

LOCAL CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

1. Purpose of Character Assessment

This document is intended as an adjunct to the Vale of White Horse Design Guide (2014). It applies the planning principles outlined in the Design Guide specifically to Wantage Parish and supports the Neighbourhood Plan Policies in their intent to encourage future planners and developers to build on the town's strengths, while avoiding repetition of past planning mistakes. It identifies:

- The history, topography and geology of the town and its natural environs;
- The design strengths and weaknesses of the built and green environments in the town (as identified by the 2014 Residents' Survey and Stakeholder Workshops);
- The visual character of the town's different neighbourhoods;
- The linkages between these neighbourhoods.

Appendix 1 gives a detailed summary of the distinctive features of the town's different areas.

Appendix 2 is a map showing the main discrete character areas and their linkages.

Green infrastructure and transport linkages are not covered in detail here (see relevant surveys).

2. History, Topography and Geology

Now the second largest settlement in the Vale, Wantage was originally a small Roman settlement. The town's sense of human history is enhanced by the evidence in the surrounding landscape for medieval and earlier settlement and land use, from ridge-and-furrow to iron-age hill forts and roman villas, to the rich vernacular architecture of Wantage, based on brick works in the local area. Wantage has changed and expanded dramatically over the last two centuries, particularly with the arrival of the canal and railway and, in recent years, with the redevelopment of parts of the town centre.

Wantage lies in the shadow of the north of the Down's scarp slope, which results in periodic low rain-fall. The town's topography differs deceptively and distinctively, with elevated parts relatively exposed to strong south-westerly winds and low-lying areas comparatively milder, but susceptible to frost pockets. These characteristics make for slow plant establishment in some areas.

The town is situated in the Midvale Ridge National Character Area (NCA) which provides a wide range of benefits to society. These are derived from the natural attributes and human cultural processes specific to this area.

Much of the ridge is underlain by a minor aquifer, and groundwater is important for supplying the fens and flushes which are notable features of the area. The rivers and groundwater within the NCA are not deemed to be over-abstracted, although the Thames catchment area as a whole is in deficit, due to the shortage of supply for London in dry years. Springs issue at the foot of escarpments. Along the northern escarpment of the North Berkshire Downs, the most numerous springs emit from Upper Greensand west of Letcombe Basset, while the largest arise in the Lower Chalk east of Letcombe Basset. The original settlement followed the natural lines of Letcombe Brook from south

to north and the spring line running from the south-west to the north-east, from Childrey towards Harwell.

Letcombe Brook is a very rare example of a chalk stream and hence of exceptional local and global ecological significance. As well as being centrally important to the natural landscape of Wantage, the Brook has been, and continues to be, a major force in shaping and facilitating human activity: in the past, it provided water for wool processing, sack-making, the breweries and the tanneries (at their height, the largest in England) and powered the town's mills; it continues to be an essential source of fresh water for the district and absorbs flood water from its environs.

The entire area of the Midvale Ridge is within a nitrate vulnerable zone designated to protect groundwater and surface water for public water supply. The Midvale Ridge supports a mixed pastoral and arable (mostly cereals and oil seed rape) farming system. It has historically been considered a good grain-growing area and today cereals are still the main arable produce. The sheep farming that once supported the Wantage wool and tanning industries is still in evidence, but is now primarily for meat. The town enjoys good-quality greensand soils.

Although the National Character Area is surrounded by the Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA and has many links with it, it maintains its own character. Its elevation allows wide views across the flatter surrounding countryside to the hills of the North Wessex Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the South.

3. Overview – Main Assets & Strengths

Wantage's most famous recent resident, John Betjeman, wrote numerous hymns to the beauty of the town and its surroundings, and the Residents' Survey provided strong evidence that the town's open, rural setting remains a key attraction for both new and native residents. From the town centre, a short walk in almost any direction still leads to open countryside. The Letcombe Brook corridor and its associated green spaces (principally Betjeman Millennium Park, the Ham and Willow Walk) form a wooded backbone to the town. They are havens for wildlife, crucial pedestrian linkages and leisure facilities for both residents and visitors. Other important communal spaces with a green character in the town are the Memorial Recreation Ground, the Cemeteries and Humber Ditch.

Central Wantage and Charlton Village are distinguished by their fine collections of historic buildings, which have evolved through time, in response to social change and fashion. Though diverse in style, they are built of the same, mostly local, materials (notably orange-red bricks from nearby Childrey, Grove and Uffington) and hence have a harmonious appearance and a strong relationship with the local geology. The surviving period walls complement the town's architecture and natural surroundings.

Most of the buildings in the Town Centre and Charlton Village Conservation Areas are 16th- or 17th-century timber-frame buildings, with Georgian or Victorian facades. There are also notable examples of medieval buildings and Victorian architecture. Immediately outside the town centre, there are attractive red-brick Victorian and Edwardian terraces and villas. Many of the town-centre houses have large or very large gardens, which contribute "borrowed landscape" to town views.

The role of Wantage as a market town is intrinsic to its character and townscape. The twice-weekly market is a living and valued link to the town's ancient origins as an important meeting and trading centre on the Ridgeway. The Square remains the town's primary community space and the location for the traditional fairs, festivals and fundraising events. Small retail units are still concentrated in the Market Place and along the four main arterial streets, and a large proportion of the pre-war shop fronts have survived. In 2007, the Limborough Road development was opened as a much-needed extension to the town's retail district, with additional parking and the much larger units preferred by big-name retail firms. King's Walk is sympathetic to its historic setting in both style and materials, and provides accessible, pedestrianised shopping. A brick sculptural relief outside Sainsbury's refers to the Wantage tramway, which once ran through this area.

Wantage has historically been a major industrial centre. Remnants of this past can be found throughout the town and contribute much to its townscape. These include the mills, evidence of the historic tanning industry, the remains of the Wilts and Berks Canal, the Wantage Engineering Works, the Wantage Tramway building and parts of the old breweries. The canal and the mill races, originally built exclusively for human and industrial use, are now important sites for wildlife and human leisure.

The Christian Church was the major landowner in Wantage for many centuries and another important influence on the town's development, providing education, social care and health care to residents. Although St. Michael's Priory closed in 1978 and the Convent of St. Mary the Virgin is also about to close, these buildings and the Parish Church of St. Peter and St. Paul are much loved by residents and contribute a spiritual heart and architectural grandeur to the Wantage townscape. Other Christian denominations have long been active in the town and have also left their architectural marks here.

Relatively little development occurred in Wantage in the 20th-century inter-war period, but those houses that did spring up (West Hill and Garston Lane) were substantial and traditionally proportioned, with large gardens. Extensive estates were built in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, in response to expanding job opportunities at Harwell. The chief strength of these estates is the prevalence of well-maintained grassed areas, often with numerous inherited mature trees. These provide relatively safe play areas for children and, where properly managed, promote a sense of community, communal responsibility and civic pride. Most mid-20th-century housing in Wantage is furnished with both front gardens and (often large) rear gardens. The majority of these houses also have private drives or allocated parking.

Of the more recent residential developments, the Engineering Works and Wharf buildings are notable for their distinctive modern styles and imaginative references to the sites' industrial pasts. These details distinguish the developments from those built to generic templates and give them unique, local characters. Wantage Library is built in 1980s postmodernist style and contributes a sympathetic contemporary architectural element to the townscape.

4. Overview – Main Character Defects & Deficiencies

The status of Wantage as a historic town, worthy of interest from tourists, is currently undermined by damage done to its ancient core in the 20th century. Tourists and shoppers entering Wantage

from the east are directed by sign posts to the Civic Centre carpark and have to cross Church Street, where their first sight of the town centre is a poorly designed and fragmented space. Much of the historic built heritage here was demolished in the 1960s and 1970s to make way for public buildings, such as the (now redundant) Magistrate's Court, Police Station, and carparks. The pedestrian routes through the Victoria Cross Gallery and the adjacent Arbery Arcade are inadequate in status and scale for their crucial role as the main pedestrian access for out-of-town visitors to the Market Place.

Wantage Market Place lost a large section of its historic northern frontage in the later 20th century, and this continued in the 21st century with the demolition of the 16th-century Blanshards building. Demolished buildings were replaced with architecturally uninspired structures, built in unsympathetic, non-local materials. Wallingford Street and Newbury Street have also suffered in this way, resulting, in some places, in a lack of architectural coherence and loss of distinctive local character. Some period boundary walls have been replaced with poor-quality imitations.

The wider townscape lacks architecturally significant modern buildings that complement their distinctive locales and use sympathetic and sustainable materials. Most of the twentieth-century residential developments are formulaic, uniform in design and layout, and without reference to the specific character of Wantage. With the exceptions of the Wharf and Engineering Works sites, the most recent developments are generally generic pastiches of historic styles.

Although the Market Place remains the focus of civic pride, global trends towards out-of-town and online shopping have taken their toll on town centre retail. The recent economic recession, and its stalling effect on new housing developments and hence footfall, has adversely affected take-up of the new units in Limborough Road. This development gives out-of-town shoppers the opportunity to park close to retail, but there is no natural circuit back from the northernmost units for shoppers entering the development on foot from the Market Place. The King's Walk passage connecting Limborough Road to Mill Street is not sufficiently prominent or inviting to encourage shoppers to explore Mill Street, although this could be improved if the windows facing onto the passage for display were filled.

On the western side, the carpark is two storeys high and hard up against the bank of Letcombe Brook, creating a disjuncture between the built and natural environment at this point. The noise and pollution from cars so close to the Brook's bank is detrimental to its wildlife and ecology.

Some critical "gateways" to Wantage town centre have been developed unsympathetically. From the north and east, large garage forecourts and unsympathetic housing developments mark the entrances to the town centre. These gateway areas give little hint of the character and charm of the town centre beyond.

Despite having numerous very small communal green spaces within housing estates, Wantage is significantly under-endowed with large open green spaces (see Green Infrastructure Survey) and those that do exist are visually incoherent and fragmented. Extensive development on the town's fringes is in danger of dislocating the town from its rural surroundings, a relationship which is essential to its character. Infilling of small parcels of land within the town's current footprint continues to erode existing green space provision and mature trees are continually lost and either not replaced or substituted with non-native species. Many areas of the town, especially Charlton

Road and the later 20th-century housing estates, rely on “borrowed” landscapes (trees planted on private land) for their green character.

Drainage of flood water is a significant concern in Wantage. Most pavements and residential drives are tarmacked or concreted and so do not absorb rainwater.

5. Overview – Analysis of the Town’s Main Physical & Visual Linkages

Pedestrian Linkages

Wantage is well-endowed with pedestrian linkages, many of which pass through green spaces and nature reserves. Throughout Wantage, small side roads and paths provide alternative routes for pedestrians that take them away from main roads and through quieter areas of the town. Many of these follow ancient property boundaries and give continuity with the town’s historic and prehistoric past.

In the last half-century, development has damaged these important linkages. It has not been possible for many years to follow Letcombe Brook or the canal basin on foot along their whole lengths from Wantage to Grove, so that the only clear, continuous pedestrian routes between the two settlements are now along busy, noisy and polluted main roads. This makes people less willing to walk this route and affects not only leisure pursuits, but physical fitness and traffic levels.

Some more recent residential developments, notably Stockham Park, have insufficient pedestrian linkages to adjacent residential areas and to the town centre. Some cul-de-sac layouts are visually confusing, make for complicated linkages and isolate different sectors of developments from one another. High-density town centre residential developments lack pavements and safe pedestrian routes.

There is currently no direct pedestrian route from Wantage town centre to the iconic Ridgeway path. A safe pedestrian route would encourage walkers on the Ridgeway to visit Wantage; likewise, Wantage residents would be more inclined to use the Ridgeway for leisure and exercise. A footpath from Chain Hill to the Memorial Recreation Ground in Manor Road would give residents of Springfield and Chain Hill much-needed off-road access to the town’s main municipal recreational green space.

Cycle Linkages

Please see Cycling Infrastructure Survey

Vehicle Linkages

Please see Road Infrastructure Survey

6. Overview – Guidelines for the Future

Urban Form- Town Centre

It is critical to the town's future prosperity that future development within the town centre actively enhances its historic and mercantile character, expands its commercial role and mitigates weaknesses in its linkages with outlying areas. The Market Place must remain the primary retail centre in the town: future housing developments on the edge of the town must not include rival commercial districts that undermine the primacy of the Square. Retail outlets in these developments must be limited to small convenience food stores and pharmacies with floor space of no more than *X sq m*.

Within the historic town centre, future development must be in keeping with the historic styles, scale, massing, colours and materials of the existing buildings and associated features, such as boundary walls. Particular attention should be paid to the "gateway" areas of the old town centre: Grove Road from the north, Wallingford Street and Charlton Road to the east, Newbury Street to the south, Portway to the south-west and Mill Street to the west. Buildings in these areas should be representative of the architectural character of the town and creative attractive entrances to the centre.

Shop fronts in the town centre should be traditional in appearance: painted timber structures, with framed glass windows and hinged doors. Period shop fronts are limited to the span, or part of the span, of a single building, and are only at ground floor level. Paint colours should be limited to naturally inspired colours (not colours only produced synthetically, such as mauve or neon).

Urban Form – Residential Areas

Features of housing developments in Wantage which should be perpetuated include:

- Architecture inspired by the site's previous function (social, agricultural, industrial);
- Scale and massing to match adjacent developments;
- Retention and repair of historic buildings and features;
- Use of local materials and skills;
- Eco-friendly design and materials;
- Retention, extension and enhancement of soft landscaping and trees;
- Front and rear gardens;
- Sympathetic new landscaping that supports wildlife;
- Additional communal green spaces with formal and informal recreation facilities;
- Adequately proportioned off-street parking with green surfaces;
- Drainage and sewerage provision sufficient for the long term;
- Discreet, but adequate utilities and bin storage;
- Retention of historic boundaries and linkages;
- Safe, segregated pedestrian and cycling routes within developments;
- Off-road pedestrian and cycling routes connecting developments to the town centre.

In future residential developments in Wantage, the following should be avoided:

- Generic design with no reference to the locale's distinctive character and history;
- Disproportionately tall buildings that cut out light;
- Replacement of historic built features that could be repaired;
- Removal of mature trees and soft landscaping;
- Reliance on "borrowed" landscape;
- The hazardous blending of pedestrian and car access;
- Walled or fenced-in pedestrian routes not overlooked by housing, which favour criminal behaviour;
- Over-scaled bin stores.

Townscape

To retain its sense of place, Wantage must remain a town that is closely tied to its rural surroundings and any development within the townscape areas should respect the rural character of the Vale setting. Development should not visually intrude on the AONB and thick screening woodlands and hedgerows should be conserved and reinforced, to preserve the experiences of high tranquillity, dark skies and far-reaching views within the AONB.

Letcombe Brook must be given the prominence it merits, as the natural feature that shaped the town and still performs essential roles for the human and wild populations.

The historic heart of Wantage should be treated as the town's chief asset. Its functions as a meeting place on the Ridgeway route, a marketplace for agricultural produce and an industrial centre have now become central to its heritage and leisure industries. Any future development in any part of the town must take into consideration its potential impact on the town centre as a focus for retail and for the community. New developments must not be isolated from the town centre, but look towards it and be well connected to it.

7. Recommendations

It is recommended that a visually coherent and physically integrated "Wantage Townscape Plan" be drawn up, specifying both hard (built) and soft (landscape) components.

Action Time-Frames

To be confirmed.

Funding & Human Resources

Adequate and sustainable funding must be put in place for the implementation of the Townscape Plan. Voluntary participation in this implementation by both the local business community and the owners of residential and institutional properties in the town should be encouraged or mandated. Where appropriate, work should be supported by Trusts, financed by Endowment Funds.

Periodic Reviews

A Standing Committee or Working Group should be established to oversee and ensure the implementation of the Townscape Plan. The Plan should be reviewed and revised periodically.

APPENDIX 1: LOCAL CHARACTER AREAS – DETAILED ASSESSMENTS

Wantage can be divided into six local character areas (LCAs) that are distinct from one another and have some architectural coherence. Each LCA has been further subdivided to reflect its diversity.

1. Town Centre & Charlton Village Conservation Areas
2. North East Wantage
3. South East Wantage
4. South West Wantage
5. West Wantage
6. North West Wantage

1. Town Centre & Charlton Village Conservation Areas

Topography & Layout

Wantage Market Place is approached down-hill from the south and up-hill from the north, east and west. The town centre is relatively protected from strong winds by the Down's scarp slope, but can suffer from frost pockets.

Of the main arterial streets in the town centre, Grove Street takes a particularly attractive meandering and undulating route to the north. At the street's lowest-lying point, the buildings are set back from the street, creating a light and spacious layout. Newbury Street suffers in parts from being flanked by buildings too tall for its width, which exclude sunlight.

Charlton Village Road is protected from the prevailing wind by the prevalence of trees and new housing to the south.

Built Environment

Most buildings in the Conservation Areas front directly onto the road and are generally three-storey where the ground floor is used commercially, or two-storey where it is solely residential.

Architecturally, the Conservation Areas are dominated by 16th- or 17th-century, prefabricated, square box timber-frame buildings with brick facades added in the 18th and 19th centuries. There are also notable examples of medieval hall houses and cruck-framed buildings, as well as "Strawberry Hill Gothick" features and Victorian gothic revival architecture. A number of buildings have rendered or painted facades. A group of houses in Grove Street have Georgian facades in Oxford sandstone.

Three architectural styles predominate: Georgian, timber-framed and "Cottage Ornée".

The Georgian brick frontages are patterned with grey-blue, vitrified header bricks and red stretcher bricks, either in an alternating pattern or contrasting blocks. Vitrification was caused by excessive heating of bricks closest to the flames in the firing process, hence such patterning utilised bricks that could have been considered seconds. In evening sunshine, these glassy brick ends glitter in an

attractive way. This effect cannot be reproduced simply by using matt-textured, grey-blue bricks. The very recent Peacock House and King's Walk developments include authentic vitrified header bricks to pleasing effect.

Windows in the Georgian frontages are mostly generously proportioned, painted softwood sashes with multiple panes. Doors are also traditionally painted, not varnished. A number of the Market Place shops retain their historic fronts, notably the Arbery building and the Post Office Vaults. The roofs are mostly tiled with plain terracotta tiles or slate with terracotta ridge tiles. They have either neoclassical brick parapets or generous eaves. Gable fronts may be hung with shaped tiles and attic dormer windows are common.

A few historic, exposed timber-framed frontages survive in and around the Market Place, notably the old Elephant Inn on the north side and Falcon Court at the top of Grove Street, which have herringbone-patterned brick infills. The old Elephant Inn has stone roof tiles. Numerous other timber-framed buildings in the Conservation Areas have rendered facades. More modest buildings of this type have either period metal casements with leaded lights or simple vernacular casements with a single horizontal glazing bar.

Several buildings in both the Market Place and Charlton Village have been re-fronted in the late-Victorian "Cottage Ornée" style, with decorative brickwork, terracotta roof tiles, mock timber framing and ornately pierced fascias. The Old Town Hall dates wholly from the late Victorian era and is in the Arts and Crafts style. The buildings in this group have either large-paned sash windows or leaded lights.

The late-19th-century St. Mary's School buildings in Newbury Street were designed in the fancy gothic style by the architects Butterfield and Ponting, with ornamental brickwork, tile hanging and timber-frame panels. Other important examples of Victorian gothic architecture in the Conservation Areas include the Priory of St. Michael (in brownstone with brick banding), the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church in Mill Street, the Butler Centre, King Alfred's School, Charlton's old Village School building (all of stone) and Charlton village church (brick).

Historic industrial and commercial buildings include the old Wessex Mill buildings, built in stone, the Victorian red-brick Engineering Works and the neo-Renaissance-style Wantage Tramway office building.

The historic buildings in the Conservation Areas are complemented by period, lime-mortared boundary walls in brick or stone, which have weathered gently and are also an important ecological niche in their own right.

Parking

Most town centre properties have either no parking facilities at all or limited on-street parking. Residents often have to park some distance away from their homes.

Green Features

The most significant town centre, publicly accessible green features are the Betjeman Millennium Park and the associated areas The Platt, the Goggs and Alfred's Well. These features are all part of the Letcombe Brook corridor and contain many mature deciduous trees (mostly Ash). The Brook heavily influenced industrial development in the town, providing water for the tanning industry and the Mills, hence its relationship to the buildings flanking it is historically important. The nearby Parish Churchyard also contains a number of mature yews and deciduous trees.

The Market Square currently has no green features, except for small planters and flowerbeds and the walled garden of No. 6, Alfred Street. Any future development of the Square should include more substantial planting.

Properties on the north side of Wallingford Street, the west side of Priory Road and the south side of the Church square typically front directly onto the pavement, but have very large rear gardens, containing mature trees. There are also two large gardens with big trees immediately south of the Market Place. Access issues prohibit development in most of these gardens. A few properties in the streets radiating out from the Market Square also have small front gardens. Most other houses in the town centre area have small or medium-sized gardens or none at all.

An important, but now much depleted, historic green feature in Wantage town centre is the group of very old copper beeches and horse chestnut trees around what was once a large pond at the eastern end of Wallingford Street, but is now Broadway Motors garage. In the past decade, two of these trees, both around 150 years old, have been felled and not replaced, and other gaps have been filled in over the years with fast-growing conifers. Any opportunity to reinstate trees in this area should be taken. The pond was fed by a spring that may have been used as a gathering point from prehistoric times and the status of Wantage as a stopping place on the old Ridgeway path could be enhanced by some acknowledgement of the spring's presence in any future development of the Broadway Motors site.

To the east of Broadway Motors, the private grounds of St. Katherine's House and Stirlings Residential Care Home also feature large, mature trees, both deciduous and coniferous. Another group of large trees is found in the gardens north of Wallingford Street. A number of mature lime trees can be found in front of Saxon House in Seesen Way and in the Waitrose carpark.

The Charlton Village Conservation Area contains many mature trees, hedges and shrubs. Although some houses here front directly onto the (discontinuous) tarmac pavement, others are heavily screened by greenery and the road terminates with woodland, giving the area a strongly rural atmosphere.

Linkages

Wantage town centre is bypassed to the east by Seesen Way, to the south-east by Ormond Road, to the south by Portway and to the west by Ham Road. Of the roads radiating from the Market Place, only Wallingford Street, Newbury Street and Mill Street are open both ways to through traffic. Mill Street is a narrow street on a steep hill, with a sharp, dangerous bend at its foot, and for these reasons does not work well as a gateway to the Market Place. Accessing Newbury Street from the Market Place involves an awkward, almost blind left turn and is also hazardous. For these reasons,

as well as pedestrian convenience and the dangers of pollution to the historic fabric, through traffic in the Market Place is undesirable.

The most important pedestrian linkages in the town centre are the Arbery arcade and Victoria Cross Gallery passages, which give pedestrian access from the Civic Centre carpark to the Market Square. The area between Regents Arcade and the Post Office Vaults is also a well-used pedestrian route. Several historic pedestrian passages on the north side of the square are now blocked. Kings Walk gives pedestrian access from Mill Street to the Sainsbury's shopping precinct.

Charlton Village is a no-through road, which protects it from through traffic and helps it maintain its peaceful character. It is, however, well connected to the rest of Charlton and is close to the main Didcot road and to Charlton Primary School.

Recommendations

Regrettably, large sections of the north side of the Market Place, Church Street, Newbury Street and Wallingford Street were demolished, either partially or totally, in the later 20th century and replaced with uninspired modern buildings in unsympathetic materials. Any future development or redevelopment in the Conservation Areas, including infills and back garden developments, should be architecturally in keeping with adjacent buildings and appropriate in scale and massing. The use of historically and ecologically sensitive materials reflecting the historic character (such as brick, render, clay tile, slate, stone and lime-based mortars) should be encouraged to increase the unity of the area.

Parking is a significant problem for residents of town centre terraced properties that front directly onto the road. Consideration should be given to ameliorating this problem before allowing further infill residential development.

Boundary walls should be appropriate to the character of the area in style, scale and materials. Where at all possible, soft landscaping should be retained, enhanced and extended. Mature trees should be retained or replaced with the same species.

2. North East Wantage

The land between Wantage and Charlton Village was developed from the late 19th century onwards, with large estates being built in the later 20th century.

Charlton Road

The houses on this road are typically detached or semi-detached, two-storey Victorian and Edwardian villas, or 20th-century, detached, two-storey houses or bungalows. They tend to be elevated above the tarmac pavements and set back from the road. The houses on the north side generally have large front and rear gardens, with private drives and brick retaining walls. Those on the south side tend to have smaller front gardens with either limited off-street parking (created by digging out front gardens) or on-street parking only. However, to the west of Springfield Road are large late Victorian villas with front gardens and private drives. The predominant character of the area is affluent and well-established.

Housing styles in this street are very varied. The Victorian houses to the south are built in red Uffington brick, with slate roofs and timber sash windows, and the terraces have yellow brick detailing. The larger villas have fancy painted timber fascias. The 20th-century houses on the north side are treated in a variety of ways, including brick, render, mock-timber framing and pebbledash. The large, recently completed block of flats "Badger Gardens" is not in keeping with the detached properties typical of the area, and has a large carpark at the front which is not screened by trees or hedges.

The large front gardens on both sides of Charlton Road are lawns, bounded with small or semi-mature trees and thick hedging.

Foliat Drive & Harcourt Road

This area was developed in the 1950s to provide housing for Harwell UKAEA employees. It centres around the Humber Ditch, a small stream. The steep gradient to either side of the Ditch inhibited development here, which left a significant, well-established and attractive inherited open green space at the heart of the estate. However, this area is not well maintained. The houses are arranged along through-roads, around greens or in cul-de-sacs.

Many of the houses were prefabricated and there is a high degree of architectural uniformity in this area. The typical house here is semi-detached and two-storey, built in a simple, traditionally proportioned style with small chimneys and moderately shallow roof pitches facing front to back. Most have both off- and on-street parking, and moderately sized front and back gardens.

The predominant building material is pink brick with cement-tiled roofs. In some areas, houses are typically rendered, clad or half-clad and painted in pale colours. Front doors have either simple flat porticos supported by plain metal columns or extended porches. In most cases, the original metal Crittall windows have been replaced with UPVC windows.

Front boundaries are not walled or hedged and tarmac pavements are separated by grassed strips from the road, creating an open, pedestrian-friendly feel. The Humber Ditch environs and other communal grassed areas have many mature trees, mostly horse chestnuts, some pre-dating the housing. However, there is relatively little shrub or hedging in front gardens.

Charlton Heights

This area of low-density estate housing was built in the 1960s. The houses are detached or semi-detached and typically two storeys high, with attached garages, private drives and front and back gardens. Housing is arranged in blocks between circulation roads or around cul-de-sacs.

Architecturally, these houses are generic and typical of their period: they are built in pale pink or yellow, industrially produced brick, with short chimneys and shallow, concrete-tiled roof pitches and some roofs orientated with gables to the front. They have large, plate-glass picture windows and white fascias, now uniformly in UPVC. Houses are given a degree of individuality with details such as timber cladding or rendering (on one storey only).

Front boundaries are not walled or hedged, but are separated from the road by tarmac pavements. Front gardens are laid to lawn with ornamental shrubs and occasionally small trees, but mature trees are rare in this area. The houses to the north of the estate currently look over open countryside. The overall feel of the estate is spacious, communal and pedestrian-friendly.

Garston Lane

This area has been developed piecemeal over the last century, resulting in a confusing array of sub-streets and chaotic house numbering. The housing styles vary from mock-Victorian to 1960s mock-Georgian and inter-war bungalows. The most recent development, Chapel Close and Weaver Row, was completed within the last decade and consists of high-density terraced two- and three-storey housing and flats. There are communal carparks and some integral garages. Weaver Row has no on- or off-street parking adjacent to the housing.

This latest development is built in a composite mock-Georgian / Victorian style, in red brick. The houses in Weaver Row are two-storey, with yellow brick detailing to echo houses in nearby Charlton Road, while those in Chapel Close are two- or three-storey, with loosely Georgian-inspired facades and details such as steel balconies to first-floor French windows. Some facades have brick detailing in blue, red or yellow around windows or are rendered at ground floor level. Roofs are slate or terracotta tile. Windows and doors are UPVC.

Chapel Close centres on a large, fenced green area, planted with young trees and ornamented with sculpture. Weaver Row has communal lawn and semi-mature trees to the front, with a low, brick retaining wall. There are no pavements, but the open nature of the development and close-style layout give drivers good visibility and encourage low speeds. Although high-density, this development feels light and both modern and well-established, with no cars visible, and a communal focus is provided by the fenced green area.

Recommendations

Any future developments adjacent to this area should provide additional open green spaces to ameliorate the deficiencies in the existing estates and reduce their dependence on “borrowed” landscapes. Infills should respect the dominant character of the district in style, scale, massing and materials. Parking provision should equal or exceed existing standards.

3. South East Wantage

This district consists primarily of late Victorian housing, centring on Ormond Road and Orchard Way, and 1950s and 1960s development around Springfield Road. To the south, the Chain Hill area is currently being developed. The land slopes steeply upwards to the south and is bordered on this side by the AONB and to the east by open farmland. The more elevated parts, Springfield and Larkdown, are relatively exposed to strong south-westerly winds.

Springfield

The most distinctive streets in this area, Springfield Road and Larkdown, are long, straight streets, running approximately east to west, parallel to each other. The houses are two-storey, semi-detached with both front gardens and large back gardens, and off-street parking.

The typical housing style in upper Springfield Road is red, machine-made brick with decorative yellow brick string courses which echo the design of older houses in the district, slate-tiled hipped roofs and shared central chimneys. Windows are tall, narrow casements, grouped in threes.

Larkdown is characterised by 1950s houses of a similar design to those in the Foliat Drive area, with large front gardens, private drives and sometimes garages. They are typically in pinkish-red brick, with gabled, cement pantiled roofs and UPVC picture or casement windows. Some are pebbledashed or partially rendered.

Front gardens in this area tend to be bounded with hedges, walls or fences and are separated from the road by pavements. Springfield Road has mature front boundary hedges but few trees; Larkdown has many mature trees. The rural, elevated setting of Larkdown is a considerable asset, giving residents fine views across Wantage and the surrounding landscape, as well as easy access to the countryside. Springfield has views across north Wantage and is a well-established area, with architecture that makes some attempt to reflect the local vernacular style.

Ormond Road

Ormond Road is a wide, busy road, lined on its south side with spacious Victorian and Edwardian housing on its south side, off which lead two closes of generic, high-density 1960s and 1980s houses and flats. At its western end, are the high-density St. Mary's and St. Gabriel's developments. Most of the north side was redeveloped in the mid-20th century for municipal services (nursing home, sheltering housing, fire station).

The late Victorian houses in Ormond Road are semi-detached or in short terraces, and are built in Uffington red brick. Some have yellow string courses and decorative patterns. They are two-storey with attic dormer windows and ground-floor or double-height bay windows. Front doors are recessed and windows are painted timber sashes in a variety of configurations. Gables are tile-hung, with painted wooden, sometimes fancy, fascias, and the tiled or slate roofs have ornamental ridge tiles and finials. These houses have large back gardens, with mature trees and shrubs, and front gardens of varying sizes, not generally with much planting, bounded by period brick walls. The larger houses have off-street parking and the very largest have private drives. Pavements are tarmacked.

To the west are a series of red-brick Edwardian semi-detached houses with hipped slate roofs, paired central chimneys and porticos of slate supported on wooden brackets extending across the frontages, over the front doors and bay windows. Where original windows survive, they are 8/2 painted timber sashes. These houses have large front and rear gardens, with numerous shrubs and small trees, and private drives, giving this area an affluent and well-established atmosphere.

The continuity of the period built environment is broken up by late-20th-century blocks of flats, which are three storeys high. Some attempt has, however, been made to reference the local style:

the flats are red brick with yellow details, bay windows cantilevered on timber brackets and slate-style roofs. They are separated from the road by lawns and mature trees.

The estates built on the old St. Mary's school sites at the western end of Ormond Road are also loosely influenced by local vernacular styles: they are red-brick, with UPVC imitation sash windows or casements and tiled or slate roofs. Details such as bracketed porticos, rendering, steel balconies and herringbone brick panels and mock-timbering give some individuality to properties. Although part of the estate is two-storey housing, most properties are three or even four-storeys high, taking their cue from the imposing historic St. Mary's buildings fronting onto Newbury Street.

The historic properties on the sites have been carefully restored and converted into apartments. However, period boundary walls were unnecessarily rebuilt in the same style, in new, inferior and less sympathetic materials that failed almost immediately, resulting in them having to be rebuilt after only a year or so. The 16th-century building, Alma House, was partially re-rendered inappropriately in cement and nothing was done to rectify the disfigurement of the fine frontage by the removal of the front door some years earlier.

An attractive feature of these developments is the retention of numerous mature trees (mostly horse chestnuts) and some shrubs, and the planting of some new trees; however, most of the houses have no front gardens and most open onto large areas of brick-paved hard standing.

A significant defect of the St. Mary's development is the lack of segregation of cars and pedestrians, with no pavements, and the lack of safely accessible, car-free play areas for children. Pedestrian passageways under and between housing could facilitate crime by creating confusing and invisible linkages. Another defect of both St. Mary's and St. Gabriel's is the high walls fronting onto the pavements in some parts, isolating pedestrians.

Buildings on the north side of Ormond Road typical, mid-20th-century municipal buildings, essentially functional in style, in pale, machine-made brick. The sheltered housing is architecturally designed to imitate 17th-century almshouses. These institutions are mostly set well back from the road and screened by tarmac pavements, extensive lawns, mature shrubs and mature deciduous trees.

Orchard Way

This street and its neighbour, Trinder Road, are an architectural bridge between the Victorian properties in Ormond Road and the post-war properties in Springfield, but the physical linkage between these areas was broken when the eastern end of Trinder Road was closed to traffic. Orchard Way consists of Edwardian red-brick, semi-detached houses with hipped, slate roofs and shared chimneys. They have chain-pattern yellow string course decoration, front doors recessed behind arches or with slate-roofed porticos on brackets, and, where they have not been replaced with UPVC, the original windows are either 6/2 or 4/1 painted timber sashes.

This street has very narrow tarmac pavements and little off-street parking. Front gardens are small, bounded by hedges or fences. The houses have large rear gardens with mature planting, but few large trees. Their view of the AONB, previously an important asset, is currently being replaced with new housing.

Alfredston Place

This 1980s redevelopment of the Wantage Engineering Works site is a mixture of high-density housing and flats, with only communal outside spaces and balconies, and terraced housing with medium-sized front and back gardens. The developers took inspiration from the site's industrial character, incorporating decorative painted steelwork, red and blue brick and rendered or yellow, timber-clad panels into the new buildings to echo the historic core, which was restored and imaginatively extended. Consistent use of petrol blue painted detailing throughout the development gives it a strong sense of identity, as well as a distinctively postmodernist style.

Parking is communal. Gardens are bounded by red brick walls with blue soldier brick capping. In addition to extensive tarmac hard standing and brick-paved areas, there are small areas of established soft landscaping, with shrubs and semi-mature trees. Pedestrians are not segregated from traffic and, although this development is a small cul-de-sac and traffic is necessarily slow, children cannot play safely in spaces that are guaranteed to be free of cars. There are some tarmac pavements, but these are not continuous.

Recommendations

Any future developments adjacent to this area should provide additional open green spaces to reduce dependence on "borrowed" landscapes and adjacent countryside which is fast being built on. Infills should respect the dominant character of the individual streets in style, scale, massing and materials. Parking provision should equal or exceed existing standards.

4. South West Wantage

Locks Lane, The Ham & Ickleton Road

This area, through which flows an important stretch of Letcombe Brook, is relatively undeveloped and is dominated by school sports fields and large houses. It includes the area known as The Ham, Locks Lane, the eastern end of Ickleton Road and the residential street Manor Road.

The Ham is a very important open green space for both people and wildlife. Letcombe Brook, which branches into several streams and pools here, is overhung by mature trees, mostly ashes and willows. The open areas are maintained as grass: grazing for horses, sports fields for King Alfred's School and Wantage Football Club, and private garden lawns. Immediately to the south of Ickleton Road are allotments. To the south, agricultural land slopes upwards into the AONB. A public footpath runs from the north end of Manor Road westwards to the allotments, then south and west towards Letcombe Regis. This linkage connects Wantage to its satellite Letcombe villages and provides crucial access to the natural environment for walkers, runners and cyclists.

Houses in Locks Lane, Ickleton Road and The Ham are large and detached, with a high degree of privacy and extensive gardens or grounds. They range from a Georgian mansion and substantial Victorian residences to individually designed, two-storey, 20th-century homes, in wide variety of styles and materials. Locks Lane and Ickleton Road have no pavements.

Manor Road

Manor Road was developed between the late 19th century and the mid-20th century. Houses here are detached or semi-detached bungalows or two-storey villas, usually red brick or rendered. They vary considerably in style and materials and are mostly generic of their architectural period, but all are spacious, with front gardens, private drives and large, mature back gardens, with views over the open fields of The Ham to the rear and Wantage Memorial Recreation Ground to the front. Front gardens are hedged, planted with mature shrubs and small trees and separated from the road by tarmac pavements.

Recommendations

Development on open land in this important natural landscape should be strongly resisted. Infills in gardens should be discouraged and, where approved, should respect the dominant character of the district in density, style, scale, massing and materials. Development should not impede or spoil views into or out of the open green spaces or AONB land. Parking provision should equal or exceed existing standards.

5. West Wantage

This area is divided east to west by the Challow Road, which is straddled by the grounds of the Anglo-Catholic Convent of St. Mary the Virgin. The convent buildings are of stone and were designed in the gothic style by Victorian architects Street, Butterfield and Pearson. To the south, the land was developed gradually between the late 1800s and the 1980s, and features small estates, such as West Hill, Hamfield and Naldertown, in a variety of styles and layouts. To the north is the dense, homogenous Stockham Park estate, built in the 1950s. Further large, high-density estates of pastiche period-style housing are currently being built on Stockham's margins.

This area is relatively elevated and consequently exposed to south-westerly winds.

Stockham Park

This large, relatively high density estate dates from the post-war period and is architecturally similar to UKAEA Charlton. In layout, however, it is more regimented and geometrically arranged. The houses, typically in pink, machine-made brick, are in terraces of three or four, with pitched, cement pantiled roofs and picture or traditionally proportioned windows. Windows and fascias are now uniformly UPVC. Front doors are surmounted by small porticos supported by slim steel columns. Some houses have cream render at first floor height only, while others have yellow brick string courses, alluding to the style of late Victorian houses in Charlton and Ormond Roads.

Houses here have small or medium front gardens, which are enclosed with walls, fences or hedges in some areas, but left unbounded in others, and separated from roads by tarmac pavements. The larger properties have private drives, but most parking is on-street. A positive feature of Stockham is the large number of mature trees and shrubs and several communal green spaces. A defect is the sometimes confusing arrangement of housing around narrow lanes and small, winding cul-de-sacs.

West Hill

This straight cul-de-sac dates from the inter-war period and is closely related to a stretch of housing in Garston Lane, north-east Wantage. The houses are traditionally proportioned, spacious and semi-detached. They are fully rendered and painted, with tiled roofs, shared central chimneys and gabled front extensions with tile-hung apexes. These properties have private drives and large front and back gardens, bounded by hedges or fencing, but with few mature trees. There are no pavements.

Hamfield

These 1950s red-brick, semi-detached houses feature hipped roofs tiled in cement pantiles, shared chimneys and double-height bay windows, now mostly in UPVC. Front doors have small porticos or porches. There are medium-sized front and back gardens and private drives, with additional visitor parking. Front gardens are hedged or fenced and separated from the road by tarmac pavements. Communal grass strips further separate pedestrians from the road, promoting pedestrian safety, and a communal green space with mature trees is a safe play area for children.

Naldertown

A street of small, plainly built, red-brick Victorian terraces gave its name to this area. Replacement of many of the slate roofs with concrete tiles in different styles and of original timber sashes with UPVC windows has diminished the architectural unity of the terrace. The street is a no-through road paved entirely in bricks and the houses have on-street parking there, as well as small, fenced front gardens. The small, enclosed rear gardens are planted with a few mature shrubs.

The rest of Naldertown is a relatively high-density 1980s estate, built around two meandering cul-de-sacs. The houses are red-brick or rendered, some with red brick detailing around windows. Roofs are quite steeply pitched, with small external chimneys and concrete pantiles, and windows are white UPVC and traditionally proportioned. The properties have small or medium-sized, enclosed front and rear gardens, with private drives, mature shrubs and a few mature trees that probably pre-date the development. Tarmac pavements separate front gardens from the road.

Recommendations

Any future developments adjacent to this area should provide additional open green spaces to ameliorate the deficiencies in the existing estates and reduce their dependence on “borrowed” landscapes and views of the surrounding countryside, which is rapidly being developed. Infills should respect the dominant character of the district in style, scale, massing and materials. Parking provision should equal or exceed existing standards.

6. North-West Wantage

With the exception of Belmost, the majority of houses in this area were built between 1950 and 1980, with additional developments in the early 2000s. Most of the housing is medium-density.

Belmont

The houses in this narrow close are mostly late Victorian large villas and semi-detached homes, as well as a few more modest terraces. They are two-storey, red brick with slate roofs, with typical features of the period, such as sandstone detailing, bay windows, painted timber 1/1 sash windows and fancy painted timber fascias. The large houses have grander details like glass-roofed verandas, carved stonework, cast ironwork, stained glass windows and decorative tile borders. The terraced houses have yellow string course detailing. The period feel of the road has been compromised by unsympathetic houses built in the 1960s and 1970s, presumably on land taken from gardens of older properties.

Back gardens and some front gardens are very large, with mature deciduous trees, shrubs and hedging. A communal carpark is available for residents with no private parking. The road has no pavements and there are no communal open green spaces. The area is linked to the town centre by a footpath from the bottom of Mill Street.

Barwell

This highly symmetrical and uniform 1950s cul-de-sac of two-storey, semi-detached houses is similar to Springfield Road in architectural style, but without specific reference to the local vernacular. It is built in pinkish-red, machine-made brick, with red-tiled, hipped roofs and shared, central chimneys. Front doors have projecting, cantilevered shelters. Windows are now all UPVC.

The houses have front gardens, bounded by hedges or fences, private drives and large back gardens. There are additional on-street parking areas. The tarmac pavements are separated from the road by grass verges and there are two, centrally located open green spaces with mature deciduous trees.

Witan Way

The two-storey, semi-detached or staggered terrace 1960s houses in this road are generic and typical of their period, built in pink, machine-made brick with picture windows and very shallow roof pitches covered with concrete pantiles. Windows and fascias are now uniformly white UPVC. The houses have small front gardens (either unbounded or delineated by low brick walls), off-street parking and medium-sized back gardens. Some houses have attached garages with brightly coloured doors. The tarmac pavements are separated from the road by grass verges in some places. Planting is well established, with numerous mature trees (notably silver birches) and shrubs. There is one small, centrally located open green space on the south side of the road.

Elizabeth Drive

This medium-density 1970s estate housing is two-storey, in red, machine-made brick with decorative stained wooden cladding to the upper storey that echoes the style of local farm buildings. The proportions are traditional, with tall, narrow windows and the detailing, including windows, front doors, fascias and garage doors, is in white UPVC. The roofs are tiled with heavy concrete tiles. Each house has an integral garage with space in front for an additional car.

The houses are arranged in blocks, with the medium-sized back gardens fully enclosed within squares of houses facing outwards. There are small/medium front gardens, separated from the road

by tarmac pavements. Most front gardens do not have marked boundaries, but there are a few dividing hedges and some mature trees. A small communal green space is available on the south side of the road.

Roman Way

This is a 1980s, medium-density, mock-Victorian development, echoing the style of Belmont. Houses are arranged along meandering cul-de-sacs. They are two-storey, red-brick or rendered, with gabled wings, fancy timber fascias, cantilevered bays on timber brackets and white or stained mock-timbering. They have roofs of concrete pantiles, chimneys and decorative dormers with carved finials. Windows are imitation 1/1 sashes in UPVC and garages are integral with white doors and space in front for an additional car.

Houses here have medium-sized back gardens and small front gardens, with low boundary walls or hedges, separated from the road by tarmac pavements. There are shrubs and some semi-mature trees. The development is self-contained, with no direct vehicle linkage to adjacent residential areas. It is well supplied with open green spaces, being bordered to the east by the green corridor of the old canal basin and additional green spaces to the north and south.

Recommendations

Infills should be discouraged in the streets in this area that are already deficient in green spaces. Where approved, they should respect the dominant character of the locale in style, scale, massing and materials. Parking provision should equal or exceed existing standards.

APPENDIX 2: LOCAL CHARACTER AREAS – MAP

