

Brightwell cum Sotwell

Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2016 – 32

Landscape and Green Spaces Study
August 2017



Brightwell cum Sotwell
Neighbourhood Plan



Brightwell cum Sotwell: (top to bottom) River Thames, historic settlement, former marshland, community event

I Introduction

This Landscape and Green Spaces Study was written to inform the preparation of the Brightwell cum Sotwell (BCS) Neighbourhood Plan (NP).

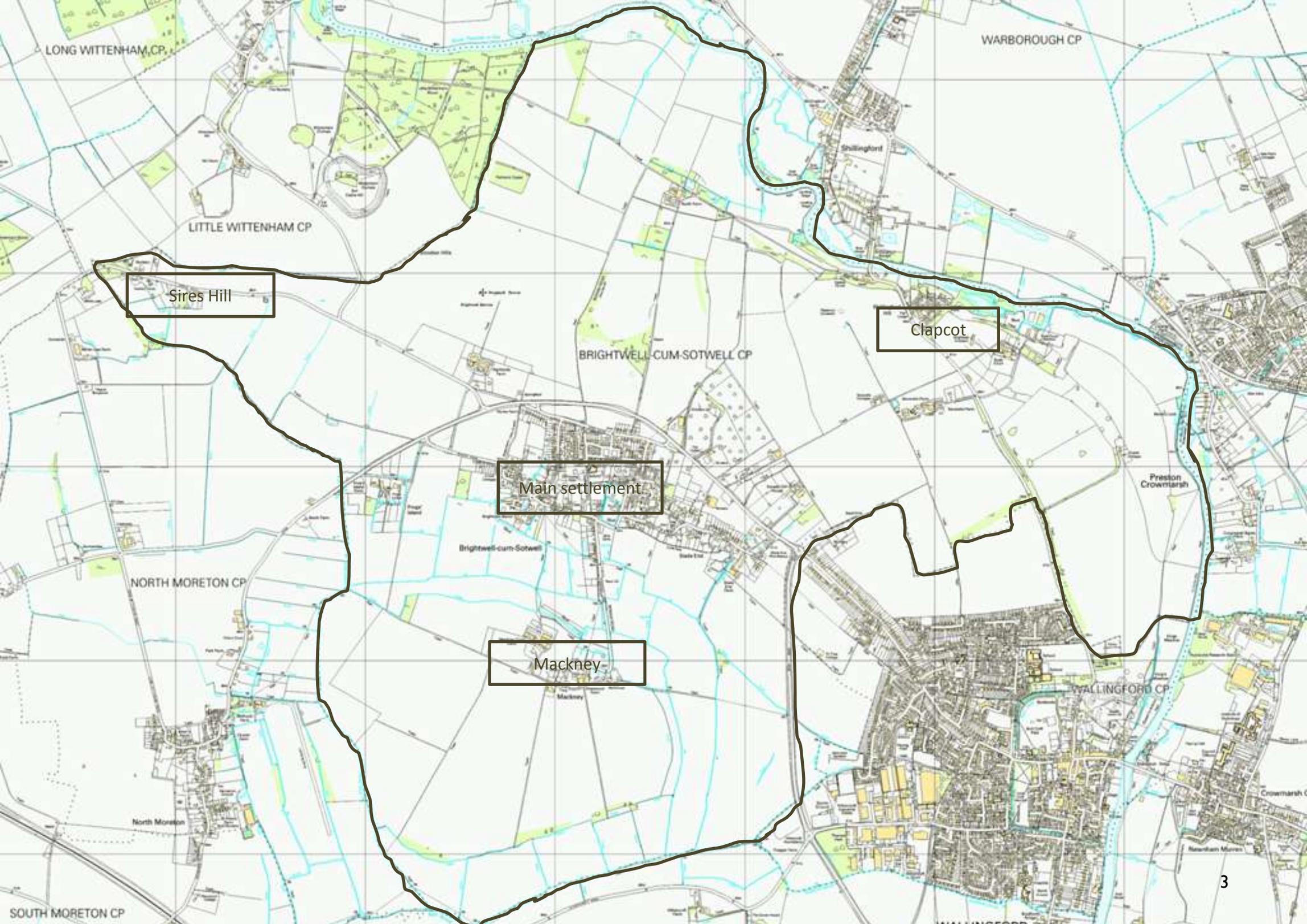
The study seeks to outline the landscape character of Brightwell cum Sotwell with particular reference to the main village (where new development is proposed), identifying key characteristics and sensitivities, both in terms of character and views.

This Landscape and Green Spaces Study is not intended as a detailed Landscape Character Assessment. A Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Brightwell cum Sotwell was published in 2006 and a Village Design Statement was included in the 2004 and 2014 Community Led Parish Plans. In addition, the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and both the District and County Councils have carried out wider landscape studies that include the parish. A desk top review of these reports has been undertaken and the relevant information included in this report.

The study begins with an appraisal of the regional landscape setting. The general characteristics of the parish are then set out before a more detailed appraisal of the main village and its green spaces is outlined.

Landscape is not only seen with the eye, it is felt in the heart.....





LONG WITTENHAM CP

WARBOROUGH CP

LITTLE WITTENHAM CP

Sires Hill

Clapcot

BRIGHTWELL-CUM-SOTWELL CP

Main settlement

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell

Preston Crowmarsh

NORTH MORETON CP

Mackney

WALLINGFORD CP

North Moreton

SOUTH MORETON CP

2 The Origins of the Parish

Brightwell and Sotwell developed around several Saxon manors centred on a spring line at the intersection of two key routes including the old (but still used) north-south Alchester to Silchester Roman Road and an east-west route that linked the river crossing at Wallingford with Abingdon. The parish was within the homeland of the Gwisse tribe and as such, part of one of the most significant early Saxon strongholds in England. The first charter establishing Brightwell was in 854AD, the manor being granted to the Bishop of Winchester from the King. Subsequently Brightwell was split into smaller units including Sotwell. Brightwell and Sotwell's lands were considerably larger than at present extending over what is now Wallingford; established in the 10th century as a Saxon new town with the Liberty of Clapcot. The modern parish of Brightwell cum Sotwell was formed in 1948 when the separate units of East and West Brightwell, Sotwell and Clapcot were re-united.

Although Saxon in origin, human habitation in the parish extends into pre-history. Roman, Iron Age and Bronze Age activity is spread along the Sinodun ridge extending down to the spring line. It is known that the region supported a nationally significant pre-Roman population centred to the north of the hills around Dorchester. Archaeological evidence suggests that Brightwell was a landscape of nucleated farmsteads at the periphery of this historic landscape. It is likely that most trees on the southern slopes of the hills were cleared for agriculture at this time, with small fields sweeping down from the hilltops to woodland in the clay vale below. Geological evidence points to this – silt being washed from the hills to the lower land below (eroded away through agricultural activity). In the low lying land the silt accumulated in the old meander of the Thames (that once looped around Mackney and Cholsey islands) creating an extensive area of wetland in the flat valley floor that survived into the modern era as marsh.

The main village lies at the foot of the south-facing slope of the Sinodun Hills, Brightwell Barrow rising 70m above the Thames floodplain. Settlement is along a narrow east-west gravel terrace, crossed by small streams fed by springs. To the east are the Chiltern Hills and to the south the Berkshire Downs.

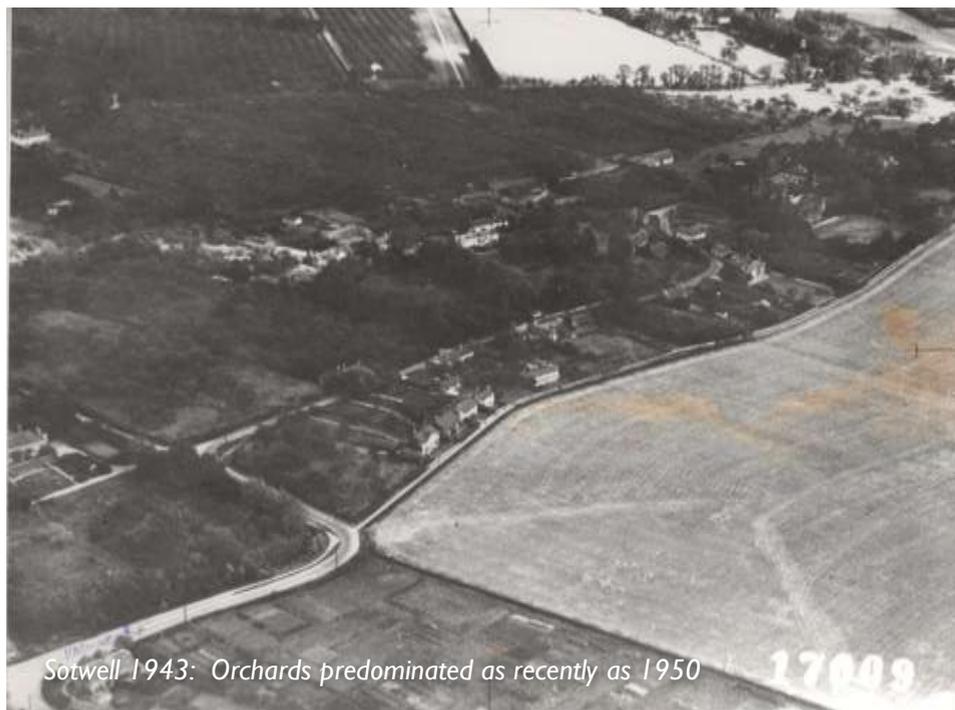
Mackney lies 800m to the south on an old island rising above ground, which before drainage must have formed extensive marshlands. Sires Hill is a small hamlet to the west of the main village located on the crest of the Sinodun ridge. Clapcot comprises all the lands north of Wallingford between Sotwell and the Thames and was for a long time a private territorial asset held by whoever had the castle and honour of Wallingford - presumably as a royal hunting park. Shillingford Hill and Rush Court are located at Clapcot, 2km north west of the main village on the A329. The Clapcot communities are not connected directly to the main village by road. Vehicular traffic needs to pass through Wallingford.

The main village evolved from a number of small hamlets spread out along the spring line. The boundaries of this settlement were defined by the ancient track to the south of the village and the Wallingford / Abingdon High Road to the north. Clusters of settlement located on The Square / war memorial, the Red Lion, the Priory Farm, Bakers Farm/Sotwell Manor and at Slade End emerged; each linked with its neighbour by twisting footpaths that now form the village lanes. Over the centuries the 'gaps' in between these historic sites were developed - many old cottages surviving to the present.



The war memorial looking towards the iconic Village Hall

The oldest house in the village is believed to be Woodley's – a 14th century cruck framed house. Several cottages survive from the late medieval and Tudor periods with thatched roofs and walls of wattle and daub. Most of the stock of historic houses comes from the Great Rebuilding period however – the village containing many fine 17th and 18th century buildings ranging from simple cottages to grand farm houses. Local bricks of a mellow red type with lines of flints were used. Clay tiles are common. These details are carried on to walls and outbuildings. Smalls House in Mackney is of considerable note. In the Victorian age, a series of large homes were built for the 'gentry'. This settlement pattern predominated until after WW II although by 1910, several large properties had appeared on high ground north of the High Road.



Sotwell 1943: Orchards predominated as recently as 1950

Brightwell cum Sotwell was within living memory a predominantly rural community where agriculture dominated, with arable farming on the higher ground, grazing on the marshland below. Extensive areas of orchard were planted around the settled areas. As recently as the 1950s, the main village was still a mosaic of farmsteads, cottages and small manor houses, separated by orchards and smallholdings.

It was only in the last half of the C20th that this ancient pattern of life changed. Improvements in agricultural practices, the opening of the Cowley Motor Works and the expansion of Didcot saw many long established families re-locate, replaced by a new wave of people seeking employment in thriving Oxfordshire. Improvements in transport links (the opening of the M40 and M4 and the direct line to London Paddington from Didcot), put the parish firmly on the commuter map.

Between 1945 and 1990, two large building developments, Greenmere and Kings Orchard were constructed south of the High Road. Greenmere was planned as a model estate to house former agricultural workers who had previously lived in tied cottages across the village. The estate was separated from the historic core of the village by strip of field and orchard but linked by the footpath network. The tumbledown cottages that for millennia had housed poor agricultural workers were restored and bought up by those seeking to live the rural idyll.



New development in the village includes a range of styles

During the 1970s a private housing estate was constructed at Monks Mead, typical of the new development that was taking place on former orchards within the historic core of the village. Elsewhere small clusters of family houses and bungalows appeared, typically one property deep. These flanked the lanes between the older properties, but preserved boundaries of historic enclosures. At Shillingford Hill the post WW II breakup of the Rush Court Estate led to the establishment of the residential Home Park site and former farm cottages becoming private homes. The estate house has become the Elizabeth Finn Trust home.

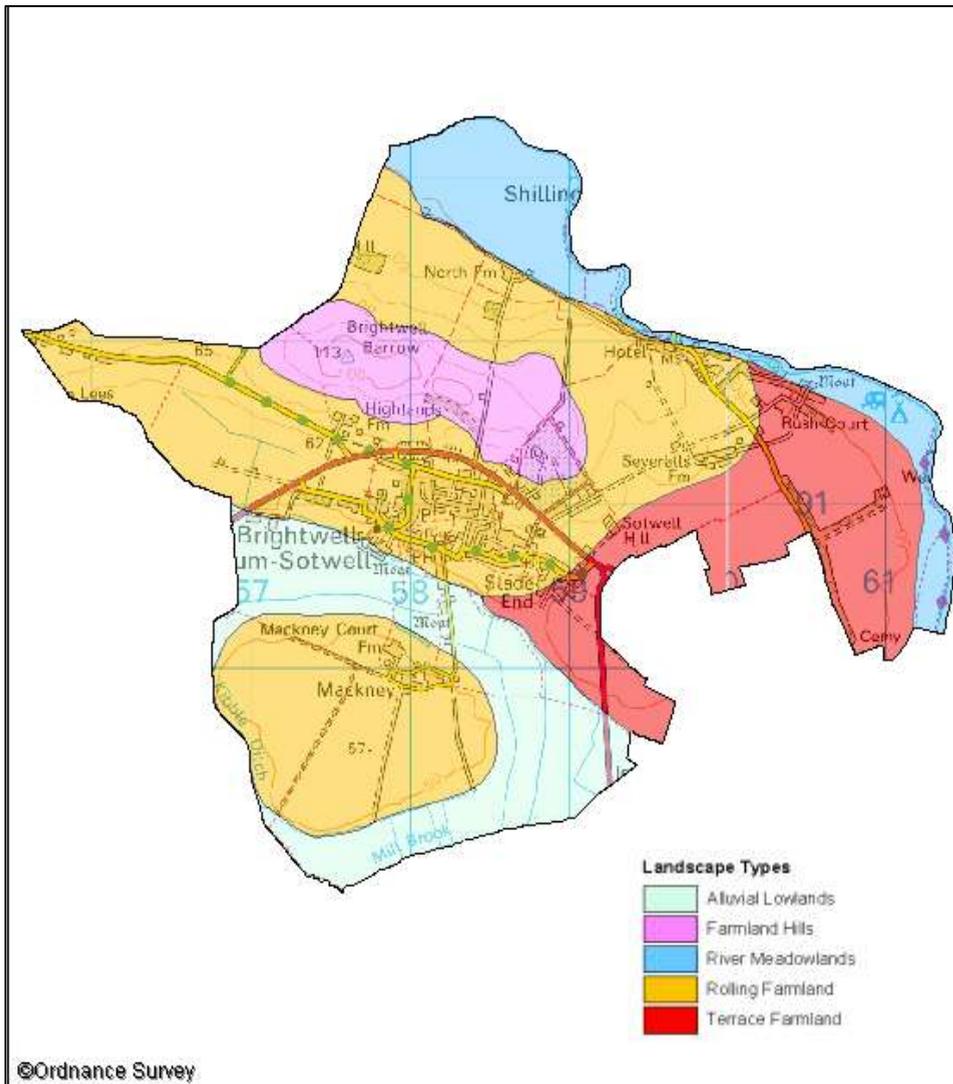
There are two conservation areas – the largest covering most of the village of Brightwell cum Sotwell and the other covering Mackney). There are 50 listed buildings in the Parish, which is a relatively high concentration in a small area, and their prominence and cumulative effects play a very significant role in defining the character of the Parish.



3 Regional Landscape Context

3.1 Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS)

OWLS is the current landscape character assessment for Oxfordshire. This section lists the landscape character types found within BCS Parish with a more detailed description of each type and subsequent local character analysis.



3.1.1 Alluvial Lowlands



This landscape type includes flat landscapes of lowland river valleys, associated with alluvial soils. It is characterised by a regular pattern of medium-sized hedged fields with permanent pasture and arable cropping.

Key characteristics

- Broad alluvial plains.
- Mixed farming pattern with regular fields with both arable cropping and pasture.
- Densely scattered hedgerow trees of ash and willow.
- Dense willow corridors bordering a large number of ditches.
- Sparsely settled

Landscape Character

The area has a mixed farming pattern of arable cropping and semi-improved grassland but is dominated by medium-sized arable fields. There is some semi-improved pasture adjacent to Mill Brook. Fields are enclosed by hawthorn hedges and ditches. Hedges are gappy and fragmented in most places. The main landscape feature is mature hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses. They include species such as willow, ash and poplar. Trees also border the railway line to the southeast of the area and there are a few, small scattered deciduous plantations.

Biodiversity

Locally important habitats include semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined watercourses.

3.1.2 Farmland Hills



Prominent hills and ridges dominated by arable farming and interspersed with small to medium-sized woodlands and plantations.

Key characteristics

- Large, regularly shaped arable fields enclosed by fragmented hawthorn hedges.
- Tree clumps and blocks of semi-natural and plantation woodland.
- Sparsely settled landscape

Landscape Character

The ridge is characterized by large-scale arable fields with thorn hedges restricted to the margins of grassy tracks. The western part of the ridge is more diverse with semi-improved grassland interspersed with scrub on the steep slopes of Wittenham Clumps and Castle Hill. Semi-natural and plantation woodland is also a prominent feature on both of these hills.

Biodiversity

There are only a few locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hawthorn hedges.

3.1.3 River Meadowlands



This is a linear riverine landscape with a flat, well defined alluvial floodplain. It has pastoral character with meadows, wet and semi-improved pasture.

Key characteristics

- Flat, low-lying topography with seasonally flooded alluvial floodplains.
- Meandering river channels.
- Grazing meadows and small fields of permanent pasture.
- Riparian character with a strong pattern of riverside willows and tree-lined ditches.
- Sparsely settled with a few roads

Landscape Character

The river corridor is mainly characterised by small to medium-sized semi-improved grass fields and some arable farming, particularly around Radley. Hawthorn hedges are not a conspicuous feature, except in some of the less built-up areas. They are overgrown and gappy and, in places, replaced by fences. Gardens, and some parklands, come down to the river edge and are particularly noticeable adjacent to villages and other built-up areas. There is a continuous tree corridor that borders the river, consisting mainly of willows, poplars, alder and sycamore. There are also some pollarded willows bordering the river and ditches and, along the river, there are a few small mixed poplar and conifer plantations and ash and sycamore woods.

Biodiversity

This length of the River Thames, between Oxford and Goring, supports a relatively wide range of locally important habitats including deciduous woodlands, plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and trees bordering the river. There are also a number of neutral grassland and wet woodland sites adjacent to the river, as well as parts of the river being fringed with species-rich marginal vegetation.

3.1.4 Rolling Farmland



A landscape with a prominent rolling landform and distant views from hillsides across the surrounding low-lying vale. It is associated with large open arable fields and localised blocks of ancient woodland.

Key characteristics

- Prominent rolling landform.
- Large, geometric arable fields enclosed by a weak hedgerow pattern.
- Thinly distributed hedgerow trees.
- Locally prominent blocks of ancient woodland.
- Small to medium-sized villages.

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell

Landscape character

This is a landscape of medium to large-sized arable and grass fields. They are enclosed by hawthorn, blackthorn and elm hedges with some oak and

ash trees. Towards the north, where it slopes down to the River Thames and Little Wittenham, it has a more wooded appearance. There are small to medium-sized plantations, a semi-natural oak and ash woodland and a large block of ancient woodland. Most of the internal field hedges are fragmented, whereas the roadside hedges are intact, tall and thick. Views are framed by the woodlands and tall hedges.

Biodiversity

A number of locally important habitats were recorded including plantations, deciduous woodland, semi-improved grassland, and species-poor hedges with trees. There were no priority habitats, but Little Wittenham Wood, at just under 70 ha, is a significant block of ancient semi-natural woodland on the slope to the south of the River Thames.

Mackney

Landscape character

The hill is dominated by large-sized arable fields. It is an open landscape with few hedges. Tree cover is largely confined to small ornamental plantations surrounding farmhouses. At the foot of the hill there are reed-fringed ditches lined with poplars.

3.1.5 Terrace Farmland



A flat, open, intensively farmed landscape overlying river gravel terraces.

Key characteristics

- Broad, flat or low-lying gravel terraces with localised tree-lined ditches
- A large scale, regularly shaped field pattern of predominantly arable land.
- Nucleated villages

Wallingford: Landscape character

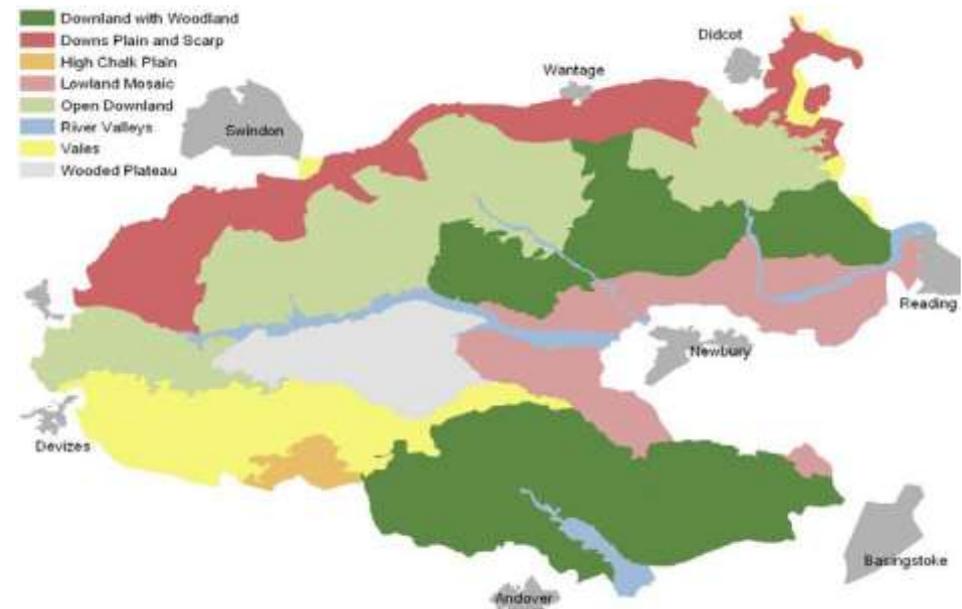
The area is dominated by large arable fields enclosed by hedges. There is also horticultural cropping to the north of Wallingford, and some small semi-improved grass fields around dwellings to the south of Rush Court. Hawthorn hedges are locally prominent to the south of Wallingford, where they are intact and have numbers of hedgerow trees including ash, sycamore, dead elm and field maple. To the north of Wallingford, the landscape is very open with most of the hedges and hedgerow trees having been removed. A distinctive feature is the avenues of Scots pine and sycamore to the north and south of Wallingford. Scattered tree clumps around farms and adjacent to roadside dwellings are also characteristic. The parkland at Rush Court is in good condition and includes prominent mature trees.

Biodiversity

Locally important habitats include plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. The parkland at Rush Court is also of local interest.

3.2 North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment & Management Plan

The area of the parish to the north and west of the old A4130 is designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Landscape guidance is included in the AONB Landscape Character Assessment & Management Plan. That sets out a series of landscape character types (see above). Detailed guidance for BCS is included in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Integrated Landscape Character Assessment. With the exception of a small pocket of Thames floodplain, the AONB in the parish is classed as Landscape Type **Downs Plain and Scarp**, falling in the area known as the Moreton Plain).



The key characteristics include:

- underlain by layers of High Chalk, Middle Chalk, Lower Chalk, and Upper Greensand forming a transitional landscape between the high downs and the Thames Floodplain;
- a varied landform including strong ridges and skylines of downland outliers e.g. At Sinodun Hills, although the scale is reduced compared to the more dramatic 'downs' landscapes to the south;
- large fields of intensive arable farmland dominate the area, with a weak or absent hedgerow structure and a sparse covering of trees, except on the steeper slopes above the Thames to the north of the area;
- open, expansive landscape with 'pockets' of remoteness;
- field pattern includes some sinuous field boundaries of medieval origin between Long Wittenham and Little Wittenham. Elsewhere, most fields are large and regular, created by Parliamentary enclosure, with more recent boundary removal to form open 'prairie' type fields;
- clumps of woodland on prominent hilltops as at Wittenham Clumps are a distinctive feature of the area;
- the adjacent town and chimneys of Didcot are often a dominant feature in views due to the open nature of the landscape.

Key Issues

- almost exclusively in intensive arable cultivation with loss of environmental assets including biodiversity (e.g. chalk grassland) archaeological features and landscape character with creation of large open 'prairie' fields;
- loss of hedgerow enclosure plus poor management of remaining hedgerows creating a very open landscape;
- denuded woodland cover - need to maintain distinctive hilltop clumps;
- open landscape with particular vulnerability to large scale development - high visual impact of built development and power station at Didcot plus overhead power lines;
- management of historic parklands and designed landscapes, e.g. at Sinodun Hills;
- development pressures within the villages and impact on settlement character;
- development impinging on AONB boundaries, particularly at Didcot and to a lesser extent at Wallingford with visual and other associated impacts.

Key Management Requirements

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the rural agricultural character of the Moreton Plain, which provides a transition between the chalk uplands and the clay Vale. The key features to be conserved and enhanced include historic field pattern, archaeological sites, historic gardens and parks, and chalk grassland. There are specific opportunities to extend and link sites of chalk grassland and restore hedgerows. The ridges and clear skylines, e.g. at Sinodun Hills and the backdrop of the high downs to the south, and the characteristic settlement pattern with villages located on high points on the Plain or along the scarp springline should be maintained. Consideration should be given to the impact of new development on the boundary on both the character of the AONB and in views from the higher ground.

3.3 The South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment

The South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment places the parish within two character areas – the River Thames corridor and the Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes. Of particular note to the BCS Neighbourhood Plan is the Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringe hat includes the following guidance.

Landscape management issues

Overall, the character area retains a predominantly rural character with some particularly unspoilt and attractive areas of landscape which have retained a strong structure of woods, hedgerows and trees, have a particularly rich, diverse and well-managed character and are of high scenic quality.

These are mainly associated with the more heavily dissected, wooded and enclosed parts of the North Wessex Downs but they also include the distinctive chalk ridge of the Sinodun Hills which supports the well-preserved hillfort, the prominent trees of 'Wittenham Clumps' and extensive woodland at Little Wittenham Wood and Long Wittenham Wood. Together, they form a distinctive and prominent landscape feature which is visible as a landmark over a wide area. Management to conserve and enhance these assets is the most appropriate strategy in these areas.

Most of the remaining farmed landscape of the character area, while still rural and attractive, is showing some signs of decline in condition and quality. Principally this is the result of a general weakening of landscape structure through intensive arable farming, creating an open and denuded character. This exacerbates the intrusion of built development and roads (eg. around Didcot), and the network of overhead power lines which cut across the open farmland within the central part of the area. Other typical land management issues include intrusive land uses on the fringes of the main settlements, some of which is the result of 'hope value' arising from perceived future development potential of land on the urban fringes. Intervention to repair or, more typically, to restore diversity to the landscape and to reintroduce a stronger pattern and structure of field boundaries, belts of trees and blocks of woodland, would be appropriate across these areas.

Key landscape enhancement priorities should be to:

- manage existing hilltop and valley-side woods on the Wessex Downs and Sinodun Hills to maximise their landscape and nature conservation value;
- retain important open views from the chalk downland and greensand hills but encourage some replacement of hedgerows and woodland planting within the 'open rolling downs' landscapes (to replicate the semi wooded patchwork character of other downland areas);

- protect any remnant areas of chalk grassland and encourage conversion of arable land to permanent pasture where possible;
- manage gallops to favour chalk grassland species;
- maintain permanent pasture and riverside trees to reinforce the tranquil, pastoral character of the river floodplains;
- encourage planting and pollarding of willows along ditches and watercourses and less intensive management of ditch systems to promote semi-natural aquatic and riparian vegetation
- encourage better maintenance of field boundaries and discourage further hedgerow removal and replacement by fencing;
- encourage the maintenance and restoration of parkland landscapes and features at Rush Court and Sinodun Hill;
- improve landscape structure and land management on the fringes of built areas and along main roads

The plan identifies a series of planning and development issues. Large-scale development of any kind will be inappropriate within open countryside areas. Any development associated with future expansion of the main urban centres of Didcot and Wallingford would require careful integration to minimise its impact on surrounding areas. The ability of the landscape to accommodate development will depend upon:

- the potential impacts on distinctive landscape and settlement character;
- the potential impacts on landscape quality and valued features and the sensitivity of the landscape to change including the receiving landscape.

The key issues associated with this are summarised as follows:

- the unspoilt, rural landscapes of the Wessex Downs, Sinodun Hills, floodplain pastures and parkland/estate landscapes are particularly sensitive to change and therefore less able to accommodate new development;
- development within visually exposed landscapes such as the denuded arable downs and the open flat farmland of the floodplain, will be highly prominent;
- landscapes with strong landform and a mature structure of woods and hedgerows may be more able to absorb small-scale development, as long as it is in character with the locality, carefully sited and well-integrated;
- landscapes on the fringes of settlements are particularly vulnerable to change and special attention should be paid to creating strong landscape

- ‘edges’ to reduce the urbanising influences of development on adjacent countryside and to prevent the coalescence of settlements;
- any new development on the fringes of Didcot and Wallingford should avoid visually exposed areas and prominent skylines, and be well-integrated within new landscape frameworks, which provide a strong edge to the built area, to minimise its wider impact on the landscape.

3.4 Parish Landscape Areas



- | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 The Main Settlement | 2 Mackney | 3 Sires Hill |
| 4 Shillingford Hill with Home Park Caravan Park | | |
| 5 Clapcot with Rush Court | | |
| 6 The Sinodun Hills including Brightwell Barrow | | |
| 7 The Terrace farmland (south of the Sinodun Hills) | | |
| 8 The Terrace Farmland (north of the Sinodun Hills) | | |
| 9 Orchard and Market Gardens | | 10 The Mackney Gap |
| 11 Frogs Island with flat lowland meadow | | |
| 12 Mackney Island | | 13 'The Evils': drained marshland |
| 14 The Drained Mackney Marshes | | |
| 15 Thames Floodplain at Clapcot | | 16 Thames Floodplain |

4 The Local Landscape

The overwhelming perception of the community is that Brightwell cum Sotwell is a country parish and should strive to protect the rural character of the area. The parish is set around an east-west ridge of low hills running from Wittenham Clumps across Brightwell Barrow towards Wallingford. To the south is a flat area of farmland and to the north, the River Thames meanders through its floodplain. For the purposes of the NP, Brightwell cum Sotwell has four distinctive local landscape types:

•The Thames floodplain

- The chalky-marl ridge of the **Sinodun Hills** that extends from the River Thames in the east of the parish to Sires Hill in the west.
- The flat former marshland area that wrap around **Mackney** island to the south of the Sinodun Hills
- The main settlement of **Brightwell and Sotwell** following the spring line

4.1 The Thames Floodplain

The Thames floodplain is characterised by a network of grazed meadows, willow carr and wet woodland. To the north of Brightwell Barrow, the floodplain is quite extensive and has recently been upgraded



by the Earth Trust to restore lost wetland features. At Shillingford Hill low chalk cliffs covered in trees rise from the river to the terrace above. The landscaping has included the opening of new access routes that will provide a wonderful opportunity to get close to nature as the area matures. The chalky cliffs at Shillingford Hill are a distinctive landscape feature rising close to the river to flat farmland above. Downstream of Shillingford Bridge, the River Thames flows through a broad expanse of meadowland that once formed part of a Royal hunting park owned by Wallingford Castle. The Thames Path crosses into the parish at Benson Lock. Large fields and meadow continue to the Castle Meadows at Wallingford.

4.2 The Sinodun Hills

The northern flank slopes of the Sinodun Hills form a most distinctive and well-known backdrop to the River Thames that has inspired poets and artists for generations. Six footpaths and bridleways cross the farmland on the hill linking Shillingford Bridge, the main village, and Wallingford with the Clumps and Castle Hill. Sensitive farming encourages wildlife, whilst outstanding views from the crest attract many walkers to this part of the parish. Be it blackberry picking or jogging however, the one factor above all else that gives the Sinodun Hills their most special characteristic is the ridge's relative seclusion – a perceived semi-natural haven that when considered alongside the Earth Trust's outstanding estate is a real asset for parishioners to enjoy.

The Sinodun Hills are at the centre of a nationally important historic landscape that extends from Dorchester to Mackney and the Wittenhams to Wallingford. It is an area that was settled from the earliest times becoming an important Bronze and Iron Age community.

The trees on the southern slopes of the Clumps were cleared for agriculture from the earliest of times, open fields sweeping down from the hilltops to woodland in the clay vale below. During the Dark Ages, silt washed from the hills to the lower land below (eroded through agricultural activity) accumulating in the old meander of the Thames (that once looped around Mackney and Cholsey islands) creating an extensive area of wetland in the flat valley floor. This has only been drained relatively recently.

Remnants of this ancient character of open hills managed for agriculture surrounded by meadow and wetland has survived to the present. To the north of the Sinodun Ridge, the patchwork of fields and woodland is varied and forms an attractive and wildlife rich landscape. This is in stark contrast to the openness of the southern slopes of the Sinodun Hills that are only broken into smaller units where ancient roads climb the ridge or parish boundaries needed to be marked. To the east of the Roman Road, scrub and orchard start to dominate. Apples, cherries and plum were commonly planted trees. Many large areas of orchard with high landscape and wildlife value still remain at the old Sheard's Fruit Farm and could be restored and new commercial uses found.

4.3 Mackney

A remarkable series of Saxon boundary features ring the western and southern boundaries of the parish. The Kibble Ditch and the boundary that runs between Sires Hill and the River Thames is of particular note. The landscape to the south of the hills includes the open fields of Mackney (and Cholsey) islands, surrounded by areas of smaller fields, enclosed by streams and ditches that once drained the marshes. The principal streams mark edges of Saxon estates still followed by the boundaries of the modern parish. Whilst possessing some landscape merit the area could be improved through tree planting and wetland enhancements, The area is criss-crossed by well used footpaths linking the villages of Cholsey, the Astons, North and South Moreton, Mackney, Brightwell, and Sotwell to one another and to Wallingford. Drainage is clearly an issue in this location – large areas flood during the winter. The hamlet of Mackney is reached by a long causeway known as Mackney Lane that follows the route of the old Roman road. Mackney is a small predominantly rural hamlet centred around Sherwood and Mackney Court Farms. The settlement includes many fine buildings including the Grade I listed Smalls House. More recent development sits happily in between the older properties separated by large gardens, orchards and barns.



Mackney Lane (top) links the main settlement along the route of a Roman Road. Mackney retains a rural character.

The Sinodun Hills; Brightwell Barrow, the defining landscape feature of the parish



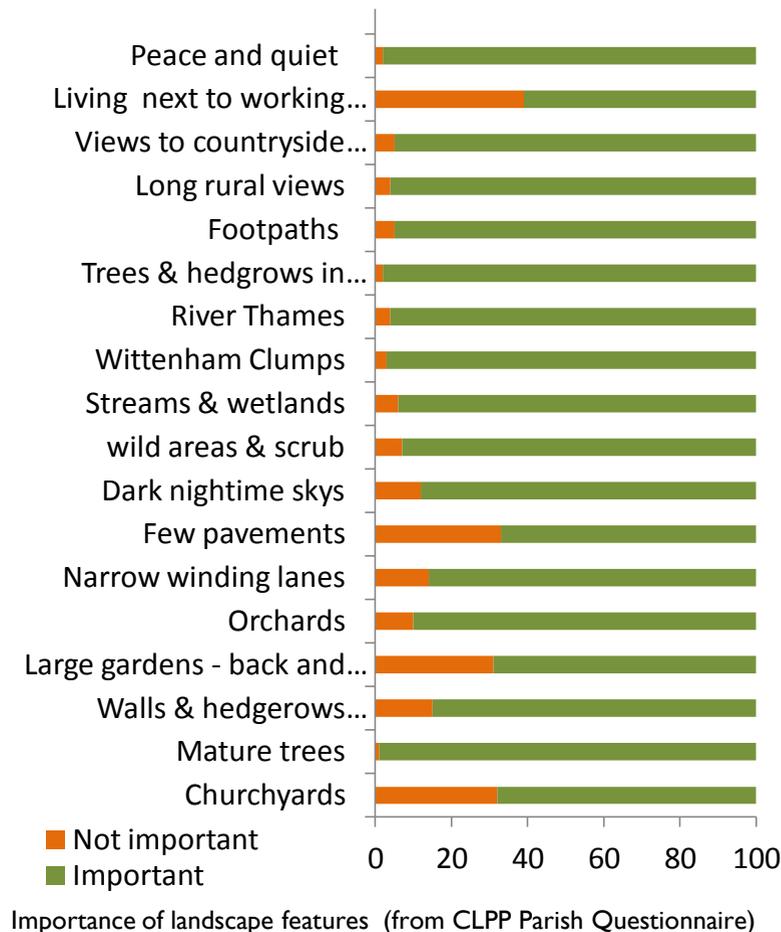
The main village sits virtually invisibly in its landscape (Picture Anna Dillon)



4.4 The Main Settlement

Sotwell and Brightwell are linear villages stretching 2km along the southern flank of the Sinodun Hills. Here the A4130 skirts the settlement on three sides, but from every aspect views of the settlement are mainly of surrounding farmland, with only a few village buildings and mature trees showing. Even at the four entrances into the village off the A4130, the settlement blends so well into the landscape they could easily be missed if it were not for the multitude of road signs. Road safety at these junctions is, however, a serious issue for villagers. The topography of the main village is important in maintaining the landscape character in that the shape of the village is hidden in its landscape. Much of this character is derived from the way that the settlement does not extend to the A4130. The Brightwell by-pass is not an edge of settlement; the fields, paddocks and fruit farms between the housing (to the north and west of the village) and the main road providing an essential role in screening and softening the impact of the village and in shaping the character of the wider AONB. This aspect of the main settlement also makes it an inward looking community – in that the vast majority of housing is accessed (both by car and on foot) from the village lanes rather than from the A4130. Measures should be taken to retain this character.

A major feature that shapes the character of Sotwell, Mackney and Brightwell is that these settlements have been bypassed since medieval times by the old High Road, now in turn replaced by the A4130. Without the need to have accommodated through traffic for over 500 years, internal movements are still largely via unimproved lanes and old trackways with few pavements. This helps to create a very strong and special sense of place. It is a village that is naturally unfriendly towards vehicular traffic, with an internal network of ancient footpaths that encourages pedestrian movement. Curving streets flanked by combinations of banks, hedges and walls maintain the rural character and are important to residents. These features do not dominate the building beyond, but are in scale with the property and with the style, period and setting of their location. This landscape is therefore characterised by a variety of different landscape features including historic enclosure lines that record agricultural origins and boundary treatments such as flint walls and native hedgerows. Private and public spaces are an important element in shaping



the place. Large gardens, areas of scrub, orchards, streams and wet areas in the main village have a considerable positive effect on character. It is generally accepted that Conservation Areas have been adequately protected the historic core of the main village, although much more could be done to enhance their wider setting and approaches. Several large development sites within the main village have been clear-felled before submission of a planning application to the considerable detriment of both the wider environment and the setting of the proposed development. Despite more recent developments, Brightwell cum Sotwell has retained a remarkable integrity. Modern houses on the whole, respect the layout of the village and mature vegetation on boundaries helps to integrate them. Gravel paths and a lack of street

lighting add to this timeless antiquity. Most new development has respected ancient boundary plots although the Cul de sac is at odds with the village tradition. Historically, lanes criss-crossed the area linking different areas with each other. Brightwell cum Sotwell is a very permeable place. Village lanes are often without raised curves and of different road widths with historic buildings commonly jutting into the road space. The modern road network in the village is the product of 1000 years of evolution and in many places this process stopped with dinosaurs! The modern road network is simply a series of improved tracks. It is within living memory that these lanes have been tar-maced. Streams that once flowed down village streets have now mostly been culverted although they do appear at several places as sluices or ditches alongside the road. Buildings (including outbuildings and barns) flank the road – both side and front elevations facing the street. Gable ends are particularly prominent feature. It is only in the modern estates that road widths are standardised and pavements line both sides. This is at odds with the established character and is a pretty pointless exercise when it is considered that to access these places, the twisting tree-lined lanes must be negotiated first.

There is a very wide range of materials, styles and type of building in the main settlement including lime washed timber framed cottages, old barns, converted farmsteads and modern detached dwellings that generally fit well into the character of the village. Thatch, slate and clay tile roofs sit happily next to each other. The height, scale and density of properties vary greatly and change rapidly although due to careful conservation planning and the retention of historic curtilage boundaries, with well-treed gardens and remnants of old orchards much of the charm of the village can be found in this variation; the village retaining a very strong character and identity. Simply because there is not a single characteristic village style, there is no excuse for the introduction of anonymous architecture however. 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.

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. There is a growing concern that new works are failing to reflect the proportions of nearby properties, being out of context with their setting.

Our main villages are built around a mosaic of old barns and converted farmsteads that began to fall into disuse early in the 19th century. Until well into the C20th most cottages were still lived in by tied agricultural workers and few had mains water, sanitation or even electricity. In the 1940's the Wallingford Rural District Council proposed wholesale demolition of these 'hovels'. Local campaigners successfully fought off this demolition proposal. The larger farmsteads were re-roofed beneath tile and slate, retaining good brick chimneys. Barns are weather boarded above local stone, brick and flint walls. A fine freestone Elizabethan house at Mackney merits a Grade I listed status. There is also a good scattering of Victorian properties, some showing fine ornate brickwork.





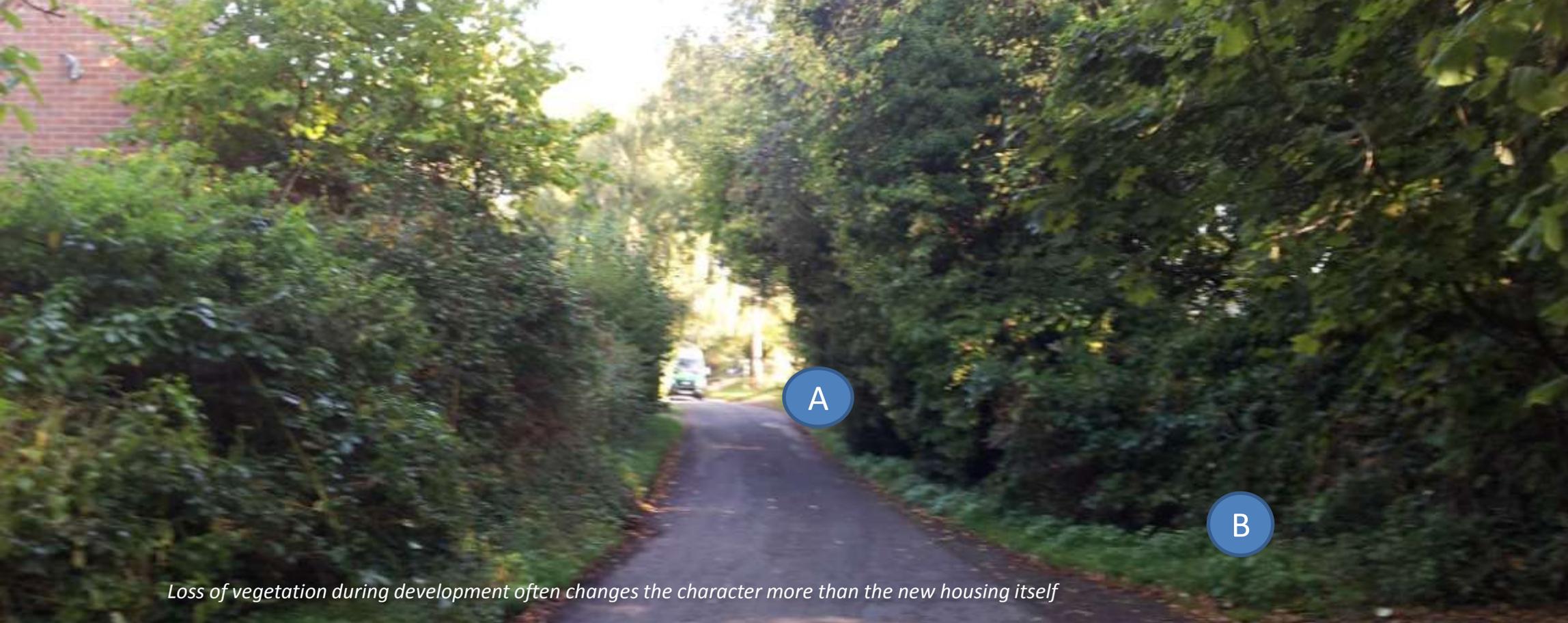
Many village lanes are 'sunken' through centuries of use and lined by trees, wooden fences, brick & flint wall or hedges. There are few raised kerbs.

The main housing expansion in the village was between 1945 and 1990. Two large building developments, Greenmere (designed as a model estate around a central 'village green') and Kings Orchard, considerably extended the built area but were separated from it by an internal green belt around the historic footpath network. This green core to the main village extends through the back gardens of properties located to the north of the Street to Vine House Orchard and onto the southern fields and westwards through Wellsprings to Sotwell House. This central green core is an important landscape element. The Monks Mead and Datchet Green developments however in-filled within that green core – their pavements and standardised road widths at odds with the narrow village lanes beyond. Elsewhere small clusters of family houses and bungalows appeared, typically one property deep. These flanked the lanes between the older properties, but preserved boundaries of historic enclosures. The design of access to driveways from the highway is an important consideration; there being a strong vernacular that adds much to the rural village character.

Many properties have old barns or detached garages that fit in well with the village scene accessed down narrow tree-lined driveways. Open plan frontages to properties with large car parking areas are not in keeping and have begun to alter the character of the village – particularly outside of the conservation area. Street lighting has been resisted in most parts of the village – a feature that above else has helped retain the rural identity. As such, light pollution is more noticeable in the village. Light pollution from the Hithercroft Industrial estate and Hithercroft Sports Centre is of particular concern, and the proliferation of lights on the Wallingford by-pass roundabouts. Within the main village, badly designed house lights, in particular the installation of flood lamps that are not attached to sensitive light sensors are an obtrusive night time feature. Noise pollution from the A4130 is a concern to many residents.

Within the village are many picturesque views, mostly short-distance views, which are closed by buildings, winding paths and vegetation. Unfolding views along narrow paths and lanes are characteristic of the village.





Loss of vegetation during development often changes the character more than the new housing itself



4.5 Views

Views play a key role in how local people relate and interact with their surrounding environment. These may be long 'big sky' views on open farmland in Mackney, sweeping panoramas across the Thames Valley from the top of the Sinodun Hills, shorter views within settlements terminating on a particular feature or building or a rural glimpse of the Berkshire Downs seen through a gap between two buildings. Views to Brightwell Barrow are particularly cherished, the ancient mound being the symbol that unites all parts of the parish providing the most iconic feature in the landscape.

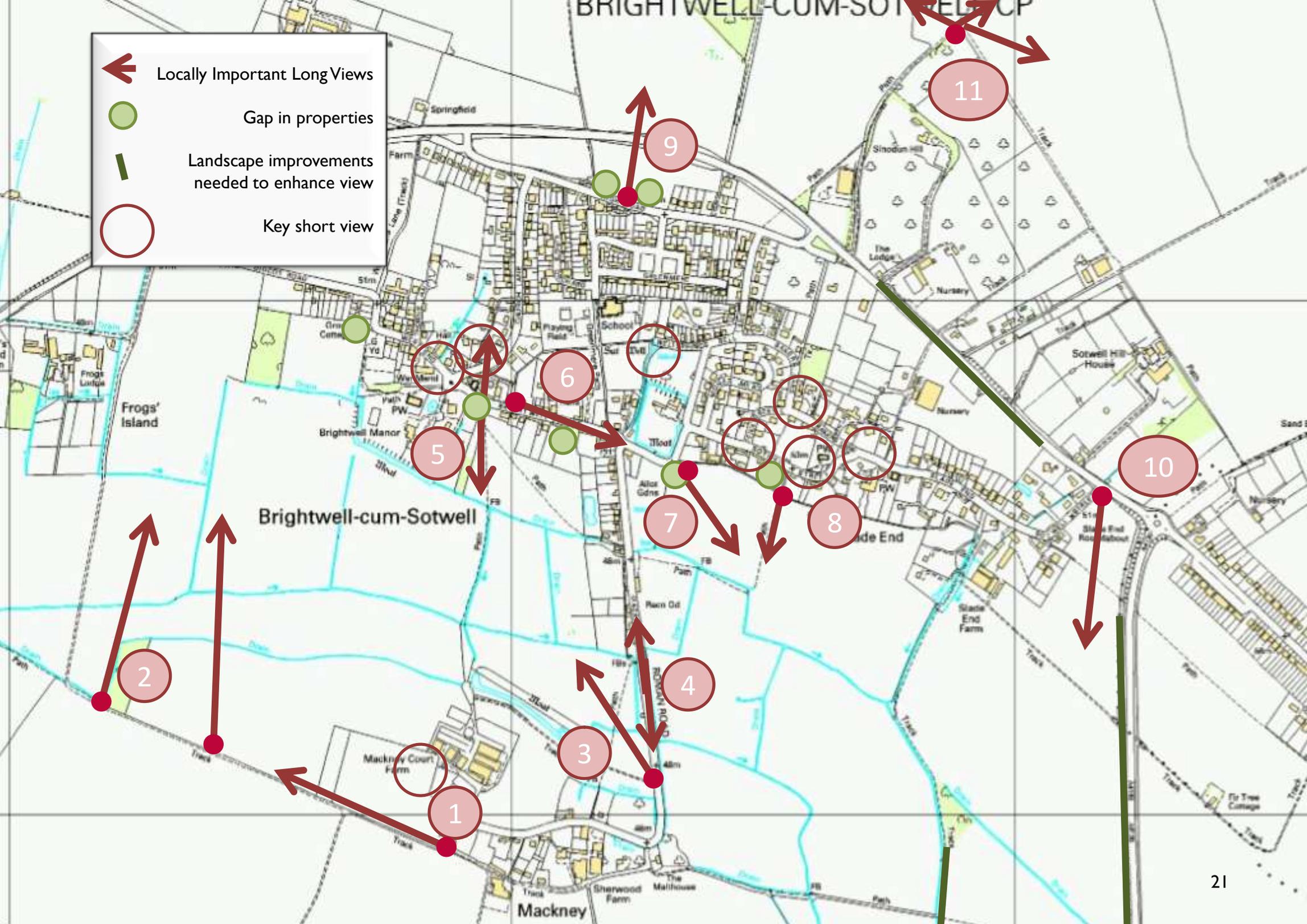
The form of the village is inward looking – the rear of properties looking outwards across open countryside.; the lanes themselves surrounded on both sides by properties and gardens. Distant views across farmland to surrounding hills from the village or a rural glimpse through gaps between village properties are therefore particularly important. These farmland views from gaps, lanes and footpaths were deemed (in the CLPP) important to 95% of residents connecting residents with their surrounding countryside. Long rural views across sweeping countryside were important to 96% of respondents in the CLPP. From the main village, there are fine views in all directions: south to the Berkshire Downs, west to the Moreton ridge separating the basin from Didcot, north to the Sinodun Hills, and east to the Chilterns and the Goring Gap. This creates much of the rural character that is important to many local people and provides a degree of landscape legibility, re-enforcing Brightwell cum Sotwell's place in the South Oxfordshire landscape.

Within the village are many picturesque views, mostly short-distance views, which are closed by buildings, winding paths and vegetation. Unfolding views along narrow paths and lanes are characteristic of the village. The enclosure of the village, limits views to the middle distance although they are found in several places such as along the straight expanse of The Street. In terms of important historic views, the whole of the conservation area is comprised of these. There are shorter views down the winding lanes, along streams, across open spaces or towards groups of cottages. The area of land between Mackney and the main village which includes allotments, a playground, the recreation ground and

the Croft Fields (both sides of Mackney Lane) is perceived as an integral part of the boundary of the village and not simply an outside agricultural space. Views to the north and west of the main village are strengthened by the way that the edge of settlement does not extend to the A4130. This feature also helps to reinforce the rural character of the parish.



- ← Locally Important Long Views
- Gap in properties
- Landscape improvements needed to enhance view
- Key short view





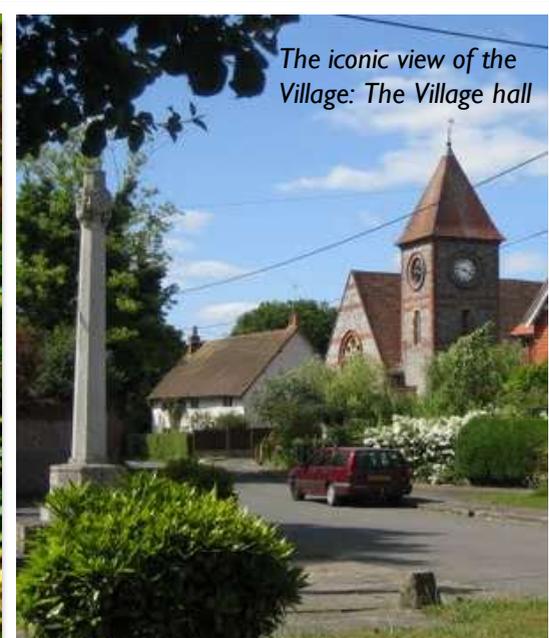
Sotwell Street to St James House



Wellsprings



Wellsprings Lane



The iconic view of the Village: The Village hall

Key short views within the village



The Square: both looking north and south



Sotwell Street



Bakers Lane

Locally Important Views

This list does not provide an explanation of the key short views. The identified views were suggested during the preparation of the Community Led Plan and have been refined and re-tested during the development of the BCSNP.

1 Mackney Fields

A long view from Mackney west towards Haddon Hill. Significant for its 'big sky' view across the flat expanse of the former Mackney marshes and Mackney Island. The rural character of this view will be considerably strengthened following the eventual demolition of Didcot Power Station.

2 The Home Fields

A series of long views, northwards from the Moreton footpath across open countryside and working farmland towards Brightwell Barrow, and Wittenham Clumps. The field pattern to the north includes smaller enclosed fields with mature oak trees and hedges compared to the openness of Mackney Fields to the south. Views terminate on Brightwell Barrow, re-enforcing the sense of place. The village itself sits invisibly in this view appearing as a wood at the foot of the Sinodun ridge.

3 The Mackney Gap

A long view across working farmland from Mackney Lane terminating at Brightwell Barrow. The view re-enforces the separation between Mackney and Brightwell. Mature hedgerow trees are significant.

2 The Home Fields: Brightwell Barrow dominates the view across enclosed fields and working farmland

1 Mackney Fields Big sky views



3 The Mackney Gap



4 Mackney Lane

View north and south along Mackney Lane through working farmland. To the north the main settlement is tree'd whilst to the south the large back gardens of Mackney provide a rural appearance.

5 Hay Croft

To the western end of Brightwell Street a small gap in the housing provides one of the few public glimpses from the historic settlement to open countryside across the Hay Croft. The foreground of this view could be considerably enhanced through the removal of visual clutter.

Looking northwards from public footpath across The Hay Croft, the same view provides a glimpse through the rear of the properties along Brightwell Street, to Woodman's Cottage and onwards to the iconic Brightwell Barrow.

6 Brightwell Street

The view along Brightwell Street, (from the meander in the lane at The Old Rectory) to the east terminating on Moat Cottage. The view is along one of the few straight lanes in the village. The gable ends of thatched properties are particularly prominent. Most development is on or close to the road, in contrast with other locations. The orchards at Vine House and Orchard Cottage provide a natural break in the view that re-enforces its village character. To the east, the cluster of buildings around the Red Lion pH including Moat Cottage and the listed telephone box that enclose the view.



4 Mackney Lane

7 The Croft looking towards the Chilterns ridge



7 The Croft from the 'Duck pond'

The Green Heart of the village extends across the Street to the Swan Allotments to the south. Between the allotments and the rear of White House a gap allows long views across The Croft to the east, terminating on the Chilterns ridge. This is a key gap in the settlement boundary towards working countryside; measures need to be taken to ensure that any new development at Slade End does not detract from this view and that any impact from new development at Site B in Wallingford is minimised particularly at night. Light pollution from Hithercroft is an issue.



6 Brightwell Street

5 The Hay Croft looking northwards across Woodman's Cottage to Brightwell Barrow



8 The Croft from Dobson's



8 The Croft from Dobson's Path

The view from Dobson's Lane southwards across the Croft provides a glimpse to working farmland in Sotwell.

9 The High Road

To the north of the High Road, the most extensive gap between buildings in the village is found. Here the view is across working farmland to the tree capped Sinodun Ridge framed on both the east and west with trees and hedgerows. Tree growth along the A4130 helps to screen the impact of the busy main road.



9 The High Road looking north

10 Slade End Fields



10 Slade End Fields

Re-enforcing the gap between the two distinct settlements of Wallingford and Brightwell cum Sotwell is a single field to the west of the Wallingford by-pass. The view is across working farmland towards the Berkshire Downs in the south.

11 Style Acre Ridge

To the north of the main village an ancient sunken footpath climbs the slope of the Sinodun Hills passing through orchards and small copses. As the path reaches the crest of the hill, a wide panorama is revealed. From this vantage point, the whole of the north of the parish can be viewed, the River Thames, Dorchester, Wittenham Clumps, the Chilterns and on a clear day Oxford itself. The view is remarkably rural despite the Wallingford suburbs encroaching to the west.

11 Style Acre Ridge



Across the parish, in open countryside many spectacular rural views are found.



4.6 North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Brightwell cum Sotwell is situated at the edge of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (formally known as the Berkshire Downs). Defined as an area of countryside considered to have significant landscape value, the designated area wraps itself around the north/west portion of the parish embracing most of the area north of the old High Road and west/south of the Kibble Ditch but excluding the main village and Mackney island.

The setting and views to the AONB from the village and Mackney are particularly important as are the views from the AONB over the village southwards terminating on the ridge of the Berkshire Downs on the horizon. Much of this aspect is achieved by the way that the village sits invisibly in the landscape (this has been considered elsewhere in this report) – the village melting into the wider landscape. That the modern A4130 does not form an artificial boundary to the main settlement is an important factor in determining this landscape feature.

The open spaces and working farmland situated between the north of the built area and the road perform a valued function in softening the impact of the busy main road on the Sinodun ridge when viewed from the village or along the road itself. This is further enhanced by the roadside vegetation that has grown over the past 40 years. These open spaces also help to strengthen the separation between Wallingford and the main settlement of Brightwell and Sotwell preventing the coalescence of distinct settlements. Particularly considering the development of Site B.

The verge to the south of the A4130 between the Slade End turn and Style Acre turn could be considerably enhanced through planting. At present, views from the road are to an unsightly chain link fence alongside Sotwell Manor Fruit Farm. Native hedge planting with mature trees (including trees to the north of the road between the boundary and the kerb) would soften the impact of the road and help to bring the feeling of the countryside closer towards Wallingford.





At the centre of the main settlement is a remarkable network of open spaces that forms a green heart to the village. This characteristic gives a remarkably rural feel. Much of this is achieved by views from lanes into adjacent fields, large back gardens and orchards

5 Wildlife and Nature Conservation

Although there are no Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the parish, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell is rich with wildlife. The parish has a variety of different habitats that support a diverse range of species. To the north of the parish on the floodplain of the Thames, the Earth Trust has recently created a large area of wetland through its River of Life project. The Site of Special Scientific Interest at Wittenham Clumps is located immediately to the west of the parish.

Surrounding the settlements is a patchwork of fields, woods and meadowland. To the south of the parish is a network of streams and ditches draining the land towards the Mill Brook. The area given over to woodland in the parish has increased significantly over the past 50 years and the destruction of hedgerows has been largely halted. This environment, although being predominantly agricultural, does contain a good number of species and could be further improved through more wetland habitat creation possibly linked to drainage enhancements and the planting of hedgerows and small copses of native trees. Around the margins of the fields, strips are left for wildlife. – there is considerable scope to improve this habitat by linking isolated areas with each other. The scope to enhance wet environments particularly to the former marches around Mackney is considerable.

Deer and badger are a common sight in the parish. Many garden song birds have declined over the past decade whereas other species have increased. The red kite and buzzard are now a common, yet awe inspiring sight and nest in the tall trees in the village. The house martin, swift and swallow population has declined significantly in the past decade.

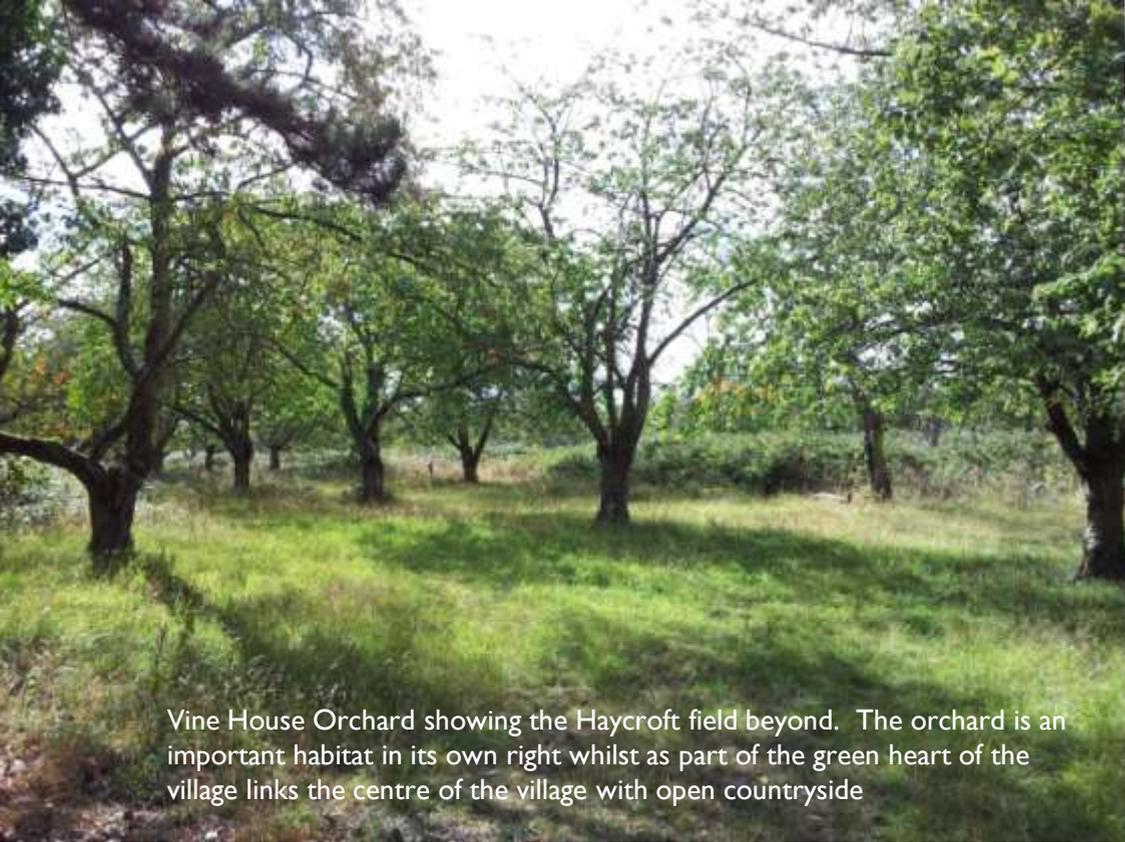
Orchards once dominated the main village and a good number survive although many are in a poor state. Their wildlife importance is only now being recognised with Natural England recently supporting their conservation through new legislation. Brightwell-cum-Sotwell's old orchards are our most unique and special habitat and should be conserved but their destruction continues. Many fruit trees are found in our hedgerows providing an ample supply of fruit for homemade jams and drinks. 80 different varieties of apple have been identified in the main settlement.

Large gardens provide a valuable habitat for wildlife. Our native hedges and flower-rich verges add much to the character. They are also an essential part of the natural cycle that sustains the countryside, providing food for our hungry pollinators and other wildlife such as birds and mammals, and green chains for wildlife to move about in. Scrub is a significant habitat on the hills and around the margins of the various settlements. Where new developments remove this habitat, measures should be taken to compensate for its loss and to retain the wildlife corridor function that this habitat provides.

The parish contains some sites that could be considered as locally important for nature conservation such as; the village hedgerow network, the Swan Wilderness Area, the Millennium Wood, Wellsprings Pond and Green Hill. A survey of hedgerows that flank the village lanes has shown that gapping up with native species is needed if this prominent feature is not to be lost. This would include a good mixture of fruit bearing trees such as blackthorn, wild cherry and crab apple. Landscaping of the High Road between the Slade End roundabout and Five and Half Acres has also been identified as a priority. The Village Environment Group has completed two Conservation Reports that set out key environmental considerations.

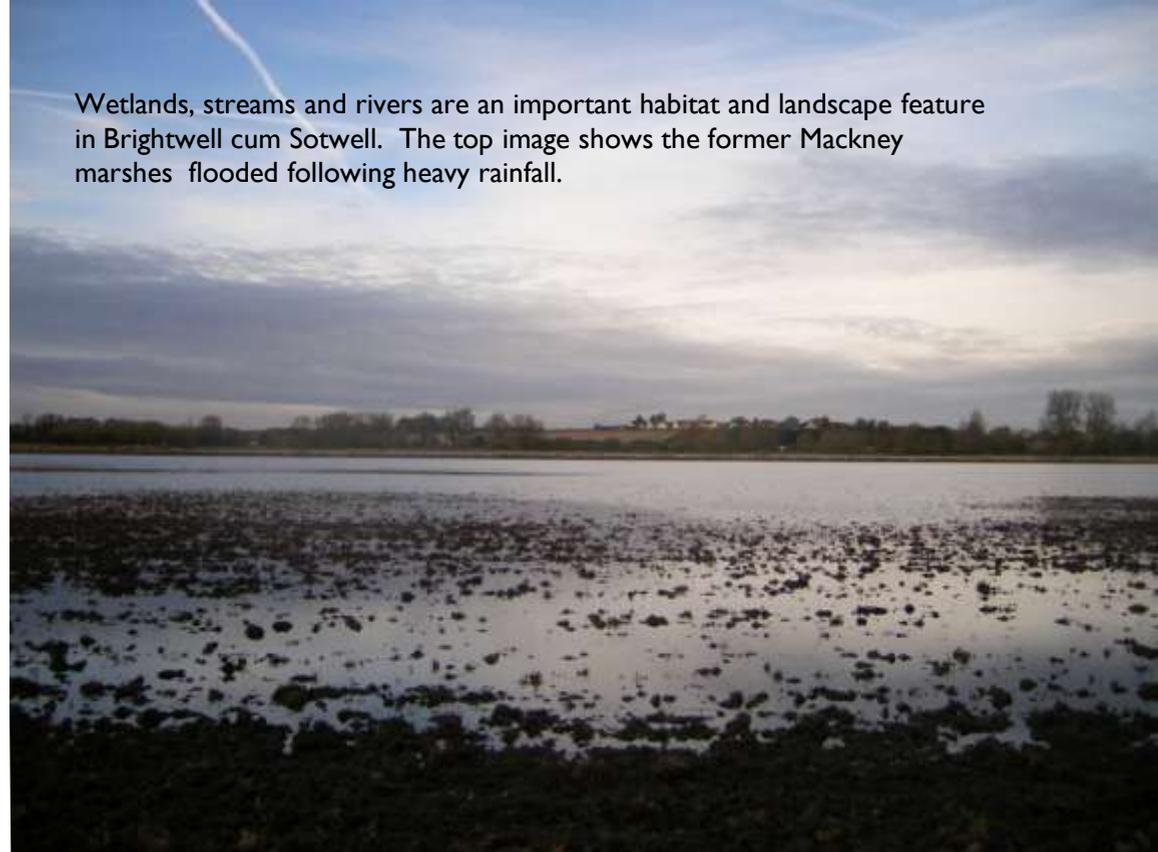
Wildlife strip along a field margin



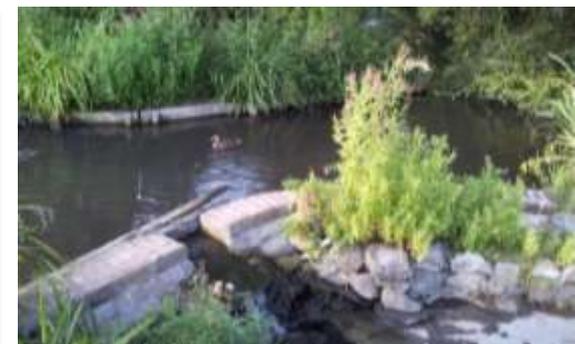


Vine House Orchard showing the Haycroft field beyond. The orchard is an important habitat in its own right whilst as part of the green heart of the village links the centre of the village with open countryside

Wetlands, streams and rivers are an important habitat and landscape feature in Brightwell cum Sotwell. The top image shows the former Mackney marshes flooded following heavy rainfall.



Red kite



6 The Local Character: The Main Settlement

6.1 The War Memorial and West End



The open space around the war memorial is an attractive focal point at the centre of Brightwell spoiled only by parked cars associated with the facilities located nearby. The area includes the entrance to the footpath to the parish church of St Agatha's, the village shop, Brightwell Garage and the Village Hall (formally the school) – a building of considerable townscape merit. To the west of the war memorial a mixture of timber framed cottages and Victorian buildings are found, alongside new developments, mainly bungalows that on the whole sit happily behind old brick walls and low hedges. Thornes Nursery remains undeveloped to the north of Old Nursery Lane.

6.2 Brightwell Manor and St Agatha's Church



To the south of the war memorial, the two most important historic buildings of Brightwell, Brightwell Manor and St. Agatha's Church, occupy a large area set mostly in open countryside. Scarcely visible from Brightwell Street, they retain much of their historic separation from the village. Much of the character of this area is given by the fields beyond that maintain the rural setting of the village to the south and west.

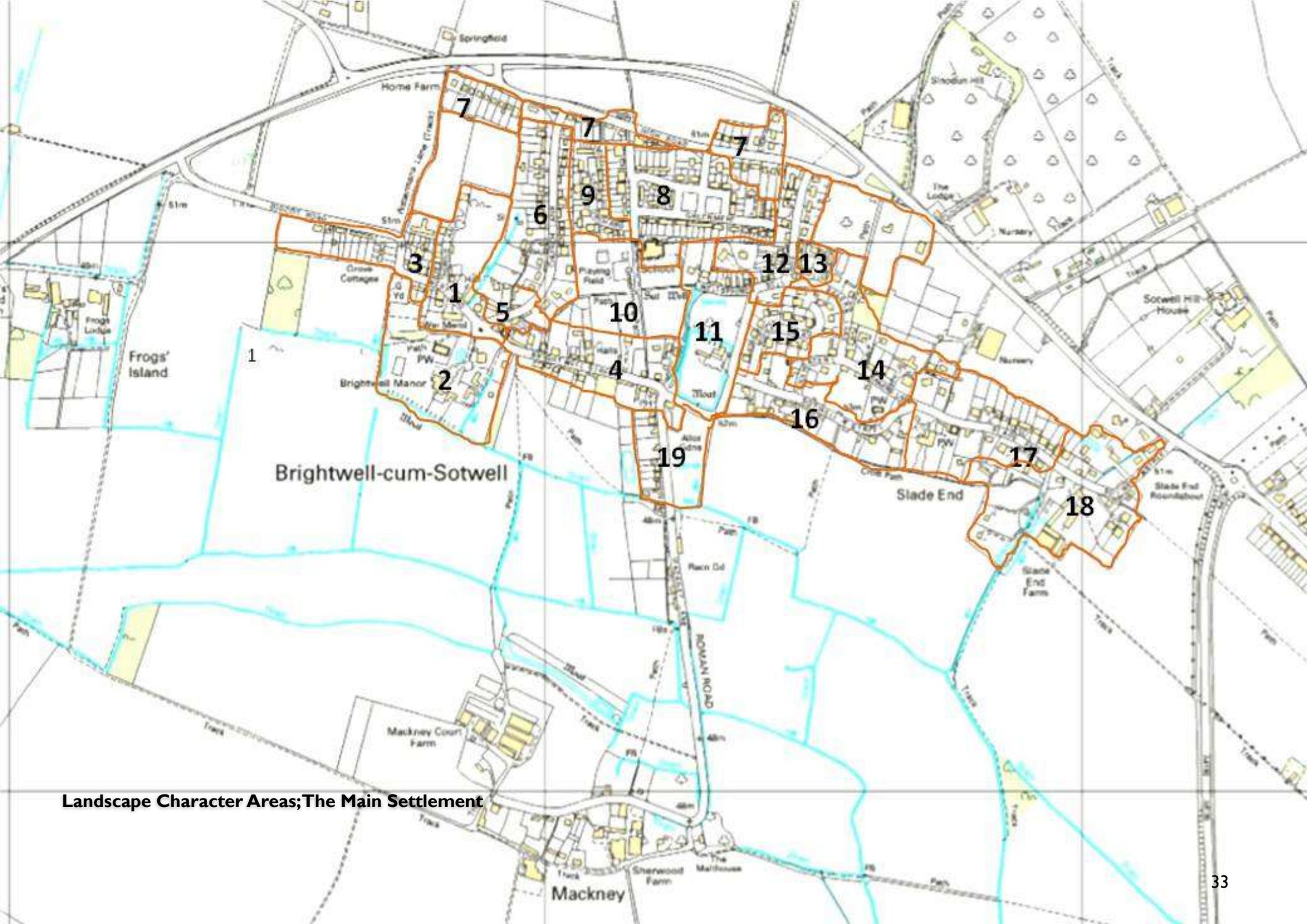
The extent of the village is defined by the stream that rises in the graveyard and flows to the west and south of the Manor house grounds forming a boundary with the flat, open fields beyond. Views out from the conservation area to the south and west are unspoilt and uninterrupted, highlighting the isolation of the Manor from the rest of the village. Hedges, trees and walls play an important role in shaping the character.

Only two houses are built beyond the historic edge of the village. With the exception of Mackney Lane and the former Slade End nursery site, this is the only point at which the established historic boundary on the south side of the village has been breached by new building.

6.3 Grove Cottages and Home Farm



The derelict Home Farm complex was redeveloped in the 1980s by a small group of housing that mainly face the road. This site (situated to the north of West End) and the graveyard to the south, historically defined the western edge of the built up area. A row of post war housing however has strayed beyond this historic core at Grove Cottages towards Frog's Island but their design and planting soften their impact. The field opposite is an important landscape consideration. The rural edge of the village is strengthened by this field providing the only entrance to the village (from the A4130) that is accessed through open countryside. The northern verge is marked by a row of mature trees that softens views to the A4130 yet allowing longer views to the Sinodun Hills beyond. The edge of settlement is further defined by Watermans Lane that retains its rural character. Views across Rectory Meadow through a small gap between Grove Cottages and the Graveyard provide a connection between the countryside and the built area.



Landscape Character Areas; The Main Settlement

6.4 Brightwell Street



The Red Lion – the centre of gravity of the village

East of the war memorial, where the mediaeval and post-mediaeval village developed along Brightwell Street, the historic grain of the village is still evident and includes many houses of local historic interest. The houses face the street where open spaces and gaps between buildings make as much contribution to the character as the buildings themselves.

Opposite the Woodman is an important gap in the building line that allows open views to the south. The open space between Vine House and the Barn (and opposite at The Orchards) is of particular importance in this streetscape, separating two groups of historic buildings.

These orchards form part of a series of green spaces linking the village with open country to the south of Brightwell Street with the open spaces to the north. The buildings along the Street include timber framed thatched cottages, Georgian houses and more modern structures. These, on the whole fit in well with older properties.

The range of styles is typical of the village that with the exception of some new backland development are located either on or close to the roadside. The eastern end of the Street is marked on the north side by Moat Cottage and on the south by the Red Lion forming an attractive space at the top of Mackney Lane providing the centre of gravity to the village.

6.5 The Square



Situated between the war memorial and Church Lane is The Square - possibly the old nucleus of the medieval village, and still a place for the village to gather. A group of cottages cluster on four sides around a small area of grass - the last vestige of Brightwell Common and an important open space on the curve of Church Lane. The buildings around The Square make a significant contribution to the character of the area both in their own right and as part a group and include several thatched cottages and a magnificent thatched tithe barn.

6.6 Church Lane and Little Lane



Church Lane curves north east from The Square to The High Road. Between the cluster of thatched cottages around the Square and the northern entrance of Little Lane, modern houses constructed on established property lines sit behind established vegetation. These hedgerows give a rural feel although recent development has resulted in the significant loss of hedgerow. The cottages around the Priory form an important group.

To the north of Little Lane Cottage, a mix of modern development, one property deep, set back from the road characterises the lane; some with mature trees and hedgerows to the front. A small estate to the west is largely hidden from view by vegetation. Paving over front gardens is an issue and detracts from the setting of the conservation area.

6.7 The High Road



The High Road is characterised by a mixture of modern houses and older cottages. At the top of Church Lane is a small row of rural terraces – one of the last surviving examples of this type in the village. To the west, modern bungalows are set back from the road and screened by mature planting.

Between Church Lane and Greenmere, development is largely confined to the south of the road and includes a mix of styles and building types dating from the late 19th and 20th centuries. The entrance to Greenmere is landscaping well – the scene being enhanced by views to the north across open fields to the Sinodun Hills formed by one of the only places in the village where the gap between the building line is of any size. To the east of Greenmere modern houses are found to the south of the High Road, the road becoming predominantly more rural towards Style Acre Lane.

6.8 Greenmere



The post war estate at Greenmere was constructed as a model estate around a central village green, primarily to house local people in social housing. Over the past three decades many of the houses have been sold - the estate now having a mix of tenures.

6.9 Kings Orchard



Kings Orchard was constructed in 1979 on the site of a former Orchard and includes a mix of two, three and four bed roomed houses.

6.10 – 11 The Green heart of the Village with Wellsprings

At the centre of the village is a large area of green space formed by a mixture of different ownerships that includes a school playing field, a public open space, a stream, Sotwell House and moat, several former orchards, paddocks and private back gardens.

This group of inter-connected green space adds considerably to the rural character of the village and provides a green heart to the village that can be accessed by the footpath network from all directions. The importance of this asset in shaping the wider character of the main settlement is paramount.

To the north west of the Green Heart is the Kings Meadow Playing field enclosed on four sides by trees. The old Roman Road runs north – south through between Kings Meadow and the school, which together with Butts and Back Lane have a tree-lined rural character. This is emphasised by the old orchards to the back of properties located on the Street.

The grounds of Sotwell House are particularly important: they mark the western end of Sotwell and, with the Elliot's Orchard, Sotwell House Orchard and the school grounds, form an open space separating the twin villages of Brightwell and Sotwell. Wellsprings Footpath meanders alongside the small stream to the red telephone box close to a marker stone commemorating the former parish boundary. The moat of Sotwell House runs along the east side of this wooded path; the path itself shares the route of a stream and the gravelled surface is an important aspect of its character. The only buildings visible from the path are partial glimpses of Sotwell House and two modern late 20th century houses on the western side. Towards the northern end of the path at Wellsprings, the views into the paddocks on either side are partly obscured by high banks, trees and undergrowth. This gives the impression, particularly in summer, that the green spaces are larger

than they are in reality and increases the perception of Brightwell and Sotwell being separate settlements. The spring that bubbles up below the picturesque group of cottages at Wellsprings is believed to be the 'Sot well' that the village is named after, which together with the small stream that meanders alongside the gravel public footpath to the pub is regarded as the most cherished lane in the village. To the east of the impressive Sotwell House gardens is the lower section of Bell Lane. Despite the modern development of houses in Monks' Mead, the gardens, boundary beech hedges and grass verges bordering the road give Bell Lane a semi-rural character, reinforced by the trees along the boundary of the paddock opposite, on the western side of the road. Wellsprings is a deeply rural spot overhung by trees and framed on either side by paddocks; it is separated by a small area of grass from the informal road serving the row of houses on Wellsprings. This little settlement still retains a sense of being a place set apart from the larger village to which it is linked. The fact that large modern housing developments press against it on two sides makes this character particularly special and particularly fragile. Three historic houses make a significant contribution together with the absence of buildings to the south - all contribute to the sense of rural isolation. The green heart extends south outside the village boundary to include the Swan Allotments, the Hay Croft, these spaces providing the same function as the rest of the green heart.





The green heart: Wellsprings, Sotwell House and Bell Lane



Bell Lane

6.12 Bell Lane

Bell Lane is characterised by predominantly 19th and 20th century building to the east and north of Wellsprings. Large, mature front gardens give the impression of a secluded lane leading out of the village. The thatched roof of The Knowle forms an appropriate focal point at the curve of Bell Lane with the tree'd curve of Bakers Lane curving beyond. To the north, the lane meanders to the High Road. The thick hedges to the rear of Datchet Green and the sunken nature of the road help to soften the impact of buildings that on the whole sit invisibly along the leafy lane.

6.13 Datchet Green



This small Cul de sac comprises of a series of bungalows set around a small leafy garden square. The entrance to Bakers Lane including a prominent street light does not blend well with the rural character of Bakers Lane however.

6.14 Bakers Lane with Penny green Lane

Between Bell Lane and the Dr Bach Centre, Bakers Lane is a predominantly rural experience. The high banks of the sunken lane are full of old fruit trees and ash that in summer gives the impression of a country path. Mount Vernon, known as the Dr Bach Centre, is a significant feature in the village. The hedges, cottage garden and path beyond provide the house with an appropriately rural frame. The bridleway running alongside the house to the north links both house and setting to the orchards beyond.

6.14 Bakers Lane with Penny green Lane



The group of cottages at the junction of Penny green Lane and Bakers Lane is one of the finest in the village and contains some notable brick & flint walls. Penny green Lane, on the north side of Sotwell Street, is a sunken track running between high banks, enclosed by hedges and trees, bordered by the gardens and not overlooked by buildings. Even during winter, the lane has an air of seclusion.

The modest St James' Church is largely hidden from view from Sotwell Street and Baker's Lane by trees and hedges, only its distinctive tower, covered with oak shingles and topped by a weathervane, is visible. Baker's Lane narrows towards its western end past the mature copper beech in front of Sotwell Manor – one of the finest trees in the village. An unbound track with grass verges links a set of buildings associated with the old Manor Farm with Baker's Lane adding to the rural character. The open spaces between Manor Farm and the High Road (forming a fruit farm and paddocks) provide a valuable function, helping to prevent the coalescence of the distinct settlements of the main village with Wallingford.



6.15 Monks Mead

Monks Mead is a cul-de-sac of houses with little or no connection with local tradition although the estate does contain some fine family homes set in large gardens. Constructed in three phases, the road twists through a former orchard to a dead end.



6.16 Sotwell Street West



The southern edge of the village is clearly defined by Croft Path, the long-established historic edge of settlement where views out are still across open fields towards Mackney and the Berkshire Downs beyond. The group of five Victorian villas set on a slight curve in Croft Path form a distinctive feature particularly viewed from the south. The orchard to the east of Benjamin House provides an echo of a rural past in marked contrast to the magnificent brick and flint boundary walls that characterise the area.

As is common elsewhere in the village, Sotwell Street is a mix of different building styles and ages. Some of the older cottages are positioned on the road itself separated from each other by the hedges and walls of more recent developments. Trees and thick vegetation to the north side of Sotwell Street give a semi-rural character as the road straightens out towards Dobson's and St. James Church. Beyond St. James Church, Sotwell Street narrows, wiggling between a series of remarkable buildings including a large Georgian house, a former coach house and a simple thatched cottage. Boundary treatments including mature hedgerows and long brick walls unite the different styles of buildings into one of the most attractive and rural groups in the village.

6.17 Sotwell Street East



From the junction with Baker's Lane, four very different buildings on the south side of Sotwell Street form a distinct group framed on the opposite side of the road by the large front gardens of large detached 20th century housing. A long brick wall follows the curve in the road.

The street scene here is characterised by trees, hedgerows and grassy banks, which give the sense of a green and enclosed country lane running between the two historic settlements of Sotwell and Slade End. The gardens and trees of Elmleigh and the 1960s detached housing opposite maintain a green area between Slade End and Sotwell and help to define the division between the two historic settlements.

6.18 Slade End



At the eastern end of Sotwell Street is Slade End, dominated by the handsome 18th century Slade End House, its associated buildings and its brick and flint boundary wall which until 1948 formed the manor associated with East Brightwell or Bishop's Sotwell.

Although the group of historic buildings forming this part of the village is small and surrounded by modern development, the area is still identifiable as a hamlet distinct from Sotwell. Its distinctiveness relies largely on the open fields to the east and south - at the very edge of the village as a whole - and the open spaces formed by gardens between houses.

To the south of Sotwell Street is a small un-bound road known as Green Lane. The track includes the old farm of Slade End to the east and the derelict site of Strange's Nursery to the west.

At Slade End, the Croft Path changes character to become narrow and secluded, winding between hedges, which partly obscure views of the fields outside the village. The buttressed walls and heavy thatched roof of Honeysuckle Cottage and Cappaslade Cottage bulge out into the path as it turns north towards the road appearing to be set in a woodland clearing - an illusion created by the surrounding gardens and the overgrown Slade End Nursery site beyond the path.

6.19 Mackney Lane



Beyond Red Lion, the view south from the conservation area gives a sense of leaving the village into the open country. This illusion is created by the front gardens of the relatively small houses along Mackney Lane which are set well back from the road behind hedges and trees.

Opposite the Red Lion, on the corner of Mackney Lane, is a pair of distinctive Victorian houses. These two Victorian houses and Moat Cottage frame the entrance to Sotwell Village seen from the west. Perhaps paradoxically, the view beyond is essentially green and open, with no buildings visible.



Orchard at Mackney Lane



First Edition OS



Brightwell Manor

The springline villages of Brightwell and Sotwell evolved from a series of small nuclei located at the old manors. Over the centuries the gaps in between these ancient settlements have been filled in. During The last half of the 20th century many former orchards were developed but vegetation has ensured that on the whole the old and the new sit happily together.



Church Lane – a mix of 16 – 21st century housing



The 'Bright 'well

7 Village Green Spaces

7.1 The Recreation Ground



Owned and managed by the Parish Council, the Rec is a well used public open space that includes the village cricket and football grounds. Community events such as Jubilee celebrations and village gatherings naturally take place on the Rec whilst from dawn to dusk, the space is used for all manner of informal recreational activity such as dog walking, kite flying, kite surfing and simply hanging out.

Facilities include the Pavilion, rebuilt in 2000 following a disastrous fire. As well as providing changing facilities and a kitchen, the building is also used for private events such as birthdays and also is used as the base for the village Beaver, Cub and Scout groups. A cricket net is located in the south east corner of the field. To the north is one of the village's two children's play areas – facilities including a small climbing frame, a swing and a slide. It is known that this facility is in need of replacement.

The Rec is formed of a flat former meadow on the edge of the old Mackney moors. The area is still susceptible to flooding. Sotwell Stream enters the Rec on its northern border, flowing along the north side in a ditch that is used extensively by local children for play. Willow and ash are found in the hedgerows that surround the space. Long views towards the Chiltern Hills to the east are found. Noise pollution from the A4130 however is a concern.

7.2 Swan Wilderness and Community Orchard



Owned and managed by the Stewart Village Hall, this open space, located immediately north of the Recreation Ground was formally allotments that through neglect in the 1970s scrubbed over. The wilderness is formed of self sown sycamore, ash and hawthorn with an interesting understory of bramble and native flowering plants. It is a public open space that really does feel a little bit wild and as such plays a significant role in the village as an informal recreational area particularly for younger people who regularly make camps or a BMX ramp in the thick undergrowth. The Community Orchard was planted in 2014 by the BCS Village Orchard Group. The space offer a way of saving vulnerable old orchards that once characterised much of the village through the planting of a new one. It is place for quiet contemplation, a reservoir of local varieties of fruit and a refuge for wildlife. It is also used during the annual village Wassail.



7.3 The Swan Allotments



The Swan Allotments are owned by the Stewart Village Hall and available for villagers on an annual ground rent. The allotments are very popular.

7.4 The Millennium Wood



A survey of the parish in 1997 indicated that only 3.5% was covered by woodland – compared with an average of 6% nationally. Planted in 2000 to mark the new millennium the wood hoped to redress this balance. Over 100 villagers contributed to the project through the sponsorship of a tree that were planted on a redundant council compound. This popular community initiative is open to the public at all times with the wood being used by Brightwell School for Forest School and other activities. The wood is managed by the Village Environment Group who regularly thin the wood as the trees mature.

7.5 Kings Meadow Playing Field



Kings Meadow is owned and managed by the Parish Council. The space includes a children's play area, football posts and tennis courts. Gifted to the village as planning gain in the 1980s following the construction of the Kings Orchard housing development immediately to the north the area is an integral part of the Village Green Heart. To the south, east and west are decayed hedgerow with tall mature trees, whilst to the north, the parish managed an area of hazel coppice.

The tennis courts have recently been fully repaired and a plan to upgrade the children's play facilities is progressing. Being located at the centre of the village, the space is very well used for both informal and formal recreational activities and is used by the school as an area to spill out to on sunny days at closing times.

7.6 Wellsprings Footpath and Stream

Wellsprings pond and footpath is the most cherished lane in the footpath. Generations of village children have grown up damming the stream that criss-crosses the gravel footpath or fishing for stickleback in the moat that runs besides it. The area supports some wildlife and is of considerable aesthetic and landscape value particularly when viewed as a group with the adjacent Dobbins Orchard and Elliot's Orchard. The footpath was until the 1890s the main road between Sotwell and Brightwell.



**Brightwell cum Sotwell
Neighbourhood Plan**

The Parish Clerk
The Parish Office
The Village Hall
Brightwell cum Sotwell
Oxfordshire

**Brightwell cum Sotwell
Neighbourhood Plan**