

Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan Review 2011- 2035

**A report to South Oxfordshire District Council
on the Sonning Common Neighbourhood
Development Plan Review**

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Executive Summary

- 1 I was appointed by South Oxfordshire District Council in April 2022 to carry out the independent examination of the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan Review.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by written representations. I visited the neighbourhood area on 21 April 2022.
- 3 The Plan includes a range of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the parish. It has a clear focus on maintaining the character and appearance of the neighbourhood area and ensuring that it can deliver strategic housing development as required by the Local Plan. The Plan was revised during the examination.
- 4 The Plan has been underpinned by community support and engagement. All sections of the community have been actively engaged in its preparation.
- 5 Subject to a series of recommended modifications set out in this report, I have concluded that the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan Review meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum should be held within the neighbourhood area.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
30 November 2022

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan Review 2011-2035 (the 'Plan').
- 1.2 The Plan has been submitted to South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) by Sonning Common Parish Council (SCPC) in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan. The Plan was revised during the examination to propose the allocation of the Little Sparrows site for residential development.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 and its updates in 2018, 2019 and 2021. The NPPF continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.
- 1.4 The role of an independent examiner is clearly defined in the legislation. I have been appointed to examine whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions and Convention Rights and other statutory requirements. It is not within my remit to examine or to propose an alternative Plan, or a potentially more sustainable Plan except where this arises as a result of my recommended modifications to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions and the other relevant requirements.
- 1.5 A neighbourhood plan can be narrow or broad in scope. Any plan can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The submitted Plan has been designed to be distinctive in general terms, and to be complementary to the development plan. It has a clear focus on maintaining the character and appearance of the neighbourhood area and ensuring that it can deliver the strategic development as required by the Local Plan.
- 1.6 Within the context set out above, this report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the basic conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.7 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome the Plan would then be used to determine planning applications within the Plan area and will sit as part of the wider development plan.

2 The Role of the Independent Examiner

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by SODC, with the consent of SCPC, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both SODC and SCPC. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. In previous roles, I have over 35 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level. I am a chartered town planner and have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service.

Examination Outcomes

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan as submitted proceeds to a referendum; or
 - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
 - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 2.5 The outcome of the examination is set out in Sections 7 and 8 of this report.

Other examination matters

- 2.6 In examining the Plan I am required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
 - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
 - the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.
- 2.7 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.6 of this report. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan complies with the three requirements.

3 Procedural Matters

3.1 In undertaking this examination I have considered the following documents:

- the submitted Plan;
- the revised Plan;
- the Basic Conditions Statement;
- the revised Basic Conditions Statement;
- the Consultation Statement;
- the SODC SEA/HRA screening report;
- the evidence on the Plan on the Parish Council website;
- the Parish Council's responses to the clarification note;
- the representations made to the Plan as submitted;
- the representations made to the revised Plan;
- the appeal decision on the Little Sparrows continuing care retirement community care village (APP/Q3115/W/20/3265861).
- the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035;
- the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021);
- Planning Practice Guidance; and
- relevant Ministerial Statements.

3.2 I visited the neighbourhood area on 21 April 2022. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular. My visit is covered in more detail in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.16 of this report.

The process for the examination

3.3 The submitted Plan proposes the following principal changes to the 'made' Plan:

- Policy RSB1 – The identification of a settlement boundary;
- Policy RH1 – A revised package of housing allocations and reserve sites; and
- the introduction of a series of new policies in relation to the environment and climate change

3.4 In addition, the submitted Plan is now adding local value to a different local plan – in this case the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 as adopted in December 2020.

3.5 The Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 identifies the circumstances that might arise as and when qualifying bodies seek to review 'made' neighbourhood plans and introduces a proportionate process to do so based on the changes proposed. There are three types of modification which can be made to a neighbourhood plan or order. The process will depend on the degree of change which the modification involves and as follows:

- minor (non-material) modifications to a neighbourhood plan or order which would not materially affect the policies in the plan or permission granted by the

order. These may include correcting errors, such as a reference to a supporting document, and would not require examination or a referendum; or

- material modifications which do not change the nature of the plan or order and which would require examination but not a referendum. This might, for example, entail the addition of a design code that builds on a pre-existing design policy, or the addition of a site or sites which, subject to the decision of the independent examiner, are not so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the plan; or
- material modifications which do change the nature of the plan or order would require examination and a referendum. This might, for example, involve allocating significant new sites for development.

3.6 In the two submitted Modification Statements, both SCPC and SODC consider that the proposals represent material modifications to the 'made' Plan, but they are not considered so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the 'made' Plan.

3.7 I have considered the Modification Statements very carefully. I agree with SODC that the majority of the changes to the 'made' Plan generate the need for an examination without a referendum. However, the package of new policies as described in paragraph 3.4 of this report are important new elements of the Plan and introduce a different direction and focus to its approach. In these circumstances, I have concluded that the submitted Plan includes material modifications which change the nature of the Plan and which require examination and a referendum.

3.8 I advised SODC and SCPC of this conclusion. SCPC subsequently confirmed that it was content for the examination of the Plan to proceed. In these circumstances, I have examined the Plan in accordance under Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The remainder of this report sets out the findings of the examination.

The revisions to the Plan made during the examination

3.9 In its representation to the Plan, SODC suggested that the Little Sparrows site should be allocated for residential development following the granting of planning permission for the site on appeal. In its response to the clarification note, SCPC requested that I consider recommending the allocation of the site for housing purposes. It was beyond my remit to recommend the inclusion of an additional housing in the Plan. In these circumstances SCPC decided to revise the Plan to include the allocation of that site. A revised Plan and a revised Basic Conditions Statement were submitted. The revisions were summarised in a Schedule of Modifications. The modifications incorporated a series of consequential revisions to the Plan relating to its intention to include the Little Sparrows site as a housing allocation. Thereafter a further six-week consultation took place on the revised Plan.

3.10 Section 4 of this report sets out the responses to both the submitted Plan and to the revised Plan. Except where the report comments otherwise it comments on the details in the revised version of the Plan.

The request for a public hearing

- 3.11 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations made to the submitted Plan, I was satisfied that the submitted Plan could be examined by written representations and without the need for a public hearing.
- 3.12 L&Q Estates had requested that a hearing was needed to consider the matters raised in its representation about the way in which SCPC assessed the site options in general terms and considered its emerging proposals for land off Kennylands Road in particular. Having considered this request in detail, I was satisfied that the matter could be considered by way of written representation. In reaching this conclusion I was assisted by the detail within the representation and SCPC's to the response to the question in the clarification note on this matter.
- 3.13 The representation received to the revised version of the Plan were equally comprehensive. As such I was satisfied that there were no issues raised during the second consultation process which generated the need for a hearing.

Detailed matter

- 3.14 This revised report corrects earlier technical errors in the report dated 21 November 2022. In paragraph 7.9 the text should be inserted as a free-standing paragraph after the existing paragraph on page 7 of the Plan and before Map 1.2, as the neighbourhood plan does not contain paragraph numbers. In paragraph 7.73 the recommendation to amend 'allocations' to 'allocation' was grammatically unnecessary as the revised neighbourhood plan allocates two sites. These matters are correctly expressed in this report.

4 Consultation

Consultation Process

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 SCPC prepared a Consultation Statement. The Statement sets out the mechanisms used to engage all concerned in the plan-making process. It also provides specific details about the consultation process that took place on the pre-submission version of the Plan (October to December 2021). It captures the key issues in a proportionate way and is then underpinned by more detailed appendices.
- 4.3 Chapters 1 and 2 of the Statement set out details of the comprehensive range of consultation events that were carried out in relation to the initial stages of the Plan. They included:
- the use of the Sonning Common Magazine and the Henley Standard to raise awareness (ongoing);
 - the use of the Parish Council's Facebook account to raise awareness of the work on the Plan;
 - the drop-in event (February 2019);
 - the presentations made by the Steering Group (November 2019);
 - the questionnaire to all households (November 2019); and
 - the drop in exhibition (February 2020).
- 4.4 The Statement also provides details of the way in which SCPC engaged with statutory bodies. The process has been both proportionate and robust. Many of the appendices either reproduce the materials used or summarise the findings of the various events and engagements.
- 4.5 Chapter 3 of the Statement provides specific details about the comments received during the consultation process associated with the pre-submission version of the Plan. Chapter 4 identifies the way in which SCPC responded to the comments received. It then identifies the principal changes that worked their way through into the submission version of the Plan. This process helps to describe its wider evolution.
- 4.6 I am satisfied that consultation has been an important element of the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation.
- 4.7 From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I can see that the Plan has promoted an inclusive approach towards seeking the opinions of all concerned throughout the process. SODC has carried out its own assessment that the consultation process has complied with the requirements of the Regulations.

Representations Received to the Plan as initially submitted

4.8 Consultation on the submitted Plan was undertaken by SODC and ended on 17 March 2022. This exercise generated comments from the following organisations:

- Investfront Limited
- Sport England
- Chilterns Conservation Board
- Deanfield Homes
- South Oxfordshire District Council
- Coal Authority
- Kidmore End Parish Council
- Scottish and Southern Electricity Network
- Natural England
- Johnson Matthey plc
- L&Q Estates
- Oxfordshire County Council

4.9 Comments were also received from a local resident.

Representations Received to the revised Plan

4.10 SCPC revised the Plan during the examination process to propose the allocation of the Little Sparrows site for housing purposes. Consultation on the revised Plan was undertaken by SODC and ended on 20 October 2022. This exercise generated comments from the following organisations:

- Sport England
- SODC
- Investfront Limited
- Chilterns Conservation Board
- Marine Management Organisation
- Scottish and Southern Electricity Network
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Johnson Matthey plc
- Coal Authority
- Inspired Villages
- L&Q Estates
- Maiden Erlegh Trust and Deanfield Homes Ltd
- Thames Water

4.11 Comments were also received from four residents. I have taken account of all the representations in examining the Plan. Where it is appropriate to do so, I make specific reference to the individual representations in Section 7 of this report.

5 The Neighbourhood Area and the Development Plan Context

The Neighbourhood Area

- 5.1 The neighbourhood area consists of the parish of Sonning Common, part of Kidmore End parish and part of Rotherfield Peppard parish. It is located approximately four miles north of Reading centre and three-and-a-half miles west of Henley-on-Thames. The population of Sonning Common in 2011 was 3784 persons living in 1595 houses. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 25 October 2013.
- 5.2 The neighbourhood area has an attractive topographical setting. It is situated along the southern fringe of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in a rural landscape of rolling farmland and woodland. Its neighbouring parishes are Kidmore End to the west, Rotherfield Peppard to the north, and Harpsden, Binfield Heath and Eye and Dunsden to the east.
- 5.3 The village has a vibrant and attractive village centre in Wood Lane with a good range of retail and commercial premises. It enjoys a spacious and attractive village environment.

Development Plan Context

- 5.4 The South Oxfordshire Local Plan was adopted in December 2020. It sets out the basis for future development in South Oxfordshire up to 2035. It has largely been the adoption of that Plan which has generated SCPC's desire to review the 'made' Plan.
- 5.5 The Basic Conditions Statement usefully highlights the key policies in the development plan and how they relate to policies in the submitted Plan. This is good practice. It provides confidence to all concerned that the submitted Plan sits within its local planning policy context.
- 5.6 Sonning Common is identified as a Larger Village in the adopted Local Plan (Policy H4 and Appendix 7). The policy comments that a housing requirement of 257 homes will be collectively delivered through neighbourhood development plans and Local Plan site allocations at specific larger villages (46 homes at Nettlebed, 96 homes at Sonning Common and 115 homes at Woodcote).
- 5.7 The supporting text in the Local Plan provides a broader context to the policy as follows:

'The Local Plan proposes the provision of 15% growth in the Larger Villages. This level of growth has been calculated using the existing housing stock as it was at 2011 - the base date of the Local Plan and is on top of (the former) Core Strategy allocations where these exist (paragraph 4.17)

The achievement of the 15% growth figure needs to be balanced with the social, economic, and environmental factors that may impact upon the ability of settlements to accommodate the amount of development that has been calculated. Consideration

of the availability of suitable and deliverable sites may also impact on how much development a settlement may accommodate (paragraph 4.27)

Some villages are constrained by factors such as Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and Flood Zones. Where Neighbourhood Development Plans are considering sites within an AONB or sites that form part of the setting of an AONB, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be undertaken. In these villages a 15% growth may not be fully achievable (paragraph 4.28)'

The submitted Plan directly addresses the environmental issues which are associated with delivering the level of growth in the neighbourhood area as anticipated in the adopted Local Plan.

- 5.8 In summary, the emerging neighbourhood plan has sought to respond positively to the adopted Local Plan. The submitted neighbourhood plan has been prepared within its wider development plan context. In doing so it has relied on up-to-date information and research that has underpinned adopted planning policy documents in the District. This is good practice and reflects key elements in Planning Practice Guidance on this matter.

Unaccompanied Visit

- 5.9 I visited the neighbourhood area on 21 April 2022.
- 5.10 I drove into the neighbourhood area from Nettlebed to the north along the B481. This gave me an initial impression of its setting and character in general, and the context of its wider setting. I saw the importance of its setting within the Chilterns AONB.
- 5.11 I looked initially at the part of the village off Blount's Court Road. I appreciated its quiet rural character and the views to the north. I then looked at the Johnson Matthey Technology Centre. I also saw its car park to the south of the road. I looked at the Little Sparrows site adjacent to the car park. I took the opportunity to spend a quiet time on the benches by Widmore Pond.
- 5.12 I then drove along Widmore Lane and Peppard Road to the Kennylands Gymnastics site. I saw the way in which it related both to Bird Wood Court and to the Abbeycrest Nursing Home and Essex Way to the south. I took the opportunity to look at the Millennium Field. It was a pleasure to do so and a real testament to those who had secured its use in this way.
- 5.13 I then took the opportunity to look at the village centre in and around Wood Lane. I saw the way in which the various commercial and retail uses had occupied former houses and, in most cases safeguarded their character and appearance. I also saw the medical facilities which were conveniently located in the heart of the village and the Village Hall and its associated car park.

- 5.14 I then looked at the Local Green Space off Woodlands Road. I saw its attractive nature and the level of its use. I also saw its relationship with Bishopswood to its immediate north.
- 5.15 I then spent some time in Reade's Lane. I saw the scale and significance of the Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School.
- 5.16 I finished my visit by driving to Gallowstree Tree Common along Reade's Lane and then back into the village and then onto Kidmore End via Kidmore Lane. This highlighted the wider landscape setting of the neighbourhood area within the AONB and its relationship with other settlements.

6 The Neighbourhood Plan and the Basic Conditions

6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped considerably in the preparation of this section of the report. It is a well-presented and informative document. It is also proportionate to the Plan itself.

6.2 As part of this process I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the Basic Conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:

- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan in the area;
- be compatible with European Union (EU) obligations and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); and
- not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

6.3 I assess the Plan against the basic conditions under the following headings.

National Planning Policies and Guidance

6.4 For the purposes of this examination the key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued in July 2021. This approach is reflected in the submitted Basic Conditions Statement.

6.5 The NPPF sets out a range of core land-use planning issues to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are particularly relevant to the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan Review:

- a plan led system – in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan;
- delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
- building a strong, competitive economy;
- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities;
- taking account of the different roles and characters of different areas;
- highlighting the importance of high-quality design and good standards of amenity for all future occupants of land and buildings; and
- conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

6.6 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 13 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic

needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.

- 6.7 In addition to the NPPF I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and ministerial statements.
- 6.8 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance in general terms subject to the recommended modifications included in this report. It sets out a positive vision for the future of the neighbourhood area within the context of its role in the settlement hierarchy. It proposes a series of policies to safeguard its character and to ensure that an appropriate level of new housing is delivered in the Plan period. The Basic Conditions Statement maps the policies in the Plan against the appropriate sections of the NPPF.
- 6.9 At a more practical level, the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraph 16d). This is reinforced in Planning Practice Guidance. Paragraph ID:41-041-20140306 indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise, and supported by appropriate evidence.
- 6.10 As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. Most of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

Contributing to sustainable development

- 6.11 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the contribution that the submitted Plan makes to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social, and environmental. The submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. In the economic dimension, the Plan includes policies for the village centre (RVC1&2) and for employment uses (RE1a/b). In the social role, it includes policies on new housing development and housing mix (RH1-3). In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively seeks to protect its natural, built, and historic environment. It includes policies on design (RD1) and climate change (RENV5). SCPC has undertaken its own assessment of this matter in the submitted Basic Conditions Statement.

General conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan

- 6.12 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in South Oxfordshire in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.
- 6.13 I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to this strategic context. The Basic Conditions Statement helpfully relates the Plan's policies to the policies in

the development plan. Subject to the recommended modification in this report, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 6.14 The Neighbourhood Plan General Regulations 2015 require a qualifying body either to submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 or a statement of reasons why an environmental report is not required.
- 6.15 In order to comply with this requirement, SODC undertook a screening exercise (December 2021) on the need or otherwise for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be prepared for the Plan. The report is thorough and well-constructed. As a result of this process, SODC concluded that the Plan is unlikely to have any significant effects on the environment and accordingly would not require a SEA. It reaches this conclusion on the basis that the Plan's effects are limited to seeking to allocate an additional thirteen dwellings within the neighbourhood area, identify an additional reserve site, and propose a settlement boundary for the village of Sonning Common.
- 6.16 The Screening Statement was not updated as part of the consideration of the revised Plan as the information submitted in December 2021 had already considered whether the allocation of Little Sparrows would give rise to likely significant effects. I am satisfied that this approach is appropriate.

Habitat Regulations

- 6.17 The screening report also included a separate Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan. It concludes that the Plan is not likely to have significant environmental effects on a European nature conservation site or undermine their conservation objectives alone or in combination taking account of the precautionary principle and that Appropriate Assessment is not required.
- 6.18 The HRA report is both thorough and comprehensive. It takes appropriate account of the significance of the following protected sites:
- Hartslock Wood SAC – approximately 7km away;
 - Chilterns Beechwood SAC – approximately 13km away;
 - Aston Rowant SAC – approximately 14.5km away; and
 - Little Wittenham SAC – approximately 7km away.

It provides assurance to all concerned that the submitted Plan takes appropriate account of important ecological and biodiversity matters.

- 6.19 The conclusion reached is underpinned by the associated work that had taken place on the adoption of the Local Plan. That Plan includes a housing requirement to be met by the neighbourhood plan, to which the review of the neighbourhood plan seeks to respond. The policies in the Local Plan were subject to an Appropriate Assessment.

- 6.20 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that a proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of European obligations.

Human Rights

- 6.21 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. In addition, there has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. Based on all the evidence available to me, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

Summary

- 6.22 On the basis of my assessment of the Plan in this section of my report I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications contained in this report.

7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the policies in the Plan. It makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that they have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 The recommendations focus on the policies themselves given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended changes to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is distinctive and proportionate to the neighbourhood area. The wider community and SCPC have spent time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in their Plan. This sits at the heart of the localism agenda.
- 7.4 The Plan has been designed to reflect Planning Practice Guidance (Section 41-004-20190509) which indicates that neighbourhood plans must address the development and use of land. The Plan includes a separate section which addresses Infrastructure Projects.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted Plan. Where necessary I have identified the inter-relationships between the policies. I comment on the Projects after the policies.
- 7.6 For clarity, this section of the report comments on all policies whether or not I have recommended modifications in order to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions.
- 7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

The initial section of the Plan (Parts One to Three)

- 7.8 The initial parts of the Plan set the scene for the range of policies. They do so in a proportionate way. The Plan is presented in a clear fashion. It makes a very effective use of well-selected maps. A very clear distinction is made between its policies and the supporting text.
- 7.9 Part One addresses the background to the neighbourhood planning agenda. It comments about how the Plan has been prepared and how it will be used within the Plan period. It comments on when the neighbourhood area was designated and includes a map of the defined area (Map 1.2). It also comments about the broader development context within which the Plan was prepared. Whilst the Plan identifies the Plan period on the front cover, I recommend that it is included in the text for clarity.

Add a free-standing paragraph of text after the existing paragraph on page 7 of the Plan and before Map 1.2: 'The Plan period is 2011-2035. This corresponds with that of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan'

- 7.10 Part Two comments about the need for a review of the made Plan and the processes which were followed. It provides specific details about the site selection process. Whilst this part of the Plan identifies the Plan period on the front cover, I recommend that it is included in the text for clarity.

At the end of the first paragraph of beginning with 'The Process begins' add: 'The review of the neighbourhood plan follows this same time span. As such the Plan period will be 2021 to 2035.'

- 7.11 Part Three describes keys elements of the neighbourhood area with a specific focus on its extensive range of services. It does so in a very effective fashion. It then sets out a Vision for the neighbourhood area.
- 7.12 The remainder of this section of the report addresses each policy in turn in the context set out in paragraphs 7.5 to 7.7 of this report.
- 7.13 The Plan includes a range of policies as it builds on the 'made' Plan. In some cases, the policies are new to the Plan (New). In other cases, they are modified versions of existing policies in the made Plan (Modified). In other cases, they remain unchanged from the made Plan (Unchanged). The nature of each policy is highlighted with the summary identified in the preceding sentence

Policy RSB1 Settlement Boundary (New)

- 7.14 The policy proposes a settlement boundary for Sonning Common. It then comments that development proposals within the defined settlement boundary will be supported provided they accord with the other policies of the development plan. It also comments that proposals for development outside the settlement boundary will only be supported if they are appropriate to a countryside location and are consistent with development plan policies.
- 7.15 In general terms, I am satisfied that the policy takes an approach which meets the basic conditions. In particularly it establishes an effective spatial strategy for the parish which concentrates new development in a sustainable location. In some places the line thickness of the settlement boundary makes its precise location difficult to establish. This is particularly the case on the eastern edge of the boundary. I recommend that the quality of the map showing the proposed settlement boundary is improved. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions.
- 7.16 The revision to the Plan proposed by SCPC to include the Little Sparrows site as a housing allocation leads to a situation where there would be an inconsistency between the definition of the settlement boundary and the incorporation of the allocated housing sites within the boundary. The final paragraph on page 25 of the Plan indicates SCPC's intention that these two matters correspond. I recommend that the settlement boundary is expanded to incorporate the Little Sparrows site.

Extend the settlement boundary to incorporate the Little Sparrow housing allocation

Improve the clarity of the settlement boundary as shown on Map 4.1.

Policy RSB2 Green Spaces (New)

- 7.17 The policy sets out to retain important green spaces in the parish. It comments that open green spaces, the Millennium Green and valued woodland that lie within settlement boundary will be protected from development.
- 7.18 The policy has been well-considered. The green spaces contribute significantly to the character and appearance of the parish. The policy meets the basic conditions.

Policy RH1 Housing Allocations (New)

- 7.19 This policy sits at the heart of the Plan. It seeks to respond positively to the requirement in the Local Plan to deliver new homes in the parish.
- 7.20 The structure of the Plan sets out the site-specific proposals in Part Six of the Plan. In general terms, this approach is acceptable and national planning legislation allows considerable flexibility in terms of the format of neighbourhood plans. However, for the purposes of the examination I will address the site-specific proposals in this section of the report.
- 7.21 The adopted Local Plan requires the delivery of 377 new homes in the parish. The allocations in the made Plan provided for 195 homes. By April 2020, completions and commitments had raised the number of homes built or with planning permission to 281. This has left an outstanding requirement of 96 homes to be identified at that time.
- 7.22 In order to address this strategic matter, SCPC decided to refresh the work which it had undertaken in respect of the site selection process associated with the 'made' Plan. All the submitted sites were assessed against criteria used in that Plan. They included landscape setting, sustainability, connectivity, views, surroundings, wildlife and wider environmental issues. The results were collated by the working party into a 'traffic light' grid. The grid was then audited by an independent group of residents and any changes were incorporated.
- 7.23 SCPC also commissioned Terra Firma to undertake a professional assessment of the new sites.
- 7.24 The guiding principles for this task were similar to those which had informing the 'made' Plan. The work undertaken and associated public consultations confirmed the view that the existing village edge along the B481 Peppard Road should be maintained. Other issues arising from the consultation were that the separation between the village and Reading should be preserved, together with the gap between Sonning Common and Kidmore End. In addition, it was concluded that new housing should, as far as possible, be located closer to rather than further away from the village centre.
- 7.24 The policy sets out the following proposals to achieve the strategic target:
- an increase from 37 to 50 homes on allocated site SON 15 (Chiltern Edge Top) – with provision for key workers as agreed with the owners.
 - the allocation of SON 23 (Johnson Matthey staff car park) as a reserve site for approximately 20 homes.

- the identification of SON 8 (Kennylands Gymnastics) as a reserve site allocation.

Commentary on the site selection process

7.25 L&Q and its professional advisers raised a series of issues in its representation about the procedure followed to assess potential housing sites as follows:

- the Parish Council have not properly considered SON 26;
- the consultation statement does not address the errors in respect to SON 26;
- the consultation statement does not address the comments made by L&Q and South Oxfordshire District Council ('the Council') pertaining to the allocation of site SON 23; and
- the comments made by L&Q and Sport England pertaining to the allocation of Site SON 15 have not been addressed.

I comment on the first two issues at this point in the report. I will address the third and fourth issues later in the report in the relevant parts.

7.26 L&Q has sought to promote land at Kennylands Road for residential development. A planning application for the development of the site (95 homes) was refused planning permission in 2016. A subsequent appeal was dismissed in 2018. The land is located to the immediate southwest of the allocated housing site in the made Plan (SON 6) to the southwest of Kennylands Road.

7.27 In November 2018 Gallagher Estates submitted details about the same site for consideration as part of the Call for Sites process. It was assessed as part of the wider site selection process.

7.28 In March 2020 L&Q submitted further information in relation to a reduced area for housing development off Kennylands Lane in the form of a linear strip of infill to the immediate south west of the Kennylands Road housing allocation. That representation estimated that a land area of approximately 0.75-1 hectares would be required and would deliver 20-25 dwellings. It also included its own version of the traffic light assessment for the alternative scheme based on the approach which had been adopted earlier by SCPC.

7.29 In its response to the clarification note SCPC commented on the issues raised by L&Q as follows:

'The provisional allocations decided on by the working party were presented to the village at an open day on February 29 2020. SON 26 was not among them. This reflected feedback from a public consultation carried out by the NP working party in November 2019 which found that 12.1% favoured the development of SON 26, and 71.2% opposed it, with the remainder undecided. Both Barton Willmore and Strutt and Parker were invited to provide feedback during the public consultation and to attend the open day but neither participated.'

Further correspondence from Barton Willmore (acting for L&Q Estates, previously Gallagher Homes) was received in March 2020 criticising the methodology used in the

Traffic Lights summary. This letter raised the question of ‘a more modest quantum and extent of development’ within SON 26. But by that time the working party’s proposals on site allocations had already been presented.

Thus, it can be seen that any land promotion on behalf of L&Q Estates, which differed from the site as submitted, occurred after the site assessment process had taken place and therefore was not considered. This approach has been taken with all sites submitted, ensuring a fair and consistent approach’

- 7.30 The representation raises several important matters both in terms of the way in which SCPC assessed the various sites and how it decided to respond to revised proposals as the site selection process developed. SCPC decided to assess the sites in February 2019 as a one-off exercise. It contends that the approach taken was reasonable and provided fairness and consistency.
- 7.31 I have considered this matter very carefully. In the round I am satisfied that SCPC took a reasonable and a responsible approach to this matter. In particular I am satisfied that the consistency issue was an important factor to be considered. In reaching its decision on the initial proposal for the Kennylands site SCPC was entitled to take account of the recent appeal decision on the site. In addition, the information submitted by Gallagher Estates in November 2018 provided little by way of additional information which would overcome the earlier planning application and appeal decisions.
- 7.32 Moreover the March 2020 proposition for a smaller site was significantly different from that submitted in 2018. This reinforces my conclusions on the consistency issue.
- 7.33 I am also satisfied that the approach taken by SCPC takes account of the capacity which a qualifying body (and its volunteers) might reasonably be expected to invest in a site selection process. A clear process was identified and then followed.
- 7.34 This process is then reflected in the way in which SCPC summarised the comments in the Consultation Statement about the site selection process. It concentrated its comments on the sites as originally submitted (in this case by Gallagher Estate). In the round I am satisfied that the Consultation Statement includes information which is both relevant and proportionate to the comments received.

The implications of the allowed appeal in relation to the Little Sparrows development

- 7.35 In June 2021 planning permission was granted on appeal for a hybrid proposal for the development of a continuing care retirement community care village (Use Class C2) of up to 133 units with ancillary communal and care facilities and green space at Little Sparrows (APP/Q3115/W/20/3265861). It consists of two related parts. The first is for a full planning application for 73 assisted living units with ancillary communal and care facilities, gardens, green space, landscaping and car parking areas and residential blocks B1-B4. The second is for an outline application for up to 60 assisted living units with ancillary community space, gardens, green space and landscaping and car parking areas.
- 7.36 The Little Sparrows site is one of the sites which had earlier been assessed for its appropriateness for housing development (SON 24)

- 7.37 SODC made an application to the High Court to review this appeal decision. That application was unsuccessful. The review of the Plan was proceeding whilst the application to the Court was made and SCPC chose not to address the issue in the Plan. In its representation on the Plan SODC suggests that SCPC should consider allocating the appeal site to ensure it counts towards the housing delivery requirement in the Local Plan. In its response to the clarification note SCPC took a similar approach.
- 7.38 I have considered these suggestions very carefully. However, it is not within my remit to recommend that an additional allocation is included in the Plan. The site was not included in either the pre-submission Plan or the submitted version. As such the public and other stakeholders were unable to comment on its details.

The Little Sparrows site and the submission of a revised Plan

- 7.39 During the examination of the Plan SCPC decided to revise the Plan to include the Little Sparrows site as a housing allocation. In effect it concluded that the recent granting of planning permission on appeal had significantly altered the position on housing supply and delivery in the neighbourhood area. The process followed both by SCPC and then during the examination of the Plan is described in paragraphs 3.9 and 3.10 of this report.
- 7.40 In the round, I am satisfied that the proposed revision to the Plan takes a pragmatic approach to this matter. It acknowledges a set of circumstances which did not exist when the housing sites were selected and incorporated into the initial submitted Plan. I am also satisfied that it is appropriate for the Plan to allocate a site for residential development which already benefits from planning permission. Whilst its development appears assured, its allocation will provide a context for any subsequent planning applications which may arise within the Plan period.
- 7.41 I looked at the site when I visited the neighbourhood area. I saw that it was a self-contained parcel of agricultural land with well-defined boundaries. I also saw its relationship both to the Johnson Matthey site (to its north) and to Widmore Lane (to its west). In this context I conclude that the site is well-related to the village in general, and to the retail, commercial and community facilities in Wood Lane in particular. Whilst the principal vehicular access into the site will be off Blounts Court Road, its layout incorporates a pedestrian and cycling access from its western corner directly onto Widmore Lane.
- 7.42 I am also satisfied that the site will be able to deliver new housing in the Plan period. Whilst the examination of the Plan was taking place, various planning applications were submitted to SODC for slight variations to the approved drawings and for the discharge of conditions on the planning permission granted on appeal.
- 7.43 The proposed revisions to the Plan on this matter have been carefully considered. It is entirely appropriate that the site is allocated for the specialist housing included in the proposal which was approved on appeal.
- 7.44 In coming to this decision, I have taken account of the representations made by SODC and by the Chiltern Conservation Board (CCB). The latter comments that CCB understands the revisions which have been made to the Plan and wishes to work with

SCPC to ensure that the delivery of the Little Sparrows site mitigates and prevents any further erosion of the nationally protected landscape which envelops the site

- 7.45 A representation was received during the consultation of the revised Plan from an agent acting on behalf of Inspired Villages, the proposed developers of the Little Sparrows site. It commented as follows:

'The Ecological Report and Map included as appendix 1 and 2 to this letter formed part of the evidence base for the original neighbourhood plan and shows those sites that were surveyed hatched pink. This shows that the Little Sparrows site was not surveyed. Therefore, the inclusion of a wildlife corridor on this site is not supported by evidence and there is no justification for it and should be removed. As part of the application and appeal process the Little Sparrows site was subject to detailed ecological assessments and which found the site to be of limited ecological value. Indeed, at paragraph 128 of the appeal decision the Inspector noted that the appeal site contains habitats of a lower biodiversity value, which are common and widespread throughout the District. The appeal scheme provides for a net increase in biodiversity across the site, specifically an increase of 51% for the detailed element. Furthermore, the planning permission for a community care retirement village on SON24 includes suitable ecological mitigation and planning conditions that requires compliance with this mitigation. Any future applications (in relation to the outline element of the hybrid permission granted via appeal) would be subject to the same scrutiny in terms of assessments, consultation with the Local Planning Authority and planning conditions could be imposed to secure suitable mitigation, if required.'

The representation concludes by commenting that the wildlife corridor shown on Map 4.4 that bisects the Little Sparrows site should be removed as it is not supported by evidence and the site has been subject to extensive assessment and surveys, which found the site to be of limited value.

- 7.46 Taking account of all the relevant information I recommend that the wildlife corridor which bisects the Little Sparrows site is deleted from Map 4.4.
- 7.47 In coming to the broader conclusion on the proposed allocation of the Little Sparrows site I have also taken account of the representation made by L&Q to the revised Plan. I am satisfied that there is a clear distinction between the circumstances in which SCPC decided not to allocate the Kennylands Road site in the Plan as initially submitted and to allocate the Little Sparrows site for residential development in the revised Plan. In the case of the former, the site initially proposed by L&Q had been refused planning permission (and dismissed on appeal). The subsequent proposed smaller site was not submitted in accordance with SCPC's timetable for the consideration of potential allocations in the Plan. In the case of the latter, the site had been considered by SCPC and not included in the Plan as initially submitted whilst the appeal decision was being considered. Nevertheless, as paragraph 7.37 of this report has already commented, SCPC has now taken a different position given that SODC's challenge to the appeal decision was unsuccessful.

- 7.48 In all the circumstances I am satisfied that it would be appropriate to allocate the Little Sparrows as a housing site. I am also satisfied that this approach meets the basic conditions.
- 7.49 SCPC has also proposed to change the initial commentary about the site in the earlier part of the Plan. I recommend modifications to part of this revised text so that it explains the revised context in a neutral way.
- 7.50 The allocation of the Little Sparrows site for housing purposes in the Plan will ensure that the strategic minimum residential requirement for the neighbourhood area as identified in the Local Plan has been met. Nevertheless, the strategic requirement in Policy H4 of the Local Plan is expressed as a minimum figure. As such it would not be inappropriate for the Plan to deliver a higher figure. In these circumstances I consider the ongoing need for the proposed revised allocated sites in the Plan and the proposed reserve sites in the following sections of the report.

SON 15 (Chiltern Edge Top)

- 7.51 The site was one of the allocated sites in the made Plan. As proposed in the submitted Plan it is 2.5-hectare in size (2.1 ha for built development and 0.4ha for drainage incorporated into the landscaping/amenity area) and forms part the playing fields to the east, south-east and south of Chiltern Edge School (now Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge). It lies at the western edge of the village and to the south of Reade's Lane. The site was proposed to deliver 37 dwellings in the made Plan. The submitted Plan proposes that the slightly extended site would deliver 50 homes
- 7.52 I sought clarification from SCPC about the delivery of this and other sites within the Plan period. In a letter attached to SCPC's response Maiden Erlegh Trust (MET) and Deanfield Homes Ltd made the following comments:

'The existing Sonning Common NDP (made October 2016) allocated land at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School (defined as 'Chiltern Edge Top' (site SON 15a)) – comprising the majority of site SON15 – for residential development in order to help enable the school to achieve funds to deliver urgently needed improvements to its infrastructure and facilities. This followed formal Government approval from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for the disposal of site SON15a in March 2016.

In 2018, MET took over the running of the School and has since been working to progress the residential development proposals and resulting sports mitigation. This has included positive detailed pre-application discussions and engagement with South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), Sport England, SCPC and the local community through several meetings and consultation events (including public exhibitions in September 2019 and March 2022), informed by detailed design and technical assessment work.

Through engagement with SCPC, it was agreed that the allocated site area (SON15a) should be extended (forming site SON15) to enable sustainable drainage to be accommodated in a lower part of the School site, as well as thereby increasing the capacity of the site to accommodate 50 units (located within the existing allocated site

area). This process is explained in the NDP Review (submission version, 2022) and is supported.

Subsequently further pre-application discussions were held with SODC and Sport England in 2020 and 2021 which confirmed the necessary sports mitigation required. MET has subsequently been continuing to positively progress the sports mitigation proposals, including via further engagement with SCPC and the local community, together with an appointed consultant team.

In December 2021, following positive pre-application feedback and marketing of the site, MET exchanged contracts with Deanfield Homes, who were appointed as MET's chosen development partner to work up and progress plans for residential development at the site and submit a planning application. Deanfield Homes is an experienced housebuilder specialising in small to medium sized residential developments, including at other sites in Oxfordshire and adjoining counties. Deanfield is committed and contractually obliged to deliver new homes at site SON15.

A detailed planning application for 50 units on site SON15, informed by further technical assessment and accompanied by detailed plans, has subsequently been prepared by an appointed consultant team and is expected to be submitted to SODC in May 2022. Alongside this application, a separate detailed planning application for the proposed sports mitigation is also expected to be submitted to SODC in May 2022. The two applications have been prepared and coordinated together between MET and Deanfield Homes. An application for the disposal of the additional land included within the revised draft allocation (SON15) was submitted to the ESFA in July 2021 and is progressing well towards a positive determination. Subject to receipt of full planning permission, Deanfield Homes aims to start on site in 2023 and to complete development by the end of 2025, within the NDP Review Plan period.'

- 7.53 A planning application for 50 homes on the site was submitted on 13 June 2022 (22/S2180/FUL). It includes a delivery of 40% affordable housing.
- 7.54 I have considered this matter very carefully. Based on the available evidence, I am satisfied that the allocation of the site for housing development in the Plan is entirely appropriate. I have reached this conclusion for three principal reasons. The first is that it is available for development and its delivery in the Plan period is being managed in a positive and robust fashion. The second is that the proposal is a refinement of the allocated site in the 'made' Plan. The third is that the proposed development of the site as set out in the recent planning application is policy-compliant regarding the much-needed requirement for affordable housing in the parish.
- 7.55 L&Q raise issues about the way in which SCPC addressed concerns which it raised about the site selection process. However, I am satisfied that the impact on AONB had already been assessed in the 'made' Plan and the increase in the site area is both minimal and would provide sustainable drainage facilities for the wider site.
- 7.56 In all the circumstances I am satisfied that the allocated site should remain in the Plan. It has been promoted and refined in a positive fashion and there is a high degree of assurance about its timely delivery.

SON 23 (Johnson Matthey car park)

- 7.57 This site is proposed as a reserve site. It is 0.7 hectare in size and is located on the eastern edge of the village at the junction between Widmore Lane and Blounts Court Road. It is owned by Johnson Matthey, a sustainable technologies company. The company's research and development centre is located immediately opposite the proposed site on Blounts Court Road. The site is used as the company's car park. It is within the Chilterns AONB. The site is to the immediate north of the Little Sparrows site.
- 7.58 The car park's vehicle access is onto Widmore Lane. The Plan comments that this would remain the sole vehicle access in the event of the site being developed for housing. There is also a pedestrian access onto Blounts Court Road
- 7.59 The site came out consistently as the most favoured site in the site selection process. The site was also considered suitable for development in the landscape assessment carried out by Terra Firma.
- 7.60 I looked at the site carefully as part of the visit. The Plan provides very limited detail on the way in which its release would be triggered and its ability to be delivered within the Plan period. It comments that 'there have been extensive discussions between representatives of the NDP Revision working party and Johnson Matthey. It has been emphasised from the start that the working party would want to see any development on such a small site being weighted towards to smaller two- and three-bedroom homes. The company's representatives have been fully supportive of that approach.'
- 7.61 In its response to the clarification note SCPC commented that:
- 'The company have had extensive contacts with SODC; these have not as yet resulted in a planning application. The development of the existing car park for housing would be contingent on permission being given for a new car park on the other side of the road. While there is no way to know how the planning process will turn out, we are assured that JM remain committed to this plan, which they regard as critical to the future success of a company which is by far the biggest employer in the area. Their plan is strongly supported by Sonning Common parish council (and by Rotherfield Peppard parish council, in whose area the existing company site is located), and in all the circumstances we feel that allocating it as a reserve site – with the implication that it may well not come forward for some time – is entirely justified.'*
- 7.62 I have also taken account of the representation made by Johnson Matthey on the submitted Plan together with its earlier comments on the pre-submission Plan as follows:
- 'SON23 is deliverable as it is intended that the existing car park site is to become surplus to requirement for JM and therefore could be released from its current staff car parking use and used for residential development as effective re-use of a previously developed site to meet local housing needs. The site will become available once planning permission is achieved for the relocation of the car park as part of the customer innovation centre development proposals. JM therefore continue to promote the land to the west of the existing JM site for R&D related uses including a*

replacement car park as mentioned earlier in this letter to demonstrate how the replacement parking will be delivered within the Neighbourhood Plan. As the Neighbourhood Plan Group are aware JM are proposing to relocate the existing staff car park to the north side of Blounts Court Road alongside the new Customer Innovation Centre as part of JM's future investment into the Sonning Common site. The proposals have been submitted to SODC (reference P20/S2161/FUL) and are awaiting determination.'

- 7.63 The planning application for the demolition of existing restaurant building and development of a new customer innovation centre within the existing Johnson Matthey site plus associated arrivals space, landscaping, access, servicing area and car parking. (P20/S2161/FUL) was withdrawn in May 2022
- 7.64 I have considered the potential development of the reserve site very carefully. On the one hand, it has been promoted as part of an emerging proposal for the consolidation and future use of the Johnson Matthey site. It offers the potential to make a brownfield site available for development on the edge of the village. On the other hand, the most recent planning application on the adjacent employment site was withdrawn. Similarly, there are a range of design and layout issues which remain to be resolved including the site's location in the AONB.
- 7.65 On the balance of the evidence, I am not satisfied that the allocation of the site as a reserve site meets the basic conditions. Its potential effect on the AONB has not been assessed in any significant detail. In addition, there is no assurance around its eventual release or the extent to which its delivery would be necessary in statistical terms. As such I recommend that it is deleted from the Plan. I also recommend consequential modifications to the supporting text and maps in this part of the Plan and in the part of the Environment section which refers to this site.
- 7.66 The future need for reserve sites and/or the use of the site could be considered in any review or update of the Plan
- 7.67 I have also taken account of the comments made by L&Q in relation to the promotion of this site as a reserve site in the Plan. Given the recommendation which I have made I do not make any comments on its details.

SON 8 (Kennylands Gymnastics)

- 7.68 The site is existing gymnastics building and ancillary car parking area off Bird Wood Court.
- 7.69 The submitted Plan proposes that it is retained as a reserve site as it was in the made Plan where it was allocated for fourteen homes. Revised density guidelines from SODC indicate a greater number in the event of it being developed. Extended discussions were held with the owners of this site and their representatives about its possible allocation for assisted living accommodation.
- 7.70 The Plan provides very limited detail on the way in which its release would be triggered and its ability to be delivered within the Plan period. It comments that 'extended discussions were held with the owners of this site and their representatives about its

possible allocation for assisted living accommodation. These discussions were overtaken by the Little Sparrows planning inquiry decision, which made any proposal for an additional assisted living development in Sonning Common extremely questionable. The situation is further complicated by covenants requiring that it be used for recreation and amenity purposes only'. This does little to provide assurance

7.71 In its response to the clarification note SCPC commented that:

'(The reserve site) was originally intended as an allocation for assisted living apartments, but that was overtaken by the Little Sparrows application. Because of the existence of long-standing restrictive covenants and the adoption of policy CF4 in the Local Plan, the development of the site for any form of housing has been regarded as dependent on the owners being able to secure an alternative site for the gym. The trigger for the release of the whole site for development would be the securing of an alternative location for the gym – although in the original NP it was envisaged that it might be developed in two phases, with the green space to the north of the gym being built on first.'

7.72 On the balance of the evidence, I am not satisfied that the allocation of the site as a reserve site meets the basic conditions. There is no assurance around its eventual release or the extent to which its delivery would be necessary in statistical terms. As such I recommend that it is deleted from the Plan.

7.73 The future need for reserve sites and/or the use of the site could be considered in any review or update of the Plan.

In Policy RH1 delete the separate references to SON 23 and SON 8.

In Part Five of the Plan:

Delete SON 23

Delete the associated supporting text and maps

Delete SON 8

Delete the associated supporting text and maps

In the supporting text on Little Sparrows (which runs from pages 13-14) replace the final three sentences with: 'Planning permission was refused in June 2020. A subsequent appeal was allowed in June 2021. In these circumstances the Parish Council has reconsidered the matter. The granting of planning permission means that the site is deliverable and is considered to contribute to the overall housing requirement for Sonning Common.'

Delete the wildlife corridor shown on Map 4.4. which bisects the Little Sparrows site.

In the Environment Section delete the seventh paragraph of supporting text.

Policy RH2 House Sizes (Modified)

- 7.74 The policy offers support to proposals for one-, two- and three-bedroom homes – and to proposals that meet a specialist need such as assisted living accommodation.
- 7.75 The policy takes a positive approach to this matter. I recommend a series of modifications so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF. Otherwise, it meets the basic conditions.

Replace the policy with: ‘Development proposals for one-, two- and three-bedroom homes and proposals that meet a specialist need such as assisted living accommodation will be supported’

Policy RH3 Infill development (Modified)

- 7.76 This policy comments about development proposals for infill development. It sets out the description of infill development from the Local Plan. It then offers support to infill development subject to a series of criteria.
- 7.77 In general terms the policy meets the basic conditions. However, I recommend that the elements of supporting text in the policy are deleted and relocated into extended supporting text. I also recommend that the fifth criterion is split into two separate criteria. This will correspond with the very different matters which they address. Such an approach will bring the clarity required by the NPPF.

Replace the opening element of the policy with:

‘Proposals for infill development will be supported where they meet the following criteria:’

Replace criterion e) with: ‘pollution, contamination or the use of/or storage of hazardous substances.’

Add a further criterion to read: ‘f) external lighting.’

Immediately before the final paragraph in the support text (after the RH policies) add:

‘Policy RH3 sets out the Plan’s approach to infill development. It follows the approach taken in the adopted Local Plan. Infill development is defined as the filling of a small gap in an otherwise continuous built-up frontage or on other sites within settlements where the site is closely surrounded by buildings. The scale of infill development should be appropriate to its location.’

Policy RH4 Garden Spacing (New)

- 7.78 This policy seeks to retain the attractive and open way in which house plots are arranged in the parish. It comments that new developments with gardens backing on to or beside existing gardens should, wherever possible, share boundaries with those gardens so that there is no gap between the two garden areas. The supporting text comments about the circumstances which have arisen since the Plan was made to generate the need for this policy.

- 7.79 In general terms I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions and addresses a distinctive local matter. I recommend that the policy is modified so that the elements of supporting text are removed. They are already adequately captured in the existing text. I also recommend that 'possible' is replaced by 'practicable'. This highlights that in some cases, and based in site specific circumstances, the ambition of the policy will not be capable of delivery.

Replace the policy with: 'New developments with gardens backing on to or beside existing gardens should, wherever practicable, share boundaries with the adjacent gardens.'

Policy RH5 Affordable Housing (New)

- 7.80 This policy seeks to respond both to the adoption of the Local Plan and the recent introduction of national policy on First Homes. It comments that the apportionment of affordable housing tenure should be as follows:

- First Homes 25%
- Social Rent 35%
- Affordable Rent 25%
- Other routes to affordable home ownership 15%

- 7.81 The policy supplements the approach taken in the adopted Local Plan and responds positively to the agenda in relation to First Homes. It meets the basic conditions

Policy RD1 Design (Modified)

- 7.82 This policy seeks to respond to the design approach in the most recent version of the NPPF. It comments that all new development should demonstrate good quality design and achieve the highest possible standards of energy efficiency and water conservation, including the provision of electric vehicle charging points and solar panels. It also comments that development must respect the scale and appearance of existing buildings responding to and integrating with the surroundings and landscape context.

- 7.83 The policy takes a positive approach to this important matter. I recommend a series of detailed modifications to the policy to take account of comments from SODC. They will ensure that the policy can operate in a complementary way to the relevant policies in the adopted Local Plan.

At the beginning of the policy insert 'As appropriate to their scale, nature and location'

Insert 'as set out in the development plan' after '...standards of energy efficiency and water conservation'.

Policy RD2 Building Heights (Unchanged)

- 7.84 This policy remains unchanged from the equivalent policy in the made Plan.

- 7.85 There have been no material changes to national or local policies which would cause this policy no longer to meet the basic conditions.

Policy RD3 Village Character (New)

- 7.86 This policy complements the approach taken in Policies RD1 and RD2. In this case, it relates to village character. It comments specifically that development proposals should demonstrate how the design respects the existing character of the village, having regard to the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2013), Sonning Common Character Assessment and Design Statement (2013), South Oxfordshire Design Guide and the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide.

- 7.87 The policy takes a positive approach to Section 12 of the NPPF. It helpfully relies on existing published documents. It meets the basic conditions.

Policy RD4 Street scene (New)

- 7.88 This policy supplements the more general approach taken in Policy RD3. It comments that proposals for new homes in existing residential streets should have regard to and relate to established plot widths, particularly where they shape the rhythm of the street scene and its architecture.

- 7.89 As with Policy RD4, this policy takes a positive approach to Section 12 of the NPPF. It helpfully relies on existing published documents. It meets the basic conditions.

Policy RVC1 Village Centre – Uses (Modified)

- 7.90 The policy proposes an amendment of the equivalent policy in the made Plan. It seeks to take account of the detailed uses classes introduced in the 2021 version of the Use Classes Order. It comments that within the designated village centre proposals for new or extended premises for ‘centre uses’ – retail, leisure and ground floor offices – will be supported where they conform with other policies in the development plan. I recommend that the policy is modified to ensure its simplicity and to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. Otherwise, it meets the basic conditions.

Replace the policy with: ‘Within the designated village centre (as shown on the policies map) proposals for new or extended premises for retail, leisure and ground floor offices will be supported.’

Policy RVC2 Village Centre – Traffic (New)

- 7.91 This policy comments that proposals to improve traffic flow and access and to ease parking problems will be supported, provided they conform with other policies in the development plan and with Oxfordshire County Council standards.

- 7.92 The supporting text provides a context for the policy. In the context of the vitality and attractiveness of the village centre, it comments that:

'But that very success brings problems. The one public car park, behind the Co-op, has 32 spaces. When the village hall is being intensively used – for instance for the monthly markets, exercise classes, parties and other functions – it tends to be full. But at off-peak times there are usually spaces available. However, many shoppers in the village centre prefer not to find out if there is a free space in the car park, and park in Wood Lane – often illegally, often with a complete disregard for the safety and convenience of others.'

- 7.93 The policy is helpfully general in nature. It also overlaps with one of the Infrastructure Projects listed in Section 7 of the Plan. Its approach meets the basic conditions in general terms. I recommend a modification to the detailed wording of the policy so that it acknowledges that some general improvement works within the public highway would benefit from permitted development rights.

At the beginning of the policy add: 'Insofar as planning permission is required'

Policy RVC3 Village Centre – Electric Charging Points (New)

- 7.94 This policy offers support to proposals to provide electric vehicle charging points will be supported. It meets the basic conditions.

Policy RE1a Existing employment areas (New)

- 7.95 This policy seeks to promote economic prosperity in the parish. It comments that the retention of the existing employment sites and proposals to establish new employment sites will be supported provided they conform with other policies in the development plan.

- 7.96 The policy takes a positive approach towards this important aspect of national planning policy. The retention of existing employment uses will help to retain the overall sustainability of the parish.

- 7.97 I recommend that the wording is refined so that it more clearly expresses its intentions and brings the clarity required by the NPPF. Otherwise, it meets the basic conditions.

Replace the policy with: 'Proposals to retain and consolidate existing employment sites and to establish new employment sites will be supported where they conform with other policies in the development plan'

Policy RE1b Kidby's Yard (Modified)

- 7.98 This policy relates to the existing employment uses at Kidby's Yard. It has two related parts. The first comments that proposals related to the expansion or more intense use of the small business park known as Kidby's Yard will be supported provided they conform with other policies in the development plan. The second comments that proposals which will result in a change of use of this site to non-employment uses will not be supported unless a series of criteria are met. The second part of the policy properly takes account of viability issues and a potential lack of interest in any marketing which may take place on the site for alternative purposes.

- 7.99 The policy will help to complement the wider effect of Policy RE1a. It has also been carefully-crafted to take account of the circumstances of the use of the existing site. I recommend that an element of supporting text in the policy is deleted and repositioned into extended supporting text. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions.

In iii) delete the final sentence.

At the end of the second paragraph of supporting text add: 'Policy RE1b comments about the way in which proposals for alternative uses on the site would be considered. The third criteria identifies that such proposal may have the ability to improve the living conditions of adjacent residential properties. As part of any such proposals the District Council will consider whether there is a realistic prospect of mitigating the detrimental effects of continuing employment use.'

Policy RCSH1 Public Services (Modified)

- 7.100 The policy comments that development proposals will be supported which enhance local public services, community services and facilities such as the library, the Village Hall, the health centre and dental surgery and the bus service.
- 7.101 The approach taken is general in nature. Nevertheless, it will assist significantly in promoting the overall sustainability of the village. It meets the basic conditions.

Policy RCSH2 Schools (Modified)

- 7.102 The policy comments that proposals to enhance, update and improve Sonning Common Primary School and Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge Academy will be supported.
- 7.103 The approach taken is general in nature. Nevertheless, it will assist significantly in promoting the overall sustainability and vibrancy of the village. It meets the basic conditions.

Policy RCSH3 Memorial Park (New)

- 7.104 This policy comments that development proposals on the Memorial Park for recreation and sports uses will be supported provided they conform with other policies in the development plan.
- 7.105 I recommend that the policy is modified so that it more clearly relates to proposals for new or enhanced recreation and sports uses on the Memorial Park. This would bring the clarity required by the NPPF and avoid unintended consequences.

Replace the policy with: 'Development proposals for new or enhanced recreation and sports uses on the Memorial Park will be supported'

Policy RTP1 Parking (New)

- 7.106 This policy comments that proposals to improve and rationalise parking provisions will be supported provided they conform with other policies in the development plan and with Oxfordshire County Council parking standards. I recommend a modification to the detailed wording of the policy so that it acknowledges that some general improvement works within the public highway would benefit from permitted development rights.

Replace the policy with: ‘Insofar as planning permission is required, proposals to improve and rationalise parking provisions will be supported where they otherwise conform with Oxfordshire County Council’s parking standards’

Policy RTP2 Footpaths and cycleways (Unchanged)

- 7.107 This policy remains unchanged from the equivalent policy in the made Plan.
- 7.108 There have been no material changes to national or local policies which would cause this policy no longer to meet the basic conditions.

Policy RTP3 Road Safety (New)

- 7.109 This policy seeks to improve road safety condition by ensuring that new development should not have a detrimental impact on road safety including that of pedestrians, cyclists, and other road users. It also comments that planning decisions should take account of a range of matters.
- 7.110 The policy is well-intentioned. However, I recommend a series of recommended modifications to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. In particular I recommend that the first part of the policy is modified so that its various components better relate one to the other.

Replace the opening part of the policy with: ‘New development proposal should not have an unacceptable impact on road safety including that of pedestrians, cyclists and other road users. In particular, proposals should demonstrate the way in which they would address their impacts on:’

Replace the final part of the policy with: ‘Any such development proposals should not result in an unacceptable impact on noise levels or the introduction of urban features which would not relate to the character and appearance of the village.’

Policy RENV1 Green Infrastructure (Modified)

- 7.111 This policy loosely comments about green infrastructure. As submitted, the wording used does not generate a policy which SODC could apply to development proposals within the Plan period. In its response to the clarification note, SCPC commented about the purposes of the policy. It advised that Map 4.4 illustrates the network of wildlife corridors around the village which were identified in a survey carried out in 2014. The intention of this policy is to make it possible to urge developers to include the creation

of such corridors or other features (tree planting, hedging etc) in their plans to enhance this connectivity and overall diversity. I was also advised that the SCPC see the proposed approach as following on from the Plan's objective to conserve and enhance the countryside and open spaces.

- 7.112 I recommend modifications to the policy to reflect this explanation and overall intentions.

Replace the policy with: 'Development proposals which seek to improve the connectivity of green infrastructure and enhance biodiversity will be supported.'

Policy RENV2 Locally valued landscapes (Modified)

- 7.113 This policy comments that development proposals which do not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the locally valued landscape setting of the village and which deliver the key duties of conservation and enhancement of the special qualities of the AONB will be supported.

- 7.114 In general terms the policy supplements the approach taken in national and local policies. I recommend a detailed modification to take account of the comments made by the Chilterns Conservation Board. They highlight both the setting within the AONB (nationally protected) and that element outside the AONB (locally valued as identified within the scope of the NPPF). Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions.

Insert 'and nationally after 'locally'

Policy RENV3 Trees and hedgerows (Modified)

- 7.115 This policy celebrates the importance of natural vegetation to the parish. It comments that development proposals should avoid the unnecessary loss of mature and veteran trees, hedgerows, orchards, or wildlife corridors. It also comments that developments should promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of wildlife priority habitat and the protection and recovery of priority species. Finally, it comments that biodiversity features should be incorporated in and around new developments wherever possible.

- 7.116 The policy responds well to this important element of the natural environment. I recommend that the second sentence of the policy is modified so that more clearly offers support to the type of proposals indicated. In the third sentence, I recommend that 'possible' is replaced with 'practicable'. It will bring the clarity required by the NPPF and more clearly relate to site-specific circumstances. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions.

Replace the second sentence of the policy with: 'Proposals which promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of wildlife priority habitat and the protection and recovery of priority species will be supported.'

In the third sentence of the policy replace 'possible' with 'practicable'

Policy RENV4 Landscaping (Modified)

- 7.117 This policy sets out the Plan's approach towards landscaping. It comments that new developments which include the provision of trees, shrubs and hedging in keeping with local character will be supported. It also requires that development proposals should be appropriately landscaped.
- 7.118 As submitted, the policy could have unintended consequences. As such, I recommend a modification to ensure that it underpins the approach taken in the wider development plan.

Insert 'which are in accordance with other development plan policies and' between 'development' and 'which'

Policy RENV5 Climate change (New)

- 7.119 This proposed new policy seeks to respond to the contents of Section 16 of the NPPF. This part of national policy has been significantly updated since the Plan was initially made. The policy comments that developments which demonstrate a commitment to mitigating climate change through energy and water efficiency, including use of renewable energy and adoption of sustainable drainage systems will be supported.
- 7.120 The policy is both supportive and non-prescriptive. I recommend that it is modified so that it can be applied on a proportionate basis to the proposal concerned. Otherwise, it meets the basic conditions.

Replace the policy with: 'As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, new developments should mitigate climate change through energy and water efficiency and the use of renewable energy and adoption of sustainable drainage systems'

Policy RDE1 Pre-application services (New)

- 7.121 This policy proposes that developers can have pre-application discussions including the opportunity to present proposals to the Parish Council.
- 7.122 Pre-application advice can be very helpful in securing good outcomes and efficient decision-making. It is actively promoted in the NPPF. I have considered the intention of the policy very carefully together with SCPC's response to the clarification note. On the balance of the information, I recommend that the policy is deleted from the Plan. I have reached this conclusion for three reasons. The first is that the policy is an expression of intent about a process rather than a policy. The second is that the issue is already addressed in national policy and local protocols and there is no need for a neighbourhood plan to repeat this approach. The third is that pre-application discussions between developers would largely be channelled through SODC in its capacity as the local planning authority. This process has remained unaffected by the 'made' Plan and will continue to apply within the proposed Plan period.

7.123 The associated supporting text is general in nature. As such I am satisfied that it can remain in the Plan without a policy to which it would be directly associated.

Delete the policy

Infrastructure Projects

7.124 The Plan includes a package of Infrastructure Projects. They are non-land use issues which have naturally arisen during the plan-preparation stage. They are included in a separate part of the Plan (Section 7) as advised by national policy. Their identification is indicated as a focus for the application of CIL and Section 106 monies which may be applied in the parish.

7.125 The various Projects are as follows:

- A community facility for Memorial Park;
- Village centre enhancement including parking;
- Cycle pathway from Sonning Common to Reading;
- Footpath from Memorial Park to the skate park (including land);
- Widmore Pond improvements; and
- Regeneration and enhancement of Old Copse Wood.

7.126 The Projects have been well-developed. They are distinctive to the neighbourhood area. In some cases, their delivery has the potential to complement the land use policies.

Other matters - General

7.127 This report has recommended a series of modifications both to the policies and to the text in the submitted Plan. Where consequential changes to the text are required directly as a result of my recommended modification to the policy concerned, I have highlighted them in this report. However other changes to the general text may be required elsewhere in the Plan as a result of the recommended modifications to the policies. It will be appropriate for SODC and SCPC to have the flexibility to make any necessary consequential changes to the general text. I recommend accordingly.

Modification of general text (where necessary) to achieve consistency with the modified policies.

Other Matters – Specific

7.128 SODC has raised a series of helpful comments on the Plan. Where they directly relate to policies they have been addressed elsewhere in the report.

7.129 In addition I recommend the following general modifications to the Plan to ensure that it meets the basic conditions as follows:

Page 24 - Paragraph 177 of the NPPF does not refer to the setting of the AONB. As such I recommend that the relevant sentence in the second paragraph is replaced with:

'The settlement of Sonning Common is bounded on most sides by the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The village also is well provided with trees and has a distinctly rural character.'

Page 27 - The commentary about Little Sparrows is both dated and potentially misleading. I recommend that the issue is tackled in a more neutral and factual way. In any event I have recommended modifications elsewhere in the Plan to address the implications of the recent grant of planning permission on the site.

Replace the final two sentences on page 27 with: 'This has left an outstanding requirement of 96 homes to be considered in the revised Plan and is addressed in Policy RH1. The granting of planning permission on appeal for the 133 extra care apartments on the Little Sparrows site is considered in the wider Plan.'

Page 41 - Map 4.4 incorrectly shows the Chilterns AONB boundary on the northeast side of Sonning Common, around Widmore Pond and southwest of Spring Wood.

Correct the AONB boundaries on Map 4.4

Other Matters – Site Specific

- 7.130 The Plan comments loosely about the ongoing designation of SON 1 (Old Copse Field) as Local Green Space.
- 7.131 I am satisfied that circumstances have not changed on the site since the Plan was made. I walked along the footpath through the field as part of the visit and saw several others enjoying its relaxing environment. In reaching this conclusion I have taken account of the representation made by Investfront Limited.
- 7.132 The Plan should be clearer in the way in which it safeguards the land as Local Green Space. Its identification as a LGS in the allocations section of the Plan is confusing. As such I recommend that the site is identified as a LGS in a separate policy in the main body of the Plan with associated supporting text. Nevertheless, the approach taken to the site remains unaffected.

Delete the reference to SON 1 in the 'Retained Allocations Section and Map 5.3

Insert a new policy and supporting text in Environment section of the plan to read:

Policy RENV6 – The plan designates land at Old Copse Field (as shown on Map insert number) as local green space. Development proposals on the site will only supported in very special circumstances.

Reposition Map 5.3 into the Environment section (and renumber this map as required together with other maps elsewhere in the Plan which will arise as a consequence of this change in plan numbering)

After the sixth paragraph of supporting text add an additional paragraph to read:

'The review of the Plan continues to designate land at Old Copse Field as local green space. This approach carries forward the designation made in the 2016 NDP. The detailed case was set out there on pages 71-2 and in the view of the current working party remains compelling. In the context of the review of the Plan it is treated as a separate policy (RENV6) rather than as an outcome of a wider appraisal of a sites for other purposes.'

Other Matters – Housing Delivery

- 7.133 The recommended modifications in this report in relation to housing delivery have significant implications on the contents of Parts Two and Five of the Plan and on Policy RH1 and the associated supporting text relating to the RH policies. I recommend that the Plan is modified in a factual way accordingly

Modify the factual contents of Parts Two and Five of the Plan and Policy RH1 and the associated supporting text relating to the RH policies to reflect the recommended modifications to Policy RH1 (and the proposed allocations)

Monitoring and Review

- 7.134 The Plan acknowledges the importance of keeping the Plan relevant and up-to-date. The current review is an excellent response to this matter.
- 7.135 However the Plan is silent on the potential need for a further review of the Plan. This could arise as a result of changes in national or local planning policy. Similarly, it could arise from the inability of committed or allocated housing sites to deliver the number of new homes as required for the parish in the adopted Local Plan. In this context I recommend the inclusion of an additional section in the Plan to address this important matter

Add a new section to the Plan to read as follows:

'Part Seven – Monitoring and Review

The Sonning Common Plan will run concurrently with the current South Oxfordshire Local Plan and apply until March 2035. It is, however, acknowledged that the Plan is a response to the needs and aspirations of the local community at the time of making and will need monitoring and review to ensure continuing relevance and delivery.

The Parish Council, will remain as the designated body responsible for maintaining and periodically reviewing the Plan should the needs and aspirations of the community require. Similarly, this requirement would arise following any significant changes to the Local Plan.

Housing delivery is a particularly important component of the Plan. In this context the Parish Council will monitor the delivery of the housing allocations in the Plan. If delivery is unlikely to proceed to meet the number of dwellings set out in Policy RH1, the Parish Council will consider a review of the Plan to identify the extent to which delivery is not proceeding and/or to explore the allocation of alternative sites to meet any shortfall.

The Parish Council will assess the effectiveness of the Plan against national planning policy. It will also assess the ongoing effectiveness of the Plan against any changes which may arise in national planning policy. Where necessary it will consider undertaking either a full or a partial review of the Plan.'

8 Summary and Conclusions

Summary

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2035. It is distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community.
- 8.2 Following the independent examination of the Plan, I have concluded that the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan Review (as revised during the examination) meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.

Conclusion

- 8.3 On the basis of the findings in this report, I recommend to South Oxfordshire District Council that subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan Review should proceed to referendum.

Referendum Area

- 8.4 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the Plan area. In my view, the neighbourhood area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved by South Oxfordshire District Council on 25 October 2013.
- 8.5 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth and efficient manner.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
30 November 2022