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### Review and evaluation of sites and allocations

#### Housing Allocations proposed

Our NDP is lodged under the umbrella of the SODC Core Strategy which extends to 2027. Our NDP plan now allocates 195 homes in respect of the SODC Core Strategy 2012-27. Under the Core Strategy, SODC allocated 138 new homes to the “Larger Village” of Sonning Common. SODC have defined the “Larger Village” to include 1916 dwellings as at Census 2011 – including 321 dwellings from the parish of Rotherfield Peppard that SODC defined to be part of the “built form” of the overall settlement. In essence the extra 321 dwellings from outside the parish and NDP area represent all of Peppard Common - reaching up as far as the Unicorn pub.

The Oxfordshire SHMA 2014 is now in play and SODC are working towards a new Local Plan 2031. The SHMA includes increased housing numbers and their likely allocation remains unknown at present. However, it appears likely that Sonning Common, as regards the “Larger Village” will receive an extra allocation to cover the period out to 2031. In view of this the NDP now provides for an allocation of 195 new homes. The Core Strategy allocation in practice covered the period 2017-2027 as the “Larger Villages” were receiving allocations for the first time ever and could not have been ready for the first 2012-17 quinquennial. Thus even if SC received merely a pro-rated allocation for the extra 4 years to 2031 this would be  $4/10 \times 138 = 56$ . That would bring our overall obligation up from 138 to 194. So up to 195 new homes have been allocated. In this context some 17% of the dwellings in the “Larger Village” of Sonning Common relate to our neighbouring parish of Rotherfield Peppard (321 of total 1916 dwellings). So, in the event of very significant extra allocations beyond 195 there would be an expectation that a share would go to available sites there – outside the current NDP area.

The 195 new homes allocated are on the following sites;

| Site reference | Site descriptor            | New Homes  |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------|
| SON 9          | Lea Meadow                 | 60         |
| SON 6          | Kennylands Infill          | 26         |
| SON 5          | Kennylands Paddock         | 22         |
| SON 2(3)       | Bishopswood Middle         | 50         |
| SON 15a        | Chiltern Edge Top (school) | 37         |
| <b>Total</b>   |                            | <b>195</b> |

**SON 9** is non-AONB land which was supported in surveys and evaluation, subject to respecting its sensitivities. The site is on a rising slope and faces out to the AONB of SON 10 which has particularly high visual beauty and is much cherished by residents – as reflected by their surveys and responses. Collectively SONs 6, 7 and 9 represent an important break in the elongated built form of Sonning Common, wedged between the two iconic AONB dry valleys on either side. These sites offer an important corridor for wildlife and trees and vegetation in this area are important. It is believed that the southern border of SON 7 and 9 together represent an historic “green lane”. Within the NDP evaluation SON 9 had initially been listed for 47 dwellings. There have been 3 applications on this site – all withdrawn after public comments and SODC advice. The last of those in October 2012 was for 55 homes on the site, also withdrawn. Following an option agreement by the owner with Bewley Homes, a fourth application was recently made for 82 homes. It is understood that, after widespread criticism of the proposal and its layout, the developer has been seeking to re-work it and have revised the layout – but with much criticism from the Thames Valley Police “Secured by Design” officer – and bid for 65 homes; finally, this application has now been refused by SODC. Following a careful review with stakeholders the NDP allocation on this sensitive site is now set at 60 homes – which is in line with the SODC LVIA and capacity assessment.

**SON 6** is the linear infill between number 56 and 80 Kennylands Road. It is non-AONB land which was supported in survey and evaluation, but beyond it in clear view is the AONB land of Bur Wood and Rudgings

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plantation. As a strict linear infill it appears a rather obvious site. The properties of Kennylands Road are large with long gardens and this site is commensurately deep. Thus, although it may appear from the numbering that there might only be scope for 11 detached infill properties, the site policy proposal is for construction built in sympathy with the existing form but which provide 26 homes – some multiple within a building. The linear site is deep and is expected to give full scope for private gardens for each dwelling. It is clear that this site requires a clear buffer of significant landscape screening to make good the continuous landscape setting of the village at this point and to maintain the rural view from the AONB and public footpath. Residents were strongly of the view that this site should not be a basis for sprawl into the countryside and adjoining settlements.

**SON 5** is the paddock behind the homes along the west side of Kennylands road, between Kidby's yard and the "Orchard" behind Alpen Rose (being 54) and 56 Kennylands Road. Because of location and topography the SHLAA SON 5 represented a significant risk both to opening up sprawl towards Reading and significant adverse impacts on the very high visual beauty of the AONB countryside just outside. The area outside is rolling AONB land including the SON 4 site and the countryside out to the Kidmore End settlement - across the small dry valley. Residents significantly opposed this. Ultimately, liaising with SODC and in the context of the SHMA and upcoming LP2031, a strong landscape planting regime and elimination of the (Alpen Rose) "Orchard" area to the south of this site have enabled a compromise where the site is enabled to accept 22 homes with clear constraints on ridge-heights so as to protect key objectives whilst taking a contribution from this sensitive site. This approach also avoids the loss of a hedgerow along the Orchard and provides better scope for established wildlife movement corridors along the old and important outer hedgerow along the border with the AONB. This site has been subject to previous planning applications, one having been rejected at Appeal and a more recent one bidding for 33 homes was rejected by SODC, whose landscape architect was clear that the applicants had not respected an appropriate layout and planting scheme. The developer has now agreed to apply the compromise agreed with the NDP WP. Residents have been very strong in wishing to avoid a sprawl of Sonning Common out into the countryside and towards a conglomeration with other settlements – particularly Reading which is a town of such scale that it would rank as a substantial city. It is probably impossible to fully mitigate the impact of this site and there are other considerations including uncertainty over subsidence and the proximity behind the orchard area of a very large and deep old chalk pit – which may be related to the incidences of subsidence. The old chalk pit is fenced in and huge trees – including Ash trees growing out of its depths are within that area. The Orchard area contains some huge Pine trees of architectural significance in the landscape. The chalk pit has a badger sett and there is another in Rudging's Plantation. Together the chalk pit and "Orchard" area is understood to be significant for bats and avian wildlife including owls. The "Orchard" area has a strategic position closing off this area with its trees and hedgerows from the open farmland running to the SE and down towards Emmer Green and Reading.

**SON 15a** is not AONB land, although this high site does look out to the AONB countryside. The site sits within an existing enclave in the built form and would not represent an overall advance of the wider settlement shape. The site does have some habitat and AONB sensitivities and is allocated for 37 new homes having taken due account of these. Chiltern Edge School was built in 1956 and now faces substantial investment needs. Development of the SON 15a site would provide important enabling benefits for an important community asset – the secondary school – Chiltern Edge. Although it will require the planting of a suitably deep landscape buffer, once planted and grown up the development will not be overlooked from any part of the surrounding landscape and will if anything positively enhance the landscape setting and view in from the AONB. Chiltern Edge School has foundation status and will require Department for Education (DfE) approval for the Governors to proceed with the sale of the land. However, after a long process, NDPWP understand that it is now progressing towards a DfE approval. Our assessment has been that the school's application fully meets the standards required by DfE, pursuant to s77 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. This former playing field land is no longer needed by the school - whose school roll has fallen from a peak of some 1300 in 1977 to less than 600 presently. Whilst the school roll may well increase in future there is no prospect of it recovering to its previous peak. The reasons for this are many, but include increased use of private fee-based education, the expanded development of

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Highdown School in Emmer Green and the extraordinary youthful age-imbalance that applied in Sonning Common in 1977. Of course development of playing field land is also governed by S74 of the NPPF, but there was previously limited public access to use this land and the proposals for SON 3 address recreation needs.

**SON 2** is identified for 50 homes. This site is in the AONB and was supported in survey and evaluation. It is surrounded on two sides by housing and has the developed farm complex on the 3<sup>rd</sup> side. Only the hedgerow on its 4<sup>th</sup> (SW) side is adjacent to another field – SON 3. The site is strongly contained by hedgerows and woodland to its NW side as well as the farm complex going out to the wider AONB. The field itself is a fairly flat, ploughed arable field with rather hard edges of fence-lines to the two sides of housing, particularly on the SE side to Ashford Avenue. The NDPWP have carefully limited the residential areas on the site and provided some stand-off for the area on the western edge around the farm where we know there is wildlife habitat. There is presently very limited visual intrusion from the wider AONB into this site and carefully planned buffers and landscape planting fully screen these out. The Landscape capacity evaluations suggest that SON 2 is very much capable of accepting this development. The NDP's independent Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment fully supports this, as does detailed work done on behalf of the developer. The SODC LVIA report – which was limited only to housing in isolation of wider needs such as recreation – assessed SONs 2+3 as being good for 56 homes. The proposals for SONs 2+3 have been worked up in close collaboration with the CCB's former Planning Officer. This site has been firmly supported by residents in the NDP process, **strictly** on the understanding that the ownership of SON 3 will be delivered to a community trust for the purposes of recreation use in perpetuity. The planned uses of SON 3 are largely green – playing pitches without harm to the surrounding enclosure of trees and hedgerows. As noted previously and shown in this document there are important deficits of recreational provision in Sonning Common and this appears to be the only opportunity to find a strategic solution to find scope for facilities that will not stand out and jar in the surrounding and more open other AONB landscape.

### Contingency Reserve sites for potential housing allocation release

Our reserve sites are available, but not yet confirmed as immediately available. These are;

| Site reference | Site descriptor              | New Homes |
|----------------|------------------------------|-----------|
| SON 7 + 7a     | Hagpits House + Orchard      | 30 (25+5) |
| SON 8          | Thames Valley Gym (enabling) | 4         |
| <b>Total</b>   |                              | <b>34</b> |

The reserve sites are intended to provide a contingency against any unforeseen problems with the allocation sites and also to provide for any further requirements the LP 2031, above and beyond allocations to Rotherfield Peppard.

As regards sites **SON 7&7a**, there are two different owners and the small site 7a is dependent on access from SON 7 – since it is considered vital to retain the existing tree screen along Kennylands Road and consequently direct access to the road is not available. Together these two sites provide a reserve of up to 30 new homes (being 25 +5). For SON 7, there currently exists a large house and grounds where the owners live. The owners are long retired. There is not a full plan which is immediately ready to implement. Although some evaluation has been made, as yet no full arboricultural survey of the SON 7 site has been made; this is a consideration because there are numerous mature trees on the site. Also no combined scheme has yet been made between the owners of the separate sites. SON 7 could proceed on a stand-alone basis, but SON 7a is defined as being dependent on access from SON 7. There has been some consideration of some extra-care housing on the main site; but as yet it has not been fully clear whether the existing house would be demolished or not. If not, then the capacity of the main site will reduce from 25. Our judgement is that a combined scheme for the two sites together would provide a better result. Thus at this stage, although the sites are available we cannot be certain exactly when implementation could

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proceed and it seems questionable that they could go forward in the very near future. However, both owners are keen to harvest the latent value in due course.

Finally, site SON 8 is earmarked for a reserve of 4 new homes. Currently, although dedicated to gymnastics, the gym on SON 8 – which when originally sold (from being the previous Kennylands School gymnasium) was protected in recreation use by a planning covenant. It is clear that the gym should not be lost at the very least until a new Sports England compliant facility with public access can be provided on SON 3. It is a reserve site for 4 homes, as the owners have represented that land profit from these could help with capital refurbishment of that gym and would be so invested to extend the life of the gym. These 4 new homes would be located on the blind side of the existing gym building next to SON 9, thus they would not have adverse impact on the Millennium Green and views from it. The existing gym does not have land capacity around it for pitches and could thus not offer a Sports England compliant site for wider provision of a community sports hall. There are some disputes over access with SCOMIT who are the owning trustees of the Millennium Green and also the owners of the access-way to SON 8; although the owners of SON 8 have certain rights of access, the nature and extent of these is disputed by the parties. However, for the NDP, it is judged that this modest number on the back part of the site may well be possible under existing access arrangements.

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### Employment sites

Despite best endeavours, we have not been able to persuade SHLAA site owners with credible sites to support employment. (Although the owner of SONs 10, 12 and most of 11 was prepared to offer some of his iconic AONB land for such use!). Accordingly, the NDPWP have had to settle for accepting intensified use and development of existing sites. These are;

**Kidby's Yard** (a visually contained site off Kennylands Road). This site is next to SON 5 and adjacent to the AONB. Development is subject to complete screening from the AONB. Currently the buildings on site are single storey low-rise and that pattern is expected to be replicated if development took place on the upper site and along the well-planted boundary with SON 5. The owner intends to replant the lateral line of trees (were Western Red Cedar) to help with screening the upper site.

**The Herb Farm and Saxon Maze.** This site is off the B481 next to SON 9 – so it is adjacent to the AONB (SON 10) on the east side of the B481. Development is subject to complete screening from the AONB. Again development for retail employment use is more likely on the upper site more distant from the AONB and subject to ridge height considerations. Currently development is set back from the road and screening could be improved. This retail intensification is not supported by the landowner..

### Other SHLAA Sites not covered above

The following sites have not been taken forward for potential housing development. Below is a brief explanation of why.

**SON 1** is being designated for Local Green Space. It is AONB and will remain as farmland for now. It has adjacency to Old Copse – ancient Beech woodland which residents subscribed for and placed under trust. It has a public right of way going through it. The owner does not (presently) want development of this site, although it remains as a SHLAA. The NDPWP would ideally have liked to gain some of this land for Amenity Greenspace, but that has not proven to be possible. Surveys and evaluation suggested that this land should not be developed but should remain green AONB. Amenity Green Space was supported, but the best present option is as Local Green Space. This space is important to residents and could balance the provision of the Millennium Green in the south (although there the trustees restrict much of the area as a nature reserve and limit recreation access to a surrounding path).

**SON 3** is being designated for recreation use with transfer of ownership to a community trust, subject to development of SON 2. It is AONB and is intended to remain in green recreation use in perpetuity. As with employment, sites for recreation depend on a willing landowner. It is viewed to have future scope not only for pitches, but also for built sports facilities including for changing, toilets, fitness and some indoor sports.

**SON 4** has been withdrawn by the owner. It is AONB, in the parish of Kidmore End and extends out from Sonning Common towards the village of Kidmore End itself. It was not favoured in surveys and evaluation. It includes a public right of way to Kidmore End. In terms of visual attractiveness this AONB is particularly outstanding and cherished by residents of SC and KE alike. This was strongly reflected in the survey feedback – as it was in feedback from the CCB.

**SONs 10/11/12** are all part of the Eastern AONB dry valley and, with clear CCB input, it was agreed that they were not appropriate for development. With the exception of a tiny part of SON 11 that used to be owned with Reddish Manor they are all AONB; development of this site would impact the AONB and the heritage of Reddish Manor. In terms of visual attractiveness this AONB is particularly outstanding and cherished by residents of SC. This was strongly reflected in their survey feedback – as it was in CCB counsel to us.

**SON 13** above Blounts Court Road was withdrawn by the owner. It is AONB and the full site was not favoured in surveys and evaluation. If it had not been withdrawn, it might have supported a linear

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development behind the tree-lined frontage along the road and below the lee of the rising farmland slope, over the crest of which, is the settlement of Rotherfield Peppard around All Saints church. It is next to the Johnson Matthey research complex and is in the Rotherfield Peppard Parish.

**SON 14** over Widmore Pond was withdrawn by the owner. It is AONB and was not favoured in surveys and evaluation.

**SON 15b** was strongly rejected on survey and evaluation. It is non-AONB, but were the site to have been developed it would have too much impact – both on the AONB and on the important hedgerow and habitat along Kidmore Lane.