

MID-CHERWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2018-2031

MADE MAY 2019



POLICY PD1: DEVELOPMENT AT CATEGORY A VILLAGES

Residential development proposals at Fritwell, Kirtlington and Steeple Aston in the form of infilling, conversions and minor development will be supported in principle within the settlement areas established and defined in Policy Map Figs. 9, 10 and 11 respectively.

Any residential development proposal which is outside the settlement areas of these three villages must have particular regard to all the following criteria:

The site should be immediately adjacent to the settlement area

The site should not be the best and most versatile agricultural land and the use of previously developed land is particularly likely to be acceptable.

The development should conserve and, where possible, enhance the landscape.

The development should conserve and, where possible, enhance the special interest, character and appearance of the conservation areas and the significance of other heritage assets (see Appendix K: Heritage and Character Assessment).

The development should not give rise to coalescence with any other nearby settlement. This particularly applies to Steeple Aston and Middle Aston.

The total indicative number of additional dwellings permitted during the Plan period either within the settlement areas of these villages, or adjacent to them, shall be approximately 25 for Fritwell, 17 for Kirtlington, and 20 for Steeple Aston (as detailed on p.29).

Rationale for Category A villages policy

3.2.4 The purpose of defining settlement boundaries for these villages is to assist Cherwell District Council in the application of its Local Plan Policy Villages 1 (PV1), which refers to “residential development within the built-up limits of villages”. The settlement areas designated in this Neighbourhood Plan are intended to clarify the precise extent of the built-up limits of the villages in the NP area where PV1 is most likely to apply.

3.2.5 The areas defined are intended to have an in-principle presumption in favour of sustainable development within the settlement area, and a presumption which favours constraint against development outside it.

3.2.6 The Local Plan Part 2 -Development Management and Sites: Issues Paper states:

5.91 “Some local authorities identify settlement boundaries for their villages, beyond which development would not normally be permitted. Cherwell District has not followed this approach in the past as it can lead to pressure for development within the boundary on land which is not appropriate, for example areas of open space. However, the definition of settlement boundaries can provide greater certainty as to the extent of the built-up area. This may become more important in the light of the government’s proposed changes to the NPPF (December 2015) which include a “presumption in favour” of development on small sites, provided they are within existing settlement boundaries.”

3.2.7 Clearly, the amount and type of development in Mid-Cherwell should be carefully controlled to respect the largely rural character and setting of the villages and their natural environment. In the face of development pressures, the potential loss of rurality is a major concern, especially where the space between villages is concerned. The Neighbourhood Plan Forum takes the view that the balance of advantage favours defining settlement boundaries for the five Category A and B villages where minor development may occur. This policy of definition is compliant with Local Plan Part 1 in that it would provide the basis for applying Policy Villages 1, i.e. the area ‘within’ which the infilling, conversions and minor development would be acceptable in principle, subject to other Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan policies.

3.2.8 The Forum has considered the option of not defining settlement boundaries for these villages, instead leaving decisions about development “within the built-up limits” of villages to the District Council. However, the parish councils concerned have taken the view that their local knowledge about land use and buildings in the villages is best used to give effect to Policy Villages 1, in determining such applications.

3.2.9 The adopted Local Plan para. C254 refers to the provision of “small-scale development” within village categories A & B “typically but not exclusively for less than 10 dwellings”. Neighbourhood Plan Policies PD1 and PD2 refer to “minor development”, which is understood to have the same meaning.

3.2.10 Local Plan Policy Villages 2 provides for a further 750 dwellings ‘at’ category A villages across the Cherwell District, whereby ‘at’ is understood to mean both sites adjacent to the built-up limits of a village and also larger sites within a village. Of the 750 dwellings district-wide target, a large percentage has subsequently (since the baseline of 31/04/2014) been permitted or subject to a resolution to permit development. At the time of writing (February 2018) additional sites are being sought to deliver the residual amount of circa 86 dwellings (CDC Annual Monitoring Report 2017). The Forum has been advised by CDC that Local Plan Part 2 will allocate these on a site-by-site basis, and will not be based on proportioning out the remainder across the category A villages.

- 3.2.11 However, the Housing Needs Assessment commissioned from AECOM (see 1.11.2) did use a pro-rata methodology based on population, and arrived at a total figure of 48 dwellings for the three Category A villages in the MCNP area⁵. When sites are put forward they will be considered by CDC with regard to the ability of the category A village to sustain the scale of development, the site's availability and deliverability, and landscape and transport (amongst other) constraints. CDC have said that they will be mindful of those villages that have already made a contribution to meeting the 750 dwelling target. Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Forum and the parish councils concerned expect to engage constructively with Cherwell District Council when allocation of sites is being considered (expected to be in 2018).
- 3.2.12 The sustainability of the category A villages in the neighbourhood can be a fragile matter, and it can change almost overnight. Shops and pubs have closed in recent years, and one village school is currently under capacity, while the popularity of another village school greatly increases "school run" traffic through several villages at peak times. A village which is sustainable at its current population level could lose its sustainability for the future as a result of excessive population growth, whereas another village may need population growth to achieve the sustainability of its facilities.
- 3.2.13 Although there has been steady growth in all three villages during the period 2001-2011 (at rates of between 6% and 11% -2011 census figures), the levels of sustainability in each village at the time of writing this Plan are significantly different from each other. Our policy on the appropriate level of sustainable residential development is therefore one that looks at the neighbourhood as a whole, balancing the encouragement of growth in some areas with less growth in others, an approach which conforms with that of the adopted Local Plan. The settlement areas for the three Category A villages have been re-examined and revised following the pre-submission consultation, and are explained in more detail in the box on p.29. More detail about the general criteria used for MCNP's settlement areas can be found in Appendix C.
- 3.2.14 The effect of policy PD1 is that the Category A villages could contribute a total of about 62 additional dwellings during the Plan period, contributing significantly to the approximately 86 still required across the District, and exceeding the assessment of 48 dwellings required on a pro rata basis. It is considered that the use of the word "indicative" allows flexibility in permitting windfall development within the settlement areas. This Plan therefore, while taking a positive approach to provision of housing and sustainable development, sets reasonable targets for the villages concerned to ensure their sustainability.

FRITWELL

The settlement area was formally adopted at Fritwell Parish Council's meeting of 27th March 2017, and is shown in Fig.9. Here the school is under capacity by about 0.5 FE per annum; of the two pubs in the village, only one now remains and is currently closed. The parish council considers that about 25 new dwellings are needed to make existing facilities sustainable. There were 295 dwellings in the parish at 2011 Census, and 2 dwellings completed 2011-2015; there is an extant permission for a further 11 dwellings in the village, but there are uncertainties over its implementation. 25 new dwellings would represent an approximately 8 % increase in dwelling numbers. Fritwell developed from two manorial estates either side of open fields and the settlement area has been drawn to reflect this historic pattern; the open fields in the centre of the village are designated as an important Local Green Space FT1.

KIRTLINGTON

The settlement of Kirtlington has a traditional, essentially linear, pattern, north-south. The settlement plan (see Fig 10), formally adopted by Kirtlington Parish Council on 11th October, 2016, is limited on the eastern side by the listed historic park (designed by Capability Brown), while on the western side a well-defined boundary to the contemporary built area approximates closely the old Woodstock Way (clearly visible on 18th and 19th century maps and referred to by the Cherwell District Council Conservation Officer in opposition to a planning application west of that line in early 2017). Kirtlington Parish Council is very keen to maintain these eastern and western boundaries. To the south, the boundary is the 30mph sign, as development south of that point could lead to coalescence with Bletchington. The settlement is unique in the neighbourhood area in having two registered village greens. Within Kirtlington's settlement plan, as drawn, sites do exist for small-site 'windfall' new dwellings within even moderate sized gardens, as shown by recent proposals.

Cherwell District Council stated (at an Appeal hearing in 2015 into refusal of developers' applications in Kirtlington) that the appropriate share of the remaining Category A village load for Kirtlington would be 17 new houses. The Parish Council considers that this is a reasonable requirement. There were 440 dwellings at 2011 Census, of which 369 are in the designated settlement area. 22 dwellings were completed in 2011-2015, so the current parish total is 462 dwellings. 17 new houses would be an approximately 5% increase on the settlement size, which the parish council considers would be sustainable.

The school at Kirtlington is at full capacity with no physical space to expand as the playground is already at minimum size for the number of pupils. OCC Education envisaged busing overflow to the school in the next village. Kirtlington's small shop is well-used and often has queues. The village hall is already booked every weekday evening and at most weekends.

STEEPLE ASTON

An east-west stream runs in a valley through the settlement and gives it its particular character, with fairly steep hills and a green "heart" surrounded by dwellings and their gardens. The settlement has developed to the north-west and south-east of this rectangle in the twentieth century. The settlement area was formally adopted at Steeple Aston Parish Council's meeting of 16th January 2017 and is shown in Fig.11 .

The "green heart" is deliberately not included in the settlement area as it is the view of many local people consulted at engagement meetings, and of the Parish Council, that this important and historic feature of the village should be protected from development. This area of extended gardens and pasture land is unsuitable for nomination as a Local Green Space.

It is the view of the parish council that a reasonable limit, during the Plan period, is for growth to be permitted representing 5% of the number of dwellings in the village at the start of the Plan period (2018). There were 397 dwellings at 2011 Census and 21 dwellings were completed 2011-2017, making a current estimated total of 418 dwellings, of which 20 additional dwellings represent about 5%.

POLICY PD4: PROTECTION OF IMPORTANT VIEWS AND VISTAS

Development proposals within the plan area must demonstrate sensitivity to the important views and vistas described in Table 4 and illustrated by photographs in the documents referred to in that Table, by including an assessment of the significance of the views and the effect of the proposed development on them. Proposals which cause significant harm to any of these views will only be acceptable where the benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh any harm.

Development proposals must also be designed such that there is no adverse impact on the sensitive skylines identified in Fig. 8 and referenced in Table 4.

Applicants for development in or adjacent to a Conservation Area must demonstrate in a Heritage Impact Assessment that they have taken account of the appropriate Conservation Area Appraisal, and of the Heritage and Character Assessment at Appendix K, and demonstrated that the proposal causes as little harm to an identified view as possible and that any harm is outweighed by the benefits of the proposal. The development should not harm the Conservation Area and its setting, other heritage assets, or historic street and village views and longer distance vistas.

Rationale for Protection of Important Views and Vistas policy

- 3.2.21 Local Plan Policy ESD15⁵ states that development will not be permitted if it causes “undue visual intrusion into the open countryside”. CDC’s Countryside Design Summary 1998 also refers to vistas in relevant character areas, as does the draft Cherwell Design Guide SPD (2017).
- 3.2.22 The underlying landform, historic landscape elements, and notable landmarks within the landscape make views an important characteristic within the Mid-Cherwell area. The Cherwell Valley provides opportunities for far-reaching and panoramic views from along the valley sides, and more intimate views from within the base of the valley. Along the Cherwell Valley the strong rural characteristics of the landscape are apparent, including the small-scale isolated settlements dispersed along the valley, most notable in views as a result of their churches standing tall above surrounding woodland. Views within the Cherwell Valley are more open from the eastern side of the valley than the west, which is more wooded and has slightly greater enclosure. Fig.8 on p 51, shows the contours and highlights the sensitive skylines of high ground on each side of the Cherwell Valley that are to be protected.
- 3.2.23 There are important views recognised in Cherwell District Council’s Conservation Area Appraisals for many of the villages, which are referenced in Table 4 on p.34. Some of the land nominated as Local Green Spaces (policy PD7) plays a significant role in important views that are listed. Across the area the most prominent recurring landmarks are the churches at the many small villages within Mid-Cherwell, and the historic water tower (currently due for demolition) and other structures at the former RAF Upper Heyford. The churches are often framed within the landscape by surrounding vegetation, and are often the first indicator of the location of a settlement. The views between church towers along the Cherwell Valley, and the setting of these views, are a particularly characteristic feature. The neighbourhood plan Forum together with AECOM has identified a number of views and vistas within the neighbourhood plan area which are of particular importance to its history and character. These views and vistas have been used as a reference point in producing the Heritage and Character Assessment (Appendix K), and are referenced in Table 4 on p.34.

3.2.24 In the experience of the parish councils involved in this neighbourhood plan, applicants often do the minimum necessary to demonstrate that there will not be harm to Conservation Areas and other heritage assets. Local Plan policy makes no mention of the value of Heritage Impact Assessments in this context. Policy PD4 requires that such a document must be prepared and submitted by applicants in cases where harm could be done (a judgement that will have to be made by Cherwell District Council in responding to the application). It is believed that such a document, properly prepared, will bring to the surface issues (for example through the inclusion of accurate montages of the likely impact of a proposal) that might otherwise not be recognised. Where potential harm is apparent, applicants will be expected to show whether mitigation could be achieved in order to allow approval to be considered.

TABLE 4: IMPORTANT VIEWS AND VISTAS TO BE PROTECTED

- A) Views of all church towers in the MCNP area, as seen from numerous viewpoints including those shown in photos referred to in c) below, and as shown in Fig.8 on p.51.
- B) All the vistas and views referred to in the following CDC Conservation Area Appraisals, or in updated versions of these documents: Ardley 2005: para 4.12 and Table p.11-12; church views on p.27 Fewcott 2008: para 6.11 and Fig.7 Duns Tew 2005: Table 1 and Fig.8 Fritwell 2008: Paras. 6.11, 7.11, 8.7, 9.10 and 10.11 and Figs. 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 Kirtlington 2011: p.33-34, and Fig.13 North Aston 2015: Para 12.2 and Fig.12 RAF Upper Heyford 2006: Para 6.4 and Figs 9,10 and 11 Steeple Aston 2014: Paras. 8.1.3, 8.1.4, 8.2.1 and 8.3.3, p.26 and Fig.14 Rousham 1996 (in course of being updated) Somerton 1996 (to be updated) Oxford Canal 2012: para 6.69 -6.76
- C) With reference to Appendix K (AECOM Heritage and Character Assessment), all the vistas and views referred to on p.22, 23, 76 and 90, and those referred to below, together with the relevant photos on those pages:
Fritwell: p.35; Kirtlington: p.43; Lower Heyford: p.51; Middle Aston: p.57;
Steeple Aston: p.65, and Upper Heyford: p.72

NOTE: Part 2 of APPENDIX K covers only Category A and B villages and Upper Heyford; other Category C villages were excluded from AECOM's study because of funding limitations affecting the scope of the work.

POLICY PD5: BUILDING AND SITE DESIGN

New development should be designed to a high standard which responds to the distinctive character of the settlement and reflects the guidelines and principles set out within the Heritage and Character Assessment (see Appendix K). Development proposals should have full regard to the following criteria:

Proposals should wherever possible include appropriate landscape mitigation measures to reduce the impact of the built form, to ensure that development is in keeping with the existing rural character of the village, and to provide a net gain in biodiversity.

Development affecting existing traditional stone walls should identify them on proposals drawings, and wherever possible retain and/or repair them using traditional forms and materials.

Proposals for minor development schemes (excluding infill and conversions) of new housing will be required to provide new or improve existing footpaths and cycle ways to ensure that new residents of all ages and mobility have safe access to village amenities such as the school, bus stops, shop and green spaces. Where new routes are proposed to meet this requirement, the development proposals shall contain full details of all associated materials and infrastructure.

The section on Managing Change on p.76 -77 of the Heritage and Character Assessment (see Appendix K), which sets out general principles and specific recommendations for villages highlighted in the document.

NOTE 1: This policy does not apply to development within the area covered by CDC's policy Villages 5, where site-specific design and place-shaping standards are already set out.

NOTE 2: Part 2 of APPENDIX K covers only Category A and B villages and Upper Heyford; other Category C villages were excluded from AECOM's study because of funding limitations affecting the scope of the work.

Rationale for Building and Site Design policy

3.2.25 Para. 58 of the NPPF encourages local and neighbourhood plans to "develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics." This policy strongly supports paragraphs 56 and 57 of the NPPF: "56. The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people. 57. It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes." In addition, the design of new housing development was given additional weight in the Housing White Paper of 2015.

- 3.2.26 Policy PD5 adds a local perspective to adopted Local Plan policy ESD15: The Character of the Built and Historic Environment. In development management terms, the appearance of proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings are fully recognized by Government as material planning considerations. See also CDC's Countryside Design Summary 1998, and the draft Cherwell Design Guide SPD (2017).
- 3.2.27 However, this neighbourhood plan recognises that the settlements should not appear to be set in aspic. There is an acceptance of the need for change and renewal in the villages, as has always been the case. This should be done with careful thought, skill and craftsmanship. The policy states that new development should have a high standard of design, which is regarded as including the following:
- authentic traditional building is encouraged, using materials and forms found locally.
 - thoughtful contemporary design is also welcomed, if it is capable of integrating well into its particular surroundings.
 - discouragement of pastiche housing design, which deliberately imitates traditional forms but succeeds only in achieving inauthenticity.
 - discouragement of features that are un-neighbourly, discordant, monotonous or inappropriately prominent.
- 3.2.28 The landscape mitigation policy (criterion a) allows for offsite planting where it might not be possible to accommodate new trees or other planting on an application site. This policy aims to ensure that there is no net loss of natural habitats and, wherever possible, a net gain in biodiversity. CAP 5.4 (see p.74) also addresses this issue.
- 3.2.29 Stone walls as boundaries to fields and properties are a characteristic and traditional feature of the neighbourhood. There is strong community support, as expressed in local engagement meetings, for their retention and protection. Some of these walls are in a poor state of repair, and others have virtually disappeared from view in undergrowth. This policy encourages their repair and re-emergence where the opportunity to do so arises.
- 3.2.30 New buildings should wherever possible incorporate special bricks or boxes designed for swifts, and care should be taken in the repair of traditional buildings not to remove existing opportunities for birds to nest in eaves and other traditional locations.
- 3.2.31 To allow for residents to access facilities easily and safely all efforts should be made to improve and enhance the existing network of footpaths and cycle tracks throughout the Neighbourhood. This is supported by Local Plan policy PSD1 and its sustainability objective SO13. Fig.8 in Appendix K shows a map of existing footpaths in the neighbourhood area.
- 3.2.32 A major community objective is to maintain the rural character of the neighbourhood. Given the scale of growth in both residential and commercial traffic it is critical that effective plans are put in place to route traffic entering or leaving the neighbourhood along designated routes, minimizing disruption to the rural road network and communities. Given the proximity of the M40 and major conurbations in Oxford, Bicester and Banbury the impact of traffic transiting

the neighbourhood also has to be considered. Traffic and transport issues are also addressed in the Community Action Plan in Section 5.

3.2.33 The Cherwell Neighbourhood area contains nine conservation areas and a listed park. Road improvement and routing policy should strive to minimize any changes to these important environments (see Fig.3). There are numbers of roads in the NP area that are either single-track or where passing is difficult. These rural lanes are an essential part of the character of the neighbourhood and are unsuited to increasing volumes of traffic that new development will generate. Their protection is a key part of this policy. Local Plan policies ESD13 and ESD15 support this policy. In addition Local Plan policy ESD16 emphasises the importance of the Oxford Canal which traverses the MCNP area.

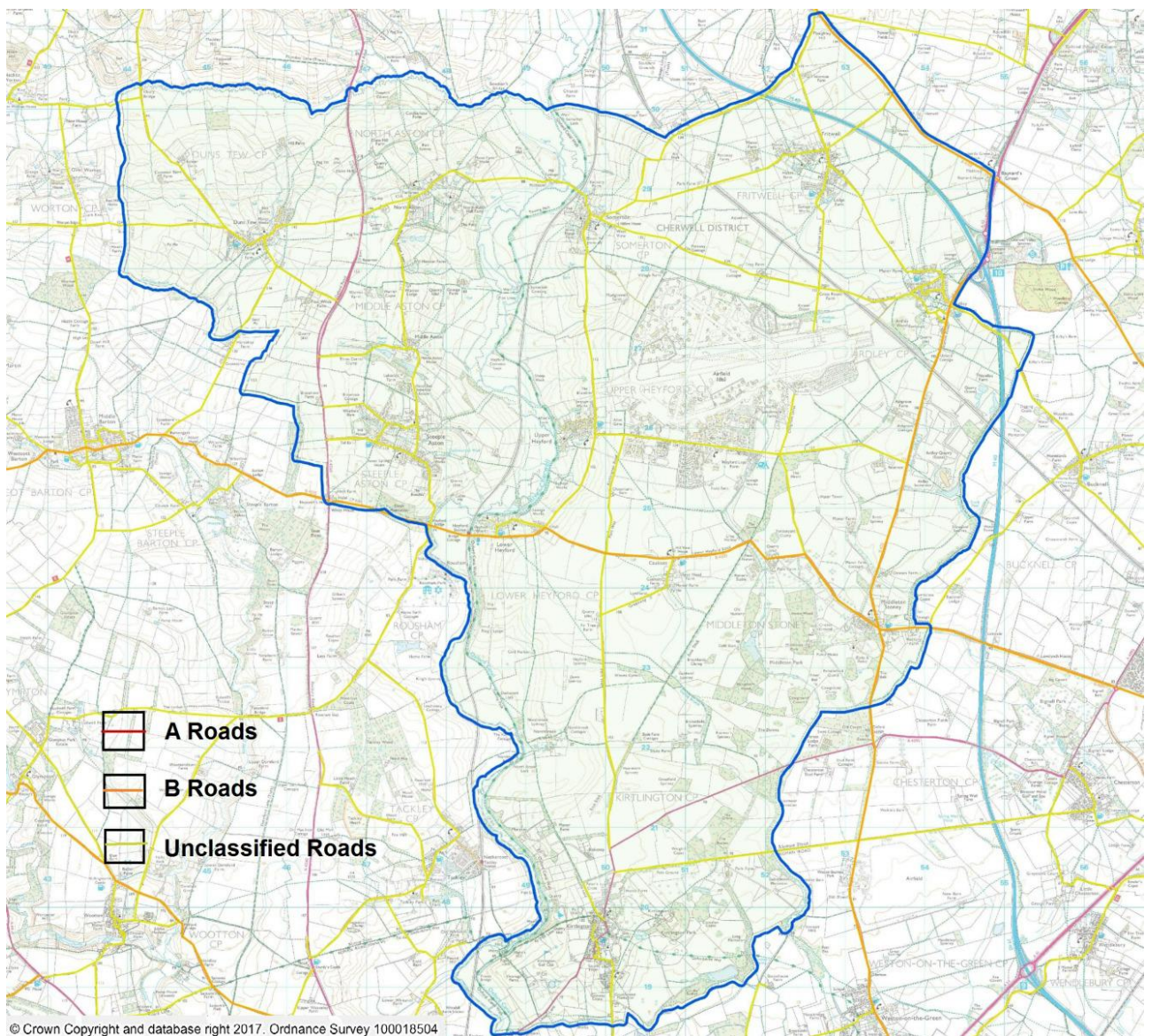


FIGURE 6. THE ROAD NETWORK IN THE MID-CHERWELL AREA

POLICY PH1: OPEN MARKET HOUSING SCHEMES

Where other policies permit such development, any new market housing should favour homes with a smaller number of bedrooms. The mix of housing will be determined having regard to the evidence of housing need in the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, or more up to date published evidence, and the characteristics of the location and site. On the basis of the 2014 SHMA, in developments of 10 dwellings or more the indicative mix should be: 30% 1 or two bedrooms, 46% 3 bedrooms and no more than 24% with 4 bedrooms or more. Smaller schemes should aim for a similar mix where possible.

NOTE: This policy does not apply to the affordable housing element of such schemes or developments affected by Policy Villages 5 of the Local Plan.

Rationale for Open Market Housing Policy

3.3.3 This housing strategy is directed towards improving the sustainability of Mid-Cherwell as a demographically mixed and balanced community. In particular, the Oxfordshire SHMA states at Table 65 that 29% of the new dwelling (market sector) requirement for Cherwell District should be one and two-bedroom dwellings, while 46.2% should have three-bedrooms (a significantly higher percentage than recommended for Oxfordshire as a whole -42.9%).

There are very few dwellings of 1 bedroom in the rural parts of Cherwell, and a relatively higher level of homes of 4+ bedrooms. CDC's Local Plan notes a need for smaller homes.⁸

3.3.4 This policy therefore aims to redress a current housing imbalance in the Plan area, which may over time be subject to change, measurable through collection of evidence. CDC Local Plan policy BSC4 requires the mix of housing to be negotiated having regard to up-to-date evidence. This is compatible with the aims of Policy PH1, but goes further in order to reflect the particular circumstances of the Mid-Cherwell area.

POLICY PH5: PARKING, GARAGING AND WASTE STORAGE PROVISION

Unless it is clearly impractical, garages, covered or open parking areas should be built in direct association with the houses whose inhabitants may be expected to use them. These are preferred to rear or separate parking courts. They must be spacious enough to accommodate modern cars and bicycles.

All dwellings should have well-designed and adequate facilities for the storage of waste bins to avoid less able residents having to haul heavy bins from unsuitable locations to the front of properties.

NOTE: This policy does not apply to development within the area covered by CDC's policy Villages 5, where site-specific design and place-shaping standards are already set out.

Rationale for Parking and Garaging Policy

3.3.14 Although residents cannot generally be prevented from parking at the roadside, all future housing developments should have adequate car and cycle parking facilities for both residents and visitors, in accordance with Oxfordshire County Council's standards. This will help to foster use of driveways instead of parking on verges or roadsides. This policy supports Local Plan policy ESD15. Reference should also be made to CDC's emerging Design Guide SPD 2017.