

Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan

Interpretation & extract from the ORCC Sonning Common Housing Survey

General

We need to look at the overall position of the current housing stock. This includes the results of the 2011 Census to give the best overall picture of the current reality.

In the old 2001 Census :-

Dwelling Type	Sonning Common Parish		SODC	
	Number	%	Number	%
<u>Detached House or Bungalow</u>	798	50	19,737	37
<u>Semi-Detached or Terraced House or Bungalow</u>	664	42	27,671	51
<u>Flat, Maisonette etc</u>	124	8	6,510	12
Total	1,586	100	53,918	100

Tenure	Sonning Common Parish		SODC	
	Number	%	Number	%
Owner-occupied	1,255	82	39,906	77
Rented – Council/H.A.	200	13	5,927	11
Rented – Private L/L	75	5	6,272	12
Total	1,530	100	52,105	100
<i>Vacant/2nd home*</i>	56	<i>memo</i>	1,813	<i>memo</i>

*mostly private

The old Census showed that Sonning Common has a comparatively high amount of detached properties. We also have a comparatively high amount of owner-occupied property. SODC has a much higher mix of these types than nationally, but this trend is even more pronounced locally. The supply of properties to rent is comparatively low locally.

In the new 2011 Census :-

Dwelling Type	Sonning Common Parish		SODC	
	Number	%	Number	%
Detached House or Bungalow	792	50	20,279	36
Semi-Detached or Terraced House or Bungalow	666	42	29,082	51
Flat, Maisonette etc	137	8	7,302	13
Total	1,595	100	56,663	100

(Based households)	Sonning Common Parish		SODC	
	Number	%	Number	%
Tenure				
Owner-occupied	1,236	80	39,461	73
Rented – Council/H.A. (incl Equity-Hybrids)	211	14	6,622	12
Rented – Private L/L	100	6	8,021	15
Total	1,547	100	54,104	100
Vacant/2 nd home*	48	memo	2,559	memo

* mostly private

With a lack of new-builds between 2001 and 2011 the mix of dwelling types in Sonning Common has changed little and shows a VERY high mix of detached properties. In SODC over that period the dwelling type mix has moved a little The tenure has changed a little towards flats and away from detached, perhaps reflecting the focus on Didcot town for new-builds. Over the same period the tenure mix for Sonning Common has moved slightly towards rented, whilst in SODC it has moved more markedly to privately rented – perhaps reflecting the buy-to-let era – as illustrated by the absolute number of owner-occupied units falling at the same time as the absolute number of detached dwellings has increased.

The housing survey could only report the pattern of actual **respondents** (the highest response to a question was 351 responses from what is now some 1620 dwellings – around 22% of the total stock). Hopefully the response % will prove to be an accurate and representative sample of the overall reality. (Note the Census does not split out houses and bungalows, so this is one of a number of areas where the survey gives us lots of extra detail.)

In the 2001 Census the age profile of the parish was :-

0-15	759	20%
16-64	2,231	59%
65+	788	21%
TOTAL	3,778	100%

By the 2011 Census the age profile of the parish was :-

0-15	694	19%
16-64	2,128	56%
65+	962	25%
TOTAL	3,784	100%

Thus we see that the current age mix is continuing to increase. This reflects increasing longevity, but also a lack of new-builds and barriers to entry for younger people. Barriers include high prices and a content existing population of whom few migrate out and there are high property prices to enter. Sonning Common boomed in the 1960s and 1970s and when he wrote in 1977 the local historian Fred Richens commented that Sonning Common was now a place where younger people had come to predominate. They came, liked it and stayed!

Types of Housing Need

It is a requirement of the SODC planning regime that 40% of housing built should be “affordable” i.e. social Housing Association property. It is also a requirement that such housing be mixed into new building to give a balanced and inclusive community.

Many ordinary people are confused by the technical term “affordable” and interpret it to mean cheaper “open market” housing to buy – but it does not! However it should be mentioned that about 25% of the social housing released in South Oxfordshire is on a “Shared Ownership” or Equity Hybrid basis – part rent, part equity stake - where the tenant can build up a stake in the property market.

Property locally is expensive, more expensive than the “South East outside London” generally. In addition, currently banks are requiring high, often 20% deposits (although there is some mitigation from the UK Gov’s “Help To Buy” scheme) and are restricting mortgage lending against strict proven and stable earnings criteria. As the UK begins to emerge from the worst economic recession in living memory, the “Great Recession”, this places a heavy burden on up-sizing purchasers generally and younger first-time buyers in particular. The average age of first time buyers is now well over 30 years of age!

The housing survey summary says that the top 3 types of housing type considered to be needed overall, in order, (by 302 respondents making 867 suggestions) are :-

- “Affordable” social housing
- Semi-detached house
- Detached house

As noted above, the existing housing stock of Sonning Common provides a very high mix of detached and owner-occupied property. We also have a large stock of under-occupied semi-detached and detached family homes which could be released IF there were sufficient appropriate properties to which older “empty-nester” people could down-size in a way that would meet their needs. Typically they will be owner-occupiers with small or no mortgages, seeking at least two bedrooms and probably in a bungalow format with some reasonable garden. They have established a life-style and will not lightly choose to down-size out of the area away from friends and family or to a property that does not meet their standards of requirement. However, for a given internal space, bungalows are generally more expensive than an equivalent house. As longevity increases so this issue becomes more important! Also in some cases health issues may intervene requiring some residents to seek a “home for life” property with easy wheelchair access and facilities for those with limited mobility.

The housing survey summary says that the top 3 types of housing tenure considered to be needed overall, in order, needed are :-

- Owner-occupation
- Shared/intermediate social “affordable” housing – tenant owns a stake
- “Affordable” social housing for rent only – tenant holds no stake

However, part 3 of the survey focuses on people needing to move to a new home in Sonning Common (41 respondents).

As an ideal their overall pattern of preferences reflect a pattern of preferred owner-occupation, then shared ownership, then social H.A. rented then private rented. Limited availability and finance barriers and affordability challenges inform such choices. For this group the housing survey summary says that the top 3 types of housing type considered to be needed overall, in order, are :-

- Semi-detached house
- Terraced house
- Semi-detached bungalow
- Detached house

(For decades there have been few new-builds locally and most of those few have been larger properties on infill sites. Meanwhile, the pre-existing local housing stock has been extended and increased into lofts etc so that the mix has changed. Once modest homes have become larger and more “posh”! Older homes and particularly bungalows had the scope and the “land to expand”! Now, there appears to be a need to re-balance the existing stock – filling a gap at the lower end.)

The Detailed Responses

Overall Responses (sections 1+2)

The **age profile** of residents in the households of respondents overall was:-

AGE group	Survey Response %	2011 Census %
0-15	15	19
16-24	7	7
25-44	17	22
45-64	24	27
65-74	20	12
75-84	14	9
85+	3	4
TOTAL	100%	100%

It is not a surprise that the parish age profile has aged a little, but does the response pattern fit our current reality? Well the comparison with the 2011 Census stands up to a reasonable degree. It appears that the time-stressed working families are a bit under-represented in the respondent mix because they did not find time to fill in the survey? This is reflected in a slightly low response of 0-15 year olds and 25-44 year olds. Equally the response from older 65-74 and 75-84 year old groups was strong. But overall the fit is not too bad.

Respondents indicated that 40% of them were retired, which correlates with the 37% mix of age 65 or more seen above. That 37% mix was truly represented by 25% in the 2011 Census mix. (But again this seems to indicate latent demand for down-sizing, given that the 65+ mix for SODC overall is only 18%?)

The **current dwelling type** mix of (324) respondents' **current home** showed :-

Current Dwelling Type	Survey Response %	2011 Census %
Detached	63	50
Semi-detached	27	30
Terraced	6	12
Flat/maisonette etc	4	8
TOTAL	100	100

We see that the survey response from detached current homes at 63% of the survey response is stronger than the 2011 Census ratio of 50% and that the terraced response at 6% and the flat/maisonette response of only 4% understate the 2011 Census mix of 12% and 8% respectively.

The **current tenure** mix of (346) respondents' **current home** showed :-

Current Tenure	Survey Response %	2011 Census %
Owner-occupier with NO mortgage	60	45
Owner-occupier with mortgage	<u>30</u>	<u>35</u>
Owner-occupier – sub-total	<u>93</u>	<u>80</u>
Shared Ownership – “affordable” H.A.	1	1
Rented – “affordable” H.A.	<u>5</u>	13
Rented – private landlord	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>
TOTAL	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

This owner-occupier response mix at 93% is stronger than the true 2011 Census ratio of 80%, and this particularly comes from the older segment with no remaining mortgage. By contrast the response from household in purely rented stock (both Housing Association and private stock is under-represented by comparison to the true 2011 Census mix.

In more detail the **current nature of dwelling** mix of (324) respondents' **current home** showed :-

Current Nature of Dwelling	%
House (Det. 43%, S/D 24% and Terraced 5%)	72
Bungalow (Det. 20%, S/D 3% and Terr. 1%)	<u>24</u>
Flat/maisonette etc	4
TOTAL	100

The mix of bungalows is quite high in comparison with other areas. Also, the high mix of detached bungalows gives, and has given, considerable scope for development and extension. The Census does not collect data split in this way and it is only possible to note that the true mix of flats and maisonettes was 8% in the 2011 Census. However one might make an educated guess that the 24% mix of bungalows does somewhat over-state the true position, based on the high response from older residents.

In more detail the **current number of bedrooms per dwelling** mix of (343) respondents' **current home** shows:-

Current Number of Bedrooms	Survey Response %	2011 Census %
1-bed	<u>2</u>	4
2-bed	<u>17</u>	21
3-bed	48	45
4-bed	<u>27</u>	23
5+ bedrooms	6	7
TOTAL	100	100

This response mix of 1-bed and 2-bed dwellings is comparatively low. Instead of 2% and 17% the true 2011 Census mix is higher at 4% and 21% respectively. But the 2011 Census data for SODC overall shows 8% and 24% respectively, and England as a whole shows 12% and 28% respectively. There is a clear gap at the lower end for start and down-sizing homes.

Respondents indicate low mobility in the local housing market :-

Do you intend to move in the next 5 years?	%
“No”	79
“Want to but can’t”	7
“Yes, intend to”	14
TOTAL	100

For those leaving the Sonning Common community, perhaps as they become young adults, 36% quote local barriers forcing them away - including affordability (26%) and lack of suitable housing (10%).

According to respondents, there is a coming need for sheltered housing. When 302 respondents were asked what type of accommodation is needed locally, 9% indicated supported housing (at question 16). When asked what kind of supported housing is needed, if it is, 160 respondents replied making 327 suggestions. This is a high response. The suggestions particularly featured :-

Private sheltered (warden assisted) 23.5%, Housing association sheltered (warden assisted) 21.5% and Independent accommodation with care support 26%.

Particularly given our ageing demographics, we will need to consider households including one or more members with limited mobility, disability and/or a medical condition (including stroke and heart problems). This may indicate a need for more homes built to “homes for life” standards.

The **needed tenure from extra new homes** (in the view of overall respondents, 281 responses at Q18, is :-

(View of) Needed Tenure of extra homes	%
Owner-occupation	34
Shared Ownership – “affordable” H.A.	27
Rented – “affordable” H.A.	24
Rented – private landlord	12
Tied to job	3
TOTAL	100

Thus a 51% (27 plus 24) share of new homes is indicated for affordable Housing Association homes. It is SODC policy to provide 40%. SODC would expect 25% of new “affordable”, thus 10% of overall new homes to be “Shared Ownership” homes. Local opinion seems to think that this should be nearly 3 times as big at 27%. However, the responses to this question are from an invitation to people to suggest what they think others may need; thus the results need to be viewed with some caution.

As regards views of what property people seeking to “return” to Sonning Common might need, at Q22, 49 respondents make 103 suggestions. Broadly the indication is that they need cheaper, lower-end housing – probably particularly for younger adults – but also some bungalows (13% of suggestions) which may be for older people. Detached houses represent 17% of suggestions, but this might come from released dwellings from the existing stock rather than necessarily being new builds!

In comment and at Q23, real concerns are expressed as to whether LOCAL people will be able to access new “affordable” social housing. Will the Housing Association(s) not simply allocate them, in accordance with their policies, to those with highest “social need points” from all across South Oxfordshire - so that in practice local people usually miss out? This upsets local people and under-mines the motivation to build new homes and new “affordable” social homes. (It is to be noted that Woodcote NDP secured 20% of new affordable to be retained for people with strong local connections.)

From the overall responses there was quite high interest in self-builds. At Q24 17% of respondents (60 responses with 116 choices) indicated real interest. The 116 choices may be analysed as follows:-

Approaches to “self-build”	Choices	%
Refurbish an empty house	47	41
Take on a home built to shell stage.	20	17
Do a community self-build scheme	8	7
Full self-build on a serviced single plot	41	35
Total	116	100%

So at least 41 of the 60 respondents were prepared to undertake a full self-build on their own single plot, about 12% of total respondents. This indicates a very strong interest in self-build.

Themes of comments from overall responses:-

- Huge concerns about the Village Centre and needs for Car Parking. Strong indication of a major parking need. Main infrastructure issue raised.
- Worries about the age-balance of the village.
- Concerns to protect the “character” of the village - protect
 - “country atmosphere
 - “character”
 - “the village feel of our community”
 - “the village feeling”
- Fears of being engulfed by Reading and becoming over-densely developed
- Concerns for new footpaths and safe cycling – notably for children and seniors as well as adults.
- Particular housing needs for :-
 - Younger adults and first-time buyers
 - Older/down-sizing/sheltered needs

Responses from those seeking to move to a new (to them) home in Sonning Common (section 3)

This section was specifically for those actively seeking a first or a different home in Sonning Common. Overall there were 41 responses in this category.

The **age profile** of residents in the households of respondents seeking a new home was:-

AGE group	Home-seeker %	PAR % (to say ave age of 90)	Variance	% var.
0-15	25	18	+7	+39%
16-24	14	11	+3	+27%
25-44	31	22	+9	+41%
45-64	16	22	-6	-27%
65-74	6	11	-5	-45%
75-84	7	11	-4	-36%
85+	1	5	-4	-80%
TOTAL	100%	100%	0	

Unsurprisingly, the above figures show that the pattern of the home-seekers is focused on :-

- Mostly 25-44 year olds with kids (0-15 year olds)
- Then 16-24 year olds – young adults some with kids as young families

In this section, older people looking to down-size are (unsurprisingly) not well represented. Home-seekers of 65+ represent only 14% of the total (rather than the 27%+ that might be expected from an even progression to say an average longevity of 90 or indeed the 37% of such ages represented in the overall response to sections 1 and 2).

Motivations to move for the home-seekers are :-

Motivations to move home	%
To be near family	24
First home	19
Bigger home	19
Smaller home	7
Other reasons – various smaller %s *	31
TOTAL	100

(*Smaller reasons include “can’t afford”, insecure tenure, retirement, jobs, divorce/separation, special needs etc).

The current situation of home-seekers is :-

Current situation/tenure of home-seekers	%
Owner-occupiers (incl. those with no mortgage)	46
Living with parents/family etc	22
Rented – private landlord	22
Rented – “affordable” H.A.	10
TOTAL	100

Of the 41 respondents, 1 flagged a wheelchair user in the household and 5 flagged a member with limited mobility; together, some 15% of these respondents.

Home-seekers desire a **nature of dwelling** mix as follows :-

Desired Nature of Dwelling	%
House (Det. 16%, S/D 21% & Terraced 20%)	57
Bungalow (Det. 13%, S/D 15% and Terr. 4%)	32
Flat/maisonette etc	11
TOTAL	100

Unsurprisingly there is more interest in flats, maisonettes and bungalows.

Home-seekers desire a **dwelling type** mix as follows :-

Desired Dwelling Type	Desired %	Overall stock per response %	Census 2011 %
Detached	28	63	50
Semi-detached	37	27	30
Terraced	24	6	12
Flat/maisonette etc	11	4	8
TOTAL	100	100	100

Demand for bungalows at 32% far exceeds the 14% of home-seekers who are aged 65+. The reason for this is not clear, but it may reflect the fact that some of these offer scope to refurbish and EXTEND some smaller tired properties which, if they are older properties, may offer the land and scope to do so. This result may reflect the keen interest shown in self-builds.

It is clear that home-seeker demand for detached properties is likely to find scope in the existing housing stock, whereas demand at the lower end is likely to be significantly aided by the building of new homes.

Home-seekers desire a **number of bedrooms per dwelling** mix as follows :-

Desired Number of Bedrooms	Desired %	Overall stock per response %	2011 Census Stock %
1-bed	15	2	4
2-bed	42	17	21
3-bed	29	48	45
4-bed	10	27	23
5-bed	2	6	7
5+ bedrooms	2		
TOTAL	100	100	100

The response shows that 86% of home-seekers have housing needs in the 1-3 bedroom range. 67% have needs in the 1-2 bedroom range, but only 25% of the Census stock complies with this need.

Of the 41 respondents 31 are on the SODC housing register.

Of the 41 respondents 3 has a household member with a supported housing need.

Some of the home-seeker responses make very strong comments AGAINST any new homes being built! This may raise some questions as to whether they are in fact genuinely looking for a new home?

NOTE:

We have not here sought to further interpret the household income data. It is clear that in the main section there are a high (60%) percentage of owner-occupier people with mortgage paid within which income is less critical and there are a range of incomes overall. In the home-seeker section, unsurprisingly, incomes are limited in a good percentage of cases – as one might expect given that a significant proportion are on the SODC housing register and that some are looking to down-size. Some 46% of home-seekers are presently owner-occupiers – so it is also a mixed group.

CONCLUSIONS

The housing survey shows the position in 2012. Our NDP stretches until 2027, when increasing longevity will have had further impact on our overall demographic mix. We need to factor-in a reasonable assessment of the needs that this will bring.

Thus informed, we need to consider the mix of new build homes for our NDP.

For Open Market housing it seems clear that the gaps in our range are :-

- For younger and first-time buyers needing 1-3 bedroom dwellings in Flat/Maisonette, Terraced and Semi-Detached House formats
- For older down-sizing buyers needing 2-3 bedroom dwellings in Semi-Detached and Detached Bungalow formats
- For the oldest buyers needing 1-2 bedroom accommodation in sheltered/"homes for life" formats

For "Affordable" Social Housing it seems that we will need :-

- For families 2-3 bedrooms in Flat/Maisonette, Terraced and Semi-Detached House formats. These will also perform as "Shared Ownership" or via future evolution as "Open Market" properties.
- Given increased longevity and our demographic mix, whilst the percentage of people presently renting "affordable" social Housing Association properties is modest, there will need to be some extra provision for properties appropriate to people of advancing age where mobility becomes a challenge. This may indicate a need for some terraced/Semi-detached bungalows or apartments with lifts to the upper levels, "homes for life" design and perhaps some aspects of support/sheltered format? This provision will meet the need of these residents and free up some family-format "affordable" housing for re-use. (We will need to check the allocation rules of SOHA etc to verify how they will **prioritise** local **older** people with such needs.)

Whilst other housing demand exists in Sonning Common, it appears that other demand can be met from our existing housing stock. What is needed, and to some extent required by SODC policy, is extra provision at the lower end to re-balance our housing stock after decades of extensions and development of the current stock. Such a re-balancing will provide a more balanced and sustainable stock which will hopefully re-rejuvenate our community and allow more young people and young families to stay in the village. New provision will also address the particular needs of older residents and provide scope for them as longevity increases.

Our overall conclusions are based on the independently organised survey by the Oxfordshire rural Community Council (ORCC) on behalf of the NDP, plus data from the 2011 Census and information gathered through the NDP process.