

STONESFIELD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

SPC Responses to Examiner's Clarification Note, March 2026

NB. The PC has prepared a file of further evidence that supports the Plan. For the Policies where clarification is being sought, we attach the further evidence in case it is helpful. Generally, this draws out the relevant sections of higher policies, other sources and local evidence, particularly the Survey results including free text.

Comment

Policies SH1/SH3/SH4 (first part)/SH7

These policies read well. However, do they bring any added value beyond national and local plan policies?

Response

Policy SH1 is important in setting out how housing objective 2 will be met. It also gives context to meeting the housing needs of the Village as set out in the text below the policy. It emphasises that particular support will be given to developments wholly comprised of affordable or social housing. It also emphasises the most salient criteria from the NPPF and Local Plan that the PC can refer to, both for current Councillors who have been involved in developing the Plan and future Councillors who will not have been.

Policies SH3 & SH4 give context for meeting the needs of specific groups within the Village and provide a pointer to what type of development will be supported, emphasising the importance of rural exception site(s). These policies are derived from the evidence in the Housing Needs Assessment, but in the context of national and district policies. They are important in setting out how housing objectives 2 & 3 will be met.

Policy SH7 (first part), is important as it emphasises the importance of rural exception sites as identified as an outcome of the Housing Needs Assessment. The PC has already taken steps to identify such site(s) and this policy is helpful in the wider context of residents understanding why the PC is committing itself and limited resources to pursuing this course. Having it embodied in a policy is helpful. This policy supports housing objective 2.

Comment

Policies SH8 and SH10

Are the criteria in the two policies the added value beyond national and local plan policies?

Response

Policy SH8 & 10 is important for Councillors to have in mind when considering planning applications for sub-dividing dwellings or developments in residential gardens. The intention is for the NP to be a useable document and it is intended that Councillors will have a flowchart of Neighbourhood Plan policies to assess the most important aspects of applications as they apply in the Village context and avoid the complexity of them needing to reference to a myriad of other planning tools; the draft flowchart will be finalised once the Plan is made. This policy supports housing objective 3.

Comment*Policy SH11*

I noted the limited parking spaces and elements of congestion in the village centre during the visit. Nevertheless would the delivery of the higher parking standards resolve the existing parking issues which feature in the supporting text?

Response

You correctly note that the emphasis of this policy is geared towards not exacerbating the existing congestion problems, the nature of which were highlighted by many people in the Village Survey, going forwards. It was important to address the issue given the feedback from residents. The final paragraph emphasises support for additional public parking, but any such proposals would have to be developed. Problems around the village hall may be easier to meet than the school or the shop. The policy signals it as an issue and provides a placeholder for the PC to work with land owners and local authorities to find solutions, but if a clearer statement can be proposed, it would be welcome.

Comment*Policy SEA1*

This is a very detailed policy which refers both to the Local Plan 2031 and to the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-25. For my clarity it would be very helpful if the Parish Council identifies which of the various sections bring added value beyond national and local plan policies.

Response

The HNA at page 14 sets out the loss of facilities in the village between 1974 and 2024. This policy is considered essential given the feedback from residents on the importance of existing amenities in the village and to promote a growth of potential employment to maintain the vitality of the village. The first paragraph and two bullet points set this out. The following paragraph draws attention to the support that will be given for new non-residential development and was added to emphasise this point. The next paragraph emphasises the need to retain employment spaces and discourage conversion for housing; the net effect of losing employment and gaining housing from where residents would need to commute to service centres for employment is to be discouraged.

The following two paragraphs are purely to aid Councillors and developers in assessing planning applications by emphasising which Local Plan and Cotswold National Landscape Plan sections are important in the assessment.

It was important to reflect the strength of feeling in the village about the White Horse Public House in the Village Survey. Whilst the community subsequently bought the pub, the PC felt it was important to acknowledge the issue and its safety in the future.

The paragraph on home working is an emphasis important to the village given the lack of other employment and the desire to address some of the wider issues identified e.g. transport and infrastructure.

The final paragraph sets out for the PC and developers the support for re-use of non-residential buildings for particularly, employment, and community use, in the context of these having declined so significantly since 1974 (see ref. above).

Comment

Policy SEA2

The final section of the policy is a statement of intent rather than a land use policy. I am minded to recommend that it is deleted and relocated to the supporting text I am also minded to recommend that the need for robust evidence associated with proposals which would result in the loss of existing community facilities is included in the supporting text. Does the Parish Council have any comments on these propositions?

Response

The Parish Council wishes to retain the policy.

The statement of intent to consider designation of a community facility as an Asset of Community value in order to protect it from harmful consequences of development is intended to be included as part of the policy in order to establish from the outset the resource available to the Parish Council.

It is proposed we could add the wording in red to the last paragraph of the supporting text:

The Localism Act 2011 allows buildings or land of community value to be registered on the local planning authority's register of Assets of Community Value (ACV). This gives the Parish Council or other community organisations the opportunity to bid to acquire the asset on behalf of the local community. ACV designation demonstrates the importance of the asset to the community and will be taken into account by WODC in considering any proposal for loss of service or community facilities, in accordance with WODC Local Plan 2031 policy E5. **The Parish Council would require robust evidence to confirm the importance of the asset to the community.**

Policy SEA2 was written to emphasise and provide a local approach to WODC Policy E5. An example of this working in practice in **Stonesfield** was the White Horse Public House, designated as an ACV whilst closed, which was later acquired by the community in September 2023.

Comment

The second part of the policy read as process matters rather than as a land use policy. As such I am minded to recommend that they are deleted and relocated into a consolidated version of the supporting text. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

Response

This statement relates to the consideration of maintaining a facility considered to be commercially unviable, on a community-run basis as a first option before considering any alternative. This is a policy for the protection of community facilities and the Parish

Council would prefer that it is maintained within the policy statement. The residents' responses to the Village Survey in the area of Business and Commerce (see Residents' responses to draft NP | SG responses | action) demonstrate the strength of feeling concerning the risk of allowing business premises to be converted to residential use, or to allow housing development on land previously occupied by businesses, because of its impact on employment. The plan needs to be robust in its defence of business premises, although we acknowledge a recent conversion to residential flats on Farley Lane.

Comment

Policy ST1

The policies ambitions to secure sustainable transport relate to the details of the parish and community feedback. However, in this broader context:

- is the second part of the policy necessary as electric vehicle infrastructure is now controlled nationally by the Building Regulations and cycle storage provision by the County Council's standards?
- is the third part of the policy land use related and capable of being implemented through the development management process?
- is the final part of the policy necessary as the development plan is intended to be read as a whole?

Response

The PC acknowledges there have been some changes introduced since this policy was first drafted eg EV infrastructure. It is helpful for Parish Councillors and developers to have these points in mind when considering planning applications, however, it will be possible to simplify the policy by simple reference to Building Regulations and OCC, rather than the detailed statement.

The PC believes the third part is capable of being implemented and is in part a development management issue, for example it wishes to engage with public transport providers on the routing of services in to and through the village and the provision of further shelters to encourage use.

The final paragraph is somewhat ambiguous and was intended to refer to other NP Plan policies, for example, SEL 9.

Comment

Policy SHW1

The ambitions of this policy are very appropriate. However, is it necessary as the final part of the policy identifies other elements of the Plan which will assist in the implementation of the Oxfordshire Health and Well-Being Strategy?

Response

The purpose of the policy is to make it clear, for residents as well as planning authorities and developers, that the Plan seeks by specified routes to ensure better health and wellbeing as defined by the Oxfordshire Health and Well-Being Strategy 2024-2030. It is necessary, within the policy, to spell out these routes and the specific policies in the four key areas defined as building blocks of health, in order to make clear how this Plan adds to the general recommendation of the county's Strategy. The OCC comments at Regulation 16 were supportive of this policy.

Comment

Policy SHW2

The policy takes a positive approach towards local sports facilities.

Where the policy refers to replacement provision, I am minded to recommend that it is presented as an alternative rather than an additional requirement alongside the other criteria. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

Response

The third paragraph of policy SHW2 could be amended to use the word 'alternative' as shown in red below, rather than 'replacement'.

New development should not result in the loss of open space, sports and recreational buildings and land unless up to date assessment shows the asset is surplus to requirements, or the need for and benefits of the alternative land use clearly outweigh the loss, and **alternative** replacement provision is made. Where appropriate, development will be expected to provide or contribute towards the provision of necessary improvements to open space, sports and recreational buildings and land.

Comment

Policy SEL2

I note that this policy is underpinned by the excellent Landscape Assessment (Appendix B) and Character Assessment (Appendix D).

There appears to be a high degree of overlap between the second, third and fourth parts of the policy. Please can the Parish Council elaborate on its approach.

Response

We accept that there is overlap between these three paragraphs. We propose that they could be re-cast as follows:

Views of the landscape should be respected and protected from harm. Development proposals will only be supported where they respect the landscape of the parish and cause no harm to **defined**, important views of the village from the landscape surrounding it, **within the village** or of the surrounding landscape from the village, and especially views from, and of, its designated green spaces.

The important views are highlighted in the Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix B), **the Local Green Spaces document (Appendix C)** and the Village Character Assessment (Appendix D).

These views are listed in the following references to Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCAs):

Comment

I looked at a selection of the key views identified on Figures 9.2 and 9.3. For clarity, are the identified key views the most important of those addressed in the Landscape Assessment (Appendix B) and Character Assessment (Appendix D)?

Response

The Landscape Assessment, Appendix B, lists the key viewing points looking towards the village from public footpaths, bridleways and roads. This map is repeated in the Plan (Fig 9.2) and is an accurate record of these inward key views.

The Key outward views map, in both the Plan (Fig 9.3) and the Character Assessment (Fig 59) have been revised – see the response to the next comment. These are the key outward views from the village.

Comment

There is a slight disjoint between the information shown on Figure 9.3 and the details of the eleven views listed on page 85 of the Plan. Please can the Parish Council elaborate on its approach in general and the status of the unnumbered views on Figure 9.3.

Response

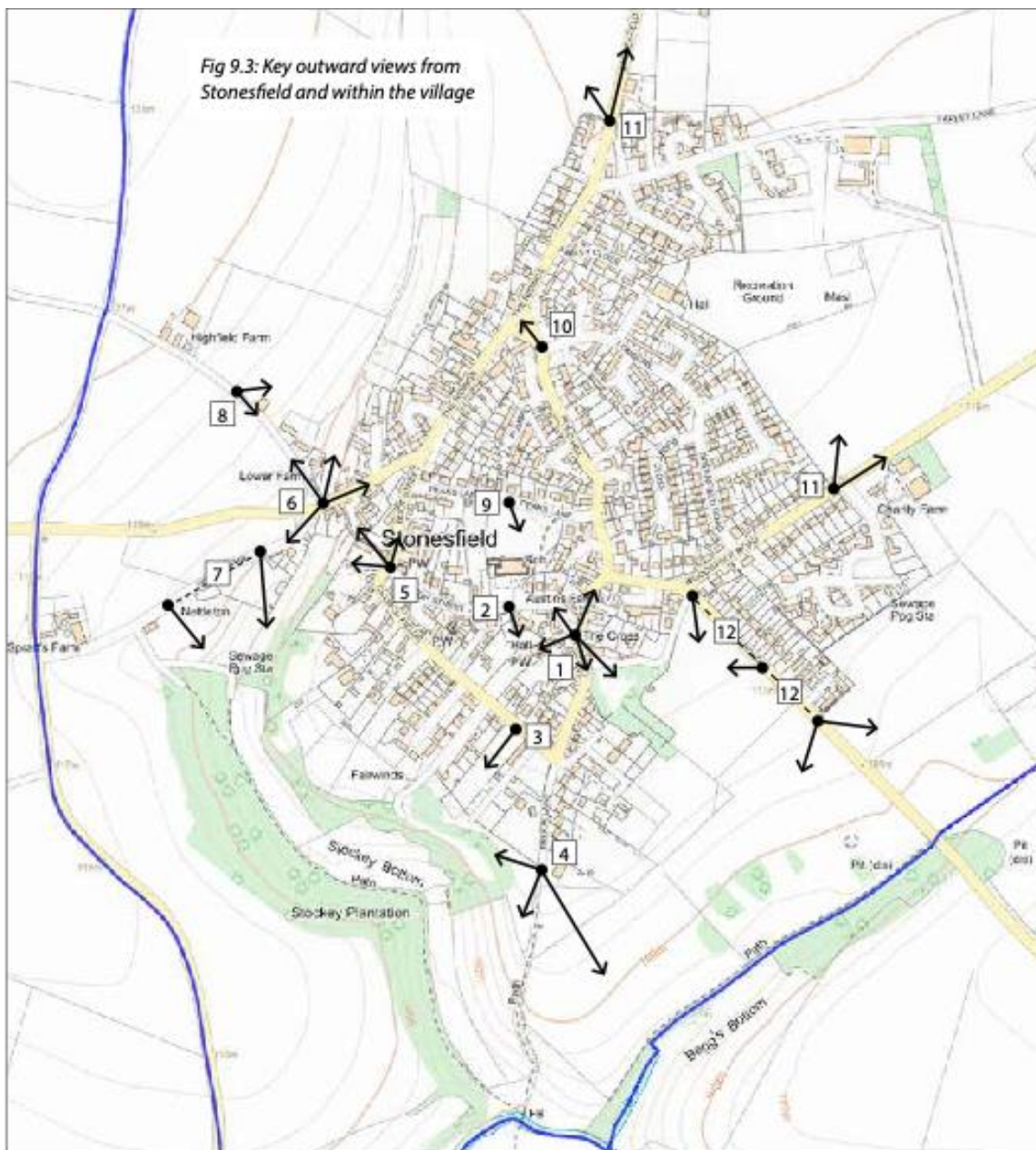
We recognise the disjoint between the text and maps of the key outward views from the village and wish to correct this. The Parish Council proposes the following revised text to be used in both the Character Assessment (pages 75-77) and page 85 of the Plan. The map has been revised, deleting unnumbered arrows and rationalising the order of the numbering. The revised map shows kinetic views from Witney Lane, view 7, and Combe Road, view 12 on the new map. A PDF of the revised map is enclosed, and the following is the revised accompanying text.

The following were identified as key outward views, see Fig 9.3:

1. From The Cross, a panoramic village centre view takes in traditional buildings, the focal building of the church with the village lockup, distinctive stone wall boundaries and a variety of outward framed views along the streets leading away
2. From High Street over the former school to St James' church, clearly visible over the 19th century school building
3. From Churchfields, over the allotments and also glimpsed between buildings along Churchfields: an open green view where the rural edge of the village is clearly appreciable
4. Brook Lane over the Evenlode: a wide vista and an exceptionally well-walked and much appreciated local view from the village edge
5. Kinetic views along the narrow winding route of Boot Street and High Street; topography and narrow width renders this experience intimate, varied and positive, with glimpses towards Highfield Farm and over Well Lane to the surrounding countryside, and the focal building of the Methodist Chapel with traditional materials and buildings
6. Views in all directions at the bottom of Laughton Hill, along the valley (the Dene), Witney Lane, Oxfordshire Way - a highly attractive entry point to the village
7. Village edge kinetic views from Witney Lane down the dry valley of Stockey Bottom
8. View from the Oxfordshire Way when approaching Stonesfield by Highfield Farm: a striking view of the village wrapped along the valley edge, where buildings set on the hill present a varied, interesting and characteristic

roofscape (see photo above)

9. Peaks Lane. Open spacious views over the school's playing field. An important echo of the historic nature of the once less developed village centre.
10. Pond Hill towards the White Horse: a pleasant view towards the Green and the public house, accentuated by the topography
11. Strongly linear outward views from The Ridings and the Woodstock Road, leading from the village over the flat plain to the north and north east, accentuated by straight routes and wide skies.
12. Kinetic views from the Combe Road looking out over Stonesfield Manor paddock towards Bagg's Bottom, and back towards the Grade II listed Manor House with glimpses of the Church tower beyond.



Comment

Policy SEL3

I saw the importance of the Evenlode Valley during the visit.

On the one hand the general approach taken in the policy is very positive. On the other hand, does it bring any added value beyond existing national and local planning policies for the National Landscape and Policy SEL1 of the submitted Plan?

Response

When the Parish Council originally looked at this topic, it was one of the areas that was felt needed consistency across a wider area than just Stonesfield. Consequently, the Council sought to propose a policy that was consistent with Charlbury's NP for the Evenlode Valley and therefore adopted a similar wording. Given the importance of this landscape, the Parish Council does not think it unreasonable to ensure every other opportunity has been sought before considering development.

Comment

Is the third bullet point either reasonable or practicable especially as it will be unlikely that a developer will control land elsewhere in the neighbourhood area?

Does the fourth bullet point overlap with/repeat the first bullet point?

Can the 'existing building line' be defined on a map (to bring the clarity required by the NPPF)?

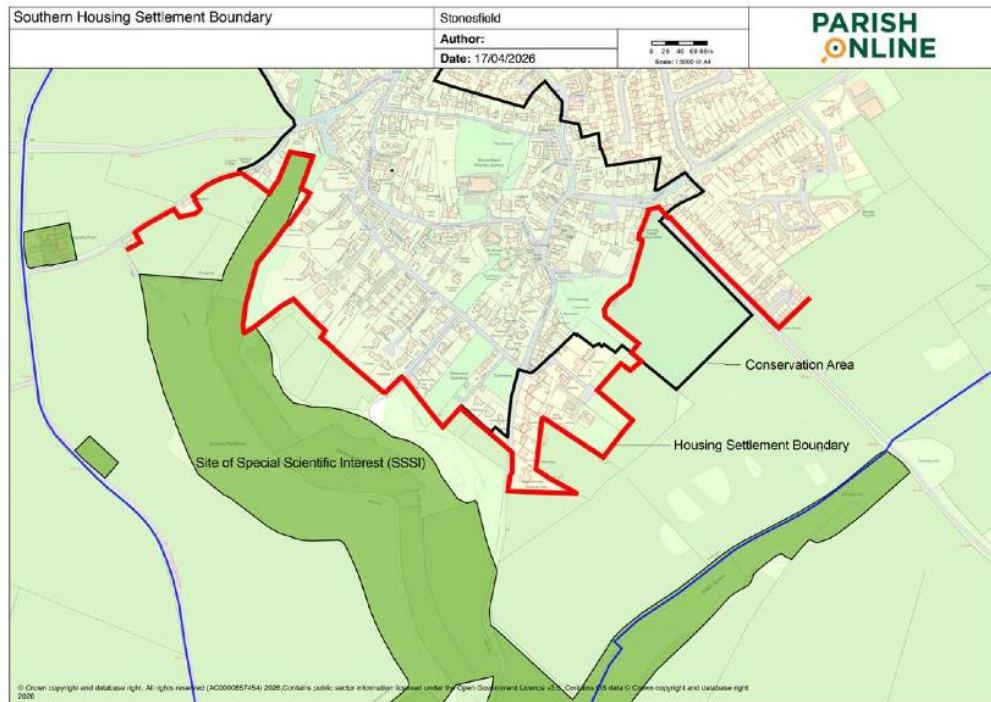
Response to both points

In writing policy SEL3 we have incorrectly used the term 'building line' which has a strict statutory definition. We based this policy wording on a similar policy in the Charlbury neighbourhood plan.

We propose changing the term 'building line' to 'housing settlement boundary' which more accurately describes the very sensitive area which this policy seeks to protect. The following is a proposed revised SEL3 text which also accepts your comment regarding the original bullet points three and four which have been deleted. A map showing the housing settlement boundary defined by the red line is also attached. The black line shows the conservation area boundary.

Policy SEL3 – Protecting the Evenlode Valley and the adjacent dip-slope lowland Development proposals to the south-west, south and south-east of the existing ~~building line defined~~ housing settlement boundary as defined by the red line on Fig (number to be assigned) of Brook Lane, Churchfields, Church Street, Boot Street, Combe Road and Witney Lane will only be supported where they meet the following conditions:

- they respect and where possible enhance the landscape
- it can be robustly demonstrated that the consequent public benefit outweighs any harm to the landscape.



Comment

Policy SEL4

I looked at the proposed local green spaces (LGSs) carefully during the visit. I saw their different sizes and land uses. I note that the proposed designations are helpfully underpinned by the details on a site-by-site basis in Appendix C. I also note the high level of local support for the proposed LGSs received as part of the recent consultation process.

Has the Parish Council assessed the extent of any additional local benefit that would be achieved by the designation of the various LGSs beyond their location in the Cotswold National Landscape in accordance with the details in Planning practice guidance ID: 37-011-20140306?

Response

The Parish Council has assessed the extent of any additional local benefit that would be achieved by the designation of the various LGSs beyond their location in the Cotswold National Landscape. In doing so it has carefully taken into account the PPG.

As one of the planning consultants for the LGS landowners correctly asserts that different types of designation are intended to achieve different purposes. The purpose of SSSI designation is to protect land which is of special interest ‘by reason of any of its flora, fauna, geological, geomorphological or physiographical features.’ Though unlikely, it is conceivable that a development proposal for land in within either of the two Stonesfield SSSIs (Stonesfield Common, bottoms and banks, and Stonesfield slate mines) might demonstrate that its benefits would outweigh the adverse impacts resulting from the development. Nonetheless, the value and significance of a green space for its local community, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of its wildlife

(considerations distinct from those relevant to designation as an SSSI), could tip the balance back against the grant of permission for development.

Similarly, though again unlikely, the balance between harm to the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB (as part of the Cotswolds National Landscape), prevailing exceptional circumstances and public interest might tip in favour of development. In contrast, if the special quality and significance of a green space for its local community were to be added in the balance, this would tip back towards refusal of permission for development. It is respectfully submitted that, in each case where LGS designation is proposed, this effect is significant and justifies designation.

The Cotswolds National Landscape is expansive and far reaching. The suggestion that CNL status makes LGS designation unnecessary for land within it or requires a heavier requirement for justification would deny protection of green spaces special to their local community and of particular local significance over a vast area. Endeavours to protect the quality special to a local community of green space would be frustrated not just at the location in question but much further around, due to the free movement of wildlife. That cannot have been the intention of those who created the statutory designations.

The same principle applies equally to LGS designation of green spaces subject to other relevant designations mentioned by the planning consultant, such as deciduous woodland, priority habitat, Cotswolds National Landscape, Upper Thames Tributaries ESA and the Northern Evenlode Conservation Target Area. Existing designations are not to be weighed against LGS designation. On the contrary, they are often evidence in support of the special quality of the space for the community. As above, the balance of exceptional circumstances and public interest against the qualifying criteria for other designations might conceivably tip in favour of development proposals, but the balance might revert against development when the qualities of being 'special to the community' and 'of particular local significance' are taken into account.

All the designations have different qualifying criteria and different consequences. For example, the protection afforded by designation as a Conservation Area is triggered by considerations which may not include those which make a green space 'special'. Development proposals for allotments may or may not affect heritage assets. Even with no potential effect upon heritage assets, they might significantly degrade the special quality the allotments have for members of the local community. Similarly, the requirement to place great weight on the scenic and landscape beauty of the surrounding AONB (CNL) might conceivably be deemed to be outweighed by the contribution of a development proposal to meet housing need. However, in such circumstances, the demonstrably special quality of the allotments for the local community and their particular local significance would arguably tip the balance against granted permission.

Exactly the same principle applies to the consideration of development within a Conservation Target Area, where proposed development for housing is weighed against wildlife conservation and protection of the 20 priority habitats specified in Oxfordshire.

The PPG's requirement to consider whether any additional local benefit would be gained by designation as Local Green Space, when there is a pre-existing designation for a specific purpose, was not intended to suggest that designated land should of necessity not be subject to a second or even third designation for a different purpose. The same land might have more than one purpose which would justify designation. Moreover, designation for one purpose might not result in the appropriate protection of the land for a concurrent purpose.

In proposing designation, the different purposes of the different types of designation have been taken into account. The Parish Council believes that it has demonstrated the additional local benefit to be gained by LGS designation.

Comment

In terms of the proposed LGSs:

LGS1 – the visit identified that the parcel of land concerned is not clearly distinguished from the land to its immediate south. In addition, the assessment in Appendix C focuses mainly on landscape setting and views. Given that these matters are addressed by Policy SEL1 and other policies in the submitted Plan, it would be helpful if the Parish Council elaborated on its approach to this proposed designation.

Response

The field to the south-east of William Buckland Way does appear to be one tract of land. Whilst there is no wall or hedge distinguishing LGS1 from the majority of the field, the larger portion to the south is protected because it is part of the Stonesfield Roman villa scheduled monument site.

The Parish Council seeks to protect the views of the village from the Oxfordshire Way and the Combe Road. At page 48 para 3 of the Landscape Assessment the author, referring to what is now known as the William Buckland Way development, said the "Recent housing development at Charity Farm has created a hard edge to the village in these views, and **additional development will further threaten the integrity of its valued rural character.**"

Stephen Normington, the Planning Inspector in the Cala Planning Appeal Decision relating to the nearby Woodstock Road land, expressed similar serious concern about the harmful effect of development in these fields upon the AONB setting of the village. Agreeing with the Landscape Assessment, he said at paragraph 52 of the Appeal Decision that from the Akeman Street footpath "current views looking towards the village on this approach are dominated by the incongruity of the Charity Farm development, which, owing to its urban form and materials, appears as a disjointed protrusion into the rural landscape and displays little integration with the rest of the village."

Comment

LGS2 - the assessment in Appendix C focuses mainly on landscape setting and views. Given that these matters are addressed by Policy SEL1 and other policies in the submitted Plan, it would be helpful if the Parish Council elaborated on its approach to this proposed designation.

Response

The whole of Stonesfield Parish is within the CNL and therefore covered by the CNL Management Plan. In proposing the Manor Field as an LGS the Parish Council believes it is important to identify the site-specific reasons for the designation in addition to the coverall of SEL1.

The field is within the village Conservation Area and is integral to the setting of the Grade 2 listed Stonesfield Manor, formerly the rectory. It forms an important part of the rural setting of the village when approached from Combe. The concerns raised in the Landscape Assessment and that Stephen Normington raised regarding the Cala Homes development, and stated above for LGS1, apply equally to this site with views from Oxfordshire Way and the Combe Road.

In proposing the Manor Field as an LGS, the Parish Council believes it is important to identify the site-specific reasons for the designation in addition to the coverall of SEL1. The PC firmly believes that the intensity of application of the generally protective policies in the NP, District Plan, NPPF and CNL Management Plan, and conservation Area status, together with other factors reflected in the Village Survey endorsement of LGS designation, render this particular piece of land demonstrably special to the local community. Because of its beauty, historic significance, tranquillity and the richness of its wildlife it holds a particular local significance. Those qualities of being 'demonstrably special' and 'particular local significance' justify an extra measure of protection, i.e. that afforded by LGS status.

The LGS2 land is a field ('the Manor Field') behind Stonesfield Manor, a Grade II listed building. It was, until the recent sale of the Manor, in the same ownership since 1928. Its history of occupation by the owners of the Manor and its character as a crucial part of the setting of the Manor are demonstrably special and of particular local significance. West Oxfordshire District Council has included the land within the Stonesfield Conservation Area. The WODC has a duty under paragraph 204 of the NPPF: when considering the status of land as part of a conservation area: '... local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.'

This special quality was recognised by the Landscape Character Assessment, which commented:

- 'the enclosures immediately on the edge of the village – to the east and south-east of Stonesfield Manor/Church Street – have retained much of their hedgerow vegetation and therefore their historic field patterns have been preserved. These much smaller fields have a more pastoral character that is distinctive and contrasts with the rest of the Local Landscape Character Area and they provide valued 'outward' public views from the settlement edge' (page 47, final paragraph; on page 48, first paragraph);
- 'The Stonesfield Inner Fields,' of which the Manor Field is one, form 'part of the rural landscape setting when approaching Stonesfield' (page 49) and this landscape setting 'contributes to the special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape' and constitutes 'Remaining pockets of pastoral land on the southern edge of the village' which 'add to the settlement's sense of time depth and survive as remnants of historic field enclosures' (page 50).

- a warning under the heading ‘Threats and issues’ at page 51 ‘This LLCA is highly sensitive to development which will impact on its rural character; the village edge setting; open views across the landscape towards the settlement, or ‘outward’ views across the remaining pastoral fields south-east of Stonesfield Manor’ and ‘Development within the remaining smaller-scale pastoral fields to the south and south-east of the village will result in the loss of part of Stonesfield’s historic landscape setting.’
- ‘The Stonesfield Inner Fields and Bagg’s Bottom LLCA is bounded on its south-eastern edge by the Oxfordshire Way long-distance path, an important recreational route that in sections uses the line of the former Roman road, Akeman Street. This affords those using the route clear views towards Stonesfield across the open farmland, putting the Stonesfield Inner Fields firmly in the settlement’s rural landscape setting. Recent housing development at Charity Farm has created a hard edge to the village in these views, and additional development will further threaten the integrity of its valued rural character.’ (Page 48).

The exceptional landscape sensitivity of the area of which the application site is part was also recognised in the planning appeal (‘the Cala Appeal’) decision APP/D3125/W/18/3209551, dated 21 June 2019, by the Inspector, Stephen Normington, who had conduct of the Planning Inquiry into WODC’s refusal of an application by Cala Homes for major residential development on land (‘the Cala site’) north of Woodstock Road, Stonesfield; another approach road to the village from the direction of Blenheim. Indeed, this sensitivity was pivotal in Mr Normington’s decision to dismiss Cala’s appeal. The proposed LGS2, like the Cala site, forms part of significant views towards the village setting from the nearby public footpath and bridleway which is the Oxfordshire Way/Akeman Street. This runs along the dip slope valley (‘Bagg’s Bottom’) south-east of the Application site.

In his Appeal Decision at paragraph 52, Stephen Normington referred to ‘current views looking towards the village on this approach,’ i.e. as the Oxfordshire Way/Akeman Street approaches the village travelling south-west. He said that these views ‘looking towards the village on this approach are dominated by the incongruity of the Charity Farm development which, owing to its urban form and materials appears as a disjointed protrusion into the rural landscape and displays little integration with the rest of the village.’ He went on ‘This development serves to emphasise my concerns at the sensitivity of the landscape to change and the harm that can be created by a relatively large-scale model development that fails to integrate into its surrounds.’

What he referred to as ‘the Charity Farm development’ is now known as the William Buckland Way housing estate. The proposed LGS2 is similarly visible from the Oxfordshire Way/Akeman Street and any development of the site would be equally incongruous and similarly combine with the ‘Charity Farm development’ and display ‘little integration with the rest of the village.’ It would similarly be a ‘disjointed protrusion into the rural landscape’ stretching suburbia along the roadside on this side of the village, of which the LGS land is an important part.

Development of the LGS2 land would be radically more visible and closer to users of the Oxfordshire Way/Akeman Street than would have been the proposed Cala development. The ‘cumulative visual impacts’ of the existing and proposed

developments when viewed from the Oxfordshire Way would a fortiori appear as a 'modern suburbanisation' of a rural settlement. This gross harm to the AONB setting of the village would be experienced, not simply by users of the Oxfordshire Way walking both south westwards and north eastwards, but equally by users of the Combe Road approaching the village, both on foot and in vehicle, first from the relative height of the Combe side of the dip slope valley and then as they climb up the Combe Road towards the village.

The trees and other vegetation along the west side of the Combe Road are themselves an attractive feature of the countryside between March and November. They do not during those months divorce the entrance to the village from its landscape context. Views of the landscape across the proposed LGS2 land towards Baggs Bottom, the chipping banks copses and onwards towards the Evenlode valley are to be savoured through the hedge by passers-by in vehicle and on foot, both in the summer months and in winter. All these special and much-loved views are equally enjoyed by residents from the access lane to the Manor just off Combe Road by the village War Memorial.

Comment

LGS3 - I note that permission in principle was granted on appeal for the construction of a single dwelling on the proposed LGS late in 2025. Does the Parish Council now wish to reassess the appropriateness of the proposed designation?

Response

Although the Parish Council is aware that permission in principle has been granted following appeal, will impede the granting of designation, the judgement contained a number of flaws in the reasoning.

The Parish Council accepts that there is no public access to this land but the views from Brook Lane across the Evenlode Valley have been treasured for generations I'm sure you will have seen this on your visit. This field is in a very sensitive area in the CNL on the Evenlode valley adjacent to SSSI sites. A two-storey dwelling as indicated in the application on this site would be very prominent, especially from the other side of the river on the public bridleway from North Leigh Roman villa.

For information, we attach a file of Parish Council comments on the Appeal judgment.

Comment

LGS 4 and 5 – I walked from one LGS to the other during the visit. I note that the white dotted line on the map on page 11 of Appendix D shows the Parish Council's thoughts about distinction between the two designations. From the descriptions used should I conclude that the distinction is based on land ownership rather than any obvious natural or man-made boundary?

Response

Yes, the dotted line on the map indicates the distinction between landowners, the larger area being owned by the Diocese and the smaller area the Stonesfield Scouts including their new Scout hut. As far as the walking public are concerned it appears as one stretch of land with a public right of way.

Comment

LGS11 - the assessment in Appendix C focuses mainly on landscape setting and views. Given that these matters are addressed by Policy SEL1 and other policies in the submitted Plan, it would be helpful if the Parish Council elaborated on its approach to this proposed designation.

Response

The whole of Stonesfield Parish is within the CNL and therefore covered by the CNL Management Plan. In proposing the field to the west of the Ridings as an LGS, the Parish Council believes it is important to identify the site-specific reasons for the designation in addition to the coverall of SEL1. In this case it is the views of the village as seen from the Oxfordshire Way and the ridge path 208/3/10. This is new, arising at the Regulation consultation.

Addressing the points made as numbered by Carter Jonas:

1. The PC contends that the land is visible from the bridleway 208/3/10. The Examiner will form his opinion from his own inspection.
2. The land is also significantly visible from the Oxfordshire Way. That visibility is not accurately characterised by 'In a short gap.' The photograph is a fair representation of that which may be seen from the Oxfordshire Way. Again, the Examiner will form his own view from his inspection. Hedging is unlikely significantly to inhibit the view. The land forms a crucial part of the rural setting of Stonesfield when viewed from the bridleway and the Oxfordshire Way. That setting, in close proximity to the community, holds special local significance because of its beauty when viewed from the rights-of-way by users of those in pursuit of recreation and because it contributes significantly to the tranquillity and wildlife-friendly qualities of the village setting. Both of these public rights of way are intensively used by residents of Stonesfield and the wider public, to whom views of the land itself and the wider setting are indisputably special.
3. This is not disputed, i.e. it is agreed there are no public rights of way across the land, but the existence of such rights of way is not a precondition of LGS designation.
4. This is not disputed. The land forming proposed LGS 11 is however a significant proportion of the landscape setting of Stonesfield as viewed from the relevant public rights of way. Its protection as a Local Green Space is crucial to the preservation of the beauty, recreational value, tranquillity and wildlife-friendly quality of this part of the landscape setting.
5. There is nothing in the protections afforded by designation as a Local Green Space which would interfere with the existing use of the land for agricultural and recreational purposes.

More generally any current 'lack of access' and technical inhibition of development by virtue of a 'sharp incline' are not a warranty against future inappropriate development. Rights of access can change overnight and technical progress can render construction which is apparently difficult eminently possible.

The presence of the land within the statutory AONB is no guarantee of the appropriate protection of land fulfilling the necessary criteria for LGS designation but not so designated, because it is land immediately adjacent to the limits of the built

development of Stonesfield. Land of this kind which is of special local significance is vulnerable to development proposals in the future.

Comment

LGS13 – the proposed LGS has two distinct parts. The summary in Appendix C reads as it primarily relates to the larger area. If this was the Parish Council's intention, does it wish to prepare a summary (along the lines set out in Appendix C) for the smaller of the two areas fronting onto High Street?

Response

The Parish Council views both areas of the Primary School with equal importance and as one under the same landowner. The first bullet point in section 5 on page 26 of Appendix C applies to both areas. The views from High Street are equally important as the views from Peaks Lane to village residents. The larger field to the rear is used for more sporting activity and the village fetes, the front field a wild flower meadow used by the school for wildlife studies. It would seem like unnecessary duplication to treat these as two separate Local Green Spaces.

For a more complete response please see the Parish Council's response to OCCs Reg16 representation.

Comment

LGS15 - the assessment in Appendix C focuses mainly on landscape setting and views. Given that these matters are addressed by Policy SEL1 and other policies in the submitted Plan, it would be helpful if the Parish Council elaborated on its approach to this proposed designation.

Response

In proposing the field north of Woodstock Rd as an LGS, the Parish Council believes that in this case, as with the other LGS proposals and particularly LGS1 and LGS2, it is important to identify the site-specific reasons for the designation in addition to the coverall of SEL1. The PC firmly believes that the intensity of application of the generally protective policies in the NP, District Plan, NPPF and CNL Management Plan, and Conservation Area status, together with other factors reflected in the Village Survey endorsement of LGS designation, render this particular piece of land demonstrably special to the local community.

Its landscape setting is at the most heavily used approach to the village, very close to the entry to the Cotswolds National Landscape at its boundary adjacent to the UNESCO World heritage site at Blenheim. It therefore holds a particular local significance. This also makes it demonstrably special to the local community. It is the 'face' of Stonesfield, shown to the outside world at the entry to the first settlement of the AONB and it is the access to the village used day in day out by almost all, if not all, of the village's residents. Those qualities of being 'demonstrably special' and 'particular local significance' justify an extra measure of protection, i.e. that afforded by LGS status.

Planning Inspector Stephen Normington in his Appeal Decision dated 21 June 2019 (Appeal Ref: AP P/D3125/W/18/320 9551), rejecting Cala Homes appeal of refusal of permission to build 68 houses on the land, placed particular weight upon the significant harm to the character and appearance of the AONB that major development of this site would cause. At paragraph 97 he was at pains to say that he made this finding notwithstanding that 'the scheme would provide additional benefits... which are afforded moderate to significant weight.' At paragraph 49 of the decision, he had stated:

'Overall, in considering the landscape impacts of the proposal, the development would be contrary to the guidelines provided in the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines. In particular, as an expansion of the settlement it would not maintain the open, sparsely settled character of the Dip Slope Lowland. It would intrude negatively into the landscape by eroding part of its open character.'

He had earlier (at paragraph 52) specifically expressed great concern at the effect of major development of this site on 'views of the appeal site.... apparent as the footpath approaches the village travelling south-west' i.e. from the Oxfordshire Way/Akeman Street. He was moved to express this concern, taking into account the effect of the recent major development of the Charity Farm (now named William Buckland Way) estate on the other side of the Woodstock Road. He noted that:

'current views looking towards the village on this approach are dominated by the incongruity of the Charity Farm development which, owing to its urban form and materials, appears as a disjointed protrusion into the rural landscape and displays little integration with the rest of the village. This development serves to emphasise my concern that the sensitivity of the landscape to change and the harm that can be created by relatively large-scale modern development that fails to integrate into its surrounds.'

Thus, it is perfectly possible, and indeed it is the case here, for green space to be significant because of its landscape setting and views and at the same time to be demonstrably special to the local community and of particular local significance. The field north of Woodstock Road is all of these and, because it satisfies all these criteria, it justifies protection both in respect of its scenic landscape beauty and in respect of its local green space status. This is not a superfluous duplication, but a strengthening of protection for a very special and significant piece of land.

Comment

There is an opportunity for the Parish Council to respond to the representations received on some of the designations later in the policy.

Response

Responses from the PC to the individual representations will be sent to follow this document.

Comment

Policy SEL5

Is the first part of the policy necessary as it restates Policy EH3 of the Local Plan and Policy CE7 Cotswolds Management Plan?

Response

Yes, this purposefully restates the importance of EH3 of the Local Plan and CE7 of the Cotswolds Management Plan so that the reader of the Plan immediately understands the wider context of Policy SEL5. Throughout the Plan we have sought to ensure the reader, be that an ordinary resident or a potential developer, has a clear understanding that Stonesfield's Plan conforms to wider National, Local and regional policies.

Comment

The second part of the submitted policy reads as supporting text rather than as a land use policy and describes ongoing work. It would be helpful if the Parish Council elaborated on its approach to this part of the policy.

Response

The second paragraph of SEL5 could be moved to the Justification and supporting evidence. This paragraph was added in response to feedback at Regulation 14. It can be moved as suggested.

Comment

The District Council advises that the third part of the policy is too stringent in not allowing any development in this area and should require any development to take every opportunity to enhance the environment, and particularly the Conservation Target Area (CTA). It also advises that the requirement for development adjacent to a CTA to demonstrate an exceptional need does not comply with the approach taken in the Local Plan. The Parish Council's comments on these observations would be appreciated.

Response

The third paragraph is purposefully 'stringent' in stating that development proposals in the blue/green corridors will not be supported. The purpose of these blue/green areas is to ensure that there is an uninterrupted corridor for wildlife of all types to move from one area to another. The very nature of development, building of any kind, infrastructure and mono-agriculture causes a barrier stopping the movement which is so important to biodiversity. Significant parts of the blue/green corridors have SSSI status, or is a scheduled ancient monument or Wild Oxfordshire Conservation Target Areas.

As recommended by OCC, we will accept a proposal to add to paragraph 1, a reference to the first and second principles of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy which require management of areas important for biodiversity so that wildlife does not decline further, and to focus local efforts and resources on the creation of a strategic network of habitats that prioritise connectivity – achieving a wide range of biodiversity-rich habitat types, joined by corridors. We also propose to include in the Justification and supporting information for SEL5, reference to the LNRS Local Habitat Map, which shows recommended actions for maintenance of each habitat type.

In addition, we propose to refer to the Natural England map of Risk Zones for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI IRZs). According to that map, potential developers

are required to consult Natural England in relation to proposed developments within the risk zones – and in this context that would be in the areas specified in the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan as part of blue/green corridors. This is because the Risk Zones for Sites of Special Scientific Interest indicate that at the location selected, there is potential for a proposed development to have a harmful effect on terrestrial SSSIs and those Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites that they underpin.

It is also proposed to add to the Justification and supporting information, reference to the LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities, and its identification of recommended actions for conservation of the range of habitat types and their connecting corridors.

The suggested changes, referring to the LNRS are all covered in the draft Stonesfield Biodiversity Policy, and link with the new requirements for the Basic Conditions.

Comment

Policy SEL6

This is a good policy which addresses biodiversity in a positive way and has regard to the approach set out in Section 15 of the NPPF.

Response

Agreed, but we would propose this should be further amended to: All development proposals should result in a net biodiversity gain of at least 20%, in line with OCC recommendations.

We propose to add to the Justification and supporting evidence, reference to the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and its measures to focus attention on ensuring retention of wildlife habitats important to biodiversity and their connecting networks.

Comment

Policy SEL7

I noted the availability and good condition of the various footpaths in the parish during the visit. The policy addresses this matter in a positive way.

In this broader context I am minded to recommend that the order of the two parts of the policy is reversed so that it has a positive focus. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

Response

The Parish Council accepts the recommendation to change the order of the two parts of this policy.

Comment

Policy SEL8

The second, third and fifth parts of the policy read as process matters rather than as a land use policy. As such I am minded to recommend that they are deleted and relocated into the supporting text. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

Response

Agreed, these paragraphs can be moved to the justification and supporting evidence section associated with policy SEL8. The second, third and fifth parts of the policy were added following Reg 14 feedback and are process matters which add no material value to the policy overall.

Thames Water made some helpful Regulation 16 comments in their representation. If the sections above are modified, it probably addresses their concern about too many topics being covered in one policy, although the PC is content that sewerage and sewage (wastewater) treatment and water supply infrastructure are covered in one policy rather than their suggested two.

Comment

I note the comments about sustainable drainage. However, this approach will not necessarily be required for all forms of development, particularly where proposals are very minor in scale. On this basis I am minded to recommend a modification to the fourth part of the policy to address this matter. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

The final part of the policy (on Grampian Conditions) reads as a process issue (how the District Council will deliver planning permissions) rather than as a land use policy. As such I am minded to recommend that it is deleted and relocated into the supporting text. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

Response

The Parish Council response to these two comments is covered below.

It is worth noting in relation to this policy that the PC is concerned about significant sewerage and drainage issues which have caused residents major problems on Brook Lane, Churchfields, Combe Road and Laughton Hill. The PC wanted to reassure residents it would assess applications to ensure the developer had fulfilled its responsibilities to avoid worsening this situation and will be looking at it as part of its NP flowchart.

There are two locations in the village, Combe Road and Laughton Hill, where even 'minor' changes could have a disproportionate impact in increasing the flood water blocking the road.

Thames Water's proposed policy change in relation to Building Regulations is probably more relevant to WODC rather than NP. However, the proposed policy wording proposed by them: *'New development must not exceed the maximum water use targets using the 'Fittings Approach' in Table 2.2 of Part G of Building Regulations. Planning conditions will be applied to new residential development to ensure that the water efficiency standards are met.'* is relevant given that the water system is highly stressed generally in the TW area and specifically in Stonesfield, as outlined above.

Comment

Policy SHE1

Given that Policy SHE2 addresses non-designated heritage assets is there any need for the reference to such assets in this policy?

Response

The purpose of Policy SHE1 is to define the whole framework of heritage considerations which need to be taken into account in relation to proposed developments: i.e. the archaeological remains, scheduled monuments, listed buildings and non-designated assets. Policy SHE2 then goes on to specify the less obvious considerations relating to developments in relation to non-designated assets.

Comment

Policy SBD1

This is a very good policy which is underpinned by the Building Design Guidelines (Section 11.5). It is an excellent local response to Section 11 of the NPPF.

The final three parts of the policy do not naturally relate to design matters and overlap with other policies in the Plan. It would be helpful if the Parish Council elaborated on its approach to these parts of the policy and the extent to which they are necessary.

Response

It is agreed that the final three parts, relating to access to the countryside, risk of flooding or pollution, and development beyond the current settlement area, should be deleted from Policy SBD1. These issues are accommodated by

- access to the countryside: Section 9, especially 9.5, 9.5 and 9.6
- risk of flooding and pollution: Section 9.7 and Policy SEL8
- development beyond the current settlement area: it is proposed to delete the last sentence from 11.3.1 (The open countryside...) and to insert new paragraph:

11.3.2 Development in the open countryside, beyond the current settlement area, should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with the principles of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 and the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan.

Comment

Policy SBD3

In general terms the policy takes a positive approach

I am minded to recommend that the first part of the policy is modified so that it can be applied in a proportionate way and to allow proposals to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of its immediate locality. This would acknowledge that development proposals will have different abilities to enhance the character and appearance of its immediate locality. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

Response

It is proposed to add the wording in **red** to the first two paragraphs of the policy:

Proposals should **make proportionate attempts to** enhance the character and appearance of **the** immediate locality. Development, including new builds, should **as far as possible** maintain and **seek to** enhance the character and appearance of the village and contribute to local distinctiveness and biodiversity.

Proposals which **significantly** detract from the character or the appearance of the neighbourhood or views within the village or across the surrounding rural landscape will not be supported.

Comment

The final part of the policy repeats the more general approach taken in Policy SEL1. As such is it necessary?

Response

We propose the final section of SBD3 could be replaced with the following:
Proposals should take full account of the requirements to conserve and enhance the natural landscape, as set out in Policy SEL1.

The Parish Council accepts that this is a duplication of SEL1, but sees this as a useful repetition of a very important condition, and therefore is content for it to be repeated.

Overall

Please note that some related representations were made, in particular from WODC and OCC, to which the Parish Council's responses will follow.

Stonesfield PC comments on the Appeal Judgment on Proposed LGS3

The Parish Council has considered the Appeal Judgment on this site and has serious concerns about the basis for the outcome of the Appeal, which contains inaccuracies and some highly subjective statements. These are summarised below:

Appeal Para. 20. The Stonesfield Parish Council Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) (dated April 2024) also indicates that 100 properties were sold in Stonesfield since December 2018. This does not clarify whether these sales related to the existing housing stock or new-build dwellings, or if those who purchased these dwellings were local to Stonesfield. Given the above context, I do not view this number of recent private housing sales as a useful indicator of local housing demand being met.

Comment:

The Parish Council is disappointed that the data in the HNA appears to have been misunderstood. The HNA looked at the projected demand from within the settlement and compared it with the past turnover of market housing in the settlement. The conclusion was clear that, based on the past turnover, there would be a substantial surplus of market housing available to meet the identified need and there is no case for further market housing in the next five years.

21. Furthermore, the HNA indicates that the two significant WOLP allocations of land for housing have now been built out. The DSNP and HNA refer to ten houses in Stonesfield, over multiple small or "windfall sites" sites, but there is little evidence before me regarding significant delivery of new-build dwellings in Stonesfield within

the last several years. This is noteworthy because Stonesfield comprises a larger village for the purposes of the WOLP.

Comment:

The Parish Council is disappointed with the inaccuracy of this statement. Since 2015, 83 new housing units have been delivered, a simple search of the WODC planning portal would have yielded this and is strong evidence of significant delivery of new build dwellings in a village the size of Stonesfield. Therefore the appeal conclusion that the appeal proposal as an open market dwelling would meet a local housing need relative to Stonesfield is based on factually incorrect bases.

27. The site is identified in the DSNP as part of a wider parcel of local green space. The proposal site is in private ownership and there is no evidence before me to demonstrate a public right of access or recreation use. It nonetheless has some value in a landscape and visual sense as an undeveloped parcel of land, forming part of a wider grassed field at the end of a row of bungalows on the eastern side of Brook Lane.

Comment:

Whilst it is true that the parcel of land has no right of access or recreation use, this is not the basis of the proposed designation of it as an LGS.....

31. For the above reasons, the proposed plot forms a logical complement to the existing scale and pattern of development, as required by Policy OS2. A solid panel has recently been attached to the inside of the site's vehicular access gate. It is <https://www.gov.uk/planning-inspectorate> 4 Appeal Decision APP/D3125/W/25/3363544 unclear as to whether this has or requires planning permission from the District. Even if this panel were to be removed, views within the site from along Brook Lane would be fleeting. The close-range visual impact on the scenic beauty of the CNL along Brook Lane would therefore be very limited.

Comment:

The Parish Council disagrees that the views would be fleeting. The Council wrote to WODC to request enforcement action to remove the panel, but it appears not to have been actioned. The reason the view is not fleeting is that residents often pause at the gate to enjoy the outward view, often before turning along the footpath opposite the gate to enjoy the view over Stocky Woods. The Council also disagrees with the statement 'The close-range visual impact on the scenic beauty of the CNL along Brook Lane would therefore be very limited', which is highly subjective and is not consistent with the views from the village survey to support the NP.

32. Further along the PRoW and across the Evenlode river, the PRoW inclines considerably and allows for expansive views of the valley landscape when looking back towards Stonesfield. Although the proposal site is at the top of the valley where it plateaus across the village, I found only very limited views of the rear (eastern) section of this site due to the undulating topography and intervening groups of mature trees. Such views are from the higher parts of the valley at substantial

distance away from the proposal site, whereby I was also able to see some other roof forms amongst the mature tree groups.

Comment:

The view on the path from the Roman Villa gives a beautiful vista of the Evenlode, Common and Stocky Woods with little view of the settlement. It has been possible to see clearly the children's goal posts on the field and on that basis, a house, being taller and larger would be highly visible.

33. The PRoW running beyond the southeast of the site (ref: 370/2/10) forms part of the Oxfordshire Way. Along the walking track that runs near to the southeastern field boundary (and which appears to broadly correlate with the PRoW map route before me), I found views of the appeal site to be effectively restricted by the intervening large open field's ridgeline where the land levels incline towards the village plateau. Some other roof forms are also visible along this PRoW route.

Comment:

It is true that the view from along the valley (Oxfordshire Way) is limited, but a building of more than a single story would spoil that as it would be highly visible.

35. For the above reasons, I conclude that the provision of one dwelling at this site would have a limited adverse visual impact. This impact, along with physical alteration of undeveloped land for residential use, would inevitably fail to conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the CNL. These adverse impacts amount to conflict with Policies OS2 and EH2 of the WOLP. These policies require, amongst other things, new development to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the CNL and the quality of the District's natural environment.

Comment:

It is on the basis that the physical alteration of undeveloped land for residential use, would inevitably fail to conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the CNL and should have been refused, as it was originally by WODC.

Planning Balance

42. I have found conflict with Policies OS2 and EH2 of the WOLP in respect of adverse landscape and visual impact on the CNL. Statute 6 requires me to seek to further the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of National Landscapes. This is also reflected in WOLP Policy EH1 insofar as it requires great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing the CNL's natural beauty, landscape and countryside. I therefore conclude that the proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole.

46. This undersupply of housing means that the approach set out in paragraph 11d) of the Framework applies. This sets out that planning permission should be granted unless, as per paragraph 11d)i., the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance, including National Landscapes, provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed.

50. The proposal would provide a modest level of local employment during the construction phase and future occupiers of the dwelling would likely contribute towards the vitality of Stonesfield through direct expenditure and use of its nearby

facilities, potentially including the primary school. I afford moderate weight to the economic and social benefits arising from this.

Comment:

These considerations hold little water. Given this is a self-build, by existing residents with children of school age, the level of local employment provided is likely to be negligible as is the benefit to the primary school.

51. I have carefully considered the statutory duty related to NLS10. As set out in my above reasons, I have found that the landscape and visual impact on the CNL would be limited and would not amount to a strong reason to refuse permission in principle. It follows that this harm would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the abovementioned benefits when assessed against the policies of the Framework.

Comment:

For the reasons given above, the Parish Council does not accept these conclusions.

Conclusion

54. For the reasons set out above, the proposed development would conflict with the development plan. However, material considerations justify making a decision other than in accordance with it. The appeal is therefore allowed.

Comment:

For the reasons given above, the Parish Council does not accept these conclusions.