

# **DORCHESTER-ON-THAMES**

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

### **Draft 10 March 2016 (amended 9.3.16)**

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## **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 Historic England and the local planning authority; then for independent examination, before being put forward for referendum within the Parish and then, hopefully, formal adoption.

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 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 7<sup>th</sup> June 2013 the 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.

## **1.2 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. 3.1-3.5. These lead separately to a number of policy proposals, and these are summarised in paras. 4.1-4.5.

## **1.3 What we are asking you to respond to?**

This document is a full draft 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 **dd/mm/yr** and the feedback gained can then be used to make any necessary amendments and finalise the Plan.

#### **1.4 Project timetable and next steps**

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 Desmesne field being removed from the Green Belt (150 attendees).
2. Publicity and feedback  
Every effort has been made to engage with the community throughout the process.
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - Attendance at the meeting called to consider the 35 acre Desmesne 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 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.

### 3. 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).

### 4. 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.

### 5. The next steps

- By 31 March, draft Plan to be circulated for initial comment and feedback to:
  - o SODC
  - o the Parish community
  - o local landowners who may be impacted
  - o other interested parties such as English Heritage, National Trust, Environment Agency, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England.
- By 31 May, complete redrafting as required after allowing 6 weeks for SODC and other feedback .
- By 30 June, public consultation with the village community, for provisional approval.
- By 31 July, finalisation and professional formatting of final document.
- August, submit completed draft including all photographs, maps, appendices etc. to SODC, for final approval and referral for independent inspection.

- By 31 October, referendum and final approval.

## 2 Dorchester-on-Thames

### 2.1 Overview

#### 2.1.1 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 6000 years, and much of its evolution is still clearly in evidence in the landscape today. [PHOTO 1](#)
- 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. [PHOTO 2 AND 3.](#)
- Commercial facilities include a village shop, hotels and restaurants, tea-rooms, hair salon, and other small business premises, [PHOTO 4 & 5](#)
- Community run facilities include the village hall, allotments, a large recreation ground with a sports pavilion, tennis courts and children's play area. [PHOTO 6 & 7](#)
- 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.

#### 2.1.2 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.
- **Economy:** To support enterprises providing employment in the village and promote small businesses contributing to the economic well-being of the community.
- **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.

## 2.2 SWOT analysis

### Strengths:

- Attractive village, many listed buildings
- Dorchester Abbey, major tourist attraction, largest public building in South Oxfordshire for public events
- Dorchester Abbey Museum, accredited by the Arts Council
- Locations for episodes of Midsomer Murders and other television or film productions
- Good hotels, tea-rooms and small supermarket
- The Fleur de Lys pub and the former site of the Post Office registered as community assets
- Distinctive landscape character of the River Thames and its valley; excellent vistas

### Weaknesses:

- Few premises for small businesses and retail units
- Limited public transport
- Inadequate parking
- Uncoordinated promotion of tourism
- Vulnerability of conservation areas and nearby green areas to inappropriate development
- Lack of affordable accommodation

- Good area for walking and cycling; footpath network
- Managed wildlife sites
- Strong community spirit with high level of voluntary activities

<b>Opportunities:</b>	<b>Threats:</b>
<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>	<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>

### 2.3 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. [PHOTO 9](#)
- 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 Thame 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.

## 2.4 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.
- This 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. **PHOTO 10.**
- 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 Thame 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. **PHOTO 11.**
- 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.

## 2.5 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(<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/conservation-and-design/conservation-areas/list-areas-and-> )

## **3 The themes for the plan**

### **3.1 Historic environment**

#### **3.1.1 Objective**

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

#### **3.1.2 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.

#### **3.1.3 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 open 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. 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 design and the generous provision of garden land to enable the inhabitants to grow their own produce. **PHOTO 12.** 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.

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





### 3.1.4 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, it is proposed that the text and the policies should be incorporated as an essential part of the NDP. A number of the potential enhancement schemes set out in the associated Management Plan approved by SODC on 16 June 2005 have been implemented and these have been deleted from the revised text. (Appendices 1,2,3,4).
- The appraisal map which accompanied the character study 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. **PHOTO 13.** However, in our view they are 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. 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 5,6).
- 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 7 to give their addresses and a brief statement of their interest and marked them on the revised maps. Appendix 7 also includes those buildings outside the designated conservation areas which are of local interest.

### 3.1.5 Archaeology **PHOTO 14.**

- 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<sup>2</sup>. The areas protected by the Scheduled Ancient Monuments designations 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, Historic England will be

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<sup>2</sup> Cook, J., & Rowley, T. (ed.), *Dorchester Through the Ages* (Oxford 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Abingdon Archaeological Geophysics 2013: see *Dorchester-on-Thames: a walk through 10,000 years of Archaeology* (2014).

sponsoring a pilot survey of the whole parish to assess its archaeological potential and the results 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. This 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. [PHOTO 15.](#)

### **3.1.6 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 English Heritage (2014). It is recognized that they will need to be taken forward outside the Neighbourhood Development Plan,

- That the revised appraisal maps as set out in Appendices 5 & 6 are formally approved by SODC.
- That the buildings set out in Appendix 7 are added to the official list of buildings of local interest.
- That the Character Appraisals of Dorchester and Overy as amended in this plan and set out in Appendices 1 and 2 are formally adopted by SODC as Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- 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 6.
- In view of the sensitive archaeological significance of Dorchester, particular care should be taken in the application of Policies Con12 and Con13 of the Local Plan.
- The proposal to remove the Demesne Field from the Green Belt as discussed in 3.2.3 below would threaten known but undesignated archaeological features and particular attention is drawn to the importance of Policy DoT8 in this plan.

### 3.1.7 Policies

**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.**

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.

**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.**

Any unavoidable harm to the significance of these buildings should be clearly justified by the public benefits delivered by the proposals.

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.

**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. [PHOTO 16](#)**

On street parking on both sides of the High Street has reached saturation level making access for emergency services difficult and detracting from the character and appearance of the historic street. Recent developments in adjacent streets have noticeably exacerbated the problem. Conventional methods of restricted parking controls will have an adverse visual effect on the character of the conservation area.

**DoT4. All the other policies in this plan will be measured against the prime objective as set out in paragraph 3.1.1.**

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.

## **3.2 Natural environment, wildlife and biodiversity**

### **3.2.1 Background**

- 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 many green spaces within the built-up area (recreation ground, allotments, cemetery, road-side verges, private gardens, public footpaths through green spaces, etc).
- 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 rise when flood water backs up from the Thames. 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 diversion round Oxford is implemented. (See "Other Enclosures")
- Gravel extraction is an important industry in the Thames Valley, and quotas for South Oxfordshire are under yet another review. Until the recent County Council review Dorchester had been excluded as a potential source of gravel on grounds of archaeology, but then any pre-existing arrangements were ruled out, and all potential sites are being reconsidered. 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.

### **3.2.2 Wildlife management**

- 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, including 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, both 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 two flood meadows, (1) The Hurst and (2) Old Bridge Meadow, together occupying 21 acres on the east bank of the River Thame, and has also purchased a further 4 acres between Old Bridge Meadow and the confluence of the 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. [PHOTO 17 & 18.](#)

### **3.2.3 Policies**

**DoT5. Any development or change of use of land adjoining the River Thame or River Thames should have regard to river users and will only be supported if it includes measures to protect or enhance river bank biodiversity.**

**DoT6. Proposals on sites adjoining designated Nature Reserves will be favoured where they make a positive contribution to the ecology of those sites.**

**DoT7. Developments which retain, protect and enhance the green lanes, spaces and verges in the village will be encouraged.**

**DoT8. The development of Demesne Field (see 6. "Other Enclosures - Parish Map) for community use in a manner which safeguards the underlying archaeology would be supported.**

This field on the northern edge of the parish is currently in agricultural use but should this not prove viable in the future the creation of a community use under a sympathetic management regime that helped to preserve the known archaeological remains would be appropriate . Such a use might include strengthening the tree cover along the boundaries together with a management plan to establish a wildlife rich lowland meadow for the benefit of the community. In addition to the educational and leisure benefits it could act as a sound and visual barrier to the by-pass. The Hurst

Trust which manages the contiguous water meadow would have the expertise to take this forward for the benefit of the community. In exploring possible sites for additional housing, the field was considered to be unsuitable due to its visual importance in providing an open setting to the built edge of the village which acts as a buffer to the noise and activity of the by-pass. Moreover, contrary to the recommendation in the Local Green Belt Study for South Oxfordshire District Council dated 14 September 2015, it has an important role in preventing the merging of the separate communities of Dorchester and Berinsfield, particularly if development proposals in the latter come to fruition. In these regards it fully meets the criteria for retention in the Green Belt. It is important to remember that the bypass was built in 1982 specifically to remove through traffic from the historic core of the village. The creation of a new access at the end of the Drayton road would defeat that objective in conflict with Policy DoT4 of this plan.

## **3.3 Housing**

### **3.3.1 Objectives**

- ***To ensure new housing, extensions and other residential development respect the character of the village.***
- ***To promote a range of housing size and type, including affordable housing, to meet the needs of residents.***
- ***To encourage high standards of environmental performance in all residential development.***

### **3.3.2 Background**

Dorchester suffers a shortage of smaller properties. In recent years much of the new housing stock has been larger properties, and many existing smaller properties have been extended and enlarged.

The provision of affordable housing has been identified by many residents as an important issue in the village. Furthermore, the need for affordable housing within the village was confirmed by the October 2012 Dorchester Housing Needs Survey Report which indicated that there were 12 respondents who met the criteria of need and local connection. Whilst there are no designated development sites within the parish, small windfall sites do sometimes emerge.

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.

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.

### **3.3.3 Housing Policies**

#### **DoT9. Development on suitable windfall sites which exceed the required percentage of affordable housing will be supported.**

Given that the parcels of available land are likely to be quite small, developers will be expected to provide the maximum number of housing units that are demonstrated to be viable whilst ensuring that developments are in keeping with their surroundings. Priority should be given to units that are for rent, shared ownership and for sale to local people. Starter homes and family homes with adequate gardens or shared green space are priorities for a community that needs to retain its young families.

Dorchester is washed over by the Oxford Green Belt and has very limited potential for new development within the built-up limits of the village. The threshold for requiring affordable housing as part of the development should therefore be set lower than is normally expected in order to meet the objectives of NPPF section 50.

For the same reason the policy will also apply when the development includes re-development of an existing property such as the conversion of a non-residential building or the subdivision of a residential building.

The full integration of affordable and open market housing is a requirement of the SODC Core Strategy CSH3.

#### **DoT10. Proposals for the development of small scale affordable housing schemes on rural exception sites in suitable locations within the parish boundaries where housing would not normally be permitted will be supported provided they are in accordance with Policy H10 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011.**

The SODC Core Strategy provides for rural exception sites for affordable housing where the development meets an identified local need and is supported or initiated by the Parish Council.

In the process of preparing the plan, various potential exception sites have been carefully explored and it is proposed that the following allocations should be made.

1. It is considered that part of the field known as Allen's Pit on the Abingdon Road would provide the best opportunity for housing development in accordance with the other policies in the plan. Given its previous use, it is clearly a brownfield site and it is already characterised

by established housing on either side to the north west and the south east. Although the site has a history of refusals of planning permission in the past, in the changed circumstances of the predicted housing need for the District it could help to meet that demand without compromising the unique character of Dorchester. Any development should be confined to the roadside frontage and should reflect the scale and proportions of the row of cottages to the south east. It is essential that a substantial area of land to the south should remain undeveloped to protect the open nature of the countryside when viewed from the River Thames

2 . It has recently emerged that once the remaining residents of Belcher Court have left, SOHA are likely to make the building available for development. This would offer an opportunity to redevelop the site with a scheme that would be more sympathetic to the scale and character of the village. With careful planning such a scheme could provide access to the land-locked field to the north thus offering a further exception site which could be integrated with the established built area of the village provided that any new development respected the privacy of the existing houses on the east side of the High Street and the south side of the Drayton Road. Belcher Court itself could be sensitively refurbished and extended to provide a continued element of social housing. Belcher Court is an established site for social housing in Dorchester for single elderly people and if it is not refurbished it should continue to provide alternative new housing of a similar nature for the same number of residents as well as including suitable open market housing on the same site.

3. The former local authority housing scheme at Tenpenny is laid out with a vehicular access to the south which currently terminates in a cul de sac. This could provide access to the parcel of land beyond with the potential for a housing development in a similar form to the existing houses in Tenpenny. It is understood that this was the original intention when the estate was first laid out.

4. The parcel of land at the north west end of the old Oxford Road adjacent to no.9 , could accommodate a housing development which visually would terminate the northern limits of the built area of the village and complement the existing buildings on the east side of the road. Any development should be restricted to the road frontage with a western limit which continues the rear boundary line of the adjacent houses to the south in order to complement the established built form.

The location of all these potential exception sites is shown on the allocation map

(Appendix )

Any development should be in conformity with policy **DoT4**.



**DoT11. Small scale infill developments that relate well to the character of the surrounding area and contribute to maintaining a balanced housing mix will be supported.**

The purpose of this policy is 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 family homes in suitable locations as well as smaller two-bedroom homes to meet the established demand.

**DoT12. Applications for new buildings will be encouraged to exceed the minimum required environmental performance.**

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 plan seeks to encourage the design principles needed to significantly improve the overall quality of the building stock within the village. Development applications will be enhanced if they show a clear commitment to this principle.

**DoT13. Proposals for all new homes to be built in Dorchester should provide one off-street parking space for each bedroom, unless otherwise justified having regard to site-specific circumstances and Oxfordshire County Council parking standards.**

The high demand for on-street parking in Dorchester is not only from visitors. A large number of village-centre properties are terraced and have little or no off-street parking capability. The problem is exacerbated by the high level of car ownership in Dorchester. 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. 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 Dorchester requires a higher than usual ratio of off-street parking spaces for new dwellings.

### **3.4 Economy**

#### **3.4.1 Objective**

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

#### **3.4.2 Background**

Current retail, farming and commercial offerings satisfy a number of the village requirements. The Co-op food shop helps maintain a vibrancy at the heart of Dorchester-on-Thames, particularly since the closure of the

Post Office. The hotels, public houses and cafe 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. [PHOTOS 19, 20 & 21.](#)

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 non-retail and small start-up businesses and employment. 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. [PHOTO 22.](#)

### **3.4.3 Policies**

**DoT14. Development which retains and supports existing retail, commercial, farming and home working businesses and employment will be encouraged.**

**DoT15. Developments which support tourism and leisure enterprises which are based on the conservation and enjoyment of the qualities of the area will be encouraged.**

## **3.5 Tourism and Leisure**

### **3.5.1 Objectives**

- ***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.***
- ***To preserve the character and nature of the village for its residents and visitors.***

### **3.5.2 Background**

Tourism is diverse and well established. The River Thames brings boats and walkers. [PHOTO 23](#). 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”. Dorchester also benefits from being close to the Earth Trust at Little Wittenham. Annual events such as Arts Week also bring visitors.

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. [PHOTO 24](#).

Leisure for residents and visitors is also well established. There is 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. [PHOTOS 25, 26 & 27](#).

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

### **3.5.3 Policies**

**DoT16. 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.**

**DoT17. 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.**

**DoT18. The peace and tranquility 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. Summary of policies**

### **4.1 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.

DoT4. All the other policies in this plan will be measured against the prime objective as set out in paragraph 3.1.1.

### **4.2 Natural environment, wildlife and biodiversity**

DoT5. Any development or change of use of land adjoining the River Thame or River Thames should have regard to river users and will only be supported if it includes measures to protect or enhance river bank biodiversity.

DoT6. Proposals on sites adjoining designated Nature Reserves will be favoured where they make a positive contribution to the ecology of those sites.

DoT7. Developments which retain, protect and enhance the green lanes, spaces and verges in the village will be encouraged.

DoT8. The development of Demesne Field for community use in a manner which safeguards the underlying archaeology would be supported.

### **4.3 Housing**

DoT9. Development on suitable windfall sites which exceed the required percentage of affordable housing will be supported.

DoT10. Proposals for the development of small scale affordable housing schemes on rural exception sites in suitable locations within the parish

boundaries where housing would not normally be permitted will be supported provided they are in accordance with Policy H10 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011.DoT11. Small-scale in-fill development proposals that relate well to the character of the surrounding area and contribute to maintaining a balanced housing mix will be supported.DoT12. Applications for new buildings will be encouraged to exceed the minimum required environmental performance.

DoT13. Proposals for all new homes to be built in Dorchester should provide one off-street parking space for each bedroom, unless otherwise justified having regard to site-specific circumstances and Oxfordshire County Council parking standards.

#### **4.4 Economy**

DoT14. Development which retains and supports existing retail, commercial, farming and home working businesses and employment will be encouraged.

DoT15. Developments which support tourism and leisure enterprises which are based on the conservation and enjoyment of the qualities of the area will be encouraged.

#### **4.5 Tourism and leisure**

DoT16. 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.

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## 5. Appendices

- 5.1 Dorchester Conservation Area Character Appraisal. Revised Text.
- 5.2 Overy Conservation Area Character Appraisal. Revised text.
- 5.3 Dorchester Conservation Area Management Plan. Revised text.
- 5.4 Overy Conservation Area Management Plan. Revised text.
- 5.5 Dorchester Conservation Area. Revised Appraisal Map.
- 5.6 Overy Conservation Area. Revised Appraisal Map.
- 5.7 Buildings of Local Note (Local List).

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## 6. Other Enclosures

### **Maps:**

**Dorchester Parish, -**

*Unable to find suitable link for this*

### **Conservation Areas**

<http://maps.southoxon.gov.uk/website/south/conservation/showmap.asp?action=postcode>

### **Scheduled Ancient Monuments -**

### **Listed Buildings**

[-http://maps.southoxon.gov.uk/website/south/conservation/showmap.asp?action=postcode](http://maps.southoxon.gov.uk/website/south/conservation/showmap.asp?action=postcode)

### **Archaeology sites**

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/archaeological-sites-oxfordshire>

### **Footpaths, -**

[http://publicapps.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council\\_services/environment\\_planning/countryside/Map/ROW/row.html](http://publicapps.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council_services/environment_planning/countryside/Map/ROW/row.html)

**Green belt - *where is this link ???***

**Flooding -** [http://watermaps.environment-agency.gov.uk/wiyby/wiyby.aspx?lang=\\_e&topic=floodmap&layer=0&x=457698&y=193940&scale=10&location=OX10+7JQ#x=457491&y=193683&scale=9](http://watermaps.environment-agency.gov.uk/wiyby/wiyby.aspx?lang=_e&topic=floodmap&layer=0&x=457698&y=193940&scale=10&location=OX10+7JQ#x=457491&y=193683&scale=9)