# Stonesfield Parish Council

MADE





















Produced by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group on behalf of **Stonesfield Parish Council**

# Stonesfield Parish Council

NOVEMBER 2026

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# Foreword

Neighbourhood Plans come out of the Government's determination to ensure that local communities are closely involved in the decisions which affect them as defined by the Localism Act 2011. The Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan has been drafted with the intention of delivering, as far as the Town & Country planning law and policy framework can, the wishes of the local community. It has been prepared according to strictly defined regulations.

This Neighbourhood Plan is a statutory document that will become part of the Development Plan for West Oxfordshire. The law will then require the planning authority, other than in exceptional cases West Oxfordshire District Council, to "have regard" to it in determining planning applications. Our Plan has been produced by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, which is a Working Group of the Parish Council, using the views of the residents of Stonesfield. The Steering Group has consulted and listened to the community and local organisations on a wide range of issues that will influence the well-being, sustainability and long-term preservation of our rural community.

During the period the Plan was being prepared, the Steering Group, via the Surveys undertaken and Village events, received a wealth of feedback concerning issues that were important to local residents. The Plan has attempted to capture these concerns in policies and aspirations, wherever they can be within the regulations governing the function of Neighbourhood Plans. Where there are concerns that sit outside the Plan, the Parish Council has stated an intention to capture these as aspirations for further community action and encourage involvement from interested residents in taking these ideas forward.

This draft Plan is submitted by the Parish Council as the qualifying body, and we would like to thank past and present Council members for their support for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, a group of volunteers drawn from the Council and the community, to formulate the plan on the Council's behalf.

Too many people contributed to this Plan to be thanked individually so we hope that you will forgive us for not naming each one. They include all those who either ran or participated in the various workshops and public meetings, those who created, distributed and analysed the Village Survey, communicated progress via The Stonesfield Slate or social media, and all those volunteers who worked on the Village Character Assessment. Please see the Acknowledgements on p119.

Our final thanks go to all those who take time to read, comment on and hopefully support this Plan. We recognise that there are constraints on what can be done but that the Plan strives to build on all that is good about Stonesfield to make it an even better place to live, work and visit. Many thanks to all.

**Ursula Rice**
Chair, Stonesfield Parish Council

**Richard Morris**
Chair, Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

# Overview

Stonesfield is a historic village in a beautiful location within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or AONB. Since 2020 this is also known as the Cotswolds National Landscape, CNL. In 2023, 89% of residents responding to the Neighbourhood Plan Village Survey strongly agreed or agreed that it is a great place to live. Stonesfield has an active community offering a wide range of services, activities, clubs and facilities that are very well supported.

However, the village has some challenges to face. It needs to continue to be a vibrant and enjoyable place to live, adapting to the challenges of rural living where house prices are high, employment is scarce and transport can be a challenge. While almost half of its working residents work from home, most of those who commute are car-dependent – and yet a high proportion would like to use more sustainable transport. The village is strongly determined to protect its very special environmental setting within the CNL and also its historic heritage, while working towards meeting WODC's aim to be carbon neutral by 2030.

The Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan represents the opportunity and the responsibility, within the present planning regime, to retain all that is good about the village, while enabling appropriate development that addresses current challenges, and at the same time sustaining and enhancing the many features that people value.

The Plan describes in detail how Stonesfield can work to achieve its aims while supporting those of national and West Oxfordshire planning policies, and of other relevant organisations including the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan. It sets out a positive vision for the future of Stonesfield, enabling the views, needs and aspirations of the local community to shape and direct development in the village.

The Plan has been developed using a wide-ranging evidence base including the detailed responses of local residents to the Village Survey of 2023, a Housing Needs Assessment and Landscape Character Assessment commissioned by the Parish Council, and a Village Character Assessment and Local Green Spaces Assessment compiled by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, with substantial assistance from many local volunteers.

## Housing

Stonesfield housing is dominated by larger detached or semi-detached houses, with a greater affordability gap than the national average. The housing market is predicted to meet the need for local people wishing to move until at least 2030, with significant excess capacity. A significant amount of new housing has been built between 2012 and 2024, but disproportionately of larger properties, often sold to people with no local connection. Planning policy restricts permission for housing on sites outside the built-up area of the village to that which is necessary to meet identified housing needs, and this has been held to mean needs specific to the settlement. The Housing Needs Assessment 2024 (HNA, Appendix A) shows no further current need in Stonesfield for such large properties.

However, while the HNA shows there is currently reasonable provision of social/affordable housing, there may be a very small shortfall in the next five years. There may therefore be a case to deliver more social/affordable homes for people with a local (Stonesfield) connection, which could be met via a small rural exception site. The Plan seeks to redress this imbalance with policies that support the provision of a limited supply of new housing affordable by those on or below median income, and this should incorporate the highest level of energy efficiency.

## Economy and amenities

Stonesfield village has limited employment opportunities but a high proportion of working residents (48.9%) work from home; there is scope for new small businesses, and residents are keen to support local employment, e.g. in light industry or workshops. Opportunities for setting up new businesses have been limited, partly due to lack of suitable business premises or suitable office accommodation. New appropriate business proposals or new commercial developments would be welcome, provided due account is taken of the requirements on access, protection of the natural and historic environment, and building guidelines.

The Plan proposes policies to protect and enhance retail, employment and other services, by increasing employment opportunities within Stonesfield, and by actively maintaining services of local importance including shops, pubs, education including early years, healthcare services and facilities for sport and education.

## Transport, road use and footpaths

Apart from use of buses to Oxford and Woodstock, residents' travel to work, services and education outside Stonesfield is predominantly by car. This brings attendant problems in the village of parking, access along narrow village lanes, road safety and congestion. While the Plan cannot reach to public transport or road maintenance, it does make provision for progress toward more sustainable transport and for ensuring road safety, especially for pedestrians, cyclists and other non-motorised road users.

## Health and wellbeing, education and young people

The health of Stonesfield residents is significantly better than that of the population of England, and they undertake more physical exercise. The age profile of England's population as a whole is getting older; that of West Oxfordshire slightly more so and that of Stonesfield slightly more than that of West Oxfordshire, but similar to that of other Cotswolds villages. The coming years may therefore involve greater healthcare needs. Stonesfield has no GP surgery, no dentist and no pharmacy, which makes its residents dependent on their own, public or other transport to other towns and villages for these primary healthcare services. Referral to secondary care requires travel to Oxford, Banbury, or at least Witney.

Supporting the wellbeing of residents of a rural village, and helping them to stay physically active, faces challenges but many of the aspects of this Plan, both commercially run and voluntary, contribute to that aim by providing practical amenities and services, facilities for exercise, education and recreation. Affordable, energy-efficient housing of good quality is important to wellbeing, and its provision is addressed in Section 5 Housing. The Plan's policies on health and wellbeing support the aims of the Oxfordshire Health and Well-Being Strategy towards addressing health inequalities, preventing ill health and promoting closer collaboration between relevant organisations and services. It also focuses on ensuring protection and improvement of local sports facilities: the Plan suggests a number of approaches to maintain and increase their availability, in support of the WODC Open Space Study 2013-2029.

Stonesfield's primary school has in recent years catered for about 100 children, although a combination of factors in 2024-25 led to the school roll falling significantly; the incoming new executive head and head of school are implementing new policies to reverse this trend. A small number of local children attend schools in neighbouring villages or the private schools in Oxford. The pre-school will be operating on the primary school site from autumn 2025. The majority of older pupils travel to attend the Marlborough secondary school in Woodstock and the remainder to Witney, Banbury or Oxford.

The Plan recognises that housing costs in Stonesfield are much higher than the national average, which is a particular problem for those seeking to set up house for the first time. Its policies SH3 and also SH1, SH6 and SH7 set out provisions for the sort of housing likely to be needed by young people who have left their parental home and by young couples. These provide for affordable rented housing (which are most likely to be of interest rather than purchased housing), affordable or social housing to rent for people on lower incomes, lower-cost homes and on the location of new affordable homes in rural exception sites.

Young people in their teens living in a rural village with limited facilities for recreation face a number of issues, at a time when school work and social relationships often create anxieties. Recent research has highlighted their needs for more social activities and safe, inexpensive social spaces. The cost of travel to other locations for recreation can also be limiting. However Stonesfield does offer good sports facilities and a number of other volunteer-run activities. Further initiatives by voluntary groups are currently developing summer holiday activities for families with teens, and a wide range of mainly outdoor projects for fun and learning rural skills. The Plan provides in Policy SHW2 for measures to protect and enhance Stonesfield's sports facilities.

## Countryside and natural environment

The beauty and significance of Stonesfield's natural environment is acknowledged through its inclusion within the Cotswolds National Landscape, and protection of this environment is very important to the local community. This Plan identifies particular aspects which deserve special protection, including important views and landscapes, the River Evenlode Valley, Stonesfield Common and Stockey Bottom and Banks (one of Stonesfield's two SSSIs), Bagg's Bottom, Stonesfield's dip-slope lowland and King's Wood. The Plan has designated 16 Local Green Spaces for protection from development. Blue/green corridors surround the village on three sides, enabling interconnectivity between conservation target areas, with biodiverse wildlife. Stonesfield is also a hub of local and long-distance footpaths, enabling residents and visitors to exercise and enjoy the landscape. Finally, it is proud to be in a dark skies area.

## Historic environment

Stonesfield's character depends to a large extent on its history as a mining village in the 18th-19th centuries, although the village and surrounds have rich Roman

connections and earthworks back to the Iron Age. Many of its older cottages date from the mining industry days, although a few are older. These cottages are built of local stone and roofed with local limestone 'slates' which were the basis for the successful mining industry. About half of the village, the historic core, is a conservation area, designated in 1988, and the village has 11 Grade II listed buildings and one Grade II* (the Church of St James the Great). The village is typified by narrow lanes and dry stone walls, without street lights, which add greatly to its tranquil and rural character.

This Plan sets out policies to conserve and enhance this character and Stonesfield's heritage and non-heritage assets, supplementing national policies and those of WODC. The Plan includes policies to inform the design of any new developments and for alterations to existing buildings – its aim is to ensure that Stonesfield's distinctive character and identity is maintained for future generations.

## Building and environmental design guidelines

Within the terms of the WODC Local Plan 2031 is the principle that development in Stonesfield will be limited to that which respects the village character and local distinctiveness and would help maintain the vitality of the local community. To that end, the building and environmental design guidelines seek to conserve and enhance Stonesfield's intrinsic character, appearance and setting in relation to any future development or redevelopment,

Policies are defined for locally appropriate design for both development and new buildings (SBD1), listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets and existing buildings (SBD2), and in relation to the natural environment (SBD3). Separate proposals make requirements for environmental design standards for development or redevelopment with regard to energy and water efficiency; again for both new developments and refurbishments (SBD4), and for listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets and existing buildings (SBD5). Additional recommendations are made for preserving and enhancing biodiversity.

## Appendices

The following are separate, stand-alone documents:

**Appendix A: Housing needs assessment 2024**

**Appendix B: Landscape character assessment 2024**

**Appendix C: Local green spaces 2024**

**Appendix D: Village character assessment 2024**

**Appendix E: Village survey results 2023**

# SECTION 1: **Aims and Objectives**

The priorities of Stonesfield residents for the future of the village and its residents were identified in their responses to the 2023 Village Survey and through other public engagement exercises held between 2022 and 2025, detailed in Section 4. These priorities were used to create the aims and objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The policies defined in later sections of the Plan (Sections 5-7 and 9-10) are its basis, and are designed to address the aims and objectives by directing future development in the village, taking into account the current national, county and district plans and frameworks, and all other relevant guidance. It should be noted however that the Plan alone cannot ensure that all of the aims are met. See also 4.4.2 and 4.4.3.

The aspirations defined in sections 7 (Transport, road use and footpaths) and 9 (Countryside and natural environment) concern hopes and wishes expressed in the 2023 Village Survey, and in Stonesfield residents' responses to the draft Plan and the two exhibitions of early 2025 which are beyond the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan, and represent possibilities for further evolution as separate and later initiative(s) from Stonesfield Parish Council. See also 4.4.3.

The Plan, its survey, policies and format, were based on the Charlbury Neighbourhood Plan according to WODC recommendations. It was reconfirmed by Stonesfield Parish Council in July 2025 that the scope of the Plan is that of a formal document and that it cannot provide for every facility that the village might want. Those issues are captured in the aspirations, which can be pursued by the Parish Council separately from the Neighbourhood Plan.

## The aims of the Plan are:

1 **To maintain and enhance the community of Stonesfield**

2 **To encourage growth in economic activity in order to maintain and enhance current services**

3 **To ensure that housing development in Stonesfield meets the specific needs of the village, and those of the District as far as required by national or district policy, and is sustainable**

4 **To enhance community facilities and their accessibility to all age groups**

5 **To conserve the environment of Stonesfield's landscape and countryside as appropriate for its position within the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL)**

6 **To conserve Stonesfield's historic village character**

7 **To take appropriate measures toward addressing climate change at the local level.**

## Aim 1

**To maintain and enhance the community of Stonesfield**

### Objectives

- To ensure, as far as is possible in compliance with district and national planning policy, that housing development and infrastructure are consistent with the needs of the Stonesfield community
- To ensure that the implementation of planning policy is conducive to a thriving community
- To seek contributions from new developments to support community facilities
- To retain and enhance public transport links into and out of Stonesfield
- To enhance the access of Stonesfield residents around the village and into the neighbouring countryside by walking and cycling.

## Aim 2

**To encourage growth in economic activity in order to maintain and enhance current services, so far as possible in compliance with CNL policy requirements**

(See Section 6)

### Objectives

- To support and enhance existing businesses and services
- To support existing and new employment opportunities, including home working
- To retain and enhance public transport links to the village.

## Aim 3

**To ensure that housing development in Stonesfield meets the specific needs of the village, and those of the District as far as required by national or district policy, and is sustainable**

(See Section 5)

### Objectives

- To ensure that the supply of housing meets the specific needs of the existing demographic of the village and of the future demographic as projected in 2025
- To enable more people of working age to live in Stonesfield
- To provide housing that is affordable to households on or below median income level
- To ensure that any future development is limited to smaller social housing at lower than market rents
- To ensure that affordable housing remains affordable for would-be future occupants, not only initial occupants
- To ensure that new development does not exacerbate congestion and parking problems.

## Aim 4

**To enhance community facilities and their accessibility to all age groups and disabilities**

(See Sections 6 & 7)

### Objectives

- To maintain existing local facilities and facilitate creation of new ones for current and future residents
- To ensure that new developments contribute to community facilities in the village
- To retain and enhance sustainable public transport links to the village, in order to reduce the need for car travel
- To enable residents, especially those who are elderly or disabled, to access key services safely by walking, cycling or public transport
- To promote health and wellbeing through walking and cycling.

## Aim 5

**To conserve the environment of Stonesfield's surrounding landscape and countryside as appropriate for its position within the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL)**

(See Section 9)

### Objectives

- To respect, conserve, enhance and protect Stonesfield's valuable landscape setting within the Cotswolds National Landscape
- To ensure that development proposals demonstrate how they will conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area
- To protect important landscape views into and outward from the village
- To protect Stonesfield's high-quality green spaces
- To protect Stonesfield's interconnected blue/green corridors as havens for wildlife biodiversity
- To promote a net gain in biodiversity to 2043
- To provide areas for sport and physical activity and recreation
- To ensure access to the countryside by protecting parish public rights of way
- To manage and mitigate the risk of flooding
- To ensure that water and sewage infrastructure is sufficient to prevent further pollution of the River Evenlode
- To conserve the tranquillity and dark skies of the Cotswolds National Landscape, especially in relation to new development.

## Aim 6

**To conserve Stonesfield's historic village character**

(See Section 10)

### Objectives

- To preserve, conserve, and where possible to enhance the historic character and appearance of the village and particularly the conservation area and its surroundings
- To ensure that all work to historic buildings and non-designated assets respects their character and significance
- To protect Stonesfield's archaeological heritage
- To ensure that any new developments are well designed and respect Stonesfield's local character.

## Aim 7

**To address climate change at the local level**

(See Sections 5 & 7)

### Objectives

- To support the WODC target to become carbon neutral by 2030
- To apply the highest standards of environmental building design wherever possible
- When government allows planning authorities to impose conditions requiring energy-efficient mechanisms on individual houses such as solar panels, heat pumps, high specification insulation, Stonesfield Parish Council will strongly support the planning authority to do so
- To reduce the need for car travel and to reduce traffic congestion
- To promote safe cycling and walking within Stonesfield and to neighbouring towns and villages
- To support other initiatives to reduce carbon emissions within the village, provided these are consistent with other aspects of the Plan and national guidelines.

# SECTION 2: **Introduction and context**

## 2.1 Structure of the Plan

2.1.1 The Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan) is divided into sections, as explained below. Section 1 sets out its aims and objectives, and Section 2 (this section) defines the legal framework and background to the Plan.

2.1.2 Section 3 describes the village and community of Stonesfield as it is today, and summarises the challenges and aspirations for the future.

2.1.3 Section 4 sets out the process used to develop the Plan.

2.1.4 Sections 5-11 cover, in more detail, the formal policies to be applied within the parish of Stonesfield, including those related to planning applications. In most of these sections are also a number of aspirations which are outside the scope of formal policies but nonetheless represent intentions and hopes to protect the character and amenities of the village into the future. In this Plan, its policies are shown in green boxes and aspirations are shown in blue boxes.

2.1.5 Section 5 concerns housing, while Section 6 covers Stonesfield's policies for economy and amenities. Section 7 is concerned with transport and road use, while Section 8 outlines the Stonesfield community's health, and education. Section 9 proposes policies for the countryside and natural environment, and Section 10 sets out the policies for the preservation and protection of Stonesfield's historic environment. Section 11 covers building guidelines.

2.1.6 In addition, Appendices A to E give the detailed assessments which have contributed the data on which the Plan is based. Appendix A is the assessment of Stonesfield's housing needs; the landscape and countryside surrounding the village and enhancing its character are discussed in Appendix B. The question of Stonesfield's local green spaces is examined in Appendix C, and Appendix D assesses the village character. Finally, the detailed findings of the survey of village residents, their priorities and concerns are given in Appendix E.

## 2.2 Planning framework

2.2.1 Before anyone can carry out development, in most cases the law requires the person to have planning permission. Development is defined by the law as the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land. Planning permission is usually granted by the local planning authority to which a planning application must be made; in our case, West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC).

2.2.2 The Neighbourhood Plan is a statutory document that, once adopted, must be considered in determining planning applications within the parish of Stonesfield. West Oxfordshire District Council must have regard to the provisions of the Plan as far as they are material to the application.

2.2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan sits within the overall planning framework alongside the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)[1] and the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031. It also takes into account, as far as possible at the time of submission, the draft WODC Local Plan 2043. The Plan is required to be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the Local Plan and must not promote less development than that which is set out there for the area, nor undermine those strategic policies.

2.2.4 The Plan acknowledges that Stonesfield lies within the Cotswolds National Landscape; prior to June 2020 also known as the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and AONB is still its legal designation.

2.2.5 The WODC Local Plan notes that areas within the Burford-Charlbury sub-area of the Cotswolds National Landscape, including Stonesfield, are subject to a more restrictive approach to new housing development than the other four sub-areas. This means that the amount of housing proposed for this sub-area up to 2031 is based on past completions and existing commitments only, and no allowance is made for future speculative 'windfall' development – sites which have not been specifically identified as available in the Local Plan process, and which are usually previously-developed sites that have unexpectedly become available. The WODC states that it is in a strong position to deliver sufficient houses to meet its requirements

over the five-year period 2023-2028[2] (see Housing Needs Assessment 2024 (Appendix A), Section 2 – Policy context).

2.2.6 However, proposals for further housing development will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and a proposal will have to demonstrate convincingly that it would give rise to benefits (e.g. meeting identified local housing needs) and that the benefits would clearly outweigh any likely harms (e.g. heritage, landscape, impact on local services). Major development proposals (i.e. developments where 10 or more homes will be provided, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more) are only to be permitted in exceptional circumstances and where it can be shown that they are in the public interest[3, 4].

2.2.7 In addition, much of Stonesfield is also a conservation area, designated by WODC in 1988, which is discussed in Section 10 (Historic environment) and Appendix D: Village Character Assessment. Within the conservation area, planning applications for development, including new buildings and alterations to existing buildings, must demonstrate how the proposals would preserve or enhance the character of the area[5]. Special attention should be given to the design, scale and use of materials, so that the existing character of the area is not harmed. There are also restrictions to the Permitted Development Rights for homeowners and businesses[6].

2.2.8 Stonesfield's 11 listed buildings are also affected by the requirement for listed building consent from WODC for all work affecting the building's historic character[3, 4].

## 2.3 Policy context

2.3.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced rights and powers to enable local communities to shape new development in their community. It specifically provided for the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans which allow local communities to define both general and specific planning policies for the development and use of land in their neighbourhood areas. This document is a Neighbourhood Development Plan as defined in the Localism Act 2011.

2.3.2 To meet the requirements of the Localism Act 2011, the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan 2043 must:

- have appropriate regard to national planning policy and guidance;
- have special regard to the preservation of listed buildings, their settings and/or associated features of special architectural or historical interest;
- have special regard to the preservation and/or enhancement of the Stonesfield conservation area;
- contribute to sustainable development;
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 (and, as far as possible at the time of submission, with the draft Local Plan 2043);
- be compatible with EU obligations.

2.3.3 In this regard, the Plan is compliant with the following policy documents:

- The NPPF as last revised in December 2023[7]
- The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, adopted in September 2018[8]
- As far as possible at the date of submission, the draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043[9]
- The Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025[10].

## 2.4 Submitting body

2.4.1 The Neighbourhood Plan 2043 is submitted to WODC by Stonesfield Parish Council, which is a qualifying body as defined by the Localism Act 2011.

2.4.2 Stonesfield Parish Council resolved at its meeting on 1 September 2021 to proceed with the production of a Neighbourhood Plan. Application to WODC for the designation of the Neighbourhood Area was made on 16 November 2021.

## 2.5 Neighbourhood area

2.5.1 The Neighbourhood Area to which the Plan relates covers the Parish of Stonesfield and was designated by WODC as such on 17 November 2021. It covers all land within the Parish Boundary, outlined in blue on Fig1 below. Under the Neighbourhood Planning (Amendment) Regulations 2016, the proposal qualified for designation without consultation or decision from WODC.

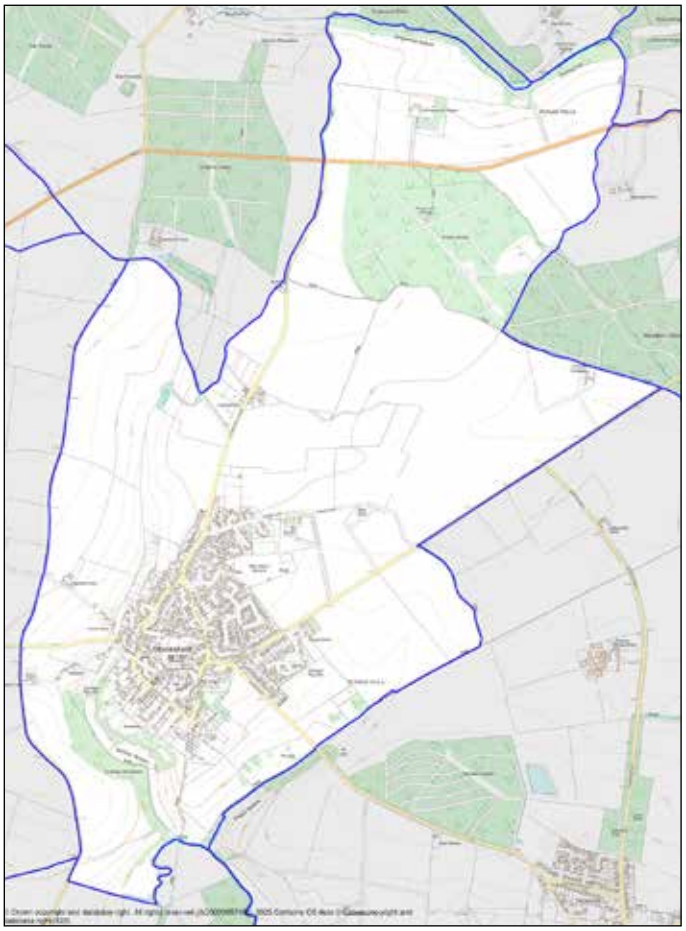


*Fig 1: The Neighbourhood Area designated for the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan 2043. The dark blue line is the parish boundary.*

## 2.6 Plan period, monitoring and review

2.6.1 The Plan will apply from the date of its adoption until 31 March 2043, running concurrently with the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043.

2.6.2 It is recognised that this Plan can only take into account the provisions of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043 in as far as they have been developed up to the time of submission of this Plan. In addition, the concerns and priorities of local residents may change over the period from adoption of the Plan to 31 March 2043.

2.6.3 It may therefore be necessary to revisit and revise the Plan from time to time. Stonesfield Parish Council, as the Neighbourhood Plan Authority, will be responsible for maintaining and periodically revisiting the Plan to ensure relevance and to monitor its delivery. The adoption of the Local Plan 2043 will alter the strategic planning context in the District. The Parish Council will consider the need for a full or partial review of the Neighbourhood Plan within six months of the adoption of the Local Plan 2043.

**Endnotes**

1 The National Planning Policy Framework includes central government planning policies with which local planning policies, e.g. those in the WODC, must conform.

2 WODC Housing Land Supply Position Statement 2023-2028, October 2023

3 WODC Local Plan 2013, Paras 9.6.28 and 9.6.29

4 NPPF December 2023, 82

5 NPPF December 2023, 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

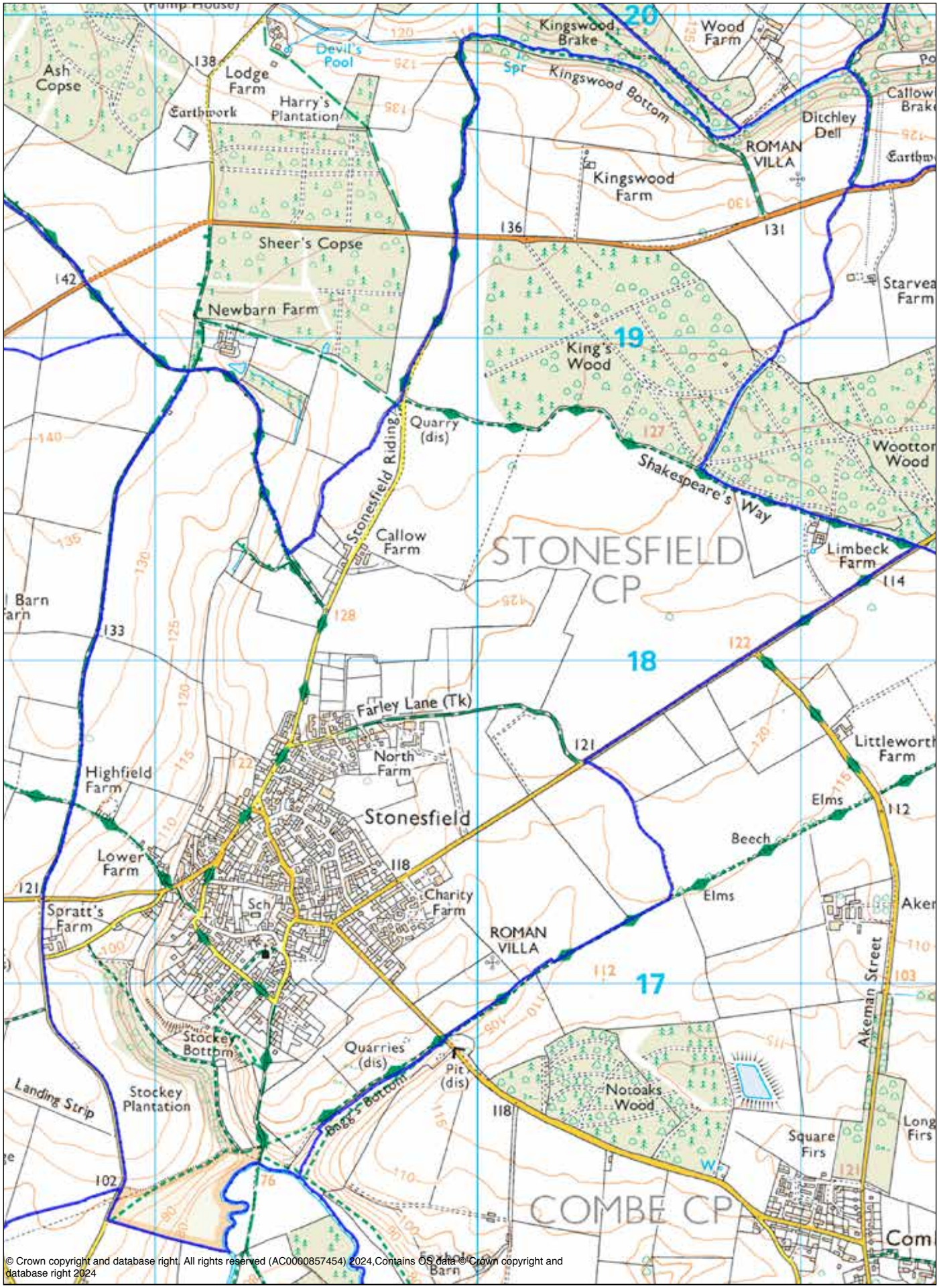
6 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

7 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was first published on 27 March 2012 and updated on 24 July 2018, 19 February 2019, 20 July 2021, 5 September 2023 and 19 December 2023. The NPPF sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

8 The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 was formally adopted on 27 September 2018 and sets out the overall planning framework for the district from 2011 to 2031.

9 Draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043: Source to be added here as late as possible before submission of this Plan

10 Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/planning/cotswolds-aonb-management-plan/




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# SECTION 3: **The village of Stonesfield**

## 3.1 Stonesfield today

3.1.1 Stonesfield is a traditional Cotswold stone-built village in West Oxfordshire; approximately 13 miles north-west from Oxford and the same distance south-east from Chipping Norton. Despite its nearness to those large centres, Stonesfield is served only by minor roads. It sits in the north-east part of the Cotswolds National Landscape (formerly referred to as the Cotswolds AONB). Stonesfield's setting is rural, which is very important to its residents and a major consideration in this Plan.

3.1.2 Stonesfield lies on the crest of a limestone escarpment, with most of the village buildings situated on the gentle dip slope north-easterly towards Wootton. To its western and southern sides, the village is bounded by a steep drop to a shallow dry valley (in the south-west, known as Stockey Bottom). At its southern end, this valley meets the river Evenlode, a tributary of the Thames. One further (largely) dry valley (Bagg's Bottom) extends north-easterly from the river valley, following at a little distance the remaining (eastern) side of the village. Rising from the point where the river is closest to the village is the sunken path to Stonesfield Common. The Common, together with Stockey Bottom and Bagg's Bottom, is one of Stonesfield's two SSSIs (see Section 9).

## Housing

3.1.3 The 2021 census identified that Stonesfield had a population of 1700[1]; the Neighbourhood Plan 2023 Survey identified 727 households. This represents a growth from 241 houses in 1961; development between 2011 and 2021 increased the housing capacity in the area of Farley Lane and North Farm. The average of 1.85 people per household in Stonesfield is significantly lower than the average of 2.42 for the district and 2.40 for England.

3.1.4 Stonesfield's housing is dominated by detached, owner-occupied dwellings; a much higher proportion than the national average and the district.

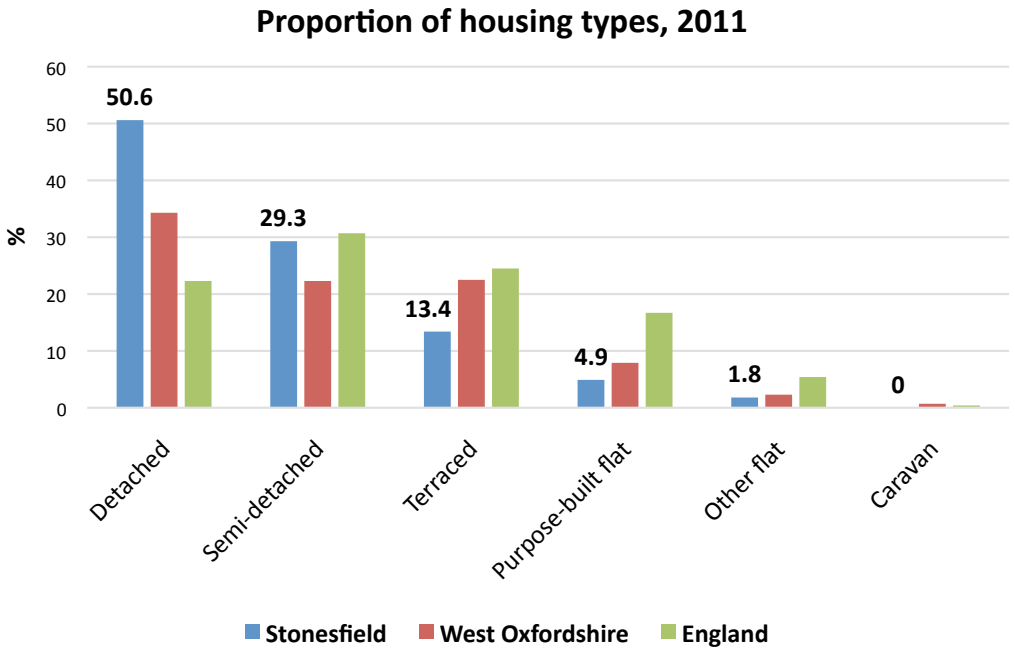
3.1.5 Between 2011 and 2023, 92 planning consents were granted for Stonesfield, of which more than half were detached houses (including two bungalows), including 15 in William Buckland Way and 10 in Farley Lane.

3.1.6 The size of Stonesfield's houses as indicated by number of rooms, in comparison with the average for England, is also significantly weighted toward larger houses.

3.1.7 In 2021, Stonesfield had a significantly higher proportion of people in owner-occupied houses than the national average, of which significantly more were

*Fig 3.1: 1:25 000 Ordnance Survey map of the parish of Stonesfield.*

*Fig 3.2: Proportion of housing types in 2011; Stonesfield, West Oxfordshire and England* [2]



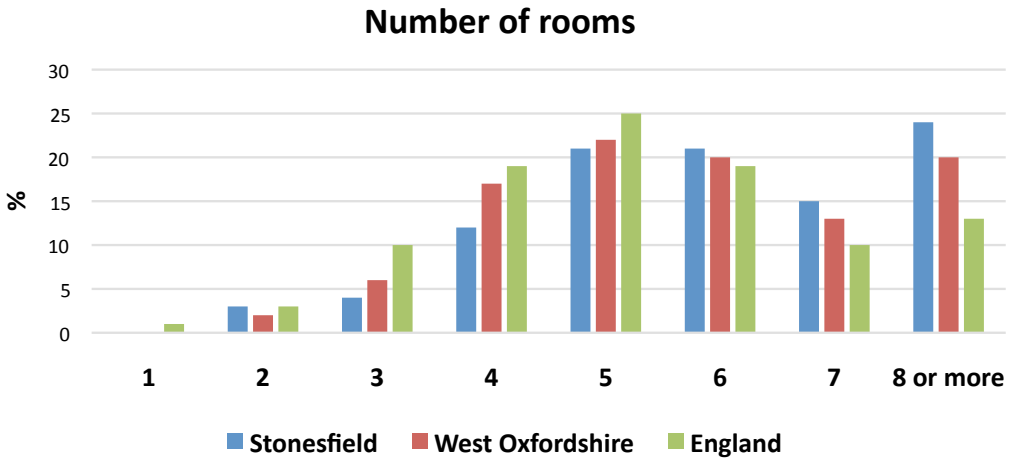



*Fig 3.3: Number of rooms as an indicator of household size; Stonesfield, West Oxfordshire and England, 2011[2]*

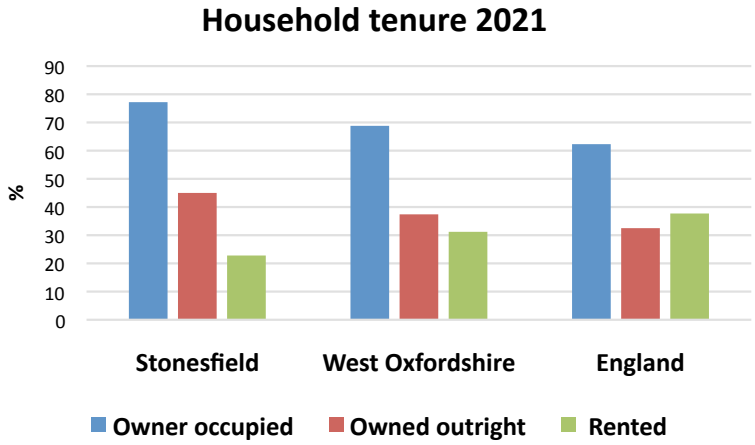



*Fig 3.4: Household tenure, 2021[2]*

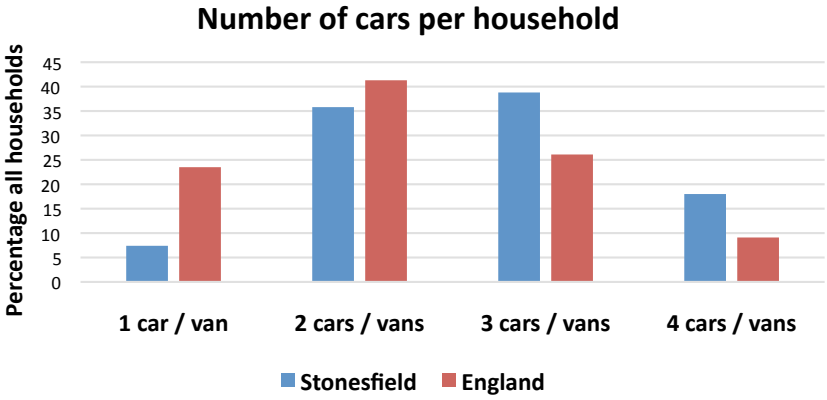



*Fig 3.5: Number of cars per household 2023[2]; Stonesfield and England*

owned outright. The proportion of people in rented homes, either social or private, was much lower than the national average.

3.1.8 Out of the 92 new properties receiving planning consent since 2011, 76 (83%) were for owner-occupied properties and 16 (17%) were for rented properties.

3.1.9 There is also a bigger affordability gap for property in Stonesfield than the national average. The average Stonesfield sale price in the year to January 2024 was c£626k, and £759k for a detached house (see Housing Needs Assessment 2024 (Appendix A) for more details).

3.1.10 A further indicator of the prosperity of the village may be car ownership per household, although caution is needed here as its rural position may also necessitate a higher number of cars to take individuals to work in different locations, given the challenges of public transport.

## Demography

3.1.11 Stonesfield's population of 1700 according to the 2021 census shows a significantly larger proportion of people aged over 50 (48.6%) compared to the average of 37.8% for England. The proportion of people between 20 and 49 in Stonesfield (30.6%) is

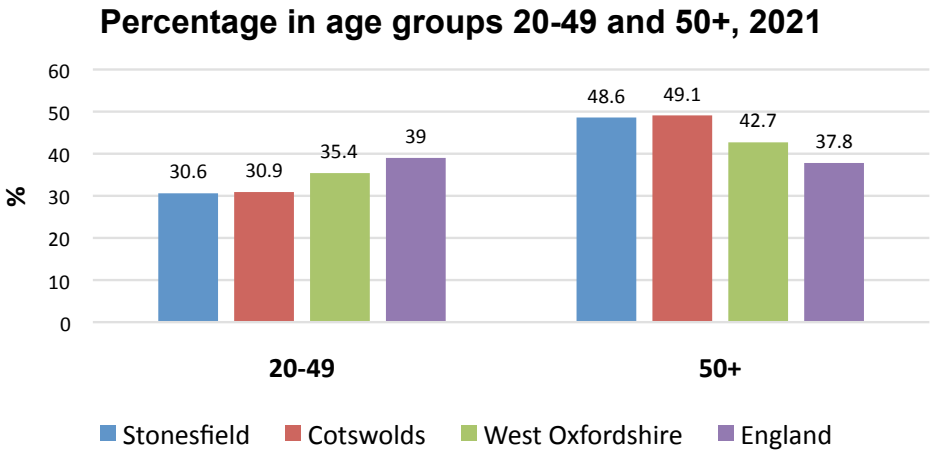



*Fig 3.6: Percentage of the population in age groups 20-49 and 50+; Stonesfield, Cotswolds Parliamentary Constituency 2021, West Oxfordshire and England 2021*[2]

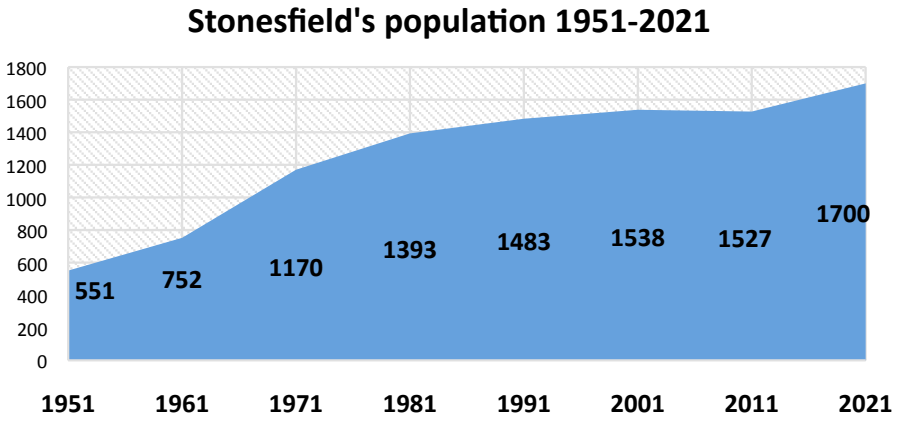



*Fig 3.7: Stonesfield's population 1951-2021 (Office for National Statistics: Censuses)*

significantly lower than for England as a whole (39%). However the differences are rather less marked when Stonesfield is compared with more similar areas than the heterogeneity of the whole of England: the Stonesfield demographic is typical for a Cotswold village.

3.1.12 The population has risen steadily since the middle of the last century, with periods of steeper rise in the 1960s and between 2011 and 2021 corresponding with the periods of building development.

3.1.13 Stonesfield's population is predominantly white (96.2%), compared to the 81% average for England[2].

## Employment

3.1.14 The 2021 census showed that 57.7% of Stonesfield's residents aged 16 and over are in employment; almost exactly the same as the proportion for England (57.4%). In Stonesfield 1.7% are unemployed (3.5% for England) and 40.6% economically inactive (39.1% for England). The Neighbourhood Plan Survey found 55% of respondents are in employment, and 40% of respondents are retired.

3.1.15 The occupations of those in employment are primarily professional (25%), as managers, directors and senior officials (17%) and associated professional and technical activities (15%), with skilled trades at 12.5%[2]. All of those occupations are represented at a higher proportion than the average for England; administrative and secretarial posts (9%) exactly match the England average, and significantly fewer Stonesfield residents are engaged in sales, plant and machinery operation and elementary occupations than the average for England[2].

3.1.16 This current emphasis on professional, associated professional and technical occupations masks to some extent the loss of several notable employers in recent years, both of which moved to locations that suited them better. These were Solid State Logic and its successors Smart Terminals and Torex, all engaged in electronics and computer services; and also Witney Welding, a steel fabricator. The nature of new housing built and its cost may have had a bearing on the sustainability of that employment.

3.1.17 More recently, and in part potentially due to the enforced lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic, work patterns have changed. The greatest proportion of residents of Stonesfield work from home (30% of respondents to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey); and 26% work elsewhere in Oxfordshire including Oxford. Thirteen per cent work in Woodstock or Witney, and 10% outside Oxfordshire.

## Community life

3.1.18 Stonesfield is often described as a very friendly village – 89% of respondents to the Survey said that Stonesfield is a great place to live, with a strong community and lots of activities. It is common for people to comment that it is impossible to walk about the village quickly because they are frequently stopped by others for a chat. But the sense of community in the village runs far deeper than that. Its many organisations and groups, run almost without exception by volunteers, securely underpin the wellbeing of residents and the future of their village and environment, in many diverse ways.

3.1.19 It is not always obvious that those who hold office on Stonesfield Parish Council are volunteers and give their time and skills freely, as do the members of its sub-groups, of which the group compiling this Neighbourhood Plan is one. Other Parish Council subgroups, all volunteers, are the Stonesfield Action for Enhancing Road Safety (SAFER, conducting speed watch and installing speed indicators on approach roads) and the group working to maintain the good grassland status and biodiversity of Stonesfield Common.

3.1.20 Many other volunteer residents support the professional staff with the working of the primary school: the governors, those who support the staff running the Forest School, those who assist with reading practice, and the Friends of Stonesfield School (FoSS) who run the summer fete, fundraise and share information. The Pre-School is run by professional staff but the baby and toddler group is informal, run by mums.

3.1.21 The Village Hall is the hub of many social, supportive and sporting activities and is run by one paid staff member and a committee of volunteers. The Stonesfield Food Group runs socials every Tuesday in term time, consisting of an afternoon café for senior residents (recently moved to the pub), and a cooked supper for all, using supplies from the Oxford Food Hub and supplied free of charge or with a minimal cost. Between 60 and 80 people attend regularly and it is a much-valued source not only of a meal, but also a friendly meeting place and supportive information. Working together with Stonesfield Mutual Aid, spare food is donated to any who need it, and the two groups work closely with the Primary School and the Pre-School to ensure its distribution.

3.1.22 The Food Group volunteers also run a quarterly Community Café with pay-what-you-feel coffee and lunch, and this event is regularly in tandem with the Repair Café, where skilled volunteers repair all manner of household goods and appliances free of charge. A separate Carers' Group offers respite support for those in need of a break.

3.1.23 The White Horse is Stonesfield's community-owned pub and this is one part of the village that has particularly galvanised community action. After the pub (the last in Stonesfield) had been vacant for more than two years, the Stonesfield Community Pub Group successfully bought it in September 2023. The funding had been raised by the Group's campaign and purchase of shares, not only by residents but also by supporters across the world. A programme of extensive renovation was begun, with additional funding raised by a pop-up pub / café and driven by about 150 volunteers cooking, serving, cleaning, mending, decorating and gardening over a four-month period. Having recruited tenants, the pub opened fully from June 2024 with a staff team drawn from Stonesfield and beyond.

3.1.24 The churches offer community activities as well as spiritual support. St James the Great provides Monday coffee, village suppers, occasional concerts, exhibitions for special occasions, and other social events. The Methodist Church organises tea afternoons and shoebox collections for children in East European countries, and the Roman Catholic Community in Stonesfield provides social activities including talks and lunches, and charitable fundraising activities for Aid to the Church in Need. The St James' Centre, administered by St James' church, is a well-used venue for meetings of many kinds.

3.1.25 Older residents are welcomed as members at Stonesfield Lunch Club, held at St James' Centre, where they are entertained and given a cooked lunch every Wednesday, a party at Christmas and excursions in the



*People visiting the sewing table at the Repair Café in the Village Hall*




*Supporters of the Back the White Horse campaign in September 2023 celebrating the news that the community had managed to buy the White Horse pub. (Photo: Chris Bartle)*

summer. Volunteers provide car transport from home and back again for those less able to walk. A different team of 15-18 volunteer drivers (Stonesfield Voluntary Transport Scheme) provides transport for residents to medical appointments in local villages and towns as Stonesfield has no GP surgery, dentist, optician or any other medical facility. They also provide door-to-door service to the hospitals in Oxford and Banbury, which is particularly appreciated by those without their own transport, in view of the difficulties of negotiating buses and especially so when elderly or unwell. The drivers receive only expenses.

3.1.26 Sports and social facilities in Stonesfield are centred around the Sports and Social Club. The Playing Fields Association of volunteers administers the facilities for cricket, football and tennis, and multiple teams and events are organised by the volunteers who run the various sports clubs. The playing fields contain a recently-updated children's playground and outdoor gym. Pickleball, Pilates, Tae Kwondo, high intensity interval training and Zumba are all available in the Village Hall, as is folk dancing.

3.1.27 Facilities for young people in the village are at present limited to the sports clubs, the Scouts and from time to time the Stonesfield Players (see below). In the last two years craft activities for young people have been part of the social meals, and it is hoped that an evening event with them in mind may be hosted at the White Horse. Apart from these activities, young people need to travel to larger centres for entertainment, which involves transport commitments.

3.1.28 Stonesfield is well catered for by its creative residents. The Stonesfield Players put on dramatic productions several times each year, managing all the aspects demanded. Many local artists and craftspeople take part in the annual Oxfordshire Art Weeks, opening their studios to visitors, and contribute to six-week-long exhibitions in the White Horse. Music events take place from time to time in various venues, including folk evenings in the pub, which restarted in September 2024. And every alternate September is Septembeerfest – the annual open-air fundraiser for national and local causes. Not less creative or entertaining is the Gardening Club, whose members tend the many varied garden corners and also, for everyone's benefit, the war memorial and various planters around the village. The two areas of allotments are in demand and well worked. In autumn 2024 the village established a new and very enthusiastic local history society, building on a series of events to commemorate the bicentenary of the scientific naming of Megalosaurus, the world's first named dinosaur, found in Stonesfield's mines.

3.1.29 The village is proud to have, still, a functioning library with computing facilities. A team of volunteers support the staff library manager and the library is




*Fig 3.8. Responses to Survey question: Which three things do you most like about living in Stonesfield?*

open on four days each week. The Stonesfield Slate is the village's monthly news, creative and informative magazine; this too is produced, published and edited by volunteers and distributed by more to every house in the village. The publishers of the Stonesfield Slate also maintain the village information website, stonesfield.online.

3.1.30 Sustainable Stonesfield (SUSTO, not a Parish Council subgroup) has worked for years to ensure that Stonesfield develops in a way that meets the needs of the people who live there, and of future generations, without spoiling the beauty and rural character of the village.

3.1.31 Stonesfield has a large number of residents who are concerned about the current challenges to the climate and the environment, and who have taken steps to address them at a local level. The Climate Emergency Group rapidly realised that its members could only look at some of the issues, and it gave rise to three separate action groups: the Food Group described above, the Environment Group and the Tree Planters. The issues facing the last two groups are examined further in sections 3.3 (climate emergency), 9.5 (biodiversity and trees) and 9.7 (flood risk and water quality management).




*Children celebrating outside the library at the Village Hall, having completed the Summer Reading Challenge organised by OCC Library Service.*

## 3.2 Stonesfield in the future

3.2.1 Village residents' hopes for the future were gathered by the Neighbourhood Plan Survey, conducted in March 2023, which is reported in detail in Appendix E. It followed extensive preparations and a preliminary questionnaire in February 2022. In that, when asked what people liked about Stonesfield, overwhelming support was given to its sense of community, its countryside and footpaths; and these factors, and the pub, shop and Post Office, ranked highly among aspects to be protected. People did not like the high cost of new housing and the (then) lack of a functioning village pub; and also reported problems with roads, potholes and parking. They wanted to protect all remaining green spaces, footpaths, the river and access to the countryside. Chief among changes needed were to reopen the pub, and only to build new housing to meet local need.

3.2.2 The main Survey asked questions to be answered by individuals and on behalf of households. The detailed responses have been taken into account in the development of the individual policies within this Plan.

3.2.3 For individuals the questions covered what they liked most, what most needed improvement, their reasons for moving to or living in Stonesfield, their views on village amenities, their work and travel needs, their views on various aspects of the environment, and general future hopes for the village, its development and protection.

3.2.4 For households, the Survey gathered information on the types of houses and house ownership, uptake of green energy, use of school / preschool / further education and their views on possibilities for moving house within the village.

3.2.5 According to the Survey responses, Stonesfield residents highly value living in a rural village with its friendly community and easy access to the countryside. They place high importance on protecting heritage buildings, footpaths and views, countryside and green spaces, and are concerned about sewage infrastructure, river pollution and road safety. More than 75% want to protect all identified green spaces, with a much higher proportion particularly concerned to protect the village playing field, Churchfields allotments and The Dene.

3.2.6 On housing development, much detailed evidence had been gained on residents' views on various possibilities, including affordable or low-cost houses, infill housing, garden developments and conversions. Section 5, Housing, examines these issues in detail.

3.2.7 The most highly-rated amenities of the village are the shop, Post Office, pub and the village hall. The highest proportion of residents buy their weekly shopping in Witney, followed by online services, but the shop is most used for top-up purchases.

3.2.8 In terms of general development of the village, 94% of residents strongly (80%) or slightly (14%) support the retention of local services and community facilities, and 73% support initiatives to help people working locally. There is also strong support for the re-use of former non-residential buildings, but only for a community need or specific employment purpose, i.e. opposing planning permission for change of use to residential. Seventy per cent of residents are in favour of tourism and leisure development that meets the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 and Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

3.2.9 The Survey also gave residents the opportunity to make any further comments about their hopes and concerns, which are given in full in Appendix E.

### Some of Stonesfield residents' concerns…

- Manage housing development in a balanced but realistic way. Focus upon building homes for people who most need it and at a price that is really affordable!
- Control creeping development, as seen in Farley Lane. [We need] Some means of ensuring adequate infrastructure is in place before any further development in the village.
- The pub, for me, is essential for community cohesion.
- Clean up the river, stop the discharge of sewage into it by Thames Water.
- Improve bus reliability and reduce cancelled buses. A bus service to Witney so that our young people can get to the town for leisure, education, etc.
- Community owned renewable energy schemes such as wind, solar and geothermal.
- I would like to see the village attain a dark sky status in accordance with the International Dark Sky Association.
- I strongly support the use of dedicated cycle paths.

## 3.3 Climate emergency

3.3.1 In June 2019, WODC declared a climate and ecological emergency and made a pledge to become a carbon-neutral council by 2030. This followed the County Council's declaration of April the same year.

3.3.2 WODC subsequently developed a framework Carbon Action Plan and a Climate Change strategy for West Oxfordshire. A main theme, embodied by the Nature Recovery Plan, was the protection and restoration of natural ecosystems. The strategy defined objectives for energy and reduction in carbon emissions, mitigating flood risk and managing water quality and conservation, managing waste, protecting and enhancing the landscape and biodiversity, air quality, and sustainable transport.

3.3.3 The Cotswolds National Landscape Climate Change Strategy, adopted in February 2022, addresses current understanding of the climate change impacts on the Cotswolds and what can be done to mitigate them. The strategy stresses that farming practices need to reduce soil loss, capture carbon and help with improving water quality and flood management. Tree cover needs to increase to capture carbon and support nature recovery, and much more of energy needs will have to be met through low carbon energy technologies. Buildings need to become energy efficient and infrastructure needs to be more resilient.

3.3.4 In the absence of specific defined objectives for the parish of Stonesfield, the Neighbourhood Plan has identified some areas where the residents have already taken action or have indicated their concerns by responses to the Survey.

3.3.5 The Survey revealed that as at March 2023, a little over 8% of the cars owned in the village were electric or hybrid vehicles, and this is likely to have risen since then; there is no indication of the extent of installation of home charging points. As at August 2024 there are no commercial charging points in the village but they are available in the local commercial centres of Woodstock, Witney, Eynsham, and Chipping Norton.

3.3.6 The Survey showed low interest in adding sustainable energy sources to homes – 85% of respondents said that their homes do not use solar energy, ground source or air source heat pumps, and 65-85% are not considering doing so. The reasons for this were not given but may include cost, unwillingness to change, uncertainty of potential benefit, the inappropriateness of solar panels and external heat pumps for very old, small and conservation-area properties. However some residents expressed a hope that alternative energy supplies, e.g. wind turbine, solar energy, should be explored on a community-owned basis.

3.3.7 Waste in the village is collected at the kerbside by contractors to West Oxfordshire District Council and therefore regulated by WODC requirements. Compared to many other regions, there is a high degree of segregation of waste types, and separate collection vehicles for household waste, recycling (glass, most types of card, paper and plastic containers), garden waste and food waste. Larger or more challenging items may be taken to a waste recycling centre, of which the nearest are at Dix Pit (Stanton Harcourt, 12 miles) and Ardley (14 miles). Some residents have expressed concern about litter, and from time to time litter-picking equipment provided by the Parish Council is used on an organised or ad hoc basis.

3.3.8 Stonesfield has had a Climate Emergency Group since 2022, initially inviting expert speakers and setting out to take action where possible to address the issues of concern. The group rapidly evolved into the separate Environment Group, the Tree Planters, the Food Group, and the Repair Café to encourage people to mend appliances rather than throw them away. The activities of the Stonesfield Food Group (see Community life, above) contribute to reduction in food waste by using supplies from the Oxford Food Hub which would otherwise go to landfill. The Climate Emergency Group is now primarily an information hub.

3.3.9 River pollution is very much an area of local concern, given the nearness of the River Evenlode, and the loss of amenity and biodiversity suffered by residents due to the high level of sewage discharged into the water by Thames Water. The Stonesfield Environment Group, one of the main branches of the Climate Emergency Group, has focused on the river pollution and participates in Citizen Science water sampling for nitrates and phosphates, coordinated by Earthwatch. The Stonesfield group coordinates its work with those of neighbouring villages, and is the only group testing for E. coli. In 2024 it started riverfly testing to establish a baseline for the population of this critical freshwater indicator species.

3.3.10 The question of pollution and adequate provision for waste water disposal is also reflected in the concern expressed by many residents that sewerage infrastructure must be improved before any new building is attempted. Current provision is overstretched and further development would exacerbate an already untenable situation. This concern is consistent with planning permissions imposing conditions to require adequate provision for sewage disposal infrastructure, before building is begun, related to development of a significant size. In addition, water pressure is unacceptably low in some parts of the village, so both supply of fresh water and disposal of waste water are in need of infrastructure improvement.



*Volunteers conducting a survey of flowers and grasses on the SSSI Stonesfield Common.*

3.3.11 Significant concerns relate to the whole system including connections from houses into the sewerage system, the extent and quality of the sewerage network itself, and the sewage disposal plants into which the sewerage network connects.

3.3.12 Floods and their increasing intensity and frequency due to climate change are a concern to residents of this village as it borders one of the tributaries of the Thames. More than 30 flood alleviation schemes operate in the Thames Valley, including several embankment and floodplain improvements upstream from Stonesfield on the Evenlode, in Milton under Wychwood, Ascott under Wychwood, Shipton under Wychwood and Bledington. The River Evenlode is prone to flooding at any time of the year, but floods are most common in the winter months, after heavy rainfall when the ground is saturated. Close to Stonesfield, the river has a very wide floodplain which frequently becomes completely flooded. The village itself is at some height above, on the edge of the limestone escarpment, and therefore not directly threatened, except by road flooding during and after heavy rainfall – a not uncommon problem due to limited drain maintenance in recent years (see Section 9.7).

3.3.13 Maintaining wildlife diversity is an important aspect of the overall objective of conserving the natural environment, explored fully in Section 9. The local landscape is a mix of arable land, grassland, and oak, beech, ash and elm woodland, with a diverse range of flora, including hay meadows and riverbank meadows. Of high local importance is the SSSI at Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks, comprising typical limestone grassland with a wide range of wild flowers including some protected rarities. Stonesfield Common is regularly tended by a small volunteer subgroup of the Parish Council, concerned with maintenance of the historically important, unimproved grassland and protecting it from unwanted invasion by tor grass (Brachypodium pinnatum) and blackthorn (Prunus spinosa) which have threatened in recent years to overwhelm the softer species. The area is home to a wide range of birds, insects including many butterflies, small mammals and the occasional grass snake. Equally important to local residents is the much-used woodland of Stockey Bottom, which led them to seek and achieve Village Green status when access was threatened in 2021.

3.3.14 Extensive tree planting has been undertaken between 2022-24 by a sub group of the Climate Emergency Group, with the aim to plant a tree for every resident of the village – some 1700 in the first two years. As a result a new avenue has been planted to supplement hedging along the Stonesfield Straight (the main access road from the A44) and many more along field edges and the banks of the Evenlode floodplain.

## 3.4 Key challenges

3.4.1 The Village Survey identified the key concerns for Stonesfield which have enabled development of the 30 policies in this Plan. These have been cross-checked with the statements and policies of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, the draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 and the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025.

3.4.2 In addition, Paragraph 7 of the NPPF Feb 2019 summarises the high-level objective of achieving sustainable development as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Neighbourhood Plans must positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change.

3.4.3 The individual comments at the end of the Village Survey gave residents the opportunity to raise any particular concerns or hopes for the future. They have been sorted into subjects, and the issues raised are listed in descending order of the number who raised opinions, indicating the strength of feeling in those areas.

**Endnotes**

1 Office for National Statistics: Census 2021 https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/#E04008328

2 Office for National Statistics: Census 2011 as quoted in OCSI Parish Profile report

## Key issues identified by Stonesfield residents:

(the number of comments in each area is indicative of the strength of interest)

**Housing**:

- Neighbourhood Plan should explicitly exclude major development in Stonesfield, in accordance with NPPF, WODC Local Plan and Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan.
- Housing needs to be truly affordable for young people who will stay in the village with young families; also social housing: no more £1million houses.
- The difficulty of upgrading infrastructure must mean that development must be very limited, and genuinely affordable housing must be the priority.
- Village is losing the continuity of families who have lived in Stonesfield for generations, because of the high cost of housing.
- Housing should consider multi-generational families i.e. annexes for elderly parents, or retirement bungalows or apartments.
- There are too many executive houses, built at the expense of fields and wildlife.
- There is a suggestion of rural exception sites for housing local people only.
- There should be no further housing development on the outskirts of the village or creeping development.
- Housing should require better design in keeping with the village.

**Road safety and parking:**

- Safety is top priority: calls for pavement on at least one side of the main road through Stonesfield, i.e. Laughton Hill, The Ridings, The Green and (especially on the narrow part of) Pond Hill.
- Reduce excessive number of road signs.
- Consider supervised crossing point for village school near the shop – current danger prevents children from walking to school independently.
- Greater effort is needed to reduce speed of motorists through village; despite the 20mph speed limit, 10-15 mph is more appropriate for many narrow village roads, especially High Street and Boot Street.
- Introduce measures to reduce on-road parking, parking on pavements and at junctions.
- Consider a one-way traffic system in the village.

**Pollution and sewage infrastructure:**

- The greatest concern is the pollution of the River Evenlode by sewage discharges by Thames Water, causing sickness and loss of amenity use; all possible steps are needed to reduce this.
- Concern that sewage infrastructure is improved before any new building is attempted; current provision is overstretched.
- Improvements and updating of the sewage-disposal system [are needed].
- [Thames Water needs to address] infrastructure shortfalls and actually deliver the infrastructure upgrades needed to (a) ensure all leaks, spills, and overflows are wholly eliminated, and (b) ensure the infrastructure is in place for future decades of efficient, effective, non-toxic service provision.
- Air pollution and noise pollution from cars is of concern, as is air pollution from coal and wood-burning stoves.
- Litter – more bins would be welcome.

**Transport**:

- Better public transport would help reduce the number of car journeys.
- Less than adequate public transport necessitates continued car use.
- Bus services are essential for elderly and young people.
- The S3 bus to Woodstock and Oxford is highly valued but concerns are raised about poor reliability, cancellations and too infrequent service; better service is needed to the eastern side of village (Longore) which has more elderly residents, and more needed on Sundays.
- Concern at potential cuts to S3 service
- If S3 service were lost, a small though inadequate mitigation could be a bus link to Long Hanborough rail station.
- Concern at current difficulty in taking buses to hospitals, which currently needs three buses each way (Stonesfield – Woodstock – Oxford Parkway – hospitals).
- Concern at inadequacy of bus service to Witney (four days a week, one each way).

**Heritage**:

- Need to use Cotswold National Landscape status to protect the village from inappropriate housing developments, to protect the green spaces and countryside, national food security and wildlife.
- Attention to aspects of rural character needed e.g. broken dry stone walls, gates and stiles.
- Attention is needed to character of any new buildings to avoid loss of village nature.
- Consider a shelter belt of trees from North Farm access on Straight to Farley Lane to the Ridings.
- Foster a 'heart' to the village.

**Pub**:

- Widespread support for community ownership and maintenance of the pub as a community centre with various services.

**Energy**:

- Village should consider community-owned, renewable energy schemes including wind, solar and geothermal.
- Consider a village wind turbine as an energy source which would not adversely affect the natural environment, as outlined in the Cotswolds National Landscape strategy.
- Consider electric vehicle charging facilities at the village hall.
- All new builds should come with a renewable energy guarantee.

**Employment**:

- Encourage light industry and small businesses, enabling people to live and work in the village.
- Support needs of those working from home.
- Encourage development of small workshops.
- Protect business spaces from conversion to residential.

**Young people:**

- Concern at little provision in Stonesfield for young people.
- Consider a skate park next to the tennis court to encourage outdoor fun and exercise, or other leisure space.
- Calls for strengthened bus services to Witney at the weekends.

**Recreation:**

- Consider redeveloping the whole site including the village hall, sports & social club.
- Many are concerned at the poor fabric and appearance of village hall.
- Difficulties with booking reported and a reduced rate for local people requested.

**Footpaths / cycle paths:**

- Strong support for footpaths and cycle paths from those who use them.
- Consider recognising the footpath from Farley Lane to Akeman Street.
- Consider kissing gates to replace both stiles on path across the sledging field.

**Streetlights and dark skies**

- Opinion is divided but a strong majority remains against streetlights. In the village Survey, out of the top three reasons residents like living in Stonesfield, 144 said the quiet and 66 said dark skies/lack of street lights/no light pollution, which represents a significant response. Thirty-five people thought the village could be improved with street lights while four thought there was too much light pollution (even without streetlights).

**Shop**:

- Additional coffee facilities would be a welcome social amenity.

**Health**:

- Attention is needed to increasing need for healthcare due to ageing population with reduced mobility and greater obesity.
- More important to strengthen public transport to medical facilities in other villages than to attempt an occasional consulting facility in Stonesfield.

**Wildlife / green spaces:**

- Preserve green spaces and gardens, and ensure only locally appropriate building.
- Continue tree planting initiative.
- Consider provision of greater allotment space.









*The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has presented the Plan at the annual village fete held on the primary school playing field and at presentations in the Village Hall.*

# SECTION 4: **Developing the Neighbourhood Plan**

## 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 As mentioned in Section 2.4, Stonesfield Parish Council resolved at its meeting on 1 September 2021 to proceed with the production of a Neighbourhood Plan.

4.1.2 On 12 January 2022, Stonesfield Parish Council resolved, in pursuance of its powers under section 122, Local Government Act 1972, to appoint the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group as a formal advisory Working Group of the Parish Council. The Steering Group's purpose was to develop the Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Stonesfield in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017. The group would be composed of members of Sustainable Stonesfield (SUSTO), an existing residents' group, plus a number of other residents invited for their particular expertise, plus two Parish Councillors. The Steering Group would report monthly to the Parish Council.

4.1.3 SUSTO is a group of local residents concerned about unsustainable development, and originating several years before the Neighbourhood Planning Act. Its members have a variety of expertise including legal, development planning, housing, the environment, project planning and communication; they are all concerned with protecting the interests of Stonesfield. SUSTO's objective is to ensure that Stonesfield develops in a way that meets the needs of the people who live there, and of future generations, without spoiling the beauty and rural character of the village. It recognises the responsibility of living within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and works to protect the countryside for this generation and those to come. By 2022 SUSTO already had a significant record in monitoring and successfully campaigning against proposed major housing development. SUSTO had also successfully achieved the designation of local woodland (Stockey Woods) as a Village Green.

4.1.4 The Parish Council faced a major challenge in 2017 with a development proposal, from Cala Homes, for Woodstock Road. SUSTO and the Parish Council successfully argued that the allocation of the Cala site in the 2031 Local Plan should be removed. Then the Parish Council, in conjunction with SUSTO, supported WODC in 2019 in opposing an appeal by Cala against rejection of planning approval. The Parish Council decided on 7 December 2021 to accept SUSTO's proposal to develop a Neighbourhood Plan, in order to strengthen the Council's policies to be better prepared in the face of future applications. The Steering Group would use the knowledge and expertise gained through the appeal, together with other skills available from volunteers in the village, to support the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

4.1.5 A grant of a little over £5,500 was obtained by Stonesfield Parish Council from Locality UK[1] to support the cost of developing the Plan and that of a professional Landscape Assessment. Stonesfield Parish Council funded the professional Village Character Assessment.

4.1.6 In 2010-11, considerable efforts had already been made to develop a Community Plan for Stonesfield, but this initiative had not been taken further. While it could offer some background and guidance, by 2022 its data was 11 years out of date and so the research and interpretation for the Neighbourhood Plan had to begin from first principles.

4.1.7 Anticipating the likelihood of the Parish Council's decision to develop the Plan, SUSTO had held preparatory meetings during the autumn of 2021 with representatives of the groups which had prepared the Neighbourhood Plans for Charlbury and for Hailey, in order to learn from their experiences.

## 4.2 Community engagement: First steps

4.2.1 The Plan set out from the beginning to capture how people living in the village would like to shape Stonesfield for the future, so that important future decisions on planning and services would reflect that. In order to do so, it was essential to involve Stonesfield residents as far as possible and in whatever way possible.

4.2.2 Community engagement was sought rigorously throughout the whole process of development of the Plan. It involved regular updates in The Stonesfield Slate (usually every month) and on the village website (stonesfield.online). Opportunities for two-way interaction and discussion with residents were at the school fete, in community cafés and outside the village shop, in three (approximately annual) public

meetings between 2022-24, workshop meetings with groups of volunteers, and individual meetings between volunteers contributing on specific aspects.

4.2.3 On Facebook, the posts were posted regularly on the Stonesfield Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/Stonesfield), which has 979 followers. The posts were then shared into other relevant Stonesfield Facebook groups, including the Sports and Social Club and Village Hall groups, Memories of Stonesfield, the Pub groups (Save our Pub and Back the White Horse), and the groups concerned with children (Friends of Stonesfield School, the Pre-School, Baby and Toddler Group and the Scouts).

4.2.4 Information posts were also shared at the same time with the NextDoor Stonesfield community only: (https://nextdoor.co.uk/neighborhood/stonesfield--stonesfield--england/?is=neighbor_profile). This community has just under 1,000 Stonesfield 'neighbours' who have indicated they live in Stonesfield.

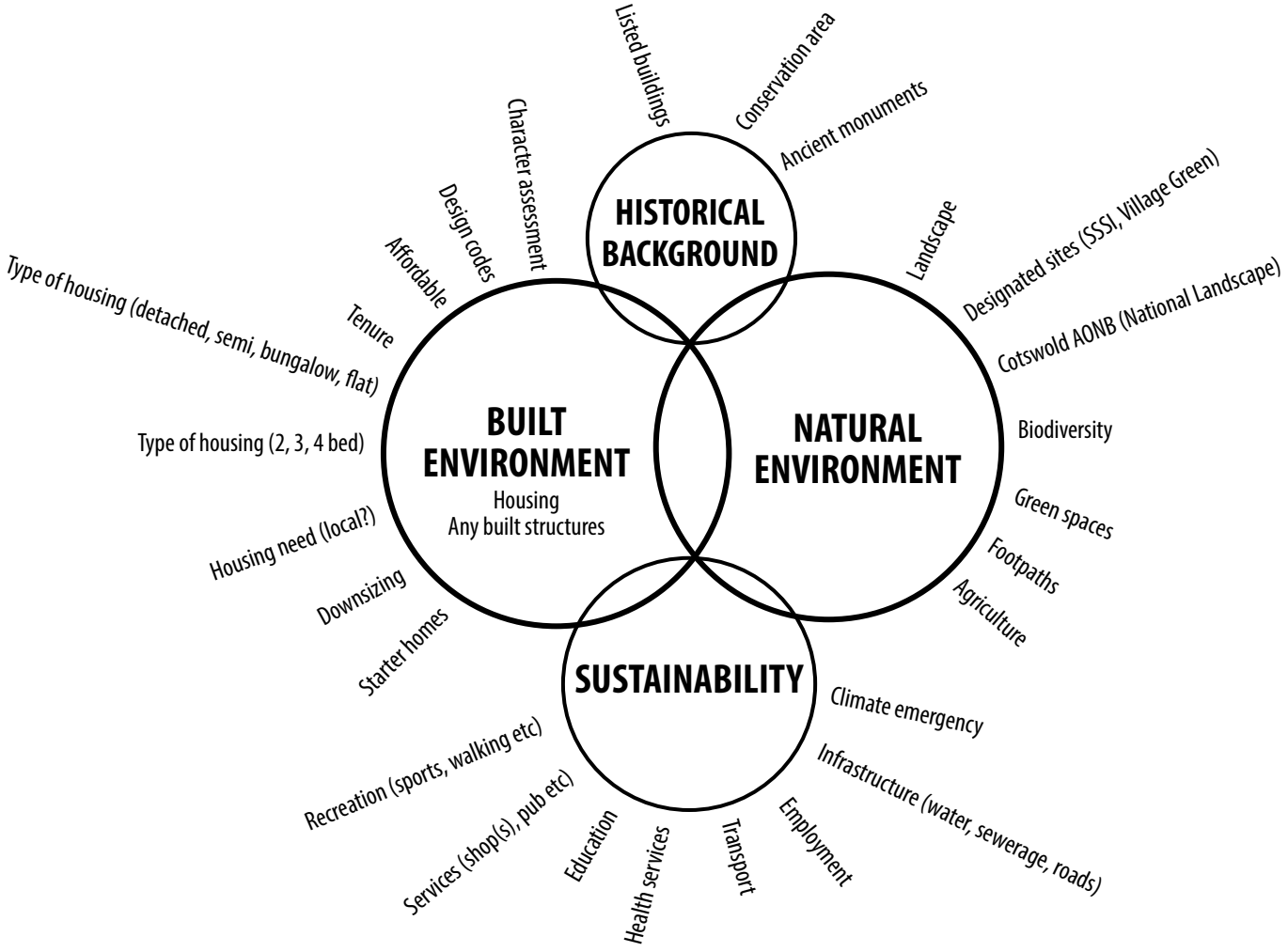
## First public meeting – March 2022

4.2.5 The first step was to gather information. The Stonesfield Slate for February 2022 invited all residents to an open meeting on 28 March 2022 to hear about the scope of the Plan, how the Steering Group would gather evidence and develop the Plan, and to invite everyone to be involved. The same issue asked residents to help the group gain an initial impression of their views by asking what they liked about Stonesfield, what or where they would want to protect and preserve; what they did not like and what changes they would like to see. The outcome would help to define the areas to be addressed in the Plan.

4.2.6 The open meeting, attended by 77 residents, reported that this preliminary survey was completed by 160 people (a 12% response rate) and it gave some important pointers for the conduct of the major survey of all residents and households planned for summer 2022. One of these was that a significant minority (just under 12%) preferred to complete the survey on paper rather than online, so both routes would be used for the main survey.

4.2.7 Volunteers were invited to contribute to the research in the areas of Stonesfield's historical background, its buildings, natural environment and the many aspects of sustainability.

*Fig 4.1: Starting point: Areas to be addressed by the main survey*






*The Village Survey (left) and one of the promotional posters put up in the village to encourage people to complete it.*

## 4.3 Village survey

4.3.1 A follow-up meeting held in May 2022 invited the 34 volunteers who had come forward to help draft questions for the main, full-scale survey of residents' views. They were focused in three main areas: housing, the green environment, and all aspects of infrastructure (services, transport, education, recreation, health, and employment). Individual groups of up to four volunteers then met separately through the summer on one or more of these aspects, chosen according to their inclination and expertise, and each group defined draft questions for the main survey. A fourth group would work on a Character Assessment of the village for the Plan, to describe the distinct appearance and feel of the built village, its history and geography.

4.3.2 It was made clear to all groups that the survey was not able to offer a wish list and that the Plan could only cover in its policies the aspects of Stonesfield that were relevant to planning and related issues, ensuring conformity with the NPPF, WODC Local Plan and the CNL plan. However, the survey would also invite residents' views on which aspects of the village are particularly valued, need protection or enhancement, and could be developed as the Plan's aspirations for Stonesfield into the future.

4.3.3 Creating the village survey proved challenging – the draft questions proposed by the many volunteer working groups were wide-ranging and the Steering Group worked through the autumn of 2022 to weed out those beyond the scope of the plan and to add what was missing. Extensive research was conducted on the questionnaire used in the development of Neighbourhood Plans for other towns and villages. It was also essential to formulate the survey questions so that the responses could be readily logged and analysed. The survey was in two parts: some questions were to be answered by every individual aged 16 or over in the household, and others by one individual on behalf of the whole household. A number of places were assigned in both for residents to add their comments and feedback.

4.3.4 A professional survey writer volunteered to complete the preparation of the survey.

4.3.5 The validity and readability of the survey was tested in December 2022 on a sample audience. Following scrutiny of the responses and some minor amendments, the final survey was delivered in February 2023 as a paper document to all households. It was also made available online, facilitated by SurveyMonkey, and residents were encouraged to respond online if possible, to aid compilation of the responses. The survey was open between 1 March and 7 April 2023, with two sets of postcard reminders delivered to all houses in the village.

## Second public meeting – June 2023

4.3.6 Forty-four Stonesfield residents attended the second public meeting on 19 June 2023, to receive the preliminary results of the survey and an account of Steering Group progress so far. The Steering Group's task was then to compile and analyse the data, and on that basis to formulate the policies to encapsulate people's views.

4.3.7 The survey results had been announced in The Stonesfield Slate, May 2023. After minor corrections (e.g. removing ineligible postcodes) about 62% of village households – 451 households – completed the survey and 612 people responded as individuals (about 45% of the eligible population). As the typical response to surveys of this kind is about 20%, the Steering Group was very satisfied with the response. Early indications suggested a higher response from older residents, so extra efforts had been made to encourage participation from younger members of the community. Data in the Housing Needs Assessment comparing the proportion of respondents in all age groups with the proportion of the population in those age groups indicate that the final response was representative of the village demographics.

4.3.8 All paper copy survey responses were entered manually into the online database, to join the data submitted online. A full set of the survey results was made available on the village website (stonesfield.online) in June 2023 and a printed copy was placed in the library.

4.3.9 The detailed results of the survey are presented in Appendix E, and their findings have been built into the policies and aspirations throughout the Plan.

## 4.4 Compiling the Plan

4.4.1 In the months following the second public meeting (July 2023 – April 2024), the Steering Group analysed the results of the survey and used the evidence it offered, together with the other three major studies described below, to develop the policies which form the main body of this Plan. The policies were then compiled and background sections added to form the whole draft document.

4.4.2 The Steering Group had emphasised both at the second public meeting and in The Stonesfield Slate for July 2023 that the policies would represent the outcome of all the evidence in relation to planning issues – e.g. what further housing development would be appropriate, of what nature and with what materials; what infrastructure (such as sewage disposal or renewable energy) should be in place for any new development; which green spaces and footpaths should be protected. These issues are what the Local Planning Authority is obliged to take into account when considering planning applications.

4.4.3 Other issues which were important to the community but largely outside the scope of the Local Planning Authority could be recorded as aspirations. These (e.g. concerns for a cleaner river, more cycle paths, a better bus service) might have an influence on relevant authorities but could not currently be considered as policies.

4.4.4 In parallel to studies of the data, three other major studies were developed. The Steering Group commissioned a professional Landscape Assessment[2] to report on Stonesfield's position in its surroundings



*Exhibition material prepared for display at the Community and Repair Cafés.*



*Public meetings have been regularly held in the Village Hall to present the latest development of the Plan and to give residents ample opportunity to ask questions.*

– its landscape, surrounding environment, and views of Stonesfield from the surrounding countryside. Work by volunteers had continued on the Village Character Assessment[3], recording housing design, materials used, density and layout of existing buildings, streetscapes, and views out from the village to the surrounding countryside. The third was the Housing Needs Assessment[4], undertaken by Philippa Lowe and the Steering Group, incorporating data from West Oxfordshire District Council. These three assessments were then used together with the survey outcomes to develop the policies of the Plan.

## 4.5 Continuing community engagement

4.5.1 While work continued through autumn 2023 – spring 2024 on the Housing Needs Assessment, the Village Character Assessment and the policies, village residents continued to receive regular bulletins on progress. To contribute to the Village Character Assessment, residents were invited in The Stonesfield Slate, October 2022 to contribute any interesting stories about the history or character of their own houses or properties.

4.5.2 In March 2024 The Stonesfield Slate reported that the draft Housing Needs Assessment was complete, founded on the survey results as well as data from national, county and district sources.

4.5.3 In May 2024 the Steering Group reported that the Landscape Assessment was now also finished, leaving only the Village Character Assessment to be completed. Volunteers finished compiling the data, and a professional was engaged to write it up[3].

## Third public meeting – June 2024

4.5.4 A third public meeting, attended by 51 people, was held in June 2024 to update residents on the work completed and still underway, and to give residents the chance to ask questions about progress. The meeting presented examples of the draft policies based on data compiled from the 2023 survey, together with extracts from the Landscape Assessment, the Village Character Assessment and the Housing Needs Assessment.

**Endnotes**

1 Locality UK is the charity set up to support local community organisations in many ways, including with establishing Neighbourhood Plans.

2 Stonesfield Parish Landscape Character Assessment, WH Landscape Consultancy Ltd., February 2024; see Appendix B

3 Stonesfield Parish Village Character Assessment, HCUK Group 2024; see Appendix D

4 Housing Needs Assessment, Philippa Lowe draft January 2024; see Appendix A

*Rural Exception Site (RES) housing on Stonesfield Riding built in 2011-12*



# SECTION 5: **Housing**

## 5.1 Overview

5.1.1 The main conclusions of the Housing Needs Assessment 2024 (Appendix A) can be summarised as follows:

**Conclusion 1:** The housing market will provide more than sufficient housing to meet identified need, so there is no need (according to the WODC Local Plan 2031 and to the recent village Housing Needs Assessment) for any additional market housing, whether within the built-up area or on adjoining land.

**Conclusion 2:** The existing housing market provides significant turnover; and the same applies to the WODC housing register in letting existing affordable homes in the village to local people. There may be a shortfall of four to five additional social/affordable houses, which could be met by a small rural exception site.

**Conclusion 3:** The Neighbourhood Plan should seek to ensure that any housing development should consist of dwellings that meet the identified local needs for social/affordable housing, while respecting the restrictions of Stonesfield's location within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the CNL.

5.1.2 Total housing stock in Stonesfield is rightly limited by the NPPF requirement to give great weight to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in the CNL. According to the NPPF, new major development needs to pass the test of meeting 'exceptional need' and being in the 'public interest'. Exceptional need must relate to the settlement, i.e. Stonesfield. (See Cala appeal judgment, Section 4.1.4, p29, and Policy SH1, p37.) The policies in this Plan respect the NPPF, such that the landscape and scenic beauty can continue to be enjoyed by visitors, existing residents and future generations.

5.1.3 There has been significant development in Stonesfield since 2012, which has tended to be weighted towards larger houses, which maintain high prices through their desirable location in a village with significant landscape and historic attractiveness. In the same period, there has been some new social/affordable housing, mainly provided via a single s.106 development which is available to those on the WODC Housing Register, but not restricted to those with a Stonesfield connection. The limited facilities and employment opportunities in the village mean that residents rely on the car to access these, unless they are on the route of the S3 bus route via Woodstock and Oxford. For those on low incomes, it provides an additional cost burden if moving in to the village.

5.1.4 As with much of the CNL, and indeed Oxfordshire generally, the market price of houses is beyond the reach of many people without significant equity or income. The Housing Needs Assessment identified that there would be sufficient market housing to more than meet future needs, but there was likely to be a shortfall of 4-5 social/affordable houses for people with a Stonesfield connection and a need for housing in the village.

5.1.5 There has been a significant decline in employment opportunities in the village and it is unlikely this trend will be reversed, which would otherwise have been an indicator of exceptional need.

5.1.6 Looking beyond 2031, as well as looking at housing need, Stonesfield Parish Council should review the continued vitality of the village, as the population ages, and whether there is benefit to more social housing development.

5.1.7 To date, Stonesfield has seen little in the way of second-home ownership for renting or Airbnb, which is more prevalent and growing in other towns and villages in the Local Plan Sub-Area. Should the local housing market continue to perform in the future to a similar pattern to the last 10 years, there is the potential for this to change as property in neighbouring areas becomes relatively more expensive. This did not arise as a specific issue in the Survey, however the HNA identified it as a future risk given the impact on some other settlements within the CNL. This question should be monitored and taken into consideration in the Parish Council's reviews of the Plan, and necessary steps taken to ensure it is not detrimental to the village.

## 5.2 Housing objectives

5.2.1 The housing objectives of Stonesfield's Neighbourhood Plan are defined as:

**Objective 1:** To meet Stonesfield's housing needs, while conserving and enhancing its status within the CNL and that of the conservation area.

**Objective 2:** Provision of further affordable/social housing to meet the needs of those with a local connection to Stonesfield on low incomes and enable them to continue living in the village.

**Objective 3:** To provide clarity on the conditions for future development to ensure the character of the village is, as a minimum, not harmed, while not being unduly inflexible in permitting changes which will benefit the village and those living in it.

5.2.2 The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to meet these objectives by:

- supporting the provision of social/affordable housing available for people on lower incomes
- maintaining the stock of affordable rented housing and supporting a modest increase when necessary to meet identified needs within the village
- weighting development towards lower-cost housing, including smaller terraced or semi-detached housing and flats appropriate for single young people or couples, young families and older people downsizing
- preventing the use of previously undeveloped land for development of larger, exclusive market housing such as detached houses with four or more bedrooms, which fails to meet identified local needs.

5.2.3 The housing policies outlined in this section have been formulated to address the housing objectives by directing future developments in the village, and following consideration of a wide body of evidence and relevant planning policies, including those in the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) and the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, as well as the Housing Needs Assessment 2024 (Appendix A).

The development formerly referred to as the Charity Farm development, and referred to as such by some respondents to the Village Survey 2023, and within the enquiry on the Cala proposed development 2019, is now known as William Buckland Way, throughout.

## 5.3 Housing policies – meeting Stonesfield's needs

5.3.1 The housing needs of Stonesfield were defined by the Housing Needs Assessment 2024 (Appendix A), which used a range of data sources including the Village Survey 2023, which had a higher than 60% response rate.

5.3.2 Looking in the Survey results at why people may have left the village in the last five years, the major reasons were for employment and education. However, for the purposes of determining housing needs, it is important to note that lack of affordable housing to rent (9 households), lack of affordable housing to buy (13), lack of suitable housing (12) particularly suggest a need for more affordable housing that is specifically available to people of the village (i.e. not to those on the wider WODC Housing Register). Of course, this is only a snapshot of individuals' reasons and there will be whole households who have left the village in the last five years, for which there is no data.

5.3.3 Only four households are on the WODC Housing Register and are looking to move within Stonesfield in the next five years (from the Survey date, 2023). This is a very small number; the same as it was in 2019 at the time of the Cala appeal. Further analysis comparing past market sales with future projection of need gave an excess capacity of 62 houses. This capacity would accommodate around 64% of those who didn't know if they might move in the village; a much larger percentage than those who are likely to actually look to move. The conclusion is that the market, subject to the next five years delivering the same scale of available property for sale, will meet the needs of people in Stonesfield wishing to move, with excess capacity. There is no case for further market housing.

5.3.4 The HNA identified that there may be a very small shortfall of social/affordable housing in the next five years (to 2031), which a small rural exception site would satisfy, although a specific assessment would be needed to justify demand and size. The only possible future exceptional circumstance would be a projection of the current trend towards a slightly older population with a corresponding decline in the proportion of the working-age population; although that is not presently impacting the vitality of the village. Current projections for Stonesfield do not indicate a significant demand for social/affordable housing. This presents the Parish Council with a dilemma in needing to evaluate the benefits of building social/affordable housing to attract a younger occupancy from outside Stonesfield, when there is little in the way of employment or facilities within the village.

## Policy SH1 – Meeting the housing needs of the parish of Stonesfield

SH = Stonesfield - Housing

Within the built-up area, housing proposals on previously-developed land will be accepted where they would meet the need identified in the Housing Needs Assessment prepared for the Neighbourhood Plan, and are otherwise in accordance with other relevant development plan policies.

On land adjoining the built-up area, housing proposals on previously-developed land will be supported where they would deliver the Plan's housing objectives as defined in the Housing Needs Assessment and would otherwise be in accordance with other relevant development plan policies.

Housing proposals on greenfield land adjoining the built-up area will not be supported unless there is clear evidence they demonstrate exceptional circumstances and a public interest directly relevant to Stonesfield, as defined in the Housing Needs Assessment (Appendix A), and where the resulting development would otherwise be in accordance with other relevant development plan policies.

## Aims of the policy

- **To meet the housing needs of Stonesfield, as set out in the Housing Needs Assessment 2024 (Appendix A)**
- **To provide clarity on when housing will be supported by the Parish Council, and under what circumstances.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

Policy OS2 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 covers development in villages such as Stonesfield, permitting limited development which respects the village character and local distinctiveness and would help to maintain the vitality of these communities. Policy H2 allows for new dwellings on both undeveloped and previously developed land within the built-up area. The Local Plan applies a more restrictive approach to new housing development in the Burford-Charlbury sub-area than elsewhere, because most of that area is within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

The housing delivery in Stonesfield anticipated in the WODC Local Plan 2031[3] (40 houses) has been built out, and there have also been a number of small-scale developments. In October 2023, WODC produced a Housing Land Supply Position Statement 2023-2028, which identified a further ten houses in Stonesfield, over multiple small sites, contributing to housing provision anticipated for the Burford-Charlbury sub-area in the 2031 Local Plan.

Following the approval of WODC's Local Plan 2031, planning permission sought by Cala Homes for 68 houses on land on an additional site adjoining the built-up area of Stonesfield was refused. The decision was upheld by the Secretary of State's Inspector and the High Court on appeal. The Inspector's appeal decision in 2019 sets out the law and policy to be applied in considering any proposal, either by plan allocation or by application for planning permission for major development in and around Stonesfield. In particular it confirms that 'to provide exceptional circumstances to overcome the great weight attached to conserving the landscape of the AONB… proposals on undeveloped land adjoining built-up areas will only be supported where there is convincing evidence of a specific local housing need specific to a particular settlement.'

The Inspector also held that, were the proposed development to be permitted, 'it would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the AONB.' For users of the Oxfordshire Way footpath, 'in views looking north-west, the village would appear as more of a modern 'suburbanisation' of a rural settlement within the AONB.'

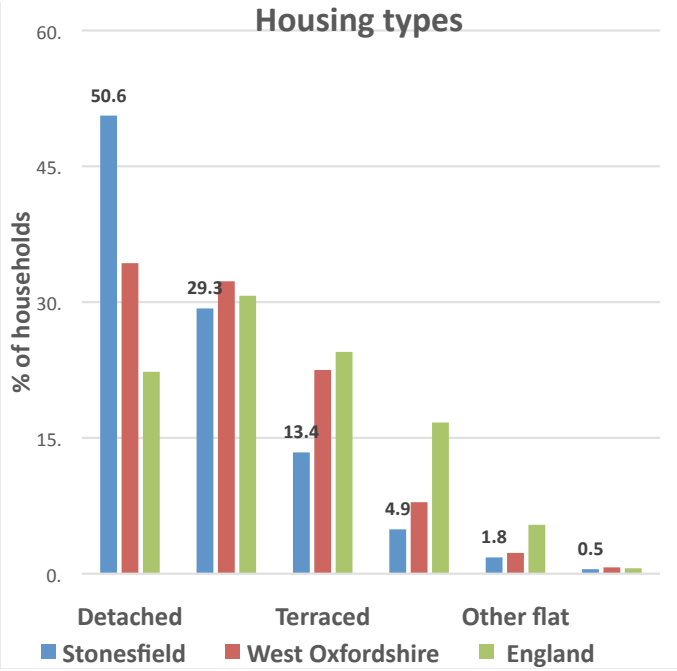
The current trend towards a slightly older population is in keeping with other settlements within the CNL and is not a pressing problem. The projected population change as a proportion of the village population is unlikely to have a significant impact on the village's vitality in the next five years (to 2031). The age distribution change in Stonesfield is in line with a 20.1% increase in the component of the population of England overall aged 65 and over between the 2011 and 2021 censuses and a 28.2% increase over that time span in that component within West Oxfordshire.

The conclusions of the Housing Needs Assessment indicate that there would need to be new evidence of exceptional circumstances and a public interest to justify support for housing proposals on undeveloped land adjoining the built-up area. As a result, its future development should be confined to small-scale housing proposals on previously-developed land within the settlement or land adjoining the built-up area.

## Size and type of homes

5.3.5 Stonesfield has seen considerable housing consolidation in the past, with redevelopment of farmyards and conversion of barns for housing primarily during the 1980s. There has been only limited new build in recent years.

*Fig 5.1: Proportion of different housing types in Stonesfield, West Oxfordshire and England, 2011 (Office for National Statistics: Census 2011)*




5.3.6 Like the rest of West Oxfordshire, the housing in Stonesfield is dominated by detached properties, followed by semi-detached and terraced houses, with a very low proportion of flats.

5.3.7 Developments since 2011 have continued to be weighted in a similar pattern, i.e. predominantly larger, detached houses. The weighting for detached properties (50.6%) is also much higher than the West Oxfordshire average of 34%.

5.3.8 The 2011 Census published data on the number of rooms (excluding bathrooms) per property, which again shows a disproportionate weighting towards larger properties.

5.3.9 While there has been little problem in selling recently built large properties, there is no evidence that they have satisfied a housing need for people with a local (Stonesfield) connection. Policy SH2 aims to redress the balance over future years and justifies a heavier emphasis on smaller properties than WODC's Local Plan 2031.

## Policy SH2
## Size and type of homes

Development proposals of ten or more homes (except affordable housing) should provide the following mix of dwelling sizes:

- at least 45% with 1-2 bedrooms;
- approximately 45% with 3 bedrooms, and
- no more than 10% with 4 bedrooms.

(See Justification and supporting evidence below.)

Homes with five or more bedrooms will not be supported unless a specific local need can be demonstrated.

New housing on land within the village built-up area and on the edge of the village should seek to make efficient use of space whist responding positively to the character and appearance of the immediate surroundings..

## Aims of the policy

➜ **To address the imbalance in property sizes in Stonesfield**

➜ **To make more smaller properties available in the future, with the long-term objective of maintaining the vitality of the village.**

## Justification and supporting evidence

The WODC Local Plan 2031 states that further housing development proposals will be considered on a case-by-case basis. It will need to be convincingly demonstrated that a scheme would give rise to benefits to the specific settlement or the sub-area (e.g. meeting identified local housing needs) and which would clearly outweigh any likely harms (e.g. heritage, landscape, impact on local services).

The Local Plan 2031 notes that the main focus of future provision of market housing should be two-bedroom and three-bedroom houses in order to address the current imbalance, and for development to be appropriate for its location and in the interest of creating sustainable communities. The proportions of properties with different numbers of bedrooms specified in Policy SH2 are justified by the heavy weighting toward existing larger houses in Stonesfield; see Fig. 5.1 (p38), and the Housing Needs Assessment p21. This bias has continued in more recent developments, in Farley Lane and William Buckland Way.

The proportion of houses in Stonesfield by number of bedrooms makes this clear. Fig 5.2 compares these proportions to the proportions recommended by the WODC Local Plan 2031 (p53, 5.75).

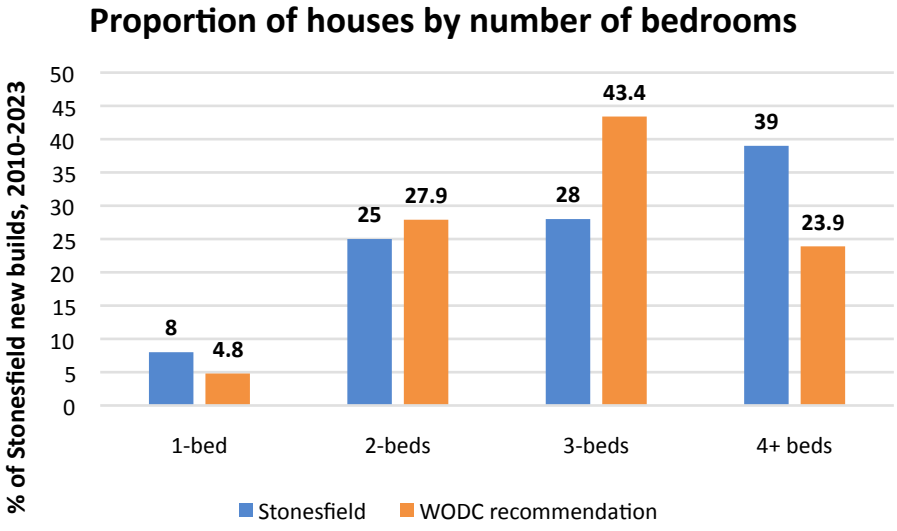



*Fig 5.2: Proportion of Stonesfield new builds, 2010 – 2023 by number of bedrooms; together with the recommended proportion of each size according to the WODC Local Plan 2031*
*Sources: WODC Planning Portal and WODC Local Plan 2031*

It is clear from these data that the proportion of two- and three-bedroom houses should be approximately 71% according to the WODC Local Plan; whereas Stonesfield has only 53%. Also, the proportion of four+ bedroom houses in Stonesfield is 39%; compared to a recommended proportion of 23.9%.

The NPPF, paragraph 82 calls for rural local planning authorities supporting opportunities to bring forward rural exception sites that will provide affordable housing to meet identified local needs.

Reference should also be made to Policy SEL2, Protecting Important Views (p 81) and the Landscape Character Assessment carried out for this Plan (Appendix B).

## Mix of affordable and rented homes / Affordable homes

5.3.10 Stonesfield has a reasonable level of provision of affordable housing, made up as follows:

- Cottsway Housing Association manages 60 properties in Stonesfield, including those they have taken on since the WODC stock transfer, net of any right-to-buy transactions
- South Oxfordshire Housing Association (SOHA) manages the affordable housing element of the William Buckland Way development, comprising 16 houses, including four shared-ownership properties
- Sovereign HA manages eight properties on The Ridings as a rural exception site, taken over from Blenheim
- Stonesfield Community Trust manages 15 dwellings (a mix of apartments and houses/bungalows on four sites), some of which have been established for many years.

5.3.11 The Housing Needs Assessment 2024 identified that there is no exceptional circumstance justifying further major development of market housing in Stonesfield. However, there may be a case to deliver more social/ affordable homes for people with a local (Stonesfield) connection. Without market housing development and in the absence of a corresponding S106 agreement for affordable housing, the need could, instead, be met via a small rural exception site. A specific assessment would be needed to justify demand and size, and if deemed viable, Stonesfield Parish Council could make a call to landowners for a site(s) which might be suitable. One of the above providers of affordable housing could provide a vehicle to help meet this need once a site(s) has been identified.

5.3.12 The only potential identified local need (which is not presently impacting the vitality of the village) is that which might be created if the trend to an increasingly older population, with a corresponding decline in the working-age population and the number of children, were to continue.



*Friends' Close, the first low-cost housing built by Stonesfield Community Trust in the 1980s on the old Boot Inn car park.*

5.3.13 This could present the Parish Council with a dilemma, i.e. a need to consider the benefits of building social/affordable housing which may attract a younger occupancy from outside the settlement, when there is little in the way of employment or facilities available to families and young people moving to Stonesfield. There is no need to address this in the next five years; hence this policy is directed to the specific needs within the settlement as required by the NPPF. However, the Parish Council should review, in the future, the continued vitality of the village and whether there is benefit to such social housing development in order to satisfy an identified need.

## Policy SH3 – Mix of affordable rented housing

Development proposals for affordable/social rented dwellings, which include the provision of dwellings which have been designed to cater for the specific needs of young people and working-age people and/or people with disabilities, will be supported where this approach is evidenced by the most up to-date information available demonstrating an identified need from within the parish.

## Policy SH4 – Affordable homes

Proposals which address the specific affordable housing needs identified in the Stonesfield Housing Needs Assessment 2024 including suitable rural exception site(s) for small scale affordable housing schemes to meet specific local housing needs which cannot be met in any other way will be supported.

All new homes on these sites should remain affordable in perpetuity to people in housing need who have a local connection with the parish.

## Aims of these policies

- **To meet the identified need for affordable housing in the village**
- **To ensure the right mix of affordable rented housing**
- **To enable new affordable housing provision to be targeted for those with a connection to the village.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

The WODC Local Plan 2031 calls for a plan for an appropriate mix of new residential accommodation which provides a variety of sizes, types and affordability with special emphasis on the provision of homes for local people in housing need who cannot afford to buy or rent at market prices. This should include those wishing to self-build, as well as homes to meet the needs of older people, younger people, minority ethnic communities, people with disabilities, families and travelling communities. The type and size of affordable homes needs to reflect the current housing strategy, local housing need and relevant site constraints.

The NPPF states that the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies. These groups should include (but are not limited to) those who require affordable housing; families with children; older people (including those who require retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes); students; people with disabilities; service families; travellers; people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes.

The HNA 2024 for Stonesfield (Appendix A) sets out further rationale for this policy.

## Needs of older people and those with disabilities

5.3.14 Like most towns and villages in the CNL, Stonesfield has an ageing population. The village's housing stock will need to change in years to come, to accommodate the needs of a moderately increased proportion of elderly residents. While it has few flats, Stonesfield has a reasonable number of single storey properties, but other properties may need to be adapted to meet the changing needs of frail or disabled occupants. One option is to enable people to create small, separate dwellings within a home or attached to it, for relatives of the primary residents.

5.3.15 Stonesfield currently has no sheltered housing or assisted-living accommodation for the elderly, so provision to meet individual needs is supported in principle.

5.3.16 From the responses to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey, and captured in the HNA 2024 (Appendix A), the number of people looking to downsize in the next five years is low. However, it is predicted that the number of people aged over 65 is forecast to grow by around 100 by 2030, so this policy aims to make provision for such growth.

## Policy SH5 – Meeting the needs of older people and those with disabilities

Development proposals that meet the needs of older people and those with disabilities currently living within the parish or with a local connection to the parish, will be supported where they otherwise comply with development plan policies. This includes accommodation that is suited to the needs of those with limited mobility, and accommodation that meets the requirements of Part M4(2) of the Building Regulations.

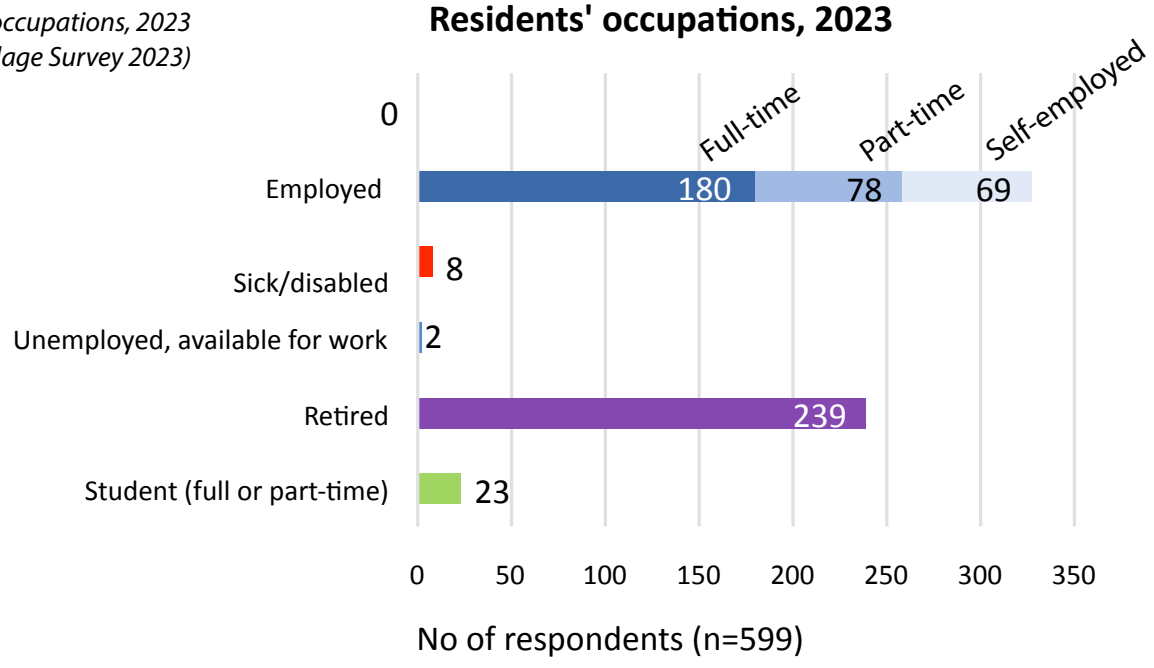
Development proposals for individual self-contained flats or annexes of 1 and 2 bedrooms which are suitable for older people or people with disabilities and which are within the curtilage of existing properties will be supported where they otherwise comply with development plan policies.

Proposals to provide assisted living accommodation which meet the housing needs of the parish will be supported where they otherwise comply with development plan policies.

## Aim of the policy

➜ **To recognise the need to adapt to changing demography and to provide for and support individuals with existing local connections, e.g. elderly relatives of people already living in Stonesfield. It is not intended to encourage development more suited to larger population centres.**

*Fig 5.3: Residents' occupations, 2023 (Stonesfield Village Survey 2023)*



## Justification and supporting evidence

The Housing Needs Assessment 2024 identified that there is no exceptional circumstance justifying further major development in Stonesfield. However, the only exceptional circumstance, which is not presently impacting the vitality of the village, is the projected continued trend to an increasingly older population, with a corresponding decline in working-age population and children.

Out of 599 respondents on the question of employment in the Village Survey (Appendix E), 39.8% were retired, compared to 54.5% in employment, see Fig 5.3 above.

However current projections for the settlement do not indicate a significant increase in demand for housing because of the increasingly older population. There is no need to address this possibility in the five years to 2031; hence this policy is directed towards the direct needs within the settlement as required by the NPPF (para 63). The Housing Needs Assessment for Stonesfield (Appendix A) sets out further rationale for this policy, which includes some of the key points below.

The Village Survey 2023 established that 23 households included one person with a supported housing need[5], and three households included two people with that need (5.8% of 448 respondents). Of all respondents, eight needed independent housing with care support, six needed independent housing with a live-in carer and six needed supported living for adults with learning disabilities who want to live independently. Reflecting the relatively older age of the population, 54 people (12.9%) in Stonesfield (May 2020) claimed attendance allowance against 12.5% nationally. These findings conclude that the numbers of people needing supported housing are low.

Only 34 people (3.7%) in Stonesfield (Oct. 2020) claimed Personal Independence Payments, against 6.1% nationally. Estimates of projected population growth (details in the Supporting evidence Addendum) indicate that West Oxfordshire's older population (65+) is not expected to grow significantly between 2024-2030, while that of other age ranges is expected to decline.

# 5.4 Social / affordable housing

## Lower-cost housing

5.4.1 The profile of size of homes in Stonesfield is currently significantly weighted toward large detached market properties: in 2011 it had 50.6% detached houses compared to the national average of 22.3%[6]. Developments since 2011 have continued to be similarly weighted; the Village Survey 2023 indicated that 45% of properties were detached, while the West Oxfordshire average, as set out in the Local Plan 2031, is only 35%.

5.4.2 National and local policy comment that the development of small-scale Rural Exception Sites for affordable housing, defined as up to ten houses, will be supported, provided they meet an affordable housing need identified in the Housing Needs Assessment, and provided they do not form part of any development constituting a major development as defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF (i.e. more than ten homes or on a site of 0.5 ha or more).

## Policy SH6 – Lower-cost housing

Development proposals for lower-cost homes for sale will be supported where they otherwise comply with other relevant policies in this Plan, and include measures to ensure that future resale of such homes is constrained so that the homes remain low-cost in perpetuity.

## Aims of this policy

➜ **Recognising that housing costs in Stonesfield are much higher than the national average, in particular those of buying a house or privately rented property:**

➜ **to maintain the vitality of the village in the longer term by ensuring the supply of lower-cost property**



*Affordable Rural Exception Site (RES) housing built on the Combe Road.*

- **to support developments which, e.g., might include shared ownership or lower-cost purchase, subject to**
- **compliance with other policies in this Plan,**
- **meeting exceptional need for people with a Stonesfield connection, and**
- **public interest.**

## Justification and supporting evidence

There is no evidence that recently-built larger properties have satisfied a housing need for people with a local (Stonesfield) connection. This policy aims to redress the balance over future years and justifies a heavier emphasis on smaller properties than WODC's Local Plan 2031.

In 2016/17, affordability of housing showed a significant gap above the national average when comparing earnings and savings to house prices.

| | Stonesfield | England |
|---|---|---|
| Lower Quartile House price ('affordable housing') affordability gap | £86,516 | £39,328 |
| Savings ratio (months of earnings for a deposit) | 12.16 | 6.54 |
| Total Ratio (years of earnings for a house) | 6.11 | 3.57 |
| | | |
| Average house price – affordability gap | £167,239 | £42,272 |
| Savings ratio (months of earnings for a deposit) | 15.6 | 10.41 |
| Total Ratio (years of earnings for a house) | 7.61 | 5.5 |

*Fig 5.4: House affordability: Stonesfield and England 2016/2017 (OCSI 2020 Local Insight report: Stonesfield )*



The Housing Needs Assessment for Stonesfield (Appendix A) sets out further rationale for this policy. The WODC Local Plan 2031 applies a more restrictive approach to new housing development in the Burford-Charlbury sub-area (Policy H1) and the amount of housing proposed for this sub-area in the plan period to 2031 is based on past completions and existing commitments only. No allowance is made for future speculative windfall development.

## Location of affordable homes

The Neighbourhood Plan supports development of small-scale Rural Exception Sites for affordable housing, defined as up to 10 houses, where they meet an affordable housing need identified in the Housing Needs Assessment, and provided they do not form part of any development constituting a major development as defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF (i.e. more than 10 homes or on a site of 0.5 ha or more).

Any small scale Rural Exception Sites for affordable housing on the edge of the village, where development would not normally be permitted, will be subject to the same limitation and providing they are not in conflict with the policies in this Plan or any other material consideration, and provided the benefits can be shown clearly to outweigh any consequent harm to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and scenic beauty of the CNL.

The detailed Housing Needs Assessment 2024 (Appendix A) was undertaken to support the Neighbourhood Plan, and encompass the national and local policy environment. This document should be used as the key reference document in support of the loction of affordable homes.

Affordable housing is defined in paragraph 5.48 of the WODC Local Plan 2031 as that which is affordable to those who cannot afford market-priced housing locally to rent or purchase. The Local Plan asserts that there is a significant need for more affordable housing in West Oxfordshire (para 5.51).

The Local Plan also states that there are two main ways in which affordable housing will be delivered, i.e. through market housing developments and through the delivery of rural exception sites 'which are essentially small sites used for affordable housing that would not normally be released for development' (para 5.52).

Policy H2 of the Local Plan says that in villages such as Stonesfield new dwellings will be permitted in circumstances, including on undeveloped land adjoining the built-up area, where convincing evidence is presented

to demonstrate that it is necessary to meet identified housing needs, it is in accordance with the distribution of housing set out in Policy H1 and is in accordance with other policies in the plan, in particular the general principles in Policy OS2.

Policy OS2 of the Local Plan notes that villages such as Stonesfield 'are suitable for limited development which respect the village character and local distinctiveness and would help to maintain the vitality of these communities'.

Policy BC1 of the Local Plan requires proposals for development in the Burford-Charlbury sub-area to be consistent with the conservation and enhancement of the CNL.

The Local Plan acknowledges that in the Burford-Charlbury sub-area there are very limited opportunities for significant housing development (para 9.6.26). Further, it is very clear that: 'within the Cotswolds AONB, windfall housing proposals on undeveloped land adjoining built-up areas will be particularly closely scrutinised and will only be supported where there is convincing evidence of a specific local housing need, such as needs identified through a neighbourhood plan or affordable housing needs specific to a particular settlement, for example through a rural exception site' (LP 2031 paragraph 5.39).

In his decision letter in the Cala appeal against refusal of permission in 2019 (paragraph 77) the Secretary of State's Inspector, Stephen Normington, accepted that 'district-wide there may be a need for the delivery of more affordable homes,' but went on to say that he did not consider the evidence before him provided a convincing case to demonstrate that the affordable units included within the [then] proposed development were necessary to meet an identified local housing need in Stonesfield. He said that he considered that Local Plan policies H2 and BC1 required that 'windfall housing proposals on undeveloped land adjoining built-up areas will only be supported where there is convincing evidence of a specific local housing need specific to a particular settlement.'



The Housing Needs Assessment 2024 (Appendix A) used multiple data sources and, most significantly, a survey of future housing needs of residents in the village which had a response rate in excess of 62%. The HNA showed:

'There is a reasonable provision of affordable housing in Stonesfield made available primarily by Cottsway Housing Association, South Oxfordshire Housing Association and Stonesfield Community Trust.'

There may be a small shortfall in provision which a Rural Exception Site could satisfy, guaranteeing occupancy by those with a Stonesfield connection, as opposed to a typical section 106 development on a conventional building plot, where guaranteeing occupancy by those with a Stonesfield connection would be more difficult.

National and local policy comment that the development of small-scale Rural Exception Sites for affordable housing, defined as up to 10 houses, will be supported, provided they meet an affordable housing need identified in the Housing Needs Assessment, and provided they do not form part of any development constituting a major development as defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF (i.e. more than 10 homes or on a site of 0.5 ha or more).

## 5.5 General housing policies

### Infill housing

5.5.1 Out of the Village Survey participants who voted on the issue of infill, a small but significant majority (57.4% against 42.6%) did not support it. Almost all those participating considered that it was important or very important to protect the parish's traditional and other buildings. This policy has been designed in that context.

### Aims of the policy

- **To recognise that from time to time, applications will be made to build on small pieces of land within the built-up area**
- **To set the parameters for acceptable applications of this type**
- **To complement the other policies within this Plan, in particular Policy SH10 Development in residential gardens (p47), Policy SEL4 Protecting Local Green Spaces (p87) and Section 10 Village character (p103)**
- **To protect the character of the village.**

## Policy SH7 – Infill development

Proposals for residential development on small infill or redevelopment sites within Stonesfield will be supported where the proposal:

a. fills a small, restricted gap in the continuity of existing frontage buildings or, on other sites within the settlement boundary where the site is closely surrounded by buildings

b. will not involve the outward extension of the existing settlement boundary of the village or encroach on local green spaces as identified in the Neighbourhood Plan, as defined in Appendix C

c. has regard to the WODC Design Guide 2016 and Section 11 of the Plan (Building and environmental design guidelines)

d. does not have a significant impact on the privacy of adjacent properties

e. is consistent with the character of the village

f. it is consistent with the approach for the development of gardens in Policy SH9; and

g. provides for at least one small home with two or fewer bedrooms for every proposed new large dwelling with four or more bedrooms. Depending on the size of the plot and the character of the surrounding area, this should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. As for Policy SH3, smaller housing will be preferred

h. where the infill is for modest sites, it respects the relationship between the existing building and the new development

i. does not have an unacceptable impact on existing curtilages and/or gardens; particularly those which make an important contribution to the character or the appearance of the village and its conservation area. Development should be a logical complement to existing buildings and should be in keeping with the pattern of development.

j. provides pedestrians with access to the rear properties

k. protects wildlife habitats from loss in a residential garden, contributes to a net gain in biodiversity, and is compliant with Policy SEL4.

Where the development proposed is back-land development (the residential development of land behind an existing frontage, or placing of further dwelling/s behind existing dwelling/s within the existing site) or if there are existing properties behind the infill properties, safe and convenient access to all the resultant properties should be provided. The access to be provided should be wide enough and far enough from the boundary and any front property to accommodate delivery, service and emergency vehicles without causing unnecessary disturbance to neighbours or the adjacent property.

### Justification and supporting evidence

The Neighbourhood Plan notes the requirements of the NPPF (updated December 2023) that planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account … the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens … (Paragraph 128 (d)).

The Housing Needs Assessment did not identify any requirement for further market housing, but did identify the potential for population ageing, and in the longer term the Parish Council should monitor the impact of this. Development of smaller properties would help mitigate this issue, making property available for older people to downsize or for younger age groups, although it should be noted that neither were immediate issues for the village in terms of need.

The Landscape Assessment advises (page 52) that policy should *inter alia*:

- protect the remaining pockets of sensitive pastoral landscape in the village edge from development, particularly to the south and south-east of Stonesfield Manor which is enjoyed by local residents in outward views from the village
- retain the low density and unobtrusive character of existing residential development at the peripheries of LLCA C (Stonesfield Inner Fields) and of Bagg's Bottom.

## Subdivision of dwellings

5.5.2 Subdividing existing large dwellings is supported in principle by this Plan because it could be a sustainable way of meeting the objectives derived from the Housing Needs Assessment (Appendix A), i.e. to provide affordable housing to support the sustainability of the village. It could, for example, provide a means for older people to remain in a section of their own homes while allowing family accommodation in the area vacated. It could also provide additional dwellings without the need to impinge on green spaces.

5.5.3 Both design and parking would need to be dealt with satisfactorily as part of any proposal, consistent with wider policies in this Plan.

## Policy SH8 – Sub-division of dwellings to create smaller units

Proposals to convert existing dwellings into smaller units will be supported where appropriate provision is made for:

- any additional parking requirements;
- accommodating refuse and recycling bins within the curtilage of the property in a manner sensitive to the character of the village and, where appropriate, the conservation area;
- compliance with the appropriate statutory requirements and building regulations, while in keeping with the historic character of the property

Proposals should be designed in a manner which respects the historic, architectural and landscape character of the locality and contributes to local distinctiveness. Wherever practicable, development proposals should take opportunities to enhance the character and quality of the surroundings.

## Aim of the policy

➜ **To establish the conditions whereby sub-division of properties are permitted.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

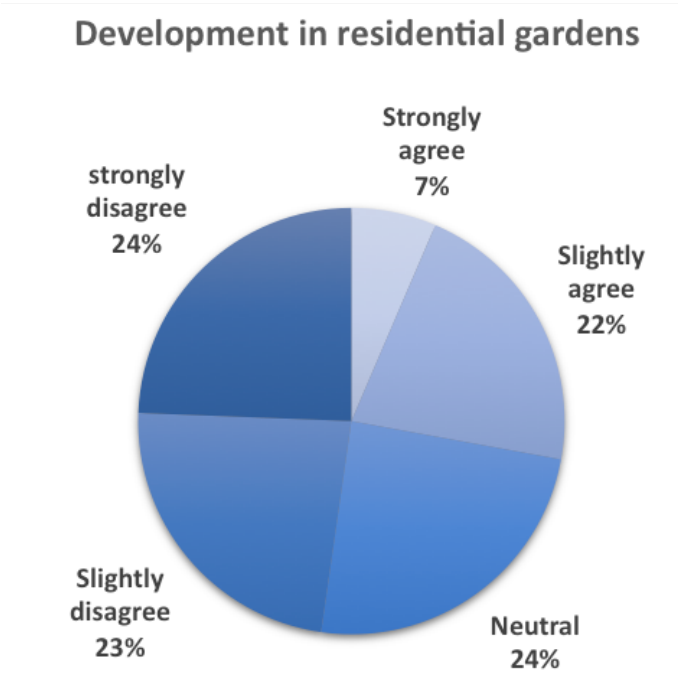
This policy is consistent with Local Plan 2031 Policy H6, which provides for the subdivision of residential properties, provided such alteration will not unacceptably affect the environment of people living in or visiting the area.

There is currently significant under-occupation of housing in Stonesfield, and this is likely to increase due to the predicted ageing of the population. Evidence from the Village Survey which represents 451 properties, shows 92 properties as 50% occupied and 71 properties less than 50% occupied. Around 77.5% of respondents in the NP Survey were supportive or neutral on the issue of subdividing dwellings. The WODC Local Plan 2031 notes that the District Council, in appropriate circumstances, will work with relevant organisations and property owners to ensure the number of empty homes is kept to a minimum. Proposals to bring empty residential properties back into occupation will be favourably supported in principle.

## Development in residential gardens

5.5.4 Respondents to the Village Survey were ambivalent on potential developments in the gardens of existing properties, but 47% disagreed while 29% were in favour. As for the Survey question on infill development, almost all respondents (92%) felt that it was important or very important to protect the parish's traditional and other buildings. This policy has therefore been designed in that context – to support development in residential gardens, but only with stringent conditions. Part e of Policy SH9 refers to the need for development proposals to delivery biodiversity net gain. This should be 10% in accordance with national policy.

*Fig 5.5: Residents' views on potential development in residential gardens*



## Policy SH9 – Development in residential gardens

Development in residential gardens (the development of land behind an existing frontage or placing of further dwelling/s behind existing dwelling/s within the existing site) will be supported, where such development:

a respects the relationship between the main building, its wider curtilage and/or garden;

b does not have an unacceptable impact on existing curtilages and/or gardens, particularly those which make an important contribution to the character or the appearance of the village and its conservation area;

c provides appropriate access to the rear properties that is wide enough and far enough from the boundary and any front property to accommodate delivery, service and emergency vehicles without unnecessary disturbance to neighbours or the front property;

d provides pedestrians with safe access to the rear properties; and

e protects existing wildlife habitats in a residential garden against loss, and contributes to a net gain in biodiversity.

## Aims of the policy

➜ **To set out where development in residential gardens is appropriate**

➜ **Consistently with the NPPF, to resist inappropriate developments in gardens, e.g. where development would cause harm to the local area**

➜ **To protect the character of the village and wildlife habitats**

➜ **To ensure proper access to existing and any new property.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

The Neighbourhood Plan notes the requirement in the NPPF[7] that 'where an allowance is to be made for windfall sites as part of anticipated supply… Plans should consider the case for setting out policies to resist inappropriate development of residential gardens, for example where development would cause harm to the local area.'

Policy SH10 is consistent with WODC Local Plan Policies H6 ((Changes to) Existing housing) and OS4 (High quality design).

WODC Local Plan 2031 (paras 5.126 to 5.128) recognises in relation to existing housing that opportunities to provide sustainable new housing can be constrained, especially outside the towns, so it is important to protect the existing housing stock and its character at the same time as accommodating sympathetic change to meet residents' needs through adaption. Alterations, extensions and subdivision of existing housing remain a significant source of new homes.

In some instances, existing dwellings may come under pressure for redevelopment to alternative uses. In such cases the loss of a dwelling will only be supported where there is an overriding community benefit and/or the existing living accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Given the attraction of a rural home within commuting distance of London and more restrictive planning policies on new housing in small villages, hamlets and open countryside in particular, existing modest properties are invariably the subject of proposals for substantial extension or rebuild.

The Landscape Assessment advises (page 52) that policy should *inter alia*:

- protect the remaining pockets of sensitive pastoral landscape in the village edge from development, particularly to the south and south-east of Stonesfield Manor which is enjoyed by locals in outward views from the village
- retain the low density and unobtrusive character of existing residential development at the peripheries of LLCA C (Stonesfield Inner Fields and Baggs Bottom).

## Infrastructure

5.5.5 The number and nature of sewage-contaminated flooding incidents in Stonesfield over recent years have been highly significant; examples are set out in 9.7.7. In view of the extent to which such incidents have been significant, a Grampian condition on planning applications on sites within the parish will be applied to all new developments to ensure that new homes will not be occupied until the Local Planning Authority is satisfied that proper water and sewage capacity infrastructure is provided. Where there is no reasonable prospect of the provision of appropriate water and sewerage capacity infrastructure within a reasonable time, such a Grampian condition will ensure that development is not commenced until there is good reason to conclude that such provision will be made before completion of the development. See Section 9 Policy SEL8, and pages 95 to 98.

## 5.6 Residential parking

5.6.1 Stonesfield's streetscape is important to the character of the village and its position within the CNL (see the Village Character Assessment (Appendix D) and Sections 10 and 11 of this Plan). This Plan seeks to avoid the negative impacts of transport within the CNL and Stonesfield's conservation area.

5.6.2 The narrow streets, particularly in the conservation area of the village, are integral to the character of Stonesfield, but they also pose difficulties for traffic and parking. This includes Boot Street, High Street, Peaks Lane, Church Street, Churchfields, High Street and Laughton Hill. Further parking problems are on the narrow Pond Hill, the Ridings, and the Square. Most of these streets have no or little pavement and few houses have off-road parking for residents. Visitors' parking needs cause additional problems and are considered separately under Section 7.4, Non-residential parking. Residents and visitors parking on pavements on Woodstock Road also pose problems.

5.6.3 The School and Pre-school have access issues due to narrow roads around them and problems can occur by inconsiderate parking. Parking for the Church and new graveyard have little availability. The Shop and Hairdresser have a few spaces outside, although there is scope to redesign the area and enhance it. Inconsiderate parking can cause considerable disruption and danger to road users and pedestrians. The village has potential problems with parked vehicles causing buses to be impeded. The third part of Policy SH10 offers support to the delivery of additional parking in the village.

5.6.4 There is little alternative to use of the car by local residents as public transport is limited, with a service to Witney three days per week (one bus) and an hourly service between Charlbury, Woodstock and Oxford. The Village Survey asked a number of questions about travel patterns: residents' places of employment are very varied and not readily served by existing public transport, shopping habits are not readily served by public transport, and neither are other journeys, such as for education or healthcare. Cycling and walking to these destinations is difficult due to safety fears on routes out of the village. The survey demonstrated that residents therefore rely heavily on their cars. (See Section 6.1; Figs 6.1 and 6.2.)

### Policy SH10 – Parking

Wherever practicable, development proposals should provide for one off-street residential parking space for each bedroom. Any such development proposals should ensure that their design and layouts respect their immediate localities and are not dominated by motor vehicles. Otherwise, development proposals should comply with Oxfordshire County Council parking standards.

Development proposals that involve a loss of existing parking and which would result in parking provision falling below the relevant parking standards should make provision for at least an equivalent number of parking spaces.

Proposals for extensions and alterations of existing buildings should not result in a net reduction of parking spaces and should achieve a 1:1 ratio of bedrooms to parking spaces, and not reduce the existing ratio unless in exceptional circumstances.

Proposals for appropriate additional parking for public use, in or near the village centre, will be supported providing they provide safe highway access, do not impact the character and appearance of the conservation area and do not have significant impact on the amenities of residential premises in the immediate location.



## Aims of the policy

- **To design and position new development where it does not increase congestion, cause danger, or create nuisance from parking problems**
- **To recognise the critical importance of private car use by residents for everyday activities, until such time as more sustainable transport is available (see Policy ST1, p60).**

### Justification and supporting evidence

Policy SH10 has been developed to be consistent with Local Plan 2031 (Policy T4), the relevant policies of Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022 – 2050 (LTCP5) and the County Council's updated Parking Standards. However, given the existing parking problems in Stonesfield, and the number of people who identified it as an issue in responses to the Village Survey, there is justification for this Plan to go further than the Local Plan 2031 and the County Council's Parking Standards.

It is important that any new development makes adequate provision for the additional parking needs it may generate, and does not reduce or place extra pressure upon the existing on-street parking. The nature of Stonesfield means there are few opportunities for providing additional parking spaces for residents and users of local shops and facilities.



Until there is significant road safety improvement for cycling and significant enhancement to public transport, the sustainability of the village will continue to rely heavily on the private car. This is an important rationale for the additional off-street parking requirements above Oxfordshire County Council Parking Standards.

Policy SH10 addresses these important issues and applies throughout the neighbourhood area. The policy is particularly relevant in the historic centre of the village, given the age and design of properties and their lack of car parking facilities. The policy recognises that some developments may propose alternative parking facilities to replace spaces that otherwise would be lost. It also recognises that many developments will be extensions or changes to properties, e.g. development in gardens or sub-division of properties, and it is important, given the issues identified above, that adequate provision for parking is made.

OCC's objective is to reduce 25% of car trips by 2030, and a further 33% by 2040, and is aiming to reduce the availability of parking to achieve this objective. The Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan supports the overall aim to find more sustainable forms of transport, but this provides a conundrum in a rural village where alternative forms of transport are severely limited and the limited bus services are regularly under threat.

In the short term, adopting an approach to reduce availability of parking will not meet local approval given the impact on safety and congestion. However changes in urban travel patterns which might enhance alternative means of transport to small rural villages in the medium to long term may lead to a need to revisit this policy in five to ten years' time.

**Endnotes**

1 The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF) states that affordable housing is social rented, affordable rented housing (with rents of up to 80% of market rents). Social Rent is set through the National Rent Regime in England at around 50% of market rents, and social rented homes are for people on low incomes.
2 As understood by the NPPF and WODC Local Plan 2031.
3 WODC Local Plan 2031 at para 9.6.31 and Table 9.6b
4 Building Regulations 2010 as amended; replaced Lifetime Homes standard
5 Accommodation alongside support, supervision or care to help people live as independently as possible in the community including the elderly, those with a learning disability, and those with a physical disability.
6 Office for National Statistics: Census 2011
7 NPPF 20 December 2023, paragraph 72

*Over 95% of respondents to the Village Survey rated the Suriya Express village shop and Post Office as very important or important.*








© Cheryl Hitchcox

*Salon Copenhagen ran a hairdressers in Stonesfield for many years, but closed during Covid. Cheryl Hitchcox, who trained in the former salon, has reopened it as HBH Hair Salon in February 2025.*

# SECTION 6: **Economy and amenities**

## 6.1 Overview: Sustainability challenges

6.1.1 In order to remain alive and flourishing, a village needs to adapt. Stonesfield cannot remain exactly as it was in previous centuries, and the expectation of this Plan is that it will not. While it must preserve its historic and environmental heritage, it also needs to provide employment for today, or enable its people to travel to work effectively and sustainably, or work from home efficiently. It needs to provide essential services and facilities, and to enable recreation. For these reasons, the village will welcome any new appropriate business proposals or new commercial developments as long as they meet other requirements in relation to access, protection of the natural and historic environment and building guidelines. Continued and new ways to work in the village are vital for its sustainability.

6.1.2 Employment focus in Stonesfield is undoubtedly changing, with the impact of new technologies and practices, and concentration of retail services in out-of-town shopping, supermarkets and home delivery. Many former small business employers in the village have closed down or moved away. As a rural village, many residents are necessarily and inevitably dependent on the car, for travel to work, for services including healthcare and, in part, for education. Some who drive might not do so if bus services were better. While over 30% of Village Survey respondents said their most often used means of transport to travel even within Stonesfield is the car, the highest use of the bus was unsurprisingly to the destinations best served by buses, e.g. Woodstock and Oxford[1].

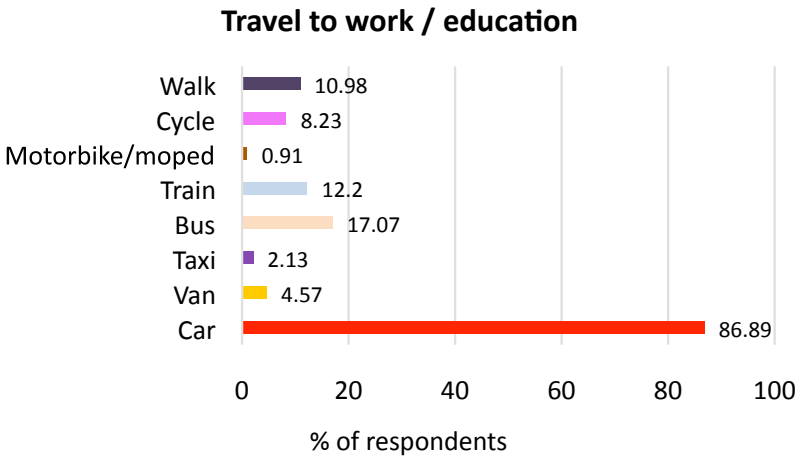
6.1.3 The village businesses that remain, flourish – the village shop and Post Office are very much needed, as are the pub, garage and hairdresser. The school is an important public-sector employer, which will continue, and there are other small businesses of long standing e.g. Plumridge Accountancy. There is scope for new small businesses, but there are barriers, mentioned in the Village Survey. Among these are lack of suitable business premises (23.76% of respondents) and lack of suitable office accommodation to rent (15.84%).[1]

6.1.4 Another barrier mentioned was poor mobile phone connectivity (68%). The local phone mast does not cover all providers, and reception is variable throughout the village. More than a third of respondents (37.62%) reported poor IT connectivity, but the Survey predated the provision by Gigaclear of high-speed connection. Ofcom reports in 2024 that broadband download and upload services of standard, superfast and ultrafast levels are all available in Stonesfield via Openreach or Gigaclear.

6.1.5 Office-based forms of employment changed during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the work-from-home requirement, after which many employees and employers found advantages in not returning to the office or only doing so part-time. At the time of writing, four years after the first lockdown, working from home has clearly suited many rural residents. In the Village Survey, 48.9% of respondents said they work from home (either employed, self-employed or engaged in voluntary work), while only 16.63% work in Stonesfield but not at home. The other large proportion of residents work in Oxford or elsewhere in the county – both of which most likely require use of the car. Again from the Survey, 86.89% of respondents said they use the car for travel to work or education, compared with 17.07% who use buses and 12.2% who use a train (see Fig 6.1).

6.1.6 The Village Survey asked a number of questions about travel patterns: residents' places of employment are very varied and not readily served by existing public transport. Equally, shopping needs are not readily served by public transport; nor are other

*Fig 6.1: Transport used for travel to work or education (people can use more than one)*



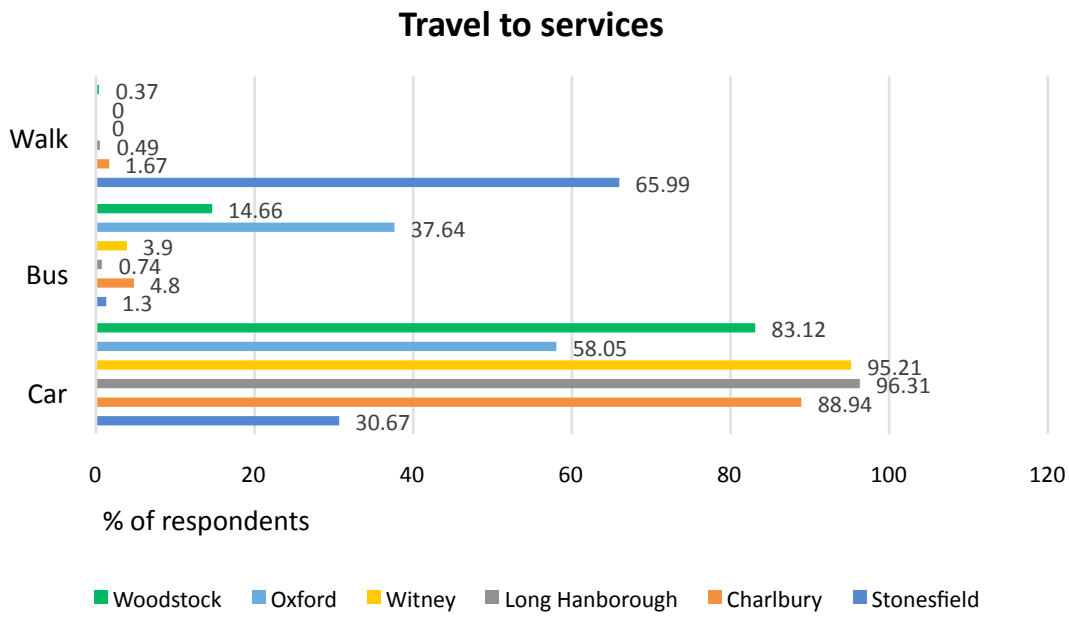



*Fig 6.2: Percentage of respondents using each mode of transport to each of the most frequent locations for services including healthcare (Stonesfield Village Survey 2023)*

journeys, such as for education or medical/dental needs or other types of healthcare. Cycling and walking to these destinations are difficult, due to safety fears on routes out of the village. Links to nearby service centres, e.g. Charlbury, Woodstock and Long Hanborough, are ill-served by bespoke cycle tracks. The Survey demonstrated that residents therefore rely heavily on their cars.

6.1.7 While a proportion of travel to Oxford from Stonesfield has changed in recent years from car use to buses (Fig 6.2) (parking is costly in Oxford City), travel from Stonesfield to all other locations except Woodstock is predominantly by car.

6.1.8 These issues focus on the question of transport and car-dependence. Public transport (essentially, on a local scale, buses) is limited and timetables may well not fit individual needs. To some extent the gap in provision of transport for healthcare needs can be filled by voluntary transport (see Section 3.1.25), but this is not the complete answer. Unfortunately both provision of public transport and road maintenance are outside the scope of this Plan, even though both are material considerations in determining planning applications. But the Plan can make provision for progress toward more sustainable transport, and for ensuring road safety, especially for pedestrians, cyclists and other non-motorised road users – see Section 7.

## 6.2 Economy

6.2.1 Over 94% of respondents to the Survey confirmed they agreed that the Neighbourhood Plan should support the development and retention of local services and community facilities. Over 73% of respondents felt the Neighbourhood Plan should support initiatives to enable residents to work locally, and the same percentage said the Plan should only support the re-use of former non-residential buildings for a community need or specific employment purpose, i.e. it should oppose planning permission for change of use to residential. A similar percentage agreed that the Neighbourhood Plan should support tourism and leisure development that meets the CNL Management Plan and Sustainable Tourism Strategy[1].

6.2.2 There have been some good examples of the community taking action to protect and improve local services. Most recently this was the community acquisition and running by volunteers of the White Horse pub, the last remaining public house in the village; the Oxfordshire County Council Library, run largely by volunteers, and the 16-year-old Stonesfield Voluntary Transport Scheme. These examples and responses to the Survey questions provide evidence of the community's desire to maintain such services within Stonesfield.

6.2.3 A number of small home-based businesses in Stonesfield, e.g. consultancy, construction, electrical services and complementary health, make use of domestic premises due to their small size and the current absence of shared office space or technology facilities. Once such setup, in Glover's Yard, did formerly offer access to office equipment but closed around 2000. Free-text comments in response to the Village Survey 2023 identified residents' wish to encourage light industry, small businesses and small workshops (see p27); however the limiting factor in 2025 is the unavailability of suitable land area and inward investment. If those factors could be addressed, e.g. by grant funding or public sector investment, such work centres could support existing or new small businesses or services. This is something to be considered by Stonesfield Parish Council.

6.2.4 In addition, the White Horse pub already offers services which attract many visitors from outside the village; apart from food and drink, through its attractive garden and events (live music, talks, art exhibitions) and its location on the Oxfordshire Way and many cycle routes. From September 2025 it displays information about Stonesfield's prehistoric heritage and its significant place in geohistory – echoed in another display on one of the main paths leaving the south of the village – which are likely to attract and interest more visitors.

## Policy SEA1
## Protecting and enhancing retail, employment and services

SEA = Stonesfield – Economy – Amenities

Development will be supported where it is shown to enhance Stonesfield's economy while protecting and enhancing the AONB and conservation area. Enhancing Stonesfield's economy means one or more of the following:

- increasing the quantity and quality of employment opportunities within Stonesfield, including fostering the growth of technology-based businesses and of small and medium-sized enterprises
- actively maintaining and enhancing services of local importance including shops, pubs, educational establishments (including early years), healthcare services and facilities for sport and recreation

Where land is already being used for employment purposes and it is possible for such use to continue, the loss of space through development will only be supported if it can be demonstrated that the site is not capable of being redeveloped for employment use, or where the site is unsuitable for employment on environmental and amenity grounds, or where substantial community benefits can be demonstrated.

Proposals for changes of use of premises currently occupied by Class E, F1 and F2 uses to other uses, including for residential uses, will not be supported unless there is firm evidence that the premises are no longer commercially viable for Class E, F1 and F2 uses, or that alternative appropriate and suitable facilities are available elsewhere in the neighbourhood area in accessible and convenient locations.

Development proposals for commercial properties that result in a loss of independently accessed associated residential accommodation on the premises will not be supported unless the proposed commercial uses would be incompatible with residential uses on environmental and amenity grounds.

Development proposals that would involve the loss of the White Horse Public House will not be supported.

Wherever practicable development proposals should demonstrate how they will support home working.

The re-use of non-residential buildings for employment, tourism and community uses to support the local economy will be supported.

## Aims of the policy

- **To protect and enhance the prospects for local employment**
- **To encourage and support home working**
- **To match local affordable housing supply to needs of local employment, to ensure local businesses can continue to operate**
- **To provide a net increase in sites for future employment within the Parish**
- **To maintain, while achieving these objectives, the rural nature of the countryside surrounding the village, the viability of agricultural activities and the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and scenic beauty of the CNL.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

These objectives, and Neighbourhood Plan policy SEA1, are consistent with Policy BC1 of the current West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, which supports additional small-scale employment opportunities, including sustainable tourism. In addition Policy CE12.3 of the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-25 also supports local employment opportunities.

## 6.3 Amenities

6.3.1 Despite the loss in the last generation of several independent shops and a butcher, the village is well provided with most day-to-day services. The main exception is those of medical, legal and some types of healthcare professionals, for which residents have to travel to Charlbury, Woodstock, Long Hanborough, Witney, Oxford or Banbury. The village shop is well stocked, with friendly staff and open very long hours; it also houses the Post Office which is a very important facility for many, and it has an arrangement with Woodstock Pharmacy to receive delivery of prescriptions for Stonesfield residents to collect.

6.3.2 The Stonesfield Slate regularly provides details of a very wide range of other services offered in the village, including building maintenance and repairs, electricians, plumbing, plastering, decorating, roofing, ironing, curtain making, garden maintenance and tree care, accounting and a number of aspects of personal care including hairdressing.

6.3.3 Stonesfield Garage is family-run and a longstanding, much-valued amenity in the village, providing car repairs, MOT testing and car sales.

6.3.4 Stonesfield is served hourly, every day except Sunday, by the Stagecoach S3 bus service to Oxford via Woodstock, and also via Charlbury to Chipping Norton. The Villager V26 bus runs once in each direction to Witney and back on three days a week. Stonesfield has no rail connection; the nearest rail stations are at Charlbury (accessible from Stonesfield by bus) or Long Hanborough for GWR services to Oxford, Didcot and London Paddington, or Hereford and Worcester. There are also very limited GWR services from the railway halts at Finstock and Combe. Alternatively, Oxford Parkway station gives access to Chiltern Railways services to London Marylebone via Bicester Village, and to Oxford, but there is no link by bus.

## 6.4 Sport, recreation and community facilities

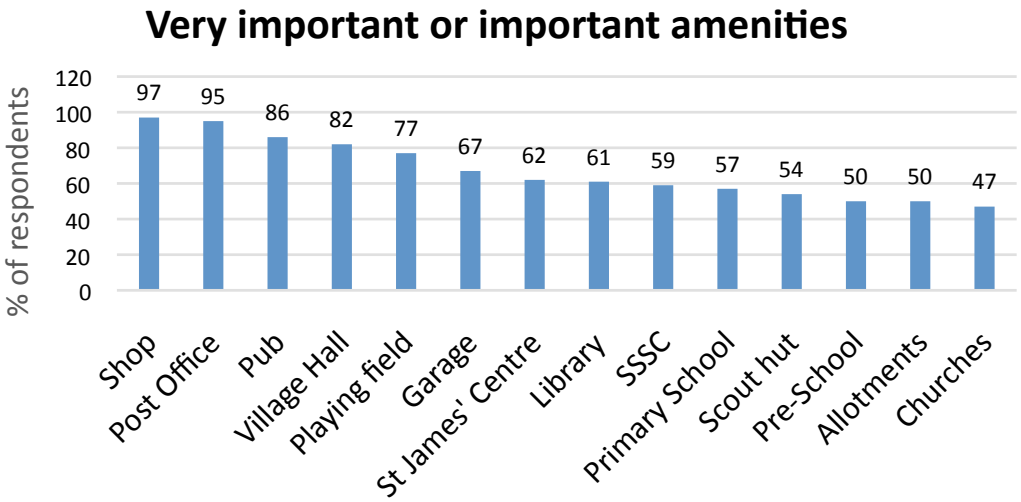
(See also Section 8.2 Wellbeing)

6.4.1 The Village Survey showed an 89% positive response to the statement: Stonesfield is a great place to live with a strong community and lots of activities YES/NO. There was exceptionally high support for the village shop and Post Office, pub, Village Hall and playing fields, with most other facilities scoring highly as well[1].

6.4.2 Stonesfield has a number of good facilities for events, sports, recreation and culture. The Village Hall, as well as the many social support activities mentioned in Section 3, is the main space in the village available for indoor sports. Built in the 1970s, it has a large hall, a meeting room, and also accommodates the Library, which was threatened with closure but is now largely staffed by volunteers, overseen by a paid employee. As the Village Hall is 50 years old, several respondents to the NP Survey commented that some updating is needed. The Village Hall is also home for the drama productions of the Stonesfield Players, for meetings of local organisations and occasional social events. The other main meeting venue is St James' Centre in High Street, and also the primary school and, since summer 2024, the White Horse provide space for meetings and events.

6.4.3 Stonesfield's sports and recreation facilities are centred around the playing fields, with their provision for cricket, football, tennis and the adult outdoor gym and children's playground. The grounds, administered by Stonesfield Playing Fields Association, are used throughout the year by the various sports clubs, and social recreation facilities are provided on the same site by the Sports and Social Club. However other facilities for teenagers are few, which drew comments from several respondents within the Village Survey.

*Fig 6.3: Proportion of respondents rating amenities as very important or important. (SSSC is Stonesfield's Sports and Social Club)*





6.4.4 While Stonesfield has lost many of its community facilities in the last generation, particularly a range of shops, it has retained and actively uses most types of amenity. The village community has benefited significantly from the establishment of the White Horse pub as an Asset of Community Value, as enabled by the Localism Act. When the White Horse, the last remaining pub in Stonesfield, became available for purchase, the associated Community Right to Bid provided for a delay in the disposal process. Having demonstrated that the facility was important to the community and that it was feasible to maintain a viable facility, this enabled the purchase of the pub by the community and avoided a change of use. After a period of several months of renovations and operation by a large team of volunteers, the White Horse re-opened fully with new tenants in June 2024.

6.4.5 The village amenities which are most important to residents, as shown by the Survey (Fig 6.3), are the shop and the Post Office, followed by the pub. More than 50% of respondents in the Village Survey rated thirteen separate amenities as very important or important.[1]

6.4.6 In addition to these specific amenities, the community places a very high value on the green spaces in and around the village which are used for walking, dog exercising, sport and play – see Section 9. The River Evenlode used to be used for recreation, e.g. swimming and paddling, but is currently unsafe due to pollution. The village's two allotments sites are well used, and demand for plots is strong.

6.4.7 In the individual Neighbourhood Plan Survey, out of those who had moved to Stonesfield within the previous five years, 63% gave access to the countryside as their main reason for coming, and 41% said their main reason was to be part of a rural community. Of those who had lived in the village for more than five years, 81% said the reason was for the countryside and 61% for the rural community[1]. The 'feel' of the village and its footpath access to fields, the woods (a designated Village Green), the river and the wider environment are very important for its people, and also for their many dogs, and horse riders. And further, this easy access has measurable impact on physical and mental health.

## Policy SEA2
## Protecting community facilities

Development proposals that would lead to the loss of existing community facilities will not be supported, unless:

- alternative facilities can be demonstrated to provide an equivalent or enhanced provision and level of service and;
- capacity and access for users will be maintained or enhanced.

Where facilities are currently operated on a commercial basis, in the event that they are considered unviable, full consideration should be given to the possibility of maintaining the facility or service on a community-run basis before any alternative option is considered.

## Aims of the policy

- ➜ **To protect and enhance the facilities available in the village**
- ➜ **To maintain health and well-being through available facilities**
- ➜ **To reduce the risk of rural isolation**
- ➜ **To reduce the need for car travel to reduce the impact on climate change**
- ➜ **To maintain local facilities for the current population and future generations.**

## Justification and supporting evidence

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 acknowledges that local services and community facilities provide for the health and well-being, social, educational, spiritual, recreational, leisure and cultural needs of the community. They are essential in meeting the day-to-day needs of residents, providing social meeting places and sports venues. They also assist in maintaining healthy and inclusive communities, sustainable travel patterns and local employment opportunities.

Policy SEA2 is fully consistent with the WODC Local Plan 2031, Policy E3, Re-use of non-residential buildings and E5, Local services and community facilities. The Local Plan 2031 also called for improved telecommunications including superfast broadband throughout the District, with a particular focus on harder-to-reach rural areas – this objective has largely been met in Stonesfield through provision of services by Gigaclear and Openreach.

The policy is also consistent with the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023 – 2025. The relevant policies are Policy CC1: Climate Change – Mitigation (concerned with reducing energy demand through transport and travel), and Policy CE12: Development priorities and evidence of need. Section CE12.3 states that priority should be given to maintaining and enhancing local community amenities and services and improving access to these amenities and services; priority should also be given to supporting local employment opportunities.

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. An example of this working in practice was the White Horse Public House, designated as an ACV whilst closed, which was later acquired by the community in September 2023.

**Endnote**

1 Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan Village Survey 2023

*The White Horse pub was eventually bought by the village in September 2023 and fully reopened in June 2024.*




Photo: Mark Saville

# Community facilities – Comments from the Village Survey 2023

**'Feel' of the village**

*We must continue to protect the size, shape and feel of our village. The infrastructure cannot sustain a large-scale new housing development. Stonesfield is a village and must remain a village and a village that has a post office, shop and pub. All three are essential components of a successful community.*

*I feel that there should be a greater number of small businesses in and around the village providing local employment opportunities, cutting car journeys and making the village a more vibrant diverse community as villages used to be. When we moved here more than 20 years ago there were quite a few local businesses, some of which have been squeezed out to provide expensive housing for people who want an urban lifestyle in a rural setting. We are losing the continuity of families who have lived here for generations because of the high cost of housing. We need young families to live here to keep preschool open. A village without these facilities is a dead village. I'm concerned the village is becoming ever more gentrified and that the connection to the land is being lost, rural life is not just a picture postcard and can be noisy and muddy.*

**The White Horse** (NB: it reopened in June 2024)

*Currently there is no 'heart' to this lovely village. Reopening The White Horse pub would go a long way to providing this.*

*Retain social space including keeping the pub as a pub and the pub garden as a pub garden.*

*Please do everything possible to facilitate the reopening of the White Horse.*

**Village hall**

*Poor fabric / appearance of village hall. Get money from developers or raise funds.*

**Village shop**

*The village store is adequate but could be much improved in what it stocks. It is in desperate need of an exterior 'facelift' more in keeping with the local surroundings.*

*Beautify area round shop - benches and greenery.*

**Teenagers**

*I feel very strongly that there is not much for teenagers to do. They hang around in the kids' playpark which isn't great for them or the kids. There is a bit of land next to the tennis courts where we could build a skatepark which would benefit kids of all ages. It would get them out, socialising, exercising. They would be far enough away from houses to not disturb people. If they had a shelter it would be a good meeting place. When I have been to skateparks in other villages, often the big kids are teaching the little kids and there is usually a nice atmosphere. I don't have a teenager yet but I do wonder what my young child will do in the village as they get older.*

*We still need better provision for teenagers to safely 'hang out' in the village. There seems very little provision for teenagers in the village - evidence of boredom in the incidences of vandalism to cars and anti-social behaviour in the woods.*

**Sustainability**

*The survey didn't prompt much on sustainability solutions for the village, perhaps a missed opportunity? E.g. opportunity for local community renewable energy solutions or waste treatment. Perhaps to ask if increased allotment space or facilities would be welcomed too?*

**Infrastructure**

*Our utilities infrastructure, especially water and drainage, is overstretched with low pressure getting worse with each development, yet planning permission goes ahead.*

*Some means of ensuring adequate infrastructure is in place BEFORE any further development in the village.*


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OU12 FGC

# SECTION 7: **Transport, road use and footpaths**

## 7.1 Sustainable transport

7.1.1 The Village Survey shows there is significant, but unrealised, demand to use more sustainable forms of transport than the car. Over 75% of respondents want to use buses more and 40% would like to cycle more. Of the 60% who work outside of the village, only Oxford, Woodstock and Charlbury are easily accessed by public transport; other destinations will invariably require car use. (Village Survey 2023)

7.1.2 Two bus services operate routes through the village. The S3 service gives access to Charlbury, Woodstock and Oxford and runs at hourly intervals from Monday to Saturday, including an evening service. Rail services on the GWR Cotswold Line have improved in recent years, but the S3 bus service does not dovetail with the train times, so residents will often prefer using a car to taking a bus. The Villager V26 service gives limited access to Witney on three days per week, enabling a short visit to the town before the return bus. In recent years there has been considerable unease about possible cuts to bus services. While it is acknowledged that bus services do not form integral parts of Neighbourhood Plans, it is important that any new development considers how new residents are able to access public transport.

7.1.3 In the Village Survey, residents showed they would very much like to use more sustainable forms of transport.

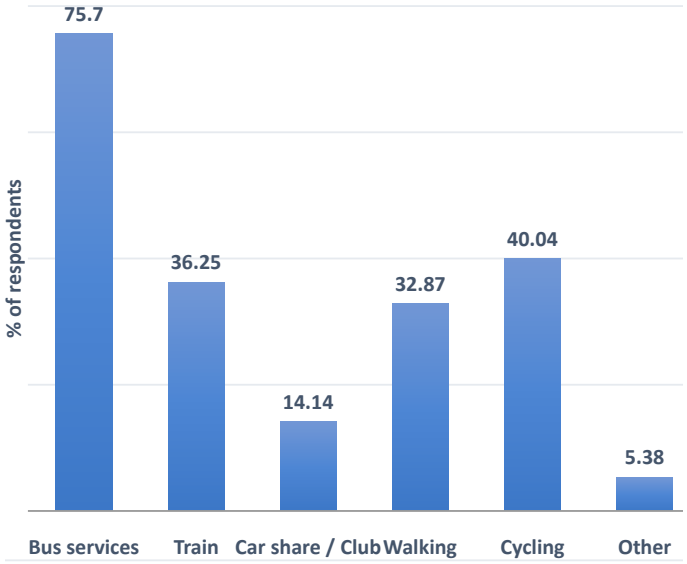
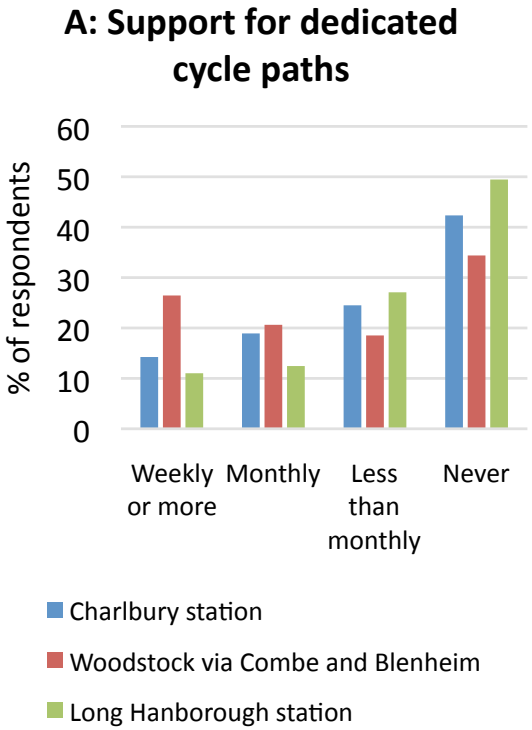



*Fig 7.1: Percentage of survey respondents who would like to make more use of sustainable transport (Village Survey 2023)*



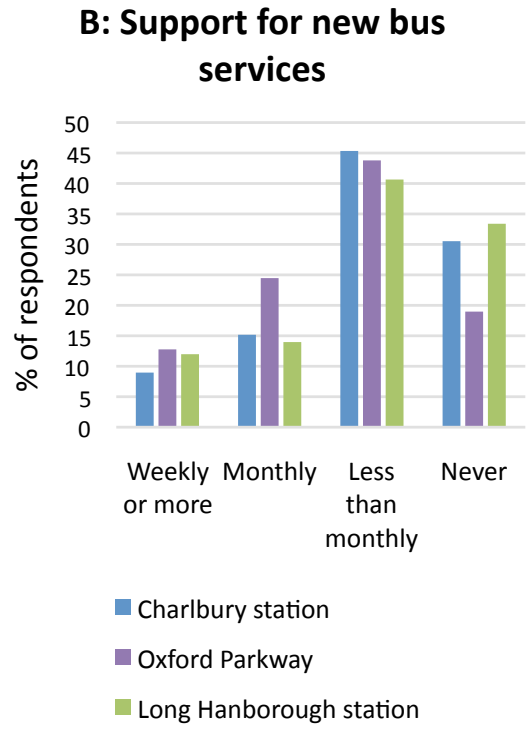




*Fig 7.2: Proportion of respondents indicating they would make more use of dedicated cycle paths (A) or new bus services (B) (Village Survey 2023)*

7.1.4 A rather smaller proportion of respondents estimated that they would make regular use of a dedicated cycle path or a bus to named rail stations, but this was a proportion of all respondents; not a proportion of those who said they would make more use of sustainable transport. Many people would not use a cycle path at all, as clearly many other factors are involved as well as choice of mode of transport.

7.1.5 Leaving aside those who would not need to go to those rail stations by any means, the greatest uptake of cycle paths for frequent use would be to Woodstock and Charlbury. Interest in new bus services to rail stations is focused on occasional rather than regular use.

## Policy ST1 Sustainable transport

ST = Stonesfield Transport

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should demonstrate how they have maintained and, where practicable, enhanced public transport links and ensure that future residents can walk to bus stops safely and easily. Development proposals that would enhance the viability of local bus services and enhance access to bus stops will be supported where they respond positively to the character and appearance of the environment and to the amenity of residents in the immediate locality.

Where appropriate development proposals should secure bicycle storage facilities in accordance with Oxfordshire County Council cycle parking standards.

## Aims of the policy

- **To protect and enhance sustainable means of transport available in the village, and access to them**
- **To maintain health and well-being through available sustainable transport**
- **To reduce the risk of rural isolation**
- **To reduce the need for car travel, in order to reduce its impact on climate change**
- **To maintain local facilities for the current population and future generations**
- **To retain, extend and enhance public transport links to the village**
- **To ensure elderly and disabled residents can access services outside of Stonesfield**
- **To enable everyone to access facilities safely within and outside the village by walking, cycling or public transport (see also Policy ST3)**
- **To improve the safety of roads into and out of the village by reduction in car use**
- **To maximise the availability of dedicated cycling and walking paths to neighbouring settlements such as Woodstock, Long Hanborough, Charlbury and Witney (see also Policy ST3).**

### Justification and supporting evidence

Policy ST1 to encourage and enable greater use of sustainable transport is supported by and endorses the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022-2050 (LTCP5), the WODC Local Plan 2031 and the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025.

LTCP5 calls for improved high quality and accessible bus services in rural areas. It aims to promote coordination between public transport providers to reduce private vehicles' carbon emissions. Developers will be called on to contribute to improving their transport impacts and in some situations a community infrastructure levy may be usable to finance transport schemes.

## Aspiration A1 – Encouraging sustainable forms of transport

There is demand from residents for better bus services to other locations and safer and better provision to encourage walking and cycling. Opportunities for improving the availability and frequency of buses to other towns such as Witney and Chipping Norton will be sought. See also policy ST3 (p63) and Aspirations A3 and A4 (p64).

WODC Local Plan 2031 also calls for improvement to public transport to enable a reduction in car use. Among its measures is provision of high-quality and maintained pedestrian and cycle facilities.

Policy CC1 of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 calls for reduction in energy demand through transport and travel, particularly by reducing car use through increasing green and active travel including public transport, and increasing shared mobility through car sharing schemes. It also promotes public transport, walking and cycling, adequate cycle parking and adequate infrastructure for charging electric vehicles, scooters and bikes.

## 7.2 Road safety

7.2.1 The older parts of Stonesfield comprise some very narrow, single-track roads, mostly without pavements; in particular, Church Street, Churchfields, High Street, Boot Street, Laughton Hill and Witney Lane. There is a dangerous bottleneck with no pavement on Pond Hill, between the turnings for Pumbro and Longore, which is part of the main route through the village but poses a risk to all users. There is also a blind corner at the Churchfields end of Church Street and a blind corner where Pond Hill becomes Woodstock Road at their junction with Church Street. Concerns have been expressed for the safety of Stonesfield School children crossing Pond Hill when going to and from school on foot. Most roads are well used by pedestrians to access facilities and connect with the many footpaths leaving the village. Policy ST2 addresses this matter. Pavements are not a practical proposition in the 'narrow roads' areas of the village, which include Pond Hill, Church Street, Churchfields, Peaks Lane, High Street, Boot Street, Laughton Hill and Witney Lane and therefore development on and off these streets which would significantly increase vehicular traffic will not be supported.

7.2.2 A Stonesfield Parish Council working group, SAFER, has had some success in improving safety within the village, reducing speed limits to 20 mph, installing speed indicators on the main approaches, and instigating speed watch activities. In addition, a group of parents, with support from the SAFER Chairman, in mid-2020 (post the first Covid lockdown) established a "safe cycling route" for secondary school pupils through Blenheim estate to Marlborough School, Woodstock, with further support from Blenheim and the School. Whilst this has mitigated some of the risk of cycling to school in Woodstock from Stonesfield it has by no means eradicated all risks, as the route still includes dangerous stretches of main road, e.g. the dip, hill and bend on the Combe Road just after it leaves Stonesfield.

7.2.3 There are further road safety concerns where roads with no pavement leave the village, particularly along the Ridings to Ruddy Lane (the Shakespeare Way), and Combe Road to the turning for the Oxfordshire Way; both are well used by walkers and cyclists. The main Woodstock Road leaving the village is used by cyclists and a few walkers, but is hazardous due to the road width and speed of passing vehicles.

7.2.4 Responses to the Village Survey identified roads and safety as a recurring theme; measures to improve the safety of Pond Hill would be welcomed.

### Policy ST2
### Road safety & easy access for all

Development proposals on or off any of the narrow roads in the village, especially within the conservation area, which would substantially increase traffic volumes on these roads, will not be supported. These narrow roads include, in particular, Church Street, Churchfields, High Street, Boot Street, Laughton Hill and Witney Lane. (See Fig 7.3 on following page)

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should demonstrate that they do not substantially increase congestion, danger to drivers, cyclists and pedestrians, particularly at school pick-up and drop-off times.

Outside the narrow roads area referred to above, development proposals which make the remainder of the village, including its green spaces, more accessible for wheelchair users, mobility scooters, buggies, people with limited mobility or disabilities, e.g. dropped kerbs, will be particularly supported. All development proposals should, therefore, demonstrate how they would address the movement requirements of people of all ages and abilities on pavements, pathways, and at road junctions and crossing points, ensuring the need to protect and enhance the historic and natural environment of the village, in accordance with other policies within this Plan.

### Aims of the policy

- **To enhance road user and pedestrian safety**
- **To prevent increase in traffic congestion**
- **To encourage healthy and sustainable means of transport, particularly walking and cycle use.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

This Policy is compliant with WODC Local Plan Policy T3 on public transport, walking and cycling, and BC1 which calls for enhancement of public transport and pedestrian and cycle routes and infrastructure, with car parking managed to reduce car use for short journeys. It also complies with the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan, which concerns measures to reduce congestion, noise, pollution, reduced safety for walkers and cyclists and rat-running along minor roads and through villages.




*Fig 7.3 Stonesfield's narrow roads. Pavements are not a practical proposition in the 'narrow roads' areas of the village, which include Pond Hill, Church Street, Churchfields, Peaks Lane, High Street, Boot Street, Laughton Hill and Witney Lane and therefore development on and off these streets which would significantly increase vehicular traffic will not be supported.*

## Aspiration A2 – Improving road safety

Pedestrian and traffic safety measures designed to improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair and buggy users and other road users on narrow village roads, at junctions and identified 'black spots' within the Parish are supported in principle, especially on roads which also serve as residential streets, pedestrian access routes to facilities or footpaths through the village.

Priority will be given to locations identified by residents as particularly unsafe (Pond Hill between the turnings for Pumbro and Longore, Church Street, Churchfields, High Street, Boot Street, Laughton Hill and Witney Lane, along The Ridings to Ruddy Lane, Combe Road to the Oxfordshire Way and Woodstock Road to Ditchley Gate). Such measures must also be consistent with the policies within this Plan. In particular, they must seek to protect the character of the conservation area and the Cotswolds Natonal Landscape.

## 7.3 Walking and cycling

7.3.1 As stated in 7.2, the responses to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey identified roads and safety as a concern, especially where residents had the opportunity for free text.

7.3.2 Encouraging cycling and walking is a benefit to all, as it will help reduce traffic and parking issues in the village. A large proportion (66%) of people move around the village on foot and it is important to ensure that new developments also have walking access. It will help people to stay healthy as well as encouraging community spirit with pedestrians able to stop and talk to each other.

7.3.3 Some parts of the village do not have a pavement, particularly in the narrow streets of the conservation area, sections of Pond Hill and the Ridings, making walking hazardous, particularly for young children and frail or disabled residents. Some residents are discouraged from walking or cycling in the village because their homes are too far away from amenities and/or the roads to be used are not well suited to walking and cycling as they are busy, have no pavement or are poorly surfaced.

7.3.4 The narrow roads, bottlenecks and blind bends identified in 7.2 all present road safety issues for those walking and cycling around the village.

## Policy ST3 – Walking and cycling

Where appropriate, development proposals should secure bicycle storage facilities in accordance with Oxfordshire County Council cycle parking standards.

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should promote and enable safe and attractive walking and cycling routes to village facilities wherever practicable.

Development proposals which promote connectivity across the village through new or improved pedestrian and cycling links between different parts of the village will be supported.

Development proposals, otherwise satisfactory, which would directly or indirectly improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists along the approach roads to the village or offer alternative safe cycle routes avoiding these roads will be particularly supported.

Development proposals which would contribute to the availability of new or improved dedicated cycling and walking paths to neighbouring settlements with due regard for proportionately managing the character, aesthetics, flora and fauna, will be supported. In particular, support will be given for the construction of cycling/walking pathways to the following destinations along the following or other suitable routes:

- along the verges of the Stonesfield Straight for access to Blenheim Park, then by a negotiated dedicated cycling/walking path through Blenheim Park to Woodstock;
- the adaptation of the Oxfordshire Way between Stonesfield and Charlbury (already a bridleway, therefore with cycling entitlement) to include a dedicated cycling-friendly surface;
- to Long Hanborough and
- to Witney.

Measures that would improve the effectiveness and safety of walking and cycling along The Ridings to the junction with the B4437 will be supported.

See also Policy SEL7, p94.

7.3.5 In addition the area around the primary school and pre-school (Church Street, The Cross and High Street) suffers congestion at school drop-off and pick-up times, with narrow approach roads and almost no parking. Parents often use the car to deliver and collect children as some of the narrow approach roads can feel unsafe to pedestrians at busy times. Out of 59 Survey respondents with pre-school or primary age children, 35 (59%) of children walk there, 12 (20%) use a cycle or scooter, but 16 (27%) are taken by car. For secondary age children (who necessarily travel beyond the village) 65% travel by school bus and 32% by car; less than 3% cycle, despite the establishment of a cycle route to Woodstock via Blenheim. The low use of this cycle route raises a question that the route may still not widely be perceived to be "safe."

7.3.6 There are many public footpaths and bridleways leaving or near to the village, which are very well used, including several long-distance paths (see Section 9.6). There are safety concerns where roads leave the village and there is no pavement, particularly along the Ridings to and beyond Ruddy Lane (for the Wychwood/ Salt Way and Shakespeare Way), and the lower end of Combe Road to the turning for the Oxfordshire Way. The main Woodstock Road leaving the village is used by cyclists and a few walkers, but is hazardous due to the road width and speed of passing traffic.

## Aims of the policy

- **To improve pedestrian safety, particularly in parts of the village that do not have a pavement**
- **To encourage walking or cycling to village facilities, addressing issues where homes are too far away and/or access is along roads that are not well suited to walking and cycling due to being very busy, having no pavement or being poorly surfaced**
- **To reduce traffic and parking issues in the village**
- **To ensure that new developments have walking / cycling access**
- **To help people to stay healthy and encourage a sense of community, where people can stop and talk to each other**
- **To respond to aspirations from residents identified in the Village Survey and the Landscape Assessment (Appendix B)**
- **To improve access to footpaths, bridleways, rail stations and nearby towns by walking or cycling**
- **To support the aims and priorities of the Oxfordshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2023 .**

## Justification and supporting evidence

Proposals which make the village safer and more accessible to cyclists and pedestrians (including wheelchair users and buggies), and which respect the village's historic character, would be actively supported and encouraged by Policy ST3.

Policy ST3 is consistent with the provisions of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 and the Oxfordshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2023[ii]. It also supports the ambitious aims of Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022-2050 (LTCP5) – see p66. Implementation of this Plan will help protect the long-term sustainability, vibrancy and safety of the neighbourhood.

The WODC Local Plan 2031 states that all development should be provided with safe vehicular access, and safe and convenient pedestrian access to supporting services and facilities. Its Policy T3 requires that new development will be located and designed to maximise opportunities for walking, cycling and use of public transport, or to promote home working. New development should contribute towards new and/or enhanced public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure, to promote healthier lifestyles, particularly for safe and convenient routes to school.

Policy ST3 acknowledges that enabling walking and cycling is essential to reducing car use and also encourages more healthy lifestyles. Providing high quality, well-designed and maintained pedestrian and cycle facilities as well as clear signage is critical, so new development must be matched by investment in new and enhanced pedestrian and cycle infrastructure. Recommended actions are additional footways and cycle paths and improvements to those already in place. Use of public transport can be encouraged through provision of walking and cycling routes to bus stops, and cycle parking at bus stops.

In addition, WODC Local Plan Policy BC1 (Burford – Charlbury sub-area strategy) calls for enhancing public transport and pedestrian and cycle routes and infrastructure together with managing car parking to reduce car use for short journeys.

Policy ST3 also takes into account the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025. This acknowledges the problems in rural villages of congestion, noise and air pollution, damage to roadside verges, reduced safety for non-motorised road users and traffic 'rat-running' along minor roads and through villages. It calls for measures to address these issues in new developments including off-road routes for walkers and cyclists, and appropriate signage.

## Aspiration A3 – Safer cycling

New measures should promote safer cycling opportunities, in particular by providing safe routes to/from the village along Woodstock Road, The Ridings, Combe Road and the road from Fawler, as well as making routes within the village safer. Advantage should be taken of any opportunities to support the priorities of the Oxfordshire Joint Health and Well-being strategy by promoting safer cycling and supporting climate action by reducing dependence on motorised vehicles.

## Aspiration A4 – Safe access to footpaths and bridleways, rail stations and nearby towns

There is demand from residents for safer and better provision to encourage walking and cycling. To encourage this, Policy ST3 seeks to make improvements within the village, but there is also an aspiration to improve routes for walking and cycling on the narrow roads leaving the village, connecting to other towns, railway stations or footpaths.

Provision of facilities along the Ridings, Woodstock Road and Combe Road, as these roads leave the built area and onwards, will be sought providing they proportionately protect the aesthetics and character of the approaches and can address any material impacts on flora and fauna. In particular cycle path links with local schools within and outside the village will be supported, provided they do not disproportionately have an adverse effect upon the landscape and scenic beauty of the countryside.

The employment of statutory mechanisms for promoting walking and cycling where appropriate will be sought, e.g. the possible designation of the Ridings as a "quiet lane" pursuant to section 268 Transport Act 2000 to recognise the use of the Ridings by cyclists and walkers linking with the Wychwood Way and Shakespeare's Way and to enable the restriction of the speed of mechanised vehicles accordingly.



*Car parking in High Street and on pavements at school drop-off and pick-up times is a significant issue*

## 7.4 Non-residential parking

7.4.1 See also SH11 Residential parking in Section 5.6, page 48.

7.4.2 Stonesfield has a lot of narrow streets, particularly in the older parts of the village comprising the conservation area. These streets are an important part of the character of Stonesfield, but they also create difficulties for traffic and parking. Some properties lack adequate private parking and residents need to park on the street.

7.4.3 The school and pre-school have particular access issues due to the narrow roads around them and inconsiderate parking at drop-off and pick-up times. Visitors to the houses, churches, cemetery and St James' Centre can struggle to find parking. The village shop has a few parking spaces, but can have short-term parking issues.

7.4.4 The buses can at times be impeded by parked cars, particularly in Laughton Hill and Pond Hill, and cars parked in these areas cause problems for pedestrians as there are no pavements.

### Policy ST4 – Non-residential parking

Proposals which alter demand and usage of services and facilities should ensure that appropriate parking provision is provided. Proposals for extensions and alterations of existing buildings should not result in a net reduction of parking spaces.

Proposals for appropriate additional public parking accessible to services and facilities in the centre of the village and/or conservation area will be supported where they respect the character and appearance of the conservation area and do not have an unacceptable impact on the amenities of other residential premises in the immediate location.

Measures to limit parking that causes a safety or nuisance issue, particularly around the school, shop, village hall and the corner of Churchfields and Church Street, will be supported where they respect the character and appearance of the conservation area and do not have an unacceptable impact on residential amenity in their immediate location.

## Aims of the policy

- **To improve safety for residents and road users and reduce nuisance**
- **To retain or enhance the attractiveness of the village within the Cotswold National Landscape**
- **To design and site any new development so that it does not exacerbate congestion and parking problems.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

There is a tension between accommodating the ever-increasing demands of using and parking the car (which residents show by their present habits they will naturally tend towards unless regulated) and the environmental harm this causes. Policies ST3 and ST4 partly address this issue, but a dialogue with the Oxfordshire County Council, as the Highway Authority, should be maintained to review other solutions.

Policy ST4 has been developed to be broadly consistent with Local Plan 2031 Policies, the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan LTCP5 and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) parking standards. However, given the existing parking problems in Stonesfield, and the number of people who identified it as an issue in responses to the Village Survey, this Plan goes further than the Local Plan 2031 and OCC parking standards, so that proposals which address residents' concerns will be considered favourably.

In summary, the County Council aims to reduce car use by reducing parking provision. This poses a dilemma for Stonesfield where public transport is inadequate and local roads present a hazard for cycling and walking: reliance on cars is therefore very high. This Plan recognises the need to address the safety and availability of alternative transport before some of the changes identified by the County Council can be effective.

Any new development must make proper provision for the additional parking needs it generates, and must not reduce or place extra pressure upon the existing on-street parking. However, in Stonesfield there are few opportunities for providing additional parking spaces for residents and users of local shops and facilities. Stonesfield's streetscape is important to the character of the village and its position within the CNL, an area of outstanding natural beauty. See also the Village Character Assessment 2024 (Appendix D), and Sections 5.4 and 5.5 of this Plan (pp 42-47).

See also Section 5 – Housing, which includes a policy for Residential parking (SH11).

Policy ST4 addresses these important issues. The policy is particularly relevant in the historic core of the village, given the age and design of properties and their lack of parking facilities. The policy recognises that some developments may propose alternative parking facilities to replace spaces that would otherwise be lost. It also recognises that many developments will be extensions or changes to existing properties, e.g. development in gardens or sub-division of properties, so it is important that adequate provision for parking is made in these circumstances; Policy SH11 supports this aim (p 48).

## OCC's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) 2022–2050

This Plan sets out an ambitious ideal of progress towards making walking, wheeling and cycling central to future, active, travel. It acknowledges that residents of Oxfordshire's many villages are currently mainly dependent on the car for travel to work and to access facilities or train stations.

The aim is to set up a county-wide Strategic Active Travel Network (SATN), primarily for utility cycle journeys, linking villages to towns, other centres of employment and to public transport connections. This will also serve as a recreational network and will support the rural economy by encouraging economic tourism.

Priority will be given to links to rural train stations, especially from towns not served by a train station, and between urban areas, sources of employment and villages. It will consist of off-road cycle tracks alongside rural main roads, routes (mostly on road) along rural minor roads and routes along upgraded public rights of way and other permissive paths.

LTCP5 also gives particular attention to encouraging children to cycle – although about 90% of children own a cycle, only 3% of secondary age children in Stonesfield cycle to school (Village Survey 2023). The LTCP5 will review and improve cycle routes to school and implement a number of plans to facilitate local travel networks and School Streets around schools. It will encourage cycle training (including for families), ensure new school locations are designed to meet School Street standards and increase 'bike libraries' to enable low-income families to access equipment.

Another key pillar of LCTP5 is the use of the Healthy Streets Approach in Oxfordshire in order to make walking, cycling, public and shared transport the natural first choice. A new approach is needed that reduces the dominance of vehicles and improves streets for all users. Improving streets to encourage walking and cycling will help to improve public health, reduce road noise, improve air quality and make local areas more relaxing. Furthermore, the Healthy Streets approach will help to tackle inequalities and improve inclusivity by ensuring streets are accessible to all users.


Oxfordshire County Council
Welcome to
Stonesfield
Primary School

# SECTION 8: **Health and wellbeing, education and young people**

## 8.1 Health

8.1.1 The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 reports that the health of people resident in this District is better that the England average, with life expectancy around one year longer; for men (1.5 years) and women (0.8 years)[1]. In the 2021 Census, 86.7% of the people of Stonesfield reported their general health as very good or good[2].

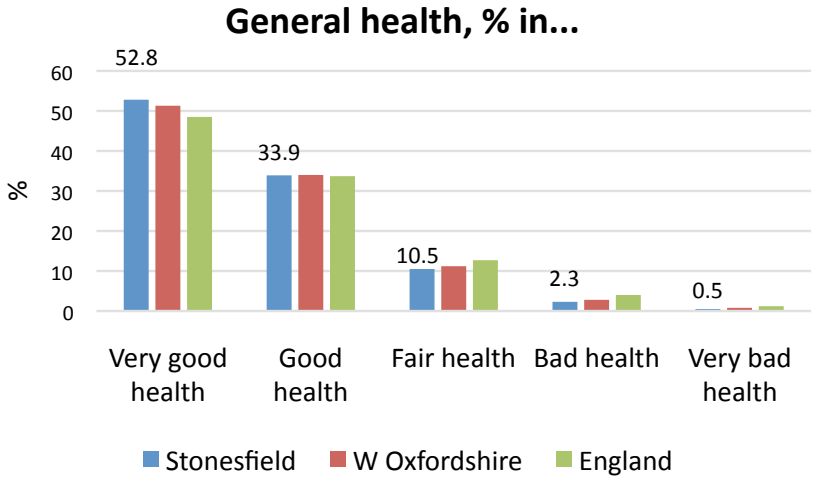



*Fig 8.1. Self-described general health, 2021 (Office for National Statistics: Census 2021, not standardised by age)*

8.1.2 Stonesfield people are generally more physically active (73% undertaking at least 150 minutes exercise per week in the past month, excluding gardening) than those of West Oxfordshire (70%) and significantly more than the England average (64%)[3]. The most prevalent health conditions (high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes) affect a comparable proportion to the England average but the proportion affected by depression (6.1% in Stonesfield, compared with 9.9% for England) is significantly lower[4].

8.1.3 However, West Oxfordshire has a relatively older demographic profile and the proportion of people aged 55+ is projected to increase by 54% in the period 2011-2031, and by 2040 people aged 60+ are expected to make up a third of the population[1]. While life expectancy is rising, more people are living into old age with disabilities. More than 18% of respondents to the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan Survey stated that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot, because of a health problem or disability (including problems related to old age) that had lasted, or was expected to last, at least 12 months. The Housing Needs Assessment did not indicate a specific need to provide housing for elderly or disabled people, but it was recommended that Stonesfield Parish Council should be mindful of the trend beyond the period covered by this Neighbourhood Plan.

8.1.4 There are no communal residential facilities (care homes) in Stonesfield.

### Access to health services

8.1.5 As a small rural village, Stonesfield has no GP surgeries, no dentist and no pharmacies, which makes its residents dependent on their own, public or other transport to other towns and villages for these primary healthcare services (see Section 7.1 Sustainable transport). According to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey, most residents are registered with the GP surgeries in Woodstock (54%) Charlbury (26%), or Long Hanborough (13%), each of which also has a pharmacy close by or on the premises. For dental care, they need to go to Long Hanborough (20%), Witney (16%), Charlbury (13%), Woodstock, Oxford, Kidlington or Chipping Norton.

8.1.6 It is highly relevant that in June 2024 the five GP partners of Woodstock Surgery sent an open letter to Woodstock Town Council, the District Councils for West Oxfordshire and Cherwell, the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & West Berkshire Integrated Care Board and all their patients. The letter was a call to action to address the need for investment in new, larger premises able to accommodate additional staff and resources: the surgery was operating at full capacity, with doctors managing patient loads exceeding those of comparable local practices. At the same time, local housing developers were planning to submit proposals for between 500 and 1000 new homes. Without strategic planning and investment, patient care would suffer. Leveraging Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, they urged, could secure contributions from housing developers to expand healthcare facilities to meet the increased demand.

8.1.7 Referral to secondary care from the three GP surgeries involves travel to the hospitals in Oxford and Banbury, or, for X-rays and minor injuries, to Witney Community Hospital. NHS physiotherapy and

podiatry is available in Witney, while for all other types of subsidiary and complementary care, residents are looking at the private sector, either in the village or further afield.

8.1.8 The Stonesfield shop has an arrangement with Woodstock Pharmacy to receive delivery of prescriptions for Stonesfield residents to collect. Averose Pharmacy in Charlbury has a separate delivery service to Stonesfield residents' homes, and Hanborough Pharmacy in Long Hanborough delivers directly to the homes of house-bound Stonesfield patients.

8.1.9 In view of the dependence on other locations for medical services, and also the shortcomings of public transport, Stonesfield is fortunate to have had, since 2008, a team of volunteer drivers (see 3.1.25) who drive residents to medical appointments in other towns and villages, and to the hospitals in Oxford and Banbury. The Neighbourhood Plan Survey also showed, relevant in this context, that more than 91% of respondents would support the provision of a consulting room within the village hall for use by local GP practices and other health services such as physiotherapists, chiropodists and health visitors. But although a visiting GP service like this was operating in the 1990s, current constraints on the NHS make it an unlikely proposition today. Indeed, although the idea received strong support, one of the free comments in the Survey was concern that it would not be possible there to meet modern NHS standards on privacy and dignity.

## 8.2 Wellbeing

8.2.1 Wellbeing is increasingly recognised as the outcome of a very broad complex of factors in people's personal, domestic and wider environment which contribute to their health and mental outlook. Helping people to stay physically and socially active, living their lives in good health for longer is also sound economics as it postpones their need for health and/or social care.

8.2.2 In terms of life in a village, many of the aspects of this Neighbourhood Plan are closely involved in generating wellbeing, and it aims to preserve and enhance them for the future. The facilities and services of Stonesfield are all important: they include the shop and post office (Section 3.2.7), the pub (3.1.23), the community and leisure activities (3.1.28), outdoor sports including cricket, football, tennis at the playing fields and the Sports and Social Club, and indoor sports Tae Kwondo, pilates, high intensity interval training and Zumba at the village hall, (3.1.26), the library (3.1.29), the school, pre-school and baby and toddler group (3.1.20, 8.3), and the churches (3.1.24).

8.2.3 All offer opportunities for active interaction and prevention of rural isolation and loneliness. Living in a rural area can compound a sense of isolation and even deprivation, which heightens the need for social connection, so access to social support and opportunities for socialising have significant health benefits. Also highly significant to both physical and mental health are the many different ways of enjoying the green spaces within the village (Section 9.3), the allotments (Policy SEL4)) and the many-faceted countryside (Section 9); see in particular the policies relating to important views (SEL2), local green spaces (SEL4), footpaths (SEL7) blue/green corridors (SEL5) and dark skies (SEL9).

8.2.4 Affordable housing is also very important to wellbeing in terms of adequate energy efficiency and insulation. The Oxfordshire County Council Health and Wellbeing strategy 2024-2030 urges that social, private rented, and new build homes should be of a good material standard and maintained to prevent health issues, especially from cold, damp, and overheating which is becoming a more significant issue due to climate change. Poor quality building and maintenance, including energy inefficiency, causes significant health issues and widens health inequalities. Living in a cold home, perhaps damp and mouldy, increases the chance of illness. Section 11 of this Plan and Policy SBD2 address the question of quality building guidelines.

8.2.5 As well as the village's facilities and services, residents benefit from a number of community initiatives, run by volunteers, which contribute greatly to the wellbeing of its people. These include the Stonesfield socials run by the Food Group (Section 3.1.21), providing free meals and social opportunity every week and a quarterly Community Café; also the group's joint actions with Stonesfield Mutual Aid to provide food to those in need. Other groups which help people to enjoy life are the Carers' Group (3.1.22) and the Lunch Club (3.1.25) providing a cooked meal and company for the elderly, the Repair Café (3.1.22); also the Stonesfield Voluntary Transport Scheme (3.1.25) whose drivers take those without transport to local and urban medical appointments.

## Policy SHW1 – Working towards better health and wellbeing

Development proposals designed to further the Oxfordshire Health and Well-Being Strategy 2024–2030 and in particular addressing health inequalities, preventing ill health and promoting closer collaboration between relevant organisations and services will be supported where they otherwise comply with development plan polices.

8.2.6 One of the areas where the local authorities can make the greatest contribution to improving wellbeing is by encouraging greater physical activity and ensuring access to recreation facilities. The OCC Health and Wellbeing strategy 2024-2030 calls for a wide approach, including every child learning to swim, ride a bike and be active for 60 minutes per day; while improved walking and cycling routes encourage their greater use in travel to work and school. Policy ST3 is directed towards achieving this. For older people, being helped to be physically and socially active reduces falls, keeps dementia and other chronic conditions at bay, and enables them to live independently in their own homes and among their communities for as long as possible. Policy SHW1 seeks to weave key elements of the Strategy into a land use Plan. These building blocks are addressed respectively throughout this Plan through the policies on sports facilities (Section 6.4 and Policy SHW2 below), on housing (Sections 5 and 11), on the countryside and natural environment (Section 9) and on the economy and amenities (Section 6). Development proposals will be particularly supported which seek to promote one or more of the 'building blocks of health' defined by the Strategy.

8.2.7 During the development of this Neighbourhood Plan, new initiatives have added to Stonesfield's community-led services which relate to wellbeing, and even more are in development specifically for young people (section 8.4). A men's walking group which started in spring 2025 offers gentle exercise and a chance to chat 'about anything that's on your mind'. The Food Group has obtained substantial funding to support new sports equipment and sports and fitness training for young and older residents. It also ran a very successful activity day in partnership with WODC for families and teenagers, that will showcase the activities available in the village and potentially drive up participation.

8.2.8 However, the WODC Open Space Study 2013-2029 (for Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton) recognised that increased participation in recreation will create greater demand and pressure on existing facilities and make retaining and maintaining them even more important.

8.2.9 In order to retain capacity, it may be helpful at a local level to explore dual-use arrangements between sports clubs or other community groups and existing playing fields, including schools, given appropriate precautions. An example of this is the potential collaboration between the Stonesfield Strikers football team and The Marlborough School, Woodstock.

8.2.10 Another approach, according to the Open Space Study, involves wider thinking to consider relocation of an open space or sport and recreation facility, especially if this would enhance its quality or accessibility for existing users, or to use land which is not suitable for another purpose. The quality, quantity and access to facilities at neighbourhood level would all need to be considered.

8.2.11 It would need to consider where different types of facilities and space - children's playgrounds, sports pitches, young people's facilities etc. - are to be located. It would also identify if any green space is no longer needed and its disposal or re use could be used to fund improvements to other spaces. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and grants could play a crucial part in delivering improved and/or enlarged open space, sport and recreation facilities.

## Policy SHW2 – Protecting and enhancing local sports facilities

SHW = Stonesfield – Health – Wellbeing

The development of new leisure facilities and the extension of sports and leisure facilities to meet local needs will be supported.

Measures to improve access to such local facilities, especially on foot, will be supported where they respond positively to the character of their immediate locality.

Development proposals 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 should provide or contribute towards the provision of necessary improvements to open space, sports and recreational buildings and land.

## Aims of the policies

- **To maintain, or improve where possible, the health and wellbeing of residents through increased choice and quality of shopping, leisure, recreation, arts, cultural and community facilities.**
- **To encourage protection, maintenance and further development of local services and facilities in Stonesfield.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

The WODC Local Plan 2031 lists among its aims for West Oxfordshire that the rates of physical activity will increase through improved leisure and recreation provision, leading to a reduction in rates of obesity.

Policy SHW1 supports the following objectives of the WODC Local Plan 2031:

CO12: Look to maintain or improve where possible the health and wellbeing of the District's residents through increased choice and quality of shopping, leisure, recreation, arts, cultural and community facilities.

CO13: Plan for enhanced access to services and facilities without unacceptably impacting upon the character and resources of West Oxfordshire.

Policy E5 of the Local Plan 2031 on local services and community facilities, states that the Council will support the development and retention of local services and community facilities to meet local needs and to promote social wellbeing, interests, interaction and healthy inclusive communities. From the supporting text: the Council will continue its approach of resisting the loss of local services and community facilities as a result of change of use proposals. In considering proposals involving the change of use of such facilities, the Council in consultation with the local community, will take into account the importance of the facility to the local community particularly in meeting day to day needs.

Policy EH5 on sport, recreation and children's play requires that new development does not result in the loss of open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, subject to the conditions as given above. 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, with regard to the Open Space Study (2013)[5] and Playing Pitch Strategy (2014)[6] for West Oxfordshire.

Policy SHW2 is supportive of the following Open Space policies of the WODC Open Space Study 2013-2029:

OS9 Priorities for improvement [of the quality of open spaces] include the enhancement of the existing provision for children and young people and the improvement of sports pitches.

OS10 Management plans should be developed for the main parks, sport and recreation grounds. These priorities could be considered in neighbourhood plans and by the local community.

OS11 Contributions received through CIL (community infrastructure levy, ensuring that a new development contributes to the cost of the infrastructure that the development will rely on) should enable investment in all types of open space.

OS14 CIL plays a crucial role in delivering open space, sport and recreation facilities through new development, and open space should be considered as a priority in the CIL.

Community-led improvements to open space, sports and recreational facilities will be strongly supported and the Parish Council will use its ability to leverage funding support by way of grants, S106 or CIL funding.

## 8.3 Education

### Pre-School and Daycare

8.3.1 The Pre-School in Glover's Yard, also Ofsted-rated as Good, caters for children aged 2–4. Its Breakfast Club and After-School Club are available for primary school children, who are taken across the road to school and collected after school by Pre-School staff; there is also all-day holiday provision.

8.3.2 Stonesfield Pre-School is to move into premises on the primary school site in autumn 2025, although it will remain a separate entity.

### Primary School

8.3.3 Stonesfield's primary school, in the heart of the village in High Street, provides for children aged between 4 and 11. Between 2019-2023 it had a school roll of about 100 children (102 in 2023, falling to 96 in October 2024 and 70 in September 2025). As a result, one class has been removed. This downward trend in pupil numbers is likely to be due in part to the nationwide decline in fertility rates since 2010 and partly that people are starting families later, but other issues are considered further below.

8.3.4 The capacity of the school was re-examined by a 2016 report prepared for Stonesfield Parish Council in the light of proposed additional housebuilding in Stonesfield (William Buckland Way and Farley Lane). The school faced limitations in its premises, plus the additional traffic at school times from those outer parts of the village would increase the difficulty of access to the school in an already narrow and bending road.

8.3.5 The report considered four possible levels of increase in school numbers (for more details, see HNA 2024 (Appendix A), pp32-35). However, the subsequent uptake of new housing did not contribute the projected increase in pupil numbers. In 2024, the current school roll meant the school was operating at the level of use for which it was originally constructed (see the Housing Needs Assessment (Appendix A) for further details), but the last year has indicated a greater drop in numbers than previously foreseen. A continuing dialogue with the school should be pursued by the Parish Council to ensure its continued viability. The Parish Council has set out its intention to work with the school to make Stonesfield as attractive as possible to young families (whether remaining in the village where they set up home, or entering it from other locations). This intention ties in with the policies in Section 5 Housing, to ensure provision of smaller, affordable housing for young families (see Policies SH1, SH2, SH3, SH4, SH6 and SH7); and also those in Section 6 Economy and amenities (Policies SEA1 and SEA2), and Section 8 (Policies SHW1 and SHW2).

8.3.6 The school had a 2023 Ofsted rating of Good. Since September 2024 an overall effectiveness is no longer given by Ofsted inspectors; instead schools are graded on a four-point scale for key aspects of performance. The Ofsted rating on inspection in October 2024 for behaviour and attitudes, personal development and

*Stonesfield Primary School playing field*



early years provision was good; however the quality of education, and leadership and management were rated as requiring improvement.

8.3.7 The school year 2024-25 presented a number of issues involving leadership and staff turnover. These are in the process of being addressed by the appointment in June 2025 of the new executive headteacher, who will work part-time for 2025-26 alongside the new full-time Head of School, who will become substantive head in due course. The stated aim of the executive headteacher is 'to work together to restore and revitalise the school'. Preparation for the 2025-26 school year has involved drafting new policies and planning professional development for staff.

8.3.8 A high proportion (59%) of children attending Stonesfield Primary School or Pre-School walk there from home and a further 20% use a cycle or scooter. This has given rise to many concerns from parents about road safety, which have been mentioned in Section 3.4 Key challenges and examined further in Sections 7.2 and 7.3.

8.3.9 Out of respondents to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey, some Stonesfield children also attend the primary schools of Combe, Woodstock, Freeland and private schools in Oxford (The Dragon, Magdalen College). The Survey did not enable distinction between primary and secondary age children attending those private schools which take both age groups: in Witney (Cokethorpe, The King's School), Banbury (Sibford) and Oxford (Oxford High), so it is possible that some primary age children from Stonesfield attend these schools.

## Secondary schools

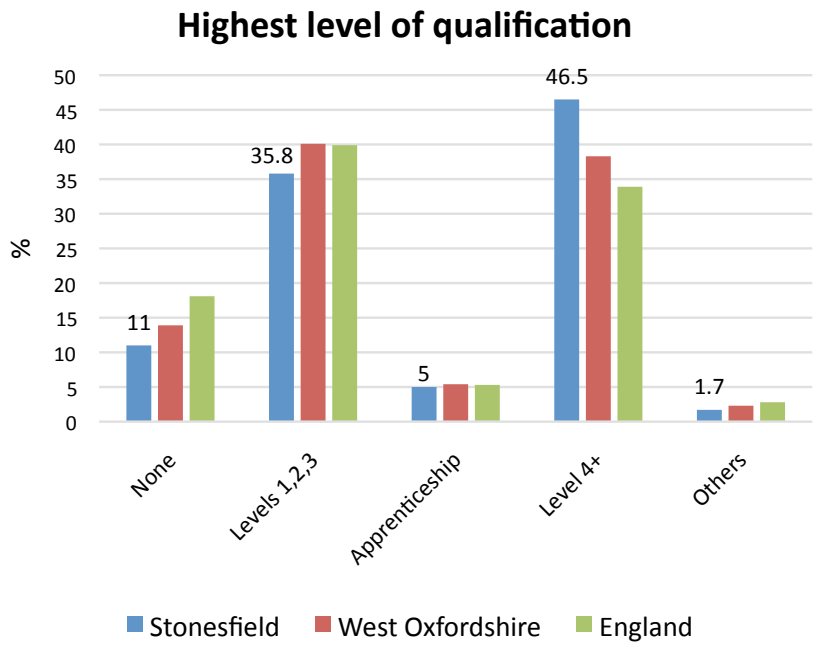
8.3.10 According to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey, the majority of primary school leavers from Stonesfield (46.9%) move to the Marlborough School, Woodstock. Other Stonesfield secondary-age children attend schools in Witney (Cokethorpe, The King's School), Banbury (Sibford, Swalcliffe, Frank Wise) and Oxford (Oxford High).

8.3.11 Stonesfield's secondary age children largely travel there by school bus (57%) or by car or taxi (28%); 12.5% use a public bus and only 2.5% ride a bicycle.

## Further education

8.3.12 Few households in Stonesfield have anyone currently attending further or higher education; 12% have one person; 4% have two and 83% have none. However, out of the people who have left Stonesfield in the five years before the Survey (2018-2023), the second-highest number (after seeking employment) did so to gain access to further or higher education (see HNA 2024 (Appendix A), p25). Education is clearly a high priority. Out of current residents, Stonesfield has a significantly higher proportion (46.5%) with a degree or higher qualification than West Oxfordshire as a whole (38.3%), which is itself higher again than the England average (33.9%).

*Fig 8.2: Proportion of population showing highest level of qualification, Stonesfield, West Oxfordshire and England 2021[2]. Level 1: single O-level, GCSE or NVQ; Level 2: five O-levels or GCSEs; Level 3: two A-levels; Level 4: degree or higher qualification*



## 8.4 Young people

8.4.1 A significant number of residents responding to the first draft of this Neighbourhood Plan rightly asked for it to take more account of young people, who represent part of the future of our village. The scope of the first draft had been modelled on the approved earlier plans of some other parishes – and the intervening years have thrown young people's specific needs into much clearer focus.

8.4.2 Young people aged between 10-19 years represent 11.5% of Stonesfield's residents[7], which is very comparable to the national average although the proportion of people in Stonesfield aged over 65 years is higher. These proportions are not expected to change significantly.

8.4.3 This section considers the needs of young people, and how the Plan can begin to address them in respect of housing and recreation.

### Housing

8.4.4 The Plan (Section 5) is fully supportive of the sort of housing likely to be needed by young people who have left their parental home; i.e. one- or two-bedroom houses, which are most likely to be rented rather than purchased. Policy SH3 (p40) sets out the Plan's support in its provisions for the mix of affordable rented housing:

> Development proposals for affordable/social rented dwellings, which include the provision of dwellings which have been designed to cater for the specific needs of young people and working-age people to address the trend of an ageing population in the village and/or people with disabilities, will be supported where this approach is evidenced by the most up-to-date information available demonstrating an identified need from within the parish.

8.4.5 Other provisions of particular relevance are:

> Policy SH1 (p37) on meeting the housing needs of the parish of Stonesfield:
>
> Development proposals which otherwise comply with relevant policy, and are wholly comprised of affordable or social housing to rent for people on lower incomes, will be particularly supported…
>
> Policy SH6 on lower-cost housing:
>
> Development proposals for lower-cost homes for sale will be supported where they otherwise comply with other relevant policies in this Plan, and include measures to ensure that future resale of such homes is constrained so that the homes remain low-cost in perpetuity.
>
> and Policy SH7 (p43) on location of new affordable homes (rural exception sites):
>
> Development of small-scale Rural Exception Sites for affordable housing, defined as up to 10 houses, will be supported, provided they meet an affordable housing need identified in the Housing Needs Assessment, and provided they do not form part of any development constituting a major development …
>
> Small scale Rural Exception Sites for affordable housing on the edge of the village, where development would not normally be permitted, will be supported, subject to the same limitation…

8.4.6 Policy SH6 recognises that housing costs in Stonesfield are much higher than the national average; in particular those of buying a house or privately rented property. It therefore sets out to maintain the vitality of the village in the longer term by ensuring the supply of lower-cost property, and to support developments which might include shared ownership or lower-cost purchase for people who have a village connection.

8.4.7 Policy SH7 is designed to meet the affordable housing need identified in the detailed Housing Needs Assessment 2024.

### Recreation

8.4.8 As in all rural villages with limited facilities, young people are sometimes at a loss for how to spend their time. In the mid and late teens, schools impose an increasing burden of work and often anxiety at a time when social relationships, hopes and plans for adult life are developing, and energy is high. Space and outlets for recreation and support are needed.

8.4.9 A 2020 survey undertaken by WODC among young people aged 11-18 in West Oxfordshire schools and colleges, including those attended by Stonesfield pupils[8], set out to find out what they would like to be able to do, what barriers were stopping them, what they needed and what was a concern.

8.4.10 This gave a good insight: young people want to be active and to have access to activities that are inexpensive. They want safe spaces where they can 'hang out' and socialise; they are active online. Mental health is a real concern, as are worries about climate change. And they want to feel their views are heard and acted on.

8.4.11 Sixty-five percent of the young people in the survey do not want to live in West Oxfordshire as adults – the main reason for this is that they want to travel and experience new things. However, approximately 30% want to move away because of the lack of opportunities, because they don't like the area they

live in, because it is too expensive or too rural. The restricted opportunities referred to may be limited employment possibilities and/or high housing costs.

8.4.12 The activity types that were most wanted by young people in the survey (but of limited availability in West Oxfordshire) were physical sports, outdoor / adventure, music / theatre / dance, youth club and crafts. Football and basketball were the most wanted sports, followed after some distance by horse riding and skateboarding. Indoor activities favoured most were dance, playing an instrument and drama. The main reasons for not being able to access these activities were that they were located too far away or too expensive. They would welcome:

- More social activities or clubs, which would reduce the tendency to wander around and of some, to resort to more anti-social behaviour
- More safe, sheltered social spaces, where young people can meet and have fun without having to spend a lot of money, particularly in the evenings
- Reduction of cost of public services such as bus passes, to enable easier and more frequent travel to where activities are held.

8.4.13 Major concerns were the availability of mental health support, social media protection, and the apparent lack of action on climate change which for many generated uncertainty about the future.

8.4.14 So how does Stonesfield measure up to these needs? As a small village located some distance from more active towns, its resources for young people are limited (Section 3.1.27). They centre on the various sports clubs, the Scouts, and drama and backstage opportunities with the Stonesfield Players. The activities of the Climate Emergency Group would interest those concerned in that area. The playing field offers a seasonally-limited place to socialise, but there are no coffee shops and the pub and the Sports & Social Club have rather older customers.

8.4.15 However, some recent initiatives are making a difference as they come into play in 2025. As mentioned under Section 8.2 Wellbeing, the Food Group has won funding for 2025 to finance sports equipment to ensure young people have free access to tennis and to coaching. A plan started over the summer of 2025 and continues into the new term. The very successful activity day run by the Village Hall Committee and WODC attracted local families and teenagers to a range of activities that are available in the village. In particular, the teenagers are keen to get involved in a village youth group. Plans are underway to see how to make that happen with support from parents, WODC and the community.

8.4.16 In this Neighbourhood Plan, Policy SHW1 (under Section 8.2 Wellbeing, p70), sets out steps to ensure that open spaces, sports and recreational buildings and land are not lost to new development, unless they are no longer needed and an equivalent replacement is made. Demand for these facilities will clearly increase, with the growing population and the heightened emphasis on the importance of outdoor exercise for both physical and mental wellbeing. They therefore need to be protected or replaced, or preferably enhanced.

## Aspiration A5 – Supporting our young people

Making a significant difference to village facilities, which would require both land and investment, in order to resolve the issues and concerns of young people, is beyond the scope of this Plan.

However the Parish Council may be able to work with the WODC, landowners and developers and to seek funding, drawing on District resources and CIL (community infrastructure levy) resources where available, to support more social initiatives, augment sports facilities and develop safe meeting places. This could encourage participation by young people and parents in collaboration with one or more of the volunteer groups which have already organised recreational activities, either within the existing facilities or through developing new options.

**Endnotes**

1 WODC Local Plan 2031

2 Office for National Statistics: Census 2021

3 Sport England (Active Lives Survey 2020) – small area data 2018/2019; quoted in OCSI Parish Profile 2021

4 House of Commons Library 2019; quoted in OCSI Parish Profile 2021

5 WODC Open Space Study 2013–2029

6 Source: West Oxfordshire Playing Pitch Stratergy and action plan report, February 2022

7 Office for National Statistics: Census 2021

8 WODC Youth Needs Assessment – Report for informal Cabinet – 17th August 2022



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# SECTION 9: **Countryside and natural environment**

## 9.1 Overview: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

9.1.1 Stonesfield is the first settlement within the Cotswolds National Landscape (formerly referred to as the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) after crossing the CNL boundary on the approach from Woodstock. It therefore contributes crucially to the first impressions of the landscape and scenic beauty of the CNL gained on entry.

9.1.2 Protecting views and the landscape is important to residents. Many of Stonesfield's residents enjoy the beauty of walks through Stockey Bottom woods with bluebells in spring; Stonesfield Common (SSSI) with a diversity of flowers and butterflies in summer, and views over the Evenlode; the Oxfordshire Way and the ridgeline to the west of the parish, with views across Ruddywell; and the open pastoral views to the north of the village. The opportunity to live in beautiful countryside is highly rated by residents.

9.1.3 Stonesfield's green spaces are varied and well-used, whether for children's play, sports, growing food (allotments) or for general enjoyment of open air and the beauty of hedgerows, trees and wildlife. The network of public footpaths is well used, and extensible for more active travel.

9.1.4 Stonesfield is home to a number of legally protected and notable species (e.g. farmland birds, whose populations are in decline, glow worms, and rare protected meadow clary) as well as important habitats (Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks Site SSSI). There are opportunities for green spaces/wildlife sites to be better, bigger, more and joined up (as set out in the Cotswolds Management Plan for improving biodiversity) along three main blue/green corridors.

9.1.5 Poor water quality due to sewage pollution of the River Evenlode is a major concern to residents; its banks are well used by picnickers in summer. Surface water drainage is an issue rather than flood risk.

9.1.6 Stonesfield is a dark skies settlement, and has one of the lowest levels of light pollution in the Cotswolds, allowing stars to be seen at night, and avoiding negative impacts on people and wildlife.

## 9.2 Landscape character

9.2.1 Approaching Stonesfield, the first local landscape areas to be passed through, as identified by the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA, Appendix B) are Stonesfield Inner Fields (if coming from Woodstock) or Bagg's Bottom (coming from Combe). Stonesfield Inner Fields form the rural landscape setting for the settlement and contribute to the special qualities of the CNL. However, recent housing development at William Buckland Way has created a hard edge to the village in these views, and the LCA notes that additional development will further threaten the integrity of its valued rural character.

### Protecting the Cotswolds National Landscape

### Policy SEL1 – Protecting the Cotswolds National Landscape

SEL = Stonesfield - Environment - Landscape

All development proposals should ensure they conserve and enhance the landscape, countryside and natural beauty of the Cotswolds National Landscape, including its wildlife and heritage.

All development proposals must demonstrate how they preserve and enhance landscape, natural beauty and existing scenic value. Proposals must show how they comply with policies in the CNL Management Plan, Position Statements and any other associated relevant guidance.

Development proposals for affordable housing that meet identified housing needs in either the District or the parish will be supported where they are consistent with the great weight that must be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape, natural scenic beauty, wildlife and heritage of the National Landscape.

### Aims of the policy

- ➜ **To emphasise the importance of the provisions in the NPPF in relation to National Landscapes**
- ➜ **To ensure that development proposals demonstrate how they will conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

Policy SEL1 adds local weight to the policy approach of the NPPF[2], Policies EH1 and EH2 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031[3], and the Cotswolds Management Plan 2023-2025[4].

WODC Local Plan 2031 policy EH1 places great weight on conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, landscape and countryside of the AONB including its wildlife and heritage. Policy EH2 seeks to conserve and enhance the character and features of the landscape. Policy SEL1 is also consistent with the CNL Management Plan and with the NPPF policy on protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

The NPPF further requires that the scale and extent of development within an AONB should be limited; permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. In addition, in the Burford-Charlbury Sub Area, the WODC Local Plan 2031 also states that any proposed development within the AONB will be expected to conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty.

Policy SEL1 is endorsed by the Village Character Assessment (Appendix D) which placed particular emphasis on the importance of views to the character of the village and the wider parish.

## Protecting important views and landscape

9.2.2 The whole of the parish of Stonesfield is located within the Cotswolds National Landscape. It is clear that the surrounding countryside and what it offers is what the people of Stonesfield predominantly LIKE about living in Stonesfield, as the NP Survey 2023 revealed (see 3.2.1 and Fig 3.8 p22).

- Around 310 responders identified what they liked most about Stonesfield as the countryside, walks, quietness, rural setting, dark skies
- Over 220 responders gave the same reasons as the second most important aspect, and
- Over 155 gave these reasons as the third most important aspect.

## Policy SEL2 – Protecting important views

Development proposals should respond positively to Stonesfield's character as a gateway from the nearby UNESCO Blenheim World Heritage site into the Cotswolds National Landscape, and further the statutory purpose of the CNL to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. Development proposals which detract from Stonesfield's character or inhibit furtherance of the statutory purpose of the CNL will not be supported.

The Plan identifies key views on Figure 9.3. The design, layout, height and massing of development proposals should respond positively to the identified key views. Development proposals that unacceptably impact on the identified key views will not be supported.

## Aims of the policy

- ➜ **To protect important views and landscape, recognising that the village sits inside the boundary of the Cotswolds National Landscape and the landscape takes on major significance for visitors and residents as a result**
- ➜ **To provide protection from development which would otherwise cause harm to important views and landscape**
- ➜ **To capture the recommendations of the Landscape Character Assessment 2024 and Village Character Assessment 2024.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

Policy SEL2 is consistent with and adds local value to the WODC Local Plan 2031 policy EH1, which places great weight on conservation of the CNL; and EH2 which seeks to conserve and enhance the character and features of the landscape, including its tranquillity and dark skies. It is also consistent with the Cotswolds Management Plan and with the NPPF policy on protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The NPPF further requires that the scale and extent of development within a CNL should be limited. In the Burford-Charlbury Sub Area, the Local Plan 2031 states that any proposed development within the CNL will be expected to conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty.

Stonesfield is identified in the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) as a key settlement in Character Area 6; the Lower Evenlode Valley. The Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix B to this Plan) notes that one of the most striking qualities of Stonesfield's landscape is the contrasts within such a small parish area - the intimate wooded dry valley at Stockey Bottom, the sloping Stonesfield Common with views across the Evenlode's floodplain, the views across the Ruddywell from the ridgeline on the west of the parish, and the views across the open, expansive landscape of the arable plateau north of the village, part of the village's rural setting.

The Landscape Character Assessment notes that the Parish of Stonesfield contains the five local landscape character areas (LLCAs) defined in Policy SEL2. These are defined by the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines 2016 as two key landscape character types (LCT): 11 - Dip Slope Lowland, and LCT 16 - Broad Floodplain. It sets out the valued qualities and the threats and issues relating to each of the five LLCAs, with guidance for how they should be protected. Full details are given in the Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix B).

Policy SEL2, Figs 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4 and Appendix C: Local Green Spaces describe the LLCAs surrounding Stonesfield, which all contribute to the special qualities of the CNL and to the wider rural landscape character. Further relevant descriptions from the Landscape Character Assessment adds justification for the protection of these landscape character areas:

LLCA A – Ruddywell Dry Valley Farmland – has open views over large arable fields in the northern part and pastoral pockets in the south abutting the settlement edge, indicating remnants of historic field enclosures.

LLCA B: Stockey Bottom and Banks, and Stonesfield Common – offers expansive views from Stonesfield Common across the broad Evenlode floodplain, and significant recreational value of both open grassland and woodland walks, with views from the woods to the pastoral landscape across the dry valley.

LLCA C: Stonesfield Inner Fields and Bagg's Bottom – both give views across the arable landscape towards the village, or valued outward views across the remaining pastoral fields southeast of Stonesfield Manor. Views across this open landscape from the Oxfordshire Way long-distance footpath, from Woodstock Road and Combe Road offer open views and intervisibility with the LLCA D and long-distance views to the south-west beyond the parish boundary.

LLCA D: Callow Farm to Limbeck Farm Plateau Farmland – presents the wider rural landscape, particularly dip slope lowland. The Shakespeare's Way long-distance path affords long-ranging open views south across the farmland, reinforcing the landscape's visual sensitivity. The former Roman road, Akeman Street, gives clear views towards Stonesfield across the open farmland.

LLCA E: King's Wood to King's Wood Bottom Wooded Farmland – principally includes King's Wood and farmland to the north and east of this as well as a narrow tract of farmland between King's Wood and Stonesfield Riding to the west. The LCA concludes that this area is visually divorced from the rest of the parish, but it has a pronounced and strong unspoiled rural character that contributes to the Cotswolds National Landscape.

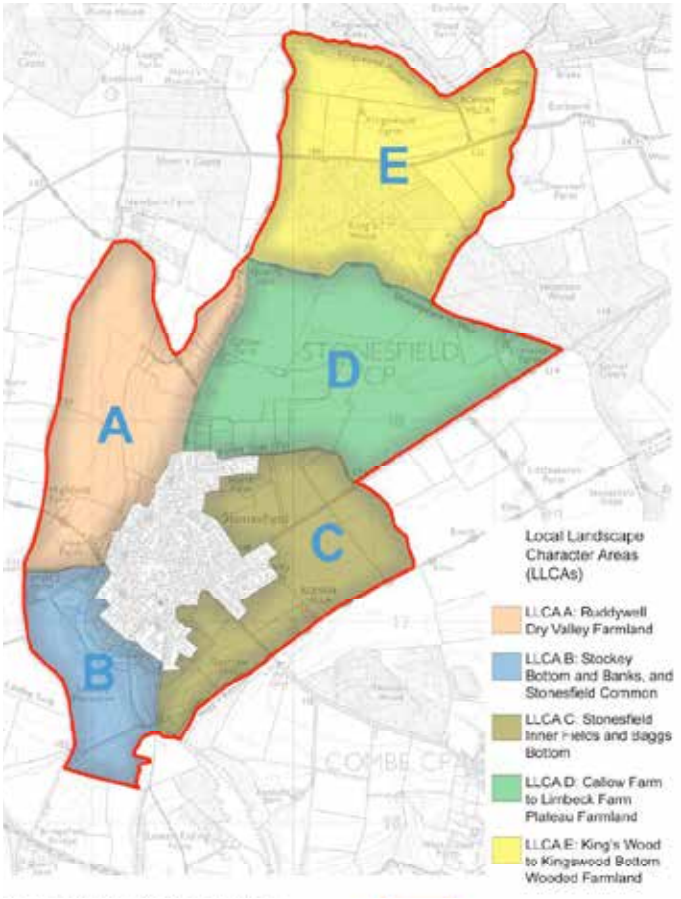
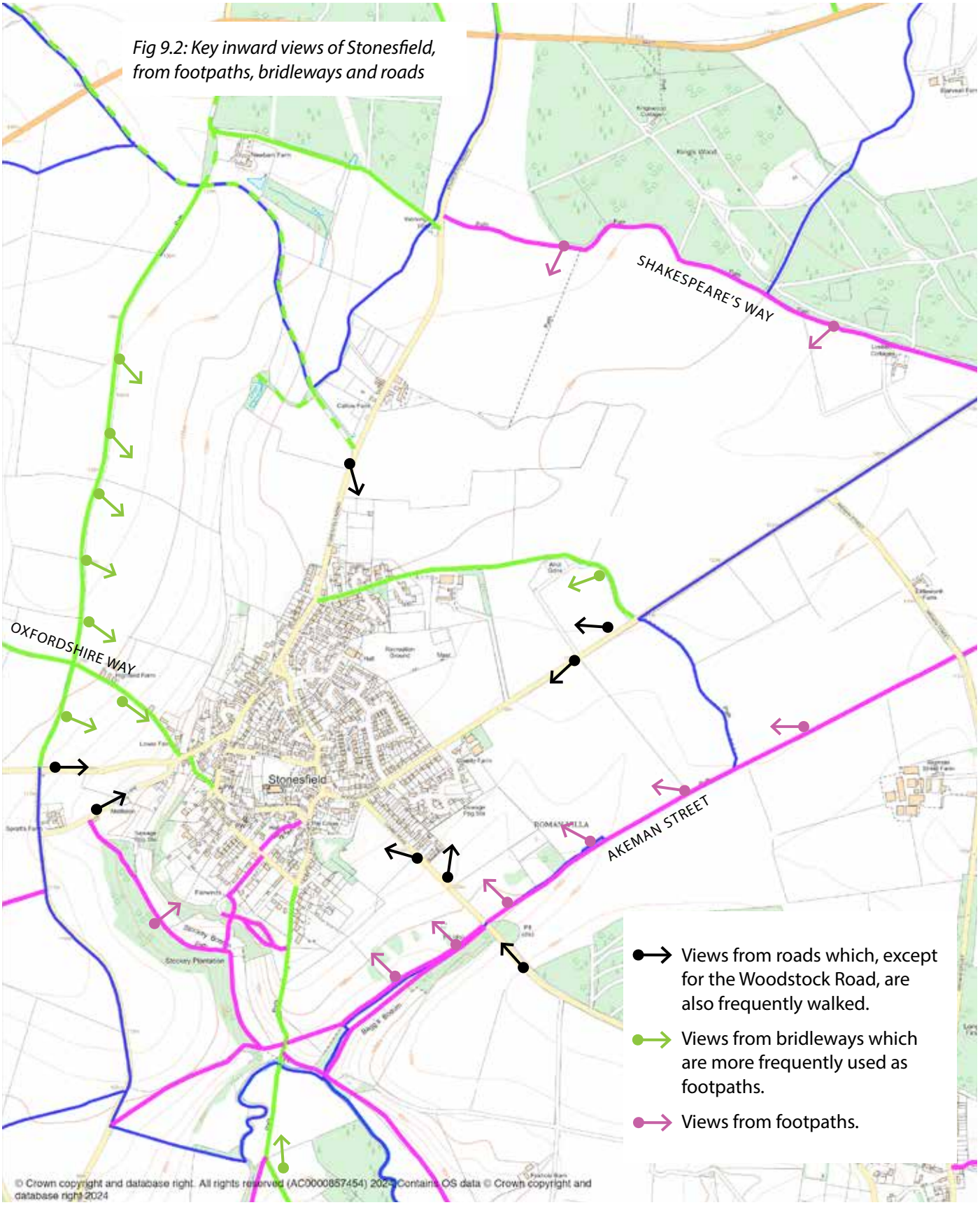



*Fig 9.1: Stonesfield's Landscape Character Assessment Areas (LLCAs)*

*Fig 9.2: Key inward views of Stonesfield, from footpaths, bridleways and roads*



## Protecting the Evenlode Valley

9.2.3 The distinctive Evenlode Valley and the dry valleys to Stonesfield's west, south and east are a particular local landscape feature and highly sensitive to development. The 1998 West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment describes the landscape of the Lower Evenlode Valley as 'a distinct landform unit which … creates a sense of enclosure and a particular sense of place. The valley floor has a distinctly pastoral, intimate and riparian character with a close visual relationship with its enclosing valley sides…'.

9.2.4 The Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix B) explains that the parish of Stonesfield lies on a plateau on the eastern side of a shallow, dry north-south valley typical of limestone dip-slope landscape. The valley (Ruddywell valley) gives a distinct western edge to the village, and at its southern extent it curves around the village to form the more enclosed valley of Stockey Bottom. Further south at the end of Stockey Bottom, the dry valley meets the Evenlode in its broad floodplain.

## Policy SEL3 – Protecting the Evenlode Valley and the adjacent dip-slope lowland

Development proposals located south-west, south or south-east of the existing building line that defines the settlement boundary along Brook Lane, Churchfields, Church Street, Boot Street, Combe Road and Witney Lane will be supported only where they meet the following criteria:

- they respect and where possible enhance the landscape
- major development proposals can robustly demonstrate that the consequent public benefit outweighs any harm to the landscape.
- any detriment to the landscape has, as far as practicable, been minimised and mitigated.

## Aims of the policy

➜ **To recognise the scenic beauty and importance of the Evenlode Valley and adjacent dip-slope lowland**

➜ **To provide continuity in protection of this important environment extending from the neighbouring area (Charlbury, as recognised in its own Neighbourhood Plan)**

➜ **To protect these areas from inappropriate development.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

The whole of the parish of Stonesfield is located within the Cotswolds National Landscape. This policy is consistent with WODC Local Plan 2031, Policy EH1, which places great weight on conservation of the AONB, and EH2 which seeks to conserve and enhance the character and features of the landscape, including its tranquillity and dark skies.

It is also consistent with the Cotswolds Management Plan and with the NPPF policy on protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The NPPF further requires that the scale and extent of development within a CNL should be limited (paragraph 182). In the Burford-Charlbury Sub Area, the Local Plan 2031 states that any proposed development within the AONB will be expected to conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty (paragraph 9.6.47 and Policy BC1).

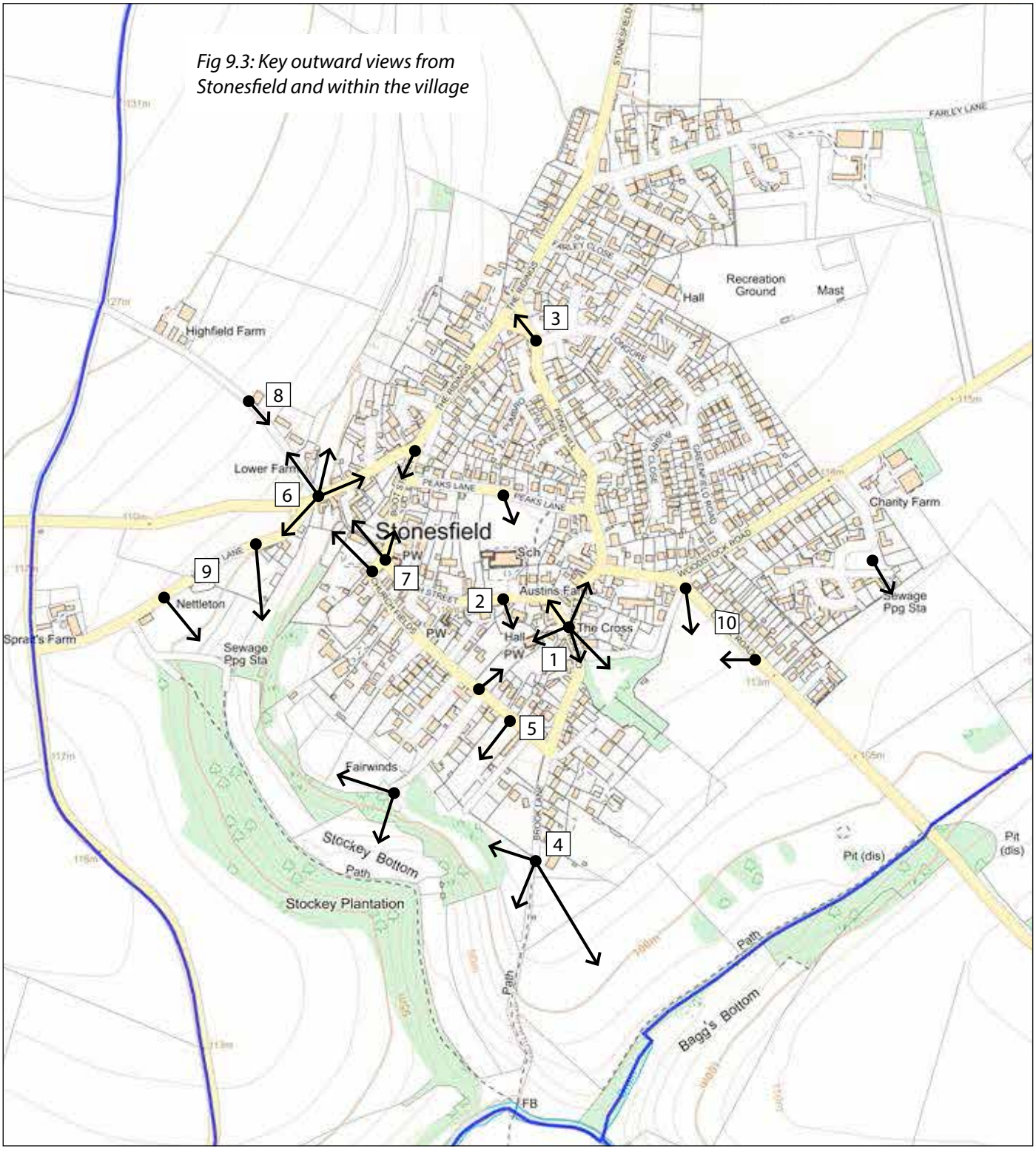
In addition, Stonesfield is identified in the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) as a main settlement in Character Area 6, the Lower Evenlode Valley.

The landscape's quality, significance and contribution to the AONB indicated its development sensitivities, including that:

- unspoiled valley floor farmland and the minor valleys are of particularly high quality and sensitive to development;
- open valley-sides are visually sensitive and development would be highly prominent and exposed.

The Landscape Character Assessment of February 2024 (Appendix B) endorsed these findings. The strong landscape of the Evenlode Valley to the south of the village and the dry valleys to its west, south and east are highly sensitive to development and so visual impact will be a key consideration for any proposed development in this area. The 1998 West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment illustrates the extent of the Upper Thames Tributaries-designated environmentally sensitive area and the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks Site, designated SSSI, which lie alongside the Evenlode Valley.

*Fig 9.3: Key outward views from Stonesfield and within the village*





## Protecting important views looking out of the village

The Village Character Assessment (Appendix D) highlights the importance of landscape views to the character of the village and the wider parish. A specific policy protecting the Evenlode Valley (Policy SEL3) has therefore been developed, and also for protection of Local Green Spaces (Policy SEL4).

Policy SEL2 of the Plan is based on the fixed viewpoints shown on Fig 9.3. Other views that provide a positive experience of the village's landscape character landscape are shown in the Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix B). These other views underpin the Plan's more general approach towards landscape character.

The following views are identified as important views for the purpose of this policy:

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. Pond Hill towards the White Horse: a pleasant view towards the Green and the public house, accentuated by the topography
4. Brook Lane over the Evenlode: a wide vista and an exceptionally well-walked and much appreciated local view from the village edge
5. From Churchfields, over the allotments and also glimpsed between buildings along Churchields: an open green view where the rural edge of the village is clearly appreciable
6. Views in all directions at the bottom of Laughton Hill, along the valley, Witney Lane, Oxfordshire Way - a highly attractive entry point to the village
7. 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 over Well Lane to the surrounding countryside, and the focal building of the Methodist Chapel with traditional materials and buildings
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. Village edge views from Witney Lane down the dry valley of Stockey Bottom
10. Kinetic views from the Combe Road looking out over Stonesfield Manor paddock towards Baggs Bottom, and back towards the Grade II listed Manor House with glimpses of the Church tower beyond.

## 9.3 Local green spaces

9.3.1 Access to green spaces is as important in a rural village as in towns, for the physical and mental health and well-being of its residents. Larger green spaces such as the community and school playing fields offer not only space for sports and recreation, but space for rest and appreciation of the open air, or a pleasant open aspect from a village lane. Greens, gardens and spaces within the street pattern provide welcome and high-quality views, contribute to biodiversity and give access to the broader countryside.

9.3.2 In the Village Survey, 573 out of 584 respondents (more than 98%) felt that protecting green spaces was very important or important[1]. This is a very clear message and responds to the NPPF policy that allows communities to 'identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them' by designating them in their neighbourhood plans as Local Green Spaces.

9.3.3 It is important that any further infill of gaps between properties is made in accordance with Policy SH8 (p45) to minimise loss of green space, and does not affect the Local Green Spaces designated in this Plan.

## Aims of policy SEL4

- **To provide access to a network of high-quality open spaces**
- **To provide opportunities for sport and physical activity which is important for the health and well-being of the village**
- **To protect areas of importance to the village as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment 2024 and identified as special in the Neighbourhood Plan Survey 2023**
- **To recognise the long-term importance of these green spaces to the village and ensure they provide a legacy in terms of the village character for future generations to enjoy.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

Stonesfield sits entirely within the Cotswolds National Landscape and significant parts of the village are a designated conservation area as shown on the map (see Section 10: Historic environment, p103). The village is therefore subject to the relevant development restrictions for conservation areas. Within the WODC Local Plan 2031, these include a requirement to be sympathetic to Local Green Spaces such as paddocks, greens, gardens and other gaps between buildings. The Local Plan also stresses that street trees, gardens, parks and open spaces have a particularly important role in the emergence of green infrastructure networks that need to be integral to the design and planning of new development. See also Policy SH10 (e) on residential gardens, p47.

The NPPF emphasises that access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change. It says that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless strict conditions are fulfilled, and it advocates the designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans, so that communities can identify and protect green areas of importance to them. The importance of protecting and enhancing open spaces for sport and physical activity is highlighted in Sections 3.1.26 and 8.2, Policy SHW2 – Protecting and enhancing local sports facilities, which also draws on the attention given to this by the WODC Playing Pitch Strategy and the WODC Football Facilities Plan.

The areas of land designated as Local Green Spaces by Policy SEL4 are all within or physically very close to the community of Stonesfield. Each one is 'special to the local community', as demonstrated by the approval given in the Village Survey for designation in each case. The features of each designated Local Green Space which indicate its particular local significance are listed in full in Appendix C.

In the Village Survey, residents were asked to what extent they agreed with the need to protect the 15 original proposals for designated green spaces – support ranged between 73% and 93%. All of the spaces achieved strong agreement from 57% or more of the 578 respondents. Eighty per cent of respondents registered strong or slight agreement for protection of ten out of the 15 designated spaces[1]. Subsequent investigation and discussions with landowners required division of two sites, and removal of one space and part of several others.

Stonesfield's allotment holders have a particularly special reason to value their two Green Spaces (nos. 4 and 13 in Fig 9.4). The 27 Churchfields allotments are cared for by 44 residents and there is a waiting list. This green space links the historic centre of the village with Stockey Bottom (designated a Village Green) and is rich in wildlife. Allotment holders rated physical and mental health as their most important benefits as well as the opportunity to grow fresh food; spare produce is donated to the village. In 2019 they raised over £3,000 for installation of four new water troughs to supply fresh water. At the Woodstock Road site, 18 allotments are maintained and any being vacated are immediately filled. Allotment holders enjoy open farmland views and proximity to a wide range of wildlife; some have created ponds and hung bird boxes and feeders.

*"Growing our own organic and chemical-free produce is a sustainable source of food for the family over the summer and autumn months. It has introduced my children to the joy of growing your own food, which they take forward into their adult lives."* Comment from Stonesfield allotment holder, April 2024

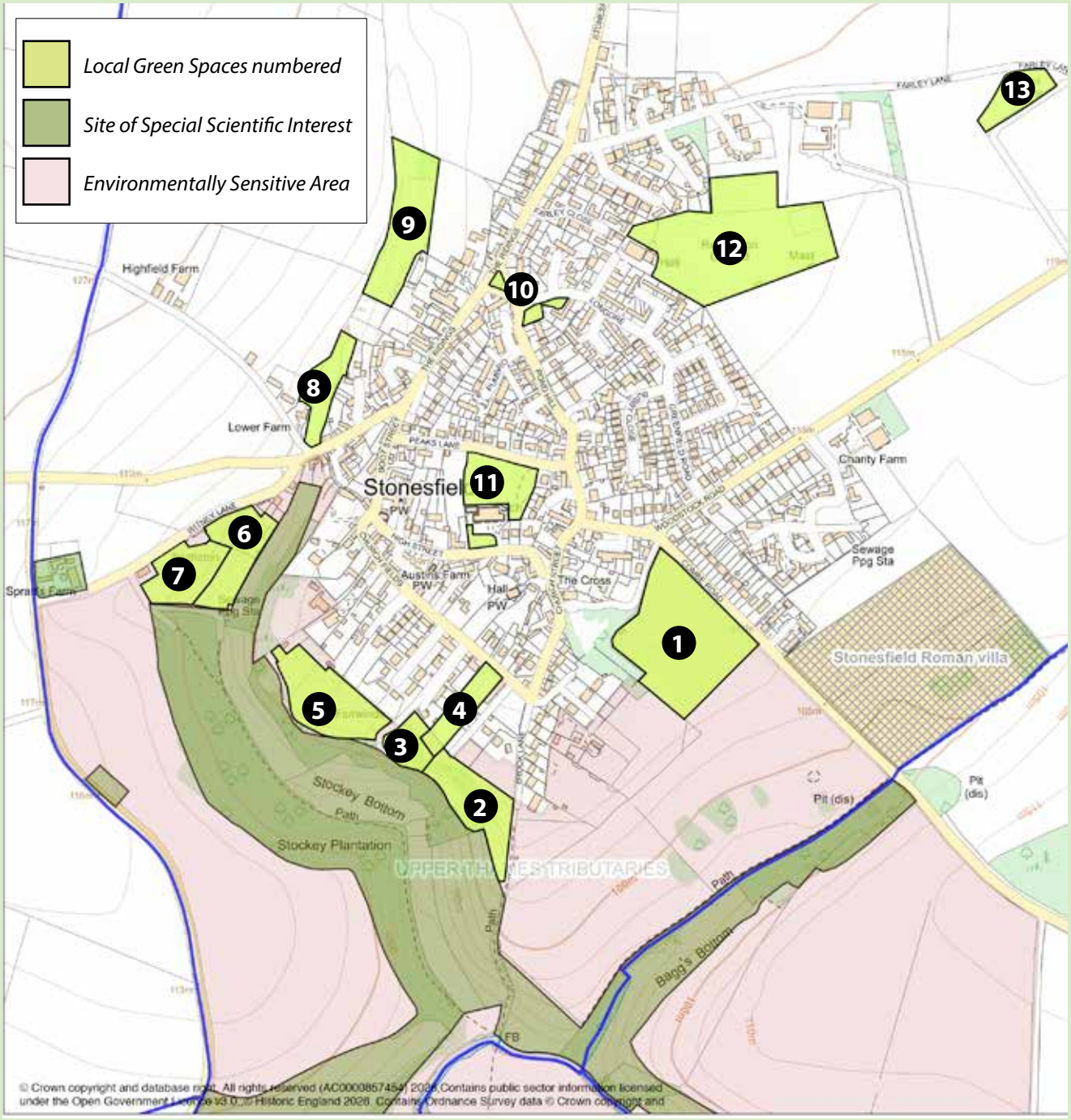
# Policy SEL4 – Protecting Stonesfield's Local Green Spaces

Development will not be permitted on Local Green Spaces except in very exceptional circumstances.

The Neighbourhood Plan designates the following as Local Green Spaces, shown in Fig 9.5:

1. Paddock between Manor House and Combe Road
2. The glebe land from Brook Lane to the Scout hut
3. The Scout hut land
4. Churchfield allotments
5. Paddocks to the right on the path down to the Scout hut
6. Paddock to the south-east of Witney Lane
7. Paddock to the south-east of Witney Lane
8. The Dene
9. Field behind the garage west of the Ridings
10. Corner of Pond Hill and Longore, and the green in front of the White Horse
11. Primary School playing field
12. The village playing field
13. Woodstock Road allotments

*Fig 9.4: Stonesfield's Local Green Spaces. Details of each green space are shown in Appendix C.*



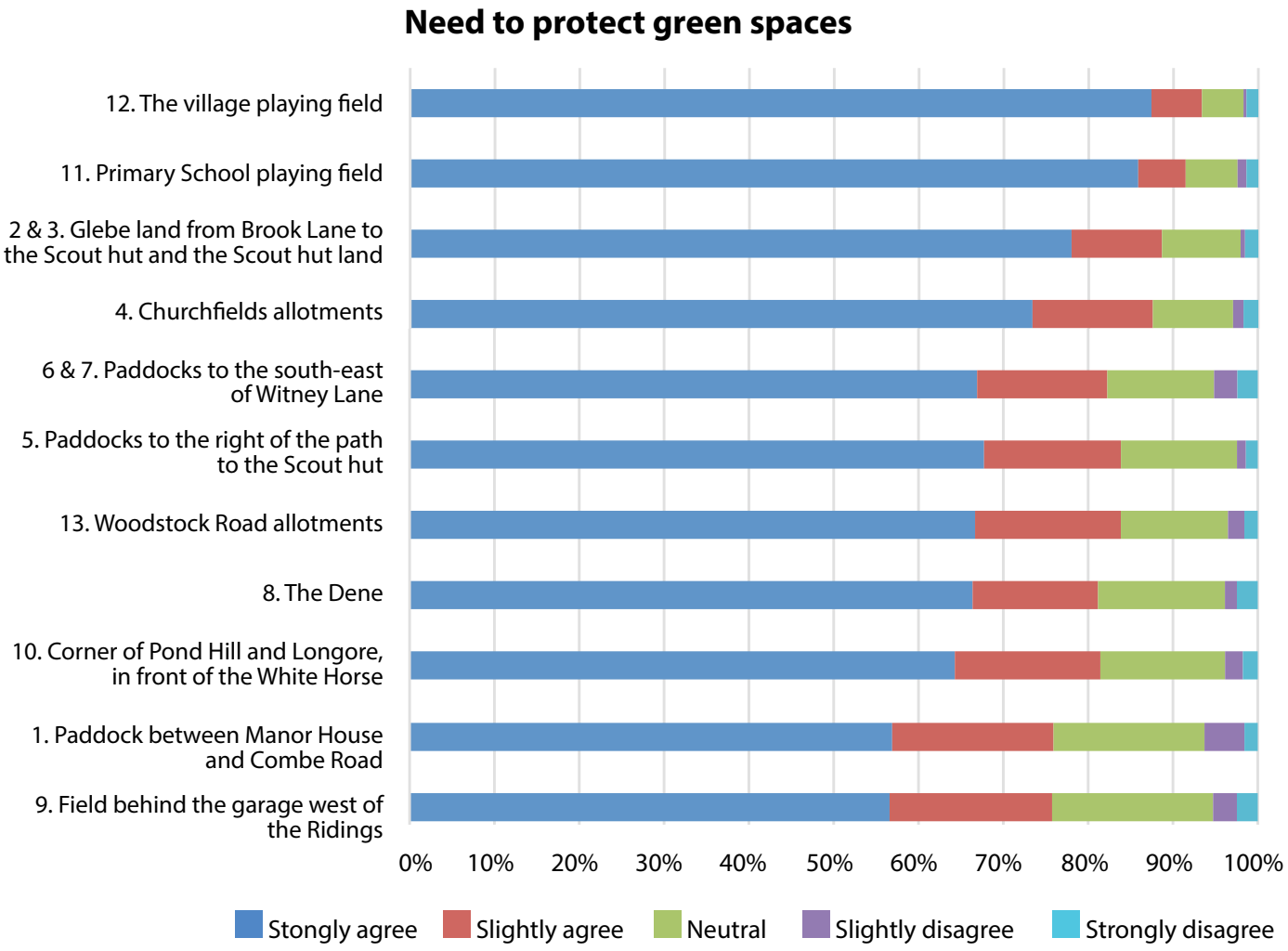



*Fig 9.5: Residents' views on the importance of protecting Stonesfield's Local Green Spaces, in order of level of support (Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan Village Survey 2023)*

*Below: view from Churchfields across the Churchfields allotments towards Stockey Woods*



## 9.4 Blue/green corridors and conservation target areas

9.4.1 Blue/green corridors describe areas that provide a bridge from one important habitat to another, often separated either by development or modern farming. Where accessible to the public, they are also important for recreation and quality of life. Important habitats, including CTAs and SSSIs, that are interlinked to form blue/green corridors are particularly valuable for wildlife as they allow animals and plants to move or spread from one green space to another. Wildlife of important habitats such as that found on SSSIs cannot survive in isolation, but needs to be part of a wider network of habitats connected at a landscape scale. This ability to move is important if species are to adapt to the impacts of climate change – a key principle of the biodiversity policy set out in the Cotswolds Management Plan[4].

9.4.2 Conservation target areas (CTAs), designated by Wild Oxfordshire[5], are some of the most important areas of habitat for wildlife, where targeted conservation action has the greatest benefit; each CTA supports one or more of the 20 defined priority habitats. The Northern Evenlode Valleys CTA includes all of the Stonesfield blue/green corridors, which feature the priority habitats of limestone grassland and lowland, deciduous mixed woodland.

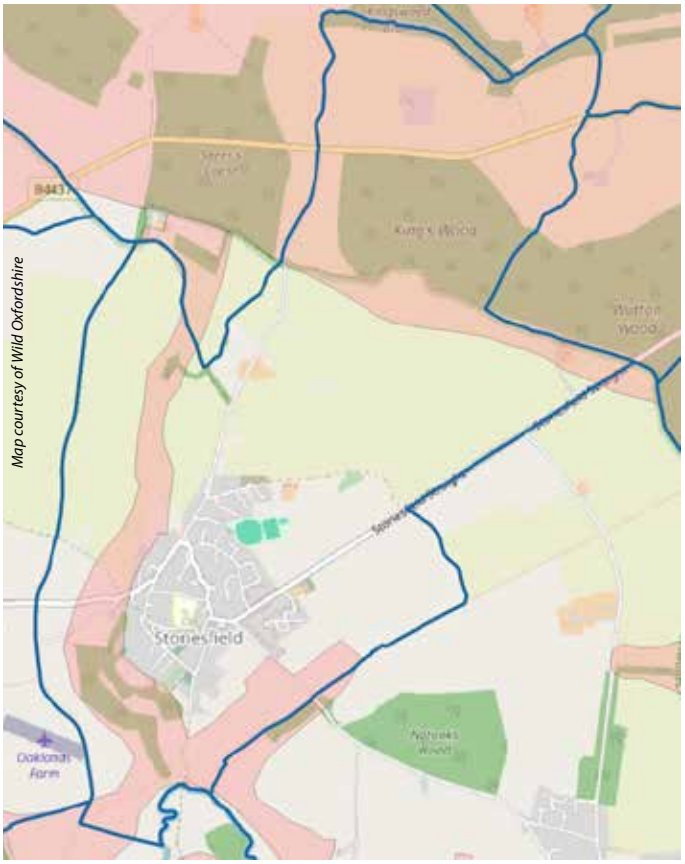



*Fig 9.6: The pink areas on the map show the Northern Evenlode Valleys Conservation Target Areas (CTAs).*

## Stonesfield's three blue/green corridors

9.4.3 Together, the Evenlode Valley, Stockey Bottom extended northward through the dry valley to Sheer's Copse, and Bagg's Bottom constitute Stonesfield's three blue/green corridors.

### River Evenlode valley

9.4.4 The River Evenlode forms the southernmost boundary of Stonesfield parish and much of the area from the south-west to the south-east of the built village is part of the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area. This is the main corridor of the wider Evenlode catchment area and connects with neighbouring parishes and habitats. It is also the boundary to Bagg's Bottom and Stonesfield Common, both of which are within the SSSI. There is public access along the whole length of the river within the Parish, especially at the bridge and ford, which is at the crossroads of two well-used public rights of way. The area by the bridge has been used for generations of local people to picnic and paddle in the river. There is significant concern about the water quality; see Section 9.7.

### Stockey Bottom to Ruddywell and beyond

9.4.5 This dry valley, an important corridor for fauna and flora, extends from the Evenlode through Stockey Bottom, skirting the village to the west to Ruddywell and beyond to New Barn and Sheer's Copse, which is just outside the parish boundary; and ultimately to the recognised ancient woodlands of the Ditchley estate. After heavy rain, in places the valley becomes a winterbourne, especially in the lower part of Stockey Bottom and in The Dene. The valley north from the Dene has no public access until beyond Ruddywell, where it is crossed by a bridleway.

9.4.6 Stockey Bottom and Banks are areas within the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks SSSI. The south side of Stockey Woods is in part ancient woodland, while the Common is unimproved limestone grassland with a rich flora. The northern part of the dry valley is bordered by arable agricultural fields.

9.4.7 At the edge of the SSSI toward the village is an area of glebe land which has in 2024 undergone detailed surveys of its flora and insect populations, with the objective of protecting its limestone grassland. The glebe land adjoins deciduous woodland, a priority habitat like the grassland. The latter holds a significant population of pyramidal orchid, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, known to be attractive to Small Skipper and Marbled White butterflies. It is also home to a healthy population of glow worm, *Lampyris noctiluca*.

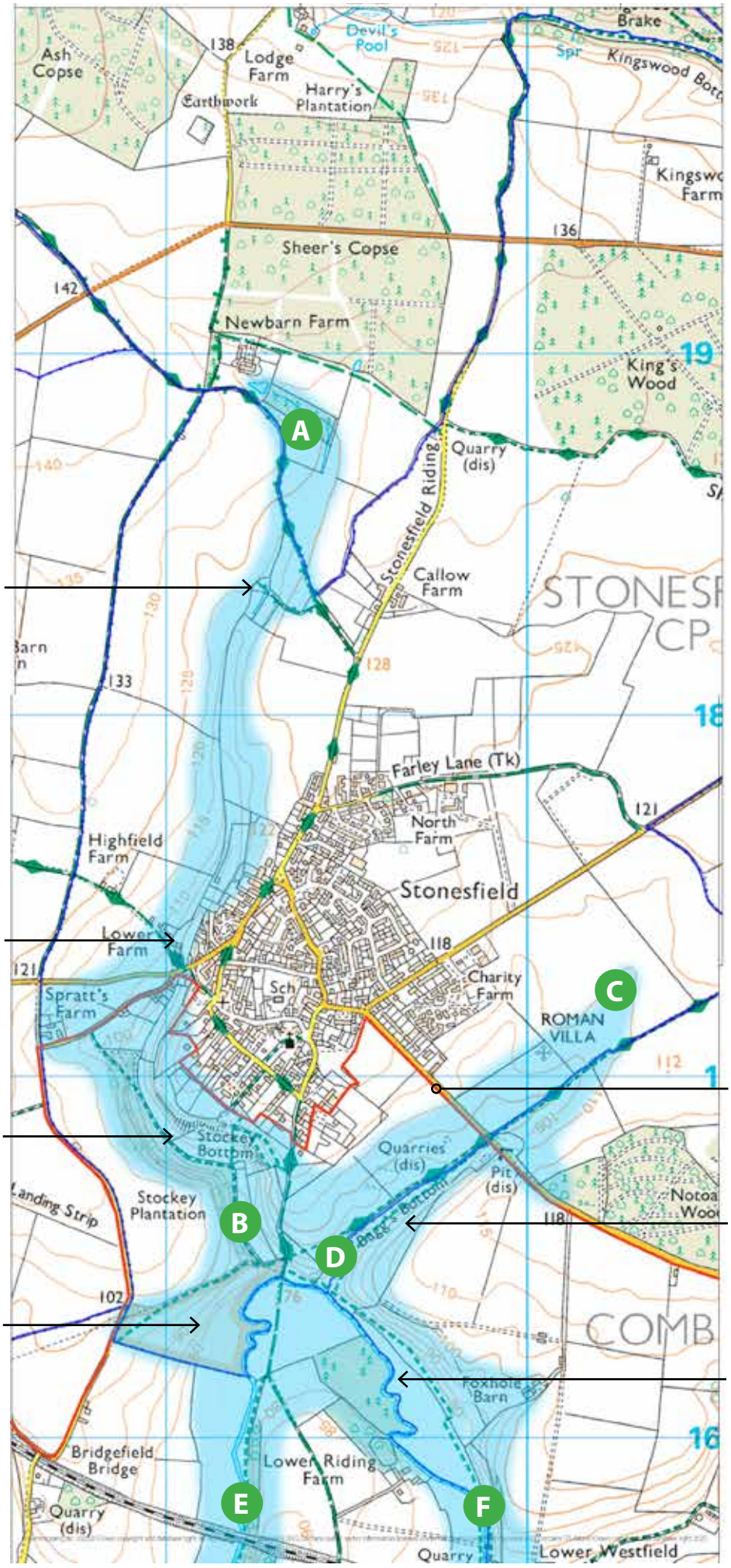



*Fig 9.7: Stonesfield's blue/green corridors*

9.4.8 Oxfordshire County Council granted Stockey Woods 'Village Green' status, in response to an application in 2016 based on evidence from village residents and groups, showing how they had enjoyed the woods 'as of right' for many decades. In the Village Survey, 49% of respondents said they walked in the woods weekly, and 68% did so monthly. Village Green status means the woods are still the property of Blenheim Estate which remains responsible for managing the trees, while Stonesfield residents can continue to use the woods as they always have, with their rights enshrined in law.

### Bagg's Bottom

9.4.9 This is a short dry valley running from beyond Combe Road and the designated ancient monument of Stonesfield Roman Villa, down to the Evenlode. Like Stonesfield Common, the valley is part of the designated SSSI area on account of its unimproved limestone grassland. It forms an important corridor for flora and fauna between Stockey Woods, the Evenlode and Notoaks Wood. Near where Bagg's Bottom meets the Evenlode, a spring rises from the valley bank and flows into the river most of the year.

9.4.10 The Oxfordshire Way long-distance footpath runs down the middle of the valley. This is also the route of the ancient Roman Akeman Street from St Albans to Cirencester, which runs past the site of the Roman villa. Two paths follow the valley, both of which are frequently used by residents and visitors. In the Village Survey, 36% of respondents said they walked these paths weekly, and 56% did so monthly[1].

## Aims of policy SEL5

- **To promote a net gain in biodiversity over the Plan period**
- **To identify the areas in the village which are particularly important for biodiversity, and afford them a level of protection against any detrimental activities and/or development**
- **To maintain the interconnectedness of the green areas via corridors and hubs for the movement of flora and fauna through urban landscapes**
- **To enhance health and wellbeing through the availability of green infrastructure**
- **To provide a basis for developing a Green Plan for Stonesfield and a Nature Recovery Plan, linking with neighbouring areas**

## Policy SEL5 Blue/green corridors

Stonesfield's natural environment should be protected, and where practicable enhanced, to achieve an overall net gain in biodiversity as set out in Local Plan 2031 Policy EH3 and Cotswolds Management Plan policy CE7. Stonesfield's SSSIs and designated wildlife sites will be protected.

Development proposals in the three blue/green corridors identified on Fig 9.7 should take appropriate opportunities to enhance the environment and in particular to contribute towards the Northern Evenlode Conservation Target Area. Development proposals that would detract from the character, appearance and integrity of a blue/green corridor will not be supported.

Where appropriate, development proposals should incorporate measures that contribute to delivering overall gains for biodiversity, and in particular the aims of the relevant Conservation Target Area in achieving net gains for each of the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets.

### Justification and supporting evidence

Policy SEL5 is consistent with Local Plan 2031 policy EH1, which places great weight on conservation of the CNL, and EH2 which seeks to conserve and enhance the character and features of the landscape, including its tranquillity and dark skies. Policy EH3 emphasises the importance of taking all opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of the site or the locality, especially where this will help deliver networks of biodiversity, green infrastructure, UK priority habitats, species targets and meet the aims of CTAs.

The Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan[6], adopted as guidance in the Cotswolds Management Plan, calls for more wildlife sites and that they are better, bigger and joined. Steps already under way towards a net gain in local biodiversity will be continued and extended. These include the Parish Council's development of a Biodiversity Policy, extensive tree planting on verges of roads, bridleways and paths (with the aim of planting one tree for every Stonesfield resident), the Community Orchard being developed on previously unused land, and the Glebe project to manage and enhance diversity in wildflowers, butterflies and insects. Further work continues in the maintenance and enhancement of the protected undeveloped limestone grassland of Stonesfield Common, in the care of a Parish Council Working Group, and on butterfly conservation in Bagg's Bottom.

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The NPPF calls for protection and enhancement of valued landscapes and recognition of the character and beauty of the countryside. Planning policies should promote preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets. Local planning applications: local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by refusing applications for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats unless the need for, and benefits of, that development clearly outweigh the loss.

## 9.5 Biodiversity

9.5.1 The parish of Stonesfield contains a number of natural and semi-natural areas of vegetation, supporting a rich variety of habitats for insects, birds and other wildlife, including lowland mixed deciduous woodland and lowland calcareous (limestone) grassland, plus arable fields and hedgerows. See also Section 11.7 Design guidelines for biodiversity.

9.5.2 The parish includes both ancient and semi-natural woodland, including some priority habitat deciduous woodland and ancient replanted woodland either side of Stonesfield Riding, at Callow Farm. This land provides a habitat for typical farmland birds, including linnet, chaffinch, yellowhammer and skylark.

9.5.3 To the south and south-west of Stonesfield, at Stockey Bottom and Bagg's Bottom, there are some areas of Priority Habitat Inventory Lowland Calcareous Grassland. These are part of the Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks SSSI, which is a series of steep-sided dry valleys and banks with unimproved limestone grassland and scrub habitats. The ground flora consists of bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and primrose *Primula vulgaris*, as well as toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*, spurge laurel *Daphne laureola*, and yellow archangel *Labiastrum galeobdolon*.

9.5.4 The calcareous grassland of Stonesfield Common includes patches of protected meadow clary *Salvia pratensis* – a rare, clump-forming, woody based perennial that is only native to a few sites in southern England. Grassland such as this was once widespread on the oolitic limestone of western Oxfordshire, and the importance of this SSSI is in its survival as one of the largest remnants of this grassland type in the county. Stonesfield Common grassland has been dominated by upright brome *Bromus erectus* and has a herb flora including field scabious *Knautia arvensis*, greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. In recent years, significant areas of tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* have developed.

9.5.5 On the steeper slopes of Stonesfield Common a shorter sward includes rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, wild mignonette *Reseda lutea*, common toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*, bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* and the nationally uncommon bastard toadflax *Thesium humifusum*.

9.5.6 To the north of the parish, King's Wood contains both ancient and semi-natural woodland, which includes Priority Habitat Inventory Deciduous Woodland, and Ancient Replanted Woodland (part of which is coniferous plantation). Parts of the replanted woodland have been cleared for timber, and these areas have mostly been left to be naturally re-colonised. A Buglife 'B-line' crosses the northern part of the LLCA, to the north of the B4437. B-lines are 'insect pathways' that run through England's countryside and towns where they link existing wildlife areas together[7]. By restoring and creating a series of wildflower-rich habitats they provide a solution to the problem of the loss of flowers and pollinators, benefiting bees, butterflies and a host of other wildlife.

9.5.7 Some of the projects of Stonesfield's Environment Group are crucial in supporting biodiversity and also the blue/green corridors. For example, the extensive tree planting undertaken between 2022-24 aims to plant some 1700 trees along field and road edges, and the banks of the Evenlode floodplain. Preliminary work in 2025 on a potential community orchard (now continued on a new site) revealed a green space site of high value for mixed limestone wild flowers and invertebrates, which has since been managed and enhanced by clearance of scrub species. Other local investigation has identified key breeding sites in a blue/green corridor and on an SSSI for the rare brown hairstreak butterfly *Thecla betulae*, and enabled the first local records of the nationally scarce hoverfly *Parasyrphus nigritarsis* and the parasitic fly *Gymnosoma rotundatum*.

## Policy SEL6 Biodiversity

The natural environment of Stonesfield should be protected, and where practicable enhanced, to achieve an overall net gain in biodiversity, as set out in WODC's Local Plan 2031, policy EH3 and Cotswolds Management Plan policy CE7.

Where appropriate, development proposals should result in a net biodiversity gain of at least 10%*.

Wherever practicable, development proposals should take opportunities to incorporate wildlife improvements in and around developments to help secure measurable overall gains for wildlife. As appropriate to their scale nature and location of the development concerned this could include the implementation of measures such as:

- retaining and ensuring ongoing sympathetic management of existing wildlife features, such as mature trees, hedgerows and other forms of wildlife corridors
- providing and ensuring ongoing retention of roosting features and/or nesting features for birds, such as owl, bat and/or bird boxes suited to, but not exclusively for swifts, swallows and house martins, on each new dwelling or building as an integral part of their design
- creating wildlife corridors or other features that support wildlife
- enabling hedgehogs to move between gardens through provision and retention of hedgehog highways
- encouraging features that support green infrastructure
- providing new green spaces, enhanced for pollinators including butterflies and moths, with native trees and/or hedgerows within the development
- retaining wildlife areas and strips of scrubland where development results in the loss of scrubland. Where onsite measures are not possible, offsite measures will be considered
- having no detrimental impact on the health of the River Evenlode, and where possible improving it.

*as measured by a recognised biodiversity accounting metric against a baseline ecological survey detailing wildlife habitats, trees and hedgerows, and their condition.

### Aims of the policy

- **Policy SEL6 recognises the need to protect the special environment of Stonesfield within the Cotswolds National Landscape, and especially the parts of the landscape designated as SSSI**
- **It seeks to achieve an overall net gain in biodiversity**
- **It recognises the importance of the countryside to the residents of Stonesfield, being the most important factor for people living in the village (as shown in the Village Survey).**

### Justification and supporting evidence

The WODC Local Plan 2031 recognises the richness of biodiversity in Stonesfield Parish and its Conservation Target Areas (see Section 9.4). The Policy also embodies WODC policy EH3 (taking all opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of the site or the locality, especially where this will help deliver networks of biodiversity, green infrastructure, UK priority habitats, species targets and meet the aims of CTAs). Paragraph 185 of the NPPF is also relevant (to promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity).

## 9.6 Footpaths

9.6.1 Stonesfield's rural setting is viewed by its residents as of great value. In the individual Village Survey, out of those who had moved to Stonesfield within the previous five years, 63% gave access to the countryside as their main reason for coming, and 41% said their main reason was to be part of a rural community. Of those who had lived in the village for more than five years, 81% said it was for the countryside and 61% for the rural community[1]. The 'feel' of the village and its footpath access to fields, the woods (a designated Village Green), the river and the wider environment are very important to its people, and also for their many dogs and horse riders. And further, this easy access has measurable impact on physical and mental health.

9.6.2 Stonesfield is the hub of well-used local footpaths radiating in all directions from the village, which make the countryside highly accessible to walkers – see Sections 3.1 and 3.2 for an indication of their importance to residents. The parish is also crossed by a number of long-distance footpaths and bridleways, several of which – Akeman Street and the Oxfordshire Way – have been in existence for centuries. Akeman Street, the Roman Road, forms the eastern boundary of the parish and joins Brook Lane at the river Evenlode bridge and before continuing across Stonesfield

Common. Shakespeare's Way passes to the north of the parish and the Wychwood Way cuts right through the village – see Fig 9.2, p82.

9.6.3 Supporting and improving a better network of footpaths and cycling paths round Stonesfield to encourage non-car local journeys would also open up the opportunity of providing an interesting selection of circular walks for residents and visitors around the parish and encourage more active leisure pursuits. An example of this would be the re-opening of the path known as Norton Riding (see Aspiration A9, p101 ) or possibly linking the Shakespeare's Way with the Oxfordshire Way.

## Policy SEL7 Protecting footpaths

Proposals which add to or enhance the availability of footpaths within the parish will be supported.

Development proposals which would involve the obstruction, stopping up or diversion of any public footbath, bridleway or restricted byway will be not supported unless:

- there are relevant exceptional circumstances
- it can be demonstrated that the development would be in the public interest, and
- it is otherwise compliant with planning policy.

Proposals which add to or enhance the availability of footpaths within the parish will be supported.

## Aims of the policy

➜ **To maintain and promote the health and well-being of the inhabitants of Stonesfield**

➜ **To protect and enhance public rights of way and access to high-quality open spaces.**

### Justification and supporting Evidence

Promotion of walking within this Plan acknowledges and supports the priorities of the Oxfordshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2024-2030) and Policy SEL7 sets out the Plan's approach, given Stonesfield's rural setting. Implementation will help protect the sustainability, vibrancy and safety of the neighbourhood and is complementary to the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5).

Policy SEL7 is also supported by the NPPF in its recommendations to promote healthy and safe communities, to ensure access to high-quality open spaces and opportunities for physical activity, and to protect and enhance public rights of way and access.

The policy also endorses the aims of the WODC Local Plan 2031 to support walking and cycling, and of the Cotswolds National Management Plan 2023-25 and particularly its policies UE1 and UE2 on provision of walking routes and green spaces within easy reach of communities; a safe, pleasant right of way network, and protection of the natural beauty of the national landscape.



*Oxfordshire Way footpath above Bagg's Bottom in winter.*



*Above – The Dene in flood, autumn 2024*

## 9.7 Flood risk and water quality management

9.7.1 Situated as it is with a steep scarp slope separating Stonesfield village from the river Evenlode, the flood risk from the river is negligible: the most significant flooding issue is rather that of surface water drainage. Particular problem areas are indicated in Fig 9.8 at Pond Hill, the bottom of Laughton Hill at its junction with the Oxfordshire Way and Witney Lane and at the dip at the bottom of the Combe Road. The Dene field at the bottom of Laughton Hill also floods badly in the winter.

9.7.2 The built environment of Stonesfield is classified as flood risk 1, indicating a less than 0.1% chance of flooding due to its elevated location. However, the Evenlode valley is categorised as flood risk 3 (high risk), and parts of Stonesfield Common and the area around Stonesfield bridge are frequently flooded for weeks on end, especially in winter. This flooding prevents access along bridleway 370/4/30 to North Leigh Roman villa, and to footpath 370/4/10.

9.7.3 Policy SEL7 is designed to add protection to these known risks. It is important that new development does not increase the risk of flooding by increasing the rate of surface water run-off in the village, and wherever possible opportunities should be taken to reduce the rate of surface water run-off. Drainage systems can contribute to sustainable development and improve the places and spaces where we live, work and play by balancing the opportunities and challenges that influence urban design and the development of communities.

9.7.4 The District Council will seek to ensure that adequate water and wastewater/ sewerage infrastructure is in place to serve all new developments. Developers are encouraged to contact the water/ wastewater/sewerage company as early as possible to discuss their development proposals and intended delivery programme to assist with identifying any potential water and wastewater and sewerage network reinforcement requirements. It is the responsibility of a developer to make proper provision for surface water drainage to ground, water courses or surface-water sewer. It must not be allowed to drain to the foul sewer, as this is the major contributor to sewer flooding.

9.7.5 Grampian conditions will be applied as follows, where appropriate, to permissions granted by the Local Planning Authority relating to development sites within the parish.

- Where there is a capacity constraint, the Local Planning Authority will, where appropriate, apply phasing conditions to any approval to ensure that any necessary infrastructure upgrades are delivered ahead of the occupation of the relevant phase of development or, where the Local Planning Authority considers it fairly and reasonably related to the proposed development, to ensure the upgrades are delivered ahead of the commencement of the relevant phase of development.
- Where development will result in the need for off-site upgrades to waste water/sewerage and/or water supply infrastructure, planning permission will be subject to conditions to ensure that either the occupation of the houses to be built or, where the Local Planning Authority considers it fairly and

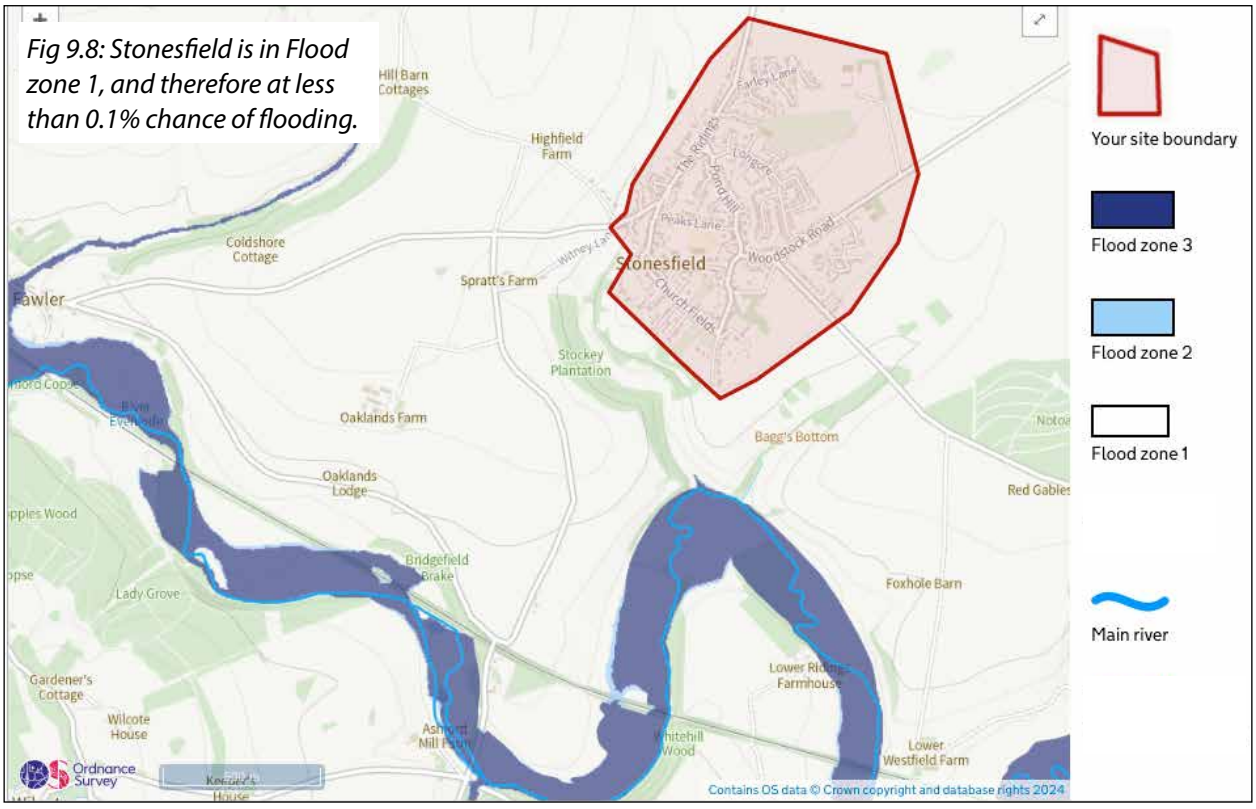



*Fig 9.8: Stonesfield is in Flood zone 1, and therefore at less than 0.1% chance of flooding.*

reasonably related to the proposed development, the commencement of development is aligned with the delivery of necessary infrastructure upgrades.

9.7.6 Given the current volume of sewage discharges into the Evenlode and the concern of local residents, inclusion of this provision is seen as essential. Stonesfield's sewage is treated at the Finstock sewage treatment works. In the period 2021-23 there were 104 occasions when raw sewage was pumped in to the River Evenlode, for a total of 741 hours.

9.7.7 In the Village Survey, 575 out of 584 respondents (98.4%) felt that addressing pollution of the Evenlode was very important or important. Seventy-four per cent of respondents stongly or slightly agreed with the granting of planning permission for development (otherwise consistent with the Development Plan) which can demonstrate that it is supported by the necessary infrastructure, e.g. sewerage[1]. The question is of such urgent public concern that on 24 July 2024, the first question put to the new Prime Minister at his first PMQ session was from Calum Miller (MP for Bicester and Woodstock), concerning the pollution from sewage to the River Evenlode.

9.7.8 In recent years a number of distressing incidents have involved sewage-contaminated surface flooding, in Combe Road, Witney Lane and Churchfields (close to sewage pumping stations); also Brook Lane where a household has suffered flooding with raw sewage. The incidents in Combe Road, in 2018-19, affected new social housing which is furthest from the village centre; the worst-affected residents had raw sewage in their house on a number of occasions, and a tanker was employed on a weekly basis at one stage to help clear the backlog[9]. In one house on the south-west side of Churchfields in November 2021[10], the main sewer that crossed the bottom of the garden, serving Churchfields and perhaps the west side of the village, had blocked. Raw sewage and a lot of liquid waste had formed a large pond, which had spilled over the edge of the escarpment and cascaded down into Stockey Bottom, polluting the ground and eventually the Evenlode. A1930s sewer pipe running through the end of the garden had blocked with limescale build-up over decades, resulting in a pipe diameter of 75 mm instead of the original 150 mm. The manhole cover at the end of the garden was forced up by the resulting pressure and raw sewage was flowing down the valley side for seven days, into the meadow below, which is an SSSI and grazing pasture. Sewage discharges from two manhole covers in a field belonging to a neighbouring house[11] have been recorded with Thames Water on three separate occasions between 2022-2024; new pressure caps have been installed to resist further discharges.

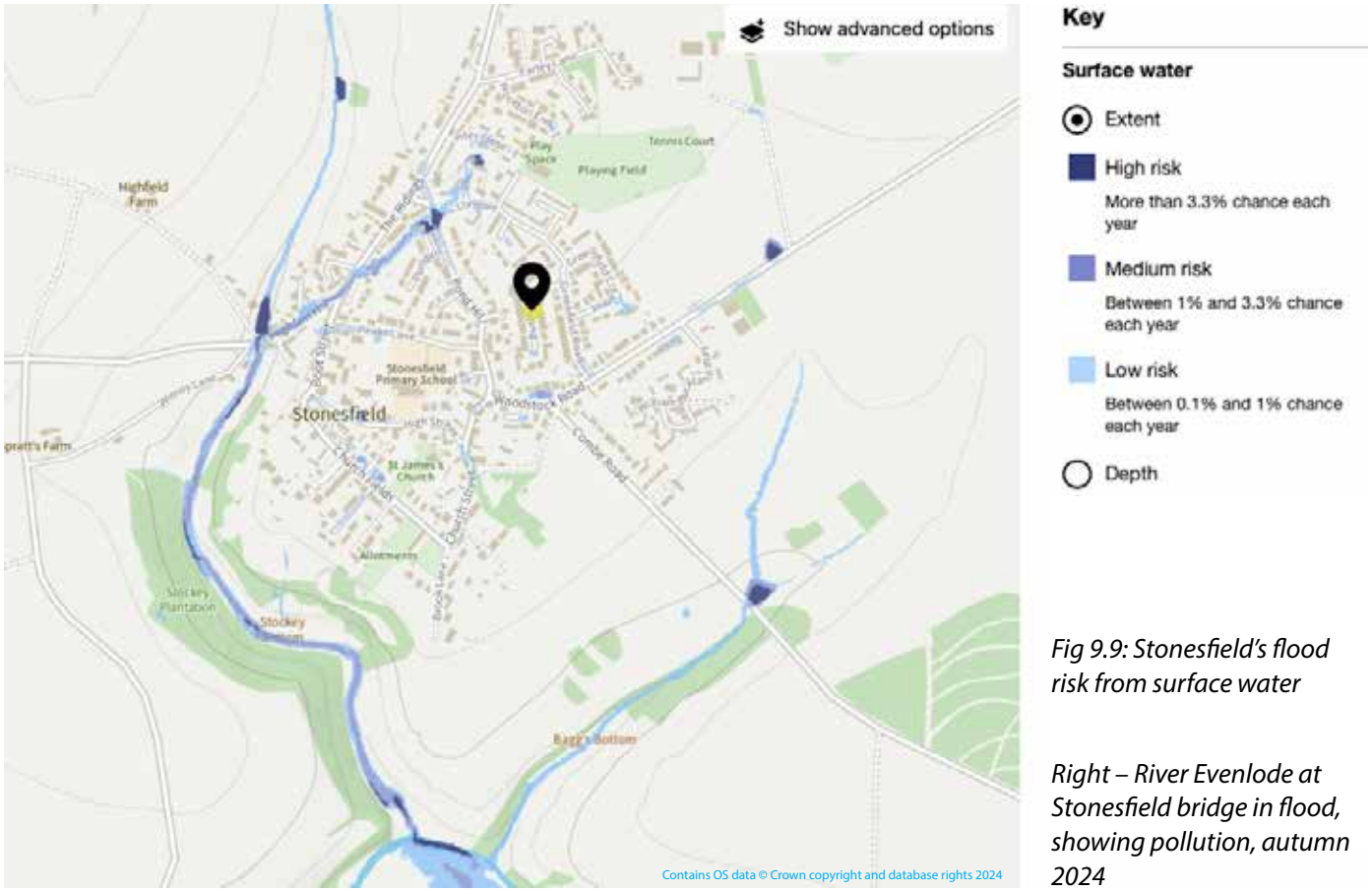



*Fig 9.9: Stonesfield's flood risk from surface water*

*Right – River Evenlode at Stonesfield bridge in flood, showing pollution, autumn 2024*

## Policy SEL8 – Water quality, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and flood risk management

Development proposals should be designed to respect the surface water drainage profile of the neighbourhood area and should not increase flood or pollution risk in Stonesfield or elsewhere along the Evenlode Valley.

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems and appropriate measures should be taken to reduce surface water run-off.

Development proposals will not be supported if they would:

- result in increased surface water run-off without appropriate mitigation measures being included with the details of the proposal, including proposals for the long-term maintenance of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems; or
- have an adverse effect on the quality of surface water in the Evenlode Catchment Area.

## Aims of the policy

- **To manage and mitigate the risk of flooding through effective SuDS**
- **To manage the quality of water and the risk of pollution**
- **To ensure that water and sewage infrastructure is sufficient to prevent further risk of pollution and sewage overspill from new development into the River Evenlode.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

Development proposals should seek to comply with applicable Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), i.e. approaches to manage surface water that take account of water quantity (flooding), water quality (pollution), biodiversity (wildlife and plants), and amenity. SuDS seek to manage rainfall close to where it falls – they can be designed to transport surface water, slow runoff down before it enters watercourses, and provide areas to store water in natural contours. Permeable surfaces can be used to allow water to soak into the ground or evaporate and planting trees and shrubs will enable water loss through transpiration.

The most up-to-date standards for SuDS should be applied to all development proposals wherever



appropriate, in order to help manage flood risk within the parish and beyond. The support of adjacent landowners is important to an integrated approach to rural SuDS, in order both to reduce flood risk and to improve the quality of the water in the river and its tributaries, including the blue-green corridor elements.

West Oxfordshire Local Plan at para 8.28 identifies the Evenlode Catchment as important in the catchment-based approach to water quality in the Thames River Basin. The Evenlode Catchment Partnership's mission is to restore the Evenlode river basin to good ecological status. The current poor quality of water requires urgent attention and any new developments should contribute to the improvement of water quality. This is essential to play a part in meeting the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive.

The WODC Policy BC1: Burford – Charlbury sub-area strategy specifies avoidance of development which will increase the risk of flooding, and working with partners such as the Environment Agency to deliver flood mitigation measures.

## Residents' concerns about pollution and the River Evenlode

*The disgusting state of the River Evenlode is a blight on our village and the AONB as a whole, as has been well documented - caused by Thames Water dumping tons of sewage directly into the river. It's a local, indeed a national scandal. Building more and more local houses will only increase issues with Thames Water sewerage and the state of the Evenlode.*

*I would like to really emphasise the impact that the Evenlode river has on our village, and ask that the neighbourhood plan specifically address[es] the pollution levels in our beautiful river.*

*The river water quality has sadly deteriorated by [because of] unaccountable water companies and unsustainable housing developments, this must be improved and be more accountable to enable future generations to enjoy the river and its surrounding area.*

## 9.8 Tranquillity and dark skies

9.8.1 There is increasing public interest in the night sky, but around 90% of the UK population rarely experience dark skies due to light pollution. As a consequence, areas of dark skies are increasingly important for people to experience natural darkness and see a starlit sky. Conversely, light pollution has a negative impact on people and on wildlife, affecting circadian rhythms and disrupting sleep.

9.8.2 The Cotswolds National Landscape has a significant and extensive area of naturally dark night skies, and remains a significant area within which to appreciate the night sky. The importance of tranquillity and dark skies within the Cotswolds is explained in two Cotswolds Conservation Board position statements[7]. The map in Appendix A of the position statement on Dark Skies & Artificial Light shows that Stonesfield is one of the settlements with the lowest levels of light pollution in the Cotswolds (in the second lowest category of nine levels of night light pollution, Fig 9.14). Stonesfield's dark skies are an important part of its character, allowing stars to be seen at night without the obtrusion of light pollution. In the early 1990s, a referendum on street lighting in the village overwhelmingly supported there being no street lights in the village.

## Policy SEL9 Tranquillity and dark skies

Development proposals should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside in the CNL and give great weight to conserving and enhancing its landscape and scenic beauty. Development proposals should comply with policy CE4 of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023 – 2025 which requires, inter alia, compatibility with the National Landscapes Board's Tranquillity Position Statement, giving great weight to conserving and enhancing the tranquillity of the CNL.

In particular, proposals should conserve and, where possible, enhance the tranquillity of the CNL and the perception of remoteness and dark skies within it.

In addition development proposals should, wherever reasonably practicable, respond positively to the Tranquillity and Dark Skies policies of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan and any relevant current Conservation Board Position Statement.

Artificial lighting should be avoided where practicable and should not be excessive nor detrimental to the wider countryside.

Measures should be taken to increase the area of dark skies by removing or, where removal is not practicable, minimising existing sources of light pollution. Lighting proposals will not be supported where lighting is visible beyond the boundary of the property concerned, or permanently on after dusk.

Noise pollution should be avoided or, where avoidance is not possible, minimized and should not be detrimental to the wider countryside.

## Aims of the policy

- **To prevent further light encroachment into undeveloped areas and to reduce existing light encroachment wherever possible, including through renewal or replacement of any private or public lighting, or lighting of new developments**
- **To ensure development proposals are in compliance with the NPPF, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside in the CNL and giving great weight to conserving and enhancing its landscape and scenic beauty**
- **To conserve and, where possible, enhance the tranquillity of the CNL and the perception of remoteness and dark skies within it**
- **To ensure compliance with the Tranquillity and Dark Skies policies of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan and any relevant current Conservation Board Position Statement.**

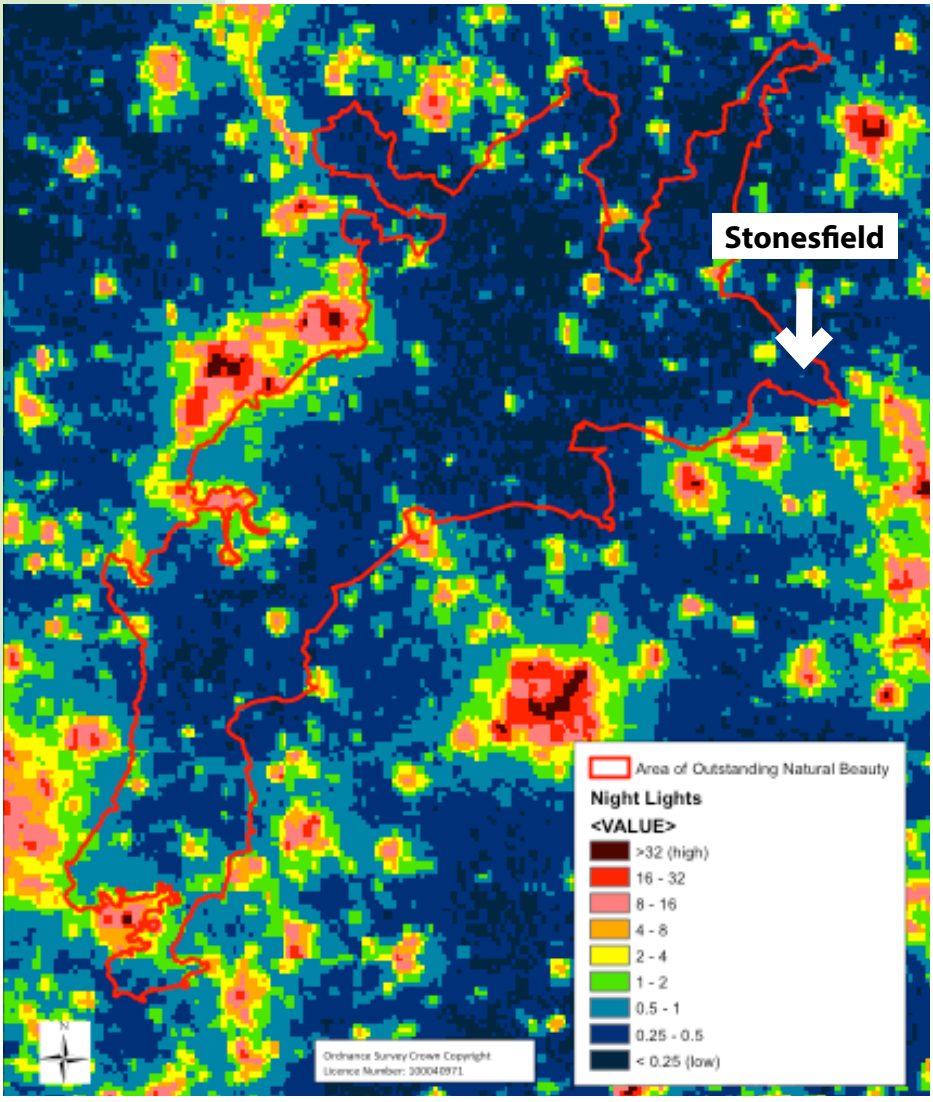



*Fig 9.10: Cotswolds AONB Night Lights (Cotswolds Conservation Board[8])*

## Justification and supporting evidence

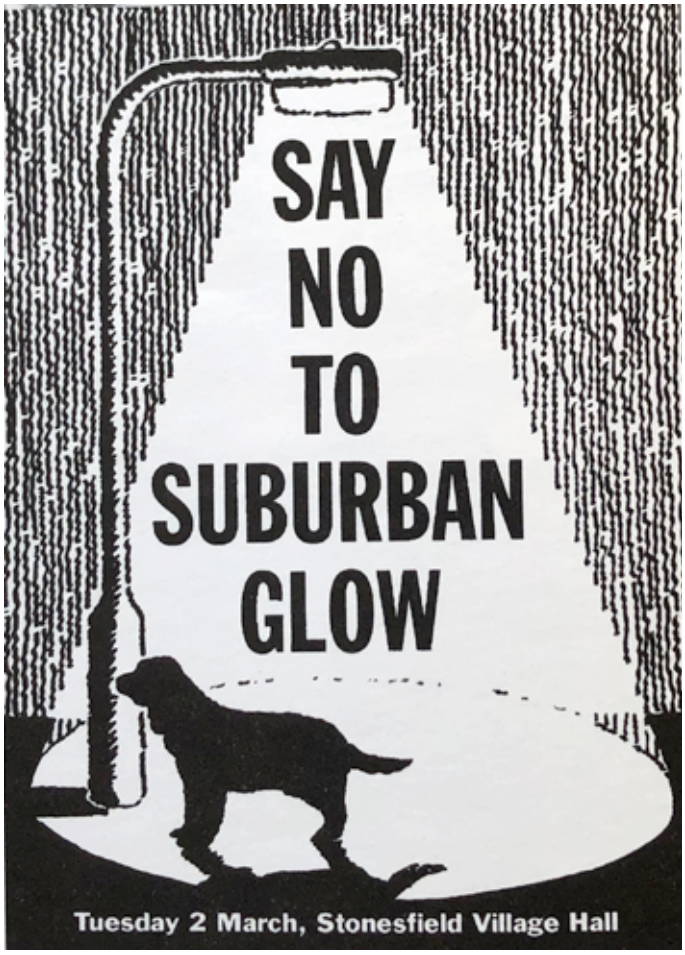
Policy SEL9 is consistent with paragraph 191 of the NPPF, which requires tranquil areas to be identified and protected, relatively undisturbed by noise and prized for their recreational and amenity value. It also calls for light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation to be restricted.

Policy SEL9 is also consistent with WODC Local Plan 2031 policy EH1, which places great weight on conservation of the CNL, and policy EH2 which seeks to conserve and enhance the character and features of the landscape, including its tranquillity and dark skies.

This policy is also consistent with the Cotswolds Management Plan policies CE4 and CE5. Policy CE4 requires the preservation of the tranquillity of the CNL by seeking to avoid and, where avoidance is not possible, to minimise noise pollution and other aural and visual disturbance. Policy CE5 requires, where possible, the avoidance of light pollution and, where avoidance is not possible, its minimisation. CMP policy CE5 also requires measures to increase the area of dark skies in the CNL by removing, or if not possible, minimising existing sources of light pollution.

The second part of the Policy SEL9 supports only those proposals for external lighting which are designed to deliver the minimum level of lighting for specific purposes (such as pedestrian access and/or safety issues). Artificial lighting should be avoided where possible and should not be excessive nor detrimental to the wider countryside.

Development proposals should comply with Policy CE4 of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-25 which requires, *inter alia*, compatibility with the National Landscapes Board's Tranquillity Position Statement, giving great weight to conserving and enhancing the tranquillity of the CNL.[8]




*Poster from the 1993 referendum campaign on street lighting opposing the proposition. 67% of residents voted against street lighting.*

**Endnotes**

1 Stonesfield Village Survey 2023

2 NPPF December 2023

3 West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031

4 Cotswolds Management Plan 2023-2025

5 Wildoxfordshire.org.uk: identifying conservation needs and supporting nature recovery action across the County

E.g. Nature Recovery Framework for Charlbury, Fawler and Finstock, February 2024 https://charlbury-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Nature-Recovery-Framework_21Feb24-1.pdf

6 Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan, adopted as guidance by the Cotswolds National Landscape, October 2021

7 https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/

8 Cotswolds Conservation Board Position Statements: Dark Skies and Artificial Light, March 2019; and Tranquillity, June 2019

9 Claire Renshaw, Combe Road, personal communication

10 Jack Peppiat and Amanda Peters, Churchfields, personal communication

11 Gaye Olesen, Churchfields, personal communication

## Aspiration A6 – Landscape Improvement

Seek opportunities to introduce or restore landscape structure in the Parish as set out in the guidance in the Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix B) including in particular:

- South-east of Callow Farm and to the north of Farley Lane, to maintain a soft edge to the village that will further enhance biodiversity and bio-abundance and filter views of existing development
- Adjacent to prominent urban edges on the east and north of the village, to create softer edges that will further enhance biodiversity and bio-abundance and filter views of development (for example by encouraging new woodland and grassland habitats on the edge of the village)
- Adjacent to prominent modern urban edges on the north-western edge of the village, where there has been recent expansion along Stonesfield Riding (for example by encouraging new woodland and grassland habitats).

## Aspiration A7 – Safe access to footpaths and bridleways, rail stations and nearby towns

(see also A4 in Section 7 Transport and road use)

Residents have called for safer and better provision to encourage walking and cycling. To encourage this, Policy ST3 (Section 7.3) seeks to make improvements within the village, but there is also an aspiration to improve routes for walking and cycling on the narrow roads leaving the village, connecting to other towns, railway stations or footpaths.

Provision of facilities along the Ridings, Woodstock Road and Combe Road, as these roads leave the built area and continue onwards, will be sought providing they proportionately protect the aesthetics and character of the approaches and can address any material impacts on flora and fauna. In particular cycle path links with local schools within and outside the village will be supported, provided they do not disproportionately have an adverse effect upon the landscape and scenic beauty of the countryside.

## Aspiration A8 – Managing public rights of way

Public rights of way will be managed to ensure access to the surrounding landscape is not reduced, and that footpaths are safe and enjoyable to use. In particular, as identified in the Landscape Assessment, seek opportunities to create appropriate all-season pathways along the route of affected footpaths during winter months.

For example, continuous sections of raised boardwalks over areas prone to waterlogging around Stockey Bottom and Bagg's Bottom would encourage people to keep to paths, to avoid damage to ground flora within sensitive areas of the woodland.

## Aspiration A9 – Reinstating the footpath formerly known as Norton Riding

To help meet the demand from residents for better provision to encourage walking, there is an opportunity to reinstate a public right of way between Woodstock Road opposite Farley Lane, and the Oxfordshire Way (once known as Norton Riding) to complete a recreational circular route on the eastern side of the village.



# SECTION 10: **Historic environment**

## 10.1 Overview, character and outline of historical development

10.1.1 Much of Stonesfield's character, scenery and place names depend on its history.

10.1.2 The earliest relic is that of the Iron Age boundary system known as Grim's Ditch, a small part of which is just within the parish boundary to the north. The area has numerous sites with Roman connections, represented in the parish itself by the Stonesfield Roman Villa and Callow Hill Roman Villa (both documented but no longer visible above ground), while the major Roman road Akeman Street passes through the parish.

10.1.3 Agriculture was the predominant activity for many centuries, and before enclosure, many villagers had their own strips of land on which to grow crops or rear livestock. However by 1820 most of the land had been enclosed and was administered by the Duke of Marlborough, with villagers working as agricultural labourers.

10.1.4 Many had other occupations alongside farming, especially in the 18th-19th centuries: mining for the oolitic limestone that could be split into the Stonesfield 'slates' (not true slate, as in the metamorphic slates of Wales and Scotland). Slates from Stonesfield became famous as desirable roofing material that was eagerly taken up and used for many of the Oxford colleges, as well as for the cottages of the village. However the source of this specific type of limestone was limited, and mining drew to a close in the early years of the 20th century. A network of paths through the woods of Stockey Bottom, and paths along Bagg's Bottom, pass the historic chipping banks, the tips of loose rock from the early open-cast and later horizontal mine shafts. Several vertical mine shafts leading to horizontal galleries remain within private properties in the village.

10.1.5 As well as stone for slates, the miners frequently found fossils, which were sold from a number of fossil shops or stalls to visitors with an interest in natural history. This contributed an extra source of income, as the fossil resource was rich and of scientific importance and because of them Stonesfield is internationally known in geological and palaeontological circles. They include the fossil remains of *Megalosaurus*, the first formally documented dinosaur in the world, presented in 1824 by William Buckland, then President of the Geological Society.

10.1.6 The older village cottages, dating from the late 17th to the early 19th century, were typically built from local stone and are spread throughout the area of the village which is now a conservation area. They are small, thick-walled and have few or no windows facing towards the north wind.

10.1.7 The women and girls from the cottages were commonly engaged, like those of other neighbouring villages, in making high-quality gloves at home, as outworkers for glove companies in Woodstock. This activity was widespread in the 19th century when, for example, the 114 gloveresses in Stonesfield in 1831 accounted for almost half of the female population. Between 1954 and 1980, Stonesfield had its own glove factory owned by Pickards in Glover's Yard, near the church.

10.1.8 The village had several working farmhouses within its boundaries, and a hand-drawn map of the 1920s shows significant areas of pasture and open land between them which persisted until after World War II. From the late 1920s, more modern houses started to be added, including council houses and also many bungalows which gradually closed the gaps between older cottages on village roads. The development of the village is examined in much greater detail in the Village Character Assessment (Appendix D).

10.1.9 A major change began in the 1960s as new developments began to fill in the open pastures; eventually 251 new homes were built between 1975 and 2024 (see Housing Needs Assessment, Appendix A). In this way the number of households in the village increased significantly; its boundaries were not significantly extended, but the open spaces in the village were lost.

*Opposite: 1722 Clockcase, a Grade II listed cottage on Laughton Hill*

10.1.10 The Village Character Assessment (Appendix D) has identified four character areas:

The historic core – St James' Church and 'The Cross', High Street, Boot Street and the cluster of cottages at the base of Laughton Hill, the lowest part of the village – the most concentrated area of historic buildings from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and with the greatest number of Stonesfield Slate roofs

Churchfields, the Ridings and Peaks Lane – sparsely developed and with a rural character, with isolated cottages divided by open fields until infilled in a relatively varied fashion through the 19th and particularly the 20th centuries

Later 20th century expansion – located to the north and east of the village and representing mass housebuilding in the post-war era and more recently

Rural surroundings – the compact farmsteads which are more remote from the village core, and surrounded by open countryside.

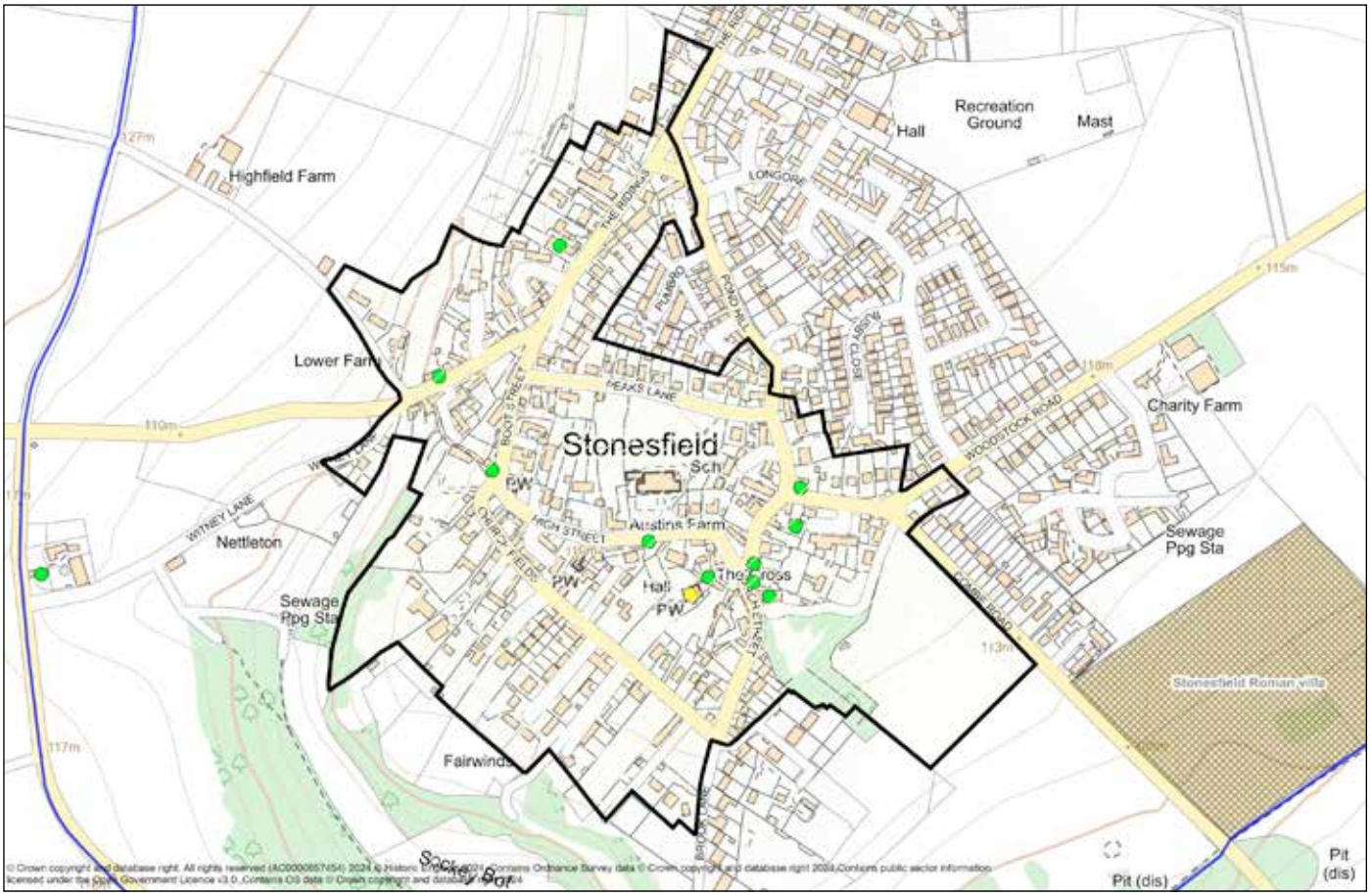
## 10.2 Local archaeology and heritage

10.2.1 Stonesfield's heritage assets include Scheduled Monuments and earthworks, and listed buildings (also known as designated heritage assets): e.g. the 13th century Church of St James the Great and a number of other buildings or structures from the last four centuries. The Village Survey asked residents' views on what aspects of the village were important to them: 92.47% (540 out of 584) responded that protecting traditional buildings and other heritage assets was very important or important. (Village Survey 2023)

10.2.2 Heritage assets include those that are designated such as Scheduled Monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas; and also those that are non-designated, but identified as having local interest, as per guidance on this matter this Plan includes some suggestions identified through the plan making process; others may be identified in the future (see NPPG: para. 040 Reference ID: 18a-040-20190723).

10.2.3 Listed buildings are protected through the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The extent of any listed building may include other structures or buildings as per the provisions of Section 1.5 of the above legislation. Applications affecting listed buildings should take this into consideration, or liaise early with the local authority

*Fig 10.1: The thick black line on the map below indicates the Stonesfield conservation area. The yellow dot is for the Grade II* church of St James the Great. The green dots represent the other Grade II listed buildings in the village. The cross-hatched area is Stonesfield Roman Villa. Callow Hill Roman Villa and associated earthworks are in the far north of the parish.*



to determine which application type is necessary. This Plan does not assess the individual extent of the listed buildings within the Plan Area.

10.2.4 All scheduled monuments, listed buildings and other protected structure and sites are listed in Historic England's National Heritage List for England. In case it is possible that Fig 10.3 has not included some listed curtilage structures, further queries may be put to the local authority planning conservation department.

| Scheduled Monuments | NHLE List entry number | Heritage category |
|---|---|---|
| Stonesfield Roman Villa | 1006366 | Scheduling |
| Callow Hill Roman Villa | 1014750 | Scheduling |
| Linear earthworks east of Callow Hill Roman Villa, forming part of the north Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch | 1014751 | Scheduling |

*Fig 10.2: Stonesfield's Scheduled Monuments*



| Listed buildings | Listing grade | NHLE List entry number | Heritage category |
|---|---|---|---|
| Church of St James the Great (photo above) | II* | 1053074 | Listing |
| Stonesfield Manor | II | 1053072 | Listing |
| Barn, approximately 10 metres south-east of Prospect Villa (not included), Church Street | II | 1199027 | Listing |
| Manor Lodge | II | 1198981 | Listing |
| The Cottage and attached outbuilding, Church Street | II | 1367928 | Listing |
| Lockup, approximately 20 metres north-east of Church of St James the Great | II | 1053075 | Listing |
| Jennetts House, The Ridings | II | 1199015 | Listing |
| 1722 Clockcase, Laughton Hill | II | 1053073 | Listing |
| Old Bakery, Boot Street | II | 1198963 | Listing |
| Austin's Farm, High Street | II | 1283611 | Listing |
| Corner Cottage, Woodstock Road | II | 1053076 | Listing |
| Spratt's Farm Barn, Witney Lane (with slate mine shaft) | II | 1053121 | Listing |

*Fig 10.3: Stonesfield's listed buildings*

## Policy SHE1 Heritage and archaeology

SHE = Stonesfield Historic Environment

The heritage values of the village and parish, particularly the designated heritage assets, and potential archaeological remains, should be carefully considered when planning any development.

Development proposals should consider the setting of designated heritage assets and demonstrate that any proposal sustains and preserves any setting of an asset that contributes positively to heritage values.

Development proposals should consider the potential for below-ground archaeological remains, including the potential evidence for the village's former slate mining industry.

Development proposals within the village outside the conservation area should take account of the design guide and illustrate how the character appraisal of the village has been considered and informed the proposed designs.

## Aims of this policy

- **To protect historic features within the parish, and the setting in which they sit, against inappropriate development. Conserving buildings and sites which have particular importance to the character of the parish or are of local historic value is an important aim of this Plan**
- **To preserve the character of the village for residents, visitors and future generations**
- **Specifically to provide protection to heritage values that may be retained in designated or undesignated assets, and from the identified unique character of the parish area. The policy seeks to ensure all potential development is designed to preserve or enhance that character, and to prevent development that might harm heritage values and unique character.**
- **To capture and preserve the historic characteristics of the village as defined in the Village Character Assessment 2024 (Appendix D).**

*Stonesfield lockup, a Grade II listed building, just outside the entrance to Church of St James the Great.*



## Justification and supporting evidence

The Historic England Conservation Principles 2008 set out the four values as in the NPPF which make up heritage significance: architectural, archaeological, historic and artistic. These features must therefore be taken into account in order to preserve the character and significance of a heritage asset.

The Stonesfield Village Character Assessment 2024 (Appendix D) provides important context for this policy, in particular the descriptions of Character Area 1: The Historic Core, and Character Area 2: Churchfields, The Ridings and Peaks Lane. The Assessment also carries details of the important archaeological sites, historical context and heritage assets.

The NPPF requires that where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation (paragraph 189). The NPPF also makes general requirements on protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

More detailed relevance is in WODC Local Plan 2031 Policy EH9 Historic Environment, which requires applications which could affect heritage assets to describe the significance of the assets at a level proportionate to their significance, in order to understand the potential impact of the proposal on the asset's historic, architectural and archaeological features, significance and character. Within the Local Plan 2031, Policy BC1 Burford – Charlbury sub-area states that in accordance with national policy and Policy EH9, all new development will be expected to conserve or enhance the special character and distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire's historic environment and conserve or enhance the District's heritage assets and their significance and settings. Policies EH10 Conservation Areas, EH11 Listed Buildings, EH12 Traditional Buildings, EH13 Historic landscape character and EH15 Scheduled Monuments and other nationally important archaeological remains are also very relevant.

Policy EH9 of the WODC Local Plan 2031 calls for great weight and importance to be given to conserving and/or enhancing the significance of designated heritage assets, including, inter alia, the special architectural and historic interest of:

- listed buildings, with regard to their character, fabric and setting,
- nationally important monuments (whether Scheduled or not), both with regard to their fabric and their settings, and also
- the special archaeological and historic interest, character and/or appearance of the district's conservation areas and their settings, including the contribution their surroundings make to their physical, visual and historic significance.

In the broader context of the village of Stonesfield as part of the whole landscape and therefore part of the Cotswolds National Landscape, Policy SHE1 is consistent with the approach of Local Plan 2031 Policies EH1, which places great weight on conservation of the CNL, and EH2 which seeks to conserve and enhance the character and features of the landscape. Policy SHE1 is also consistent with the Cotswolds Management Plan, which states that 'natural beauty encompasses everything that makes an area distinctive: geology, climate, soil, plants, animals, communities, archaeology, buildings, the people who live in it, past and present, and the perceptions of those who visit it. It is widely accepted that natural beauty is, in part, due to human intervention, such as agriculture.'

Policy SHE1 sets out the Plan's approach to designated heritage assets. In this context planning applications should be accompanied by appropriate evidence-based reports to set out how proposals address the identified character of the village and its surroundings and preserve or enhance heritage values of assets that may be affected. For proposals within the conservation area, and proposals affecting Listed Buildings or non-designated assets, this would constitute a Heritage Impact Assessment /Heritage Statement. For proposals involving below ground disturbance, an Archaeological Desk Based Assessment should be provided. Proportionate statements within the application should set out how proposal designs address the character of the parish. Development proposals which involve significant ground disturbance within the historic village centre (particularly, but not exclusively, the areas described in the 2024 Character Assessment as the Historic Core and Churchfields and Laughton Hill) should be accompanied by proportionate field evaluation assessments.

## 10.3 Non-designated heritage assets

10.3.1 In addition to designated assets (Scheduled Monuments, listed buildings) are the non-designated (also called unlisted or locally listed) heritage assets. These are buildings or structures of local architectural or historic interest, and landscape features which make a valuable contribution to the character of an area but do not meet the criteria for statutory designation (this extends to both archaeology and built assets). This description as a non-designated asset does not give statutory protection, but it does recognise their interest and the contribution they make to the appearance of the conservation area. Inappropriate alterations to these buildings can be harmful not only to the building itself, but also to the appearance of the wider area. Care should be taken to ensure that any changes to such structures are carried out in such a way as to cause no undue harm to their character or fabric. This will be reflected in planning decisions.

10.3.2 Stonesfield's proposed list of non-designated heritage assets does not include any sites that have some other form of designation, e.g. as a Scheduled Monument, a listed building, or a Natural England SSSI. Many of its chipping banks, for example, which are the remains of the slate mining industry, are not listed here as they are within the Stonesfield Slate Mines SSSI.

10.3.3 The advice provided by Historic England Local Heritage Listing Advice (Note 7, 2nd edition) has been useful in putting together the proposed list of buildings and sites in Stonesfield for inclusion. Using this, heritage interest criteria which are important in providing a sound basis for a local heritage list are as follows:

- Archaeological interest (Arch): if an asset holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point
- Architectural and artistic interest (AA): if it holds interest in the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types, or in other human creative skills, like sculpture
- Historic interest (Hist): if an asset illustrates or can be associated with past lives or events, including pre-historic; not only a material record but also possibly providing meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place




*One of the six original taps that brought water to Stonesfield residents. This one is at the top of Well Lane.*

| **Proposed as non-designated heritage assets within the conservation area** | |
|---|---|
| Stonesfield war memorial | Hist |
| Six cast iron water taps (see photo opposite): on Woodstock Road (near bus stop), Laughton Hill, Boot Street (near Peaks Lane and at top of Well Lane), The Tewer, and Witney Lane | Hist |
| The memorial wall and water tap at the junction of Boot Street and Laughton Hill | Hist |
| The former Wesleyan Chapel at the top of Peaks Lane | AA / Hist |
| The Methodist Church, High Street | AA / Hist |
| St James' Centre, High Street | AA / Hist |
| The original Methodist Church, and later schoolroom, Churchfields | AA / Hist |
| The White Horse pub | Hist |
| Solid State Logic building, won the Design Council Award in 1981 for outstanding British design. Now converted to apartments and renamed Sanders House, Churchfields. | AA |
| | |
| **Proposed as other non-designated parish heritage assets** | |
| Spoil heaps from Stonesfield Slate mines in fields south-west of Combe Road and isolated chipping banks on the south-west and south-eastern fringes of the village | Arch |
| Akeman Street, Roman Road | Arch |

*Fig 10.3: Stonesfield's proposals for non-designated assets (Arch = archaeological; AA = architectural / artistic; Hist = historic)*

## Policy SHE2 Protecting non-designated heritage assets

Development proposals should respond positively to the non-designated heritage assets (in Fig 10.3) and their setting, and to the contribution that they make to the character and appearance of Stonesfield.

The design, form and massing of development proposals (including their scale, form and character) should be sympathetic to non-designated heritage assets. The effect of an application on the significance of the identified non-designated heritage assets in Figure 10.3 should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Any application for development within the setting of a non-designated heritage asset should respond positively and sensitively to the relevant heritage asset.

## Aims of this policy

- **To conserve and enhance important non-designated heritage assets, recognizing their architectural and/or historical significance in contributing to the character of the village setting within the CNL, for both visitors and residents**
- **To provide protection from development which would otherwise cause harm to village character and important views**
- **To capture and preserve the findings of the Village Character Assessment 2024 (Appendix D) and the advice provided by Historic England.**

### Justification and supporting evidence

The Village Character Assessment 2024 (Appendix D) demonstrated that the village's distinctive historic character reflects the use of locally available materials, such as local building stone and Stonesfield Slate roofing material. The building of the nearby railway in 1853 facilitated other materials such as Welsh slate and brick to be used, but such usage is very limited in the village.

Non-designated heritage assets are covered within West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 (paragraphs 8.85-86) which make provision for unlisted buildings and sites of particular local importance to be identified as locally listed buildings or sites. Policy SHE2 has been written to be complementary to and consistent with Policies EH9 and EH16 of the WODC Local Plan 2031. According to Policy EH9, when considering proposals that affect, directly or indirectly, the significance of non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be made having regard to the scale of any harm or loss, the significance of the asset and the public benefits of the proposal. In the case of proposals that would affect non-listed buildings, these factors would again be taken into account and the main factor would be avoidance of harm or loss.

Policy SHE2 supports the policy approach already established nationally (in the NPPF) which states in Section 16 that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations. The WODC Local Plan 2031 also attaches great significance to conserving and enhancing the historic environment… a critically important part of sustainable development and a key element of the Local Plan. Heritage assets, whether designated or non-designated, are irreplaceable features of the historic environment, whose effective conservation and enhancement delivers a wide range of social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits.

Policy SHE2 also supports the specific requirements of the WODC Local Plan 2031 in this area; notably in its policies EH9 (Historic Environment), EH10 (Conservation areas), EH11 (Listed buildings), EH12 (Traditional buildings), EH13 (Historic landscape character), EH15 (Scheduled monuments and other nationally important archaeological remains) and EH16 (Non-designated heritage assets).

As well as the general requirements of EH9 (Historic Environment), the LP policies of greatest relevance to proposed developments in Stonesfield: Policy EH10 on conservation areas provides for development subject to demonstration that it will conserve or enhance the interest, character, appearance and setting and subject to detailed provisos on location, form, scale, height, layout, landscaping, use, alignment and external appearance. EH11 concerns additions or alterations to, or change of use of, a Listed Building (including partial demolition) or for development within the curtilage of, or affecting the setting of, a Listed Building. Traditional buildings are protected by policy EH12 from conversion, extension or alteration that would alter the existing structure or remove features of interest, or obscure or compromise the form or character of the original building. In the case of development proposals that could affect non-designated assets, Policy EH16 states that the presumption will be in favour of the avoidance of harm or loss. A balanced judgement will be made having regard to this presumption, the significance of the heritage asset, the scale of any harm or loss, and the benefits of the development.




*The Old Bakery at the corner of Well Lane and Boot Street, a Grade II listed building, exhibits all the essential characteristics of Stonesfield vernacular architecture.*

# SECTION 11: Building and environmental design guidelines

## 11.1 Village character

11.1.1 The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 seeks, amongst other things, to 'conserve and enhance the character and significance of West Oxfordshire's high quality natural, historic and cultural environment' (Policy CO14). Enshrined within this Plan is the principle that development in Stonesfield will be:

'limited to that which respects the village character and local distinctiveness and would help maintain the vitality of the local community' (Policy OS2, section 4.22).

11.1.2 This section of Stonesfield's Neighbourhood Plan sets out design guidelines that seek to ensure that Stonesfield's intrinsic character, appearance and setting is conserved and enhanced through any future development or redevelopment. These guidelines should be considered within the national, regional and local statutory planning framework, and are set against the background of guidance offered by the CNL Management Plan 2023-25[1], Stonesfield conservation area status and West Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016[2].

## 11.2 Settlement type

11.2.1 Stonesfield is a nucleated settlement. Such settlements are compact, with less dense development on the periphery of the central core. Historically, the core was formed around the church. The tight-knit form of nucleated settlements is particularly vulnerable to loss of character when development takes place beyond the fringes of the historic core. This has happened to some extent in Stonesfield as a result of the post-war developments, and certainly as a result of the developments since 2000.

11.2.2 The parish consists of four definable character areas:

- The Historic Core – the ancient heart of the village; stone cottages focused around The Church and 'The Cross', High Street, Boot Street and the cluster at the base of Laughton Hill
- Churchfields and Laughton Hill – sparsely developed with isolated cottages divided by open fields until variable infilling through the 19th -20th centuries
- Later 20th Century expansion to the north and east of the village, representing mass housebuilding in the postwar era and since
- Rural surroundings – the compact, more remote farmsteads, surrounded by open country.

11.2.3 The vernacular character of a typical Stonesfield cottage is typified in the photo on p110. Its key features are the coursed limestone walls with lime mortar pointing, steeply pitched roofs in Stonesffield 'slate', wooden casement windows and dormer windows in the roof level.

11.2.4 For a detailed description of Stonesfield village and its buildings, see the Village Character Assessment (Appendix D).

11.2.5 The relationship between the built environment and the surrounding landscape, in terms of scale, location and design, should be a guide for future development. New development should have regard for community cohesion, sustainable living and the implications of climate change.

## 11.3 Surrounding countryside and landscape setting

11.3.1 The Neighbourhood Plan (Sections 3 and 9), the Landscape Assessment (Appendix B), the Local Green Spaces (Appendix C) and the Village Character Assessment (Appendix D) have established the sensitivity of Stonesfield residents to the protection of its landscape and its historic heritage. It is important therefore that any new development takes account of the built village and the views of it from within, including but not limited to its heritage assets, and from the wider landscape. The open countryside and the wildlife-diverse sites within the parish are greatly valued by the community (see Section 9) and it is important not to raise the risk of flooding by surface water or the risk of pollution of the River Evenlode.

## 11.4 Conservation area

11.4.1 Conservation areas (CAs) are defined in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. Groups of listed and non-designated historic assets, walls, trees and hedges, open spaces, views and historic settlement patterns all combine to create an individual sense of place. It is this character, rather than the individual buildings, that CA status seeks to protect.

11.4.2 In Stonesfield, the conservation area is shown in Fig 10.1 (p104): it comprises the historic core and adjacent areas of Churchfields and The Ridings (see also Appendix D, Fig 9 p21).

11.4.3 In CAs, the preservation and enhancement of the area is a consideration in all planning decisions. Proposals likely to cause harm to a CA or its setting are unlikely to be supported.

11.4.4 CA status does not mean that change or development will not be permitted in that area; rather it is intended to ensure that any potential changes will be managed in a way that preserves or enhances the special qualities of the CA. An accumulation of poorly judged additions or losses of traditional features, each apparently minor in its own right, can cause significant harm to the character of a CA as a whole.

### Policy SBD1
### Locally appropriate design:
Development and new buildings

SBD = Stonesfield – Building – Design

New development or redevelopment should positively enhance the character and appearance of its immediate locality. Development, including new builds and also alterations and extensions to existing buildings, should maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the village and contribute to local distinctiveness and biodiversity.

Development proposals which 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.

Planning applications for development within the Stonesfield conservation area, including for new buildings and alterations to existing buildings, should demonstrate how the proposals would preserve or enhance the character of the area. Special attention should be given to design, scale and massing, and use of materials, so that the existing character of the area is not harmed. All developments should use appropriate building materials as outlined in the Building Design Guidelines of this Neighbourhood Plan (Section 11.5).

Within the conservation area, development proposals should use traditional building materials (limestone, lime mortar and wooden window frames) wherever practicable. The incorporation of modern materials within development proposals in the Conservation Area will be supported where they show a high degree of design integrity in relation to the building concerned.

New development should respond sensitively to nearby designated heritage assets, avoiding unacceptable harm to their significance.

Development proposals in the conservation area should incorporate existing dry-stone walls. Proposals that would result in the permanent loss of dry-stone walls in the conservation area will not be supported.

## Policy SBD2
## Locally appropriate design:
Natural environment

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should positively enhance the character and appearance of their immediate locality, maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the village, and contribute to local distinctiveness and biodiversity.

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

Proposals which would restrict access to the countryside or wildlife-rich sites will not be supported.

## Aims of the policies

- **To ensure all new building projects protect and enhance the character of Stonesfield**
- **To ensure that all alterations and extensions to listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets and existing buildings protect and enhance the character of Stonesfield**
- **To protect and enhance biodiversity**
- **To protect the built environment as a legacy for future inhabitants of Stonesfield**

### Justification and supporting evidence

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development (para 124) and that plans should set out a clear design vision and expectations so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable (para 125). To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, the NPPF encourages plans to include design guides that provide a framework for creating 'distinctive places with a consistent and high quality standard of design' while allowing a suitable degree of variety where this is justified (para 126). The NPPF is also clear that permission should be refused for poorly designed development that fails to take into account local design standards or style guides included in plans or supplementary planning documents (para 130).

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 requires new development to respect the historic, architectural and landscape character of the locality, contribute to local distinctiveness and where possible enhance the character and quality of the surroundings (strategic policy OS4). Designers are expected to provide evidence for their design approach and to have regard to design guidance. The WODC Design Guide 14 – Extensions and alterations[3] – also gives extensive guidance on the key principles to be observed in such modifications to domestic properties in the area so that the scale, form and character of the original property is sympathetically reflected in any proposed changes.

Historic England's Conservation Principles 2008, updated 2018, provide a framework for managing the historic environment sustainably. The core principles emphasise that the historic environment is a shared resource, requires public participation, and necessitates understanding the significance of heritage assets. These principles guide decision-making related to heritage assets, ensuring that changes are reasonable, transparent, and consistent, and that learning from past decisions is documented. Proposals for alterations and extensions to listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets and existing buildings should assess the history of the listed building, non-designated heritage asset or existing building and provide a statement of significance with which each element of the building can be assessed for the likely heritage impact of the proposals.

# 11.5 Design guidelines for buildings

## Walls and stonework

11.5.1 The buildings in the historic core of the village reflect the local geology, predominantly the cream-to honey-coloured oolitic limestone. Walls are constructed using coursed rubble stones with lime mortar pointing. Wooden casement windows are traditional, with smaller dormer windows in the roof. Red brick was used sparingly where rubble stone was difficult to use – specifically chimneys, lintels and window cheeks on occasion. These are the main characteristics of Stonesfield's vernacular building design.

11.5.2 Within the conservation area (and for preference, throughout the village), these traditional building materials (limestone, lime mortar and wooden window frames) should be used as far as possible; the best of modern artificial stone and slates are acceptable alternatives. A good example of a modern development in the CA using artificial stone and artificial slate roofs with red brick chimneys and lintels is the Maltsters cul-de-sac from High Street.

11.5.3 In the post-war period as the village developed to the north east, cream-coloured brick and artificial stone (Bradstone) were frequently used. While they do not have the character of natural stone, the colour is comparable.

11.5.4 Red brick was limited to specific features in a building – mostly chimneys. There are two or three entire red brick buildings in the village, some of which may incorporate bricks from the neighbouring village of Fawler, and built in the early C20 before planning material regulations were considered. However red brick construction is not in keeping with the majority of the village buildings and will not be supported for the future.

11.5.5 Rendering, painted in sympathetic earth colours, is an acceptable finish for walls. A good example of a modern development using rendered walls and artificial stone slate roofs is the Community Trust's Rose and Crown development in High Street.

11.5.6 Modern materials and traditional materials, used in a modern context and shown to be sympathetic with the historic character of the existing and surrounding buildings, will be considered if the design shows a high degree of design integrity and attention to detail.

## Roofing materials

11.5.7 Traditional roofs use the nationally famous Stonesfield limestone slates which were mined in the village. Roofs are steeply pitched, generally at 45 degrees. Stonesfield slates are laid in diminishing courses with the smallest at the ridge. The changing size of the slates, their coarse texture and rough-hewn edges give character to the roofs, together with the naturally occurring lichens and moss. Traditional Stonesfield slates have not been mined for over a century; however there are alternatives which, depending on the supplier, have some of the characteristics of limestone slate.

11.5.8 Artificial stone slates have the same diminishing sizes, similar texture and colour and also develop lichen and moss. Artificial stone slates should be used on all new and replacement roofs in the CA and also where roofs are prominent, when viewed either from roads within the village or from footpaths looking from the landscape towards the village. Barratt's Close is a good example, where proper stone and artificial stone slates on the elevations that look out on to the road at Hanks' Corner (the junction of Woodstock Road, Pond Hill and Church Street) preserve the street scene of the conservation area.



*Natural rubble stone wall with lime mortar pointing*



*Modern artificial stone wall*



*Natural Stonesfield slate roof*



*Plain grey concrete tiles with lichen and moss*

11.5.9 Many of the post-war developments use grey concrete plain tiles for roofing. While these have a regular form, they are approximately the same colour as stone slates, wet or dry, and most importantly attract lichens and moss. In the absence of artificial slates, use of these tiles is to be supported, but red concrete tiles will not be supported.

11.5.10 Black or dark grey Welsh slates were used sparingly in the late C19 and early half of the C20; frequently on extensions and outbuildings. They or their equivalent have been used on modern developments in the village, notably in William Buckland Way, as also have been red roofing tiles. Both Welsh slate and red roofing tiles are not sympathetic to the vernacular roofing material and their use will not be supported further.

## Windows

11.5.11 Windows are the eyes of a building, and make a fundamental contribution to the character and appearance of buildings within the village. Timber is the traditional construction material for windows and doors.

11.5.12 Casement windows are the most common type found in the village, from the oldest vernacular cottages to modern day developments. Their fixed and side-hung opening elements are balanced and symmetrical, and the panes of glass are of uniform size and proportion within a given window. Glazing is usually divided by glazing bars; typically with smaller panes in earlier windows and larger panes in later windows. Window frames are recessed into the wall, and lintels may be timber (plain or chamfered) or stone. Sills may be of timber or stone, or tiled.

11.5.13 With listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets, the glass used for the windows has a historic significance and adds to the character of the buildings. The glass can sometimes be crown glass or cylinder glass with an undulating surface rather than modern float glass with a flat surface. Where listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets are altered, the glass in windows is to be retained and if thermal improvements need to be made then well-designed secondary glazing should be used.

11.5.14 Replacement windows should wherever possible be like-for-like, except where replacing frames that are out of keeping or were constructed from inferior materials such as uPVC.

# 11.6 Environmental design

11.6.1 High design quality is central to the strategy for West Oxfordshire. But as well as respecting the historic, architectural and landscape character of the locality, contributing to local distinctiveness and, where possible, enhancing the character and quality of the surroundings, new development should take full account of the climate emergency and observe the highest possible current environmental standards.

11.6.2 A Climate Emergency Group has been active in the village for some years, reflecting local concern for climate issues (see Section 3.3). However, residents' views in the Village Survey on implementing green energy sources in their own houses were inevitably influenced by other considerations, including practicability of making such changes on locally distinctive properties, and cost. High importance was attached in the Survey to protecting the village's traditional buildings (92% of respondents found this very important or important).

## Policy SBD3 Environmental design standards: New developments and refurbishments

Proposals for new buildings should demonstrate how they would deliver excellent environmental performance. The following measures will be supported provided in each case that they demonstrate they avoid unacceptable harm to heritage assets, the village character and to the wider Cotswolds National Landscape:

- development proposals for zero carbon buildings
- developments which comply with the highest available standards such as Passivhaus or BREEAM Home Quality Mark standards
- new developments, including alterations and extensions to existing buildings, which incorporate energy and water efficiency measures,

Development proposals should be designed to be water-efficient and reduce water consumption. Wherever practicable, refurbishments and other non-domestic development should meet BREEAM water-efficiency credits.

Residential developments should not exceed a maximum water use of 105 litres per head per day (excluding the allowance of up to 5 litres for external water consumption) using the 'Fittings Approach' in Table 2.2 of Part G of Building Regulations.

## Policy SBD4 Environmental design standards:

### Listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets and existing buildings

Wherever practicable proposals for alterations and extensions should take opportunities to improve the environmental performance of the building concerned.

Proposals to improve the thermal efficiency of the roofs, walls, windows and doors whilst maintaining the external appearance of buildings will be supported, where they demonstrate that they avoid unacceptable harm to heritage assets, the character of the village and the wider Cotswolds National Landscape.

## Aims of the Policies

- **To recognise the importance of the climate emergency declared by Parliament**
- **To support the WODC policy target to become carbon neutral by 2030**
- **To protect the environment as a legacy for future inhabitants of Stonesfield**
- **To enhance the environmental performance of the listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets, while preserving their historic character**
- **To apply the highest standards of environmental design wherever possible**
- **To find a balance between high standards of environmental design, and protection of heritage assets and the character of the village.**

## Justification and supporting evidence

It is also consistent with advice received from Thames Water as to the content of policy on Water Efficiency / Sustainable Design. Planning conditions will be applied to new residential development to ensure that the water efficiency standards are met.

The Environment Agency has designated the Thames Water region to be 'seriously water-stressed' which reflects the extent to which available water resources are used. Future pressures on water resources will continue to increase and key factors are population growth and climate change. Water conservation and climate change are a vitally important issue. Thames Water supports the mains water consumption target of 110 litres per head per day (105 litres per head per day plus an allowance of 5 litres per head per day for gardens) as set out in the NPPG (Paragraph: 014 Reference ID: 56-014-20150327) and supports the inclusion of this requirement in the Policy. It is Thames Water's understanding that the water efficiency standards of 105 litres per person per day is only applied through the building regulations where there is a planning condition requiring this standard (as set out at paragraph 2.8 of Part G2 of the Building Regulations). As the Thames Water area is defined as water stressed it is considered that such a condition should be attached as standard to all planning approvals for new residential development in order to help ensure that the standard is effectively delivered through the building regulations.

The Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023 sets as one of its key Outcomes, No.1 Climate Action:

> The National Landscape is a place that is mitigating and adapting to climate change, and has a clearly defined pathway towards net zero emissions.

Policies SBD3 and SBD4 seek to support this outcome. The Policies recognise the climate emergency declared by Parliament and by WODC, and seeks to ensure that buildings are, by design, achieving high standards of environmental performance, supporting the WODC target to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Employing appropriate measures for building design, which achieve the highest level of environmental performance, is a key part of effectively tackling climate issues at a local level.

The BREEAM Home Quality Mark is a symbol of quality and sustainability for housebuilders and a mark of assurance for homeowners and tenants, promoting building to the highest environmental standards and providing resilience and cost-effectiveness for the future. It measures the building's environmental footprint and its resilience to flooding and overheating. Passivhaus is

a tried and tested standard that gives a range of proven approaches to deliver net-zero-ready new and existing buildings.

All development in Stonesfield is subject to a range of biodiversity policies; National (NPPF chapter 11), County (Wild Oxfordshire), District (WODC Local Plan 2031, e.g. EH2 and EH3) and the CNL Management Plan 2023-2025. In addition Stonesfield Parish Council is developing a Biodiversity Plan for the village, as required by law.

Historic England's 'Energy Efficiency and Retrofit in Historic Buildings' advice note, updated July 2024, provides a framework to reduce carbon emissions and improve the energy efficiency of historic buildings, whilst conserving their significance and ensuring they remain viable places to live in the future.



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## 11.7 Design guidelines for biodiversity

11.7.1 A number of specific actions which are conducive to protecting and enhancing biodiversity can be introduced to existing dwellings and gardens, and to all new developments. See also Section 9.5 Biodiversity.

11.7.2 Wherever practicable and appropriate, new developments and alterations to existing buildings should include swift bricks and/or house sparrow bricks, and be bat-friendly.

11.7.3 Garden enclosures can be rich sources for biodiversity. Within the village conservation area, dry stone walls are the main means of defining garden boundaries, see the map on p79 of the Village Character Assessment (Appendix D). Dry stone walls are a rich habitat for plants, invertebrates, reptiles and small mammals. In particular, those within the conservation area, and therefore possibly hundreds of years old, foster a significant range of wildlife and should be protected, even in preference to temporary removal and later replacement. New developments will be encouraged to build dry stone walls, which form a major characteristic of Cotswold villages, and new stone walls should incorporate holes for hedgehogs to roam freely between gardens.

11.7.4 Garden hedges are also a rich habitat, especially those using native plant species such as hawthorn, holly, hazel, dog rose, elder, beech, spindle and guelder rose. They provide flowers in the spring for pollinators, and berries in the autumn for birds, and allow hedgehogs and other small mammals to pass through. They are relatively slow-growing and require minimal maintenance. Evergreen species such as laurel and *Cupressus leylandii* should be avoided as they are poor for biodiversity and require a lot of maintenance, so lack of attention can result in overgrowth.

11.7.5 Good fences are said to make good neighbours. However, tall fences, especially in small garden spaces, are not good for neighbourliness: rather than larch lap fencing, consider woven hazel. All fences should have a four-inch (10cm) hole at the bottom to allow hedgehogs to roam.

**Endnotes**

1 Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025

2 West Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016: Conservation Areas. https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/0r1hifcd/6-design-guide-conservation-areas.pdf

3 WODC Design Guide 14 Extensions and alterations, https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/pekfogvr/14-design-guide-extensions-and-alterations.pdf

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*Members of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group*

*Parish Councillors:*
Wendy Gould *Jan 2022 - Jan 2025*
Jess Huband *March 2023 - Sept 2025*
Philippa Lowe *Jan 2022 -*
Simon Powell *Jan 2022 - November 2025*
Simon Warr *May 2023 - July/August 2025*

*Other members:*
Jim Astle
Caroline Friend
Jess Huband
Alan Kendall
Vivienne Kendall
Philippa Lowe
Richard Morris (chair)
Susan Rudlin
Pete Smyth

*Neighbourhood Plan writers*
Vivienne Kendall, with
Genny Early (Section 9, Introduction)
Richard Morris (Section 11, Building and environmental design guidelines, with additional input from Robert Montgomery FRIBA)

*Village Survey*
Members of the Steering Group
Paul Bates
Hannah Crowe

*Communication with the village*
Paul Bates: village website
Caroline Friend: Stonesfield Slate articles
Jess Huband: social media
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Philippa Lowe

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Jim Astle
Philippa Lowe

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Rob Atkins
Caroline Friend
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John Poucher
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Rebecca Sherlaw-Johnson
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*Copy editor*
Dale Morris

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# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| ACV | Asset of Community Value |
| AOD | Above Ordnance Datum (land height) |
| AONB | Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty |
| CA | Conservation Area |
| CIL | Community Infrastructure Levy |
| CNL | Cotswolds National Landscape; since 2020 an alternative name for the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) |
| CTA | Conservation Target Areas |
| EV | Electric Vehicle |
| HNA | Housing Needs Assessment |
| LCA | Landscape Character Assessment |
| LCT | Landscape Character Type |
| LCWIP | Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans |
| LLCA | Local Landscape Character Assessment |
| LTCP5 | OCC's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022-2050 |
| LTN | Local Transport Network |
| NHLE | National Heritage List for England |
| NPPF | National Planning Policy Framework |
| OCC | Oxfordshire County Council |
| OCSI | Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion |
| OLCTP | Oxfordshire Local Connectivity and Transport Plan 202 |
| ONS | Office for National Statistics |
| OVCPS | Oxfordshire Vehicular and Cycle Parking Standards 2022 |
| RES | Rural Exception Site – Established as a national policy in 1991 as a mechanism for delivering affordable homes on small plots of rural land that would not otherwise be granted permission for housing development. Developments on these sites are required to prioritise affordable housing for people with a connection to the local community. |
| S106 | Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Section 106 agreements may provide for financial contributions to be made by the developer to compensate for any loss or damage caused by the development, or to mitigate a development's wider impact. |
| SATN | Oxfordshire County Council's Strategic Active Travel Network |
| SNP | Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan |
| SOHA | South Oxfordshire Housing Association |
| SSSI | Site of Special Scientific Interest |
| SUSTO | Sustainable Stonesfield |
| VCA | Village Character Assessment |
| Windfall developments | Speculative developments on sites that are not allocated for housing. Such sites can be previously developed (brownfield) land where the current use may no longer be viable, or undeveloped greenfield sites that the owner wishes to bring forward for development. In some instances they may be 'rural exception sites' (RES) whereby affordable housing is provided in locations that would not normally be allowed for new housing. |
| WODC | West Oxfordshire District Council |