

Stonesfield Neighbourhood Development Plan 2026-2041

**A report to West Oxfordshire District Council
on the Stonesfield Neighbourhood
Development Plan**

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Executive Summary

- 1 I was appointed by West Oxfordshire District Council in January 2026 to carry out the independent examination of the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by written representations. I visited the neighbourhood area on 25 March 2026.
- 3 The Plan includes a range of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. There is a very clear focus on safeguarding the setting of the village in the National Landscape and designating a package of Local Green Spaces.
- 4 The Plan has been underpinned by community support and engagement. All sections of the community have been actively engaged in its preparation.
- 5 Subject to a series of recommended modifications set out in this report, I have concluded that the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum area should coincide with the neighbourhood area.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
22 July 2026

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Development Plan 2026-2041 (the 'Plan').
- 1.2 The Plan has been submitted to West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) by Stonesfield Parish Council (SPC) in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 and its subsequent updates. The NPPF continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.
- 1.4 The role of an independent examiner is clearly defined in the legislation. I have been appointed to examine whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions and Convention Rights and other statutory requirements. It is not within my remit to examine or to propose an alternative plan, or a potentially more sustainable plan except where this arises because of my recommended modifications to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions and the other relevant requirements.
- 1.5 A neighbourhood plan can be narrow or broad in scope. Any plan can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The submitted Plan has been designed to be distinctive in general terms, and to complement to the existing development plan. It has a very clear focus on safeguarding the setting of the village and designating a package of Local Green Spaces.
- 1.6 Within the context set out above, this report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the basic conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.7 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case, and that referendum results in a positive outcome, the Plan would then become part of the wider development plan.

2 The Role of the Independent Examiner

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by WODC, with the consent of SPC, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both WODC and SPC. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. I have 43 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level, and more recently as an independent examiner. I have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service.

Examination Outcomes

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan proceeds to a referendum; or
 - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
 - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 2.5 The outcome of the examination is set out in Sections 7 and 8 of this report.

Other examination matters

- 2.6 In examining the Plan I am required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
 - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
 - the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.
- 2.7 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.6 of this report. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan complies with the three requirements.
- 2.8 Section 98 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 was enacted in March 2026. It requires that a neighbourhood plan:

- so far as the qualifying body considers appropriate, and having regard to the subject matter of the plan, must be designed to ensure that the development and use of land in the neighbourhood area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change; and
- so far as the qualifying body considers appropriate and having regard to the subject matter of the plan, must be designed to take account of any local nature recovery strategy under section 104 of the Environment Act 2021 that relates to all or part of the neighbourhood plan area.

2.9 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.8 of this report and have taken account of the information in the Addendum to the Basic Conditions Statement (April 2026). I am satisfied that the submitted Plan complies with these two requirements.

3 Procedural Matters

3.1 In undertaking this examination I have considered the following documents:

- the submitted Plan;
- the various appendices;
- the Basic Conditions Statement;
- the Addendum to the Basic Conditions Statement (April 2026);
- the Consultation Statement;
- the SEA/HRA screening report (May 2025);
- SPC's responses to the Clarification Note;
- the representations made to the Plan;
- the adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031;
- the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024);
- Planning Practice Guidance; and
- relevant Ministerial Statements.

3.2 I visited the neighbourhood area on 25 March 2026. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular. The visit is addressed in Section 5 of this report.

3.3 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations, I am satisfied that the Plan could be examined without the need for a public hearing.

3.4 The enactment of Section 99 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 in March 2026 changed the basic conditions against which a neighbourhood plan is assessed. In order to address this matter SPC produced an Addendum to the Basic Conditions Statement during the examination. WODC undertook targeted consultation on the revised Statement. Section 4 of this report addresses this matter alongside the broader responses to the Plan.

4 Consultation

Consultation Process

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In this context, SPC has prepared a Consultation Statement. It sets out the mechanisms used to engage all concerned in the plan-making process. It also provides specific details about the consultation process that took place on the pre-submission version of the Plan (March to May 2025). It captures the key issues in a proportionate way and is then underpinned by more detailed annexes.
- 4.3 Annex 1 of the Statement helpfully sets out a summary of the consultation activities. I am satisfied that they are relevant both to the parish and to the matters addressed in the Plan.
- 4.4 The Statement also reproduces material used at some of the consultation events alongside associated photographs. This gives an added depth to the document.
- 4.5 Annexes VII and VIII of the Statement provide details on the comments received during the consultation process for the pre-submission version of the Plan. It identifies the principal changes that worked their way through into the submitted version. This process helps to describe the evolution of the Plan.
- 4.6 I am satisfied that consultation has been an important element of the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation. From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that the Plan has promoted an inclusive approach to seeking the opinions of all concerned throughout the process. WODC has carried out its own assessment that the consultation process has complied with the requirements of the Regulations.

Representations Received

- 4.7 Consultation on the submitted plan was undertaken by WODC. This exercise generated comments from the following organisations:
 - Historic England
 - Ministry of Defence
 - Natural England
 - Oxfordshire County Council
 - Oxfordshire County Council (Property)
 - Gloucestershire County Council
 - Thames Water
 - West Oxfordshire District Council

- Eynsham Parish Council
- Combe Parish Council
- Carter Jonas (obo a landowner)
- Stonesfield Community Trust
- Oxford Dioceses Board of Finance
- Planning Prospects Limited (obo a landowner)
- Arc Planning Associates (obo a landowner)

4.8 Comments were also received from several residents.

4.9 I have taken account of the various representations in examining the Plan. Where it is appropriate to do so, I make specific reference to the individual representations in Section 7 of this report.

4.10 A separate consultation exercise was undertaken by WODC on the revised Basic Conditions Statement. This generated representations from WODC, Oxfordshire County Council (Property), Historic England and several local residents. I have also taken account of these representations in examining the Plan.

5 The Neighbourhood Area and the Development Plan Context

The Neighbourhood Area

- 5.1 The neighbourhood area is the parish of Stonesfield. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 17 November 2021. In 2021 the population of the village was 1663 persons. As the Plan describes, Stonesfield is a traditional Cotswold stone-built village in West Oxfordshire. It is 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.
- 5.2 The Plan advises that 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. There is a sunken path to Stonesfield Common rising from the point where the river is closest to the village.
- 5.3 The historic core of the village is a designated conservation area. The village is typified by narrow lanes and dry-stone walls, without street lights, which add greatly to its tranquil and rural character. The 13th-century church of St James the Great is at the centre of the village. The village is known for Stonesfield slate, a form of Cotswold stone mined particularly as a roofing stone and also a rich source of fossils.

Development Plan Context

- 5.4 The West Oxfordshire Local Plan was adopted in 2018. It sets out the basis for future development in West Oxfordshire up to 2031. The strategic approach taken by the Plan is that a significant proportion of new homes, jobs and supporting services will be focused within and on the edge of the main service centres of Witney, Carterton, and Chipping Norton. Stonesfield is identified as one of a series of villages in the settlement hierarchy. The Plan advises that villages are suitable for limited development which respects the village character and local distinctiveness and would help to maintain the vitality of these communities.
- 5.5 Policy OS2 of the Plan comments about the way in which development should be in the right places based around the settlement hierarchy in Table 4b. The policy is underpinned a series of general principles which include that all development should:
 - be of a proportionate and appropriate scale to its context having regard to the potential cumulative impact of development in the locality;
 - form a logical complement to the existing scale and pattern of development and/or the character of the area; and
 - avoid the coalescence and loss of identity of separate settlements.

- 5.6 The neighbourhood area is within the Burford-Charlbury sub area. Policy BC1 (Burford-Charlbury sub-area strategy) of the Local Plan comments that the focus of new development will be Burford and Charlbury. It goes on to advise that development elsewhere will be limited to meeting local housing, community and business needs and will be steered towards the larger villages.
- 5.7 The supporting text of the Local Plan advises that Stonesfield has a thriving community spirit, with a range of local services and facilities. It is popular with walkers and cyclists being a focus of rural footpaths and bridleways, including the Oxfordshire Way. It also comments that Stonesfield has seen considerable consolidation of development in the past with redevelopment of farmyards and conversion of barns for housing primarily during the 1980s. Finally, it comments that there has been only limited new build in recent years as few opportunities remain for residential intensification.
- 5.8 The Basic Conditions Statement advises that the following other policies in the Local Plan have had a bearing on the production of the submitted Plan:
- Policy OS4: High Quality Design
 - Policy OS5: Supporting Infrastructure
 - Policy EH2: Landscape character
 - Policy EH3: Biodiversity and geodiversity
 - Policy EH4: Public realm and green infrastructure
 - Policy EH7: Flood risk
 - Policy EH11: Listed buildings
 - Policy EH12: Traditional Buildings
 - Policy EH13: Historic Landscape Character
 - Policy E5: Local Services and Community Facilities
- 5.9 WODC is preparing a new local plan. It will cover the period to 2043. The pre-submission draft Local Plan (Regulation 19) will be published in August 2026, and that the Plan will be submitted for independent examination in December 2026. The overlap between the emerging Local Plan and the submitted Plan is addressed in some of the representations to the Plan. I address this matter in Section 7 of this report.

Unaccompanied Visit

- 5.10 I visited the neighbourhood area on 25 March 2026.
- 5.11 I drove into the village along the B4437 from the A44 to the east. This gave me an initial impression of its character, and the context of its wider setting in the Cotswold National Landscape.
- 5.12 I looked in detail at the proposed key views and the proposed local green spaces. I also looked at the overall character of the village and its various community facilities.

6 The Neighbourhood Plan and the Basic Conditions

6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped considerably in the preparation of this section of the report. It is a well-presented and informative document. It is also proportionate to the Plan itself.

6.2 As part of this process I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the Basic Conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:

- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- not have the effect of preventing development from taking place which is proposed in the development plan for the area of the authority (or any part of that area), and if it took place, would provide housing;
- not breach, and otherwise be compatible with, the assimilated obligations of EU legislation (as consolidated in the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 (Consequential Amendment) Regulations 2023; and
- not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (7).

6.3 I assess the Plan against the basic conditions under the following headings.

National Planning Policies and Guidance

6.4 For the purposes of this examination the key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued in December 2024.

6.5 The NPPF sets out a range of core land-use planning issues to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are of relevance to the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan:

- a plan-led system – in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031;
- delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
- building a strong, competitive economy;
- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities;
- taking account of the different roles and characters of different areas;
- highlighting the importance of high-quality design and good standards of amenity for all future occupants of land and buildings; and
- conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

- 6.6 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 13 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.
- 6.7 In addition to the NPPF I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and ministerial statements.
- 6.8 Based on all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance in general terms subject to the recommended modifications included in this report. It has a very clear focus on safeguarding the setting of the village and designating a package of Local Green Spaces. The Basic Conditions Statement maps the policies in the Plan against the appropriate sections of the NPPF.
- 6.9 At a more practical level, the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraph 16d). This was reinforced with the publication of Planning Practice Guidance. Paragraph ID:41-041-20140306 indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. It also advises that policies should also be concise, precise, and supported by appropriate evidence.
- 6.10 As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. Most of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

Contributing to sustainable development

- 6.11 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the contribution that the submitted Plan makes to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social, and environmental. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. In the economic dimension, the Plan includes a policy on infill development (Policy SH8), and on retail uses and services (Policy SEA1). In the social dimension, it includes policies housing types (Policies SH1-6), community facilities (Policy SEA2), and local green spaces (Policy SEL4). In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively seeks to protect its natural, built, and historic environment. It has specific policies on a range of environmental matters (Policies SEL1-9), and on village character and design (Policies SBD1-5). SPC has undertaken its own assessment of this matter in the submitted Basic Conditions Statement.

Not have the effect of preventing development from taking place which is proposed in the development plan for the area of the authority

- 6.12 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in West Oxfordshire in Section 5 of this report. In general terms I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to this strategic context. Policy SH8 advises about the way in which infill development within the neighbourhood area can come forward. It consolidates the approach taken in Policy OS2 of the adopted Local Plan.
- 6.13 In its comments on the Addendum to the Basic Conditions Statement WODC comments about the potential effects of Policies SEL2 (Views), SEL4 (local green spaces), SEL5 (Blue/Green Corridors) and Policy SEL/6 (Biodiversity) on the delivery of housing development. In most cases, these comment overlap with the representations from WODC made at the Regulation 16 stage. Section 7 of this report focuses on my assessment of the Plan's policies against the basic conditions, and this includes an assessment of the comments made by WODC. With the incorporation of the recommended modification to these four policies in this report I am satisfied that the implementation of the Plan will not have the effect of preventing development from taking place which is proposed in the development plan.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 6.14 The Neighbourhood Plan General Regulations 2015 require a qualifying body either to submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 or a statement of reasons why an environmental report is not required.
- 6.15 In order to comply with this requirement, WODC commissioned a screening exercise on the need or otherwise for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be prepared for the Plan. The report (May 2025) is thorough and well-constructed. As a result of this process, it concludes that the Plan is unlikely to have any significant effects on the environment and would not require a SEA.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 6.16 The screening report also included a separate Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan. It concludes that the Plan is not likely to have significant environmental effects on a European nature conservation site or undermine their conservation objectives alone or in combination taking account of the precautionary principle. As such Appropriate Assessment is not required.
- 6.17 The HRA report is both thorough and comprehensive. It takes appropriate account of the significance of several protected sites and of the work undertaken on habitats as part of the preparation of the adopted Local Plan. It provides assurance to all concerned that the submitted Plan takes appropriate account of important ecological and biodiversity matters.
- 6.18 Based on the information provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that a proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various

regulations. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with the appropriate regulations.

Human Rights

- 6.19 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. In addition, there has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. Based on all the evidence available to me, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

Summary

- 6.20 On the basis of my assessment of the Plan in this section of my report I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications contained in this report.

7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the policies in the Plan. It makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that they have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 My recommendations focus on the policies themselves given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended changes to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is distinctive and proportionate to the neighbourhood area. The wider community and SPC have spent time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in their Plan. This sits at the heart of the localism agenda.
- 7.4 The Plan is well-presented and includes very good maps and photographs. In addition, it has been designed to reflect Planning Practice Guidance (Section 41-004-20190509) which indicates that neighbourhood plans must address the development and use of land. The Plan also includes a set of non-land use Aspirations.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted Plan. Where necessary, I have identified the inter-relationships between the policies. I assess the Aspirations thereafter.
- 7.6 For clarity, this section of the report comments on all policies whether I have recommended modifications to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions.
- 7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

The initial section of the Plan (Sections 1-4)

- 7.8 The initial parts of the Plan set the scene for the range of policies. They do so in a proportionate way. The Plan makes a very clear distinction between its policies and the supporting text.
- 7.9 Section 1 includes aims and a series of objectives for the wider Plan. The aims of the Plan are:
- to maintain and enhance the community of Stonesfield;
 - to encourage growth in economic activity in order to maintain and enhance current services;
 - 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;
 - to enhance community facilities and their accessibility to all age groups;
 - to conserve the environment of Stonesfield's landscape and countryside as appropriate for its position within the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL);
 - to conserve Stonesfield's historic village character; and

- to take appropriate measures toward addressing climate change at the local level.

- 7.10 Each Aim is underpinned by a series of Objectives.
- 7.11 Section 2 comments about the general background to the Plan, how it has been prepared and how it will be used. It defines the Plan period (2.5.1), and includes a map of the neighbourhood area (paragraph 2.6.1). This section also summarises the local planning context within which the Plan has been prepared.
- 7.12 Section 3 describes keys elements of the neighbourhood area. It does so in a very effective fashion. The Plan's presentation of these issues has been very helpful for examination purposes. It sets out a series of Key Issues for residents in the neighbourhood area.
- 7.13 Section 4 comments about the way in which the community was engaged in the Plan's preparation. It overlaps with the Consultation Statement.

General Comments

- 7.14 On the one hand, the Plan is very detailed and addresses a range of matters. This translates into a comprehensive range of policies. On the other hand, the format of the policies results in a considerable overlap between Local Plan policies and the policies in the submitted Plan. National policy is clear that there is no need for a neighbourhood plan to repeat or to restate a local plan policy. In this context the development plan is read as a whole. Several of the questions in the clarification note sought to address this matter. In general terms I have sought to establish the extent to which the relevant policies bring added local value beyond the more general approach that is inevitably taken in the Local Plan. I do not repeat this explanation on a policy-by-policy basis to avoid unnecessary repetition.
- 7.15 I have also sought to take a similar approach to SPC's methodology of cross-referencing policies in the submitted Plan. A neighbourhood plan is also intended to be read as a whole both generally, and in terms of its role as a component part of the development plan.
- 7.16 The remainder of this section of the report addresses each policy in turn in the context set out in paragraphs 7.5 to 7.7 of this report.

SH1 Meeting the housing needs of the parish of Stonesfield

- 7.17 This policy reflects the housing delivery requirements for the Burford-Charlbury sub-area as set out in Local Plan Policies H1 and H2. It also seeks to shape development in Stonesfield to meet local needs in recognition of the constraints arising from the village's location within the Cotswolds National Landscape.
- 7.18 The Plan advises that the housing delivery in Stonesfield anticipated in the Local Plan 2031 (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.

- 7.19 I sought SPC's comments on the extent to which the policy brings added value beyond national and local planning policies. In its response SPC commented that:

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

- 7.20 I have considered this matter carefully. In general terms I am satisfied that it brings added value and sets the scene for the Plan. Nevertheless, I recommend that the policy is recast so that it does not include the first two parts of the submitted policy which simply restate the national approach towards national landscapes and their overall significance in the planning process.
- 7.21 The representation from Rectory Homes comments about its proposed residential development on the parcel of land to the north of Woodstock Road. I note the comments in the representation about the five-year housing land supply position in West Oxfordshire and the emerging Local Plan. Nevertheless, the development plan context remains as the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031. This is a matter which Rectory Homes is entitled to pursue through the development management process. I have commented elsewhere in this report about the relationship between the emerging Local Plan and the submitted Neighbourhood Plan and the potential need for a made Plan to be reviewed once the emerging Local Plan has been adopted.
- 7.22 I am mindful of the revised basic condition which requires that a neighbourhood plan does not have the effect of preventing development from taking place which is proposed in the development plan for the area of the authority. In this context I have recommended modifications to other general policies in the Plan where I considered that their contents would have such an effect. However my role is to examine the Plan as submitted, and the Plan does not propose the allocation of a housing site.
- 7.23 With the incorporation of the recommended modifications I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

'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.'

SH2 Size and type of homes

- 7.24 The Plan advises that this policy reflects the housing mix requirements in Policy H4 of the Local Plan with more specific local context aimed at addressing the current imbalance of recent housing stock. Census data on the number of rooms shows a disproportionate weighting towards larger properties. Policy SH2 aims to redress the balance over future years.
- 7.25 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach to this matter and has regard to Sections 5 and 8 of the NPPF. In this context I recommend that the opening element of the policy is modified so that it identifies a minimum threshold to which the policy should apply. In my judgement, a threshold of any less than five homes would make the policy difficult to apply through the development management process. I also recommend that the second and the third parts of the policy are modified to bring the clarity required by the NPPF, and to allow WODC to apply these through the development management process.
- 7.26 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the opening element of the first part of the policy with: 'Development proposals of ten or more home (except affordable housing) should provide the following mix of dwelling sizes:'

Replace the second part of the policy with: 'Homes with five or more bedrooms will not be supported unless a specific local need can be demonstrated.'

Replace the third part of the policy with:

'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 whilst responding positively to the character and appearance of the immediate surroundings.'

SH3 Mix of affordable rented housing

- 7.27 The Plan advises that this policy reflects Policy H3 of the Local Plan and goes further to support developments of predominantly affordable and/or lower-cost housing which will remain affordable for future residents.

- 7.28 WODC suggest that this policy is combined with Policy SH4. Such an approach would have merit. However, it is not necessary to ensure that the policy meets the basic conditions.
- 7.29 In general terms, the policy has regard to national and local planning policies and has regard to Sections 5 and 8 of the NPPF. I recommend that the policy is recast and focuses on its second part. This acknowledges that there is no need for the submitted Plan to restate support for the relevant policy in the Local Plan. In reaching this conclusion I have taken account of SPC's response to the clarification note.
- 7.30 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

'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.'

SH4 Affordable homes

- 7.31 This policy complements the approach taken in Policy SH3 of the Plan. Its focus is on affordable homes.
- 7.32 In general terms the policy has regard to national and local planning policies and has regard to Sections 5 and 8 of the NPPF. I recommend that the policy is recast so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF and allows WODC to implement its contents through the development management process. In reaching this conclusion I have taken account of SPC's response to the clarification note.
- 7.33 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

'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.'

SH5 Meeting the needs of older people and those with disabilities

- 7.34 The Plan advises that this policy reflects the housing type and mix requirements specified in policy H4 of the Local Plan but focuses on the needs of older people and those with disabilities.

- 7.35 The policy takes a positive approach to this matter and has regard to Sections 5 and 8 of the NPPF. Within this context I recommend that the wording used in the policy is recast so that its ambitions are clearer. I also recommend that the different elements of the policy refer to the importance of proposals otherwise complying with development plan policies rather than referring to specific Local Plan policies.
- 7.36 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘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.’

SH6 Lower-cost housing

- 7.37 The Plan advises that this policy is in line with Local Plan policy H3 and supports development of lower-cost housing which will remain affordable for future residents. The Plan represents the overwhelming local need for lower-cost housing given local affordability issues.
- 7.38 The policy takes a very positive approach to this matter and has regard to Sections 5 and 8 of the NPPF. I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions.

SH7 Location of new affordable homes (Rural exception sites)

- 7.39 The Plan advises that this policy provides endorsement for rural exception sites included within Local Plan policy H3 in recognition that such developments can deliver affordable housing to those with local connections, thereby providing a uniquely important contribution to meeting local needs.
- 7.40 I sought SPC's comments on the extent to which the policy brings added value beyond national and local planning policies. In its response SPC commented that:

‘(the policy) is important as it emphasises the importance of rural exception sites as identified as an outcome of the Housing Needs Assessment. The Parish Council has already taken steps to identify such site(s) and this policy is helpful in the wider context of residents understanding why the Parish Council is committing itself and limited

resources to pursuing this course. Having it embodied in a policy is helpful. This policy supports housing objective 2.'

- 7.41 I have considered the added value issue very carefully. On the balance of the evidence, I am not satisfied that the policy brings any added value. The first part of the policy sets out the national position and the second part translates that position into a slightly different policy. Whilst the findings of the HNA reinforce the appropriateness of rural exception sites, it brings no added value to the established policy approach. In these circumstances I recommend the deletion of the policy.
- 7.42 In a broader context the supporting text sets out useful local information about housing needs in the neighbourhood area. In these circumstances I recommend that elements of the first part of the policy are weaved into the supporting text to reinforce the matter locally, and to highlight the issue to the development industry. I am satisfied that the Plan can include supporting text on this matter without a specific policy.

Delete the policy

Replace the final paragraph of Section 5.4 of the Plan with:

'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).'

SH8 Infill development

- 7.43 This policy aims to respect the character of the surrounding area and not unacceptably affect the environment of people living in or visiting that area, but recognising that such development can add value to the local community if managed appropriately. In general terms I am satisfied that the policy has regard to Section 5 of the NPPF.
- 7.44 In its response to the clarification note SPC advised that the criteria in the policy are intended to be the added value beyond national and local plan policies. I am satisfied that the criteria are locally-distinctive to Stonesfield.
- 7.45 In this context I recommend that
- the opening part of the policy is recast to omit the unnecessary reference to the Local Plan;
 - that criterion j is presented in a positive context; and
 - criterion j is recast so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF and sits as a free-standing element of the policy.
- 7.46 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the opening element of the first part of the policy with:

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

Replace criterion f with: ‘it is consistent with the approach for the development of gardens in Policy SH10’

Delete criterion j

At the end of the policy add a free-standing element (and not in the alphabetic sequence) to read:

‘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.’

SH9 Sub-division of dwellings to create smaller units

- 7.47 As with Policy SH8, this policy recognises that subdivision can help to redress the imbalance of housing mix from larger to smaller homes and offers appropriate support to such proposals. The policy includes appropriate environmental and amenity requirements.
- 7.48 WODC comment that the policy could be further strengthened by including reference to internal space standards and the provision of external garden space. I agree that this would be the case. However, it is not needed to ensure that the policy meets the basic conditions.
- 7.49 The policy takes a positive approach to this matter and has regard to Sections 5 and 8 of the NPPF. In this context I recommend that the final part of the policy is recast and simplified. This acknowledges that there is no need for a neighbourhood plan to refer to other local policies given that the development plan is read as a whole. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the final part of the policy with:

‘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.’

SH10 Development in residential gardens

- 7.50 This policy seeks to ensure that any development within residential gardens does not cause harm to Stonesfield's character and appearance. The Plan comments that it respects the general principles included in Local Plan policy OS2 as well as those appropriate to the conservation area in Policy EH10 of the Local Plan
- 7.51 In general terms this is a good policy which responds positively to Section 5 of the NPPF.
- 7.52 WODC suggest clarification on biodiversity net gain. I recommend that this is included in the supporting text
- 7.53 I also recommend the following modifications to bring the clarity required by the NPPF:
- the deletion of the unnecessary cross-references to Local Plan policies;
 - ensuring that the policy operates in an inclusive way; and
 - ensure that the specified pedestrian access is a safe pedestrian access.
- 7.54 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Delete 'where the development meets all relevant requirements set out in other policies in this plan and the Local Plan especially Policy SPD2 (Locally appropriate design), and'

At the end of a-c add '; and at the end of d add '; and'

In d replace 'with access' with 'with safe access'

At the end of 5.5.4 add 'Part e of Policy SH10 refers to the need for development proposals to delivery biodiversity net gain. This should be 10% in accordance with national policy.'

SH11 Residential parking

- 7.55 The Plan advises that Stonesfield's streetscape is important to the character of the village and its position within the National Landscape. This Plan advises that this policy seeks to avoid the negative impacts of transport within the National Landscape and the conservation area. The policy addresses a linked series of matter to retain and consolidate car parking.
- 7.56 Oxfordshire County Council comments that:
- 'It is important that any associated policies within the neighbourhood plan are aligned with Oxfordshire County Council's adopted guidance and policy documents which form the County Council's current transport guidance for assessing new development proposals For example, Policy SH11, which requires the provision of one vehicle parking space per bedroom, would result in parking levels that significantly exceed those set out within OCC's adopted standards for a village location. This approach risks over-provision of parking and is not consistent with OCC's policy position, which*

seeks to apply a flexible, context-led approach to parking provision that reflects settlement type, accessibility, and wider transport objectives. To ensure policy soundness and consistency with the County Council's role as Local Highway Authority, it is essential that the plan is prepared in conjunction with OCC's transport policies and guidance documents, including the adopted parking standards. Aligning local policy with OCC guidance will provide a robust and defensible framework for decision-making and will avoid placing officers in a position where it is difficult to object to proposals that comply with the County Council's own published standards and policies.'

- 7.57 WODC also makes a series of suggested improvements to the policy.
- 7.58 I have considered this policy carefully alongside the comments received. In this context I recommend that the first and second parts of the policy are recast to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. The recommended modification to the first part of the policy provides the opportunity for development proposals for residential development to deliver parking standards beyond those required by the County Council where they do not result in a car-dominated environment.
- 7.59 I note WODC's comment about the relationship between the final part of the policy and its title. However, I am satisfied that this element of the policy meets the basic conditions and is supported by the evidence and commentary in the Plan. On this basis I recommend that the title of the policy is modified.
- 7.60 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the first part of the policy with:

'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.'

Replace the second part of the policy with:

'Development proposals that involve the 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.'

At the end of paragraph 5.6.3 add: 'The third part of Policy SH11 offers support to the delivery of additional parking in the village.'

Change the title of the policy to 'Parking'

SEA1 Protecting and enhancing retail, employment and services

- 7.61 The Plan advises that this policy supports WODC's commitment to development and retention of local services and community facilities. Recognising that change of use may be inevitable in some cases, this policy seeks to direct such changes to provide other employment or community benefits where possible. The policy also recognises

home working can make a significant contribution to the economy and vitality of the town and its community. I saw first-hand the importance of retail, employment and services to the well-being of the community during the visit.

- 7.62 This is a comprehensive policy. On the one hand, it will be effective in securing its outcomes. On the other hand, there is a high degree of overlap with Local Plan policies. The policy also refers to the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-25.
- 7.63 In the clarification note I sought SPC's comments on which of the various sections bring added value beyond national and local plan policies. In its response it advised that:

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

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

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

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

- 7.64 I have considered these comments carefully. In general terms the policy has regard to Sections 6 and 8 of the NPPF. However, in this context I recommend that the elements of the policy which repeat or restate policies in the Local Plan are deleted. I also recommend that the remaining elements of the policy are recast so that they have the clarity required by the NPPF and can be implemented by WODC through the development management process.
- 7.65 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Delete the second part of the policy

Replace the third part of the policy with

‘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 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.’

Delete the fourth part of the policy

Replace the sixth part of the policy with:

‘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.’

Replace the seventh part of the policy with: ‘Development proposals that would involve the loss of the White Horse Public House will not be supported.’

Replace the eighth and ninth parts of the policy with:

‘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.’

SEA2 Protecting community facilities

- 7.66 As its title suggests this policy seeks to protect existing community facilities. I saw their importance to the community during the visit. Furthermore, I note the feedback on this matter in the Village Survey.
- 7.67 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach and has regard to Section 8 of the NPPF. I am satisfied that the first two parts of the policy meet the basic conditions.
- 7.68 The third part of the policy comments about where there is a risk of loss or harm to community facilities in consequence of a possible application for planning permission, SPC will consider a case to designate the building as an Asset of Community Value. This reads as a statement of intent rather than a land use policy.
- 7.69 In its response to the clarification note, SPC commented that:
- (it) wishes to retain the policy. The statement of intent to consider designation of a community facility as an Asset of Community value in order to protect it from harmful consequences of development is intended to be included as part of the policy in order to establish from the outset the resource available to the Parish Council.*
- 7.70 I have considered this matter very carefully. Whilst SPC’s intentions in the third part of the policy seek to use an alternative means to safeguard a community facility, it
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describes a process rather than a planning policy. In these circumstances I recommend the deletion of this part of the policy.

- 7.71 The process is highlighted to good effect in the supporting text to the policy. In this context I recommend a consequential modification to the supporting text to acknowledge the deletion of the third part of the policy.
- 7.72 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Delete the third part of the policy

In the final paragraph of the supporting text in the Justification delete the penultimate sentence.

ST1 Sustainable transport

- 7.73 The Basic Conditions Survey comments that this policy is consistent with the Local Transport Plan in promoting improvement in high quality and accessible bus services in rural areas. The Plan also comments that this policy is consistent with LP Core Objective 11 to maximise the opportunity for walking, cycling and use of public transport. It also comments that the policy highlights its commitment to public transport provision and emphasise the importance of safe and easy access to that transport.
- 7.74 The Plan helpfully advises that 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.
- 7.75 I raised several questions with SPC about the second, third and fourth parts of the policy. In its response to the clarification note SPC commented that:
- (it) acknowledges there have been some changes introduced since this policy was first drafted eg EV infrastructure. It is helpful for Parish Councillors and developers to have these points in mind when considering planning applications, however, it will be possible to simplify the policy by simple reference to Building Regulations and OCC, rather than the detailed statement. The PC believes the third part is capable of being implemented and is in part a development management issue, for example it wishes to engage with public transport providers on the routing of services in to and through the village and the provision of further shelters to encourage use. The final paragraph is somewhat ambiguous and was intended to refer to other NP Plan policies, for example, SEL 9.*
- 7.76 The ambitions of the policy are very clear. However, it addresses matters which are not directly related to the land use planning system (such as the availability and ease of use of bus stops) in the third and fourth parts and addresses the provision of EV charging facilities which are now controlled nationally through the Building Regulations. In this context I recommend that the policy is recast to remove these

elements, along with the unnecessary final element of the policy which relates to other components of the Plan.

- 7.77 I also recommend that the opening element of the policy is modified so that it can be applied in a proportionate way through the development management process. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘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.’

ST2 Road safety & easy access for all

- 7.78 The Plan advises that this policy seeks to enhance road safety, especially for pedestrians and to provide safe access to and around Stonesfield Primary School. It endorses and expands on the Local Plan’s promotion of walking and cycling, and its commitment to pedestrian safety.
- 7.79 WODC suggests that the policy could benefit from a map indicating the ‘narrow street’ zone included within the supporting text. SPC agreed to this approach in its response to the clarification note, and I recommend accordingly.
- 7.80 I recommend that the final sentence of the first part of the policy is deleted and repositioned into the supporting text. This acknowledges that it consolidates the approach taken in the first element of this part of the policy and explains how the policy will be implemented. I also recommend that the second part of the policy is modified so that it can be applied proportionately through the development management system. This acknowledges that many minor and domestic proposals will not trigger the application of this part of the policy.
- 7.81 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Delete the final sentence of the first part of the policy.

Replace the second part of the policy with ‘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.’

At the end of paragraph 7.2.1 add: '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, Peak's 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.'

Include a map indicating the 'narrow street' zone included within the supporting text.

ST3 Walking and cycling

- 7.82 The Plan comments that this policy endorses and expands on the Local Plan's promotion of walking and cycling, and its commitment to pedestrian safety. In addition, the Plan advises that encouraging cycling and walking is a benefit to all, as it will help reduce traffic and parking issues in the village. The Plan also comments that a large proportion 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.
- 7.83 In its response to the clarification note SPC advised that:
- (it) sees this as an important standalone policy, because there are many public rights of way in and around Stonesfield, including a number of national trails. Walking and cycling were also identified as a key issue in by residents in the Village Survey; as such it is seen as an important policy and we have added a cross-reference to Policy SEL7.*
- 7.84 In general the policy addresses an important issue in a way which has regard to Sections 8 and 9 of the NPPF. I have taken account of SPC's responses to WODC's representations on this policy.
- 7.85 I have considered the policy carefully. Several of its elements repeat national and local policies or comment about the ways in which WODC will determine planning applications. I recommend that the policy is recast so that it focuses on the locally distinctive elements which relate to the circumstances in the neighbourhood area. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

'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: (include list from the policy)

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

ST4 General parking

- 7.86 The Plan explains that the context to this policy is that Stonesfield has several 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. The policy seeks to address these matters.
- 7.87 In general the policy addresses an important issue in a way which has regard to Sections 8 and 9 of the NPPF. I have taken account of SPC's responses to WODC's representations on this policy. In this context I recommend that the first part of the policy is modified so that it sets out clearly what is required from proposals which alter the demand and usage of services and facilities. I also recommend the deletion of the unnecessary reference to other policies in the Plan in the second part of the policy and a recasting of the third part of the policy so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF and can be used by WODC through the development management process.
- 7.88 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the first part of the policy with:

'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.

Delete the final sentence of the second part of the policy.

Replace the third part of the policy with:

'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.'

SHW1 Working towards better health and wellbeing

- 7.89 The Plan advises that this policy supports 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.
- 7.90 I sought SPC's comments on the need for the policy as its final part identifies other elements of the Plan which will assist in the implementation of the Oxfordshire Health and Well-Being Strategy. In its response to the clarification note it commented that:
- 'the purpose of the policy is to make it clear, for residents as well as planning authorities and developers, that the Plan seeks by specified routes to ensure better health and wellbeing as defined by the Oxfordshire Health and Well-Being Strategy 2024-2030. It is necessary, within the policy, to spell out these routes and the specific policies in the four key areas defined as building blocks of health, in order to make clear how this Plan adds to the general recommendation of the county's Strategy. The OCC comments at Regulation 16 were supportive of this policy.'*
- 7.91 I have considered this policy carefully and in the light of SPC's response to the clarification note. On the one hand, the policy is general in nature and seeks to consolidate the approach taken in the Oxfordshire Health and Well-Being Strategy. On the other hand, it will provide a context within which proposals designed to achieve the implementation of the Strategy can be achieved. On the balance of the evidence, I am satisfied that, with modifications, the policy will meet the basic conditions. In this context I recommend that the detailed elements included within the policy are deleted and repositioned into the supporting text. This will avoid the policy being read as a summary of the Strategy (which is a non-land use document).
- 7.92 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

'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 policies.'

At the end of paragraph 8.2.6 add '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). DP will be particularly supported which seek to promote one or more of the 'building blocks of health' defined by the Strategy. 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).'

SHW2 Protecting and enhancing local sports facilities

- 7.93 This policy seeks to ensure that new development should not result in the loss of open space, sports and recreational buildings and land.
- 7.94 The policy takes a positive approach towards local sports facilities and has regard to Section 8 of the NPPF. In the third part of the policy where there is a reference to replacement provision, I recommend that it is presented as an alternative rather than an additional requirement alongside the other criteria. I also recommend that the first and second parts of the policy are recast to bring the clarity required by the NPPF.
- 7.95 The fourth part of the policy comments that in considering development proposals for the loss of local services and community facilities WODC will have regard to whether a site or facility is registered as an Asset of Community Value. As with Policy SEA2 this is a process issue rather than a land use policy. On this basis I recommend its deletion. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘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.’

SEL1 Protecting the Cotswolds National Landscape

- 7.96 This policy seeks to ensure that development conserves and enhances the landscape and heritage of the Cotswolds National Landscape.
- 7.97 Whilst there is an element of overlap between the policy and national and local policies for the National Landscape, the location of the parish within the National Landscape is of such a significance that it is appropriate for the Plan to address this matter.
- 7.98 WODC comments about the extent to which the affordable housing need identified in the third part of the policy needs to comply with the District’s approach. In its response to this representation SPC advised that it had applied the findings of the appeal judgement in the case defended by WODC as appealed by Cala which offered clarity of interpretation of the NPPF in relation to the Cotswolds National Landscape.

- 7.99 I have considered this matter carefully. On the balance of the evidence, I recommend that the policy is modified so that it refers either to an identified housing need in the District or in the parish. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development

Replace the final part of the policy with:

‘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.’

SEL2 Protecting important views

- 7.100 The Plan advises that this policy is designed to protect views of, from and within the village and its surrounding landscape whose importance was emphasised in the Landscape and Village Character Assessment documents. The Plan advises that this approach is consistent with Local Plan policies covering the Cotswolds National Landscape (EH1), the sensitive nature of the landscape (EH2) and the conservation area (EH10).

- 7.101 The policy is underpinned by the excellent Landscape Assessment (Appendix B) and the Character Assessment (Appendix D). In its response to the clarification note SPC advised about the way in which the two documents had informed the policy as follows:

‘The Landscape Assessment, Appendix B, lists the key viewing points looking towards the village from public footpaths, bridleways and roads. This map is repeated in the Plan (Fig 9.2) and is an accurate record of these inward key views. The Key outward views map, in both the Plan (Fig 9.3) and the Character Assessment (Fig 59) have been revised. These are the key outward views from the village.’

- 7.102 I looked at a selection of the key views identified on Figures 9.2 and 9.3.

- 7.103 WODC comment that:

‘the proposed views continue to be defined as character areas and still extend around the entire village which doesn’t comply with the approach taken in national and local policy. It may therefore be more appropriate to identify a smaller number of key views that warrant particular protection, rather than seeking to protect views surrounding the entirety of the village. Finally, the policy remains relatively wordy, which makes it difficult to follow in parts. We recommend condensing and simplifying the wording to make it clearer and more concise. Some of the LLCA description could also be moved to the supporting text to improve the overall clarity of the policy.’

- 7.104 WODC’s comments on the Addendum to the Basic Condition Statement advise that it considers that the inclusion of the policy as currently drafted could be considered to prevent the delivery of new housing and therefore would not meet the basic conditions.

- 7.105 I have considered this policy very carefully. It has a slightly confusing context as the inward views are identified in Landscape Assessment and the outward views are identified in the Character Assessment. Furthermore, there is a greater level of detail about views in the Character Assessment. In addition, there are inconsistencies between the information shown in Figure 59 of the Character Assessment and Figure 9.3 in the submitted Plan. SPC sought to resolve this matter in its response to the clarification note which included a revised figure showing the views.
- 7.106 The views in Character Assessment reflect the relationship between the village and the surrounding process. Whilst the Landscape Assessment is an equally well-prepared document, it relies on an informal process of the local community identifying views (mainly of the village) from the surrounding countryside. The range of views shown in Figure 9.2 of the Plan reinforces WODC's comments about views surrounding the entire village.
- 7.107 In these circumstances I recommend that the policy is modified so that it has a simpler format and is based on the defined views in the Character Assessment. The modified policy requires that development proposals respond positively to the views. In this way not intended to operate as a blanket restriction to new development. I also recommend consequential modifications to the supporting text
- 7.108 I am satisfied that most of the views identified in the Character Assessment and on Figure 9.3 have the characteristics to be captured in a neighbourhood plan policy. They identify important elements of the character of the village. However, I recommend the deletion of the two elements of view 10 and the southern two elements of view 11. In respect of View 10 the Character Assessment advises that there are strongly linear outward views from The Ridings, the Woodstock Road, and Combe Road leading from the village over the flat plain to the north and north east, accentuated by straight routes and wide skies. Whilst I agree with the general findings of the Character Assessment, I am not persuaded that these views are sufficiently important to justify inclusion in a development plan policy. They are typical views that could be achieved from other locations over the surrounding countryside from the village.
- 7.109 In respect of View 11, the Character Assessment advises about the kinetic views from the Combe Road looking out over Stonesfield Manor paddock towards Baggs Bottom, and back towards the listed Manor House with glimpses of the Church tower beyond. Whilst I agree with the general findings of the Character Assessment, I am not persuaded that the two views from the southern end of Coombe Road are sufficiently important to justify inclusion in a development plan policy. As with proposed views 10 they are typical views that could be achieved from other locations over the surrounding countryside from the village.
- 7.110 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development

Replace the policy with:

'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. ‘

On Figure 9.3 delete the two elements of view 10 and the southern two elements of view 11.’

Replace the Protecting important views looking out of the village section with:

‘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 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: Repeat the list (1-11) from the submitted Plan with the relevant adjustments (in text) to views 10 and 11.’

SEL3 Protecting the Evenlode Valley and the adjacent dip-slope lowland

7.111 The Plan advises that the sensitive landscape of the Evenlode valley is a distinctive landscape feature and of critical importance to the village setting. It also advises that the policy's purpose is to protect the Evenlode Valley. It also advises that the protection included in this policy also links with a mirroring policy in Charlbury's adopted neighbourhood plan and recognises the importance of this landscape as an extensive tract of the Cotswolds National Landscape.

7.112 I sought SPC's comments on the extent to which the policy brought any added value to national and local planning policies for the National Landscape and Policy SEL1 of the submitted Plan. In its response to the clarification note SPC advised that:

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

- 7.113 I have considered the policy very carefully. On the balance of the evidence, I am satisfied that it is appropriate to have a separate policy in the Plan on this matter. The Evenlode valley is a key feature of the landscape of the neighbourhood area.
- 7.114 Based on SPC's helpful response to the question in the clarification note about the wording used in the initial part of the policy, I recommend that it is modified to refer to the well-defined housing settlement boundary.
- 7.115 I recommend that the second bullet point in the policy is modified so that it refers to major development rather than the more general approach in the remainder of the policy. Finally, I recommend the deletion of the third bullet point. Its approach towards requiring a sequential approach whereby other sites need to be considered first and that these are not limited to the neighbourhood plan area does not accord with the development management process which requires development plan to be considered on their merits. Furthermore, a neighbourhood plan can only comment about land within the neighbourhood area.
- 7.116 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development

Replace the opening element of the policy with:

'Development proposals to the south-west, south and south-east of the existing building line defined housing settlement boundary as defined by the red line on Figure (include number) of Brook Lane, Churchfields, Church Street, Boot Street, Combe Road and Witney Lane will only be supported where they meet the following criteria:'

Replace the second bullet point with:

'Major development proposals can robustly demonstrate that the consequent public benefit outweighs any harm to the landscape.'

Delete the third bullet point

Include an additional figure in the Plan to show the defined housing settlement boundary

SEL4 Protecting Stonesfield's Local Green Spaces

- 7.117 This policy proposes the designation of sixteen Local Green Spaces (LGS) in accordance with the NPPF. The Plan advises that all potential LGS sites were assessed using the Cotswold District Council toolkit approved and recommended by WODC. Summary assessments of each proposed LGS are included in Appendix C of the Plan.
- 7.118 I looked at the proposed LGS during the visit. I noted their various sizes and land uses.
- 7.119 Several of the representations commented about the overlap between the proposed LGS designations and their location in the National Landscape. I sought SPC's comments about the added value of LGS designation for those sites surrounding the

village in the National Landscape. In its response to the clarification note WODC advised that:

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

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

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

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

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

7.120 I have considered these comments very carefully. On the balance of the evidence, I am satisfied that SPC has addressed this matter in general terms. Whilst Appendix C

does not directly address this element of Planning practice guidance, I am satisfied that SPC has it has grappled with the issue in general. In these circumstances I will address this matter for each of the contested proposed LGS.

7.121 Taking account of all the information and my own observations I am satisfied that most of the proposed LGSs meet the requirements of paragraphs 106 and 107 of the NPPF. In many cases, they contribute to the attractive environment of the neighbourhood area. In their different ways proposed LGS14 (Village Playing Field), and 16 (Woodstock Road allotments) are precisely the types of green space that the authors of the NPPF would have had in mind for such designations.

7.122 Detailed objections have been made about the proposed designation of the following LGSs

- LGS2 Paddock between Manor House and Combe Road
- LGS3 Field to the east at the top of Brook Lane
- LGS4 The glebe land from Brook Lane to the Scout hut
- LGS5 The Scout hut land
- LGS6 Churchfield allotments
- LGS11 The field behind the garage west of The Ridings
- LGS13 Primary School playing field
- LGS15 Field north of Woodstock Road

7.123 I address these proposed designations in turn in the next sections of this report and assess each of the proposed LGSs against the relevant criteria in paragraphs 106 and 107 of the NPPF and the more general issues in Planning practice guidance. I also address proposed LGS1 (Land south-east of William Buckland Way) based on my observations of the site during the visit. In doing so I have taken account of the representations made on the proposed LGSs at the Regulation 16 stage, the representation made to the Addendum to the Basic Conditions Statement and to SPC's responses to the representations.

LGS1 Land south-east of William Buckland

7.124 The land concerned is open grassland and is located to the south-east of William Buckland.

7.125 Appendix C comments that the land is part of the rural setting of the village and is one of the remaining pockets of pastoral land on the south side of the village. It also advises that the site is adjacent to the site of the Stonesfield Roman villa.

7.126 In its response to the clarification note SPC advised that:

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

The Parish Council seeks to protect the views of the village from the Oxfordshire Way and the Combe Road. At page 48 para 3 of the Landscape Assessment the author,

referring to what is now known as the William Buckland Way development, said the “Recent housing development at Charity Farm has created a hard edge to the village in these views, and additional development will further threaten the integrity of its valued rural character.”

- 7.127 I am satisfied that this proposed LGS is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It is immediately adjacent to the village.
- 7.128 I am not satisfied that the proposed LGS is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. It has none of the characteristic identified in the NPPF on this issue and is part of the wider landscape in this part of the village.
- 7.129 At 1.64 ha I am satisfied that the proposed LGS is local in character.
- 7.130 I have carefully considered the extent to which the proposed LGS will bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape (Planning practice guidance ID: 37-011-20140306). Based on all the evidence I am not satisfied that this is the case. It is a part of the landscape which surrounds the village and enjoys the protection afforded by national policy for National Landscapes.
- 7.131 In all the circumstances I recommend the deletion of the proposed LGS. Whilst it meets several of the criteria for LGS designation, I am not satisfied that it is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. Furthermore, I am not satisfied that its designation would bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape.

LGS2 Paddock between Manor House and Combe Road

- 7.132 The proposed LGS is a paddock to the south and west of Coombe Road. Appendix C advises that the paddock forms a major part of the setting of the grade 2 listed Stonesfield Manor House, a central feature of the village, when viewed from the south-east and particularly from Akeman Street.
- 7.133 A representation from the owners of the site comments about the limited visibility of the site in the village and the potential opportunity for its residential development.
- 7.134 Within its extensive response to the clarification note, SPC advised that:

‘there are several, much cherished, public views through the vegetation bordering Combe Road to the west throughout the year and particularly during the late autumn, winter and early spring months when the vegetation is not in leaf. There are also clear public views across the site from the access road to the Stonesfield Manor. There are significant views towards the site from the Oxfordshire Way/Akeman Street bridleway which passes in the dip slope valley, Bagg’s Bottom, across the field adjoining the proposed LGS. There are also views of the proposed LGS from the Combe Road on the far side of Bagg’s Bottom on the approach to Stonesfield from Combe. These views may be obtained on foot, from passing cars and from passing buses (it is on the main bus route), particularly from the upper deck of these buses. Finally, the LGS forms a crucial part of the AONB setting of Stonesfield when viewed, not only from these vantage points, but also from the crest of the land on the Combe side of Baggs Bottom.

Whilst fulfilment of the designation criteria is not dependent upon these views, they are particularly attractive. The fact that they do take advantage of this is evident from an examination of the evidence of de facto access to the vantage points from the west side of Combe Road.'

- 7.135 I am satisfied that this proposed LGS is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It is immediately adjacent to the village.
- 7.136 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. It plays an important role in the setting of the village and provides a context for the Manor House.
- 7.137 At 2.6 ha I am satisfied that the proposed LGS is local in character.
- 7.138 I note that there is a current planning application for residential development on the site (25/01897/OUT). Nevertheless, at this point, I am satisfied that the proposed LGS has taken account of paragraph 106 of the NPPF. In my assessment its designation would be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is capable of enduring beyond the end of the Plan period. No evidence has been presented to the contrary. Plainly WODC will need to consider the planning application against national and local planning policies. Should it decide to grant planning permission that decision would render the proposed LGS unrealistic given the contents of Planning practice guidance (ID: 37-008-20140306).
- 7.139 I have carefully considered the extent to which the proposed LGS will bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape. Based on all the evidence I am satisfied that this is the case. It is a specific and clearly-defined parcel of land which provides a high degree of landscape and recreational value.
- 7.140 In all the circumstances I am satisfied that the proposed LGS meets the criteria for such designation.

LGS3 Field to the east at the top of Brook Lane

- 7.141 As the Plan describes the proposed LGS is a field. Planning permission has recently been granted on appeal for the development of a single house.
- 7.142 Appendix C advises that the field is part of 'the enclosures immediately on the edge of the village' the value of which was noted by the author of the Landscape Assessment.
- 7.143 An agent acting for the owner of the site comments generally that:

'the LGS designation is not justified and contradicts key national policy tests. Further, the recent planning appeal decision (APP/D3125/W/25/3363544) that was issued on 1 December 2025, which granted Permission in Principle (PiP) for a self-build single dwelling, provides site-specific findings that contradict the assertions made within the DSNP at Appendix C – Stonesfield Local Green Spaces.'

- 7.144 Details are also provided in the representation about the planning history of the site, the lack of public access or community use and a series of other matters.

7.145 In its response SPC commented that

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

7.146 I have considered this matter very carefully and looked at the proposed LGS from the path carefully during the visit. Planning practice guidance (ID:37-008-20140306) advises that Local Green Space designation will rarely be appropriate where the land has planning permission for development. Exceptions could be where the development would be compatible with the reasons for designation or where planning permission is no longer capable of being implemented.

7.147 I have considered this matter carefully and have concluded that there is no evidence here that the site should be an exception to this element of national guidance. In these circumstances I recommend the deletion of this proposed LGS

LGS4 The glebe land from Brook Lane to the Scout hut

7.148 The proposed LGS is a strip of informal wooded open space. Appendix C advises that the lower part of the Glebe leading to the Scout Hut includes the chipping banks, the left-over waste from the historically important Stonesfield slate industry.

7.149 The Oxford Dioceses Board of Finance (ODBF) objects to the proposed designation. It argues that the proposed site has been assessed jointly with proposed LGS 5, and, collectively, that the site should be considered as an extensive tract of land.

7.150 In its response to the clarification note SPC commented that:

'(it) is, with respect, content to leave it to the examiner to determine, on the basis of his direct inspection of the green spaces in question, whether they are indeed distinct and separate pieces of land, in any single case not 'an extensive tract of land,' or whether any combination of these spaces might more appropriately be viewed as a single space and, by virtue of that, as being extensive so as to preclude designation. It is respectfully suggested that it is transparently obvious from a glance at the plan attached to policy SEL4 and a fortiori from direct inspection of the green spaces that each proposed green space is clearly separate from each of the others and cannot be justifiably described as an extensive tract of land. It is far from 'an undisputed fact that both land parcels are perceived as a single entity' (i.e. proposed LGS4 and LGS5).'

7.151 I am satisfied that this proposed LGS is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It is immediately adjacent to the village

7.152 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. It plays an important role in the setting of the village and provides an attractive, informal pedestrian route along the southern edge of the village.

- 7.153 At 1 ha I am satisfied that the proposed LGS is local in character. If it was considered with proposed LGS5 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS would be local in character.
- 7.154 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS has taken account of paragraph 106 of the NPPF. In my assessment its designation would be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. No evidence has been presented to the contrary.
- 7.155 I have carefully considered the extent to which the proposed LGS will bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape (PPG ID: 37-011-20140306). Based on all the evidence I am satisfied that this is the case. It is a specific and clearly defined parcel of land which provides a high degree of recreational value.
- 7.156 In all the circumstances I am satisfied that the proposed LGS meets the criteria for such designations.

LGS5 The Scout hut land

- 7.157 The proposed LGS is the site of the Scout hut and the land immediately surrounding the Hut. Appendix C advises that in 1962 the Scouts built a prefab hut, bought from Chipping Norton, to become the village Scout Hut, locally known as Andy's Den. The old hut was eventually closed and demolished in 2023, and a new hut is nearing completion in 2025. The Glebe land has been the centre of scouting activity and will continue to be so. I saw the completed Hut during the visit.
- 7.158 The ODBF objection to this proposed LGS and SPC's response is set out in my analysis of LGS4.
- 7.159 I am satisfied that this proposed LGS is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It is immediately adjacent to the village.
- 7.160 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. It plays an important role in the community wellbeing of the village.
- 7.161 At 0.37 ha I am satisfied that the proposed LGS is local in character. If it was considered on size grounds with proposed LGS4 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS would be local in character.
- 7.162 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS has taken account of paragraph 106 of the NPPF. In my assessment its designation would be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. No evidence has been presented to the contrary.

7.163 I have carefully considered the extent to which the proposed LGS will bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape (PPG ID: 37-011-20140306). Based on all the evidence I am satisfied that this is the case. It is a specific and clearly defined parcel of land which relates to the very significant dry valley in this part of the village

7.164 In all the circumstances I am satisfied that the proposed LGS meets the criteria for such designations.

LGS6 Churchfield allotments

7.165 The proposed LGS is in use as allotments. It is located off Churchfield.

7.166 Appendix C advises that the allotments are over-subscribed and that demand exceeds available plots. In March 2024, there was a waiting list and it was not unusual to wait a year to be allocated a plot.

7.167 ODBF comment that the site:

'is currently protected by a significant number of different designations – Stonesfield Conservation Area, Cotswolds National Landscape, and the southern part is situated within the Northern Evenlode Conservation Target Area. Additional planning restrictions will only make it more difficult for local residents to put up structures or make others changes to facilitate and improve the existing local community space.'

7.168 In its response to the clarification note SPC commented that:

'LGS6, (is) a paradigm of community activity of the kind.

The several existing designations are not to be weighed against LGS designation. On the contrary they are evidence in support of the 'special' quality the space has for the community. All the designations have different qualifying criteria and different consequences. As pointed out above, the balance of exceptional circumstances and public interest against the qualifying criteria for other designations might conceivably (though it is hoped that it is unlikely) tip in favour of development proposals but the balance might, it is hoped, revert against development when the 'special to the community' and 'of particular local significance' qualities are taken into account. For example, the protection afforded by designation as a Conservation Area is triggered by considerations which may not include those which make a green space 'special.

Development proposals for the allotments may or may not affect heritage assets. However, even were they to have no potential effect upon heritage assets, they might significantly degrade the special quality the allotments have for members of the local community. Similarly, the protection afforded by reference to the scenic and landscape beauty of the surrounding AONB might conceivably (although it is hoped and believed not) be deemed to be outweighed by the contribution of a development proposal to satisfaction of housing need. In such circumstances the demonstrably special quality of the allotments for the local community and their particular local significance would arguably tip the balance against granted permission.'

- 7.169 I am satisfied that this proposed LGS is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It is immediately adjacent to the village.
- 7.170 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. It plays an important role in the setting of the village and has an important recreational value.
- 7.171 At 0.4 ha I am satisfied that the proposed LGS is local in character. If it was considered on size grounds with proposed LGS4 and LGS5 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS would be local in character.
- 7.172 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS has taken account of paragraph 106 of the NPPF. In my assessment its designation would be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. No evidence has been presented to the contrary.
- 7.173 I have carefully considered the extent to which the proposed LGS will bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape (PPG ID: 37-011-20140306). Based on all the evidence I am satisfied that this is the case. It is a specific and clearly defined parcel of land which provides a highly valued community use as allotments.
- 7.174 In all the circumstances I am satisfied that the proposed LGS meets the criteria for such designations.

LGS 7 Paddocks to the right on the path down to the Scout hut

- 7.175 The proposed LGS is a series of paddocks to the south and west of the village. Appendix C advises that the site is one of 'the enclosures immediately on the edge of the village' described by the Landscape Assessment as having retained much of the hedgerow vegetation so that their historic field patterns have been preserve. It also advises that these much smaller fields have a more pastoral character.
- 7.176 ODBF objects to the proposed designation. It argues that the proposed site has been assessed jointly with proposed LGS 4, 5 and 6, and, collectively, the site should be considered as an extensive tract of land. ODBF also comments that:

'the LGS assessment states that the land has significant recreational value which is derived from views taken from public vantage points (Public Rights of Way); however, the land is private, and therefore has no recreational value as the public cannot access it. If views towards this land parcel were considered valuable by local residents, this would most likely be due to its beauty and not its recreational value. This confusion casts further doubt on the soundness of the assessment of this land parcel against the LGS criteria set out in paragraph 107 of the NPPF.'

- 7.177 SPC's general comments on the joint assessment issue is delt with earlier in this report. It also advised that:

'The paddocks, forming proposed LGS7, are physically distinct, i.e. on the other side of the lane giving access to the Scout Hut, are pastureland tending towards and bordering the Village Green woods of Stockey Bottom, and afford the most peaceful viewpoint towards 'Stockey' for the many members of the community who use the footpath for their recreation.'

- 7.178 I am satisfied that this proposed LGS is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It is immediately adjacent to the village.
- 7.179 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. It plays an important role in the setting of the village and has an important visual and recreational value.
- 7.180 At 1.2 ha I am satisfied that the proposed LGS is local in character. If it was considered on size grounds with proposed LGS4, LGS5 and LGS6 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS would be local in character.
- 7.181 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS has taken account of paragraph 106 of the NPPF. In my assessment its designation would be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. No evidence has been presented to the contrary.
- 7.182 I have carefully considered the extent to which the proposed LGS will bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape (PPG ID: 37-011-20140306). Based on all the evidence I am satisfied that this is the case. It is a specific and clearly defined parcel of land which relates to its landscape and agricultural heritage,
- 7.183 In all the circumstances I am satisfied that the proposed LGS meets the criteria for such designations.

LGS 11 The field behind the garage west of The Ridings

- 7.184 The site is an open piece of grassland on the edge of the village. Appendix C comments that the site is the continuation beyond The Dene of the steep-sided dry valley formed as an Evenlode tributary.
- 7.185 Agents acting for the owners of the site object to the proposed designation of the LGS. SPC commented to that objection in its response to the clarification note.
- 7.186 I am satisfied that this proposed LGS is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It is immediately adjacent to the village.
- 7.187 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. It plays an important role in the setting of the town and is attractive countryside.
- 7.188 At 1.9 ha I am satisfied that the proposed LGS is local in character.

- 7.189 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS has taken account of paragraph 106 of the NPPF. In my assessment its designation would be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. No evidence has been presented to the contrary.
- 7.190 I have carefully considered the extent to which the proposed LGS will bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape (PPG ID: 37-011-20140306). Based on all the evidence I am satisfied that this is the case. It is a specific and clearly defined parcel of land which relates to the very significant dry valley in this part of the village.
- 7.191 In all the circumstances I am satisfied that the proposed LGS meets the criteria for such designations.

LGS13 Primary School playing field

- 7.192 The site is identified as the school playing field. However, the Plan in App C shows two distinct areas. The larger area is the Playing Field and the smaller area (off High Street) is an incidental green amenity area
- 7.193 Oxfordshire County Council Property comments that:

‘the proposed LGS is private land and not accessible by the public, as it could endanger the safety of the pupils attending the school. In addition, OCC Property questions how a school playing field could be described as a “tranquil resort” when there would be children playing and screaming most of the time during the day.

land benefits from additional planning controls due to its location within the conservation area. Therefore, and as per paragraph 011 reference ID: 37-011-20140306, the land should only be designated if there would result in additional local benefits. No such case has been made in this NP and it is also significant to highlight, once again, that OCC is the owner of the land.

the land has no public recreational value, as it is only used by the pupils and staff of the school. It is significant to highlight that should the Examiner accept this designation; it will be much more difficult for OCC to discharge its educational duty and meet the expanding needs of the school. Therefore, the LGS designation poses a significant risk to the longevity of the school and its playing field which this NP has failed to take into consideration.’

- 7.194 In its response to the clarification note, SPC advised that:

‘(it) has never asserted that there is any public right of access to the playing field. In the Appendix C: Local Green Spaces document at item 4 it clearly states that “there are no public rights of way across the land”. The children play on the field for limited periods in breaks and during sports – a sight which is positively enjoyed by residents of Peaks Lane and passers-by; the majority of the time the field is empty and tranquil.

Should the school need to build new classrooms because the pupil intake has expanded to such an extent, the fact the land has been designated an LGS would not prevent this exceptional development of the already existing structure. It would prevent OCC from selling parcels of land to a developer, reducing the size of the excellent playing field and reducing pupils' ability to enjoy the sports facilities, playground and forest school.

The school playing field is clearly of recreational value to the pupils, who are by definition the children of Stonesfield. It has no recreational value to the public, but according to the NPPF, designation of a local green space depends inter alia on it being demonstrably special to a local community and holding a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife... The school playing field meets all of these conditions except that of recreational value to the (adult) public.'

- 7.195 I am satisfied that this proposed LGS is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It is within the village.
- 7.196 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. It plays an important role in the setting of the village and is a key element of its social and community life.
- 7.197 At 0.76 ha I am satisfied that the proposed LGS is local in character.
- 7.198 I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS has taken account of paragraph 106 of the NPPF. In my assessment its designation would be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. I am also satisfied that the proposed LGS is capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. No evidence has been presented to the contrary.
- 7.199 I have carefully considered the extent to which the proposed LGS will bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the conservation area (PPG ID: 37-011-20140306). Based on all the evidence I am satisfied that this is the case. It is a specific and clearly defined parcel of land which relates to a well-defined use.
- 7.200 In all the circumstances I am satisfied that the proposed LGS meets the criteria for LGS designation. I have noted the County Council's concerns about the impact of LGS designation on the playing field part of the site on the longer-term delivery of educational facilities in the village. However, and as SPC comment, any planning applications for the delivery/expansion of education facilities would be considered on their merits taking account of any very special circumstances advanced in such proposals.

LGS15 (Field north of Woodstock Road)

- 7.201 The site is a largely level piece of agricultural land on the edge of the village. Appendix C comments that the site immediately adjoins the village playing field and by being preserved as open space enhances the beauty, tranquillity and recreational value of the playing field.

7.202 Rectory Homes comments that:

'Whilst we support neighbourhood planning, as well as SPC's vision for the SNP, Rectory wish to object to the site's allocation, in its entirety, for Local Green Space ('LGS'). To designate the whole site as LGS would effectively sterilise the site for development and will only serve to put pressure on other sites within the village to provide new housing.'

7.203 In its response to the clarification note. SPC advised that:

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

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

7.204 I am satisfied that this proposed LGS is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves. It is immediately adjacent to the village.

7.205 The commentary in Appendix C about the extent to which it is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance is general in nature. It focuses on its role within the wider landscape setting of the village. It does not have any of the characteristics highlighted in the NPPF on this matter.

7.206 At 6.1 ha the proposed LGS is at the margins between being seen as local in character rather than an extensive tract of land. However, on balance, I am satisfied that the proposed LGS is local in character.

7.207 I have carefully considered the extent to which the proposed LGS will bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape. Based on all the evidence I am not satisfied that this is the case. It is part of the landscape which surrounds the village and enjoys the protection afforded by national policy for National Landscapes.

7.208 In all the circumstances I recommend the deletion of the proposed LGS. Whilst it meets several of the criteria for LGS designation, I am not satisfied that it is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance. Furthermore, I

am not satisfied that its designation would bring additional local benefit to the location of the site in the Cotswold National Landscape.

The Policy

- 7.209 The policy itself takes the matter-of-fact approach as set out in paragraph 108 of the NPPF.
- 7.210 With the recommended deletion of the various proposed LGSs I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development

Delete LGSs 1, 3, and 15

Delete LGSs 1, 3, and 15 from Figure 9.4

SEL5 Blue/green corridors

- 7.211 The Plan advises that 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. 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.
- 7.212 I sought SPC's comments on the added value of the policy. In its response to the clarification note SPC commented that:
- 'this policy purposefully restates the importance of EH3 of the Local Plan and CE7 of the Cotswolds Management Plan so that the reader of the Plan immediately understands the wider context of Policy SEL5. Throughout the Plan we have sought to ensure the reader, be that an ordinary resident or a potential developer, has a clear understanding that Stonesfield's Plan conforms to wider National, Local and regional policies.'*
- 7.213 I recommend that the second part of the policy is deleted and repositioned into the supporting text. There is no need for a neighbourhood plan to advise that SPC and others will continue with its very effective work on securing a net gain in local biodiversity will be continued and extended. Similarly, most of the work being undertaken does not need planning permission and would be unaffected by a planning policy.
- 7.214 WODC advises that the third part of the policy is too stringent in not allowing any development in this area and should require any development to take every opportunity to enhance the environment, and particularly the Conservation Target Area (CTA). It also advises that the requirement for development adjacent to a CTA to demonstrate an exceptional need does not comply with the approach taken in the Local Plan. In its response to the clarification note, SPC advised that:

'The third paragraph is purposefully 'stringent' in stating that development proposals in the blue/green corridors will not be supported. The purpose of these blue/green areas

is to ensure that there is an uninterrupted corridor for wildlife of all types to move from one area to another. The very nature of development, building of any kind, infrastructure and mono-agriculture causes a barrier stopping the movement which is so important to biodiversity. Significant parts of the blue/green corridors have SSSI status, or is a scheduled ancient monument or Wild Oxfordshire Conservation Target Areas.'

7.215 I have considered this matter carefully. On the balance of the evidence, I am not satisfied that the approach taken in the third part of the policy is either appropriate or meets the basic conditions. As WODC comment it is too stringent and would prevent otherwise acceptable development from coming forward. In this context, I recommend that this element of the policy is recast so that it has a more general nature and advises that development proposals should take appropriate opportunities to enhance the environment and in particular to contribute towards the Northern Evenlode Conservation Target Area.

7.216 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development

Replace the policy with:

'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.'

At the end of the second paragraph of the Justification add the deleted second paragraph of the policy.

SEL6 Biodiversity

7.217 The aim of this policy is that the natural environment of Stonesfield should be protected, and where practicable enhanced, to achieve an overall net gain in biodiversity

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

7.219 I recommend that the second part of the policy is modified so that it acknowledges that certain elements of domestic development are exempt from the national requirements.

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- 7.220 The list of potential enhancement measures in the third part of the policy are locally-distinctive. Within this context I recommend that the opening element of the third part of the policy is recast so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF and can be applied by WODC through the development management process.
- 7.221 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the second part of the policy with: ‘Where appropriate, development proposals should result in a net biodiversity gain of at least 10%.’

Replace the opening element of the third part of the policy with:

‘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:’

SEL7 Protecting footpaths

- 7.222 The Plan advises that Stonesfield is the hub of well-used local footpaths radiating in all directions from the village, which make the countryside highly accessible to walkers. 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.
- 7.223 I noted the availability and good condition of the various footpaths in the parish during the visit. The policy addresses this matter in a positive way. In this broader context I recommend that the order of the two parts of the policy is reversed so that it has a positive focus. SPC agreed to this approach in its response to the clarification note.
- 7.224 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development

Replace the policy with:

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

Development proposal which would involve the obstruction, stopping up or diversion of any public footpath, bridleway or restricted byway will be not supported unless: [list the criteria from the submitted policy].’

SEL8 Water quality, sustainable drainage systems and flood risk management

- 7.225 This policy endorses and follows Policy EH7 of the Local Plan providing important local context. The Plan advises that the policy also addresses the issue of water quality within the Evenlode Catchment area in recognition of the importance of this water course and the significant concerns relating to water quality issues.

- 7.226 The second, third and fifth parts of the policy read as process matters rather than as a land use policy. As such I recommend that they are deleted and relocated into the supporting text.
- 7.227 I note the comments about sustainable drainage. However, this approach will not necessarily be required for all forms of development, particularly where proposals are very minor in scale. On this basis I recommend a modification to the fourth part of the policy to address this matter.
- 7.228 The final part of the policy (on Grampian Conditions) reads as a process issue (how the District Council will deliver planning permissions) rather than as a land use policy. As such I recommend that it is deleted and relocated into the supporting text.
- 7.229 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development

Replace the policy with:

‘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.’**

At the end of paragraph 9.7.3 add:

‘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’

Replace paragraph 9.7.4 with the final part of the submitted policy (Grampian conditions)

SEL9 Tranquillity and dark skies

- 7.230 The context to this policy is that Stonesfield's dark skies are an important part of its character, allowing stars to be seen at night without the obtrusion of light pollution
- 7.231 The policy takes a positive approach to this matter and has regard to Section 15 of the NPPF. In this context I recommend specific modifications to the policy so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF. The modifications acknowledge that the ambitions of the policy may not always be practicable.
- 7.232 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development

Replace the third part of the policy with: '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.'

In the fourth part of the policy replace 'possible' with 'practicable'

SHE1 Heritage and archaeology

- 7.233 This policy aims to protect the historic environment of the village, conforming to Local Plan policies and specifically covering the conservation area (EH10), listed buildings (EH11), historic landscape (EH13), and scheduled monuments/other archaeological remains (EH15).
- 7.234 I sought SPC's advice about the need for the reference in the policy to non-designated heritage assets. In its response SPC advised that:
- 'The purpose of Policy SHE1 is to define the whole framework of heritage considerations which need to be taken into account in relation to proposed developments: i.e. the archaeological remains, scheduled monuments, listed buildings and non-designated assets. Policy SHE2 then goes on to specify the less obvious considerations relating to developments in relation to non-designated assets.'*
- 7.235 I have considered this matter carefully. On the one hand, SPC's approach towards the distinction between this policy and SHE2 highlights its intention to provide comprehensive advice to building owners and developers. On the other hand, it generates a degree of unnecessary commentary on the issue. Furthermore, it fails to acknowledge that national policy in relation to non-designated heritage assets. (in Section 16 of the NPPF) is distinct from that for designated assets. In these circumstances I recommend that the references to non-designated heritage assets. in this policy are deleted.
- 7.236 The policy takes a comprehensive approach to heritage assets and in general terms has regard to Section 16 of the NPPF. Nevertheless, as submitted, the policy is a combination of policy and supporting text. In addition, several of the elements of supporting text overlap one with the other. In these circumstances I recommend that the policy is recast so that it focuses on land use policy matters, and that the supporting

text included within the policy wording is incorporated within the wider supporting text for the policy.

- 7.237 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘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.’

As a free-standing paragraph at the end of the Justification and supporting evidence section add:

‘Policy SHE1 sets out the Plan’s approach to designated heritage assets. In this context planning application 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.’

SHE2 Protecting non designated heritage assets

- 7.238 This policy aims to protect those assets that at present have no formal recognition and yet are important to the character of Stonesfield. The proposed non-designated heritage assets. are set out in Figure 10.3.
- 7.239 I looked at a selection of the proposed non-designated heritage assets during the visit. I am satisfied that the justification for their identification is appropriate.

- 7.240 As submitted the policy does not have regard to the details of paragraph 216 of the NPPF which comments about the balanced judgement required for the determination of development proposals affecting non-designated heritage assets. This approach differs from that which relates to designated heritage assets. I recommend that the policy is recast to address this matter. The recasting process also addresses the repetition in the submitted policy.
- 7.241 With the incorporation of the recast policy, I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘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.’

SBD1 Locally appropriate design: Development and new building

- 7.242 This policy aims to protect and enhance the built environment of the village, especially within the conservation area especially through good design, scale and massing proportionate to neighbouring structures, and use of appropriate materials
- 7.243 This is a very good policy which is underpinned by the Building Design Guidelines (Section 11.5). It is an excellent local response to Section 11 of the NPPF.
- 7.244 The final three parts of the policy do not naturally relate to design matters and overlap with other policies in the Plan. I recommend that they are deleted.
- 7.245 Finally I recommend that an element of Policy SBD4 is repositioned into this policy with which it has a more natural fit.
- 7.246 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the fourth part of the policy with:

‘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.'

Delete the final three parts of the policy

At the end of the policy add: '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.'

SBD2 Locally appropriate design: Listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets and existing buildings

- 7.247 This policy aims to ensure new building projects protect and enhance the character of Stonesfield. It also seeks to ensure alterations and extensions to listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets, and existing building protect and enhance the character of the village.
- 7.248 WODC make several detailed comments about proposals affecting listed buildings.
- 7.249 The policy addresses a range of issues. However, in doing so it fails to acknowledge the distinction between national policy affecting designated and non-designated heritage assets. In addition, its contents overlap with those for policy SHE1 (Heritage and Archaeology) and policy SHE2 (non-designated heritage assets.). Furthermore, the contents of the policy do not bring any added value beyond national and local planning policies. In these circumstances I recommend that the policy is deleted.
- 7.250 Whilst I have recommended the deletion of the policy, I am satisfied that the supporting text should remain. It acts as a reminder of the nature of national and local planning policies to all concerned.

Delete the policy

SBD3 Locally appropriate design: Natural environment

- 7.251 The Plan advises that through high quality design the policy aims to positively enhance the biodiversity of the village wherever possible and to protect views from the built environment and those into the village from the wider landscape.
- 7.252 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach. Nevertheless, I recommend that the first part of the policy is modified so that it can be applied in a proportionate way and to allow proposals to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of its immediate locality. This would acknowledge that development proposals will have different abilities to enhance the character and appearance of its immediate locality.
- 7.253 I also recommend modifications to the wording used in the second and third parts of the policy to bring the clarity required by the NPPF.
- 7.254 The final part of the policy repeats the more general approach taken in Policy SEL1. On this basis I recommend that it is deleted. In reaching this conclusion I have taken account of SPC's response to the clarification note.

- 7.255 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace first part with: '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.'

In the second part of the policy replace 'which detract' with 'which unacceptably detract'

Replace the third part of the policy with: 'Proposals which would restrict access to the countryside or wildlife-rich sites will not be supported.'

Delete the final part of the policy

SBD4 Environmental design standards: New developments and refurbishments

- 7.256 The Plan advises that 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.

- 7.257 The policy advises that proposals for new buildings must also demonstrate how they would deliver excellent environmental performance. It also comments about water efficiency matters. In general, it approaches these matters in a positive way and has regard to Sections 14 and 15 of the NPPF. In this context I recommend the following modifications to bring the clarity required by the NPPF and to ensure that WODC can implement its details through the development management process:

- a recasting of the opening element of the first part of the policy;
- the simplification of the second, third and fourth parts of the policy
- the deletion of the penultimate part of the policy (which is explanatory text) and its relocation into the supporting text of the Plan; and
- the deletion of the final part of the policy and its repositioning into Policy SBD1 which addresses more general design and character issues).

- 7.258 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the opening element of the first part of the policy with:

'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.'

Replace the second, third and fourth parts of the policy with:

‘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’

Delete the penultimate part of the policy.

Delete the final part of the policy.

At the end of the second paragraph of the Justification add: ‘Planning conditions will be applied to new residential development to ensure that the water efficiency standards are met.’

SBD5 Environmental design standards: Listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets and existing buildings

- 7.259 This policy consolidates the approach taken in Policy SBD4. It seeks to protect the environment as a legacy for future inhabitants of Stonesfield. It also seeks to enhance the environmental performance of the listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets, while preserving their historic character.
- 7.260 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach to this matter and has regard to Section 16 of the NPPF. I recommend modification to the wording used in the policy to acknowledge that its ambitions for improving the thermal efficiency of heritage assets may not always be practicable. I also recommend the deletion of the repetitive policy element about dry stone walls (which I have concluded earlier best sits in Policy SBD1).
- 7.261 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘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.’

Implementation and Monitoring

- 7.262 Section 2.6 of the Plan addresses implementation and monitoring in a very positive way. It also advises about the potential need for a review of the Plan in due course. In general terms this is best practice. However, given the anticipated progress of the West Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan – Examiner’s Report

Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043, I recommend that the adoption of that Plan is weaved into the monitoring and review schedule.

At the end of paragraph 2.6.3 add: '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.'

Aspirations

- 7.263 Sections 7 (Transport, road use and footpaths) and 9 (Countryside and natural environment) of the Plan include Aspirations. They comment about concerns, 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. It advises that the Aspirations are beyond the scope of the Plan, and represent possibilities for further evolution as separate and later initiative(s) from SPC.
- 7.264 National policy comments that Aspirations should be incorporated into a separate section of the Plan to distinguish them from the land use policies. However, on balance I am satisfied that the approach in the Plan is appropriate. I have reached this view for three related reasons. The first is that they add value to the land use policies on a topic-by-topic basis. The second is that they are distinguished from the land use policies by the use of colour. The third is that the Plan properly comments about their distinction from the policies.

Other Matters - General

- 7.265 This report has recommended a series of modifications both to the policies and to the supporting text in the submitted Plan. Where consequential changes to the text are required directly because of my recommended modification to the policy concerned, I have highlighted them in this report. However other changes to the general text may be required elsewhere in the Plan because of the recommended modifications to the policies. Similarly, changes may be necessary to paragraph numbers in the Plan or to accommodate other administrative matters. It will be appropriate for WODC and SPC to have the flexibility to make any necessary consequential changes to the general text. I recommend accordingly.

Modification of general text (where necessary) to achieve consistency with the modified policies and to accommodate any administrative and technical changes.

8 Summary and Conclusions

Summary

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2041. It is distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community to safeguard the character and setting of the neighbourhood area and to designate a package of Local Green Spaces.
- 8.2 Following the independent examination of the Plan, I have concluded that the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.

Conclusion

- 8.3 On the basis of the findings in this report, I recommend to West Oxfordshire District Council that subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report that the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to referendum.

Other

- 8.4 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood area. In my view, the neighbourhood area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved on 17 November 2021.
- 8.5 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth way. SPC's responses to the clarification note were both helpful and comprehensive.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
22 July 2026