



Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan

# ASTON ROWANT NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2019 - 2034

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## PART ONE

### THE CONTEXT

#### 1. Introduction & Background

- 1.1. Aston Rowant Parish Council has prepared a Neighbourhood Development Plan for the area designated by the local planning authority, South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 and of the Neighbourhood Development Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The designated area follows the parish boundary (see Section 3).
- 1.2. Neighbourhood Development Planning gives communities power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood Development Plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan. Neighbourhood Development Plans should not promote less development than is set out in the strategic policies for the area, nor should they undermine those strategic policies. (NPPF – para 29) The purpose of the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan (ARNP) is to make planning policies that can be used to help in the determination of planning applications in the area in the period to March 2034. Its policies aim to positively plan for the appropriate growth of the main villages of Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount, and to do this in ways that will protect and enhance the special character of those villages and the Parish.
- 1.3. Once approved at a local referendum, the Neighbourhood Development Plan becomes a statutory part of the development plan for the area and will carry full weight in how planning applications are decided.
- 1.4. Neighbourhood Development Plans can therefore only contain land use planning policies that can be used for this purpose. This can mean that there are more important issues of interest to the local community that cannot be addressed in a Neighbourhood Development Plan, if they are not directly related to planning.
- 1.5. Although there is considerable scope for the local community to decide on its planning policies, Neighbourhood Development Plans must meet all relevant 'basic conditions', as set out in para. 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and applied to Neighbourhood Development Plans by S38(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. These are:
  - Is the Plan consistent with the National Planning Policy?
  - Is the Plan consistent with Local Planning Policy?
  - Does the Plan promote the principles of sustainable development?
  - Has the process of making the plan met the requirements of the European environmental standards?

- 1.6. In addition, the Parish Council must be able to show that it has properly consulted local people and other relevant organisations during the process of making its Neighbourhood Development Plan and has followed the 2012 Neighbourhood Development Planning Regulations (as amended).
- 1.7. These requirements will be tested by an Independent Examiner, once the Neighbourhood Development Plan is finalised. If satisfied, the examiner will recommend that South Oxfordshire District Council should progress the plan, with or without modifications, to a referendum for an area which they feel is appropriate. If the Council decides to progress the plan to a referendum and a simple majority of the turnout votes for the Plan, the Council must adopt it as formal planning policy for the area, so long as the plan does not breach EU regulations.
- 1.8. In April 2018, the Parish Council received a screening opinion from SODC, which established that the ARNP need not be accompanied by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) under the EU Directives 42/2001 and the 2004 Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations. The District Council consulted the statutory bodies whose views on the screening opinion concurred with those of the Council.

## **2. The Parish of Aston Rowant**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1. The Parish of Aston Rowant is located in the County of Oxfordshire, and lies astride the B4009 between Watlington and Chinnor. The principal settlements of Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount are on this road, with smaller hamlets, Kingston Stert, Chalford and Copcourt to the north-west. The population of Aston Rowant Parish is 810 (Community Insight profile report of 2016).
- 2.2. The main villages evolved from a number of small hamlets spread out along the spring line located at the foot of the Chiltern Hills, to the south-east of and, in part, within the Parish. The 'gaps' between these villages and the nearby villages of Crowell and Lewknor have been maintained, and this settlement pattern is fundamental to the character of the area.
- 2.3. There are two conservation areas – one covering the older part of Kingston Blount, and the other bounded by Church Lane and The Green in Aston Rowant. There are 12 listed buildings or structures in Kingston Blount and 3 in Aston Rowant.
- 2.4. The Parish is aligned from the escarpment of the Chiltern Hills in the south-east, north-west towards Prospect Hill, an alignment shared with other parishes in this part of South Oxfordshire. Beyond the Chilterns, the area is generally flat farmland. None of the area is susceptible to widespread flood risk (as shown on the Environment Agency mapping). The same mapping also shows that some areas may be susceptible to surface water flooding. (see *the associated Maps and Tables section of the ARNP*).



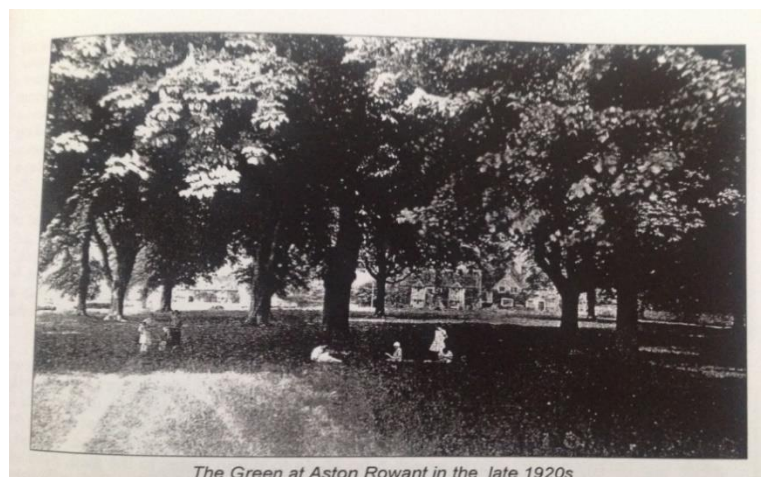
- 2.5. Much of the area to the south-east of the B4009 lies within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve lies on either side of the M40 close to the parish boundary.
- 2.6. Aston Rowant parish is a predominantly rural community where agriculture is prevalent, with arable farming and grazing on the land north and west of the Chilterns and horse-breeding in the several stud farms around Aston Rowant.

## Historical Context

- 2.7. The ancient rural parish of Aston Rowant consists of five separate settlements spread out along the spring line at the foot of the Chiltern Hills approx. 10km south of Thame and 7km northeast of Watlington in South Oxfordshire and adjoins Buckinghamshire to the southeast. Two ancient drove routes, the Upper Icknield Way, which is at least three thousand years old, and the Lower Icknield Way form part of the parish, and the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) on the Chiltern escarpment, is partly in the parish. The parish includes two larger villages, Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount, and the hamlets of Copcourt, Chalford and Kingston Stert. The green spaces between the villages and nearby villages of Crowell and Lewknor, and the Chiltern Hills have been maintained throughout the years ensuring that each village keeps its unique identity, and preserves the settlement pattern which is fundamental to the character of the area.



- 2.8. Aston Rowant was named Estone in the Domesday Book (1086) and was owned by Miles Crispin (Rohant comes from the family who were Lords of the Manor in the 14<sup>th</sup> century). Miles Crispin also owned Kingston, which had two estates at that time. Kingston, which meant King's Tun or vil (village), derives from before the Norman Conquest when the King probably owned it (Blount comes from the family who were Lords of the Manor from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries). At the time of Domesday, Kingston was called Chingestone, and Copcourt and Chalford were then part of Aston Manor. Chalford grew up on chalk land at a point where the Holbrook was fordable. Copcourt, in old English, means 'the cottage under the hill' but was referred to in the Domesday as the 'other cote'.



- 2.9. Aston Rowant parish is essentially an agricultural community comprised of traditional and relatively new buildings that blend seamlessly within its rural setting with arable and grazing farmland both north and west of the Chilterns and horse-breeding in the Stud farms in and around Aston Rowant. In the Middle Ages, Aston was the larger of the two villages, it grew up around the stream and the main part of the village was centred on the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul. The Church is the oldest building in the parish and dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Today, Kingston Blount is the larger of the two main villages as Kingston is better situated on the highway than Aston as the main road runs through the middle of the village, so for centuries it has had the greater population.

*Sources:*

- *At the Foot of the Chilterns – A History of Aston Rowant, Kingston Blount & Crowell and their hamlets by Di Eaton and Jan Gooders*
- *Walks at the Foot of the Chilterns – Aston Rowant, Kingston Blount & Crowell by ARPC*

## Demographics

2.10. The parish is home to 346 dwellings and has a population of 810 residents (according to the Community Insight profile report of 2016).

2.11. The population has remained almost static with a 2% increase since the 2011 census.

	Census	Community Insight	
Age band (years)	2011	2016	Change
0-15	139	128	-8%
16-24	49	72	+47%
25-44	183	128	-29%
45-64	251	284	+13%
65-74	103	140	+36%
75+	68	58	-15%
	<b>793</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>+2%</b>

2.12. Of the 346 homes in the village, around 60% are detached houses or bungalows, 25% are semi-detached houses, 8% are terraced and the remainder are flats.

2.13. Almost 80% of the total is owner-occupied. This proportion is higher than elsewhere in South Oxfordshire, which is in itself above the national average in terms of owner occupation.

## Local Services and Facilities

2.14. The parish retains few facilities, consisting of St. Peter & St. Paul's Church in Aston Rowant, Aston Rowant Primary School, Kingston Blount village hall, a recreation ground/playground and allotments in Kingston Blount, and a cricket ground with a very active Cricket Club in Aston Rowant. The parish also has local transport links comprising of the Chiltern Railways link to London and Birmingham from Princes Risborough station (approx. 10km from Kingston Blount), bus routes to Oxford, High Wycombe, Thame and Stokenchurch (routes 40 and 275), the Oxford Tube bus service to Oxford and London from Lewknor (junction 6 of the M40) and links to Gatwick and Heathrow from the same junction.

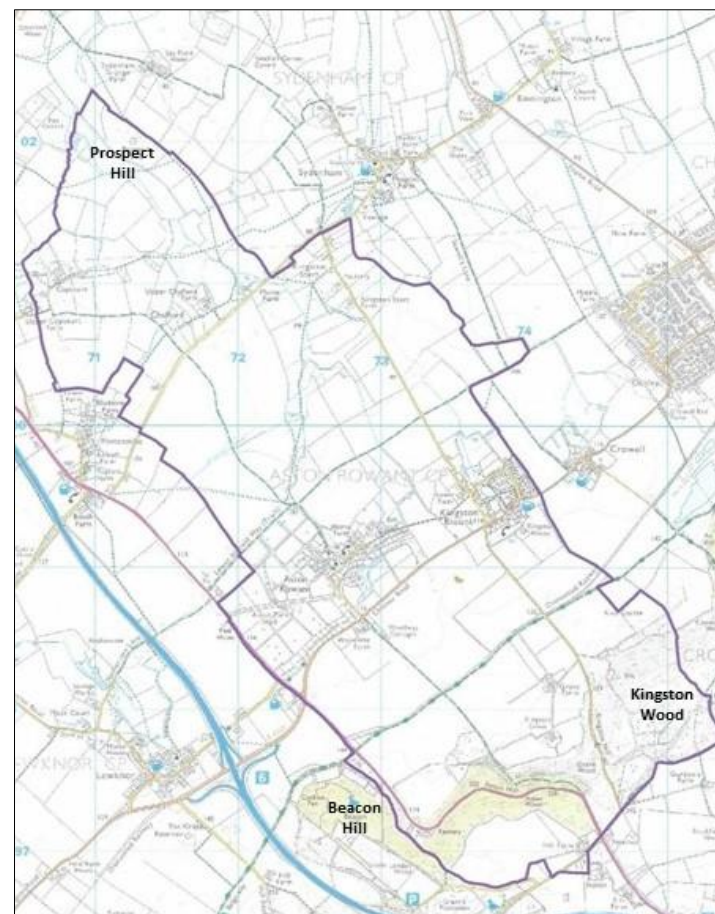
2.15. A strong 'sense of community' exists within the parish, with events involving the whole parish taking place, notably the annual Aston Rowant Fete and the annual Kingston Blount Street Fayre. Church events which, as well as regular church services, include special family services, the Harvest Festival



service and the Christmas Carol Service are well-attended. Numerous Cricket matches are played throughout the year, and there are many more events where the parishioners come together to support their parish.

### 3. The Neighbourhood Development Plan Area

- 3.1 The parish boundary is defined by the strong north-south lines of the A40 and by the parallel route running through Kingston Blount from Kingston Wood to Kingston Stert, or by the fields and woodlands abutting these routes. There are equally relevant east-west lines defined by the Postcombe - Sydenham road, the Lower Icknield Way, the A4009 and The Ridgeway, routes for which, to some degree, the Parish Council has responsibility. Their enhancement would best be achieved through a Neighbourhood Development Plan based upon boundaries which coincide with the body exercising that authority.
- 3.2 To the south the boundary is anchored by the woodlands that form the Chilterns Escarpment, from Beacon Hill to Kingston Wood. To the north it is anchored by Prospect Hill. The proposed Neighbourhood Development Plan boundary therefore follows strong geographical or transport lines, which, allowing for the normal idiosyncrasies of historic field edges and land ownerships, represents a definable area in which to consider future guidance to promote or control development.
- 3.3 The parish is centred on the two villages of Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount, where any new development might be expected to take place. The Neighbourhood Development Plan based on the parish boundary will develop a comprehensive set of planning policies that aim to protect and enhance the character of the villages and their wider setting.



## 4. Planning Policy Context

- 4.1 The Parish lies within South Oxfordshire District in the County of Oxfordshire.
- 4.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published by the Government in 2018, is an important guide in the preparation of local plans and Neighbourhood Development Plans. The ARNP must demonstrate that it is consistent with the provisions of the NPPF as a whole.

The following paragraphs of the NPPF are especially relevant to the issues addressed by the ARNP:

- Supporting a prosperous economy (paragraphs 80-84)
- Good Design (paragraphs 124-132)
- Protecting healthy communities (paragraphs 91-95)
- Protecting local green spaces (paragraphs 96-101)
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment (paragraphs 170-183)
- Conserving and enhancing the historic environment (paragraphs 184-202)
- Neighbourhood Development Planning (paragraphs 29-30)

- 4.3 The Development Plan for the area including Aston Rowant Parish currently comprises the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy of December 2012 (covering a plan period to 2027) and a number of saved policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 adopted in January 2006 (covering the plan period to 2011).
- 4.4 The emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034 will, when adopted, replace the Core Strategy and older saved policies. The ARNP will also supersede the Core Strategy and older saved policies and will cover the period to 2034. The Development Plan also includes minerals and waste plan documents adopted by Oxfordshire County Council.



- 4.5 Appendix A is an overview of the current and emerging Development Plan Policy Framework. Although the ARNP will be tested for its general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted Core Strategy, until it is superseded or deemed to be out-of-date, the imminence of the new Local Plan means that the ARNP is wise to consider the emerging policy direction, its reasoning and evidence.
- 4.6 The essence of the overall planning strategy for the District has been and will continue to focus development on the main towns and larger villages of the District, and to maintain the rural character of the open countryside that makes up the majority of the area. The Parish does not lie within an area planned for significant growth. Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount are currently considered to be 'smaller villages'. The Core Strategy deals with development in smaller villages, only insofar as it supports infill development on sites no larger than 0.2 hectares. It sets no target for growth.
- 4.7 Until December 2018, the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011- 2033 (SOLP) indicated that the spatial approach of the Core Strategy would be maintained. The approach towards the delivery of new homes was set out in Chapter 5 of the SOLP (Publication Version – October 2017). Fundamental to the housing strategy contained in the ARNP was draft policy H8, whereby:
- a) a minimum of 500 new homes will be delivered in the “smaller villages”; and
  - b) this will be achieved through Neighbourhood Development Plans which allocate sites for at least a 5% increase in dwelling numbers, above those recorded in the 2011 Census. Expectations from smaller villages without allocations in a NP were to be greater, as much as 10%.
- 4.8 In the course of the ARNP preparation, however, the emphasis placed upon the role of the smaller villages in the SOLP (now 2011-2034) has changed, primarily as a result of a fundamental change in the strategic housing situation and the long-term supply of deliverable housing land in South Oxfordshire. As a result, in the revised version of H8, **“less sustainable settlements will not be required to offset the housing requirement”** (SOLP Final Publication Version 2<sup>nd</sup> – p97). SODC will support settlements that continue with an allocation of land for housing, this on the basis that:
- a) there will always be a demand for new housing, even in less sustainable settlements,
  - b) villages without a housing allocation in an up-to-date NP may yet be vulnerable to unwanted developer pressure, in the event that house completions in SODC slipped below designated targets or if the land supply situation fell to earlier, unacceptable levels,
  - c) the NP affords local protection against failure at a higher level, and
  - d) new housing can bring forward locally-desirable projects through CIL contributions.

The obligation is, however, no longer there (assuming the new version of H8 emerges intact in the adopted SOLP) and the choice rests with the Parish Council.

- 4.9 In the event that a parish resolves, after all, not to make a housing allocation, or even not to proceed with its NP, then the situation in smaller villages reverts to the original Core Strategy policy CSR1. This old policy is to be re-used as H16 in the SOLP(2034), whereby new housing will be restricted to infill sites no bigger than 0.2 hectares. In this regard, however, SODC would expect housing to be at a density in line with its preferred standard. In earlier drafts of the SOLP, this meant housing at a density of 25-30 dwellings per hectare, broadly in line with central government guidelines, so that an infill site of 0.2 hectares might still realise 5 or 6 dwellings. In the current 2034 version, however, this has been changed by Policy STRAT5 which aims to achieve a density of no less than 40 dwellings per hectare on major developments in smaller village sites, whether they are allocated in the NP or emerge as windfall sites. Purely for the purpose of example and comparison, the recently refused/dismissed planning application made by Rectory Homes, for 5 dwellings on 0.68 hectares, would, at 40dph, have realised 27 dwellings. “Major Development (small-scale)” comprises a scheme realising 10 or more dwellings or development on a site of 0.5 – 4.0 hectares (1.2 – 9.9 acres). Proposals for “Minor Residential Development” (fewer than 10 dwellings on sites of less than 0.5 hectares) **“must demonstrate that they have achieved an efficient use of land”**.
- 4.10 The affordable housing policy framework is well-established and is not likely to change in respect of the proportion of overall numbers required per scheme. However, national changes to affordable housing policy may alter the economics and therefore mix of tenure type that can be planned for through the local planning system.
- 4.11 In identifying a benchmark for the housing supply strategy of the ARNP, the Planning Practice Guidance states that, “Neighbourhood Development Plans are not obliged to contain policies addressing all types of development. However, where they do contain policies relevant to housing supply, these policies should take account of latest and up-to-date evidence of housing need. In particular, where a qualifying body is attempting to identify and meet housing need, a Local Planning Authority should share relevant evidence on housing need gathered to support its own plan-making”.
- 4.12 The emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan indicates that the spatial approach of the Core Strategy should be maintained. Housing and employment growth will be focused in the main towns. This is a conventional and reasonable approach.
- 4.13 The preparation of the ARNP has been based on the presumption that a version of draft policy H8 will, in due course, become adopted SODC policy, and it must be presumed that the latest version (see paras.4.8 – 4.9 above) will prevail. If the Parish Council accepts that an allocation affords it the protection and opportunity identified by SODC, then it might plan for growth of around a 5% increase in dwelling numbers above those recorded in the 2011 census, in the plan period to 2034, taking into account its facilities and local environmental constraints. For Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount, as the only settlements of any scale in the Parish (with 346 total housing stock), this means growth in the order of 17 homes. This would reflect the expressed preference for smaller-scale development and infill schemes, as set out in the original Goals and Objectives for the Plan (Appendix B). **The 2034 version of the SOLP (January 2019 Version), however, no longer places any obligation on smaller villages, including Aston Rowant Parish, to aim for or meet such targets through the allocation of new housing sites**
- 4.14 In the continued, but hopefully temporary, absence of an up-to-date Strategic Policy Framework, and there being no other robust means to translate objectively assessed housing need at a District level to that of a parish, this is a fair and reasonable approach to take. In due course, the Parish Council



will undertake a first review of its Neighbourhood Development Plan, alongside any SOLP Review, to ensure that growth remains plan-led, consistent with its spatial objectives for the village and supported by the community. As the quantum of new homes in South Oxfordshire is to be spread over the next 15 years, there will be sufficient time for such a review, without undermining the contribution that this or a later Plan might voluntarily make to the District's five-year or three-year supply of housing land.

- 4.15 Although the whole parish has been considered for its development potential, it is considered that the main villages are the most sustainable place for any new housing, and, as such, any spatial strategy promoting development through allocated sites would focus new housing development in these locations. A scale of growth based on a 5% increase in housing stock would take into account the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment (a technical study required by the NPPF to assess housing need over the Local Plan period). The Core Strategy requires the mix of housing types on schemes to reflect local circumstances, which is expected to remain a requirement as this is consistent with the NPPF. A Housing Needs survey was carried out, through the offices of My Community / Locality, in the preparation of the ARNP to help inform local housing need, in terms of dwelling type, size and tenure. Housing need, in terms of numbers, is accepted as deriving from SOLP policy H8, now somewhere between nil and whatever figure the Parish considers to be suitable.
- 4.16 The Core Strategy and saved policies seek to prevent the unnecessary loss of valued community facilities, including open space. This provides an opportunity for the ARNP to identify those community facilities and, especially, green spaces in the Parish that warrant protection in line with these policies and with the NPPF. With or without a housing allocation, the Neighbourhood Development Plan serves an important function in identifying and, where possible, protecting open spaces that residents feel contribute to the character of the villages and to residents' quality of life.
- 4.17 At national and district level, there is a comprehensive framework of landscape protection policies that are relevant to the ARNP, given the presence of the AONB in part of the Parish. The framework allows for appropriate development, but reinforces the importance of ensuring that all development proposals respect the area's special landscape character. The policies have informed the spatial plan and other policies of the ARNP. Those policies that repeat national and district policy guidance do not bear repeating in a Neighbourhood Development Plan, but they reinforce the requirement that proposals have full regard to heritage assets, whether formally designated or not. Green Space of local significance and value can be protected by NP policies that are closer to residents' aspirations than national or district policies. The ARNP therefore commissioned independent consultants, Lepus Consulting, to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix F) on which our landscape policies might properly be based.
- 4.18 The Parish generally, and the villages specifically, contains a significant number of listed buildings, as well as two Conservation Areas. (Appendix C). These heritage assets will guide the site selection process and other policies of the ARNP.
- 4.19 The Development Plan framework contains a range of generic design and development management policies, to be applied to all types of development proposal across the District. There is, therefore, an opportunity for the ARNP to refine the framework so that any the guidance can be made specific to the Parish and carries greater weight in decision making.



- 4.20 The NPPF, the Core Strategy and the emerging SOLP contain a variety of policies promoting the multi-functional benefits of green infrastructure assets. Such assets are especially important in defining the character and in the functioning of the villages and the wider Parish. The ARNP provides an opportunity to bring forward specific proposals to protect and improve existing assets and, as appropriate, to create new assets through development proposals.

## PART TWO

### THE NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

#### 5. Landscape and Open Space Policies

##### Green Spaces

- 5.1 Green Spaces, that is land that is not developed and which should be protected from the threat of future development in the plan period, are fundamental to the character of settlements at neighbourhood level. They bring community and environmental benefits, especially when they:-
- Allow for formal and informal social interaction within the public realm;
  - Provide facilities for sport and physical recreation;
  - Contribute to the network of paths and spaces which facilitate pedestrian movement through an area;
  - Assist in the provision and retention of wildlife habitats;
  - Provide an attractive setting and outlook to local properties and residents;
  - Form an integral part of the character of historic areas;
  - Assist in flood mitigation; and
  - Allow for the production of local food.
- 5.2 Neighbourhood Development Plans can designate local green spaces, recognise other designations involving open space, identify deficiencies in local green space provision, control development around such spaces and allow for the provision of new spaces in association with proposed development. This must be done in accordance with criteria set down in the NPPF.
- 5.3 As noted in the Consultation Report (Appendix E), the identification and categorisation of local green spaces has figured highly in the preparation of the ARNP, from the “call for sites” consultation in June 2017 to the follow-up consultation in December 2017. There are no technical reports commissioned by the Local Planning Authority (SODC) and, therefore, there is no direct guidance on Green Space provision in the ARNP area, hence the introduction of Lepus Consulting to fill this gap (Appendix F).
- 5.4 The Parish does not contain any historic parks or gardens, nor any open spaces designated as an asset of community value. While it is close to both a National Nature Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, these statutory designations have no direct bearing on the ARNP. Appropriate provision

for the protection of such areas comes and will continue to come from the Local Plan. Both principal villages include a Conservation Area, and each, in turn, contains open space which makes a significant contribution to the character of that designated area.

5.5 The NPPF (2018 – paras 96-101) provides that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:-

- The land has been shown, by assessment to be surplus to requirements, or
- The loss to a proposed development would be compensated by equivalent or better provision in a suitable location, or
- The development is itself for new sports or recreational provision, outweighing the loss.

5.6 Local Green Space designation (NPPF 2018) is recognised as an appropriate means of protecting green areas from development when:-

- The green space is close to the community that it serves,
- The green space is demonstrably special to the community, holding particular local significance due to its beauty, history, recreational value, tranquillity or the richness of its wildlife, and
- The green space is local in its scale and character.

5.7 In this wider NPPF context, the ARNP has identified two categories of green space worthy of a level of formal protection:-

#### Local Open Spaces and Community Amenities

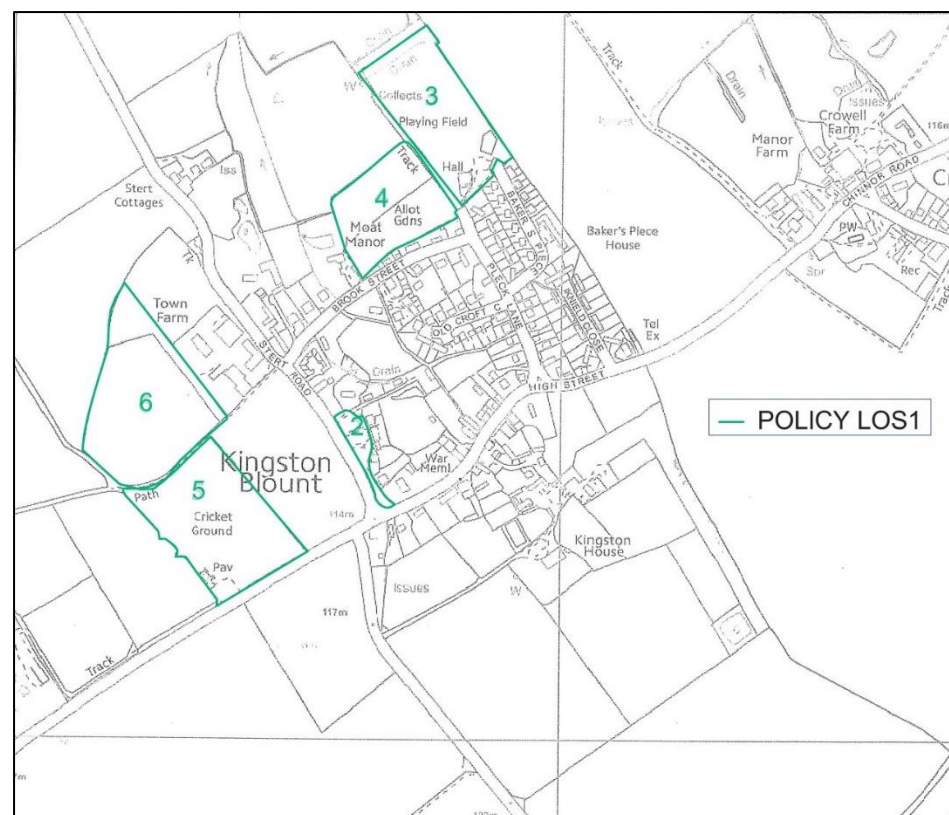
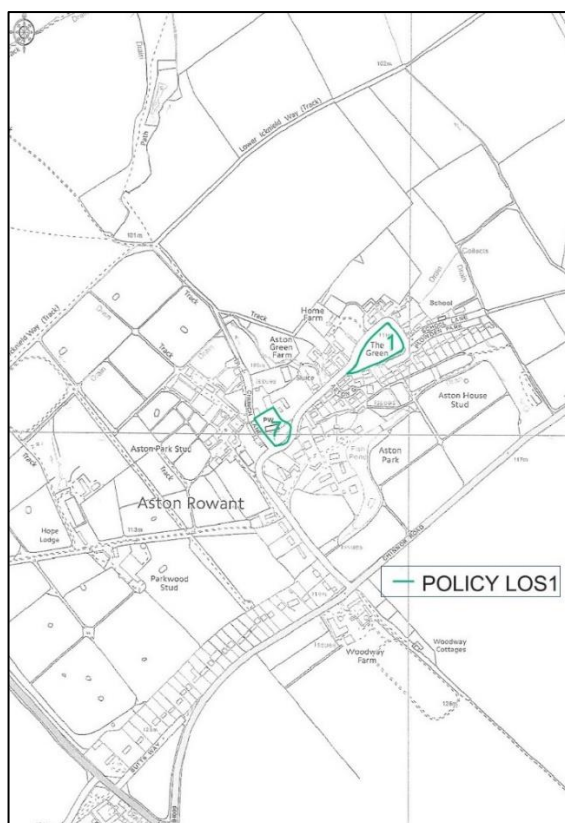
1. Aston Rowant Village Green
2. Kingston Blount Village Green
3. Hilwerke Trust Playing Field, Kingston Blount
4. Kingston Blount Allotments
5. Aston Rowant Cricket Club (original field)
6. Aston Rowant Cricket Club (new field)
7. Aston Rowant Parish Church grounds

#### Incidental Open Spaces, of historic significance and/or contributing to the setting and character of the villages

1. Butts Way B4009 site (Aston Rowant)
2. Horse Paddock (NE side of Aston Rowant Road)
3. All land between Lower Icknield Way and the built-up area of Aston Rowant

4. Land on either side of Church lane, Aston Rowant beyond the existing dwellings
5. Stud Farm land between B4009 (Chinnor Road) and dwellings in Aston Rowant
6. Land to either side of the Aston Rowant – Kingston Blount footpath not already protected
7. Land on Stert Road to north and south of Town Farm
8. Paddocks / Strip-Farming Fields adjacent to, in front of and behind the former Shoulder of Mutton PH, Kingston Blount
9. Curtilage of Kingston House.

5.8 These areas are shown on the Protected Spaces Map (below). Their significance in the context of NPPF is considered in Appendix F (Green Space Assessment).



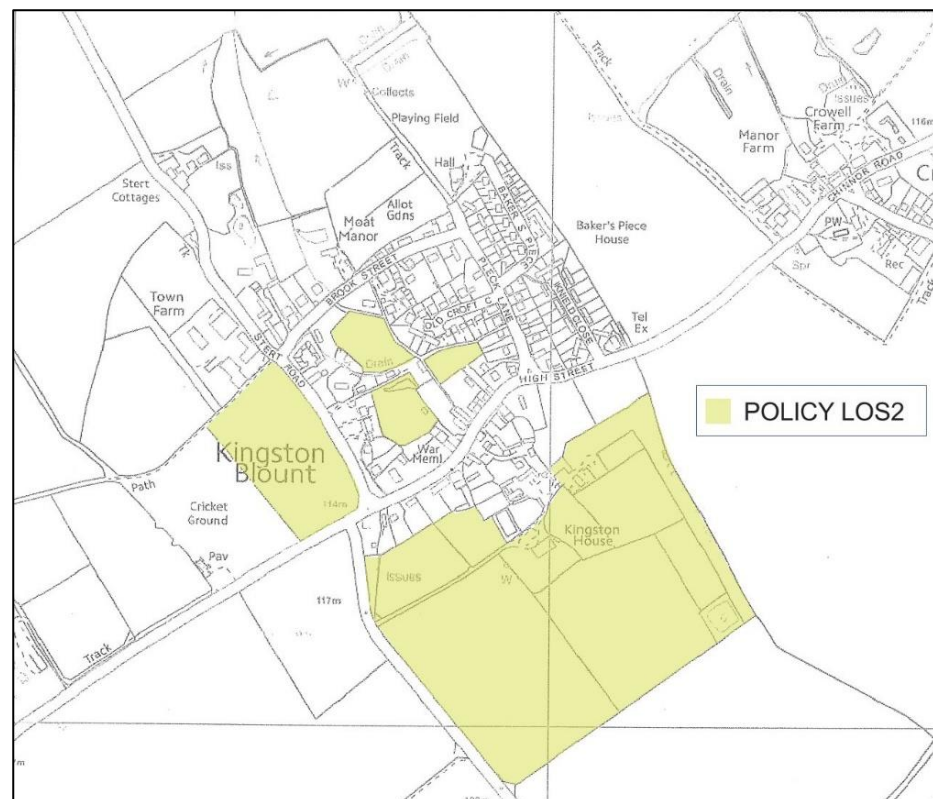
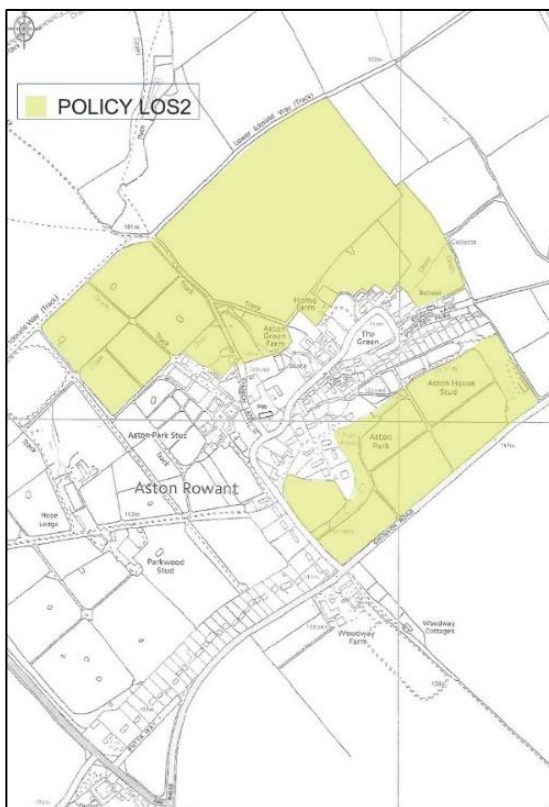
- 5.9 The spaces identified in the above list as Incidental Open Spaces are important to the character, tranquillity and setting of Kingston Blount and Aston Rowant and to the maintenance of a distinct and open space between these villages. It is considered that, notwithstanding their significance to the local communities, these spaces cannot be presumed to satisfy the tests required in the NPPF by virtue of their being privately owned, having no public right of access or use and, in some cases, being of a scale which might preclude their local character. The ARNP seeks to ensure that these spaces receive a degree of protection commensurate with 2018 decisions by SODC to refuse planning applications on two such Incidental Open Spaces.

### ***Policy LOS1 – Local Open Spaces***

***The areas identified above and on the relevant map are important to the character, setting, history, amenities and leisure of the Parish, and, as such, are designated as Local Open Spaces. Built development will not be appropriate on these Local Open Spaces, unless:-***

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements,***
- b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location, and***
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.***





### ***Policy LOS2 – Incidental Open Space***

***The areas identified above and on the relevant map as Incidental Open Spaces, being in use for arable farming or pasture, are considered important to the setting, tranquility and character of the villages in which they are located or which they abut.***

***As such, built development on this land and/ or the loss of these spaces to other uses will only be supported if it is of a limited nature and provides facilities solely to support the function and use of that space for agriculture and/or grazing.***

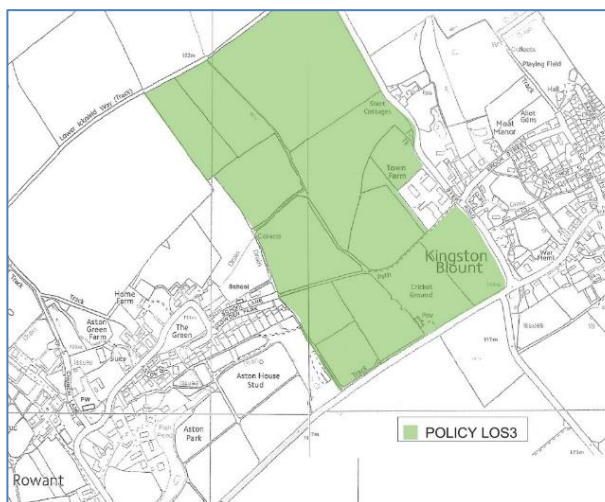
## Local Gaps

### **Policy LOS3 - Local Gaps**

*The Neighbourhood Development Plan identifies the following Local Gap on the Policies Map above:*

**i. Aston Rowant – Kingston Blount Local Gap;**

***Development proposals should ensure the retention of the open character of the Local Gap. Proposals for the re-use of rural buildings, agricultural and forestry-related development, playing fields, other open land uses and minor extensions to existing agricultural buildings will be supported only where they would preserve the separation between the settlements concerned and retain their individual identities.***



- 5.10 This policy, in conjunction with Policy LGS2, seeks to protect the essential countryside character between the settlements of Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount, in order to prevent coalescence between these separate settlements and to protect their distinctive individual character and setting. In doing so, it will conserve the way in which the village of Aston Rowant sits mainly invisible in the landscape, off the principal traffic route of the B4009, retaining the fields between the village and that road. While the village of Kingston Blount is more prominent within the landscape, bisected as it is by the same road, the policy looks to define and maintain its position within the landscape, distinct and always separate from the nearby settlements of Aston Rowant, Crowell and Kingston Stert. Within the Parish, it is deemed essential that there should remain a clear rural buffer between the principal settlements and that this buffer should be defined by the existing built-up areas of Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount.

- 5.11 The gap is shown on the Policies Map above and has been drawn to include only the minimum essential area to achieve the policy objective. It makes a significant contribution to maintaining the individual character of their adjoining settlements.
- 5.12 Policies LGS2 and LGS3 do not seek to prevent development relating to agriculture or “horsiculture” that may otherwise be suited to a countryside location, but ensures that the scale, massing and height of any such proposals do not result in the undermining of the local gap’s integrity. Development that is consistent with this policy might include minor extensions to existing rural buildings, the creation of playing fields, or other open land uses.

## Landscape Character of the Villages and Countryside

### ***Policy LOS4 - Landscape Character of the Villages***

***Development proposals within and around the villages / hamlets of Aston Rowant, Kingston Blount, Kingston Stert, Chalford and Copcourt should demonstrate how they have taken account of the contribution made to the character of the villages by the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the open plain at the foot of the hills.***

- 5.13 This policy seeks to ensure that, where appropriate, all development proposals (i) have understood and responded to the special landscape character of the Parish, and (ii) recognises the extent to which that character plays such an important role in shaping the settlements and hamlets within the Parish. The policy does not seek to impose a blanket restriction on development around or inside the villages, but, starting from a presumption that new development might harm the special character of the area, especially within or close to the conservation areas and the AONB, requires that design statements be produced to show, assess and obviate any such harm.
- 5.14 The topography of Aston Rowant is important in maintaining the landscape character in that, excepting the ribbon development between the A40 and Aston Rowant Road, the shape of the village is hidden in its landscape, as set out above. The topography of Kingston Blount is defined by the central square formed by the four principal roads in the village (High Street, Stert Road, Pleck Lane and Brook Street), with the paddocks at the core and development on the outer side of three of the roads. Development in that part of the Parish within the AONB is already managed by policies of the NPPF and development plan. Policies LOS4 and LOS5 aim to complement those policies by identifying as special the open countryside rising to Chalford and Copcourt and to the hilltop at Prospect Hill. This is the defining landscape feature of Aston Rowant parish outside of the AONB, together with the flatter agricultural landscape between Kingston Stert and Kingston Blount and the particular “equestrian” landscape formed by the stud farms around Aston Rowant. This is special to the local community with its open character, recreational value, flood storage capacity and wildlife potential.

### ***Policy LOS5 – Protection of the Countryside***

***Proposals for development outside of the built-up area of Kingston Blount and Aston Rowant, such areas being deemed to include land identified in Policies LOS6, HSG1 and HDC1, will only be supported if they are necessary and appropriate for a countryside location and consistent with local development plan policies.***

## **The Green Heart of the Villages**

- 5.15 The village of Aston Rowant is centred on the village green, with few opportunities to view open countryside. At the core of the village, the green provides informal open space and a visual focus for the settlement, as does the space around the parish church of St Peter and St Paul. Other spaces and a lake, around the edge of the built-up area, define the character of the village and require a degree of protection outside of that afforded by the NPPF and the Local Plan.
- 5.16 Local Green Spaces in Kingston Blount comprise a less formal village green, the allotments, community playing fields, assets of potential biodiversity value, the children's play area and the three remaining paddocks that form the historic core of the village. The network of footpaths and bridleways runs through and around the villages, notably The Ridgeway and Lower Icknield Way. Some of this network is enclosed, being situated within the settlement boundary, so it provides a different function to the rest of the built area in giving a more open feel to the village centres. Views from lanes and footpaths across public and private open spaces are particularly important, notably on Aston Rowant Road, Church Lane and Stert Road, whilst the open spaces help to define and reinforce the separate identity of the historic villages.
- 5.17 This policy does not preclude development, but it starts from the presumption that, faced with the possibility of harm to the open spaces at the heart of the villages, very special circumstances would be required to justify such development.

### ***Policy LOS6 - The Green Heart of the Villages***

***The Neighbourhood Development Plan identifies a Green Heart formed by a central open space in Aston Rowant and by a historically significant sequence of connected open spaces within Kingston Blount, as shown on the Policies Map.***

***Development proposals on land that lies within the Green Heart will only, in principle, be supported, if it can be shown that very special circumstances exist by which any such development might be justified.***

***Any such proposal should:***

- I. demonstrate how they sustain or enhance the visual characteristics, the function and biodiversity of the land;***
- II. have regard to how their landscape schemes, layouts, access and public open space provision and other amenity requirements may contribute to the maintenance and improvement of the Network, and***
- III. have full and proper regard to the historic significance of the spaces, their role in the heritage of the villages and local amenities.***

## **6. Housing.**

6.1 Existing and emerging local housing policy has been summarised in paras 4.6 to 4.15 above, and in Appendix B. The ARNP has evolved during a period in which the goalposts established by these policies and by the demands of a 5-year supply of housing land have constantly shifted. Development in South Oxfordshire has taken place or been permitted on the basis that the housing policies in the Core Strategy were deemed to be out-of-date, in the light of the NPPF and as a consequence of SODC not then having an agreed 5-year supply. At the time of writing, August 2019, that deficiency has been rectified, allowing continued use of the Core Strategy's policies for housing in smaller villages – infill, albeit at a relatively high density if a lower level cannot be justified, on sites not exceeding 0.2 hectares. Interpretation of policy has, however, been further tempered by:

- a) the presumption that, in due course Local Plan (2034) Policy H8 will supersede the Core Strategy;
- b) the anticipated changes made to H8 (see para 4.8 above);
- c) the grant of planning permissions within the Parish; and
- d) the expectation that appeals may yet be lodged against SODC planning refusals, ahead of or parallel with the conclusion of the Neighbourhood Development Plan process.

6.2 The Steering Group commenced its work in 2016-17 on the presumption that the ARNP should be prepared in the expectation that sites that might be deliverable for housing (suitable, available and viable) should still be allocated, as required by the earlier version of Policy H8. This could result in the Parish, as a smaller village, providing an increase in the number of dwellings over the period of the Plan. Since December 2018, however, with the 2034 SOLP version of H8, there has been no obligation to do so and no stipulation as to how many houses might result. The Parish Council resolved to



prepare the ARNP on the basis of the earlier draft policy, anticipating that sites would be allocated for new development, this on the basis that a 5% increase would result in about 17 new dwellings. The Steering Group was faced with the question of how to deal with the moveable feast of planning permissions, prior approvals and possible appeal decisions that could eat into or even exceed that target, or whether to set a target at all. Subject to the outcome of the Pre-Submission consultation into this first draft, the Steering Group concluded, in July 2019, that, as the allocation of sites is no longer an obligation placed upon smaller villages, the ARNP would first be presented without any sites allocated for new housing. If, following this consultation, the Parish Council and residents consider that the “no allocations” option is unacceptable or open to too great a risk, then the site identification and allocation process, undertaken but shelved in the light of SOLP (2034), can be revisited.

- 6.3 In line with its original goals, based on a draft policy since abandoned by SODC, the Steering Group first resolved to treat the “at least 5%” (17 dwellings) objective as relating to sites identified and allocated in the ARNP and to treat any prior or subsequent planning approvals on other sites as “windfalls”. This objective would need to be qualified in the face of planning appeals in one or both villages that could, if allowed, place a different complexion on the ambitions expressed in the ARNP or any subsequent review. As noted above, however, the “no obligation to allocate sites” option is now the preferred route. This must be qualified by the potential increase in vulnerability to development pressure that might arise in villages with no allocation, if SODC’s strategic housing policies should fail or if national delivery rates of new housing are not maintained.
- 6.4 From the outset, the Steering Group worked on the presumption, gleaned from the May 2017 site selection consultation, that minor developments (fewer than 10 dwellings) on sites in both Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount should be sought as a local preference, in line with the Core Strategy and with emerging Local Plan Policy H16, which will support the principle of infill development in existing built-up areas. It has, however, become apparent a) that there may be limited scope for genuine infill development of the scale and type supported by the Core Strategy, b) that there may well be larger sites that could, if developed, contribute all or more of any housing target identified by the parish, and c) SODC’s density expectations for small/infill sites are unrealistic in villages with such low existing densities, making larger sites but lower densities a feasible alternative.

## Site Appraisal

- 6.5 The role of the Steering Group in the identification, assessment, evaluation, selection and allocation of potential development sites for the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan has, essentially, been one of guidance and not of decision-making. The principal role in the identification of land having any such potential was played by residents in the Parish, through full consultations relating to site identification (May 2017) and, later, the identification of criteria by which sites might be assessed (January 2018). In view of the number of sites identified in the first consultation (40), the Steering Group, with the agreement of the Parish Council, resolved to outsource the duties involved in evaluation and selection and passed the job to AECOM, an independent consultancy acting under the auspices of central government’s My Community / Locality agency. AECOM have no links to the Parish and were appointed and paid by My Community / Locality and not by the Parish Council or the Steering Group. In due course, any site allocation, or none at all, will take place at the behest of the residents of the Parish, in the normal process of Neighbourhood Development Plan adoption, firstly the Pre-Submission Consultation and, at the end, the Local Referendum.

- 6.6 The Steering Group had resolved to concentrate on the suitability of suggested sites, deferring consideration of their availability and viability, this on the basis that any research into the sites' availability might raise undue expectations among landowners and developers and might prompt the submission of premature planning applications. Only if and when suitable sites were suggested by AECOM would the question of their availability arise. Allocated sites have to be deemed to be both suitable and available. The latter may not mean immediately available, but could come forward later in the plan period, to 2034. Sites satisfying both requirements are deemed to be "deliverable".
- 6.7 The identification of sites, however large or small, that might have potential for new housing arose from the first public consultation and analysis in May/June 2017, details of which are set out in the Consultation Report. Suggestions were not restricted to persons having an ownership or other interest in the land. Forty sites were identified, some by only one correspondent and others by a greater number. They became known as the "red sites". In the same consultation, residents were asked to identify land which they thought was sufficiently special as to warrant protection from development, the "green sites". Some suggested sites were both "red" and "green". The potential housing sites were considered of equal value, so there was no immediate ranking or selection.
- 6.8 The sites included the only three sites that had been registered with SODC through the SHELAA (SODC's annual Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment) process.
- 6.9 It was, pre-AECOM, decided that the process of assessing the suitability of sites should be undertaken following a second public consultation in December 2017/January 2018. This comprised a list of ten criteria compiled by the Steering Group by which sites might be evaluated, and the question was posed as to whether a weighting system might be employed to rank some criteria as having more importance than others. Subject to public comment, including advice from SODC, the criteria were reviewed by the Steering Group in February 2018, and all 40 sites were evaluated (February / March), without weighting, by the Steering Group acting as three independent groups of four. In the event, and following further discussion with SODC, this evaluation was not used or made public. Notwithstanding that Steering Group members having a potential interest in a site by virtue of proximity did not assess those sites, it was felt that current planning applications and local feeling might lead to unfounded allegations of local bias, and the Steering Group / Parish Council resolved to outsource the task of assessment, evaluation and selection to AECOM, as a wholly independent agency, as noted above. A possible site allocation ranking was therefore arrived at independently and outside of the workings of the Steering Group. AECOM's analysis includes investigation of planning histories, flooding and environmental data, national and local policies (as of early 2018), the criteria arising from the local consultation and other relevant information within the public domain.
- 6.10 In the event, the AECOM analysis was broadly in line with the expressed wishes of the residents, Parish Council and Steering Group, that any new housing allocations should be concentrated on Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount, that there should be a preference for smaller sites, that, at that time, a target for the new sites should be at least 17 dwellings in total and that, if possible, these should be spread equally between the two villages. All but five of the forty sites, all of them reviewed by AECOM, were found by them to be unsuitable or less suitable. Following an initial and unofficial approach to the

landowners of the provisionally suitable sites on the question of availability, the number of sites satisfying both requirements reduced to three, with the other two as possible longer term options.

- 6.11 Two of the suggested sites, one from Kingston Blount and one from Aston Rowant, had been recognised by SODC as both suitable and available through the SHELAA process. The other, smaller site is an infill, and the longer term options are conversions or brownfield redevelopment.

The following 3 pictures illustrate the 40 sites selected in the first Consultation for evaluation for development.











- 6.12 The principal sites identified as “possible” by AECOM would, however, only satisfy the version of the Local Plan that has since been abandoned by SODC. Their development would not satisfy the policies of SOLP(2034); nor would they satisfy the older policies contained in the Core Strategy. There must also be doubt as to their ability to satisfy the emerging policy STRAT5 as regards density. In these circumstances, it must be expected that, if such sites are not allocated in the ARNP, any planning application made to SODC would be refused.
- 6.13 The emerging Local Plan, SOLP 2034 no longer expects or requires the provision of new housing development in South Oxfordshire’s smaller villages. The choice, and some potential risk, rests with the Parish. Unless allocations are made that considerably exceed the original, now superseded expectations, it would be unrealistic and uneconomic to expect developer contributions to give rise to significant increases in local infrastructure or community facilities. Small sums may be expected to accrue to the Parish Council through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), but the sums will not materially change the appearance of, or facilities enjoyed by the Parish. In removing the 5-10% obligation for smaller villages from Policy H8, SODC has effectively confirmed that such places as Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount are not “sustainable locations”, due primarily to their lack of facilities and their reliance upon use of the private car. Recent appeal decisions have concurred with this view. The ARNP accepts this and concludes that it would be wrong and locally unwelcome to seek to provide more houses on the misplaced presumption that this might in turn enhance the limited community assets already enjoyed and appreciated. The change to the character and scale of the villages implicit in materially exceeding the 5% target once, but no longer, set by SODC, would not be acceptable and would not be in accordance with existing or emerging national and local policies for rural settlements.
- 6.14 By the same token, development on smaller sites, having ten or fewer houses, does not, as a matter of course, generate a requirement for the on-site provision of “affordable” housing. “Affordable” or “Social” Housing is generally secured through the mechanisms open to Housing Associations (HA), whereby a proportion of a new development (40% on sites yielding more than ten dwellings) is sold to the HA at cost by the developer, with the value of the land reduced to zero or thereabouts. The HA then allocates accommodation to persons or families registered as in need of housing, on the basis of leases or shared ownership or other means by which people, not necessarily local, can get a foot on the housing ladder without having to buy on the open market. “Affordable Housing” in this context is not the same as “cheap housing” or even “starter homes”. Financial contributions may be sought by SODC from smaller development sites, yielding fewer than ten new dwellings, for use in assisting “affordable” schemes off-site, but the benefits from this would not normally accrue to the Parish. National and local policy allows that exception might be made to normal housing policy on sites outside defined settlements or built-up areas which come forward as having potential wholly for affordable housing or which meet a specified local need. These are “Rural Exception” sites.
- 6.15 Feedback from the original consultation, in May 2017, had suggested that there should be provision for “affordable” housing in the villages, as a means of at least providing the opportunity for young people to remain and set up home in the area. This, however, conflicts with the equally stated preference for development on smaller sites and with the target that any allocated sites should be in both Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount. In discussion with SODC, the suggestion was made that each of the two principal sites identified as possibilities by AECOM should be earmarked for eleven new dwellings. The view of the Steering Group was that this would not be consistent with the objectives expressed by the local community, having particular regard to the approvals already granted. The Steering Group therefore concluded that, for the purpose of the Pre-Submission Consultation, a housing site allocation, if

one is accepted at all by the residents, should be limited to eight on any allocated site. The draft ARNP does not, therefore, rely, depend or insist upon the provision of “affordable” housing within the allocated sites, nor indeed upon any new housing at all, although this may arise through the distribution and mix of new dwellings on any sites that are identified and agreed upon by residents through the Pre-Consultation process. It remains possible that a developer might volunteer affordable units, on an allocated site or on a rural exception site, without reaching the minimum threshold of eleven units set nationally.

- 6.16 Discussion then turned to established and emerging policy regarding the density (dwellings per hectare – dph) at which new housing should be provided, in order to make best use of available land, while respecting the prevailing character of the locality. Given the existing densities in the built-up areas of Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount (about 5.6 dph and 11.0 dph respectively), the SODC guidance of 40dph would not be acceptable or appropriate in this parish, albeit that the matter of major development would/should never arise. A compromise would be required, accepting that a) the prevailing densities are low, even for the rural parts of South Oxfordshire, and b) some credence must be given to an increased density, in line with land supply issues and current building trends. The Steering Group, in 2018, resolved upon a maximum target density of about 15dph for each of the possible allocations, this being higher than the prevailing density, but not so high as to affect or diminish the character of each village. Eight residential units at 15dph would require maybe 0.55 hectares, roughly in line with SODC’s definition of a small-scale site, allowing that the size of the developable areas within such sites could be reduced, with space provided to protect the amenities of existing residents, a ‘green buffer’ that would fall outside of any final allocation. It has emerged, however, that a nearby parish (Pyrton) had its attempt to secure a local density standard, based on prevailing character, rejected at Public Examination on the basis that it failed to meet the government’s minimum density target of 25 dph, and that it was therefore inconsistent with national and local policy.
- 6.17 The change in SODC’s policy direction, from penalising smaller villages with no NP housing allocation to making no such requirement but leaving them at the mercy of circumstances beyond their control, left the ARNP, at this Pre-Consultation stage, in somewhat of a limbo situation.
- Does the ARNP make no allocation for new housing, despite the possibility that AECOM has identified suitable sites, knowing that there is no obligation to do so, but, at the same time, running the risk that SODC fails to maintain a housing land supply or fails to deliver on its building targets, maybe requiring smaller villages to make up a shortfall?
  - Does the ARNP continue along the lines that it is better to have a Neighbourhood Development Plan with allocations on agreed and suitable sites, affording some protection from outside events but again in the knowledge that there is no need to do so?
  - Can the ARNP find a middle way, whereby suitable sites are identified but only allocated to come forward at an agreed future date or if/when SODC’s strategic housing policy leaves the Parish vulnerable to unwanted developer pressure on less suitable sites or when the ARNP is reviewed?
- 6.18 Discussion with SODC has suggested that the Pre-Consultation draft of the ARNP should guide residents down one route, and only one. If the residents decide that the option put to them in this document is the wrong one, then the process will be re-run in line with the locally-expressed preference. The

one matter on which the Steering Group is agreed is that there should be a Neighbourhood Development Plan, even if the housing decision results in no allocation, as there are many other elements to village life that need to be identified, promoted and protected.

## ARNP Policy HSG1 – New Housing

6.19 In the light of Policy H8 and Policy H16 in the SOLP 2034, and of its supporting text, wherein the District Council will:

- support infill development in accordance with H16,
- support any Parish Council wishing to include an allocated housing increase of 5-10% within its Neighbourhood Development Plan, without obliging them to do so, and
- offset provision made through prior commitments,

the Parish Council concludes that those prior commitments identified in Appendix K and opportunities for infill development in Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount, in accordance with H16, together satisfy Objectives 1, 2 and 3 in the SOLP 2034. As such, it is considered to be neither necessary nor appropriate for the ARNP to allocate additional greenfield land for new housing development. Exception might, in accordance with national and local policy, be made for sites outside the existing built-up areas which might be considered Rural Exceptions (see para.6.14).

6.20 Not having a housing allocation at all in a Neighbourhood Development Plan introduces an element of risk, albeit that such a plan with allocations is by no means absolutely developer-proof. In the event, for example, that a major housing allocation on which SODC's strategy relies were to collapse or be delayed beyond the plan period, SODC might be held by central government to no longer have an adequate supply of deliverable housing land. Parishes with housing allocations would be afforded some protection from any fall-out in which SODC had to find new, previously unidentified housing land. Otherwise they would rely upon the general presumption that smaller villages lack the facilities to be sustainable, and would rely upon Planning Inspectors to take the same view in response to applications, such as those recently experienced in both Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount.

### ***Policy HSG1 – New Housing***

***New residential development will be restricted to infill development within the existing built-up areas of Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount, in accordance with Local Plan Policy H16 only, as reflected in ARNP Policy HSG2.***

## ARNP Policy HSG2 – Infill Development

- 6.21 Infill development, that is development on an established frontage between existing properties, has long been considered acceptable as a form of new housing within smaller villages of South Oxfordshire. Core Strategy Policy CSR2 identifies and accepts that infill development on sites of less than 0.2 hectares should generally be supported. Emerging SOLP (2034) Policy H16 will carry this forward. The ARNP is therefore consistent with this approach.

### ***Policy HSG2 – Infill Development***

***Infill development which reflects the scale and character of the settlement will be supported in Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount on sites no larger than 0.2 hectares within an established residential frontage and at a density no greater than 15dph, provided that the proposals accord with the policies of the ARNP and local development plan policies.***

## Housing Mix and Need

- 6.22 While the need for housing in the rural areas of South Oxfordshire is no less than is to be found in other areas, it must be recognised that meeting that need, particularly for smaller units, starter homes, affordable dwellings and shared-ownership housing, is harder to realise in areas like Aston Rowant Parish, where house prices tend to be appreciably higher than both the national average and the prevailing average in the county and the district. The Parish Council therefore devolved to AECOM (via My Community / Locality) the task of reviewing how the Parish might contribute to, if not meet, national and local initiatives to build new dwellings in accordance with established need and the principles of affordability.
- 6.23 The identification and satisfaction of housing need parameters was made more complex by the provisions of emerging Development Plan Policy H8, compliance with which is the fundamental guiding principle behind the housing policies in the ARNP. The ARNP allows that, given the number of planning permissions already granted in the parish, there would be little scope for sites yielding enough development to automatically generate and subsidise affordable, starter or shared-ownership housing (see para. 6.15).
- 6.24 While the law, based on the NPPF, requires that developments of more than ten dwellings make an appropriate on-site provision of affordable housing (about 40% in SODC), such sites are unlikely to come forward in the ARNP. If they do, and if they are accepted within the parameters of the ARNP's



interpretation of Policy H8, then national and district policies will apply. In areas of proven housing need, like SODC, the Courts have allowed that local authorities may seek financial contributions from developers on smaller development, for use on affordable sites elsewhere.

- 6.25 One such proposed development, in Aston Rowant, was refused by SODC, in part on the basis that no such contribution was forthcoming (P18/S0001/FUL). In the event that it is the general consensus that housing sites should be allocated, the ARNP would expect any development of ten or fewer units to meet SODC policies in this regard, even if the consequential affordable housing is located in towns or villages with better and more facilities than Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount.
- 6.26 The provision of affordable housing outside of the built-up areas of Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount and/or on unallocated sites, sometimes a justification for wholly "affordable/social" housing development on otherwise inappropriate sites, ("Rural Exceptions") is not, however, considered necessary or appropriate, as this would be likely to have an adverse effect the character and setting of the villages.
- 6.27 Having regard to the Prior Approval consent for five dwellings (P18/S/0616/PDA) through the conversion of the Pinnacle Works on the A40, outside the built-up areas, and with the possibility that, at some time, other commercial or larger residential properties might come forward as a deliverable site for conversion to housing, it may be that the need for smaller housing units identified by AECOM will be met in the plan period, without the contribution of allocated sites to the process. As this cannot be relied upon or may not occur, AECOM's conclusion that about 30% of new dwellings should be of the small, 1- and 2-bed variety should be provided for in the ARNP Policy HSG3.
- 6.28 The conclusions in the AECOM Housing Need report (Appendix G) are accepted by the Parish Council and the ARNP Steering Group, and they form the basis of that policy.

### ***Policy HSG3 – Housing Need***

***New development, on allocated or infill sites, should provide a full mix of house sizes and house types, having regard to the conclusions in the Housing Needs paper that about 30% of new dwellings in the Parish in the Plan Period, should be smaller units of fewer than three bedrooms each.***

***Any new development of more than ten new dwellings should comply with national and local policy as regards the provision of affordable / social housing on site at the ratio of 40%, subject to development viability reports.***

***Any new development of ten or fewer new dwellings should make an appropriate financial contribution towards the provision of affordable housing off site, in accordance with SODC policy and prevailing planning law and judgements.***

## **7 Heritage, Design and Conservation Policies**

### **Areas of Special Character**

- 7.1 There are distinctive features of Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount that have special character. In these main villages this does not just include the buildings. Mature trees, hedgerows, gardens, open spaces, country lanes and footpaths all make a significant contribution to the unique and special character (Appendix C).
- 7.2 This policy refines Core Strategy Policy CSQ3 and Draft Local Plan policies on heritage and design quality by reinforcing key design principles of special importance in managing future development proposals in the villages. Not all these principles will be relevant to every planning application. Where they are relevant, the policy expects applicants to show how they have taken these principles into account in their proposals, with an explanation to be provided in circumstances when compliance with the principles is not considered appropriate or necessary.
- 7.3 A feature that shapes the character of Aston Rowant is that the settlement has always been by-passed, even when the principal road network, pre-M40, ran through Lewknor and along Butts Way, now the realigned B4009. Without the need to accommodate through traffic, internal movements are still largely via unimproved lanes and old trackways (Aston Rowant Road, The Green, Church Lane) with no pavements or raised kerbs. These narrow and winding lanes help create a very strong and special sense of place.
- 7.4 It is a village that is naturally unfriendly towards vehicular traffic, bounded by a network of ancient footpaths that encourages pedestrian movement. Lanes of varying widths, flanked by combinations of banks, cottage gardens, hedges, old barns and traditional walls maintain the rural character and on the whole do not dominate the buildings themselves. They are of an appropriate scale with the style, period and setting of any given location. This character also has a natural speed calming function slowing vehicular traffic down. In practice, if not by highway regulation, the village is, or should be, a 20 mph zone, off the line of the B4009.
- 7.5 To a greater degree, the B4009 defines Kingston Blount and the outer part of Aston Rowant. The road still exhibits the characteristics of a winding rural lane running through the former, albeit with levels of traffic that detract from the character of the village and the safety of its residents. Off the High Street, the village roads are equally low-key, exhibiting soft edges and shared surfaces. Formal footpaths are a relatively modern addition to the street scene.
- 7.6 Fundamental to the character of Kingston Blount is the space enclosed by its principal roads, the open grazing areas /croft fields (formerly four, now three) which made up the original agricultural heart of the medieval village and which constitute the core of the village conservation area. Notwithstanding the development of one paddock (Old Croft Close), the encroachment of gardens and recent development pressure on two others, the original pattern of the fields and footpaths is still legible and defines the village to a greater extent than does the B4009. Development on any of these

spaces and/or the severing of the footpath links would give rise to high levels of harm and would be contrary to the character of the area. Policy HDC1, read in conjunction with Policy LOS6, looks to protect these spaces from the encroachment of development.

- 7.7 Street lighting has generally been resisted in the parish, adding greatly to its rural identity, with particular advantages for nocturnal wildlife. There has been no indication that lighting would be a welcome addition to the area, excepting that it might be necessary and appropriate if associated with new traffic-calming measures on the B4009. A dark night time sky is considered important in maintaining the character of the area. Poorly designed exterior house lights, in particular the installation of flood lamps that are not attached to sensitive light sensors, would further detract from this character.
- 7.8 On-street parking is not common and should not be encouraged. Reliance upon the lanes in the Parish for parking is both dangerous and detrimental to the character of the settlements. The design of access to driveways from the highway is an important consideration, with many properties having old barns or detached garages that fit in well with the village scene. Open plan frontages to properties with large car parking areas would not be in keeping and might be considered to have already altered the character of the village – particularly outside of the Kingston Blount conservation area.
- 7.9 There is a wide range of materials, styles and type of building in the main settlements, including lime-washed timber-framed cottages, old barns, converted farmsteads and some modern detached dwellings that generally fit well into the character of the villages. Thatch, slate and clay tile roofs sit happily next to one another. The height, scale and density of properties vary greatly, while displaying some evidence of careful conservation planning. The retention of historic curtilage boundaries, with well-treed gardens and the remnants of old paddocks and orchards contribute much to the charm of the villages, within this level of variety. The villages each retain a strong character and identity. Notwithstanding the absence of a single characteristic village style, there is no justification for the introduction of anonymous architecture. Whether new development is in a traditional style or is more modern, it is the quality of design, use of materials, scale, density and landscape details that is important.
- 7.10 New developments and extensions need to suit the character and scale of their immediate setting. Careful matching of building style and scale that use traditional materials and locally distinctive details should be sought. The way that the development fits in to the streetscape is important, with sensitive boundary treatment and landscaping that respects the local vernacular. The context and setting of existing buildings should be respected, albeit that there remains a commitment that the scale and type of new housing should reflect local need and contribute to the vibrancy and sustainability of the settlements.
- 7.11 Any potential for archaeology to be present on any of the development sites must be allowed for in any development proposal.

### ***Policy HDC1 – Special Local Character***

*In conjunction with the LOS policies, relating to Open Spaces, the special character and historic significance of the village greens and of the remains of the Saxon Field System in the Green Heart of Kingston Blount is recognised for the contribution which they make to the conservation areas in which they are located. As such, and in accordance with Policies LOS1-6, the Neighbourhood Development Plan presumes against the development, in whole or in part, of these areas, unless it can be shown, through a detailed heritage assessment, that there would be no harm to the character of the villages or to their wider historic context.*

## **Design Principles**

7.12 The design principles deriving from national guidance in the NPPF and in the Local Plan will be followed.

### ***Policy HDC2 - Design Principles***

*Development proposals made in compliance with Local Plan and ARNP policies and on allocated sites will be supported, provided they complement, enhance and reinforce the local distinctiveness of the villages.*

*Proposals must show clearly how the scale, mass, density, layout and design of the site, building or extension fits in with the character of the immediate area and wider context within the villages. The scale of new developments should conserve and enhance the rural character and appearance of the villages and the landscape setting of the parish.*

*In addition, development proposals should have full regard to the following design principles, as appropriate:*

- i. They do not include street lighting;*
- ii. They retain the dark visual ambiance of the village via minimal external illumination;*
- iii. They have regard to historic plot boundaries, hedgerows and enclosure walls;*
- iv. Proposals for new garages, outbuildings or tall garden walls must be subservient in scale and, whether of a traditional or modern design, should draw from the local palette of vernacular building materials;*
- v. The impacts on residential amenity of the construction arrangements are minimised by way of lorry movement, deliveries, working times, lighting and loss of vegetation, wherever possible;*

- vi. *They do not include installing pavements or kerbs to existing village lanes;*
- vii. *Proposed parking arrangements should seek innovative solutions that do not necessitate large expanses of driveway nor the loss of vegetation along the highway but do not necessitate parking on village lanes;*
- viii. *The layout, orientation and massing of new houses on larger residential schemes must avoid an estate-style appearance by dividing the developable area into distinct parcels and by responding to the historic grain of the development in the village, including its road and footpath network and historic property boundaries;*
- ix. *They use permeable surfaces on driveways and use sustainable drainage systems that can connect directly to an existing or new wet environment wherever possible; and*
- x. *They will not require the culverting of existing ditches.*

## Design in Conservation Areas

- 7.13 This policy refines Core Strategy Policy CSEN3 and Draft Local Plan Policy CON5 and CON7 on the historic environment by identifying three key principles that help define the specific character of the two Conservation Areas in the Parish. The ARNP recognises that new development should reinforce the local distinctiveness of the conservation area, as may be set out in any Conservation Area Character Appraisal produced by SODC (Historic England Advice Note 1 – 2016), and, where appropriate, be designed to enhance its setting. New development (including its scale, height, mass, form, detailing and use of traditional building techniques) should not cause harm to the character or significance of any heritage asset. For all listed buildings, and for alterations or extensions to heritage assets in the conservation area, a Statement of Significance should demonstrate an understanding of the significance of the heritage asset affected. It should also set out how the proposed changes will retain and, where possible, enhance that significance.
- 7.14 The constraints offered within the Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount Conservation Areas offer few opportunities for new development beyond some in-fill and extension of existing properties. Where new development does take place and the alteration or extension of existing buildings is proposed, it is vital to ensure that this is done in a way that is sensitive to the historic character and context as set out in the Conservation Area Appraisal. It is generally accepted that Conservation Area status has adequately protected the historic core of the main villages, although their character would change if paddocks and gardens were to be sub-divided and if new build were to be out of scale relative to plot size and setting.
- 7.15 One of the principal characteristics of the villages, to be retained and enhanced, is their relationship with the landscape. Grass verges, trees, remnants of old orchards and paddocks, green spaces between buildings and views out across open countryside are as much a part of the character of the village as traditional materials and historic buildings.
- 7.16 Development has most affected the historic borders of the principal settlements on their eastern sides but these developments have been successfully incorporated into the envelopes of their respective villages without detriment to their historic cores. Each village retains an immediate and soft



relationship with open fields and the countryside beyond. A crucial buffer of open space remains between the villages, while the historic boundaries have not and should not become blurred by inappropriate modern development.

### ***Policy HDC3 - Design Principles in the Conservation Areas***

***Where appropriate, development proposals in the Conservation Areas, as shown on the Policies Map, will be supported, provided they have full regard to the following design principles:***

- i. Boundary treatments to highways and village lanes should comprise the use of native hedgerow, stone, brick or flint boundary walls or iron railings as appropriate to the immediate context of the site;***
- ii. There should be no sub-division of the historic curtilage of listed buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that the historic significance of the building and its setting would not be harmed and;***
- iii. Landscape schemes should include local indigenous trees and features that form part of the vernacular of the conservation area.***

## 8 Natural Environment and Infrastructure Policies

### Biodiversity and Wildlife

- 8.1 The Parish of Aston Rowant is rich with wildlife, with a variety of different habitats that support a diverse range of species. To the south-west of the parish is the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve which, within the Parish, runs into Aston Wood and Kingston Wood.
- 8.2 Surrounding the settlements is a patchwork of fields, orchards, pastures, woods and meadowland. Throughout the parish is a network of streams and ditches, draining the land and reflective of the spring line at the foot of the Chilterns which gave rise to the original settlements. The watercourses flow through an environment that, despite being predominantly agricultural, does contain a good number of species although it could be improved through more wetland habitat creation possibly linked to environmentally sensitive drainage enhancements. The area given over to woodland in the parish has remained stable over the past 50 years and the destruction of hedgerows has now ceased. Around the margins of many fields, strips are left for wildlife.
- 8.3 Deer and badger are a common sight in the parish. Nationally, many garden song birds have declined over the past decade whereas other species have increased. Red Kites and Buzzards are now common and nest in the area. A number of orchards survive in the villages and hamlets, and recognition as a priority UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitat has been forthcoming (Land at Home Farm, Aston Rowant). Their wildlife importance is now being recognised, with Natural England recently supporting their conservation through new legislation. Old orchards are a special type of habitat and should be conserved. Many fruit trees are found in local hedgerows, adding significantly to the character. Street lighting has been resisted in most parts of the parish, affording due advantages for nocturnal wildlife.
- 8.4 Native hedges and flower-rich verges are found in many garden boundaries and along the lanes. Many of these hedges follow historic enclosure lines and provide a distinct local vernacular. They are an essential part of the natural cycle that sustains the countryside, providing food for pollinators and other wildlife, and they represent a vital element in the green corridors used by wildlife.
- 8.5 Many of the publicly owned verges and hedgerows are now maintained and managed by the Parish Council as a wildlife asset, partly as a consequence of cutbacks in highway maintenance funding. Scrub is an important habitat in the villages, particularly on redundant nursery/allotment sites. Measures to off-set its loss will be needed as these sites are redeveloped.
- 8.6 Streams and wet areas in and around the main villages have a considerable positive effect on character. Some public footpaths follow the course of these streams. Measures to open up (both physically and through improved access) water features in and around the parish should be explored.

- 8.7 Private and public space is an important element in shaping the environment. Within the villages, large gardens are common and provide a valuable habitat for wildlife. Public open space is important, with the churchyard, the recreation grounds, the paddocks, the village greens and the allotments all adding much to the character of the village.
- 8.8 The parish has a good network of footpaths, both in the main villages and in the countryside, that are cherished by local people. A variety of routes connect the parish and connect us with our neighbouring settlements at Lewknor, Sydenham, Postcombe, Crowell and Chinnor. The network of paths is the most-used asset enjoyed by the community.
- 8.9 Of particular significance is the network of paths at the centre of Kingston Blount, the path between that village and Aston Rowant, The Ridgeway and the network of footpaths emanating from Five Ways, at the end of Church Lane, Aston Rowant. Each route passes through open countryside or, in Kingston Blount, defines the layout of the old settlement. It is important that the character of these village footpaths do not become alleyways between new developments.
- 8.10 Surface water flooding has been prevalent on the agricultural land outside of the villages and hamlets and on parts of the B4009. Although the area is not within a recognised flood plain, the presence of underground watercourses and springs should be recognised in any development proposals.
- 8.11 As the climate changes, it is predicted that rainfall patterns will evolve and more flood events will become the norm associated with long periods of drought. This might affect our parish in several ways. The spring line characteristics are related to the chalk base and fissures. The springs and streams may dry, while, at other times, surface water flooding will continue to increase. Drainage ditches may not be able to cope with increased rainfall and larger areas of agricultural land can flood, causing disruption to agricultural activity and blocking public rights of way.
- 8.12 This policy complements Core Strategy Policy CSB1 and the Draft Local Plan in setting out how development proposals should address biodiversity matters, relevant to the nature and scale of the proposal. Not all of these principles will be relevant to each proposal. For the most part, they can be dealt with as part of the proposed landscape scheme as a means of ensuring that any potentially harmful effects of the development can be mitigated. This policy includes a presumption in favour of formal biodiversity offsetting as part of any development proposal, unless circumstances dictate otherwise, given the Parish Council's wish to prioritise biodiversity projects in the parish, as evidenced by the successful and ongoing project at Five Ways, Aston Rowant. This will help to compensate for the unavoidable loss of some biodiversity value due to the development proposals in this plan.

## ***Policy NEI1 - Biodiversity, Trees, Hedgerows & Wildlife Corridors***

*Development proposals should have full and proper regard to the following biodiversity principles:*

- i. Avoid the unnecessary loss of mature trees (respecting Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) where applicable), hedgerows or other form of wildlife corridor, either as part of a landscape scheme and layout or as part of the construction works of a development scheme;*
- ii. Where the loss of a mature tree or hedgerow is unavoidable, the proposals must make provision on site for replacements;*
- iii. Developments should aim to secure a biodiversity net gain for the parish;*
- iv. Proposals involving the loss of scrubland or like habitats should retain one or more wildlife strips of scrub linked to adjacent areas of open space wherever possible;*
- v. For new homes, an owl box, bat box and/or bird boxes (particularly suited to their use by swifts, swallows and house martins) should be installed as an integral part of any house design;*
- vi. Wherever possible or appropriate, piped water courses should be re-opened in new developments linked to wetland creation; and*
- vii. Proposals that result in run-off of surface water into the stream or ditch/drain network of the village should ensure that the water flows through an appropriate sustainable drainage system.*

## **Footpaths & Bridleways**

8.13 This policy aims to prevent development from undermining the established and popular network of rural footpaths and bridleways. The Parish is criss-crossed by many well-used footpaths and bridleways. Their functionality and character should be maintained so that they do not become alleys between new developments. In particular, the network of paths in the green heart of Kingston Blount should retain their existing character and function.

## ***Policy NEI2 - Footpaths & Bridleways***

*Proposals for development adjoining a public footpath or bridleway should have regard to maintaining the rural or unique village character of the footpath or bridleway.*

*Proposals to create new pedestrian and cycle links from adjoining development schemes to a public footpath or bridleway, making use of materials that are consistent with the rural location, will be supported. The loss of mature trees and hedgerows should be avoided.*

## Renewable Energy

- 8.14 This policy supports, as a matter of principle, the development of renewable energy for the Parish to contribute to global measures to tackle climate change, while acknowledging that there are parts of the Parish where such development may not be appropriate, i.e. the nationally and locally designated landscapes. Elsewhere, a solar array may be suitable, provided the potential for negative landscape and amenity effects can be satisfactorily mitigated.

### ***Policy NE13 - Renewable Energy***

***Proposals for a solar energy array will be supported in principle, provided:***

- i. they are located and designed to suit the character of the local landscape;***
- ii. it is effectively screened;***
- iii. it will not cause significant harmful noise or light pollution; and***
- iv. It will not cause substantial harm to a designated heritage asset.***



## 9 Local Facilities and Services

9.1 A community facility is a facility that is judged by the community to be essential to ensure a sustainable community. In Aston Rowant Parish these are:

- The Church (St. Peter and St Paul)
- Aston Rowant Primary School
- Aston Rowant Cricket Club
- The Village Hall, Playground and Recreation Ground
- Kingston Blount Allotments

### Community Facilities

9.2 This policy seeks to prevent the unnecessary loss of valued local community facilities. In doing so, it refines Core Strategy Policy CSR3 and saved 2011 Local Plan Policy CF1, as they apply to this Parish, along with the emerging Local Plan. Those policies share the same purpose, but allow for facilities to be lost without considering the ongoing community value of their established use and without requiring their re-provision close by.

9.3 This ARNP policy addresses those weaknesses by ensuring that those making proposals provide clear evidence that the location, as well as the current facility operations, is no longer viable for community use before its change of use and redevelopment are supported. It does, however, allow for the relocation of established uses without this test being passed, provided the relocation proposal benefits local people by being within or adjoining the village, and is not lost to other parishes. The fourth component of the policy seeks to safeguard shops, pubs and other commercial uses by not supporting proposals to change their uses. This approach will need to take account of permitted development rights. In 2015, additional flexibility was introduced into these procedures. They may continue to change within the Plan period.

#### ***Policy LFS1 - Community Facilities***

***Proposals that help to sustain the viability of the community facilities listed in paragraph 9.1 will be supported, provided they conform to other land use policies.***

***Proposals that will result in either the loss of, or significant harm to, an identified community facility, will be resisted, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the operation of the facility, or of another community use of the facility, is no longer economically viable, or that there is an alternative, accessible location within the same village.***

***Proposals to create new shops or commercial uses will be supported, provided they conform to other Development Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan policies.***

***Insofar as planning permission is required, proposals to change the use of shops, pubs and other commercial units will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that their continued use is no longer viable.***

## **Tourism, Sport and Leisure**

- 9.4 This policy encourages tourism and leisure development in the most appropriate parts of the Parish, where they would help to support the Parish's local facilities.
- 9.5 Aston Rowant Parish has a good tourist offer. There are excellent walking and horse-riding opportunities, rolling countryside, the Chiltern Hills, the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve and a network of attractive lanes and buildings. It hosts regular Point-to-Point meetings at Kingston Blount. Aston Rowant Cricket Club runs a number of teams for players of all ages and abilities, performing "above its weight" in national village cricket. It represents a positive social facility in the absence of a village pub. The parish is located about 40 miles from London, and benefits from a frequent bus link (Oxford Tube) to and from London and Oxford. Close to Thame and Henley, it is firmly within the 'Midsomer Murders' Trail and has been used for location filming for that and other TV series. The Chinnor to Princes Risborough Heritage Railway, having finally secured the piece of the jigsaw which links the line to the national network at Princes Risborough, is now looking to extend the railway to the south of Chinnor, within Aston Rowant Parish. In principle, the enhancement of this popular volunteer-operated Heritage Railway and, possible commercial activity, would improve the leisure and tourist appeal of the area covered by the ARNP.

### ***Policy LFS2 – Tourism, Sport & Leisure Facilities***

***Proposals for tourist, sport and leisure facilities, including the possible extension of the Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway to a rebuilt Aston Rowant Station, will be supported, provided:***

- i. they are located and designed to suit the character of the local landscape; and***
- ii. they do not harm the special scenic beauty of the AONB or the special character and appearance of the Conservation Areas.***

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## ASTON ROWANT NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2019 - 2034

### APPENDICES/ EVIDENCE BASE (printed versions available unless otherwise stated)

- A Development Plan Policies (SODC)  
full text at [www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2034](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2034)  
and [www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/core-strategy](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/core-strategy)
  - B Goals and Objectives - 2016
  - C Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings
  - D Local Demographics – available on Aston Rowant Parish Council website only
  - E Consultation Report
  - F Landscape Sensitivity and Character Assessment (Lepus Consulting) – available on Aston Rowant Parish Council website only
  - G Housing Need Report (AECOM) – available on Aston Rowant Parish Council website only
  - H SEA / HRA Decision Letter
  - I Schedule of Neighbourhood Plan Policies
  - J Conditions Statement (Community First Oxfordshire) – to be produced as part of final document
  - K Prior Commitments – Planning Consents for Housing in Aston Rowant parish 2011-2019
- nb. The Housing Site Analysis (AECOM) is part of the Evidence Base (on the ARPC website) but does not form part of the draft Neighbourhood Plan.



