

# SONNING COMMON DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: SITES AND ALLOCATIONS (May 2013)

## INTRODUCTION

This report is part of a suite of documents being produced by or for the Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Group (NDPWG) in Sonning Common acting under the auspices of Sonning Common Parish Council. It has, however, been produced in advance of the overall Neighbourhood Plan and stands alone because of the need to deal constructively with planning applications coming in, or likely to come in, ahead of completion of the Plan.

The report has been produced by Place Studio who developed the initial survey methodology and guided the NDPWG in managing the process, including managing the audit process.

In addition to appraising each specific site that had been put forward for potential development, and generating a list of supported sites, this report considers how all the selected sites together can be considered in terms of an overall strategy for development over the plan period.

The report covers the following:

- **General Context:** an elaborated version of the summary above to more fully explain the context and purpose of the report.
- **Policy Context:** key points from the national, sub-regional, district-wide and local planning policy context for the work and its conclusions.
- **Methodology:** in terms of the process, notably the community-led approach, and of the content, especially the surveys and other methods used.
- **Sites Assessed and Summary Results:** a listing of sites, surveys undertaken and conclusions for each 'ruled out' site.
- **Strategy for Development and Implementation:** an overall framework for the supported sites as a whole and key issues about the next stages towards the successful delivery of the strategy.

The main survey form is in the Appendix. A separate report summarises the survey results for each site.

This report should also be read in association with the **Sonning Common Character Assessment and Design Statement** as material and conclusions from this have been used to inform the site appraisal work.

## GENERAL CONTEXT

A key motivation for the commencement of the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan was a concern that inappropriate developments on inappropriate village sites could secure permission in the 'window of opportunity' created by (at the time) the absence of an adopted South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) Core Strategy – and hence 5 year housing land supply – and the relatively long wait for the production of the District's Sites and Allocation plan. This concern was understandable in the context of the government's position in favour of approving developments where a key plan is out of date or not very close to finalisation, and especially where there is no approved 5 year land supply. The experience elsewhere was that developers were moving quickly to take advantage of this 'window' and failure to address this properly could be profoundly damaging for Sonning Common.

This was exacerbated by the fact that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) process had identified 14 potential sites in and around Sonning Common totalling in the order of 42 hectares. Although not all would ever come forward or in full, this was potentially enough for close to 1,000 houses. At the same time, SODC was suggesting in its draft Core Strategy that around 1,200 houses would be distributed to the largest villages (including Sonning Common). Although the Core Strategy did not give figures for each village, the figure in informal circulation at the start of the Neighbourhood Plan process was in the order of 150 houses for Sonning Common (plus some land for employment), creating a clear mismatch with the SHLAA results.

This initially worrying picture for the community was clarified to some extent by the fact that the Core Strategy is now adopted. It is therefore now clear that there is an agreed 5 year housing land supply and that the overall figure for development in the larger villages stands. The overall figure of c.1,200 houses has now been clarified further through a process of consultation between SODC and representatives of the larger villages; it is now 1,154. This process now suggests a target figure of around 138 houses for Sonning Common. However, while awaiting the detailed control to be provided by the SODC Sites and Allocations plan, there remains uncertainty about how to agree and enforce an appropriate strategy about the final selection of sites to deliver the 138 houses in a way that will contribute positively to Sonning Common and be in line with national and local policy. There remains a concern within the community that it will still be 'first come, first served'; hence this strategy report which forms part of Sonning Common's Neighbourhood Plan work.

This report has been produced at this point both in its own right but also as a 'building block' of the overall Neighbourhood Plan. This is because planning applications for the SHLAA sites, and for others not included in the SHLAA process, are already coming forward, and more are expected, well before the District Council's Sites and Allocations plan is in place. It is hoped that, together with other material from the neighbourhood planning work, notably the Character Assessment and Design Statement, the strategy outlined in this report will be able to influence which sites are developed, for what mix of development and with what designs.

## POLICY CONTEXT

**The National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (NPPF)** introduces a range of new and amended planning policies, some of which affect development in Sonning Common. The NPPF is intended to encourage more development generally while ensuring that what takes place is in sustainable locations and is designed and constructed in sustainable ways. The focus is on balancing and integrating social, economic and environmental issues and pressures. There is also a presumption in favour of developments that can demonstrably meet the sustainability standards. To balance this, any development not included in the latest adopted plan can only be refused if it is clear that approval would lead to demonstrable harm.

Some key points from the NPPF that relate to Sonning Common and the approach being taken to development are as follows, with comments where relevant in brackets about the local approach:

- Development should be plan-led. *(In the absence of an overall Sites and Allocations plan, this report should be seen to serve that purpose.)*
- Development should be high quality and locally distinctive in design. *(The associated Character Assessment and Design Statement was produced to ensure this.)*
- Development should be located and designed to protect the landscape and, where possible, avoid higher quality agricultural land. *(This has been accounted for in the site appraisals.)*
- Development locations and design should support sustainable modes of transport. *(This has been accounted for in the site appraisals.)*

- There should be a choice of high quality homes. *(This report leads to that but delivery depends on subsequent stages.)*
- Great weight should be attributed to the protection and enhancement of AONBs. *(This has been addressed in work to date, see later.)*
- Developments should be designed to enhance biodiversity. *(This has influenced the results in this report.)*
- Plans should be based on an appropriate and proportionate evidence base. *(See Methodology section.)*

The NPPF also comments on the following:

- Encouraging people to produce Neighbourhood Plans. *(This is core to the Sonning Common approach.)*
- Involving people in the design of new development. *(See the Design Statement mentioned above.)*

**The Localism Act 2011** is the key document that promotes Neighbourhood Plans and outlines their procedures, scope and so forth. There is less detail to note here but it is important to be aware that both the Act and a number of other statements from government and Ministers fully supports communities in undertaking work such as that covered in this report. Two key points can be noted, however. First, that any Neighbourhood Plan that suggests amounts of development must include at least as much if not more than that in the strategic plan. In this case the strategic plan – the Core Strategy – did not specify a number for Sonning Common; the figure of 138 mentioned earlier is as yet purely advisory. Secondly, that a high level of community engagement is required in developing a Neighbourhood Plan. How this was done in Sonning Common is explained in the Methodology section.

Now the **South Oxfordshire District Council Core Strategy** is formally adopted, it provides some broad policies and criteria that can inform site selection and development (e.g. its section on design) and, most importantly, it links in to other material such as the **South Oxfordshire Design Guide** and the **Chilterns Building Design Guide**. The background material to the Core Strategy also includes the criteria and format used by SODC in assessing its strategic sites (though this does not necessarily apply in full to small sites). The district's plan is also complemented by policies and standards set by Oxfordshire County Highways department.

Sonning Common is surrounded by the **Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**, mainly to the east, north and west, and to the south by an **Area of Great Landscape Value**. Covering as they do several local authority areas, these are of major sub-regional significance because, although the built area of the village is not actually within either, most of the listed SHLAA sites are either in, abut or would have an impact on these protected areas. The **Chilterns AONB Management Plan**, in its section on development, sets several aims of which the following are most relevant:

- *Ensure that the natural beauty, local distinctiveness and aesthetic qualities of the built environment of the Chilterns are conserved.*
- *Ensure that all new development contributes to the special qualities of the built environment of the Chilterns.*
- *Improve the built and natural environment of the Chilterns, particularly degraded landscapes, to enhance its distinctive character.*

The Plan also highlights key issues, including:

- *The Chilterns and surrounding areas ..... are under considerable pressure to accommodate significant numbers of new houses.*
- *The retention of open space and the need to try and restrict the scale of new development are key to conserving the natural beauty of the AONB.*
- *New development of all types needs to respect vernacular architecture, settlement*

*character and the local landscape. This will require developers to do more than try to use standard designs. The Board has published guidance on design and the use of building materials.*

The key (relevant) policies are:

- *D1. Conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB, by reinforcing the local distinctiveness of the built environment.*
- *D2. Promote the highest standards of development which respect vernacular architectural styles and represent high environmental standards in terms of energy and water efficiency.*
- *D4. Support the sustainable use of local natural resources, notably timber, clay (bricks and tiles) and flint, for local building purposes.*
- *D6. Seek enhancement of the quality of the landscape of the AONB by the removal or mitigation of existing visually intrusive developments.*
- *D7. Pursue opportunities for landscape improvement and creation of green space (green infrastructure) when development is proposed in, or adjacent to, the boundaries of the AONB.*
- *D9. Encourage appropriate densities on new housing developments which reflect the local context, whilst having regard to the special qualities of the AONB*
- *D15. Support the demand for local building materials by seeking their use in new developments, in accordance with the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide and related Supplementary Technical Notes.*

Issues of landscape and character, and hence some aspects of site choice and design, have been considered in the report mentioned above – the **Sonning Common Character Assessment and Design Statement**. Although this report is not as yet adopted or endorsed by SODC, the key points from it have been used to inform what follows.

Most importantly, the Assessment report draws attention to the fact that Sonning Common is definitely not a typical Chilterns village in terms of history, layout, building styles or materials; something which probably resulted in the AONB boundary going around it rather than including it. To that extent (and given that the village is not in the AONB), while fully accepting the principles of the NPPF, the Core Strategy and the AONB Management Plan, the interpretation of these when applied to Sonning Common will be different to that of the two latter documents. To be genuinely locally distinctive, the pattern of development, the style of development and the choice of (for example) 'local building materials' will, quite correctly, be different for Sonning Common from that promoted by the Core Strategy and the South Oxfordshire Design Guide in particular.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In line with the principles of Localism, the work was led by people from Sonning Common, notably the Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Group. The sites work in particular was led by a specific Sites Task Group. This group was supported by many members of the community and the whole process was guided and advised by consultants from Place Studio.

There are two key aspects to the methodology: the development of the appraisal work through extensive community involvement and the specific survey formats used by the community in the initial site surveying work.

It is important to add that a meeting was held towards the end of the process with the planning officer at the Chilterns AONB. The meeting was deliberately informal and non-committal but it is fair to say that the officer was supportive of the community-led approach and of the methodologies used. He was also generally supportive of the emerging results in

terms of suggested (and removed) sites, with obvious provisos about any next stage details and proposals.

## **Community Involvement**

The initial stage was a 'launch' of neighbourhood planning in Sonning Common held in April 2012; it was called a 'Design Day'. This was an open day for any or all in the village. It aimed to highlight all possible issues about the future of the village (health, traffic etc.) not just sites, although this latter topic was obviously of key importance to people. The aim had been for some people to go out to do some 'first stab' site surveying but very heavy rain prevented this.

Following the Design Day, the Working Group then ran follow-up sessions. This was in part to engage more people generally but in particular to secure volunteers to undertake site surveys. The possible surveys were not just of sites but also of landscape and built environment character (to provide the baseline for the Character Assessment mentioned earlier). A number of people volunteered and the initial survey form was tried out and minimally adapted on the basis of feedback. Eventually a remarkably large number of local people undertook surveys.

It is essential to note that, in the opinion of Place Studio, although some chose to survey sites adjacent to where they lived, only very few were (unsurprisingly) cautious about change; most were extremely open and honest about the possibility of development. Steps were also taken to ensure that site surveys were not done solely by people living adjacent to or very near to sites. The actual numbers of surveys per site follow later.

As site surveys began to flow in, the Sites Task Group developed a format to record the numbers completed and to summarise results. The results were then shared at two community events, both of which took place in February 2013. These sessions were completely open meetings at which the Sites Task Group explained all the work undertaken, the overall results and their interim conclusions about sites to rule in and others to rule out. The two sessions were attended by around 170 people and were very well received (including by several local agents present). There was no discussion during the sessions but local people were invited to fill in response forms on the spot or take them away and return them later. 416 comments were made and the results used to help shape the final outcomes, as in the next sections of this report.

In close association with the above open events, two 'auditing' workshops were held, run by a representative of Place Studio. Participants at these workshops were local residents chosen to represent different parts of the village; all had also attended a presentation as above and each had undertaken at least one survey. Small groups worked to interrogate and perhaps query first the nature and quality of the evidence used to justify the interim decisions about sites to rule in and those to rule out and, secondly and if appropriate, to move any from the rule in to the rule out category, or vice versa.

A summary of the results was placed in the parish newsletter of April/May 2013 and a long letter about the process placed in the Henley Standard in March 2013, both serving to feed back results to all locally and further afield. What was used in the newsletter is covered later, the letter is in Appendix 2.

## **Landowner Contacts**

All known landowners were written to in January 2013. All replied swiftly. Points made were all addressed successfully in the material communicated to the wider community, with the exception of those made by those involved with SON 5.

Although no formal invitations were offered to landowners to attend the two community meetings mentioned in the previous section, all were sent the general leaflet and several other means of publicity were used. Once again there was concern from those involved with SON 5 but it was pointed out that their own land agent had received a leaflet.

Once this report is finalised its results will be communicated again to all landowners (SON 5 included).

## **Survey Methods**

As stated above, the core approach used to develop the strategy started with a programme of assessment by local people of each of the sites identified in the SHLAA. Two additional sites not in the SHLAA but arising since were also considered and the same methodology would be applied to other sites not currently known, if they came forward. The assessment criteria were drawn from three main sources:

- The South Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (March 2011)\*.
- The Harborough District Local Development Framework Site Assessment Methodology (February 2012)\*.
- Criteria used in the development of the Woodcote Neighbourhood Plan.

(\* Both of these are fully in accordance with standards set by the Department of Communities and Local Government.)

In discussion with the Task Group, and following some pilot exercises, a Site Assessment Survey Form was produced. The full form is in Appendix 1. This form covered many but not all of the criteria. Other criteria, some elaborating points on the form, were introduced, assessed by the Task Group and then audited by others. The full list of criteria is as follows:

### **Survey Form Sections**

(Part 1 is descriptive only.)

2. Part 2A: Sustainability – views, setting
3. Part 2B: Sustainability – green space and wildlife
4. Part 2C: Sustainability – neighbouring character and uses
5. Part 2D: Sustainability – walking and cycling
6. Part 2E: Sustainability – public transport
7. Part 3A: Key features
8. Part 3B: Key priorities

### **Additional Criteria**

- Is the site available for development within 1-5 years?
- Is the site available for development within 1-10 years?
- Is the site available for development within 15 years?
- Is the site highly sensitive environmentally or ecologically?
- Is this a green field site?
- Are there Tree Preservation Orders?
- Is the site of archaeological interest?
- Does the site include or adjoin any Heritage Assets?
- Is the land graded 3A or above for agricultural use?
- Does the site have any infrastructure deficiencies?
- Is the site particularly sensitive from a landscape (AONB) point of view?
- Is the site free from flood risk?
- Is the site readily accessible to the highway network?
- Are community healthcare facilities reasonably accessible?
- Is a bus stop reasonably accessible?
- Are shops reasonably accessible?

- Are community facilities reasonably accessible?
- Are local schools reasonably accessible?
- Will the local traffic impact be acceptable?
- On how many sides does the site adjoin existing housing?
- Are there natural, or other obvious, boundaries to the site?
- Can the site take a mixed development of houses?
- AA. Would development of the site risk a significant trend towards merging with another settlement?
- AB. Could development of this site/part site be appropriate in scale and character with the existing settlement?
- AC. Would development be compatible with existing or proposed neighbouring uses?
- AD. Would the development support or undermine the viability of the existing village centre?
- AE. Does the site currently provide publicly accessible open space, green infrastructure, recreation facilities or public right of way?
- AF. Looking from outside, would development have an adverse landscape impact?
- AG. Does the site offer particular scope for provision of amenity greenspace?
- AH. Does the site offer scope for development of B1 office space?
- AJ. Does the site offer particular scope for development of community uses?
- AK. Does the site offer particular scope for provision of schools, shops or healthcare facilities?

Using the results of the site surveys and the judgement (now audited) of the Task Group, each site was evaluated against each criterion using the well established 'traffic light' system of ranking each criterion either red (inappropriate, poor, unacceptable), amber (borderline, uncertain, perhaps addressable) or green (no issues, appropriate, acceptable). Further notes were also recorded to explain, elaborate or justify the colour ranking.

## SITES ASSESSED AND SUMMARY RESULTS

### Sites Assessed

An early, sequential testing stage involved seeking sites within the existing built settlement area. Sites SON 7, 8 and 9 might arguably be said to be within the village frame but no other obvious sites emerged. Given a well established objection by the Parish Council and the community to further backland or infill development, this option too was excluded (and would anyway be taken as 'windfall' sites so it would not affect the target number).

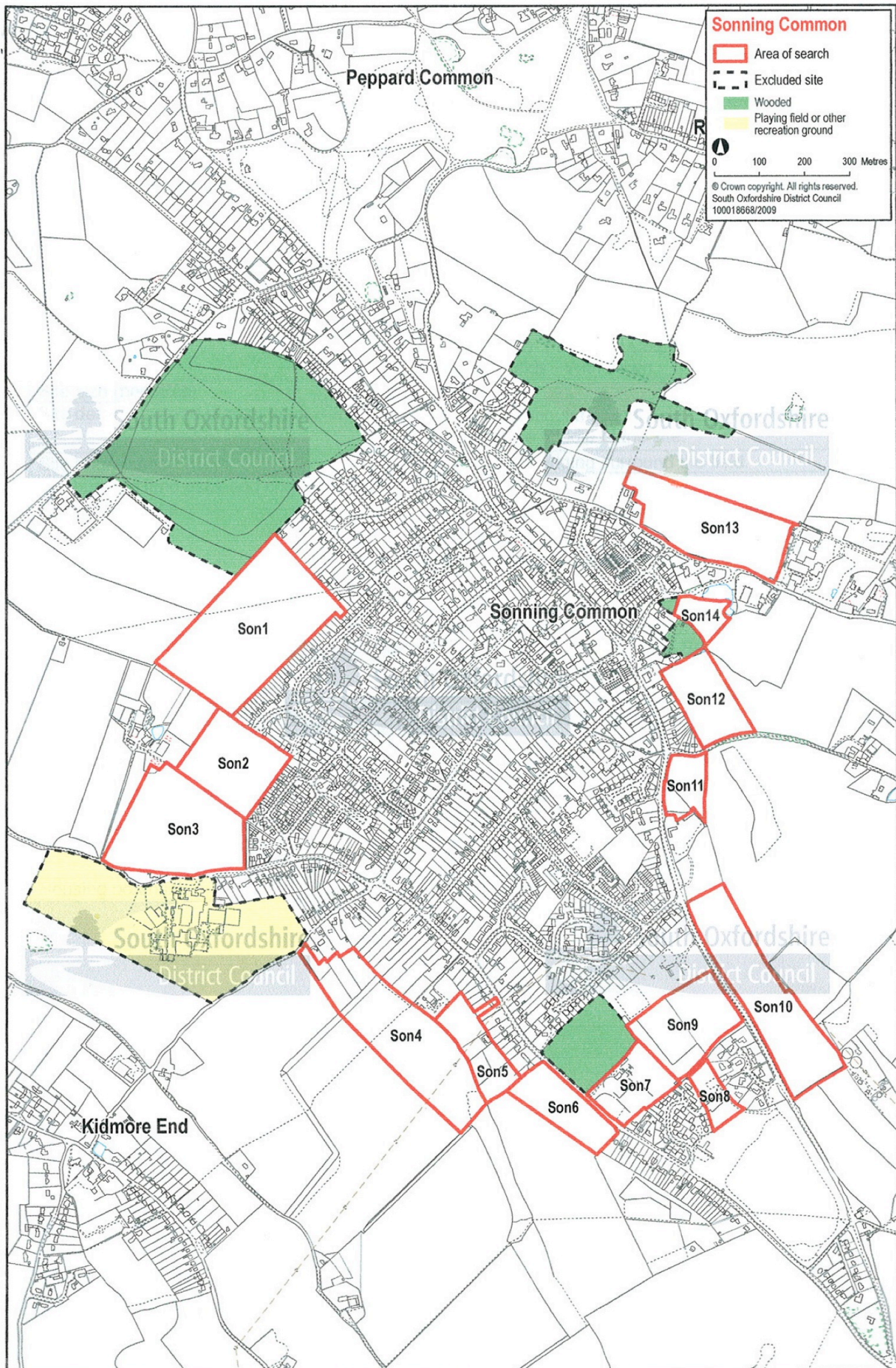
All 14 sites listed in the SHLAA report were surveyed, including SON 13, although it is within Rotherfield Peppard Parish. Two other possible sites have been identified and surveyed since the SHLAA was completed (and some withdrawn as will be seen). One is on part of the Chiltern Edge School site (titled SON15) and one is a backland site between Kidmore Lane and Kennylands Road (titled SON16).

The number of survey forms completed for each site by local people was as follows:

SON 1 = 13	SON 2 = 8	SON 3 = 14	SON 4 = 7	SON 5 = 8	SON 6 = 11
SON 7 = 7	SON 8 = 10	SON 9 = 11	SON 10 = 8	SON 11 = 7	SON 12 = 7
SON 13 = 5	SON 14 = 4				

All sites are shown on the map overleaf:







## Site Assessment Outcomes

All results were composited per site and this material was summarised in a presentation to the community. For this presentation the Task Group prepared statements ending with key points and an overall conclusion – rule out, rule in and, if the latter, what type of development might be appropriate.

The NDP team held two presentation sessions, on 7 and 9 February attended by c.170 residents, to share the information collected from the SON site surveys (120 of them in total) completed by the villagers. The team collated the information onto a grid of planning criteria. Traffic Light colours were used to capture the information and enable viewers to see the differences between the sites.

Feedback forms were completed at the end of presentations by many who attended. Others took forms away and there was then an opportunity over subsequent weeks for anybody to submit a form. The feedback from villagers, including that from the working parties who met on the Saturday, has been summarised as below (main feedback comments in italics):

**SON 1: First, the upper half (probably 10 acres) should be considered for use as amenity green space. Secondly, if SON 2 was developed, the lower SE quadrant of SON 1 could be considered for a small area of housing.**

- *Amenity green space (AGS), applauded by majority of comments*
- *Ensure AGS is protected land*
- *Consider SON sites 1, 2 & 3 together*

**SON 2: To be considered as a possible site for housing, acknowledging the challenges to find suitable access routes.**

- *Respect surrounding AONB – plant more trees*
- *SON sites 1, 2 & 3 to be considered as one*
- *Primary access via SON 3*

**SON 3: To be included as a possible site for development.**

- *Majority support for sports hall/community centre development*
- *Concerns re. traffic on Reades Lane*
- *Close proximity to village*

**SON 4: This site should not be developed for any purpose.**

- *Land not available for sale*
- *High quality AONB*
- *Natural separation between Soning Common and Kidmore End*
- *Outside the village envelope*

**SON 5: The proposal is not to include it in the next design stage of the NDP.**

- *Backland development, outside the village envelope*
- *Sink holes a complication*
- *Poor access to site*
- *Dangerous precedent to develop towards Kidmore End*

**SON 6: Only part should be developed in order to retain the envelope. This would be a small, mixed, housing ribbon development linking 56-80 Kennylands Road.**

- *Natural infill between existing housing*
- *Retain trees along road; increase screening*
- *Ensure housing similar in character to surroundings*

**SON 7: To be included in the next design phase of the NDP. It offers scope for housing, a small-company office development, or sports/recreation use.**

- *Protection of adjoining Hagpits Wood and other trees*
- *Consider proximity to Essex Way (housing for over 55s)*

**SON 8: To be considered for more extensive sports hall and recreation use.**

- *Housing should not be considered*
- *Gymnasium/recreation usage to be maintained*

**SON 9: This site has potential for a number of options and consideration should be given to sports/recreation use, a small-company office development, or housing.**

- Respect the sensitivities of the site and surrounds, include screening
- Concerns re distance/walking/traffic/parking in village centre
- No bus service on Peppard Road
- Any housing to be mixed and not too dense

**SON 10: To set this site aside and not to include it for any purpose.**

- Gateway to high quality AONB
- Visible rural character and beauty
- "Complete travesty to develop here"

**SON 11: Only part of the site should be considered for development. Potential to develop the strip of land running along the Peppard Road.**

- Limited housing mirroring developments on opposite side of Peppard Road
- Needs to be screened to protect AONB
- "Consider as a last resort"!

**SON 12: It not be considered as a site for development of any kind.**

- Within high quality AONB
- Visible rural character and beauty

**SON 13: Withdrawn during the process so no longer available for development.**

- Land not available for sale
- If became available may have potential

**SON 14: It should not be developed for any purpose.**

- Land not available for sale
- Too small plus access and gradient issues

A slightly different version of the above summary was communicated to all in Sonning Common Parish in the April 2013 edition of the Parish Newsletter. It was also outlined in the letter published in the Henley Standard (see Appendix 2).

The overall results can be summed up as follows:

SON sites	Agree with proposals	Disagree with proposals	Not sure	Proposal for NEXT STAGE design process
SON 1	29	3	3	Include
SON 2	30	1	2	Include
SON 3	29		2	Include
SON 4	24	2		Set aside
SON 5	22	2	2	Set aside
SON 6	31	3	1	Part only
SON 7	29	2	2	Include
SON 8	28		2	Include
SON 9	33	1		Include
SON 10	24	1	1	Set aside
SON 11	23	6	3	Part only
SON 12	23	1	2	Set aside
SON 13	18		6	Set aside
SON 14	25			Set aside
<b>Totals</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	

In parallel with the above engagement with the wider community, 16 local residents were invited to undertake an audit of all survey results in a process managed independently by the NDP Working Party's consultants. The 16 were selected from across the village. All had undertaken at least one Site Assessment survey and all had been to one of the presentation sessions. (The summary results from the audit are included in Appendix 3.)

## STRATEGY FOR SITES AND IMPLEMENTATION

The sites for inclusion in the development strategy as of May 2013 are as follows:

### **SON1, SON2, SON3, SON6, SON7, SON8, SON9 AND SON11.**

This is not, however, a blanket conclusion about using all of each of these sites for any development. Further work has been done to develop initial briefs for each site, not alone but considered as a whole, i.e. strategically. (This reflects the conclusions of the Examiner of the Thame NDP who commented on "*the need for site allocations to be considered 'in the round'*".) With this in mind the selected sites fall into three groups:

- SONs 1, 2 and 3: to all be considered together as suggested.
- SONs 7, 8 and 9: to all be considered together as suggested.
- SONs 6 and 11: different locations but taking the same layout/design approach.

The aim now for the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group is to begin to produce initial outlines of the nature, scale, type and content of development for each of the sites or groups of sites. This will involve, first, meetings about this report and its conclusions with the planning officers from SODC and the AONB.

It is intended that the work on the sites will be done collaboratively with input from site owners, any agents currently working on those sites, neighbours and planning officers with the intention that the outcomes will be a series of broad Concept Statements. This work will make full use of the detailed site surveys, of the village Character Assessment and of any survey material about facilities and amenities needed for the village. It is hoped that South Oxfordshire District Council will in some way agree to or endorse these Concept Statements, as is the case in other authorities around the country.

The latter point above is of particular importance given the fact that the SODC Sites and Allocations Plan will not be in place for some time, leaving communities such as those in Sonning Common exposed to inappropriate and predatory applications on sites not selected through any robust process.

Finally, though it is understood that any approved development on 'windfall' sites is not counted against the current allocation of 138 houses, it is important to highlight that the Character Assessment shows clearly that what is often termed 'backland' development (for example SON 5) is no longer appropriate if the highly locally distinctive character of Sonning Common is to be retained and even enhanced.

## APPENDIX 1: SITE SURVEY FORM

To save space, some of the boxes have been reduced in size and the surveyor instructions have been removed – this is simply the key content.

### PART 1: Site Character and Features

In some boxes we offer hints – use, ignore or add to as you wish.

<b>A. What is the landform of the site, eg. flat, sloping, in which direction?</b>

<b>B. What important views of the site are there from outside?</b>

<b>C. What important views of the village or landscape are there from inside?</b>

<b>D. Describe Important Site Features</b>	
<b>The Boundary:</b> Materials Level of Enclosure And ...	
<b>Any Buildings etc.:</b> Use, Age, Quality, Condition And ...	
<b>The Landscape and Natural Features</b> And .....	

<b>E. What are the Character, Uses and Features of the surrounding area?</b>

### PART 2: Sustainability of the Site

For each sustainability question below, place an X in the box that you think most applies to the site.

**A: Views and Setting.** How important do you think the site is in terms of views of Sonning Common and the landscape?

<b>Low Importance:</b> <i>Likely to be able to accommodate development without harming views and the setting.</i>	
<b>Medium Importance:</b> <i>Some important views but these could be maintained with a well-designed development.</i>	
<b>Highly Important and Sensitive:</b> <i>Site is very important in village setting and landscape and unable to accommodate development without major harm.</i>	
Notes?	

**B: Green Space and Wildlife.** From what you know and have recorded, how well do you think development on this site could conserve or enhance important existing natural features and wildlife?

<b>Very Well:</b> <i>There are few existing important natural features or signs of wildlife. There is potential to create new green environments.</i>	
<b>Potential for Conservation:</b> <i>Any important features could be conserved or replaced within a well-designed scheme. (You can note the features in the next section)</i>	
<b>Too Sensitive for Development:</b> <i>There are too many, too valuable features to accommodate development without causing major harm to local character.</i>	
Notes?	

**C: Neighbouring Character and Uses.** How well do you think development on this site could fit into the neighbouring character?

<b>Development could improve character by removing eyesores or creating improved character.</b>	
<b>Well designed development could fit with neighbouring land uses and the area's character</b>	
<b>Development of any kind would not fit with, and would harm, character.</b>	
Notes?	

**D: Walking and Cycling.** How well connected is the site to local facilities?

<b>Good.</b> <i>Safe unhindered access to a good range of facilities within about 400 metres.</i>	
<b>Reasonable.</b> <i>Safe, unhindered access to basic facilities within about 800 metres.</i>	
<b>Poor.</b> <i>Distance, connection and safety issues to limited facilities.</i>	

<b>Very Poor.</b> <i>Relatively isolated, poor connection and safety</i>	
Notes?	

**E: Public Transport. How well connected is the site?**

<b>Good.</b> <i>Good walking distance to public transport (400 metres).</i>	
<b>Fair.</b> <i>Good walking distance but accessibility and/or safety Issues.</i>	
<b>Poor.</b> <i>Distance and poor connections discourages use.</i>	
Notes?	

**PART 3: Your Priority Issues and Suggestions**

**A: Key Features**

From ALL your observations, what do you think are most important issues and features of this site?

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**B: Key Priorities**

If you think this site could be considered for development, how much of it could be?  
What are the main problems that any development would need to solve?

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## **APPENDIX 2: HENLEY STANDARD LETTER**

"We really appreciated Dan Robinson's article summarising the progress of our Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) which has generated even more interest in our work. We would like now to place on record some additional information to continue our policy of keeping everyone affected fully informed.

First is to say that the two jam-packed public presentations on 7 and 9 February were just a milestone on our journey to a complete NDP. To start our work programme we first held four well publicised public Design Days in April, June, July and September last year in which over 250 residents and other interested parties took part. Of those, 82 volunteered to help and carried out 186 surveys for us. Of these 123 were carefully structured Site Assessment Surveys of the 14 SON Sites, 28 were formal surveys of the Village Character and 35 were of the Landscape Settings.

Our core Working Party team then fully documented and analysed all these surveys to give us the basis for making our initial Site Selection proposals that were publicly presented on 7 and 9 February. As well as using the survey results, each of the proposals was supported by a colour-coded chart (named traffic lights summaries) setting out a 39 point empirical analysis of all the information available to us. In order to eliminate any evaluation bias 14 volunteers independent of the Working Party scrutinised each of the traffic light summaries under the guidance of our independent consultants.

At the end of each of the February presentations everyone attending was asked to take away a booklet containing the proposals for the 14 SON sites and to return them to us with their written comments in the following week. We believe that it is quite fair to assume that anyone with strong views on our proposals would have used these booklets to give them to us. We received 416 written comments on our proposals: 89% strongly supported them, 6% were undecided and 5% disagreed. This gives us confidence that we are on the right track towards a good balance of choices.

With this strong endorsement from our residents we are now ready to move onto the Design Phase in which we will be detailing our proposals for the sites that we are taking forward as well as considering the wider needs of the village for amenities, services and facilities that will be used by all. During this phase we will be consulting the appropriate landowners, local residents and neighbouring Parish Councils in the hope that we can arrive at mutually acceptable proposals for inclusion and publication in our final NDP recommendations later this year.

Once our complete NDP has been endorsed by the Parish Council it will be presented for inspection by a suitably qualified Examiner and then, if passed, it will be put to a local Referendum to seek electoral approval. Only after crossing those important hurdles will it become 'our' planning law to be applied within Sonning Common until at least 2027.

From this your readers will realise that we are now only 'at the end of the beginning'. Just to get this far has taken much toil and sweat, but no blood or tears (yet), from our many volunteer residents as well as from our very dedicated NDP Working Party – all are deserving of thanks from the whole community.

We expect to be proud of the NDP that we will produce and we are already proud of and humbled by the Sonning Common community spirit that has taken thus far."

## **APPENDIX 3: SITE APPRAISAL AUDITING**

The interim conclusions stemming from the site appraisal surveys completed by residents were discussed and agreed by the NDP Site Assessment sub-group. One of the next steps in the process was to undertake a more formal audit.

16 local residents were invited to undertake the audit in a process managed independently by the NDP Working Party's consultants. The 16 were selected from across the village. All had undertaken at least one Site Assessment survey and all had been to one of the presentation sessions. The audit was managed over two 2 hour sessions on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> February with the participation of 14 residents, two having had to withdraw at the last minute.

Participants were divided into pairs/threes, mixed to ensure geographical coverage. Each pair/threesome was asked to consider a selection of the SHLAA sites, included some 'rule-ins' and some 'rule-outs'. The information available to them per site included (a) an aerial photo, (b) a site plan, (c) the summaries of the Site Assessment surveys and (d) an evaluation grid showing the suggested 'traffic light' ranking for that site against the key criteria. They were asked to check each red, green or amber annotation against their own knowledge and what had emerged from the site survey summaries as if they were independent Planning Inspectors. If they queried any annotation they noted this with, in most cases, an argument why and a suggested re-annotation. They were also asked to consider the basic classification of 'rule-in' or 'rule-out'. Once all sites had been considered by a pair/threesome, their conclusions were shared with others in a plenary session.

The main conclusions follow below:

- No basic classification (i.e 'rule-in' or 'rule-out') was queried in either session.
- The only proviso to this was the views of a group who considered site SON 5. They queried a number of the criteria annotations and, although they still felt the site should be ruled out, they considered that to be a very marginal decision and one that could prove difficult to defend.
- Both groups felt that SONs 1, 2 and 3 should be considered together and the same for SONs 7, 8 and 9. This was not necessarily suggesting that they be released together but that some sort of 'plan' for all three was needed first.
- For several sites, including SON 7, it was felt that a blanket 'rule-in' was inappropriate because there would need to be some clear and robust conditions set about access, retention of trees, wildlife corridors and so forth.
- There was also a view that clarification is needed (though not necessarily at this selection stage) about development densities and the inclusion of affordable housing.
- SON 11 was not audited but all agreed with the overall conclusions and proposals.
- SON 8 was not audited but all agreed with the overall conclusions and proposals.
- (SON 15 emerged later so was not tested in this audit.)