

Stonesfield Neighbourhood Development Plan

Examiner's Clarification Note

This Note sets out my initial comments on the submitted Plan. It also sets out areas where it would be helpful to have some further clarification. For the avoidance of any doubt, matters of clarification are entirely normal at this early stage of the examination process.

Initial Comments

The Plan provides a clear vision for the neighbourhood area which is underpinned by distinctive objectives.

The presentation of the Plan is very good. The difference between the policies and the supporting text is clear. The Plan makes good use of various maps and high-quality photographs. Section 1 helpfully comments about the vision and objectives of the Plan and how the policies deliver on a section-by-section basis the objectives. Furthermore, the way in which each policy comments about its Aims, and its Justification and Supporting evidence is very compelling.

The Plan is underpinned by a package of appendices. This is best practice.

Points for Clarification

I have read the submitted documents and the representations made to the Plan. I have also visited the neighbourhood area. I am now able to raise issues for clarification with the Parish Council.

The comments made on the points in this Note will be used to assist in the preparation of the examination report and in recommending any modifications that may be necessary to the Plan to ensure that it meets the basic conditions.

I set out specific policy clarification points below in the order in which they appear in the submitted Plan:

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

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

Policies SH8 and SH10

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

Policy SH11

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

Policy SAE1

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

Policy SEA2

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

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

Policy ST1

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

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

Policy SHW1

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

Policy SHW2

The policy takes a positive approach towards local sports facilities.

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

Policy SEL2

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

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

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

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

Policy SEL3

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

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

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

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

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

Policy SEL4

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

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

In terms of the proposed LGSs:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Policy SEL5

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

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

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

Policy SEL6

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

Policy SEL7

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

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

Policy SEL8

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

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

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

Policy SHE1

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

Policy SBD1

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

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

Policy SBD3

In general terms the policy takes a positive approach

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

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

Representations

Does the Parish Council wish to comment on any of the representations made to the Plan?

I would find it helpful if the Parish Council commented on the representations made by:

- Oxfordshire County Council (Representation 3);
- Oxfordshire County Council Property (Representation 4);
- Representation 21;
- Carter Jonas (Representation 26);
- Representation 27;
- Stonesfield Community Land Trust (Representation 32);
- Oxford Dioceses Board of Finance (Representation 33);
- Planning Prospects Limited (Representation 35); and
- Arc Planning/Rectory Homes (Representation 36)

The District Council proposes a series of revisions to certain policies and the supporting text in the Plan. It would be very helpful if the Parish Council commented on the suggested revisions?

Protocol for responses

I would be grateful for responses to the questions raised by 24 April 2026. Please let me know if this timetable may be challenging to achieve. It is intended to maintain the momentum of the examination.

If certain responses are available before others, I would be happy to receive the information on a piecemeal basis. Irrespective of how the information is assembled, please could it come

to me directly from the District Council. In addition, please can all responses make direct reference to the policy or the matter concerned.

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Independent Examiner

Stonesfield Neighbourhood Development Plan

26 March 2026