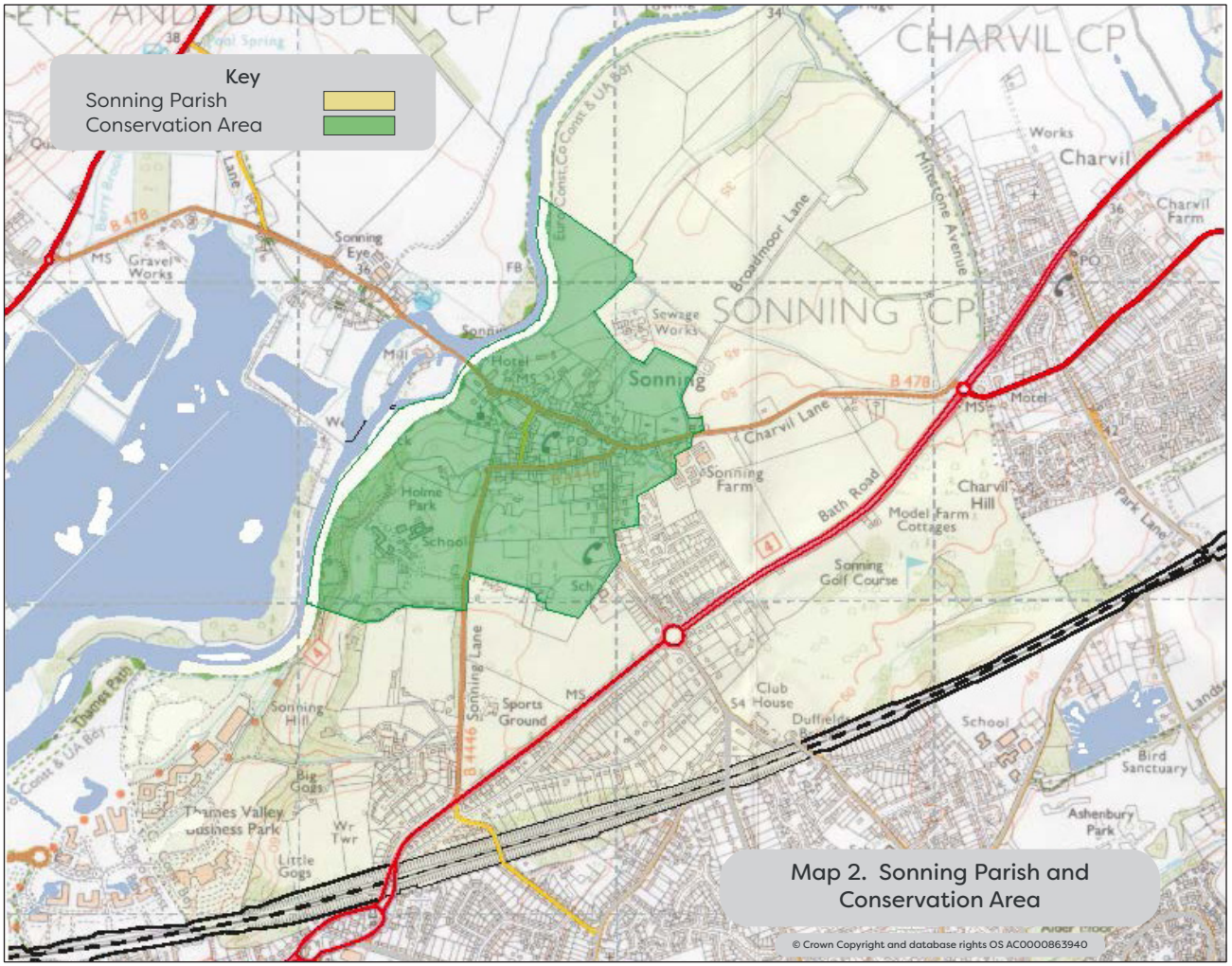
Image 6. Butts Hill Road railway bridge leading into Pound Lane, with Sonning Golf Club in distance

3 The Village of Sonning

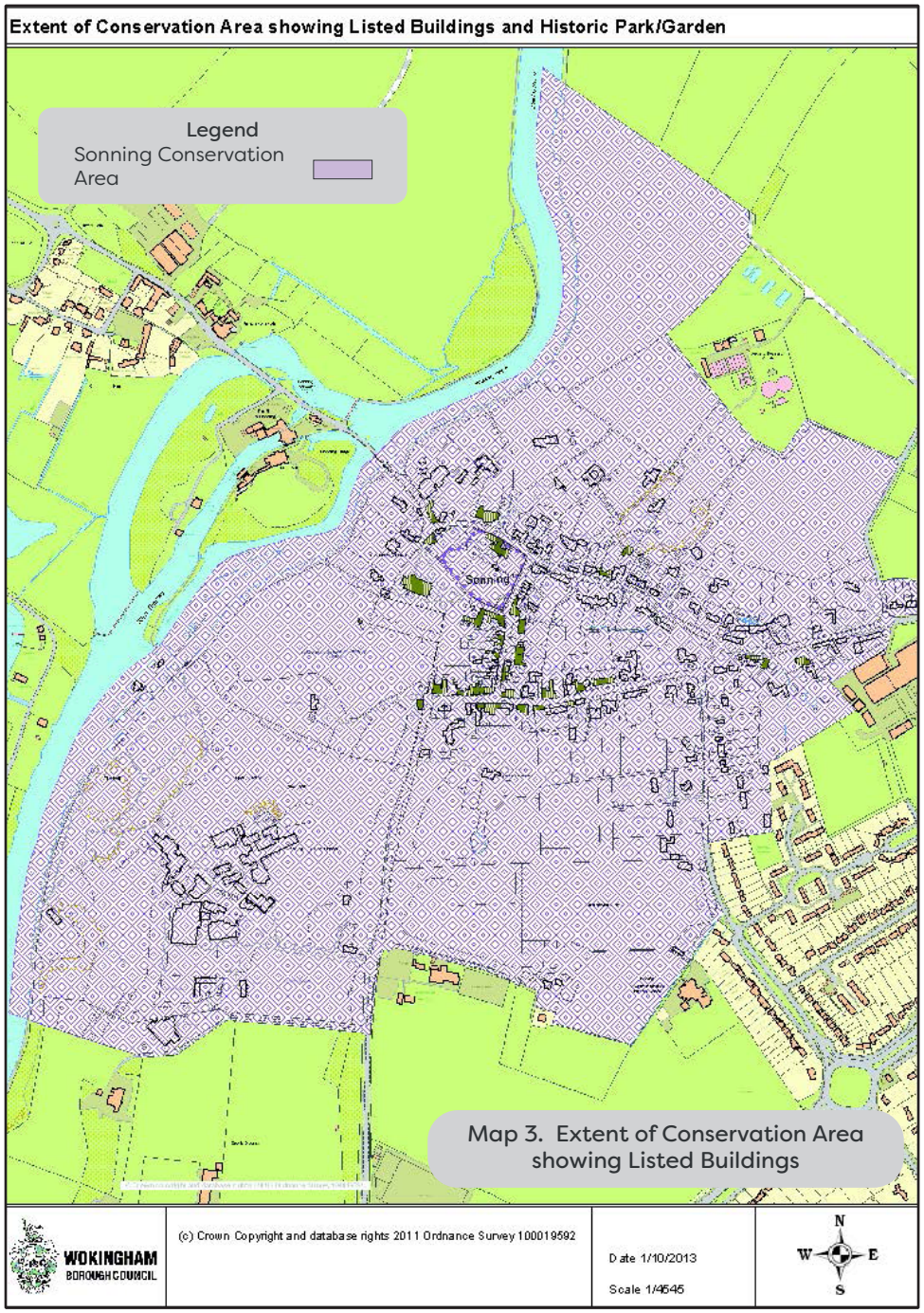
3.1 Topography and Geology

Sonning is located at the southern end of the Chilterns chalk escarpment, on the south bank of the River Thames. The central core settlement area of the village is situated on a gentle slope towards the river, with some parts on a low plateau of river gravels. The map in Section "3.2.1 The Conservation Area" on page 8 shows the physical layout of the central conservation area and its relationship to the River Thames, the Bridge and Sonning Eye. The key streets form an 'A' shape tipped 90° to the right with the B478 Thames Street and B4446 Pearson Road forming the vertices and High Street the cross-bar. Eastwards from the High Street onwards both roads run along higher ground with a shallow valley between them containing a stream that rises off Charvil Lane on University farmland.

The course and characteristic topographic dip and rise of the High Street is shaped by the westward-flowing stream that passes into a culvert beneath the road near the south-east corner of The Deanery and the village pump. The Environment Agency confirms there is no risk of flooding in the village, save for a narrow strip of riparian land running along the banks of the River Thames that lies between 35-37m above ordnance datum (AOD). For reference the Thames Street/Pearson Road roundabout lies at 46m AOD and land rises to the east to 50m AOD where the eastern boundary of the conservation area crosses Charvil Lane.



Map 2. Sonning Parish and Conservation Area



3.2 Designation and Boundaries

3.2.1 The Conservation Area

The historic core of the village of Sonning, containing many listed buildings from the 15th and 16th centuries, was designated a Conservation Area by Berkshire County Council in 1971. It was extended in 1980 and again in 1996. The current boundaries of the conservation area are the river to the north-west, the University Farm (Sonning Farm) to the north and north-east and King George's Field and Reading Blue Coat School to the south, as shown in "Map 3. Extent of Conservation Area showing Listed Buildings" on facing page.

A Sonning Conservation Area Study was undertaken in 1996, which identified opportunities for enhancement and improvement within the Conservation Area. This was followed by the Sonning Design Statement (2004) which proved to be a useful tool for assessing planning applications.

Work started in 2011 on an update to the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal (SCAA) using the guidance set out by Historic England in their document "Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (2011)". Undertaken predominantly by local residents under the management of SPC and SSES, the final document was adopted as a guidance document by WBC in 2017.

The conservation area was divided into the following nine character areas:

- The River
- The Churchyard
- Thames Street
- High Street
- Sonning Lane
- Charvil Lane
- Pearson Road
- Pound Lane
- Green Boundary

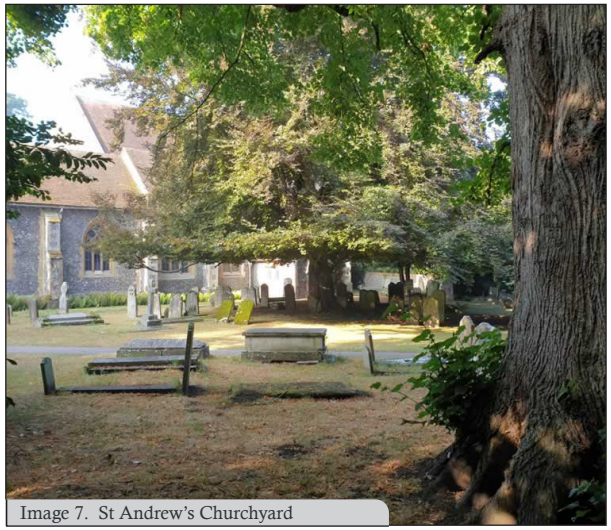


Image 7. St Andrew's Churchyard

The key features comprising each character area such as focal points, focal buildings, views/vistas, boundary walls, streets and street furniture are listed and described together with the key positive and key negative characteristics and issues. The following appendices of the SCAA (2017) provided supplementary information:

Appendix I	Building Materials
Appendix II	Listed Buildings
Appendix III	Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Positive Buildings Enhancing Character
Appendix IV	Archaeology
Appendix V	Natural Environment
Appendix VI	Bibliography
Appendix VII	Acknowledgements

As the SCAA is a relatively recent document describing the characteristics that define Sonning's core central area, it remains a key evidence-based guidance document for reference in determining planning applications within the Conservation Area. The detail within the SCAA is not repeated in the SNP, a pdf copy of the full SCAA is available at the following link:

https://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk/_pdf/Other/SonningCAA2017.pdf

Conservation Areas are defined as ***'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'***. Conservation area protection thus extends beyond buildings, to include streets, trees, paths and views.

The questionnaire issued to all residents contained the following questions relating to the conservation area:

Q6.1 Is it important to you that development does not have a harmful impact on historic buildings and the Conservation Area in Sonning? Q6.2 Should the current Conservation Area be extended?

97% of respondents said that the Conservation Area is very or quite important to them. 25% said it should be extended, although mostly the reasons given were to prevent development rather than to include areas that meet the definition of a conservation area.

In order that the Conservation Area remains relevant the boundaries will be reviewed at the time of the next Conservation Area Appraisal which will take place during the currency of the Local Plan Update prior to 2040.

It is clear from the feedback from residents that the central conservation area of Sonning is an extremely important factor in their feelings about living in Sonning, this is reflected in the following Vision for the Conservation Area.

VISION – Conservation Area

The unique historical centre of Sonning will be maintained and enhanced for future generations whilst ensuring that the buildings remain suitable for modern living, are fit for purpose, pleasant and convenient for all users, and easy to maintain and manage.



Image 8. Robert Palmer Cottages, a Grade II listed building

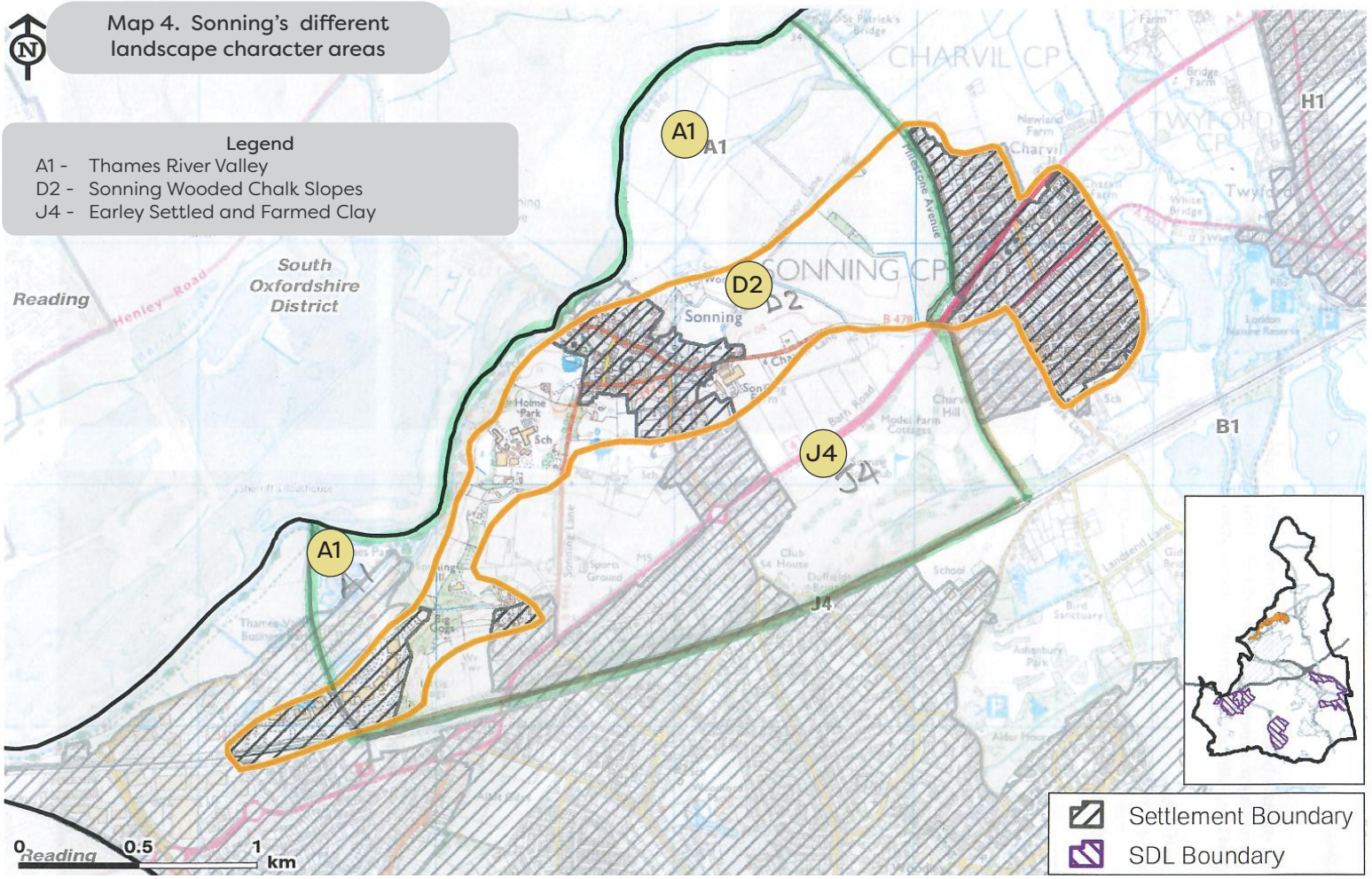
3.2.2 Boundaries and Landscape

Beyond the Conservation Area the Parish boundaries are the river, Milestone Avenue and Sonning Golf Course to the east, the railway to the south and the Thames Valley Park nature reserve to the south-west. Sonning is almost unique in having no private houses and gardens at the rivers' edge thus allowing access to the river throughout the Parish. The Thames Path runs through the Parish up to the bridge and then crosses to the Oxfordshire side, however a public footpath continues on the Berkshire side all the way to the end of the Parish.

As described later in this Plan, Sonning Parish is made up from 3 of the different landscape character areas that are defined in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2004 and 2019). As shown in the map below they run in bands roughly parallel to the river:

- the Thames River Valley band (A1), with its wooded ridgeline and small wood land copses that provides much used recreational benefits
- the Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes band (D2), with its wooded slopes and open fields separating Sonning and Charvil
- and the Woodley - Earley Settled and Farmed Clay band (J4), the unbuilt part of which contains important recreational areas such as the Berkshire County Sports grounds and Sonning Golf Club.

Map 4. Sonning's different landscape character areas



3.3 Historical Development

Sonning's situation in the broad gravel plains of the Thames, with a shallower crossing of the river at this point and rising land to the east made it a natural place for settlement. Its name derives from the Saxon tribe or family of Sunna, reflected also in the names of Sunninghill and Sunningdale. During the 11th century an Anglo-Saxon bishop was occasionally referred to as the Bishop of Sonning. Following the Norman Conquest, church reorganisation located the cathedral at Sarum/Salisbury. The link with Salisbury was maintained until 1846.

Sonning was divided into two manors, one belonging to the Bishop of Salisbury and the other to the Dean and Chapter of the cathedral. The bishop maintained a palace on the edge of the village in the grounds of what was to become Holme Park at the end of the 18th century. The palace site was excavated in 1910-1912 and a plan can be viewed in the church while a model exists in Reading Museum. The Dean and Chapter's Manor (the Rectory Manor) was located around The Bull Inn and the Deanery and to the north of Thames Street.

The crossing over the Thames had a profound influence on the layout of the village. Sonning's familiar brick bridge was constructed in 1790 by local builder John Treacher and is intersected by the county boundary between Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Two-way traffic was permitted before the installation of traffic lights in the 1960s and a structure better suited to the conveyance of pack animals and pedestrians continues to bear a highly disproportionate amount of road traffic across the Thames.

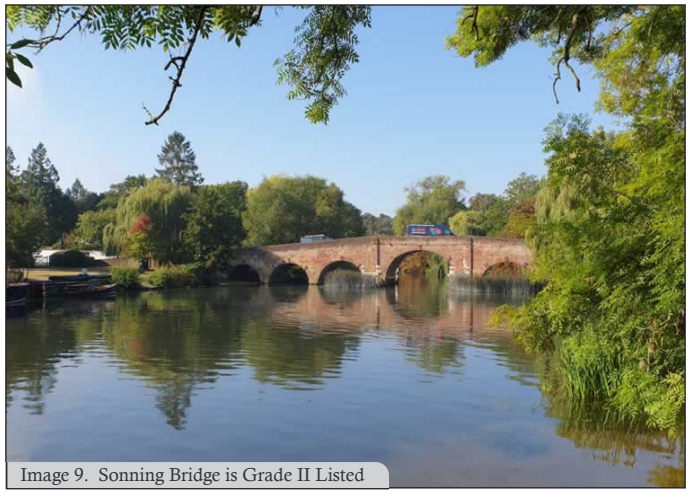


Image 9. Sonning Bridge is Grade II Listed

From the bridge, Thames Street rises eastwards towards Twyford, Windsor and ultimately, London. The south-westward road to Reading must once have passed in a direct line through the churchyard from the bridge to Sonning Lane, as indicated by a footpath that now follows this route. At some time, perhaps with the enlargement of the church, this road was blocked off, producing the existing sharp bend.

At the corner of Sonning Lane and Pearson Road (formerly Sonning Street), west of the High Street lies a large plot of land, all historically in church control. This includes The Bull Public House and its complex of buildings, the churchyard and between the church and the river a large plot of land allocated for a vicarage in 1220. To the south of the churchyard is the extensive park in which lay the Bishop's palace; to the north lies the Deanery.



Image 10. The Bull Public House is a Grade II* listed building

In Pearson Road a number of substantial late-medieval and Tudor houses indicate the presence of an affluent tenant class (e.g., The Old Cottage, Turpins/Rich's Cottage, Dower House and Sonningdene). These houses would have stood within large enclosures (toft and croft) which have subsequently been infilled with later buildings.

The palace passed into royal ownership in 1574 and was sold in 1628 eventually being purchased by Thomas Rich in 1654. The Rectory Manor, also sold during the Commonwealth, was subsequently acquired in the 18th century by the Palmers of Hurst. A map of 1783 shows village properties almost equally divided between the Rich and Palmer estates. In 1795 the Palmers purchased the Rich estate. A number of timber-framed cottages survive from the 16th century in Pearson Road and the west side of the High Street; these often retain important original features such as leaded casements. In contrast, on the east side of the High Street stand two examples of metropolitan architecture of the Georgian period. This juxtaposition of polite and vernacular architecture is a characteristic of the 18th and 19th century contributions to the village as can be seen particularly in Thames Street where substantial houses in ample grounds face terraces of former estate cottages.

The Palmers became the dominant influence throughout the 19th century. They demolished the remnants of the Bishop's Palace/Rich family house and built a new 5-bay house on top of the 'escarpment' above the river, Holme Park. The lack of male heirs meant that

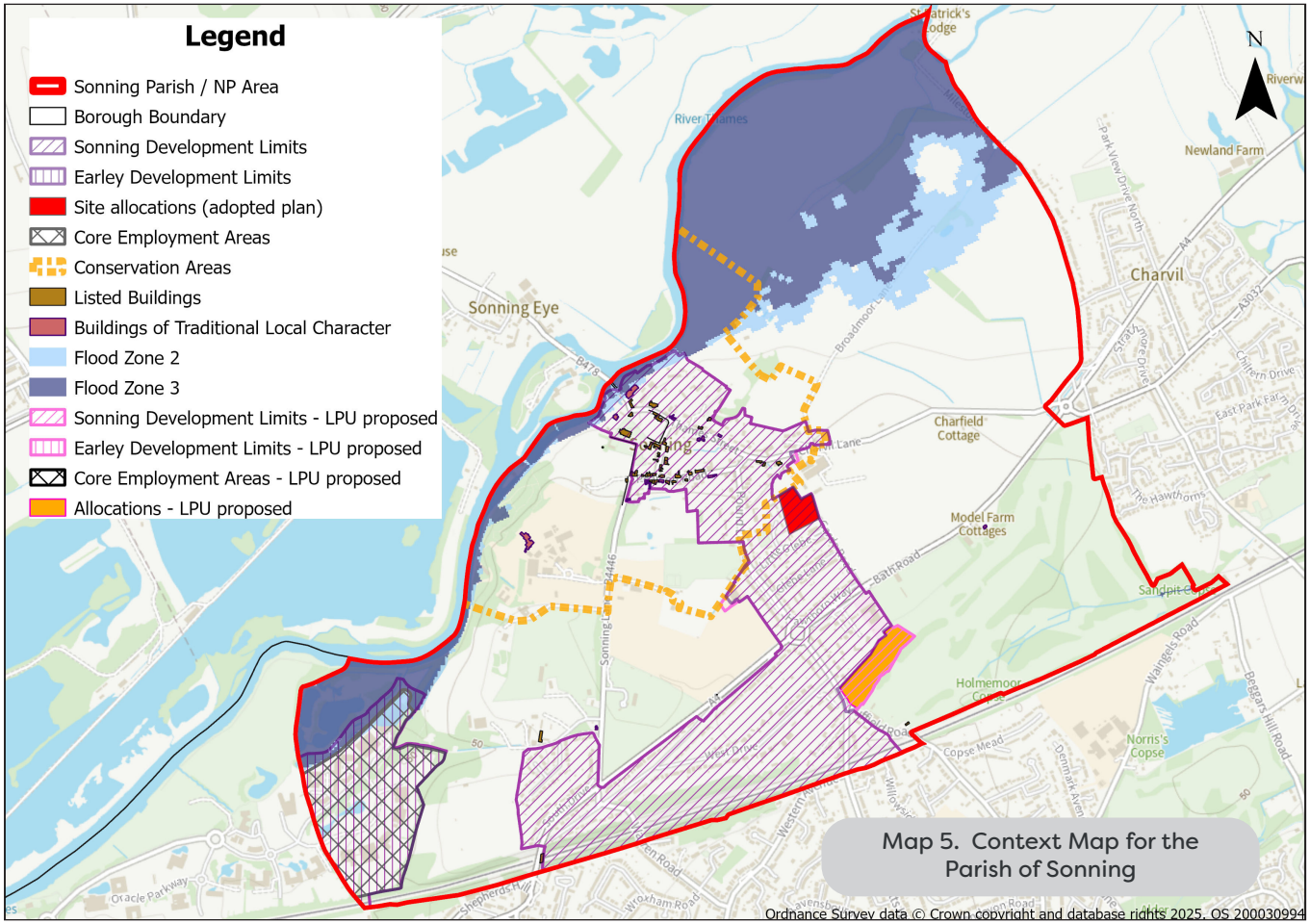
this estate was finally broken up, first in 1910 and then again in 1934. With these sales substantial plots of land became available for development.

3.4 Recent Developments

Until well into the 20th century the development of the village was concentrated in the small area centred on the 'A' shaped core of High Street, Pearson Road and Thames Street. Consequently, this area constitutes the heart of the Conservation Area and is home to many listed buildings dating from the 15th to the early 20th centuries. The village subsequently expanded southwards in the 20th century and the current extent of the Parish can be seen in the map below:

This expansion took place along Pound Lane, in the area between the A4 and the railway line (now the southern boundary of the Parish) and later in Sonning Meadows. The houses in Holmemoor Drive, South Drive and Old Bath Road were generally built in the 1950s and 1960s although some houses on Old Bath Road were built later, they are individually designed detached houses built on plots of between a quarter and a half acre.

Much information on the history of Sonning is available in "The Book of Sonning[1]" and more recent historical recollections are recounted in "Village Voices", a publication by the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society. In "The History of The Sonning Parish Magazine" by Gordon Nutbrown, it is reported that in 1912 "The Manor House and land, Charvil Farm and East Park Farm were to be offered for auction at The White Hart, Sonning. Among the attractions it is mentioned that an 18 hole golf course at Sonning is in contemplation". It is believed that the area containing West Drive was part of the farmland auctioned. In the February 1914 edition it mentions that the gentlemen's golf links and clubhouse are to be opened on May 1st. "The Ladies course on the other side of the line in Woodley Parish has begun."



Map 5. Context Map for the Parish of Sonning

The area of land upon which West Drive and its dwellings are built was farmland prior to the auction in 1912. The Ladies course was then constructed with some three holes being laid out in the land to the west of Pound Lane then known as Butts Hill Road, Woodley, the remaining six holes were part of the main golf course. A track was made in the middle which eventually became West Drive. In 1927 the purchaser of the land took advantage of the Land Registration Act 1925 (which introduced Land registration for the first time in England and Wales) to sell off land for the development which took place in the 1930s and 1950s. It would appear the ladies' three holes ceased functioning when developments started and in 1946 Sonning Golf Club purchased the Drive itself from Mr Wright so that its borehole could be utilised freely, it was eventually replaced by an electricity substation.

The houses in West Drive were built in the 1930s and 1950s but over the years many have been extended and improved, or replaced; it is a very low density area with most plots in excess of three quarters of an acre. West Drive is a private street with the freehold registered title held in a private company owned by the residents. The Drive is lined by a variety of mature trees growing in the grass verges including oak, lime, beech, sycamore and horse chestnut. There are no pavements and few light standards. All of the above combine to make this a unique, leafy suburban areas with a feeling of spaciousness.

1 The Book of Sonning by Angela Perkins published in 1977 as a limited edition ISBN 0 86203 659 5

Mustard Lane, to the south of West Drive once formed the route from Pound Lane to Woodley, however with the coming of the railway Mustard Lane was cut off at the railway embankment, and a bridge was built in Pound Lane. The railway thus formed the southern boundary of the Parish, and the major portion of Mustard Lane, now on the Woodley side, was renamed as part of Western Avenue.



Image 11. West Drive

Sonning Meadows is a discretely located development of 32 medium to large detached houses off Sonning Lane built in the late 1970s and early 1980s and is the last significant housing development that was built, since then developments have comprised consolidation of a few plots, demolition of the houses that were sited on them and redevelopment with more houses or apartments. The West Court apartments on the Pound Lane/West Drive junction are an example having been built in 2 stages in 1994 and 1997. Construction started in early 2025 on the 13 house development at the junction of Pound Lane and Duffield Road, almost opposite West Court, on land that had formerly been a part of Sonning Golf Club. Outline planning approval has been given to the 50 house development adjoining this site on the former practice ground.

The railway forms the southern boundary between Sonning and Woodley and the village is bounded by farmland to the east and the river to the north. The western (Sonning Lane) and eastern (Charvil Lane) approaches to the old village from A4 remain predominantly rural, forming green gaps of playing fields, trees and farmland. The only non-agricultural use of this farmland was Sonning's sewage treatment works (STW), accessed down Broadmoor Lane, which was closed and replaced with a pumping station located near The Great House hotel that sends the flow to the Wargrave STW. The old Sonning STW site is still owned by the Environment Agency and is currently used for agricultural research.

The Thames Valley Business Park that is located at the western boundary of the Parish was developed following the decommissioning of the coal-fired Earley power station in the late 1960s. The business park contains offices occupied by several prestigious companies such as Oracle and Microsoft and is built around a wetland area and nature reserve that serves as a valuable recreational facility for Sonning residents. Several of the office blocks are no longer in use due to changes in work patterns and have been subject to vandalism. The business park is a valuable asset and is one of the sites under consideration for the rebuilding of the Royal Berks Hospital.

The built area of Sonning village is surrounded by natural borders and green spaces. Playing fields protect Sonning from urban sprawl when approaching the village from the south along Sonning Lane, the river protects it along the north-west boundary and there is farmland to the east. Conservation Area status has generally helped to preserve the character of the central core village. In addition, the physical constraints of the river and the fact that the street frontages are so closely developed, has left little room for major change.


Image 12. Farmland provides a green border for some homes in Sonning

As pressures from economic development, population growth and increased traffic intensified with the expansion of Reading and its suburbs by the 1970s and 1980s, the preservation of Sonning's heritage has faced new and difficult challenges. Many of the village's traditional crafts and retail outlets gradually began to disappear, a story repeated throughout many parts of rural England. Although its centre was designated a 'conservation area' fifty years ago, the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society was founded in 2004 specifically to address important environmental concerns.

The varied and diverse settlement that has resulted from the post war growth has resulted in several distinct character areas which are described in more detail in the Sonning Design Guidance and Codes report prepared by AECOM in March 2024.

4 Sonning Today and Tomorrow

4.1 Sonning Today

Sonning is a well-known Thameside village, highly valued by its residents who greatly appreciate its friendly village environment, its attractive central conservation area with its wide range of historic buildings and its rural setting and tranquil riverside walks.



Image 13. Sonning Bridge over the Thames with the Great House, the Bull and the Church

The 2021 census recorded that the Parish of Sonning today comprises a dwelling stock of 688 properties housing a resident population of 1617 persons. Comparable figures in the 2011 census were 653 dwellings and 1631 population. A report from the Office of National Statistics[2] provides estimated population data yearly by parish. According to this document Sonning's estimated population in the year 2001 was 1432 growing to an estimated population of 1716 in the year 2019. Whilst there is some inconsistency with the data from the various sources it appears that Sonning's population actually decreased after 2011 despite a modest increase in dwelling stock. On a borough-wide basis the 2021 census data available for Wokingham borough shows that Wokingham's population increased from 154,000 in 2011 to 177,500 in 2021, an increase of 15%. Within this total, there was a 28.2% increase in people aged 65 and over, 11.0% in people aged 15 – 64 and an 18.0% increase in children under 15 years. This historical growth is likely to continue based on the additional 17,283 dwellings forecast to be required between 2018 and 2040 in the Local Housing Needs Assessment for Wokingham Borough[3]. These data reinforce the fact that Sonning is located in an area of high population growth and Sonning cannot expect to be entirely exempt from this trend in the future.

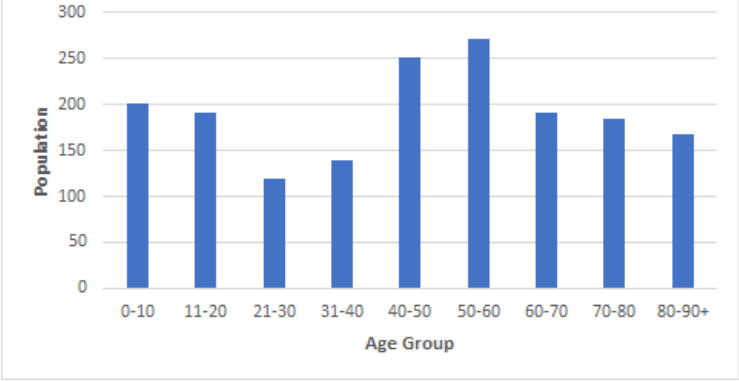
According to the responses to the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire received from 53% of households in May 2021, two thirds of respondents have lived in Sonning for at least 11 years, 13% over 40 years, 30% for 21 – 40 years and a further 22% from 11 –20 years. This is reflected in the demographic response, with two thirds of the respondents being over 55 years of age, made up as 31% of respondents aged over 70 and 36% aged from 55 – 69. Only 7% of respondents were aged below 25 years.

2 https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/adhocs/12324parishpopulationestimatesformid2001tomid2019basedonbestfittingofoutputareastoparishes/parish110119popest.zip

3 Wokingham Borough Council Local Housing Needs Assessment 2018 - 2036

According to data for the Parish of Sonning from the Office of National Statistics[4] the population distribution in 2019 was estimated as shown in the following chart:

Fig. 1. Sonning Population Age Distribution 2019



The percentage of the population in each of the above age groups is remarkably consistent over the period covered by the ONS report, 2001 – 2019, except for the percentage of the population in the 80-90+ category which increased from 4% in 2001 to 10% in 2019. This trend is consistent with increased longevity, it also supports the narrative responses from the questionnaire that most Sonning residents wish to stay in Sonning but many see themselves downsizing. The data also demonstrates that Sonning offers an attractive place for families with young children to settle, and the questionnaire shows that many stay for some time, but employment opportunities are not here to retain the 20 – 35 year age group.



Image 14. Sonning Towpath

In response to the question in the questionnaire "What do you value about living in Sonning?" the three most popular answers by far were "Proximity to River", "Rural Community" and "Village Community". These views were corroborated by two of the answers to the question "What aspects of development would you like to see in Sonning?" where the three most popular responses by far, each representing 23% of the total responses, were "Countryside", "Quality of Natural Environment" and "Transport". The high response level for the third answer, "Transport", is largely due to the negative impact of traffic on the residents, a subject dealt with in more detail later in this plan.

4 https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/adhocs/12324parishpopulationestimatesformid2001tomid2019basedonbestfittingofoutputareastoparishes/parish110119popest.zip



Image 15. Thames St looking towards Sonning Bridge

Judging from the responses to the questionnaire, Sonning residents feel comfortable with their village and they greatly value and appreciate its history and local environment. The biggest negative factor voiced by residents time and time again is the impact of traffic. Historically Sonning owes its presence to the river crossing, in earlier times this created trade and wealth but the huge increase in car ownership has resulted in long queues along the approach roads to the bridge at peak times causing noise and air quality issues, as well as the general nuisance and degradation of the environment. Traffic problems are not limited to through traffic crossing the bridge; in common with so many other villages throughout the country widespread car ownership coupled with the scarcity of dedicated parking at many of the historic houses results in congestion of the residential roads, causing the bus service to frequently get stuck. More will be said about this problem in later sections of this report.

4.2 Sonning Village Facilities

In addition to the attractions of its heritage and beautiful local environment, Sonning today enjoys a wide range of local facilities such as a village shop (the Sonning Village Hamper), hairdressing salon and local hostelries (The Bull Hotel and public house, the Sonning Club and the Great House hotel and Coppa Club), good pre-school, primary and secondary level schools (the Sonning Junior school and the Reading Blue Coat school) and a wide range of local community and sporting facilities. Other facilities such as the Mill Theatre and the French Horn Hotel and Restaurant are located close by in Sonning Eye.

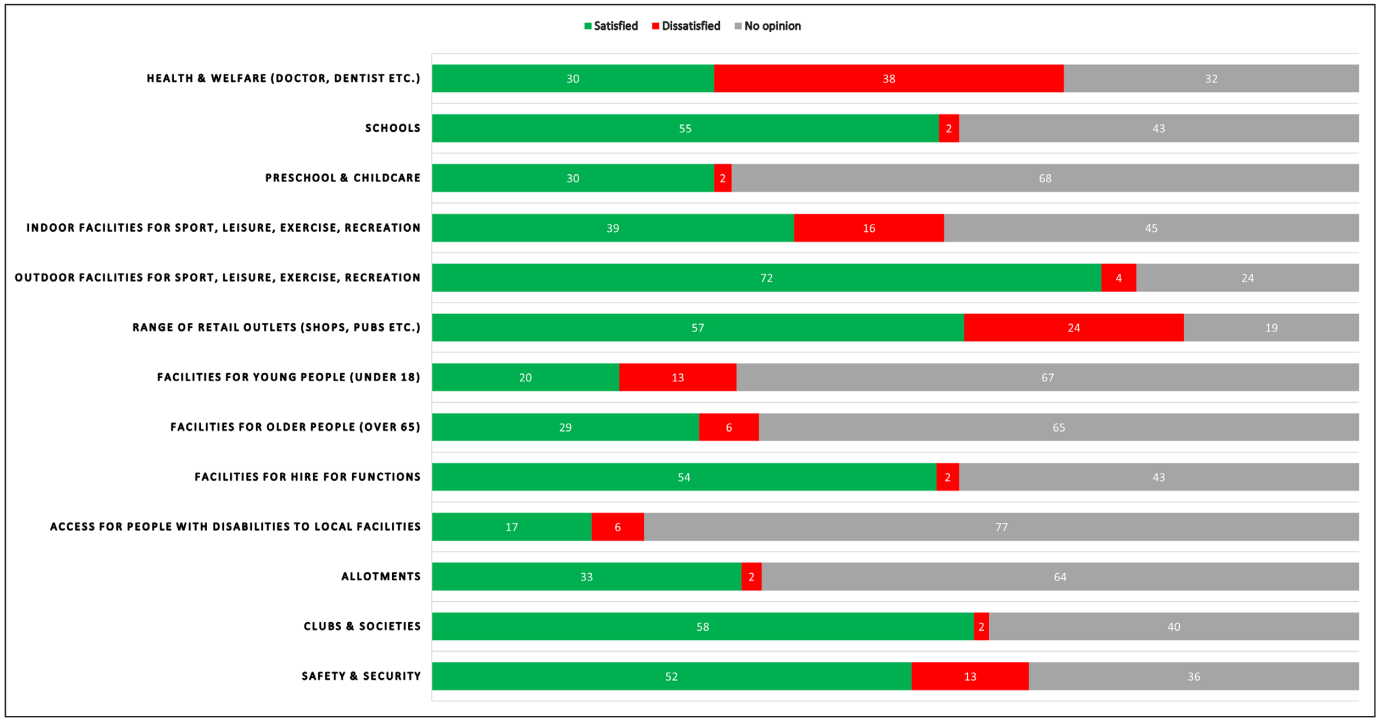
Community facilities include St. Andrew's Church (including the Ark and St. Sarik Room), Pearson Hall and Beech Lodge. The Robert Palmer's Almshouse Charity operates the 6 impressive almshouse cottages in Pearson Road. Together with the Pearson Hall and Sonning Club complex, they form the natural centre of the village.

There is a very wide range of leisure and sporting facilities available. King George's field, located in the heart of the village, provides an easily accessible recreation area that is also used by the local clubs for cricket and tennis. The Wharf, owned by SPC, located on the banks of the Thames outside the Great House, and the towpath upstream and downstream from the bridge provide extensive riverside leisure opportunities, there is the popular 18-hole Sonning Golf Course and the extensive, sports grounds along Sonning Lane and A4 that provide facilities for rugby, hockey, tennis and soccer.

In the Questionnaire residents were asked to say whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability and suitability of the various facilities and services in Sonning. The responses are given below. Notable in the responses is that most residents were happy with the schooling facilities in the village, recognizing that the village has pre-school, primary and secondary schools with many other choices in neighbouring towns. Similarly the level of satisfaction with outdoor facilities for sport and leisure was high recognizing that there are many such facilities in the village.

Looking in more detail at the levels of usage, also covered in the questionnaire, some 50% of respondents use the Sonning Village Hamper regularly and roughly 40% use the Bull Inn and Coppa Club regularly. A very small minority said that they don't use these facilities at all. Overall, therefore, it seems that residents are generally content with the facilities on offer.

Fig. 2. Satisfaction with Facilities & Services



A small number of local businesses operate out of dedicated office buildings such as the Old Forge off Pearson Road and Mead Park off Sonning Lane. A growing number of businesses operate out of residential houses, particularly with the increase in popularity of WFH (working from home) facilitated by the growth of IT. When asked whether more businesses are needed, only more shops received a significant vote (37%). Despite this, good support was shown to the question on encouraging new businesses (38%) and local jobs (39%). Not surprisingly 73% of respondents said that farming is important to the local economy and environment, recognizing that Sonning is surrounded by farmland.

4.3 The Vision for Sonning

Sonning is a popular place to live today and will continue to be so in the future. Like many villages in the south-east of England, the price of housing is a major constraint to those wishing to settle in such a desirable location. The demand for housing and the way in which this plan aims to satisfy the demand are dealt with in more detail later in this Plan, but it is clear that provision must be made for growth and the challenge is to ensure that growth is integrated into the current much-loved fabric of the Parish in a sympathetic way.

OVERALL VISION

Sonning will continue to be known by people at all stages of their lives as one of Berkshire's best Parish communities in which to live; for its semi-rural historic village character and countryside landscapes; and for its attractive green lanes, green spaces and thriving natural environment. The neighbourhood will be safe, clean, and well connected to the neighbouring parishes by unpolluted roads and pathways. New development will protect or enhance Sonning's rural settlements and provide good quality housing that is in keeping with the distinct character areas across the Parish, and is appropriate for the needs of the community.



Image 16. Sonning Lock



Image 17. Pearson Road

5 Housing

5.1 Resident's Views

The questionnaire sent to all Sonning households in April 2021 contained several questions about the current housing situation, future housing expectations and resident's views on where any future development should and should not be located. These views are discussed below and they feed into the vision, objectives and policies that follow.

5.2 Present Ownership Profile

The vast majority (83%) of respondents currently live in 3 or 4+ bedroom houses, these are overwhelmingly (87%) owner-occupied. Most residents (89%) report that they are currently in suitable premises but an appreciable percentage (28%) of large householders envisage that they will downsize in the foreseeable future. Most respondents (60%) expect to stay in Sonning, 25% are unsure and only 13% expect to relocate away from the village. Reasons given for relocation are numerous with many looking for a quieter location with less traffic.

5.3 Attitudes Towards Development

Residents were asked to consider the following 11 potential sites for housing development, these sites were the ones identified by WBC as "promoted sites" at the time of the questionnaire, and considered by WBC in their emerging LPU:

Site No.	WBC ID number	Location	Area (ha)	Proposed number of dwellings
1	5SO001	Land at Sonning Farm (Bull Close)	1.29	25
2	5SO002	Land East of Garde Road	6.16	92
3	5SO003	Land North of Thames Street	3.45	54
4	5SO004	Land West of Milestone Avenue	8.81	133
5	5SO005	Land at Sonning Golf Club	0.77	13
7	5SO007	Land Adjacent to Model farm Cottages	0.19	3
8	5SO008	Land at Sonning Golf Club	1.6	24
9	5SO009	Thatched Cottage, Sonning Lane	3.64	6
10	5SO010	RAMS RFC (Old Redingensians)	4.29	100
11	5SO011	Land at Holme Park farm	25.3	unknown
A	N/A	Land Adjacent to Sunrise Homes	1.18	57 flats

Additional sites have been promoted since the questionnaire was issued, as is often the case, details of which are shown on WBC's interactive map The newly promoted sites include an extension to Site 5SO008, designated as site 5SO013, extending over the whole golf practice area. This site is discussed in more detail below.

The questionnaire made it clear that site 1 (Bull Close) had been included in the earlier LPU and that sites 5 and A had already received planning approval for development. Despite this, all 11 identified potential sites were dismissed to a greater or lesser extent and no new sites were suggested. The following diagram shows the results in which it is clear that the strongly disapprove/disapprove ranking far outweighs the positive ranking for all sites with the exception of site 7 (3 proposed dwellings at Model Farm along the A4) where the positive and negative votes were roughly equal:

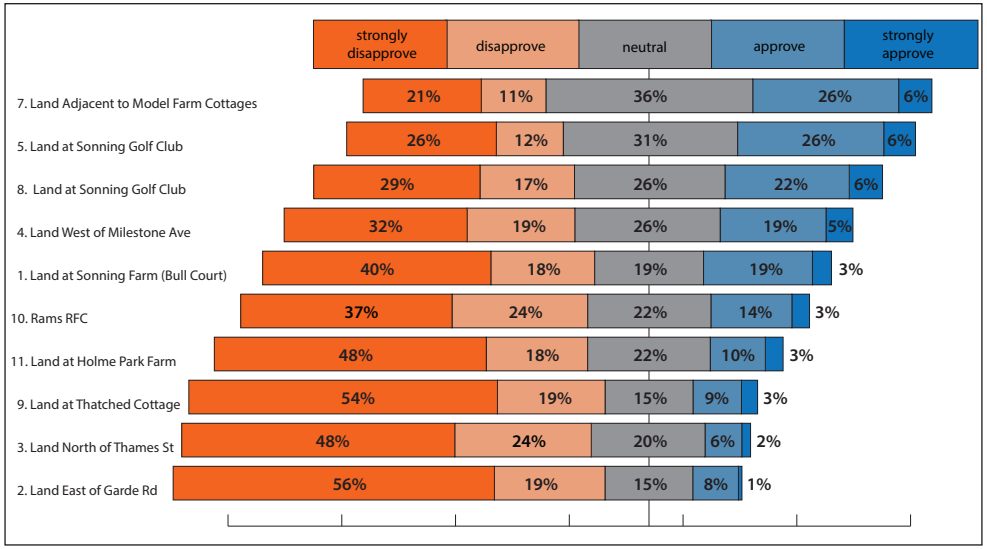


Fig. 3. Which sites do you approve of as suitable areas for housing development? (Q2.3)

The almost universal opposition to any of the proposed new developments was further amplified by resident's responses to the questions asking where else would development be favoured, what it might entail and what residents consider to be the important factors regarding planning issues. The questions are listed below with a summary of the responses.

Q2.4 List any specific locations suitable for new development? Almost universally the answer was "nowhere in the Parish."

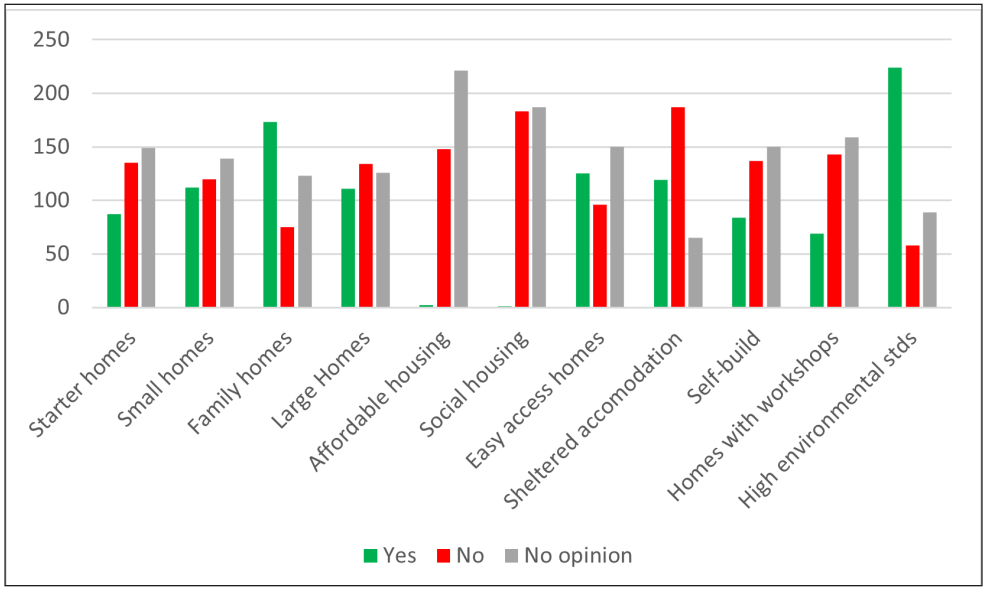
Q2.5 List any specific locations which are unsuitable. Nearly all responses suggested that there were no suitable locations

Q2.6 What type of new homes would you like to see in Sonning? The responses were

not clear-cut, the table below shows the number of votes and percentage allocated to the various options:

Type of homes	Yes	No	No opinion
Starter homes	87 (23%)	135 (36%)	149 (40%)
Smaller homes (2 bed)	112 (30%)	120 (32%)	139 (37%)
Family homes (3 bed)	173 (47%)	75 (20%)	123 (33%)
Larger family homes (4+ bed)	111 (30%)	134 36%)	126 (34%)
Affordable housing	2 (1%)	148 (40%)	121 (59%)
Social housing	1 (1%)	183 (49%)	187 (50%)
Adaptable/easy access homes	125 (34%)	96 (26%)	150 (40%)
Supported/sheltered accommodation	119 (32%)	187 (50%)	65 (17%)
Opportunities for self-build	84 (23%)	137 37%)	150 (40%)
Live/work - home with workshops	69 (19%)	143 (39%)	139 (42%)
Dwellings built to high environmental standards	224 (60%)	58 (16%)	89 (24%)

Fig. 4. What type of new homes would you like to see in Sonning? (Q2.3)



The biggest support from those who ticked the "Yes" box was for 3 bedroom houses followed by 2 bedroom houses, bungalows and sheltered housing. For those who ticked the "No" box all forms of housing were opposed to a greater or lesser extent, this was consistent with answers in previous sections reflecting a general opposition to all new development. There was a strong support for dwellings to be built to high environmental standards.

The low support for affordable and social housing is believed to be largely due to a misunderstanding of the nature of such housing and concern that it might downgrade the value of existing properties if located close by.

Q2.7 If sites come forward, what type of development would you prefer? Most support (39%) was for infill sites (1 – 2 houses), very little support was shown for larger sites within the village envelope or outside the village envelope.

Q2.8 What housing density would you prefer? The biggest support (63%) was for low density, with moderate density receiving 25% of the votes and high density only 2%.

Q2.9 What are the most important planning considerations? Communal green space and suitability for the elderly each received 25% of the votes, the next highest categories were that it should be In keeping with the housing character of Sonning (17%) and that they should be modern, innovative structures (13%).

In summary, the overwhelming message from the residents is that they are opposed to large scale development but if development of any sort takes place it should be small scale, to a high standard, surrounded by green space and suitable for the elderly. These factors are taken forward for embodiment in the Vision, Objectives and Policies below, however this SNP acknowledges that it is unrealistic to meet all the aspirations expressed by residents in their responses to the questions in the questionnaire and hence the SNP supports a limited number of new houses, compatible with the character of the village and its limited infrastructure.

In the recent past applications have been submitted for the demolition of existing houses on large plots of land with replacement by single larger houses, multiple houses on the same plot or in some cases by blocks of flats or care homes. Replacement of single units by multiple use units tend to change the character of the area and needs careful consideration as to their impact. The recent applications to demolish existing houses in southern Pound Lane and replace them with large residential care homes are instances where such applications, if approved, would dramatically affect the existing residential nature of the area. Because of their impact upon the character of the locality such large scale proposals tend to elicit significant responses from local residents.

Regarding the overall number of new houses for which this plan makes provision, the plan has to be consistent with the adopted LPU and it must also reflect and respect housing needs.

WBC's emerging Local Plan Update includes 2 new developments, Bull Close (Land at Sonning Farm) designated 5SO001 (25 units) and Sonning Golf Club 5SO008 (24 units) as per the Revised Growth Strategy (2021). In late 2022 the owner of Sonning Golf Club

submitted an application (Application Number 223458) to expand Site 8 so that it extends over the whole practice area of the Golf Club increasing the number of proposed dwellings from 24 to 54. The application was subsequently modified and the revised application for 50 dwellings was approved by the WBC Planning Committee in August 2023. This is now reflected as an allocation in the LPU Proposed Submission Plan (2024).

All development on Sonning Golf Club was strenuously opposed by SPC and SSES, The initial application to develop Site 5SO005 was also rejected by WBC but the refusal went to appeal and in 2018 the Inspector overturned the refusal mainly because WBC did not have the requisite 5 year Housing Land Supply. This contributed towards part of the Golf Club 50 houses to be built on the practice ground.

5.4 Future Development

At the request of the SNP Steering Group, WBC provided the following indicative housing requirement in October 2023 for the Plan period:

The indicative housing requirement figure for Sonning Parish over the period 2024 – 2040 is as follows:

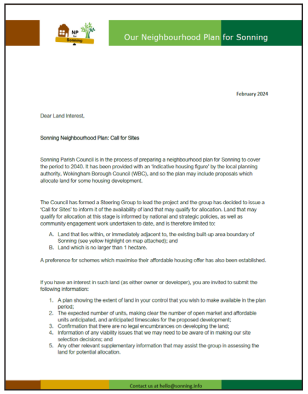
- *75 dwellings proposed in Sonning through LPU / commitments (50 units on Sonning Golf Club and 25 on Reading University Farm)*
- *18 dwellings windfall*
- *4.3 dwellings flexibility allowance*

Total = 97 dwellings (rounded)

The above figure takes account of future delivery expected through the plan led system. Any Additional sites with extant planning permission at 31 March 2023, are not reflected in the indicative housing requirement figure, and it is anticipated they will be delivered in addition to the 97 (the extant planning permissions include 13 houses on Sonning Golf Club (site 5SO005), and 57 flats in Old Bath Road (site A in the table of potential sites).

5.4.1 Call for Sites

Taken together, the allocated and permitted future developments amount to 167 new dwellings, a 24% increase in the current housing stock, if built out over the Plan period. Although this is a significant increase for a "limited development area" as Sonning is defined in CP17 of the WBC Core Strategy, the Steering Group decided to issue a call for sites in order to benefit from the engagement of NPPF Paragraph 14 against speculative development proposals.


Our Neighbourhood Plan for Sonning

February 2024

Dear Land Interest,

Sonning Neighbourhood Plan: Call for Sites

Sonning Parish Council is in the process of preparing a neighbourhood plan for Sonning to cover the period to 2040. It has been provided with an 'indicative housing figure' by the local planning authority, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), and so the plan may include proposals which allocate land for some housing development.

The Council has formed a Steering Group to lead the project and the group has decided to issue a 'Call for Sites' to inform it of the availability of land that may qualify for allocation. Land that may qualify for allocation at this stage is informed by national and strategic policies, as well as community engagement work undertaken to date, and is therefore limited to:

A. Land that lies within, or immediately adjacent to, the existing built up area boundary of Sonning (see yellow highlight on map attached); and
B. Land which is no larger than 1 hectare.

A preference for schemes which maximise their affordable housing offer has also been established.

If you have an interest in such land (as either owner or developer), you are invited to submit the following information:

1. A plan showing the extent of land in your control that you wish to make available in the plan period;
2. The expected number of units, making clear the number of open market and affordable units anticipated, and anticipated timescales for the proposed development;
3. Confirmation that there are no legal encumbrances on developing the land;
4. Information of any viability issues that we may need to be aware of in making our site selection decisions; and
5. Any other relevant supplementary information that may assist the group in assessing the land for potential allocation.

Contact us at hello@sonning.info

In February 2024 the Steering Group issued an invitation to the following landowners/agents to submit potential sites of less than 1 hectare that lie within or immediately adjacent to the existing built-up area in order to identify a suitable small site or sites for the 22 windfall and flex houses within the WBC indicative housing requirement:

- Reading University Farm
- Sonning Golf Club
- Holme Park Farm
- RAMS
- Berkshire County Sports

The above landowners were owners/agents of the sites that resulted from the WBC Call for Sites in the Local Plan Update as described in the January 2020 HELAA (Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment) and November 2021 SA (Sustainability Appraisal). A further invitation was sent to the agents for Thames Valley Park, part of which lies within the Sonning Parish, as the Steering Group felt that there might be an appetite for repurposing some of the unoccupied office buildings which are in danger of being vandalised.

> The decision to invite the submission of sites of less than 1 hectare was taken firstly due to WBC's Core Strategy Policy CP9 which classifies Sonning as a '*limited development location*' and secondly based upon para 74 of the 2024 NPPF which states that '*Neighbourhood planning groups should also give particular consideration to the opportunities for allocating small and medium-sized sites*'. The small and medium-sized sites mentioned here are defined in para 73a) as '*no larger than one hectare*'.

A maildrop was delivered to all Sonning residents explaining the reasons behind the Call for Sites and it was widely publicised in the SSES quarterly magazine "Bridge" and on the Facebook page "Sonning Buzz". Despite the wide publication, and after reminders being issued to landowners/agents that had not responded to the Call for Sites, proposals were received from only 2 of the 6 invited land interests:

- Pro-Vision, on behalf of Holme Park Farm, submitted 2 sites that met the criteria (The Grange and The Farmyard). They also re-submitted the 6 ha site (the Paddock) that had been submitted as part of a wider area in response to the earlier WBC Call for Sites.
- Ridge and Partners, on behalf of Reading University Farm, submitted 2 options for the layout of the Bull Close Site located between Glebe Gardens and the Sonning University Farm.

The Holme Park submission only offered two sites meeting the size criteria, The Grange (0.31ha) potentially capable of accommodating 4 or 5 houses, and The Farmyard (0.37ha) which was already occupied by historic farm buildings. The third site, The Paddocks (6ha) was much larger than the specified maximum area of 1ha and was therefore dismissed.

The Reading University Farm submission related to Bull Close (Site 5SO001) which was already included in the emerging Local Plan as a proposed allocation. The submission showed two alternative layouts, 27 units on the original parcel of land and 32 units if additional land in the northeast of the original site was included.

A meeting took place with WBC at end March 2024 to discuss the results of the call for sites. It was agreed that the aggregate number of potential additional housing units were probably insufficient to enable WBC to successfully invoke NPPF para 14 protection, notably because the Bull Close site is already an allocation in the adopted development plan, and therefore the Steering Group decided to abort this approach and proceed with finalising the Neighbourhood Plan without the allocation of additional sites.



5.4.2 Affordable Housing

The Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) carried out by AECOM highlighted the problems of affordability for both rented and owned property in Sonning. Median house prices are £737,000 and even lower quartile (entry level) houses are priced at £535,000. With average household incomes of £64,900/yr and household incomes for one or two lower quartile earners of £25,800 and £51,600 respectively, house purchase and commercially rented accommodation is virtually unaffordable for even average income households. There are 80 social rented dwellings in Sonning, more per capita than in other areas in the borough, but they are insufficient to meet the demand. AECOM estimate that 4 affordable rented properties and 3 affordable owned properties would be needed per year to satisfy the latent demand.

As demonstrated by responses to the questionnaire and confirmed by AECOM, older working age people (45-64) and older people (65-84) make up the largest share and together over half of the population of Sonning. These are the only age groups in the population which have grown in recent years. AECOM estimate that population growth will be driven by the oldest households; those aged 65+ will increase by 89% over the Plan period.

The above factors of affordability and aging require that policies are put in place to ensure that the additional 167 dwelling units that are envisaged to be added to the housing stock over the Plan period are appropriate to meet these demands.

The 57 flats in Old Bath Road for which planning permission has already been granted are designated to be 1 and 2 bedroom units for commercial rent to residents over 60 years of age. If built out in this way they will go some way to satisfying the local and regional demand for housing the elderly (although recent indications are that they may be for general sale and not restricted to the over 60s.) Furthermore, many current local residents will choose to remain in their suitably adapted current homes and policies already exist to facilitate planning approvals for such adaptations. Responses from Sonning residents to the questionnaire preferred that new houses should have 3 bedrooms and would be suitable for the elderly. This view was supported by the AECOM HNA which suggested that additional 5 bed houses are no longer suitable for the additional housing stock in order to re-balance the housing stock. Policy SNP/HOU2 seeks to guide new developments in this way and ensure that they are inherently accessible and adaptable.

WBC's Section 106 policy is that significant new developments must provide 40% affordable housing, this would yield about 35 units if the 3 significant developments (two on Sonning Golf Course plus Bull Close) are built out in the period. However, as can be seen from the AECOM HNA, commercially provided housing is still unaffordable to buy or rent for those on even average household incomes. Providing genuinely affordable homes is an important issue for Sonning, the Steering Group is in discussion with Reading University Farm to optimise really affordable housing on the Bull Close site and the policies below would apply to any other significant development that takes place during the Plan period.



Image 18. Sonning Wharf



Image 19. Thames Flood Plain with Sonning Bridge in the distance

The overall Vision for Sonning has already been articulated in previous sections, the relevant part relating to housing is as follows:

> ***VISION - Housing***
>
> ***The new housing development that is already approved or which is expected to take place in Sonning over the Plan period up to 2040 will provide good quality housing that is in keeping with the distinct character areas across the Parish and is appropriate for the needs of the community.***

Taking account of the demand for housing whilst respecting the wishes of the residents to maintain the character of the village the overall objective for housing in the SNP is as follows:

> ***OBJECTIVE – Meeting Sonning's Housing Need***
>
> ***The housing needs over the period of the Plan up to 2040 will be satisfied by extant planning approvals plus a small allowance for windfall and flexibility. A total of 167 new dwellings are forecast to be built over the Plan period. They will be designed and built in such a way as to maintain the character of the village and protect its rich natural environment.***

The following policies are proposed:

> ***Policy SNP/HOU1: Delivering Genuinely Affordable Homes***
>
> **A.** ***Development proposals for the residential development of the land at Sonning Farm site which provide Almshouses as part of an appropriate mix of affordable housing tenures will be supported***
>
> **B.** ***All residential development proposals should provide a mix of affordable tenures including social rent, affordable rent (including Almshouses), and affordable home ownership to support a range of housing needs and a balanced community.***

Context:

1. Policy HOU1 comments generally about the delivery of affordable housing. It also sets out the Plan's approach towards the development of affordable housing on the Sonning Farm site. That site was allocated as a reserve site via policy 'SAL03: Allocated reserve housing sites' in the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD) adopted in 2014 for 25 dwellings. The site continues to be proposed for allocation in the emerging Local Plan Update (LPU) for 25 dwellings (reference SS14.17). Policy HOU1 seeks to encourage the delivery of a 100% affordable housing scheme on land at Sonning Farm. This has been discussed with the landowner. The Plan would support such a proposal and makes it clear that the affordable housing thresholds set out in strategic policy are minimum, not maximum thresholds. The social benefits of helping to address the insufficient supply of affordable homes in the village would be significant.

2. The Robert Palmer's Almshouse Charity already manages Almshouses within the village as a charity for the benefit of qualifying residents in the village. The policy therefore encourages the owner of Sonning Farm and its future development partner to give appropriate consideration to the strong desire of the local community to see a proportion, or all, of the new homes on this site to be managed by an Almshouse charity. The approach of this policy is supported by the Government's decision to change the definition of 'affordable housing for rent'. The intention of such a change is to make it easier for organisations such as Almshouses to develop affordable homes.

3. WBC Core Strategy

   Inclusive Communities

   Policy SNP/HOU1 makes provision for delivering a considerable proportion of affordable homes in Sonning. This helps to create a socially sustainable community in Sonning by ensuring that individuals from a range of socio-economic backgrounds have access to housing. By integrating affordable homes into development, the policy plays a crucial role in fostering inclusivity and diversity within the community. This approach helps to bridge socio-economic gaps, allowing people from different income levels to live in the area, thereby supporting a more balanced and equitable community, ultimately contributing to the long-term social sustainability of Sonning, in accordance with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP2.

Policy SNP/HOU2: Housing Mix

A. ***Development proposals for new housing should provide affordable housing having regard to the recommendations of the latest Sonning Housing Needs Assessment. The precise tenure mix of affordable housing will be determined on a site-by-site basis and following discussions with stakeholders.***

B. ***Proposals for residential development, which address local need in Sonning, and are based on the most up-to-date evidence, produced or endorsed by the Local Planning Authority, will be supported. Development proposals will be expected to provide a mix of dwelling types and sizes to address the nature of local needs and contribute to the objective of creating a mixed and balanced community. To achieve this, schemes of 3 or more dwellings should secure at least two thirds of smaller units (1-3 bedrooms) with larger units (≥4 bedrooms) making up the remainder on any given site.***

C. ***Proposals for the provision of new multiple use residential or commercial buildings on sites made available through the demolition of existing residential buildings will be supported where they enhance the character of the area.***

Context:

1. The Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) published in the evidence base highlights the problems of affordability for both rented and owned property in Sonning. Median house prices are £737,000 and even lower quartile (entry level) houses are priced at £535,000. With average household incomes of £64,900 per year and household incomes for one or two lower quartile earners of £25,800 and £51,600 respectively, house purchase and commercially rented accommodation is virtually unaffordable for even average income households.

2. Many current local residents will choose to remain in their suitably adapted current homes and policies already exist to facilitate planning approvals for such adaptations. Responses from Sonning residents to a questionnaire preferred that new houses should have 3 bedrooms and would be suitable for the elderly. This view was supported by the HNA which suggested that 5 bed houses are no longer suitable for the additional housing stock and as such, this has been reflected in the policy.

3. It is considered that mainstream housing has a significant role to play in providing elderly accommodation in Sonning, with over 86% of over 75 households living in mainstream housing as shown in the HNA. Requiring new developments to deliver a higher proportion of smaller dwellings will give elderly residents the opportunity to downsize if they so wish. Whilst the neighbourhood plan is not able to stipulate building regulation provisions, it is acknowledged that more accessible and adaptable dwellings, including those of the M4(2) category would be welcomed (see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f8a82ed915d74e622b17b/BR_PDF_AD_M1_2015_with_2016_amendments_V3.pdf)

4. In the recent past, applications have been submitted for the demolition of existing houses on large plots of land with replacement by single larger houses, multiple houses on the same plot or in some cases by blocks of flats or care homes. Replacement of single units by multiple use units tend to change the character of the area and need careful consideration as to their impact. The overprovision of care homes can have a harmful effect on the ability of the village to maintain a mixed demographic.

5. WBC Core Strategy

   Inclusive Communities

   By providing a considered housing mix in proposals in Sonning, an inclusive community is fostered by ensuring that both rental and ownership opportunities are available to a broad range of income levels, integrating diverse socio-economic groups within the same neighbourhoods, reducing the risk of segregation and promoting social cohesion. The basis of this policy is in accordance with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP2.

   Housing Mix, Density and Affordability

   This policy area recognises the importance of providing proposals with a mix and balance based on the housing need within Sonning. The requirements set out in policy SNP/HOU2 are consistent with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP5 and prioritise the need for affordable housing provision in Sonning.

6. WBC Managing Development Delivery

   Residential Uses

   Policy SNP/HOU2 sets out an appropriate housing mix for proposals in Sonning based on current and projected housing need as well as the social mix in the area. The basis of this policy is in accordance with WBC Managing Development Delivery Policy TB05 and recognises the need for an appropriate housing mix for new developments in order to best serve the community, both now and in the future.

6 Design Codes

In Autumn 2004 Sonning Parish Council published The Sonning Parish Design Statement which included many very specific design guidelines for future developments. The Sonning Parish Design Statement is part of the documentation on the SPC website.

Although the principles embodied in the 2004 Parish Design Statement are still very relevant, the opportunity was taken to review and update the design guides as a part of the support provided by Locality in the preparation of the SNP. This resulted in the March 2024 "Sonning Design Guidelines and Codes Report".

In their introduction to this report, AECOM confirms that the government is placing significant importance on the quality of design through the development of design codes which aim to set standards for design upfront and provide firm guidance on how sites and places should be developed. The NPPF makes clear that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. The National Design Guide, and the National Model Design Code and Guidance Notes for Design Codes published in 2021 illustrate how well-designed places that are beautiful, healthy, greener, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice. It forms part of the Government's collection of planning practice guidance and should be read alongside the separate planning practice guidance on design process and tools such as WBC's Borough Design Guide published as a supplementary planning document in 2012.



Image 20. North Lodge

Much has been written in the SNP about the key elements that make up Sonning's unique character and the importance of maintaining these essential characteristics whilst accommodating the necessary growth envisaged in the plan period and thereafter. The following policy has been written to cater for some of the issues drawn out in previous chapters:

Policy SNP/DES1: Design Codes

A. *As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should demonstrate the way in which they have responded positively to:*

i. the essential design considerations relevant to the character area typologies within which they are located (as shown in the Sonning Design Guidelines and Codes Report), and

ii. the general design principles set out in the Sonning Design Guidelines and Codes Report.

B. *Development proposals should demonstrate how they will conserve and enhance the historic environment and have full regard to the special architectural and historic significance of the features identified in the Sonning Design Guidelines and Code Report and the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal (2017) as positive characteristics of the designated Sonning Conservation Area and its immediate setting as well as the entire historic environment.*

C. *Where a proposal does not seek to follow the requirements of the Design Code then the applicant must provide robust justification for why an exception should be made, for example, because a scheme is certified to a Passivhaus or equivalent standard with a space heating demand of less than 15KWh/m2/year, requiring a design solution that cannot fully comply with the Design Code.*

Context:

1. There are distinctive features of Sonning that shape its character. These features are set out in the Sonning Design Guidelines and Codes Report , a link for which can be found in Appendix 2. The Code encapsulates the key design principles within the Conservation Area, their settings and beyond. The policy places additional local emphasis to the design quality principles of the Wokingham Borough Design Guide and the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal.

2. The policy requires that applicants should demonstrate that they have regard to the design principles and guidance the Code contains as relevant to the location of their proposals. The policy does not advocate pastiche or historic solution; however

it is important that any new development demonstrates a connection with local character and place making.

3. The Thameside environment plays a significant role in Sonning's sense of place. The emerging Local Plan Policy FD3 sets out a number of requirements for development proposals to maintain and enhance rivers and watercourses. It specifically references the River Thames, stating that developments within its setting must ensure they 'complement the distinctive character of the water frontage and important views'. It is expected that development proposals will make efforts to respond to the Thameside environment, subject to the location of the site.

4. WBC Core Strategy

   Sustainable Development

   This policy highlights the importance of sustaining the existing environment of Sonning, as set out in the design code, as well as enhancing the environment by using similar materials in all new development, in order to preserve the character and appearance of the village and surrounding areas. Policy SNP/DES1 aims to minimize adverse impacts to the existing aesthetic environment of Sonning during development, while maintaining an awareness of resource consumption and impacts to the air, land and water, in accordance with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP1.

   General Principles of Development

   Policy SNP/DES1 aims to ensure development in Sonning is designed in a manner that respects the surrounding area's , design, and aesthetic character - in line with the WBC Core Strategy Policy CP3. This includes using materials that closely resemble those of existing buildings to maintain visual continuity and harmony with the established architectural style of the area. Additionally, new developments must be designed to fit seamlessly within the community by adhering to principles that ensure they are both appropriate in scale and accessible to all residents. This approach helps preserve the unique character of Sonning while promoting inclusivity and functionality in new construction projects.

5. WBC Managing Development Delivery

   Landscape and Built Environment Character and Value

   Policy SNP/DES1 outlines ways in which development will be considered in favour of preserving the landscape and character of Sonning - in line with WBC Managing Development Delivery Policy TB21. Further, the policy stipulates that development proposals will be approved only if they adhere to Sonning's design code, which emphasises the importance of preserving and enhancing features that contribute to Sonning's unique character. By aligning new developments with these design guidelines, the policy ensures that changes are harmonious with the existing landscape and maintain the area's visual and cultural value. This approach helps to safeguard the distinctive attributes of Sonning, fostering a cohesive and attractive environment that reflects its historical and architectural significance.

7 Local Environment (EN)

7.1 Settlement Boundaries

Sonning's landscape character is made up from 3 of the landscape character areas defined in the WBC Landscape Character Assessment published in 2004 and updated in 2019[5]. Taken as a whole they represent the canvas on which humans have painted the agriculture and settlements that visitors see when visiting the Parish. Brief descriptions of the natural boundaries which define the settlement area are provided below together with the key landscape character attributes and guidelines from the 2019 Landscape Character Assessment[6].

7.1.1 Thames River Valley (A1)

Natural boundaries: The northeastern quadrant of Sonning Parish lies in the Thames River Valley (A1) landscape character area. As shown in the Google Map image this comprises open fields lying between the river to the north and Broadmoor Lane to the south. Much of this land is subject to flooding.

Attributes: Sweeping river channel providing diverse open mosaic of arable land, pasture and wet meadow constituting a peaceful character for recreational enjoyment

Guidelines: Maintain the rural character of settlements and avoid linear spread of development and amalgamation between Sonning and Charvil

7.1.2 Sonning Wooded Slopes (D2)

Natural boundaries: Sonning's historic conservation area lies within the D2 landscape character area. Open fields lie to the east bounded by Charvil Lane to the south, Broadmoor Lane to the north and Milestone Avenue on the eastern boundary. The western border of the Parish within the D2 landscape character area comprises the wooded slopes of Holme Park farm running from the Sonning Meadows estate past the Big and Little Gogs to the Thames Valley Park development.

Attributes: Wooded slopes of the coombe valley of Big and Little Gogs; open fields between Sonning and Charvil and scheduled monuments west of Charvil

Guidelines: Conserve and enhance the wooded character around Big and Little Gogs; conserve the open farmland between Sonning and Charvil; conserve and enhance urban edges such as between Sonning and Charvil.

Image 21. Sonning Northern Quadrant
This Google Earth image shows the northeastern quadrant of Sonning Parish which lies within the A1 Thames River Valley landscape character area. Image courtesy of Google Earth



Image 22. Sonning Eastern Boundary
This Google Earth image shows the natural eastern edge of the Sonning settlement that is formed by the D2 landscape character area. Image courtesy of Google Earth



5 https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/planning-policy-information/draft-local-plan-consultation?field_media_asset_browser_target_id=165
6 https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-studies

7.1.3 Woodley - Earley Settled and Farmed Clay (J4)

Natural boundaries: The J4 landscape character area covers the southern half of the Parish. Sonning Golf course and the open cultivated farmland between Garde Road and Charvil create the natural boundary east of the built-up areas along Pound Lane and to the south of A4. The western wedge of the J4 character area is made up as the parcel of land west of Sonning Meadows, part of the Holme Park Farm

Attributes: Remaining agricultural land and Sonning Golf Club provide an important landscape buffer and sense of separation between Sonning and Charvil/Woodley as well as important recreational facilities

Guidelines: Protect the remaining areas of open land separating Sonning, Woodley and Charvil, enhance sense of place through careful design.

Our questionnaire showed how much people valued the local environment: **Q3.4 "We need to maintain all our views of, and access to, the River Thames"** - 71% of respondents strongly agreed and 24% agreed with this statement; **"The open views across the fields and woods are important assets"** was strongly agreed or agreed by 95% of people.

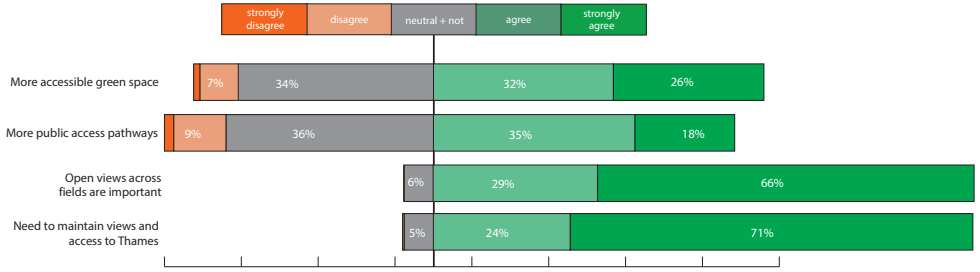


Fig. 5. Green spaces in and around Sonning (Q3.4)

The findings and recommendations in the Landscape Character Area Report, summarised above, confirm the importance of nurturing and managing the local environment in order to maintain and enhance Sonning's unique position in the landscape. It is particularly important that Sonning's identity is maintained through the protection of its eastern and western borders and the following policy is written to this effect.



Image 23. View of Thames from Broadmoor Lane

> ***Policy SNP/ENV1: Local Gaps***
>
> ***The Plan defines two Local Gaps, as shown on the Policies Map, in order to prevent the physical, visual and perceived coalescence of Sonning & Charvil and Sonning & the Thames Valley Park and to protect their setting. Development proposals that lie within the defined Local Gaps should be located and designed in such a way to prevent the coalescence of the settlements.***

Context:

1. The policy seeks to protect the essential countryside character of the area between Sonning & Charvil and Sonning & the Thames Valley Park, in order to prevent physical, visual and perceived coalescence between these separate settlements and to protect their distinctive individual character and setting.

2. The policy has been informed by the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) 2019. The two proposed Local Gaps fall within the D2 (Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes) and J4 (Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay) Character Areas. Within Character Area D2, it is noted in the LCA that the 'open fields between Sonning and Charvil provide important visual and physical distinction between the two settlements' whilst also acknowledging that the development pressures in the area would lead to 'the loss of individual settlement identity and the potential amalgamation of adjacent areas'. Within the landscape guidelines of Character Area J4 is the- recommendation to 'protect the remaining areas of open land…to provide a physical and visual separation or gap'.

3. To support the designation, Briarwood Landscape Architecture were commissioned to produce a Local Gap Study (published separately in the evidence base). The study undertook a review and appraisal, in respect of landscape and visual matters, of the potential Local Gaps that had been originally identified by the Steering Group in their brief for the Local Gap study. It concluded that the Sonning-Charvil Local Gap 'fully meets the criteria by which it can be supported in respect of landscape and visual matters'. The assessment of the Sonning-Thames Valley Park Local Gap recommended a reduced area to be designated 'to a smaller but more functional area that has well defined and defensible boundaries'. A third potential Local Gap at Sonning-Woodley was assessed but ultimately found to 'not meet the criteria to enable it to be supported in respect of landscape and visual matters'. The boundaries of the Local Gaps were informed by the study but were then refined through the examination process.

4. SPC and WBC have had discussions on the geographic extent of the Sonning-Charvil Local Gap. Nevertheless, the Steering Group decided to reduce the size of the proposed Sonning-Charvil Local Gap following the consultation on the pre-submission Plan in order to take account of WBC's comment regarding the overall size of the proposed gap. Whilst WBC suggested to reduce the north-western boundary to the alignment of Broadmoor Lane, the Steering Group considered it appropriate to retain the two fields to the north-west of Broadmoor Lane within the proposed Local Gap as they made a significant contribution to the visual separation of the Sonning and Charvil settlements. The examination process has resulted in a further refinement of the scale of the Sonning-Charvil Local Gap. The examiner concluded that the land north of Broadmoor Lane has a more limited role in preventing coalescence for the purposes of a land-use Local Gap policy. This outcome does not preclude the area from being recognised through other relevant planning considerations, including the landscape quality of the area and the presence of flood risk across part of the neighbourhood area.

5. The policy does not seek to prevent any development but requires that proposals recognise and take account of the principles in this policy.

6. WBC Core Strategy

General Principles of Development

Policy SNP/ENV1 emphasises the importance of recognising and preserving local gaps during development. By maintaining deliberate gaps between Sonning and neighbouring areas Charvil and the Thames Valley Park, the policy ensures that these spaces remain separate from Sonning. This approach aligns with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP3, which aims to protect and enhance the landscape character of Sonning and its environment. Preserving these gaps helps to prevent adverse impacts on the visual and environmental integrity of the area, thereby safeguarding the distinct rural and suburban character that contributes to the overall quality of life for residents. By maintaining these crucial spaces, the policy supports a balanced approach to development that respects both the natural landscape and the existing community framework.



Image 24. Top of Broadmoor Lane by the farm gate

7. WBC Managing Development Delivery

Landscape Character

Local Gaps are an essential element of Sonning's landscape character, serving to preserve distinct and open spaces between Sonning and neighbouring settlements. These gaps contribute significantly to the area's visual identity and rural charm by preventing the merging of built environments and maintaining the separation between urban areas. Policy SNP/ENV1 is specifically designed to protect and retain these vital gaps during development, ensuring that the unique landscape character of Sonning is upheld. This policy aligns with the WBC Managing Development Delivery Policy TB21, which supports the preservation of such landscape features. By safeguarding these gaps, the policy helps maintain the area's scenic and ecological integrity, supports biodiversity, and ensures that the spatial and visual quality of the landscape is not compromised by encroaching development.



Image 25. Dog Walkers on Broadmoor Lane

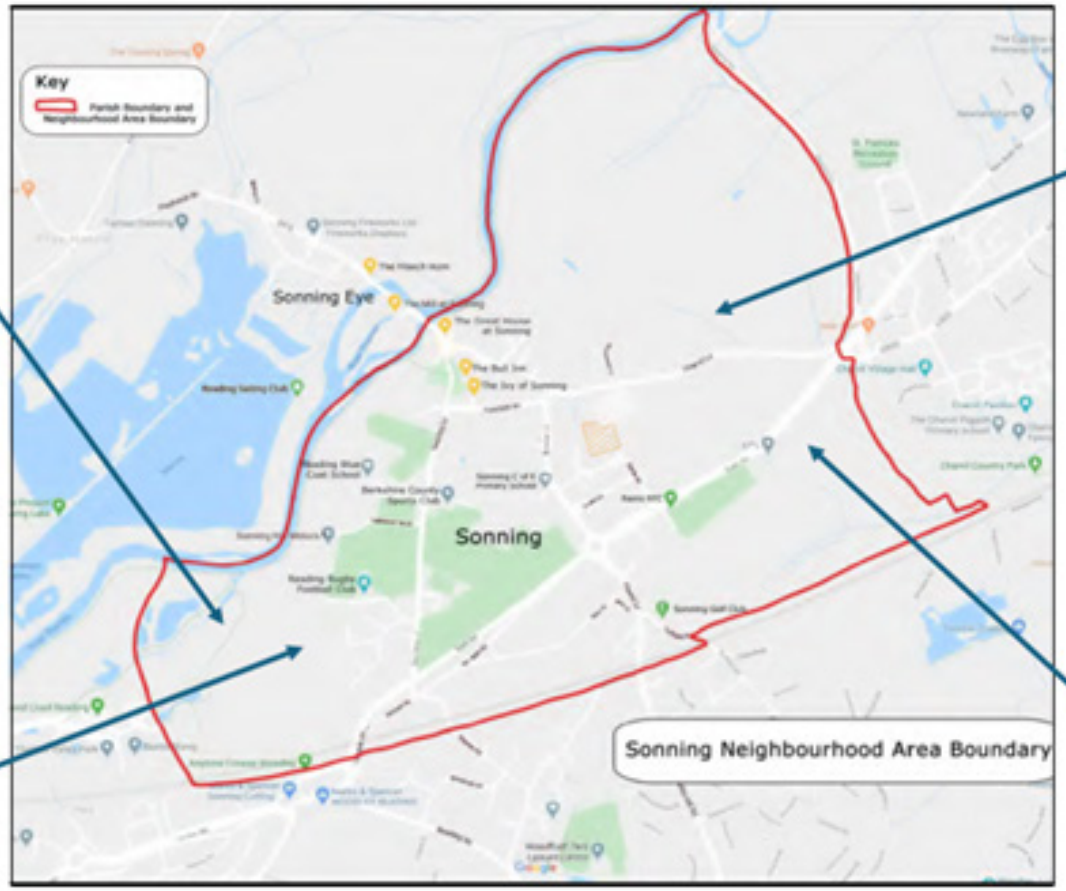
7.2 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

The Parish of Sonning is rich in archaeological history, and is home to a large number (over 150) documented sites of historic interest[7], many dating back thousands of years. Paragraph 208 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states "Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal."

All relevant development proposals in the Parish are subject to review by the conservation officer at Wokingham Borough Council, who will consider the direct and indirect impact(s) of the relevant proposal on such historic sites.

Examples of some of the 158 archaeological records held by The Berkshire Archaeology Historic Environment Record (HER), covering Sonning Parish are shown on the map below:

HER Number:01120.00.000
Record Type: Monument
Grid Reference: SU 7 742
(A complex of cropmarks at Little Gogs Farm)



HER Number: 01025.03.000
Record Type: Monument
Grid Reference: SU 766 759
(Early Neolithic to Roman - 4000 BC to 409 AD)

HER Number:01120.01.200
Record Type: Monument
Grid Reference: SU 748 742
(Roman cremations at Thames Valley Park)

HER Number: 01025.01.000
Record Type: Monument
Grid Reference: SU 770 754
Cemetery (Late Neolithic to Late Bronze Age - 3000 BC to 701 BC)

Map 7. Historic Environment Records (HER) within Sonning Parish

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7 https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/ (accessed May 2024) This website allows you to cross-search over 60 resources, offering local and national information relating to England's heritage.

7.3 Environmental Objectives

Sonning benefits greatly from a semi-rural character with a 'conserved historic village' centre, and peripheral housing surrounded or bordered by acres of green open spaces and natural habitats. The River Thames and its banks and footpaths, the farmland, the golf course, the extensive sports fields, parkland and nature reserves, all bring major benefits to the local wildlife, and to the Parish residents. Our Neighbourhood Plan focuses on protecting and enhancing our existing and future open spaces and encouraging and supporting our distinctive landscape which contributes to a sense of place and community, including natural features such as footpaths, in-field trees, hedgerows, ponds, and streams which distinguish Sonning Parish. We value the biodiversity found in the Parish and seek to protect and preserve our wildlife and their habitats. Our objectives give a clear description of the environment we cherish, we are committed to maintain, and we desire to improve wherever possible. Our questionnaire section concerning the environment identified a reduction in traffic as the biggest contributor to enhancing the quality of life in the Parish. Our objectives are designed to limit and ideally reduce the damage to the environment caused by traffic, both passing through the Parish, visiting the Parish, and through building development driven population increases within the Parish.

OBJECTIVE 1 - Maintain and develop pedestrian access paths across the Parish including those to, and along, the River Thames.

Developments should preserve and enhance current access to the River Thames and its associated pathways in the Parish. Improvements to access for wheelchair and pushchair users is encouraged. All existing pathways and access to and across public spaces should not be negatively affected by any new development. Improvements to the pedestrian pathways and cycleways infrastructure is to be supported and encouraged. New development should not harm existing footpaths and should maximise opportunities to improve and add to existing footpath networks, wherever possible.

OBJECTIVE 2 - Improve the Parish access for vehicle free movement.

Development as appropriate to its scale and location will include proposals which enhance the attractiveness of walking, cycling and other non- motorised vehicle-based routes and access. Improvements and enhancements to the existing footpaths is encouraged and new footpaths and cycle paths will wherever possible connect with existing networks.

OBJECTIVE 3 - Generate a sustainable reduction of the impact of traffic pollution, including air quality, and noise, within the Parish

Development that creates a positive reduction in poor air quality and noise pollution is encouraged.

OBJECTIVE 4 - Retain and conserve the historic environment within the Parish wherever possible.

New developments that demonstrate both recognition and preservation of sites of historic interest and historic monuments, will be supported.

7.4 Local Green Spaces

Paragraphs §106, 107 and 108 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) give local communities the opportunity to identify and protect areas of green space which are special to the local community. In order for land to qualify as Local Green Space it must meet the following tests which are set out in the NPPF:

- ◊ Be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- ◊ Be demonstrably special to a local community and hold 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;
- ◊ Be local in character and not an extensive tract of land.

Sonning Parish is fortunate to be richly endowed with green spaces. The SNP questionnaire[8] has identified Local Green Spaces, suggested by the residents, which meet the criteria defined by NPPF and its guidelines (other potential LGS such as the remaining Sonning Golf Club and Berkshire County Sports were not promoted as they are large tracts of land). Accordingly, the SNP proposes the following policy relating to Local Green Spaces:

8 Q3.3: Are there any areas of land that you would like to be considered or designated as Local Green Space?

Policy SNP/ENV2: Local Green Spaces

A. ***The Neighbourhood Plan designates Local Green Spaces, as shown on the Policies Map (section 11) and as fully detailed in Appendix 1 :***

i. ***King George V Field***

ii. ***The Wharf***

iii. ***Ali's Pond***

B. ***Proposals for development in a Local Green Space will only be supported in very special circumstances***

Context:

1. This policy designates a series of Local Green Spaces in accordance with §106-108 of the NPPF. A designation has the policy effect of the equivalence of the Green Belt when determining planning applications located within a designated Local Green Space.

2. The policy resists all development proposals that will undermine the essential character of designated areas, unless there are very special circumstances as set out in NPPF §153, to justify why consent should be granted. Its effect is to provide important Local Green Spaces with protection from development equivalent to that which applies in the Green Belt. Any proposal must maintain the essential open character of the space and must, in any event, demonstrate very special circumstances for its justification.

3. The Local Green Spaces tables in Appendix 1, establish how each space meets the tests set out in the NPPF. The owners of the Local Green Spaces have been notified of the proposed inclusion on this list and their responses have been considered in the Consultation Statement which will be published alongside the Submission Plan in due course.

4. WBC Core Strategy

   Sustainable Development

   By resisting development in designated Local Green Spaces, policy SNP/ENV2 ensures that crucial components of the existing environment are preserved and remain untouched by future construction projects in Sonning. This approach helps to maintain the ecological balance, support biodiversity, and safeguard natural landscapes that are essential for the community's quality of life. By protecting these spaces, the policy aligns with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP1, which emphasises the importance of sustainable development practices. This preservation ensures that these areas continue to provide ecological benefits, recreational opportunities, and aesthetic value, thereby contributing to the long-term sustainability and resilience of the local environment. It also helps to maintain the character of the area and supports environmental stewardship, ensuring that development does not compromise the natural and cultural heritage of Sonning.

   Biodiversity

   Designated Local Green Spaces in Sonning will be safeguarded from the impacts of development, thereby preserving their role in maintaining biodiversity. By protecting these areas, the policy aims to mitigate any adverse effects on the existing biodiversity network that thrives within these green spaces. This approach is in line with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP7, which emphasises the importance of preserving critical habitats and ecosystems. Maintaining these green spaces ensures that vital resources and habitats for various plant and animal species are not disrupted or lost. Consequently, this helps sustain local wildlife populations and supports ecological balance, contributing to a healthier and more resilient natural environment within Sonning.



Image 26. King George V Field

5. WBC Managing Development Delivery

Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping

Policy SNP/ENV2 underscores the critical importance of safeguarding existing local green infrastructure, namely designated Local Green Spaces. In alignment with WBC Managing Development Delivery Policy CC03, this policy ensures that vital green areas are maintained and protected throughout any future development in Sonning. By prioritising the preservation of green spaces (including trees and landscaping), the policy aims to sustain the ecological benefits and aesthetic value these areas provide. This approach helps to retain essential environmental features such as biodiversity habitats, natural water management systems, and recreational areas, which contribute to the overall health and green and blue infrastructure of the community. Maintaining these spaces amid development not only supports ecological balance but also enhances the quality of life for residents by preserving access to nature and ensuring the continued provision of green infrastructure.



Image 27. The Wharf



Image 28. King George V Field

8 Traffic and Travel

8.1 Traffic volumes and speeds

The Parish of Sonning has three classified roads – the A4 Bath Road running from South West to North East, the B478 Charvil Lane/ Thames Street running East to West to cross Sonning bridge and the B4446 Sonning Lane and Pearson Road running predominantly South to North. Both B roads track from the A4.

For many years Sonning has suffered from the very high volume of through traffic using Sonning's old narrow bridge over the Thames to avoid congestion in the bridges upstream in Reading and Caversham and downstream in Henley. The proposal of a third Thames crossing in the local vicinity has been mooted for a very long time. This would effectively act as a by-pass for the village and thus would:

- **dramatically reduce traffic flows and queues**
- **significantly reduce pollution and noise**
- **improve the environment for walkers and cyclists**
- **retain the historic atmosphere of the village**

Sonning Parish Council uses Speed Indicating Devices (SIDs) to monitor the speed and volume of this traffic at various locations. From the data obtained the average weekday volume of traffic crossing Sonning bridge from Oxfordshire to Berkshire before the Covid pandemic in 2019 was estimated to be 9,400 vehicles per day. These numbers reduced during Covid but have since returned to their pre-Covid levels, it is assumed that a similar number of vehicles are travelling each day over Sonning bridge in the opposite direction.



Image 29. Queuing traffic on Pound Lane at junction with A4 Bath Road

In the SNP questionnaire, 95% of those responding said that they agreed or strongly agreed that they were concerned over traffic volumes.

The above photos were taken at 8am on January 11th 2023 and show the normal queuing traffic that joins the A4 from Pound Lane. The location of the photographs is the junction of Duffield Road with Pound Lane - where traffic from various development proposals will only exacerbate the situation.

Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils have pursued options for a potential new crossing of the Thames, strongly supported by SPC and SSES, but Councils to the north of the river are presently objecting to this proposal due to the fear of excessive traffic overloading the highways in Oxfordshire, however it must be noted that vehicles from Oxfordshire are a very significant part of the high traffic flows through Sonning itself.

The SNP questionnaire indicated that 97.5% of those that expressed an opinion were in favour of a third Thames bridge and it is clear that solving the issue of through traffic is fundamental to the protection of Sonning's environment.

The volume of traffic is expected to carry on rising above pre-pandemic levels, in line with future housing development in the Wokingham borough and surrounds. The recently approved housing development of up to 200 dwellings at the Bridge Farm site in Twyford on the borders with Charvil and the recently approved 200 dwelling development at Riverway Farm to the north of A4 are just two examples of this and such developments will add further to the level of vehicles crossing Sonning Bridge, with their associated emission and noise pollution. A significant increase in the use of electric vehicles will mitigate this problem to some extent however the volume of traffic will continue to be a major inconvenience and a potential danger to residents, regardless of the benefits of electrification, until such time as an alternative Thames crossing is finally created.

The SNP questionnaire indicated that 88% of those that expressed an opinion said that they were concerned over the speed of traffic in the Parish. Whilst the SPC use the SIDs mentioned above to monitor traffic speeds, it was felt necessary to also create a Sonning Community Speed Watch group under the Thames Valley Police scheme. The intention is to continue with both methods of speed monitoring for the foreseeable future.



Image 30. 3.20pm on a Thursday Afternoon

8.2 Car Parking

Car parking is an increasing problem in Sonning, especially within the Conservation Area. Many older properties have no garage or parking space and residents have no option but to park on the street. This can lead to congestion and often larger vehicles (e.g. buses) have difficulty in transiting.

There are no ideal locations for a car park close to the centre of the village. It may be possible to find location(s) further from the village centre but doubt has been expressed as to how well these may be used.

The following policies are proposed:

> ***Policy SNP/TRA1: Traffic Calming***
>
> ***Development proposals should maintain, and preferably enhance, road safety for all users and maximise opportunities to alleviate traffic congestion. As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should deliver or contribute towards measures to mitigate the impact on the highway network, such as through traffic calming measures and active travel improvements.***
>
> ***Development proposals should take particular account of:***
>
> **A.** ***The ability to share all transport infrastructure between all road users; and***
>
> **B.** ***Locations where the existing road system is constrained, with priority given to the Traffic Calming Key Locations identified on the Policies Map (Chapter 11)***
>
> ***Mitigation measures to improve road safety should avoid the introduction of urbanising features, and minimise the other impacts such as noise.***

Context

1. The Parish of Sonning has three classified roads – the A4 Bath Road running from South West to North East, the B478 Charvil Lane/ Thames Street running East to West to cross Sonning bridge and the B4446 Sonning Lane/ Pearson Road running predominantly South to North. Both B roads track from the A4.

2. For many years Sonning has suffered from the very high volume of through traffic using Sonning's old narrow bridge over the Thames to avoid congestion in the bridges upstream in Reading and Caversham and downstream in Henley. The proposal of a third Thames crossing in the local vicinity has been mooted for a very long time. This would effectively act as a by-pass for the village, reduce traffic flows and the associated problems of traffic jams and pollution. However, proposals for a third crossing have not advanced and there are currently no plans to deliver it within the plan period of the SNP. The policy establishes an alternative traffic mitigation measures and public realm improvements project in the Parish to the third crossing, to provide relief from heavy traffic.

3. Sonning Parish Council uses Speed Indicating Devices (SIDs) to monitor the speed and volume of this traffic at various locations. From the data obtained, it is estimated that the weekday volume of traffic crossing Sonning bridge from Oxfordshire to Berkshire averages 9,400 vehicles per day. It is assumed that there are a similar number travelling each day over Sonning bridge in the opposite direction.

4. The policy identifies three key locations: from Sonning Bridge along the B478 up to the roundabout with Charvil Lane; along Pound Lane down to the roundabout with Bath Road; and between Sonning Lane B4446 and A4. It is considered these are the most important locations where public realm improvements and traffic mitigation measures, such as improved junction design, should be implemented to reduce the impact of traffic congestion.

5. WBC Core Strategy

   Managing Travel Demand

   By implementing traffic calming measures in identified problem areas, Policy SNP/TRA1 ensures that the existing transport network in Sonning can be improved and more effectively managed. These measures - such as speed bumps, roundabouts, or junction improvements - address specific issues that contribute to congestion and safety concerns. As a result, the transportation routes will be optimised to handle both current traffic volumes and anticipated increases in demand. This proactive approach not only alleviates existing traffic problems but also prepares the infrastructure to better accommodate future growth, ensuring smoother and safer travel conditions for all users. Additionally, improved traffic management can lead to reduced travel times, lower accident rates, and enhanced overall efficiency of the transport network. The basis of this policy is in accordance with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP6.

   Improvements to the Strategic Transport Network

   Policy SNP/TRA1 identifies cross-Thames travel in Sonning as a crucial area requiring traffic improvements, as outlined in WBC Core Strategy Policy CP10. This SNP policy aims to address and alleviate traffic congestion at this pivotal point and other key locations throughout Sonning. By implementing targeted traffic calming measures, the policy seeks to enhance efficiency and safety of the existing Strategic Transport Network. These improvements are intended to reduce delays, improve traffic flow, and mitigate the adverse effects of congestion, thereby facilitating smoother and more reliable travel across the region. Additionally, these measures

contribute to a safer and more pedestrian-friendly environment, supporting the overall effectiveness of Sonning's transport infrastructure.

Policy SNP/TRA2: Active Travel

A. *The Neighbourhood Plan identifies the Active Travel Network, as shown on the Policies Map (Chapter 11), for the purposes of supporting healthy and safe active travel opportunities in the Parish. This should be read in conjunction with proposed active travel routes in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) (or any successor document).*

B. *Development proposals on land that lies within or adjacent to the network shown on the Policies Map or in the LCWIP (or any successor document) should sustain, and where practicable, enhance the functionality of the network by virtue of their layout and means of access and landscape treatment.*

C. *Proposals that will cause harm to the functioning or connectivity of the network will not be supported.*

D. *Development proposals in close proximity to the River Thames should place emphasis on preserving, enhancing and creating pedestrian access to the Riverside environment, including provision for wheelchair and pushchair users.*

Context:

1. The policy seeks to encourage safe, accessible, convenient and enjoyable means of walking and cycling in the Parish.

2. The starting point for this is identifying the main existing walking and cycling routes. The Policies Map shows the full extent of the network, and the policy requires all development proposals that lie within or adjacent to the network to consider how they may improve connectivity, or at the very least do not undermine the existing value of the network, or the opportunities for improvement.

3. Where proposals include provision for landscaping, new means of access or new layouts, there may be an opportunity to relate the land better to the network and/or improve the attractiveness and connectivity of routes. Proposals should therefore consider this in the design of schemes without undermining other planning policy objectives. In some cases, proposals will enable the creation of new connections and/or the delivery of opportunities for improvement that extend the benefits of the network. They will be supported provided they are appropriate in other respects. At the very least, the policy requires that proposals that will undermine the existing value of the network, or opportunities for improvement, will be not be supported.

4. Development near the River Thames should facilitate pedestrian access so that local residents can gain the social and wellbeing benefits of having access to the Riverside environment.

5. By strengthening the Active Travel Network, the policy intends to reduce reliance on motor vehicle travel. This will lead to environmental benefits including reduced air and noise pollution as well as the potential for more physical activity.

6. WBC Core Strategy

   Sustainable Development

   Policy SNP/TRA2 emphasises the importance of preserving and enhancing the existing environment of Sonning, particularly land within or adjacent to the Active Travel Network. By maintaining and improving these areas, the policy supports the continued functionality and connectivity of the active travel routes, which are essential for promoting sustainable development. This approach not only protects vital routes and pedestrian pathways but also encourages the use of walking and cycling as preferred modes of transport. Such active travel options are recognised as more environmentally friendly compared to other transportation methods that can contribute to air pollution and degrade air quality. By aligning with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP1, which prioritises sustainable transport solutions, SNP/TRA2 reinforces the commitment to reducing the environmental impact of travel and supporting a healthier, more eco-conscious community.

   Managing Travel Demand

   Policy SNP/TRA2 is designed to promote and, where feasible, enhance infrastructure that provides viable alternatives to private car use. This initiative supports the management of travel demand by ensuring that infrastructure for walking and cycling remains both accessible and efficient for Sonning's residents. By focusing on the development and improvement of active travel networks, the policy aligns with WBC Core Strategy Policy CP6, which encourages the adoption of active travel modes such as walking and cycling over driving. This approach not only fosters healthier and more sustainable transportation habits but also aims to reduce vehicle usage and alleviate traffic congestion. By maintaining and expanding these alternative transport options, the policy seeks to create a more balanced and efficient transport system, ultimately contributing to reduced environmental impact and improved quality of life in the community.

9 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

When asked their opinion as to the preferred use of CIL monies that are available for Sonning residents most votes were cast for the following categories:

- ◊ Traffic calming schemes (56%)
- ◊ Schemes to improve Sonning pavements for walkers and disabled accessibility (43%)
- ◊ Roads and drainage (32% each)
- ◊ Fixed or average speed cameras (31%)
- ◊ Road improvements for cyclists and better Broadband services (30% each)

These priorities broadly reflect the opinions expressed in earlier sections of this Plan.

The following additional uses are envisaged, subject to more detailed study at the time that the funds become available:

- ◊ Contribution towards the provision of new Almshouses to provide genuinely affordable housing
- ◊ Improving footpaths including the provision of a new footpath along Charvil Lane
- ◊ Improved street lighting
- ◊ Consultancy services to advise on traffic calming measures that can be proposed for implementation by WBC Highways
- ◊ Tree planting along highways to engender a more rural ambience and thereby reduce speeding
- ◊ Continuing improvements to the Pavilion in King George's Field

10 Monitoring and Evaluation

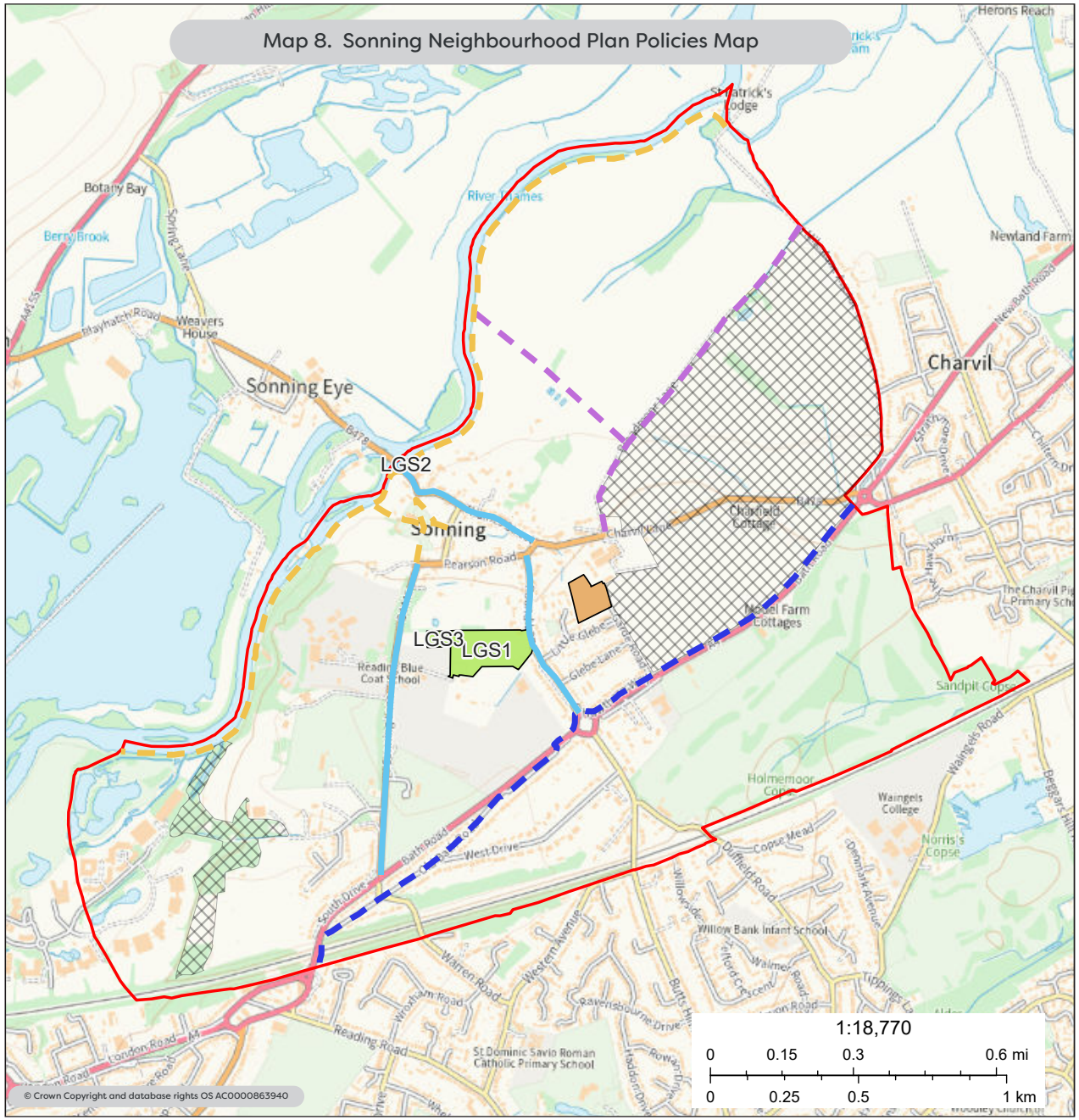
The sensitive management of Sonning's exceptional historic and natural environment should underpin all development decisions in order to provide for a sustainable future for the village. The enjoyment and understanding of this unique community depends on a robust strategy for periodic monitoring of ways by which this objective can be achieved. Where significant changes or amendments are thought to be needed, full public consultation will be undertaken.

The SNP will be reviewed every five years throughout the plan period. Review of policies will be managed by Sonning Parish Council and the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society. The purpose of review will be primarily to assess the extent to which the objectives have been achieved in practice and the contribution of the policies contained within it towards meeting those objectives; and secondly to rectify any errors and omissions.

The Parish Council notes that the Borough Council is now well-advanced in the preparation of the LPU, and acknowledges the importance of the emerging strategic planning context for the Borough. It is anticipated that the LPU will be adopted early in 2027. The Parish Council will also assess the need or otherwise for a full or partial review of the Plan within six months of the adoption of the emerging LPU.

11 Policies Map

Map 8. Sonning Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map



Key

- SNP/TRA1: Traffic Calming
- SNP/TRA2: Active Travel (PRoW)
- SNP/TRA2: Active Travel (Cycle Paths)
- SNP/TRA2: Active Travel (Permissive Paths)
- SNP/HOU1: Delivering Genuinely Affordable Homes
- SNP/ENV1: Local Gaps
- SNP/ENV2: Local Green Spaces
- Sonning Parish Boundary

Appendix 1 Local Green Spaces

The following templates support the application for creation of Local Green Spaces in Sonning Parish.

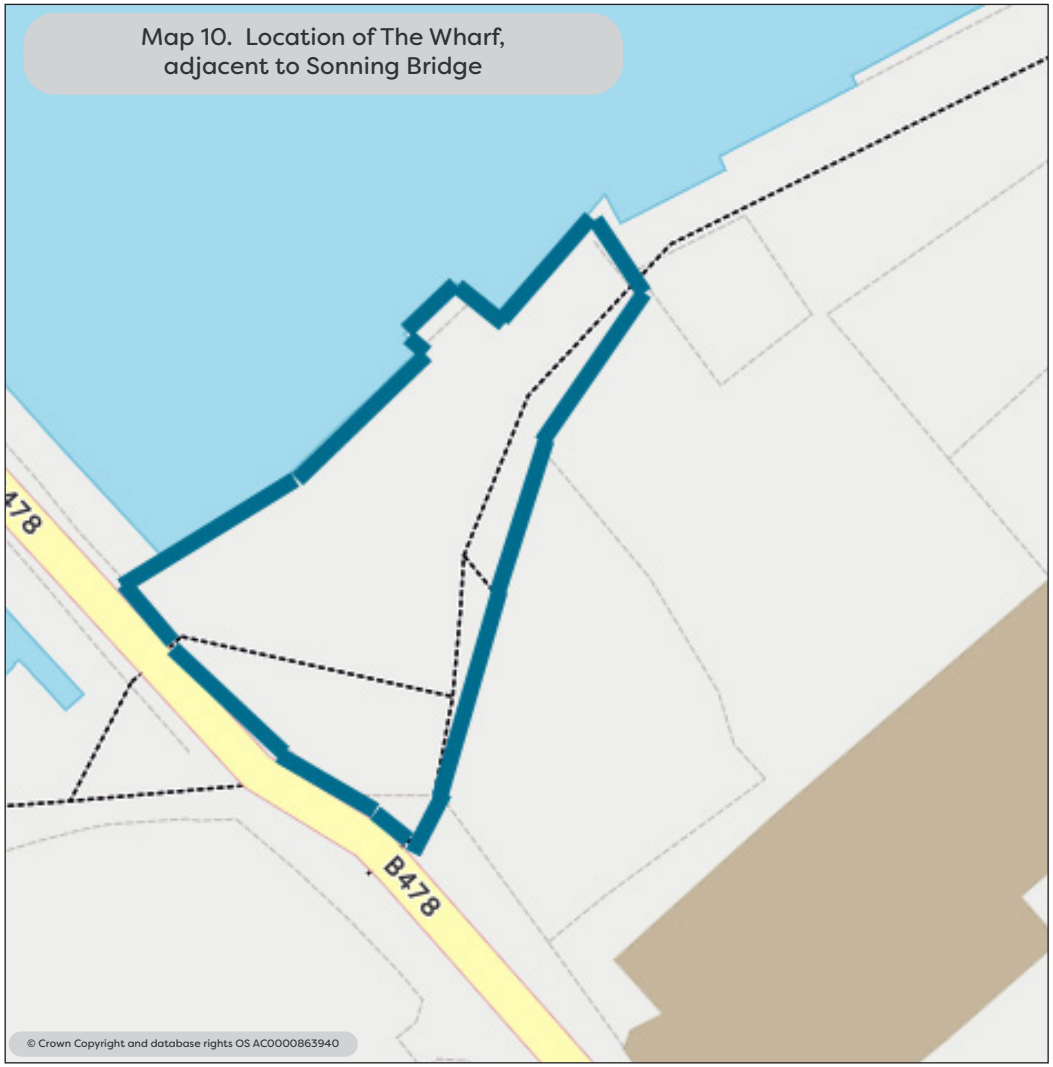
LGS.01 King George V Field



Map 9. Location of King George V Field

Site Reference	LGS.01
Site Name	KING GEORGE V PLAYING FIELD
Site Address	Off Pound Lane, Sonning RG4 6XE
Site Size	Approximately 5 hectares
Site Description	King George V Playing Field is located off Pound Lane and is in the Sonning Conservation Area. It is adjacent to Sonning Primary School. The site is Public Open Space and is also protected by Fields in Trust as a sports ground. The site is used for leisure, sport and recreation activities for all age groups including children. The site is surrounded by fine mature tree and hedges reminiscent of Sonning's rural origins, much of which remain to this day.
Is it in close proximity to the community it would serve?	Yes. The site is centrally located in Sonning close to residential homes, a junior school and Scout and Guide premises and within easy walking distance to all areas of Sonning. Public access is provided by Pound Lane connecting to Old Bath Road (A4) which is a recognised green route.
Is the site local in character and not an extensive tract of land?	The site is not considered to constitute an extensive tract of land as it is well contained and surrounded by residential development to the north, south and west immediately off Pound Lane.
Does the site have a particular local significance? Can the site be shown to be demonstrably special to a local community?	Yes. The King George V Playing Field lies within the Sonning Conservation Area and is one of 471 fields, throughout the country, established in memory of King George V who died in 1936. The Parish Council purchased the land, which had been used as their playing field since the 1870's, in 1935 and it was dedicated as a KGV Field with funding from the King George's Field Foundation. The Parish Council remain the landowners but dedicated it as a King George V Playing Field to provide it with protection in perpetuity. The Council rededicated it in 2008, confirming its importance to the community and the council's commitment to sporting facilities are used all year round. In the Summer the ground is home to Sonning Cricket club, and has an active youth section of 200 members. Football is played at the far end during the winter months. The Field is popular with dog owners, being the only significant wide-open space in the Parish with public access for dog walking. It is also well used for picnics and outdoor meetings throughout the year. The site is divided into an existing, secure, children's play area with a variety of equipment for children up to 11 years and the main area where cricket and football are played. The main field has an area equipped with 8 pieces of adult exercise machines and a very active Tennis Club with 3 courts. A small skate park is adjacent to the Tennis Club as it the ever-popular zip wire. The spinney is separated from the main field by the small car park and is a delightful tree filled oasis with wild flowers covering its ground space during spring and summer. King George V Field is adjacent to Sonning Church of England School and is used extensively by the children for both sport and educational purposes. The KGV Field is well maintained and surrounded by large mature trees, there is a historical pavilion built circa 1935, which adds to the calming tranquil ambience of the area. The area is frequented by many species of wildlife including Roe Deer, Muntjac and foxes and offers significant biodiversity opportunities.
Recommendation for Local Green Space designation	Yes. The site is demonstrably special to the local community because of its recreational and conservational value.

LGS.02 The Wharf



Map 10. Location of The Wharf, adjacent to Sonning Bridge

Site Reference	LGS.02
Site Name	THE WHARF
Site Address	Sonning Bridge (B478). co ordinates: 51°28′33″N 0°54′50″W
Site Size	Approximately 0.1 hectares
Site Description	Riverside green space offering unparalleled views of the River Thames at its widest point in the Parish. Owned and maintained by Sonning Parish Council, the Wharf has Village green status and is in the Sonning Conservations Area. A Public Right of Way runs through this modest area of green space bounded by the River Thames and Sonning Bridge.
Is it in close proximity to the community it would serve?	Yes. The Wharf is within the Parish and a short walk from all points within the Parish.
Is the site local in character and not an extensive tract of land?	Yes. Situated just east of the grade II listed, Sonning Bridge, between the river Thames and the Great House lawns, a clearly delineated local green space providing outdoor recreation, and not considered to constitute an "extensive tract of land". Very well used by all ages and well maintained. The landing stage offers short stay mooring for medium sized rivercraft.
Does the site have a particular local significance? Can the site be shown to be demonstrably special to a local community?	Yes. The Wharf is a popular riverside area with the Thames footpath running through it, and includes a wooden landing stage, seats, a TPO protected weeping Willow, and a grassed area - all for public use. The Wharf was listed as one of the "Key Positive" features of The River (Character Area 1 0l in the 2017 Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal. The 2024 Wokingham Borough Council Valued Landscapes Assessment for the River Thames recognises that other towns and villages within and adjacent to the valued landscape grew up on higher ground near wharves and river crossings for trade and security. Historically the plot was where a ferryman operated a service. Popular location of the pre-war Sonning Regatta, which included swimming races. The impressive cups awarded annually are owned by the Parish Council and on permanent display in the Bull Inn. Apart from the Thames footpath running on the south side of the Thames, the Wharf is the only public area with views across the Thames. Limited public open areas in Sonning like 'The Wharf' contribute to the significance and are key distinctive features of the Sonning Conservation Area. In the SNP questionnaire, 'Need to maintain views and access to Thames' received the highest endorsement in the Green Spaces section, with over 260 'Strongly Agree' responses.
Recommendation for Local Green Space designation	Yes. The site is demonstrably special to the local community providing extensive views over the river, and has a high recreational value for bird spotters, picnickers, and any residents seeking a calm and peaceful riverside resting point. It is well used throughout the year and particularly during the summer months.

LGS.03 Ali's Pond



Map 11. Location of Ali's Pond

Site Reference	LGS 03
Site Name	ALI'S POND
Site Address	Sonning Lane, Sonning
Site Size	Approximately 0.25 hectares
Site Description	A small Nature Reserve (contiguous with King Georges field), and bounded on the other sides by Sonning Bluecoat School fields and Private property.
Is it in close proximity to the community it would serve?	The Grounds are all within the Parish, and therefore in proximity for those parishioners wishing to use its facilities
Is the site local in character and not an extensive tract of land?	Yes. Situated totally within the parish itself, a clearly delineated local green space, specifically designed to provide outdoor recreation, and is not considered to constitute an "extensive tract of land". It lies within the Sonning Conservation Area. The Conservation Area Appraisal recognises that Ali's Pond is one of four distinct open spaces in the Conservation Area which…'provide a peaceful green area near the centre of the village whilst simultaneously providing a valuable refuge for protected species' (Page 30).

Does the site have a particular local significance? Can the site be shown to be demonstrably special to a local community?	Yes. Ali's Pond Local Nature Reserve was established by Sonning Parish Council in March 1997, following an ecological survey of Sonning Parish [Welsh 1995], which confirmed that, apart from the River Thames, the village had very few areas of high conservation value with easy public access. Since then, various activities have been implemented to enhance the area and increase community involvement in its management and use, including pond creation, hedgerow and tree planting, wildflower planting, bird and bat box installation and erection of information boards. In total, 18 species of dragonfly, 250 species of larger moth and over 40 species of aquatic/ wetland plants have been recorded at the site since its establishment in 1997. The site has been recognised with a Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) award for small scale practical nature conservation. There is an adjoining pond to the west, in Sonning Field, which was created to provide additional habitat for Great Crested Newts, and contains another amphibian breeding pond, log and brushwood piles and new hedgerows with a wide variety of native trees and shrubs. A permissive path enables easy access through from Ali's Pond and across Sonning Field to a kissing gate on Sonning Lane. There is a small network of footpaths within the two sites, which provide access to adjacent King George's Field used for wider recreational opportunities. Together these sites provide a unique amenity with easy public access within the heart of the village. Located in an area surrounded by large private gardens and the "wildlife deserts" of recreation fields, this wildlife oasis has proved incredibly popular with young and old alike. Many Sonning residents walk their dogs there on a regular basis, the elderly can stroll around the site comfortably using the regularly strimmed paths, and youngsters from the local primary school (Sonning CofE), Reading Blue Coat School and the Baden-Powell groups use it as an outdoor classroom for minibeast hunting, pond dipping etc.





Appendix 2 Supporting Studies & Documentation

- Housing Needs Assessment
  by Aecom Infrastructure & Environment UK Ltd
  March 2024
- Sonning: Design Guidance and Codes
  by Aecom Ltd in conjunction with Locality
  March 2024
- Sonning Neighbourhood Plan:
  Evidence Base and Policy Development
  by Aecom Infrastructure & Environment UK Ltd
  August 2024
- Sonning Neighbourhood Plan:
  Local Gap Study
  by Briarwood Landscape Architecture Ltd
  April 2025
- Sonning Parish Design Statement
  Autumn 2004
- Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal
  April 2017
- Sonning Neighbourhood Plan: Questionnaire for Residents
  Spring 2021
- Sonning Neighbourhood Plan:
  Determination Statement on the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment
  and Habitats Regulations Assessment
- Draft Sonning Neighbourhood Plan: Reg 15. October 2025
  (This document as downloadable PDF)
- SNP: Consultation Statement
- SNP: Appendices for Consultation Statement
- SNP: Basic Conditions Statement

Appendix 3 List of Maps

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Appendix 4 Acknowledgements

The Steering Group for the Sonning Neighbourhood Plan comprised the following people:

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Michael Firmager (Previous Wokingham Borough Councillor)
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