



**DORCHESTER-ON-THAMES**

**NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

**Pre-Submission Draft V1 March 2017**

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## 1. Executive Summary

The Dorchester-on-Thames Neighbourhood Development Plan is a product of the Government's current approach to planning, which is intended to involve local communities more directly in planning decisions which affect them.

The Plan has been produced by a small team of Dorchester residents with the support of and under the overall guidance of the Parish Council. Every effort has been made to communicate and consult with residents throughout the process, including public meetings and monthly progress reports in "Dorchester News", with the intention of ensuring that the final document incorporates and reflects the views and aspirations of the majority of Dorchester residents.

It seeks to retain the unique character of the village and preserve its natural and historic environment whilst at the same time supporting progress towards the provision and maintenance of:

- a balanced housing mix
- a thriving community of small businesses
- expanding tourism opportunities for the benefit of the economic well-being of the village

This final draft of the Plan is now provided for review and consultation with residents, following which any possible amendments arising from this review will be considered by the Parish Council and NDP team. The Plan will be revised as appropriate prior to submission to statutory consultees and the local planning authority; then for independent examination, before being put forward for referendum within the Parish and then, hopefully, formal adoption.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. What are Neighbourhood Development Plans?

From April 2012, local communities have been given new legal powers under the Localism Act 2011 to take part in Neighbourhood Development Planning for their areas.

Plans will be used to decide the future of the places where we live and work giving opportunities to:

- choose where we want new homes, shops and offices to be built
- have our say on what new buildings should look like
- encourage local businesses including home-working
- protect the environment (landscape, biodiversity, built and archaeological heritage, public access to open spaces).

This does not, however, give us free rein to decide anything we want. Neighbourhood Development Plans must still meet the policies of District Councils' Local Plans and must also take into account the relevant Regional Councils' strategic assessment of housing needs and other development issues. They must also comply with European and national legislation and must have appropriate regard to national policy.

On 7th June 2013 South Oxfordshire District Council gave approval to the neighbourhood area being defined as the whole parish of Dorchester-on-Thames. The plan will stand for a period of 15 years.

Dorchester's Neighbourhood Development Plan, once approved by a community referendum and accepted by SODC, will have statutory force and set a comprehensive agenda for the village's future development. Without the Plan we would have no strategic influence over the future development of our village.

### 2.2. What is in this document?

This document sets Dorchester on Thames' strategic direction and policies for the Built Environment, Natural Environment, Housing, Economy, Tourism and Leisure. The



background and issues related to each of these are considered under paras. 4.1 to 4.5. These lead separately to a number of policy proposals, and these are summarised in paras. 5.1 to 5.5.

## **2.3. What we are asking you to respond to?**

This document is the final version of the Dorchester-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan and it is now open to residents for review and comment before being submitted to SODC, where it is checked to ensure it has followed the proper legal process and from which point it becomes available to view by the public at large. It is then passed for independent examination before being presented in final form for referendum and, if accepted, implementation.

This consultation period will last for six weeks and residents are therefore asked to address their comments to Geoff Russell, Parish Clerk, either by letter to “Pigeons”, High Street, Dorchester-on-Thames OX10 7HH or by emailing [parishclerk@dorchesteronthames.co.uk](mailto:parishclerk@dorchesteronthames.co.uk).

The closing date for your comments is 30<sup>th</sup> April 2017 and the feedback gained can then be used to make any necessary amendments and finalise the Plan.

## **2.4. Project timetable and next steps**

### **2.4.1. Village presentations and feedback**

Opportunities for the village community to make its wishes known and to comment on plans and proposals came through a series of public meetings in the Village Hall. These were on 20.10.2012 (80 attendees), 15.05.13 (before the Parish Council APM), 31.01.2015, and 14.01.2016 regarding the possibility of the Demesne field being removed from the Green Belt (150 attendees).

### **2.4.2. Publicity and feedback**

Every effort has been made to engage with the community throughout the process, including:

#### **Kick-off**

The meeting on 20.10.2012 (facilitated by Anton Nath, ORCC) was preceded by a review of the 2005 Parish Plan published in Dorchester News (distributed to all 500 households in the

village), ORCC leaflets inserted in Dorchester News, and A4 posters throughout the village. Attendees responded to a questionnaire with a collection of post-it notes at the meeting. These were then carefully collated and summarised. The results indicated housing (affordability, size and location) and the environment (rural and built) to be the main issues, plus many other items that have been dealt with, first by the Community-led Plan, and subsequently by the Parish Council.

### **First Look**

Considerable feedback came from the 31.01.2015 meeting which opened with a poster display and a PowerPoint presentation of the plan including draft policies for each subject area. The feedback was drawn together in detail and summary form to provide the basis for careful review and further modifications to the Plan. Photographs of attendees at the meeting indicate the level of interest.

### **Demesne Field**

Attendance at the meeting called to consider the 35 acre Demesne field issue (14.01.2016) was 99% against the suggestion that it should be reclassified as a Rural Exception site. That being the case, the leader of SODC indicated that the NDP should consider other possible sites and the team move towards obtaining formal approval of the Plan as quickly as possible.

### **Dorchester News**

Dorchester News has carried regular updates (by way of a reserved special green high profile page in each issue) reporting the NDP's progress in between the village meetings.

### **Village Website**

The website has carried updates and draft versions of the plan at <https://www.dorchester-on-thames.co.uk/information/neighbourhood-planning/>

### **Consultations**

NDP members have attended some useful formal consultations:

- CPRE (Didcot) - 'Neighbourhood plans – Getting started workshop;
- 11.12.13, Eland House, London, Department for Communities and Local Government (well attended by NDP groups from all over the country);
- 23.04.2013 Brookes University workshop on Neighbourhood Planning.

These have all offered sensible guidance (e.g. be brief, be positive, keep the local community fully informed, interact with District Council staff) and provided good opportunities for networking.

SODC has maintained a close interest as the draft Plan has evolved, attending many of the NDP meetings and providing suggestions for improved content and presentation, with particular regard to conformation with existing National and Local plans. NDP members' personal networks have provided information from other villages (e.g. Great Coxwell, Woodcote) and specialist bodies (e.g. Dorchester's Hurst Water Meadow Trust, Earth Trust, Environment Agency, Historic England etc.).

#### **2.4.3. The main issue**

Without question, the main issue has been housing (how much, where, when, size, affordability?) complicated by changes in perceived requirements. Will Dorchester continue to be designated a small village with no specific housing allocation or a large one with a required housing provision? The recent draft proposals for the 2031 Local Plan would require the SODC to meet greatly increased numbers of houses. This has led to a series of draft and redrafted housing policies as the NDP has sought to meet each new demand. It is believed that the housing policies as now presented will fully meet SODC requirements and fully respect national policy on the Green Belt.

#### **2.4.4. The next steps**

Following circulation of this draft to the Parish community, SODC and other interested parties for initial comment and feedback it will be amended as necessary and then formally submitted to SODC for referral for independent inspection and then SODC approval. Subject to any further changes which may arise from this process, it will then be presented to the Parish community for referendum and, if successful, adoption.

It is anticipated that this entire process should be complete by no later than six months from the date of this current circulation.



## 3. Dorchester-on-Thames

### 3.1. Overview

#### 3.1.1. Snapshot of the village

Dorchester-on-Thames is a small village in South Oxfordshire which is loved and enjoyed by those who live there as well as by its many visitors. Despite having a resident population of a little over 1,000 people, it is considered by many to be a dynamic village with a diverse range of community activities that enrich the lives of its inhabitants.

- It is steeped in history, its origins dating back 6,000 years, and much of its evolution is still clearly in evidence in the landscape today.



Dyke Hills and Wittenham Clumps

- It is surrounded by beautiful countryside, including both the River Thames and the River Thame, Wittenham Clumps and the Hurst Water Meadow, all of which are

easily accessible to residents and visitors alike and provide almost unlimited opportunities to walk and explore.

- It boasts a number of interesting and varied buildings in and around the picturesque High Street, including the majestic Dorchester Abbey and the adjoining accredited Museum.



Dorchester Abbey



Abbey Guest House

- Commercial facilities include a village shop, hotels and restaurants, tea-rooms, hair salon, and other small business premises.

The Co-Op



'Hair' of Dorchester



- Community run facilities include the village hall, allotments, a large recreation ground with a sports pavilion, tennis courts and children's play area.



Play area and tennis courts



The Pavilion



The allotments

- It offers its residents and visitors a range of cultural and recreational leisure facilities through its many clubs and associations.
- Its pre-school and primary school, and other facilities for young families, provide the opportunity for children to begin their development and early education without the need to travel outside the village.
- People like living in Dorchester. If they move they tend to do so within the village. Residents who remain here through their retirement appreciate the range of facilities suitable for their particular age group.

### 3.1.2. Vision and objectives

Dorchester will retain its unique character by continuing to evolve as a supportive, lively, economically active community that respects and enhances its historic and natural environment.

We will meet this vision by attaining the following objectives across these themes:

- **Historic and Natural Environment:** To nurture and protect the natural and built environment of the village for future generations to enjoy.
- **Housing:** To ensure new housing, extensions and other residential development respect the character of the village, to promote a range of housing size and type to meet the needs of residents and to encourage high standards of environmental performance in all residential development.
- **Tourism and Leisure:** To promote and manage sustainable tourism to enhance the cultural and economic well-being of the village, to retain and promote recreational facilities for all members of the community and to preserve the character and nature of the village for its residents and visitors; having appropriate regard for the potential conflict between vehicular traffic and the safety of residents, cyclists and pedestrians.
- **Economy:** To support enterprises providing employment in the village and promote small businesses contributing to the economic well-being of the community.

### 3.1.3. SWOT analysis

<b>Strengths:</b>	<b>Weaknesses:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attractive village, many listed buildings</li><li>• Dorchester Abbey, major tourist attraction, largest public building in South Oxfordshire for public events</li><li>• Dorchester Abbey Museum, accredited by the Arts Council</li><li>• Locations for episodes of Midsomer Murders and other television or film productions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Few premises for small businesses and retail units</li><li>• Limited public transport</li><li>• Inadequate parking</li><li>• Uncoordinated promotion of tourism</li><li>• Vulnerability of conservation areas and nearby green areas to</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good hotels, tea-rooms and small supermarket</li> <li>• The Fleur de Lys pub and the former site of the Post Office registered as community assets</li> <li>• Distinctive landscape character of the River Thames and its valley; excellent vistas</li> <li>• Good area for walking and cycling; footpath network</li> <li>• Managed wildlife sites</li> <li>• Strong community spirit with high level of voluntary activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inappropriate development</li> <li>• Lack of affordable accommodation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with the Environment Agency and other environmental organisations to sustain and protect the natural environment</li> <li>• Support the Hurst Water Meadow Trust in maintaining, enhancing and extending wildlife sites, especially along the Thame</li> <li>• Smaller housing units will meet the needs of the young and the elderly</li> <li>• Improved facilities for leisure and recreation will give better quality of life for all ages</li> <li>• More parking spaces will ease congestion and encourage visitors</li> <li>• Work with University of Oxford Institute of Archaeology and like-minded organisations to understand and protect archaeological sites</li> <li>• Explore the potential for hydro-electric power</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of employment due to commercial premises change of use to domestic dwellings</li> <li>• Risk of flooding to low-lying houses</li> <li>• Risk of further gravel extraction which will bring more traffic and damage the local environment</li> <li>• Risk of coalescence with Berinsfield</li> <li>• Risk of damage to important unprotected archaeology by development</li> </ul>

### 3.2. Environment

- Dorchester-on-Thames is a village of outstanding character set on slightly higher ground between the open floodplains of the River Thames and its tributary the River Thame. Its visible history extends back into the Iron Age and includes the nationally important Dorchester Abbey, founded as a cathedral in 635. From medieval times the focus of the settlement has been along the High Street, part of the principal route between Henley and Oxford.
- The two Conservation Areas include most of Dorchester and the hamlet of Overy with its rural setting. The Abbey is a Grade I listed building, and many other buildings

are listed Grade II or Grade II\*. There are five Scheduled Ancient Monuments, including the Iron Age Dyke Hills, much of the centre of the village (site of the Roman town) and a stretch of farmland.



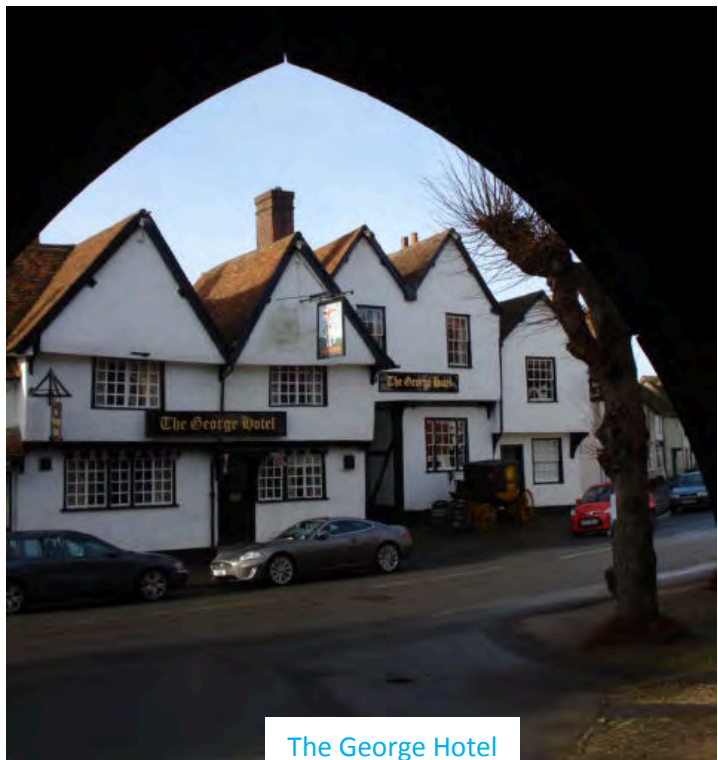
The Dyke Hills

- The whole parish lies within the Oxford Green Belt.
- Oxfordshire's Biodiversity Action Plan aims to protect vulnerable species and habitats listed as UK Biodiversity Action Plan priorities. The plan has defined 36 Conservation Target Areas of which no.27 includes all the flood meadows in the parish, the gravel pit lakes and the banks of the River Thames as far as the A4074. It also extends south across the parish boundary to the Little Wittenham Special Area of Conservation, the Wittenham Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest, and the Wittenham Clumps hillfort giving exceptional views across Dorchester to the Chilterns and the Oxford Heights.
- The underlying geology is Upper Greensand and Gault clay overlain with gravel and alluvium.



### 3.3. History

- The first permanent settlement was a late Iron-Age town in the southern part of the parish covering 46 hectares in an area defined by both rivers and the massive double bank and ditch of the Dyke Hills.
- The Dyke Hills gradually fell into disuse following the Roman invasion in the first century AD when a fort was established to the north of the Dyke Hills, quickly followed by a walled town laid out on a grid pattern with its outer limits marked by the line of Wittenham Lane and Watling Lane. There were also substantial extra-mural settlements to the north, south and especially to the east beyond the River Thames.
- In the Anglo-Saxon period following the Roman withdrawal, Dorchester became an important centre of Christianity with the first cathedral founded in 635. By 1140 the cathedral had been refounded as an Augustinian monastery which survived until its dissolution in 1536. The Abbey church was then adopted as the parish church.
- After the time of Alfred the Great, Dorchester lost its regional importance to other centres at Oxford and Wallingford. The main road, which crossed the Thames by means of a stone bridge from at least the C12, ensured that the settlement enjoyed a modest prosperity by providing hospitality and accommodation for travellers. From the late



medieval period this service function was enhanced by pilgrims to the shrine of Saint Birinus, the founder of the first cathedral. The trade continued to prosper through the coaching age.

- Agriculture was the main occupation down to the C20 when the car factory in Oxford allowed some of the inhabitants to earn their living outside the village and tourism gradually became of increasing importance to the village economy. There are a number of small businesses within the village and the agricultural presence is maintained by three farms and the cultivation of the surrounding fields.
- Gravel, which because of its free draining qualities first attracted prehistoric man to settle in Dorchester, has since World War II greatly changed the appearance of the landscape in the northern part of the parish. The relentless demand for aggregates for the construction industry has led to a string of man-made lakes which are now designated County Wildlife Sites and largely used for various leisure purposes.

### **3.4. Literature**

- Since c.1125 when William of Malmesbury first described it as 'obscure and unfrequented', Dorchester has attracted the attention of a long list of commentators, antiquaries and artists. Its proximity to Oxford has meant that it has been subjected to exceptional scholarly enquiry and the list of publications devoted to its history, archaeology and architectural qualities is remarkably extensive. A selective bibliography is provided in Jean Cook and Trevor Rowley, *Dorchester Through the Ages* (Oxford, 1985).
- Subsequently there have been two monographs on the Abbey – Kate Tiller (ed.), *Dorchester Abbey; Church and People 635-2005* (Witney, 2005) and Warwick Rodwell, *Dorchester Abbey Oxfordshire* (Oxford, 2009), an interim report on the most recent archaeological excavations, *The Discovering Dorchester-on-Thames Project* (Dorchester, 2012) and a history of The Hurst and Old Bridge Meadow by Karen Selway Richards (Dorchester, 2013).

- There have also been Conservation Area Character Studies for Overy and Dorchester published by South Oxfordshire District Council in 2005.
- This huge corpus of published literature makes it unnecessary to repeat the detailed history of the village. The most recent conservation area character studies are an essential reference for the Neighbourhood Development Plan and can be accessed on the South Oxfordshire District Council website, both the [Character Study](#) and the [Management Plan](#).

### **3.5. Our population**

- We are a small village. The most recent census showed that there were just over 1,000 people living in the parish, in 480 dwellings.
- While we have a flourishing primary school, overall our population is older than England as a whole. Just over 36% of us were 60 and over, and 15% were aged over 75 which compares with 25% and 8% respectively for South Oxfordshire.
- We have a significant number of people aged 65+ living alone (17% of households) but also a lot of families with dependent children (24% of households), or older, non-dependent children (10% of households).
- More than half of residents in employment were in management or professional occupations.
- We had an average of 1.6 vehicles per household, a similar figure to South Oxfordshire

## 4. The themes for the plan

### 4.1. Historic environment

#### 4.1.1. Objective

To nurture and protect the natural and built environment of the village for future generations to enjoy

#### 4.1.2. Designations

Dorchester has been rightly described as being 'at the heart of an area of unparalleled archaeological and historical interest'<sup>1</sup>. Its importance has been officially recognised by the statutory listing of a substantial part of its built fabric as buildings of special architectural and historic interest, the scheduling of significant areas as ancient monuments and the designation of two contiguous conservation areas covering most of the village and the adjacent hamlet of Overy. The latter contains three wildlife sites managed by the Hurst Water Meadow Trust.

The entire parish lies within the Oxford Green Belt.

The Conservation Area Character Appraisals published in 2005 provide a sound analysis of those parts of the village that lie within the designated Conservation Areas.

#### 4.1.3. Analysis of the village outside the conservation areas

To the north there are areas of mostly twentieth century housing lining the Abingdon Road, the Old Oxford Road and the south side of the Drayton Road interspersed with lakes formed from the worked-out gravel pits. The Minchin Recreation Ground is a prominent open green space. Other areas of modern housing fringe the village to the east accessed from Martins Lane and Manor Farm Road. Beyond the Hurst Water Meadows (owned and managed by a local Trust on behalf of the community) and Overy is an open landscape.

To the south is another area of twentieth century housing in Tenpenny and Orchard Haven with productive agricultural fields and water meadows beyond. The area to the west is all open agricultural land apart from a scatter of modern houses on the west side of Watling Lane. Both these areas are crossed by a network of popular footpaths which have recently been fenced in as a response to a change in farming practice from arable to grazing. The sewage works at the south-eastern end of the bridge are separated from Dorchester by Old Bridge Meadow (also owned by the Hurst Water Meadow Trust) and a field used for event parking.

There is an isolated former Council housing development further to the south east at Meadside which has a distinctive character of its own. It was built in response to the 'Home for Heroes' campaign following World War I and is characterised by its uniform architectural

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<sup>1</sup> Cook, J., & Rowley, T. (ed.), *Dorchester Through the Ages* (Oxford 1985). p.3

design and the generous provision of garden land to enable the inhabitants to grow their own produce.



Meadside from Overy

With the exception of Meadside, all the twentieth century housing is clustered around the historic core of the village and the predominant character of the landscape outside the conservation areas is one of productive agricultural fields and water meadows, in places fringed with woodland. This forms an essential part of the setting of the historic core.

#### **4.1.4. Conservation Area Character Studies**

The conservation area character studies were approved by SODC on 2 September 2004. They have stood the test of time and provide a comprehensive analysis of the intrinsic character of Dorchester and Overy. Apart from a few minor alterations to take account of subsequent changes and discoveries, the text and the policies remain an essential tool in the positive management of the historic environment. A number of the potential enhancement schemes set out in the associated Management Plans approved by SODC on 16 June 2005 have been implemented and these have been deleted from the revised text. It is hoped that the Local Planning Authority will incorporate the minor amendments to all four documents when they next review the conservation areas. The revisions are set out in the Supplementary Documents and have been made available to the conservation team at South Oxfordshire District Council.



The appraisal maps which accompanied the character studies for Dorchester and Overy sought to show important views, walls, trees, open spaces and buildings of local note as well as listed buildings and the conservation area boundary. However, in our view the maps are



A Cob wall

deficient in that they omit some significant views and do not include the boundaries of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments which are such an important part of the historic character of Dorchester (Appendix 3). Although the text of the character study emphasises the importance of boundary walls to the appearance of the village, many of them are not marked on the maps. Accordingly we have revised the maps to include the

additional boundary walls and significant views. (Appendices 1 and 2).

There is some confusion about the status of the undesignated buildings which are marked as of 'local note' on the appraisal maps. Only two of them are included on the separately published District-wide list of 'buildings of local interest'. In the interests of clarity all these buildings should be added to that list. We have compiled Appendix 5 to give their addresses and a brief statement of their interest and marked them on the revised maps. Appendix 5 also includes those buildings outside the conservation areas which are of local interest and which should be treated as undesignated heritage assets.

#### 4.1.5. Archaeology

Given the history of settlement outlined in the introduction, it is clear that the whole area covered by the plan is of unparalleled archaeological potential. The areas protected by the Scheduled Ancient Monuments designations (Appendix 3) are mainly open but it is recognised that the whole built fabric and the domestic gardens of the village conceal underlying archaeological deposits. In the spring of 2016,



Archaeology on the allotments

Historic England sponsored a pilot survey of the whole parish to assess its archaeological potential. At the time of writing this plan the results of the survey have not been published but they should inform any future decisions on development. It is expected that where



developments require planning permission the County Archaeologist will be consulted as a matter of course and it should be a requirement that an appropriate investigation should be undertaken by a professionally qualified archaeologist prior to determination in order that proposals can be designed in a way that avoids harm to any identified archaeology. Where works would affect a scheduled monument they will, of course, require scheduled monument consent. Since the last revision to the boundary of the Overy conservation area in 2004 it has emerged that the field between Overy Lane and the A4074 contains important archaeological evidence for an extensive extra-mural suburb of Roman Dorchester (Abingdon Archaeological Geophysics 2013: see Dorchester-on-Thames: a walk through 10,000 years of Archaeology, 2014). The Demesne Field, which is currently outside the Dorchester conservation area, also contains evidence for important underlying archaeological remains (Appendix 4).

#### **4.1.6. Proposals**

These proposals are important elements in the management of the historic character of Dorchester. They have been produced in accordance with the advice contained in Neighbourhood Planning and the Historic Environment published by the then English Heritage (2014). It is recognized that they will need to be taken forward outside the Neighbourhood Development Plan,

1. That the revised appraisal maps as set out in Appendices 1 & 2 are formally approved by SODC.
2. That the buildings set out in Appendix 5 are formally adopted by SODC as a local list of non-designated heritage assets.
3. That the Overy conservation area should be revised to include the field between Overy Lane and the A4074 as shown on the appended map. Appendix 2.
4. That the Dorchester Conservation Area should be revised to include the Demesne Field. Appendix 1.

#### **4.1.7. Evidence base for the Proposals**

##### **Walls**

The Dorchester Conservation Area Management Plan rightly draws particular attention to 'the many attractive walls...which make such an important contribution to the character of the conservation area'. However, the Appraisal Map only identifies a small selection of these

walls. There are many other stretches of walling which make an equally important contribution to this identified character. They are constructed of a variety of materials which cumulatively establish the vernacular character of the village such as the cob walls in the yard of the Fleur de Lys, the north boundary of the school grounds and adjacent to Cob Cottage in Malthouse Lane. Rubble stone walls include those along the High Street frontage of Lych Gate Cottage and in the footpaths leading east from the High Street, the boundary wall of Herringcote in Martins Lane and on the western and southern boundaries of the School in Queen Street. Elsewhere in the village they are found in Malthouse Lane and in Bridge End. Distinctive brick walls define the curtilage of the Rectory, the south east side of Manor Farm Road and the west side of Wittenham Lane. Two prominent stone walls mark the former existence of important groups of buildings, that along the north west boundary of Manor Farm Road being all that is left of the medieval Abbey farmyard and that on the north side of the elevated footpath leading west from Bridge End is the remains of Albion Terrace complete with one of its windows.

The importance of all these walls as marked on the amended Appraisal Map (Appendix 1) should be a material consideration in any development proposals that might affect their integrity. Some of them are in a poor condition and a revised Management Plan should include their appropriate repair as an objective of enhancement.

### Views and trees

The Dorchester and Overy Character Appraisals identify the importance of the open farmland which surrounds the tightly-knit built form of the village. Notwithstanding the recent introduction of wire fencing along the footpaths, the overall character remains that of an open landscape. Views into the village from all the distant approaches outside the conservation areas are a crucial element of its landscape character and should be protected when considering proposals within the conservation areas. The open nature of the farmland to the west, south and east is such that it is difficult to pin-point precise locations on a map where one view into the village is more significant than another and it is the totality of that whole open setting which is so important. However, there are locations within the village which either frame the view out into the open countryside or into the built up area in a way which asserts the importance of the Abbey in particular. A selection of these views has been added to the Appraisal Maps for both Dorchester and Overy (Appendices 1 and 2).

In Overy the area of land known as the Hurst is a highly-valued amenity for the community and the well-managed footpaths provide a variety of views both inwards and outwards. A belt of trees with a traditionally laid hedgerow running north-south in the eastern sector

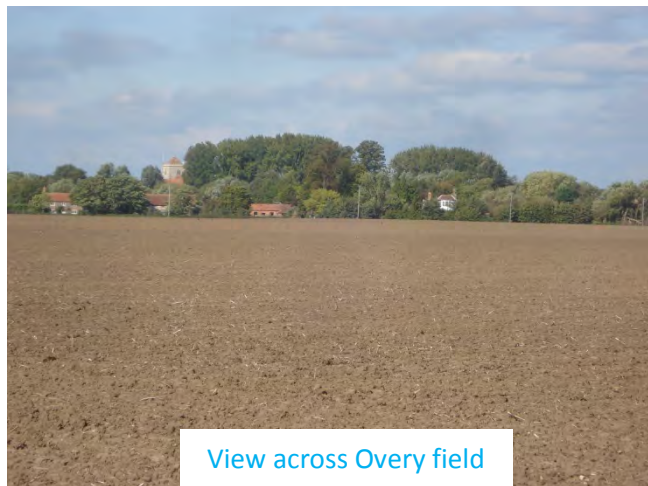
punctuates the open meadow and has been added as an additional group of important trees (Appendix 2).

### **Buildings of local note**

The justification for adding further buildings of local note is set out in Appendix 5. It includes two buildings outside the conservation area and provides a reasoned explanation for those buildings which were previously simply identified on the Appraisal Maps. Having provided this additional information it is hoped that the District Council will formally adopt the Appendix as a list of undesignated heritage assets.

### **Extension to Overy Conservation Area**

The field with the archaeological evidence for an extra-mural suburb of Roman Dorchester is a heritage asset of high importance but it is currently not recognised as a scheduled ancient monument. The field also forms the open setting for one of the most important distant views of the Abbey at the entrance to the village from the south eastern end of the bypass. In order to safeguard the contribution of this field to the intrinsic historic



character of Dorchester it is proposed that it should be included within the designated boundary of the Overy conservation area (Appendix 2).

### **Extension to Dorchester Conservation Area**

The Demesne Field on the north-east edge of the village is currently in productive agricultural use and it is hoped that it will continue to be farmed for the foreseeable future. It forms an important part of the open landscape setting of the village and acts as a buffer to the noise and activity of the by-pass. It contains a significant number of known archaeological features as recorded on the Historic Environment Record, including a Roman road and possible Romano-British enclosures (Appendix 4). It is flanked on its southern boundary by the tree-lined River Thame and on its western boundary by one of the shaded footpaths that are characteristic of the village. The line of the by-pass is concealed by a fringe of trees.

A recommendation in the Local Green Belt Study commissioned by South Oxfordshire District Council and dated 14 September 2015 that the field should be removed from the Green Belt misunderstands the role that the field plays in preventing the merging of the separate communities of Dorchester and Berinsfield. It was strongly rejected at a village meeting held on 14th January 2016 and it is crucial to the setting of Dorchester that it should remain in the Green Belt.

#### **4.1.8. Policies**

##### **DoT 1: Historic Environment**

Developments which maintain or enhance the historic environment as identified in the amended Dorchester and Overy Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans as contributing to the established character of the conservation areas as set out in Appendices 1, 2, 3, and 4 of this Plan will be supported.

As the NDP proposes amendments to the appraisals and plans, this policy is necessary until such time as the local authority formally adopts the proposals. The evidence base for the amendments is described in 4.1.6 above.

##### **DoT 2: Buildings of Interest**

Development proposals that affect properties identified in the amended local list of buildings of interest (Appendix 5) will be required to demonstrate that their significance as heritage assets, including their contribution to the character and appearance of Dorchester and Overy, has been understood and that the proposals have sought to avoid or minimize harm to their significance.

Any unavoidable harm to the significance of these buildings should be clearly justified by the public benefits delivered by the proposals. Development proposals should include a full assessment of the significance of the asset and an analysis of the effects of the proposal on that significance.

As the NDP proposes additions to the local list this policy is necessary until such time as the amended list is formally adopted by the local authority. The evidence base for inclusion on the list is contained within the Appendix.

### DoT 3: Traffic and Car Parking

Developments which could result in an increase in vehicular traffic and car parking must include an effective plan to mitigate any negative impact, especially in relation to car parking and traffic congestion in the High Street caused by demand for additional parking and pedestrian safety.

High Street traffic



## 4.2. Natural environment, wildlife and biodiversity

### 4.2.1. Objectives

1. To preserve, conserve and protect the terrestrial and aquatic life in the River Thames and River Thame flood meadows.
2. To preserve, protect and enhance the footpaths, Thames path and green lanes, green spaces and verges throughout the village and surrounding countryside.
3. To ensure that developments on land adjoining the Community Meadows owned by the Hurst Water Meadow Trust does not adversely impact on the biodiversity of these areas.
4. To retain the highest category of agricultural land for employment and the rural character of the village.

### 4.2.2. Background

Dorchester lies entirely within the Oxford Green Belt and the flood meadows adjacent to the River Thames and the River Thame are included in the Oxfordshire Conservation Target Area (no. 27), the objective is to preserve, maintain and conserve the extent and biodiversity of this important riverside village

Located within the Oxford Green Belt, Dorchester-on-Thames (and the adjoining hamlet of Overy) is a noticeably green village. It is surrounded by flood meadows, gravel pit lakes and

arable land, and includes a number of green spaces within the built-up area (recreation ground, allotments, cemetery, road-side verges, private gardens, public footpaths through green spaces.).

Dorchester is a largely open village and much of the land not yet developed is farmland. There are no significant areas of woodland within the immediate vicinity.

The River Thames forms the southern and south-western borders of the parish, and the River Thame flanks Dorchester and the hamlet of Overy on the east; both rivers are subject to flooding. Both settlements are located in Conservation Areas.

The River Thames and its valley with its scattered settlements, meadows on neutral soil, and the Dorchester lakes give the landscape its distinctive character.

The Thame has a wide catchment area including Thame, Aylesbury and the Chilterns. Its flood levels can rise when flood water backs up from the Thames when that is in flood. This affects a few low-lying buildings on the edge of Dorchester; the mill in Overy has been severely flooded twice in recent years and all buildings in Overy are at risk. The risk of backing-up from the Thames may rise when the planned river Flood Relief schemes upstream are implemented.

Gravel extraction is an important industry in the Thames Valley, and plans to increase quotas for Oxfordshire are under review. Until now Dorchester had been excluded as a potential source of further extraction of gravel on grounds of archaeology, but may not always be the case. This could affect the fields between the village and the A4074. Meanwhile PAGE (Parishes Against Gravel Extraction), with specialist advice, has submitted powerful arguments questioning the fundamental basis of quota calculations.

#### **4.2.3. Wildlife**

Dorchester is fortunate in lying in an area where the importance of biodiversity is recognised. On the opposite (south) side of the River Thames, in Wittenham Woods, is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), set up to protect a major site for the crested newt, and Wittenham Woods and the surrounding area are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In 1994 the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was published, which led the Oxfordshire County Council to identify 36 Conservation Target Areas, one of which (no. 27) comprises the Thames flood meadows between Clifton Hampden and Shillingford. It also includes those next to the River Thame up to the A4074 and the gravel lakes north of Dorchester. Also on the south side of the Thames is the River of Life project, a major wildlife and wetland development managed by the Earth Trust based at Little Wittenham.

All the flood meadows in the parish, the gravel pit lakes, existing and planned Hurst properties lie within the Oxfordshire Conservation Target Area no.27.

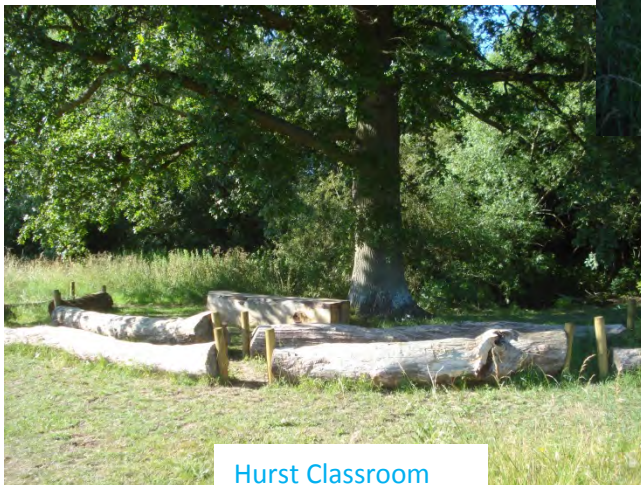


The area includes a wide variety of wildlife habitats, including: pasture, arable, woodland, wet woodland, hedgerows, reed beds, riverine vegetation, scrub, gardens, fast and slow-moving water, ponds and lakes, etc. Together these provide habitat for many hundreds of different species of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates (especially insects). The Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) lists approximately 500 species of interest in the immediate area, some of BAP Priority status.

The Hurst Water Meadow Trust owns three flood meadows; The Hurst and Old Bridge Meadow, together occupying 21 acres on the east bank of the River Thames, and a further 4 acres (called Overy Mead Piece) between Old Bridge Meadow and the confluence of the



Hurst Hedge



Hurst Classroom

Thame and the Thames. The object is for the Trust, with the active collaboration of the community, to manage these meadows and the rivers for biodiversity, wildlife, public education and informal recreation, and in particular to create a riverine wildlife corridor up the Thame from Wittenham Woods to the A4074.

Note that Environment Agency Guidance recommends a buffer of at least 10m between any development and the banks of a river, in this case the River Thames and River Thames.

#### 4.2.4. Policies

##### DoT 4: River Impact

Any developments or change of use of land likely to have an impact on the River Thames or River Thame will be supported only if it protects and/or enhances biodiversity, is greater than the 10m buffer recommended by the EA and provides continued tranquillity and enjoyment of the natural environment for the public, for example, through managed sustainable tourism, education and leisure purposes.

### **DoT 5: Community Meadows**

Development on sites likely to have an impact on Community Meadows as shown on the Policy Map will be supported only where they make a positive contribution to the ecology of those sites.

### **DoT 6: Green Infrastructure**

Development will be supported only when it retains, protects and enhances for future generations to enjoy, local green infrastructure (green spaces and verges) including all bridleways and footpaths as identified on the Policy Map.

### **DoT 7: Agricultural Land Use**

Alternative land uses in the areas shown in the Policy Map, representing the most versatile and highest quality agricultural land in the Parish will only be supported where they protect agricultural employment and protect the non-renewable land resource.

Map 1 Map of Thames and Thame floodplain

Map 2 Map of Hurst, Abbey View Meadow and Overy Mead Piece

Map 3 Map of Thames Path, Public footpaths, green spaces and verges

Map 4 Map of Agricultural land and Natural England classification (including non-flooding part of Demesne Field)

## **4.3. Housing**

### **4.3.1 Objectives**

1. To increase the housing stock through a limited number of small developments, providing affordable housing, smaller dwellings, and dwellings suitable for older people, in order to meet the identified needs of local residents and allow the village to maintain a balanced community.
2. To ensure that new housing, extensions and other residential development respect and enhance the setting and special character of the village.
3. To encourage high standards of environmental performance in all residential development.

### **4.3.2 Background**

#### **Housing needs**

The adopted South Oxfordshire Core Strategy 2027 reported an annual level of need for affordable housing in the District of 547 units each year until 2026. It noted that setting a target in relation to need at that level was unrealistic and the strategy subsequently sought to maximise the amount of affordable housing.<sup>2</sup>

The more recent Oxfordshire Strategic Market Assessment 2014 estimated future affordable housing need in South Oxfordshire, taking into account newly forming households in need and existing households falling into need.<sup>3 4</sup> The analysis concluded that: “There is thus a significant need for new affordable housing in Oxfordshire and we therefore consider the Councils are justified in seeking to secure the maximum viable level of affordable housing.”<sup>5</sup>

In Dorchester, lack of affordable housing was identified as an important issue for local residents from the start of the neighbourhood development plans process. It was one of the issues most frequently raised by residents in the first village meetings on the NDP.

In order to get a clear idea of local need, in October 2012 an Affordable Housing Needs Survey Report<sup>6</sup> was carried out by Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, with questionnaires delivered to all dwellings in the parish. 100 people replied.

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<sup>2</sup> South Oxfordshire Core Strategy Para 7.29

<sup>3</sup> Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment: April 2014 Table 50 p 114

<sup>4</sup> ibid Table 55

<sup>5</sup> Ibid para 6.79

<sup>6</sup> Dorchester Housing Needs Survey Report. Anna Kennedy, Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, October 2012

In response to the question:

“Would you support a small development of affordable housing in Dorchester if there was a proven local need from individuals or families with a genuine local connection to the parish.”

76% replied Yes, 13% said Maybe and 11% said No

A number of people said that members of their household had left the village because of lack of housing.

The survey identified an affordable housing need from 12 respondents. All of these respondents stated that they have a local connection to Dorchester. All would be unable to afford to rent or buy on the open market or would have significant financial difficulties in doing so. All but one said that they would only be able to put down a deposit of £10,000 or less. The majority (8 people) wanted 1 or 2 bedded units, the remainder wanted three or four bedrooms.<sup>7</sup>

### Housing Affordability in Dorchester

The table below shows the lowest asking prices for different size houses in Dorchester at the time of the survey in October 2012, and in October 2016

Dorchester on Thames Dwelling type	Lowest asking price October 2012 <sup>8</sup>	Lowest asking price October 2016 <sup>9</sup>
4 Bed	£650,000	£475,000
3 Bed	£260,000	£400,000
2 Bed	£249,950	£385,000
Total houses on market	12	9

The 2012 survey commented that:

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<sup>7</sup> Dorchester Housing Needs Survey Report. Anna Kennedy, Oxfordshire Rural Community Council October 2012

<sup>8</sup> Source: Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Source: [www.rightmove.co.uk](http://www.rightmove.co.uk) extracted 20/10/16

“At the average prices of homes in Dorchester, it would not be possible for a household to purchase a property without a large deposit, some equity in an existing property or a substantial income.

First-time buyers would generally struggle to meet any of the criteria necessary for obtaining their own home

In some cases shared ownership housing would be a suitable option, whilst in other instances affordable rented would be advisable..”

The follow-up data would suggest that, while larger house prices may have eased, smaller housing units have become less affordable since the initial survey.

To check this, land registry data on Dorchester sold prices on 20 houses sold from January 2010 was compared with the 20 most recent sales in 2015/16, and the average (mean) price calculated:

Dwelling type <sup>10</sup>	2010 Average sold price	2015/16 Average sold price	Change %
All sales	£527,000	£496,000	-6
3 or less bedrooms	£348,000	£424,000	+22

Dorchester is a small village, and so the data in the tables above is inevitably based on limited numbers of houses on the market or sales. However the information would seem to confirm that smaller dwellings have become less affordable in recent years, at a time when real incomes have been static or falling.<sup>11</sup>

### Housing mix

The SODC Core Strategy noted a shortfall of smaller units, especially two bedroom properties, in both the market and affordable sectors in the District.<sup>12</sup> Dorchester has a lower proportion of smaller dwellings, than has South Oxfordshire. In Dorchester 25% of households had one or two bedrooms, compared with 31% for South Oxfordshire and 40% for England.<sup>13</sup> Conversely nearly a third of Dorchester dwellings (32.4%) have 4 bedrooms or more, compared with 29% for South Oxfordshire and 19% for England.

In terms of dwelling type, Dorchester has a much higher proportion of detached houses than does South Oxfordshire or England – see chart below.

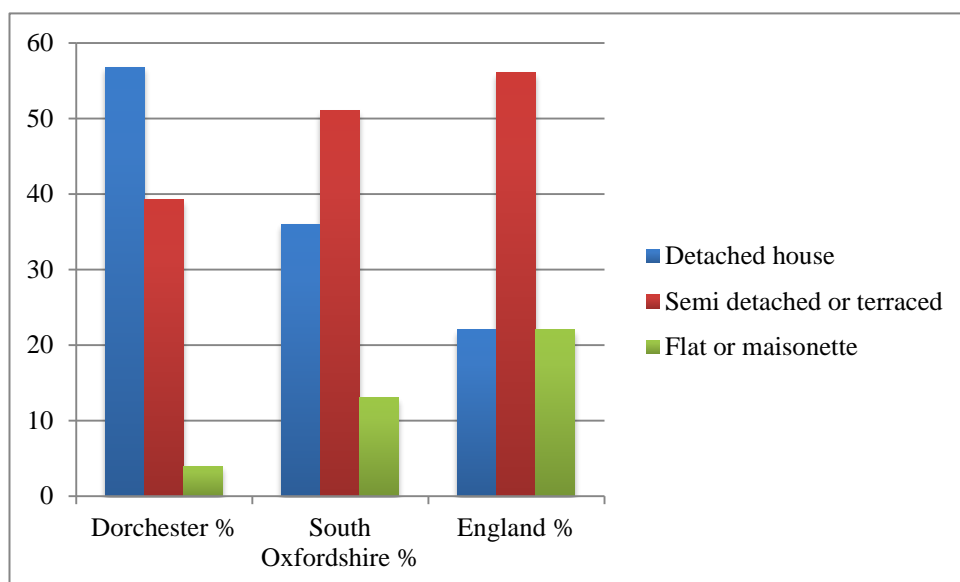
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<sup>10</sup> Source Land Registry and [www.rightmove.com](http://www.rightmove.com) extracted 20.10.16

<sup>11</sup> Real wage trends. S Machin Understanding the Great Recession: From Micro to Macro Conference, Bank of England, September 23 and 24 2015

<sup>12</sup> SODC Core Strategy para 7.37

<sup>13</sup> Census 2011



Dwelling type<sup>14</sup>

## Older people

Dorchester has a high proportion of older people. Well over a third of the population (36.5%) was aged 60 or over in 2011, and 15.4% were aged 75+. This compares with 24.7% and 8.4% respectively for South Oxfordshire. The market housing specifically for older people in the village at Herringcote provides 15 cottages and 4 apartments of in good quality accommodation, and Belcher Court until recently provided social rented accommodation (see below), but a small amount of additional provision in the village has the potential to meet more of the needs of our older population, and could free some larger housing for family use.

### 4.3.3 Policy Justifications

#### Infill developments

The policies in the plan aim to support infill development only where it is appropriate to its existing surroundings and which helps to maintain a balanced housing mix within the village. This would include small family homes in suitable locations, or homes suitable for older people, with a predominance of smaller homes to meet the established demand.

Dorchester is well known for its old and beautiful buildings - exceptional architecture is part of the character of the village. The quality of new buildings should continue to be of an exceptional standard to meet the demands of the present and future.

<sup>14</sup> Source - Census 2011



## Affordable Housing

Dorchester has very little “affordable” or social housing.

The need for affordable housing, both within South Oxfordshire and locally in Dorchester, is set out in para 4.3.2 above. The purpose of policies in the plan is to ensure that housing constructed within Dorchester LDP area, and therefore within the green belt, meets the NPPF criteria of providing: “limited affordable housing for local community needs” (NPPF para 89), and that it continues to do so into the future. Affordable housing for local needs was one of the key issues emerging from the initial consultations, and was supported in the Dorchester Housing Needs Survey<sup>15</sup>

The only substantial element of social housing, in the village is the SOHA Housing Association development at Belcher Court, which provides 10 units of accommodation for older people. It is understood that SOHA wishes to redevelop the site, and the current tenants are being decanted by SOHA.

In 1968 the then local authority compulsorily purchased the land on which Belcher Court stands in order to provide social housing for older people in the village and local area. It has continued to do this for the last 50 years

The site is virtually the only space in the built up area of the village, which is potentially suitable and available for affordable or social housing for local people, and which was publicly acquired for this purpose. Any redevelopment of the site should include a significant element of such housing.

## Environmental issues

Much of Dorchester’s housing stock has a relatively poor environmental performance, having high energy requirements and little regard to water management. The Housing policies in this plan aim to improve the performance quality of homes and reduce running costs by encouraging a thoughtful approach to design as a whole. It is not difficult to exceed the minimum requirements for sustainability set by Building Regulations and the Core Strategy, and there are good examples of homes across the country that have done so.

Building regulations and local planning policy set minimum requirements for the environmental performance of new buildings, but these are only minimum standards, not targets. There are an increasing number of zero-carbon homes in the UK and this policy seeks to encourage the design principles needed to significantly improve the overall quality

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<sup>15</sup> Dorchester Housing Needs Survey Report. Anna Kennedy, Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, October 2012

of the building stock within the village. Development applications will be enhanced if they show a clear commitment to this principle.

### Parking issues

There is high demand for on-street parking in Dorchester from residents as well as from visitors. This applies particularly to the historic High Street core of the village, Bridge End and to Queen Street, where the school is located. A large number of village-centre properties are terraced and have little or no off-street parking capability. The high level of car ownership in Dorchester exacerbates the problem. The Village Hall has limited parking for up to four cars and the primary school and pre-school have no parking facilities, even for staff. The result is that there is a high level of on-street parking, which is visually intrusive, and compromises access for buses and for emergency vehicles. This is a problem keenly felt by residents and was identified as a major concern in the initial survey that led to the development of this Neighbourhood Plan.

For these reasons the historic core of Dorchester requires a higher than usual ratio of off-street parking spaces for new dwellings, or an effective mitigation plan

### Policy context

Dorchester is ‘washed over’ by the Oxfordshire Green Belt. Chapter 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012) sets the Government’s policy on Green Belt to which it attaches great importance. One of its key purposes is to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

Dorchester is a historic village of more than local significance, with a settlement history going back 6000 years. It played an important part in the growth of Christianity in this country before and after the Norman Conquest. It has a unique setting, at the confluence of the rivers Thames and Thame and in the shadow of the Dyke Hills. Preservation of its ‘setting and special character’ is a key objective of the neighbourhood development plan.

Paragraph 83 of the NPPF states,

“Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan.” Paragraph 87 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 89 states that Local Planning Authorities should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this include limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the local plan. Other exceptions include

development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order, and can include the provision of cemeteries.

Policy CSR1 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Core Strategy 2027 covers housing in villages. Dorchester is classified in the Core Strategy as a “smaller village” where limited infill and rural exception sites for new housing will be permitted if need is shown and it is supported or initiated by the Parish Council. Sites will not be allocated for additional housing. Sites should not exceed 0.2 ha.

Rural exception sites are:

“Small sites used for affordable housing in perpetuity where sites would not normally be used for housing. Rural exception sites seek to address the needs of the local community by accommodating households who are either current residents or have an existing family or employment connection. Small numbers of market homes may be allowed at the local authority’s discretion, for example where essential to enable the delivery of affordable units without grant funding.”<sup>16</sup>

Local character and distinctiveness will be protected and the requirements of relevant development plan policies will be met.

## Conclusion

The Dorchester Neighbourhood Plan seeks to implement the above policies of the NPPF and the Core Strategy in order to meet the need for additional affordable housing in Dorchester. In line with national policy, sites will not be allocated for additional housing. The policies below support the development of local housing for local needs, and appropriate infill development.

### 4.3.4 Housing Policies

#### DoT 8 Housing infill developments

Small scale infill<sup>17</sup> developments will be supported where they respect national designations such as Green Belt, reflect the character of their immediate area in terms of scale, design and layout, and contribute to a balanced housing mix.

Development must be in keeping with their surroundings in terms of scale, design and layout, and must be consistent with the special characteristics of the street or lane, as

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<sup>16</sup> NPPF page 55

<sup>17</sup> “Infill development is defined as the filling of a small gap in an otherwise built-up frontage or on other sites within settlements where the site is closely surrounded by buildings.” SODC Core Strategy 2012 para 13.10

described in the Dorchester and Overy Character Appraisals where applicable. (see appendix ).

Within this framework, support will be given to schemes with a predominance of one, two or three bedroom dwellings.

#### **DoT 9 Affordable Housing:**

New housing development other than infill will be considered inappropriate development unless it provides affordable housing to meet identified local community need.

Such developments must reflect the character of their immediate surroundings in terms of scale, design and layout, and contribute to a balanced housing mix. Such housing should not compromise the purposes of the Green Belt .

Within this framework, support will be given to schemes with a predominance of one, two or three bedroom dwellings.

Any new homes provided in this way must be subject to a planning obligation to restrict their occupancy to people with a local connection. The application of a legally binding local occupancy clause will be expected in perpetuity.

Redevelopment or reuse of existing social or affordable housing sites must contain a substantial element of social or affordable housing.

A local connection is defined as:

- a) a person who is resident in the NDP area. The residency will need to be permanent and have lived in the area 6 months out of the last 12 or 3 years out of the last 5, or
- b) a person who is in permanent paid employment or has a fixed term contract for a minimum of one year or permanent offer of paid employment in the area, or is self-employed and works predominately in the area or
- c) a person with close family (grand-parents, parents, legal guardian, adult children or brothers and sisters) who have lived in the parish for 5 years or longer.

In the event that no persons meeting the above criteria are in housing need when a property becomes available, a local connection with South Oxfordshire criteria will be applied.

#### **DoT 10: Environmental issues**

Applications for new buildings will be encouraged to achieve excellent environmental performance, unless it can be demonstrated to adversely affect the viability of the

development. Developers are encouraged to use the Home Quality Mark to rate proposals on the dimensions of living costs for occupants, health and wellbeing, and environmental footprint.

Developments should:

- Incorporate sustainable drainage
- Incorporate energy efficiency measures and use renewable energy resources where appropriate.
- Protect trees, hedges and other valuable ecological features of the site.

### **DoT 11 Conservation Area Development - Parking**

Proposals for all new homes to be built within the Dorchester Conservation Area must provide an effective plan to mitigate the impact of additional on-street parking.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**

South Oxfordshire District Council has adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) scheme. For developments approved after 1st April 2016, a landowner or developer has to pay CIL if the development adds at least 100m<sup>2</sup> of additional floor space to an existing building or is less than 100m<sup>2</sup> but creates a new building.

The CIL scheme provides that 25% of the money raised goes to the parish in areas with an adopted neighbourhood plan where the development is located – (15% in areas without an adopted neighbourhood plan). Affordable, self-build and charitable dwellings are subject to relief from CIL.

The list below indicates initial areas where Dorchester would wish to invest any CIL monies received:

1. Improvement and refurbishment to the sports pavilion

The pavilion does not have adequate changing provision for female users, and this restricts the opportunities for women and girls to engage in sports on the village recreation ground. Use of CIL monies will enable adaptations to be made to remedy the situation.

2. Outdoor gym

Maintaining physical fitness is important for people of all ages. Provision of an outdoor gym for adults will increase opportunities for the whole adult population to remain active. We will also consider the possibility of making provision specifically for children.

### 3. Refurbishment of Village Hall and Parish Clerk's office

The Village Hall, a Giles Gilbert Scott building built in 1872, requires adaptations to enable it to be used more flexibly, so that it can continue to meet modern needs. In addition, the parish clerk currently operates from his own home. This is not a satisfactory situation in the long term, and a parish clerk's office needs to be provided. There are opportunities to do so as part of adaptations to the Village Hall.

### 4. Additional parking provision

The village has a significant parking problem, both from residents and from visitors. We will continue to look for additional parking spaces that can be provided within the framework of this NDP.

### 5. Additional cemetery capacity

The existing village cemetery is likely to be near or at capacity before the end of the plan period. We will look for opportunities to provide additional capacity.



## 4.4. Tourism and Leisure

### 4.4.1. Objectives

1. To promote and manage sustainable tourism to enhance the cultural and economic well-being of the village.
2. To retain and promote recreational facilities for all members of the community.
3. To preserve the character and nature of the village for its residents and visitors.

### 4.4.2. Background



Jubilee Celebrations

Tourism is diverse and well established. The River Thames brings boats and walkers. The Abbey brings visitors and concert goers. Proximity to Oxford brings tourists exploring the wider area. The history of Dorchester and its historic buildings attracts tourism. The Museum is a popular visitor attraction. Countryside walkers and cyclists visit or pass through the village.

More recently, tourism has been markedly increased through the international popularity of “Midsomer Murders”. Additionally, Dorchester benefits from being close to the Earth Trust at Little Wittenham. Annual events such as Arts Week also bring visitors.

Tourism can place an additional strain and burden on the resources of the village. Visitor parking is limited to the public car park in Bridge End plus on-street parking, with the latter having the obvious adverse impact on the village’s outward appearance and attractiveness.

Additional public parking is available at either end of the village – Abbey View Meadow to the south and part of the recreation ground to the north, although restrictions apply to both these locations which are therefore only made available for special events.

However, if properly managed, tourism can add to the village's economic well-being by providing welcome custom and support to its retail enterprises. In 2004-06 a Tourism Working Group was set up to review tourism in the village and to gather data, identify projects and improve the opportunities presented by tourism whilst trying to minimise its impact. Certain improvements were made, including signage and information display boards at key access points.



Notice Board, Bridge End



Cricket on the Rec

Leisure for residents and visitors is also well established. There are a variety of clubs and societies covering a range of interests. Amenities include the Abbey, Abbey Guest House, village hall, recreation ground including the recently constructed tennis courts, sports pavilion, hotels, guest houses, pubs, cafes and tea rooms. The recreation ground is host to a number of well-established sports including football, cricket and tennis.

There are allotments in the centre of the village. Sailing is available on the lakes off the Abingdon Road and fishing is available on both Rivers Thames and Thame, and on the lakes. Residents and visitors have a wide choice of footpaths to walk both locally and further afield, including the Hurst Water Meadows.



Fishing Lake



Entrance to the Hurst

Locally based small boats (canoes, kayaks, and punts) have long been able to access the River Thames upstream as far as the mill and the weir, and this will be continued subject to safeguarding wildlife priorities.

#### **4.4.3. Policies**

##### **DoT 14: Tourism**

Recognising Dorchester's prime position as a national and international tourist destination and also the historical and recreational value of the River Thames itself, development proposals will be encouraged where they promote tourism for the benefit of local businesses and the community as a whole without having an adverse impact on the village's character and natural environment

##### **DoT15: Sport and Leisure**

The village already has a number of sporting and leisure facilities. New developments which broaden and extend the accessibility and use of these facilities by residents and visitors whilst retaining the village's character and preserving its natural environment will be supported. These could include, for example, expanding access to the car parking facilities at either end of the village, particularly Abbey View Meadow which could itself then offer additional leisure facilities to visitors by providing improved access to both the Rivers Thames and Thame.

##### **DoT16: Peace and Tranquillity**

The peace and tranquillity of the village is highly valued by its residents and those who visit. Any development related to tourism and leisure which could increase the level of general disturbance or bring about an increased demand for or loss of car parking should include measures of mitigation.



## 4.5. Economy

### 4.5.1. Objective

To support enterprises providing employment in the village and promote small businesses contributing to the economic well-being of the community.

### 4.5.2. Background

The qualities of the village include its Abbey and adjacent historic buildings, its attractive High Street and easy access to the River Thames, as well as its historic and well-known coaching inns. Current retail, farming and commercial offerings satisfy a number of the village requirements. The Co-op food shop helps maintain vibrancy at the heart of Dorchester-on-Thames, particularly since the closure of the Post Office. The retail outlets, hotels, public houses and café are in the main located in the High Street, which itself tends to be the centre for tourism. They are not only used by residents but also attract considerable custom from neighbouring villages, tourists and visitors in general. As such their continuing presence is considered fundamental to the ongoing vitality and viability of the village and the locality.



Lily's



Dorchester Fireplaces



The White Hart Hotel

The village is often featured in television programmes and Dorchester Abbey has annual festivals and a reputation for attracting high profile music events. Weddings and other regular celebrations draw a significant number of visitors throughout the year and provide commercial opportunities for the village.

Existing commercial activities should be retained wherever possible and an environment created that encourages appropriate retail, non-retail and small start-up businesses and employment, including in particular those businesses which support village life and enhance its tourism potential. Employment should be protected by resisting applications that change the use of premises from retail / commercial to domestic. It is important that Dorchester-on-Thames does not become a village solely of domestic premises, with commercial businesses

forced to move elsewhere. Requests from commercial enterprises and general initiatives that suit the character of the village should be responded to sensitively, including those from Dorchester Abbey. Discussions to replace the Post Office facilities should be concluded.

The old post office



### **4.5.3. Policies**

#### **DoT17: Business and Employment**

Developments which retain support and enhance existing retail, commercial and home working businesses and employment, whilst protecting the agricultural nature of the area and maintaining the character and natural environment of the village, will be encouraged.

#### **DoT18: Tourism and Leisure**

Developments which support tourism and leisure enterprises which are based on the conservation and enjoyment of the qualities of the area will be supported.

## 5. Summary of policies

All the policies in this plan will be considered against the prime objective as set out in paragraph 4.1.1: 'To nurture and protect the natural and built environment of the village for future generations to enjoy'.

The sensitive management of the exceptional historic and natural environment of Dorchester should underpin all development decisions in order to provide for a sustainable future for the village. The enjoyment and understanding of this unique community will be dependent on a robust strategy for periodic monitoring of ways by which this objective can be achieved and it demands that the Parish Council should set up a quinquennial review for the duration of the plan.

### 5.1. Historic Environment

DoT1. Developments which maintain or enhance those characteristics which have been identified in the amended Dorchester and Overy Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans as contributing to the established character of the conservation areas will be supported.

DoT2. Development proposals that affect properties identified in the amended local list of buildings of interest will be required to demonstrate that their significance as heritage assets, including their contribution to the character and appearance of Dorchester and Overy, has been understood and that the proposals have sought to avoid or minimize harm to their significance.

DoT3. Developments which could result in an increase in vehicular traffic and car parking must include an effective plan to mitigate any negative impact, especially in relation to car parking and traffic congestion in the High Street caused by demand for additional parking and pedestrian safety.

### 5.2. Natural environment, wildlife and biodiversity

DoT4. Any developments or change of use of land likely to have an impact on the River Thames or River Thame will be supported only if it protects and/or enhances biodiversity, is greater than the 10m buffer recommended by the EA, and provides continued tranquillity and enjoyment of the natural environment for the public, for example, through managed sustainable tourism, education and leisure purposes.

DoT5. Development on sites likely to have an impact on Community Meadows as shown on the Policy Map will be supported only where they make a positive contribution to the ecology of those sites



DoT6. Development will be supported only when it retains, protects and enhances for future generations to enjoy, local green infrastructure (green spaces and verges) including all bridleways and footpaths as identified on the Policy Map

DoT7. Alternative land uses in the areas shown in the Policy Map, representing the most versatile and highest quality agricultural land in the Parish will only be supported where they protect agricultural employment and protect the non-renewable land resource.

### **5.3. Housing**

#### **DoT 8 Housing infill developments**

DOT 8. Small scale infill developments will be supported where they respect national designations such as Green Belt, reflect the character of their immediate area in terms of scale, design and layout, and contribute to a balanced housing mix.

Development must be in keeping with their surroundings in terms of scale, design and layout, and must be consistent with the special characteristics of the street or lane, as described in the Dorchester and Overy Character Appraisals where applicable. (see appendix )

Within this framework, support will be given to schemes with a predominance of one, two or three bedroom dwellings.

DoT 9. New housing development other than infill will be considered inappropriate development unless it provides affordable housing to meet identified local community need.

Such developments must reflect the character of their immediate surroundings in terms of scale, design and layout, and contribute to a balanced housing mix. Such housing should not compromise the purposes of the Green Belt.

Within this framework, support will be given to schemes with a predominance of one, two or three bedroom dwellings. Any new homes provided in this way must be subject to a planning obligation to restrict their occupancy to people with a local connection. The application of a legally binding local occupancy clause will be expected in perpetuity.

DoT 10. Applications for new buildings will be encouraged to achieve excellent environmental performance, unless it can be demonstrated to adversely affect the viability of the development. Developers are encouraged to use the Home Quality Mark to rate proposals on the dimensions of living costs for occupants, health and wellbeing, and environmental footprint.

DoT 11. Proposals for all new homes to be built within the Dorchester Conservation Area must provide an effective plan to mitigate the impact of additional on-street parking.

#### **5.4. Tourism and leisure**

DoT 12. Recognising Dorchester's prime position as an Oxfordshire tourist destination and also the historical and recreational value of the River Thames itself, development proposals will be encouraged where they promote tourism for the benefit of local businesses and the community as a whole.

DoT 13. The village already has a number of sporting and leisure facilities. Proposed developments which broaden and extend the use of these facilities by residents and visitors will be supported.

DoT 14. The peace and tranquillity of the village is highly valued by its residents and those who visit. Any development related to tourism and leisure which could increase the level of general disturbance or bring about an increased demand for or loss of car parking should include measures of mitigation.

#### **5.5. Economy**

DoT 15. Development which retains and supports existing retail, commercial, farming and home working businesses and employment will be encouraged.

DoT 16. Developments which support tourism and leisure enterprises which are based on the conservation and enjoyment of the qualities of the area will be supported.

## 6. Appendices & Supplementary Documents

### Appendices

1. Map of proposed additions to Dorchester Appraisal map including extended conservation area.
2. Map of proposed additions to Overy Appraisal map including extended conservation area.
3. Map of Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
4. Maps of identified archaeological remains under Demesne Field and to the south east of Overy.
5. Local list of non-designated heritage assets.

### Supplementary documents

1. Dorchester Conservation Area Character Appraisal as amended
2. Overy Conservation Area Character Appraisal as amended.
3. Dorchester Management Plan as amended.
4. Overy Management Plan as amended.
5. Conservation Area Appraisal Map for Dorchester as adopted in 2005.
6. Conservation Area Appraisal Map for Overy as adopted in 2005.

## 7. Digital Maps

G.I.S [Digital Map link](#)