

# Character Assessment

Evidence base for the Cumnor Parish Neighbourhood Plan – Field Work completed Autumn 2017

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## ABSTRACT

This overall Character Assessment of Cumnor Parish was produced by Dr Kathryn Davies using the inputs of residents across the parish. Volunteers conducted desk research, field observations and interviews with local residents to complete over 20 individual Character Assessments. These individual detailed assessments are contained within four additional documents, one for each ward in the Parish.

These assessments were conducted between February and September 2017 as part of the set of documents that make up the evidence base of the Cumnor Parish Neighbourhood Plan. In addition, the evidence also includes the content of the documentation that makes up the submission to the Vale of White Horse District Council the Cumnor Conservation Area and a submission in 2007 for a Conservation Area in Lower Cumnor Hill.

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## 1. Introduction

This parish character assessment provides an evidence base for the development of the neighbourhood plan. It has been produced by groups of residents of the parish using a variety of sources and surveys. The first part of this assessment seeks to summarise the findings of the different groups and the second part contains detailed assessments of the parish. The two should be read together. The surveys were based on the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit but some groups modified this as appropriate for their area. For the purposes of the survey, the parish was divided by wards: Farmoor; Dean Court; Cumnor Hill and Cumnor Village. In order to facilitate compliance of the neighbourhood plan with the NPPF the heritage significance of each character area is articulated so that policies may be developed which conserve or enhance this significance.

Cumnor is predominantly a rural parish with some significant suburban development in the east along the main roads leading into Oxford. Until the twentieth century, the area was a typical of many rural parishes, dependent primarily on agriculture for its economy, which is expressed in its field pattern, scattered farmsteads and buildings within the village. The ancient village centre of Cumnor remains largely intact as do many of the farmsteads throughout the parish. However, its proximity to the ever-expanding Oxford fostered the development of the brick and tile works at Chawley and led to the suburban development of Cumnor Hill and then Dean Court in the twentieth century. This part of the parish is the most built-up and densely populated. In contrast to this is Farmoor to the north west which, despite being so close and well connected to Oxford, remains a distinct settlement characterised by the large reservoir, open countryside and limited, low-density housing.



*Site of Farmoor reservoir 1814*

Not surprisingly, the character of the parish is varied. This assessment aims to articulate what it is that makes the parish distinctive, identifying the elements which contribute to that distinctiveness. The character is made up of natural elements and man-made elements. Some of the latter have historic significance. This assessment will seek to identify the heritage values that make up that significance.

This assessment takes account of the Cumnor Conservation Area Appraisal produced by the Vale of White Horse District Council, adopted in January 2011 and the Botley Character Statement produced in 2014 by West Way Community Concern with professional assistance, which includes Dean Court and part of Cumnor Hill. An account of the historical development of the parish has been based on published sources in the Bodleian Library, the on-line Cumnor Parish Record and maps and documentary material in the Oxfordshire History Centre. Other sources have been used in the detailed surveys and these are noted in Part 2.

Significance has been assessed using the heritage values as set out in *Historic England's Conservation Principles*.<sup>1</sup> These are:

*Evidential Value* – relating to the potential of a place to yield primary evidence about past human activity;

*Historical Value* – relating to ways in which the present can be connected through a place to past people, events and aspects of life;

*Aesthetic Value* – relating to the ways in which people derive sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place;

*Communal Value* – relating to the meanings of place for the people who relate to it, and whose collective experience or memory it holds.

This report has been written by Dr Kathryn Davies based on the above research and using the survey material produced by local groups in Part 2.

Dr Davies, BA, MA, DPhil (Oxon), Dip TP, MRTPI, IHBC, is a heritage consultant who has been a Chartered Town Planner and qualified in conservation for over 30 years. She is a founder member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and was vice-chair until June 2019.

She has over 30 years' experience of working in planning and conservation in local authorities and for Historic England (formerly English Heritage) as a Historic Buildings Inspector, Team Leader and as the Principal Historic Places Adviser in the South East. She is currently an independent consultant. She is a member of the BOB-MK design review panel and has been appointed by CABI as a Built Environment Expert to sit on design review panels. She has lectured widely on conservation and her specific area of research, secular wall paintings, on which she has published a book and several papers.

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<sup>1</sup> Historic England, *Conservation Principles*, 2008

## 2. Location and description

The parish is located between 3 and 5 miles to the south west of Oxford, the village of Cumnor being about 4 miles from the centre of Oxford. It is a parish of dispersed settlement with four main concentrations of development in Cumnor village, Cumnor Hill, Farmoor and Dean Court, see Map 1. It covers an area of 2296 hectares, of which 1774 hectares are in agricultural use. It has a population of around 5,500 housed in over 2,000 dwellings<sup>2</sup>.

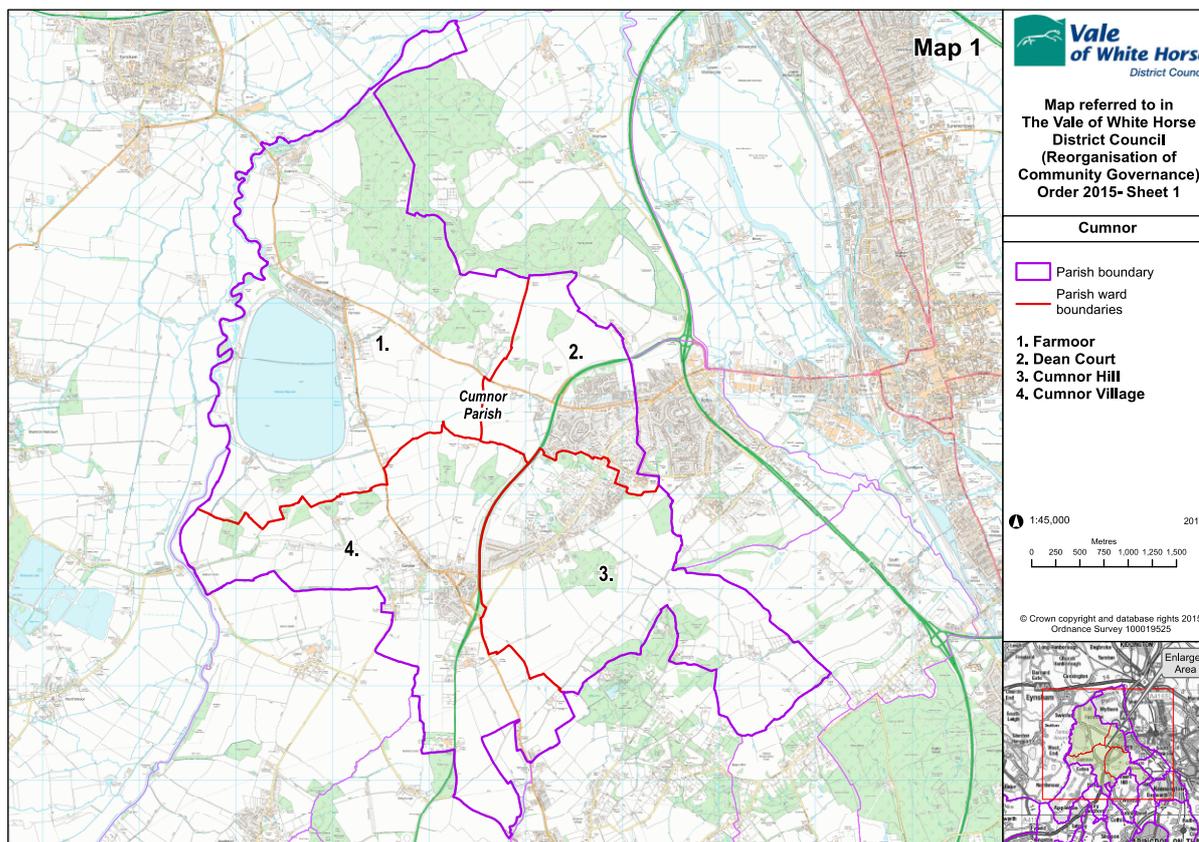


Fig.1 Location and extent of Cumnor Parish

The ground rises gradually from the eastern and western boundaries, reaching its highest point at Cumnor Hurst, at 159m above the ordnance datum. This is an SSSI with the former workings of the brickworks to the north. The village of Cumnor is set slightly below Cumnor Hurst. A number of small watercourses make their way down to the River Thames. In the north west corner of the parish is Farmoor Reservoir, which has a major recreational use and is also a nature reserve.

Cumnor Hill, a continuation of the main road west out of Oxford runs south west through the parish forking west to the village centre and south to join the A420 to Faringdon. Eynsham Rd, the B4044, is the other main road through the parish heading off north west to Swinford Bridge and on to Eynsham. The road from Farmoor to Cumnor village, the B4017 rises quite steeply after it passes the reservoir. It runs through the centre of the village and on south-eastwards to Abingdon. A minor road runs from the village centre roughly parallel

<sup>2</sup> Statistics based on the Cumnor Parish Record

with the River Thames to the villages of Eaton and Appleton to the south west. The A420 bypass built in the mid-1970s, cuts through the parish with two road bridges at Cumnor and an underpass at Dean Court being the only connections between the two parts of the parish north of the village.

Cumnor village is the historic centre of the parish. The Church of St Michael dominates the centre at the junction of the main historic routes through the village. Traditional houses of differing styles and dates can be found along the village streets, including public houses, the old school, farms and farm buildings. One notable characteristic of the centre is its openness. The church is set back from the road in a generously-sized churchyard and the site of the former Cumnor Place, adjacent to the church with its grounds and fishponds also provides a large open space.



*Cumnor High St showing church, tithe barn and old school*

Development at Farmoor is concentrated between the reservoir and the Eynsham Rd and dates principally from the twentieth century. Twentieth century suburban development is concentrated on Cumnor Hill and Dean Court with smaller developments within the Cumnor village. Whilst formerly it was principally an agricultural parish, its economic base is now more varied, housing many home businesses and commuters to Oxford and London. Its agricultural past is reflected in farms and farm buildings scattered throughout the parish. The working farms that remain in the parish are in mixed agricultural use.

All the land outside the built up areas of the village, Dean Court and Cumnor Hill lies within the Green Belt.

### 3. Historical development<sup>3</sup>

The earliest history of the Cumnor area is unclear. No evidence has yet appeared of Neolithic settlement but the area would have been crossed and hunted by peoples from settlements on the extensive gravel terraces on the western side of the Thames, using river crossings at Swinford and Bablockhythe. Archaeological excavation has revealed that the meadows at Farmoor were settled at least periodically in the Iron Age from 400 BCE (see details of Farmoor in additional document).

In the Romano-British period the Cumnor area lay within a large triangle of regional roads but was relatively isolated, cut off to the east by the Thames floodplain. Artefacts of the period have been found at river crossings and on Wytham Hill. Some evidence of Roman settlement has been found near Chilswell. Indigenous groups pastured their livestock on the river meadows and cultivated lands at a higher level.

The Saxons invaded the region after the fall of the Roman Empire. The land within this northern loop of the Thames, 'Hornemere', was the northern limit of Wessex. Small settlements were established on the higher ground and at intervals along the Thames, which became a natural frontier with Mercia. 'Cumnor' is probably derived from 'Colmenora' - 'Cuma's hilltop.'

The ministry of St. Birinus at Dorchester-on-Thames in the 7th century, brought the local people, the 'Horningas', under Christian influence. Certainly from 968, and perhaps earlier, Cumnor was a possession of the Benedictine Abbey at Abingdon and remained so for more than half its recorded history. The Abbot's possession was confirmed in the Domesday Book of 1086. Cumnor estate was the most important property of Abingdon Abbey (other than Abingdon Barton) from C10 until the Dissolution. The estate was managed from this grange at Cumnor from late Saxon period onwards.

In the late Saxon period, the church at Cumnor appears to have served as a minster, with chapels-at-ease at Wytham, Seacourt, the Hinkseys and Wootton. The latter two remained with Cumnor until the early eighteenth century. Cumnor parish itself was one of the largest in Berkshire and for ease of administration was divided into tythings: Cumnor, Stroud, Swinford, Hill End, Whitley, Chawley, and Botley, with three out-lying one-farm estates: Bradley, Henwood and Chilswell.

Bound by feudal obligations and struggling to meet both their own subsistence needs and the demands of the Abbot, the many landed tenants were self-sufficient in most respects. River fisheries added to the rural economy. Their lives were dominated by the Church, the Abbot and the seasons. Around 1330 the monks established what became known as Cumnor Place, a place of refuge and a manorial centre.

The Black Death, arriving in late 1349, had a severe impact on parts of the parish. Its aftermath, with recurring epidemics, led to the breakdown of the feudal system, here and

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<sup>3</sup> This account is principally taken from the online Cumnor Parish Record supplemented by the VCH and material in the Oxfordshire History Centre

elsewhere, and was marked in Cumnor by the consolidation of many small land holdings into larger units and the leasing of demesne.

The Dissolution in 1538 brought the closure of Abingdon Abbey. The retiring abbot spent his last days at Cumnor Place. After his death Henry VIII sold Cumnor Place to one of his physicians, George Owen. Under a succession of new lords of the manor, the pattern of tenure and land use changed little, but in marketing and buying produce the focus moved from Abingdon to Oxford, encouraged by a new causeway from Botley to Oxford. The demand for victuals by both city and university was increasing.

The Thames at this time was the boundary dividing Berkshire from Oxfordshire and the diocese of Salisbury from Lincoln. Cumnor parish was not taken into an Oxford Diocese until Victorian times.

Anthony Forster purchased the lordship of Cumnor manor in 1561, already being a tenant at Cumnor Place. He enjoyed the patronage of Robert Dudley, later Earl of Leicester. It was in Forster's time, 1560, that Amy Dudley (nee Robsart) met her untimely and mysterious death at Cumnor Place, an event to which Sir Walter Scott's novel 'Kenilworth' in 1821 drew much interest and notoriety. Forster was the last, perhaps the only, lord of the manor to reside in Cumnor Place. It was afterwards to fall gradually into decay and ruin, being demolished in 1810, see Fig 3.

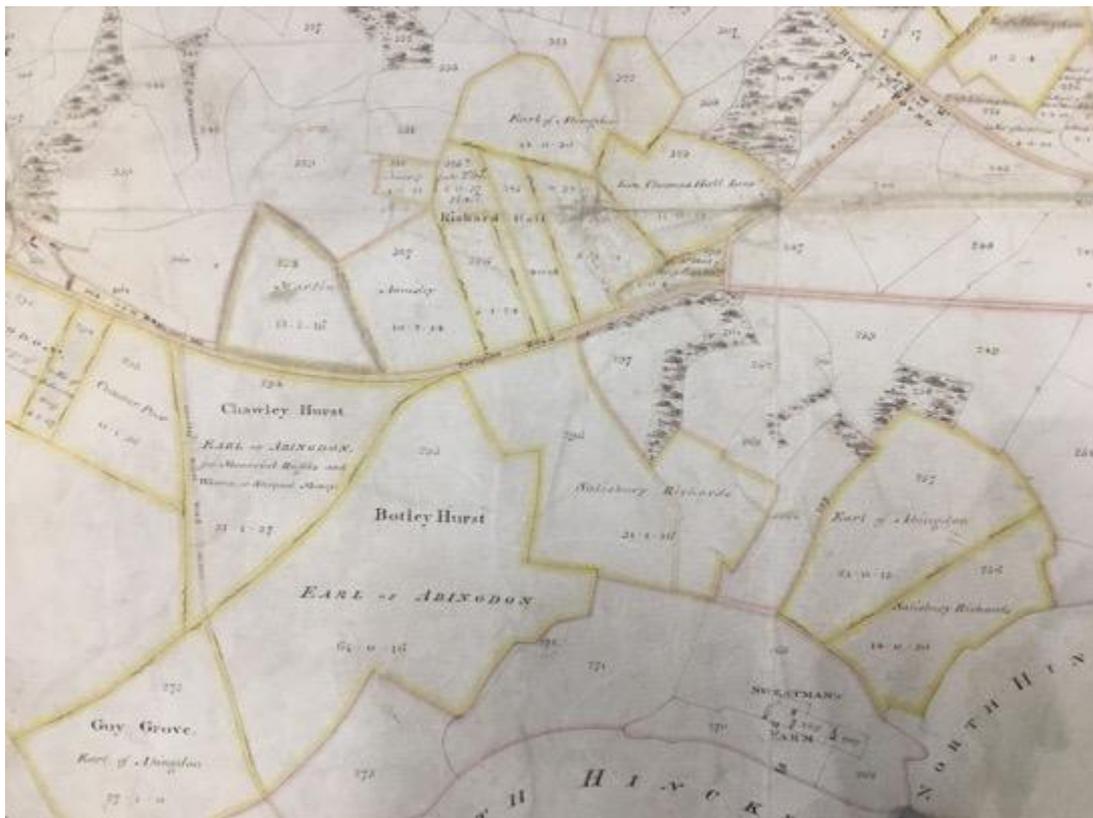


*Fig.3 Cumnor Place c.1809 just prior to its demolition*

Cumnor was affected by the Civil War. Lieutenant Godfrey and Captain Peacock, local yeomen, fought for the King's cause. When the Parliamentarians laid siege to Oxford they burnt down Botley Mill which was part of Cumnor Manor, and many local deaths resulted from the siege. In 1644 Parliamentary troops raided the village for supplies and carried away the church weathercock.

Over the 17th to the 19th century, change occurred only slowly in the rural parish. For more than 250 years Cumnor was one of the many estates owned by successive Earls of Abingdon (the Bertie family), whose seat lay at Rycote near Thame and later at Wytham. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Abingdon who created the new road to Eynsham (the B4044) in 1810-11 avoiding Wytham Hill, and built the Swinford Toll Bridge (Grade II\*) which replaced the ferry crossing. Its associated toll house, Grade II, survives and still has its original use.

The turnpike road from Botley to Cumnor was the main route west, climbing up the hill which was quite steep in places. The new road of Cumnor Hill was designed to have a steady gradient facilitating an easier climb for horses. This became the main route superseding the turnpike road of which all traces have been lost apart from a short stretch on Hurst Lane.



*Site of Cumnor Hill showing the turnpike road prior to any development*

Until the early twentieth century the parish economy depended almost solely on agriculture. Gradually the old yeomen's copyholds were converted to 'farmer's' short-term leases and some of the old open fields with their strips were enclosed by local consent. The manorial system came to an end in the nineteenth century. Enclosure in 1814 had little effect on employment but changed the landscape with the introduction of hedged, smaller field boundaries.

The other main employment in the parish in the nineteenth century was the Chawley brick and tile works, which started in 1841 and expanded throughout the rest of the century. A timber mill was established on the site and the two enterprises were run together. In the twentieth century competition from cheaper bricks, notably from the London Brick Company, led to its decline. Some land was sold off for housing, which became the Bertie Rd

and Norreys Rd development. The brickworks finally closed in the late 1930s. The site remained vacant for many years until it was eventually developed for housing, its name, Kimmeridge Close, reflecting the geological name of the raw material there, Kimmeridge Clay.

Cumnor gained literary recognition through the poetry of Matthew Arnold, who enjoyed walking the hillsides. His elegiac poems 'The Scholar Gypsy' and 'Thyrsis' are both set in the area.

In Victorian times Cumnor was still a parish of labourers. By 1841 the population exceeded 1,000. A parish school was built in 1861. Until the end of the century there were no resident gentry. The fortunes of the parish reflected those of agriculture and in the recession that followed the repeal of the protective Corn Laws, the parish suffered neglect and a decline in population.

The first significant event following the First World War was the decision by the 8th Earl of Abingdon in the 1920s to sell the freeholds of his Cumnor properties. This coincided with the introduction of local bus services and the further growth of Oxford, encouraging exploitation. Thus the twentieth century saw a rapid rise in suburban development, which the Oxford Green Belt policy sought to control. North of the Eynsham Road the environmental concerns of the purchaser of the Wytham Estate safeguarded the slopes of Wytham Hill and in 1943 the estate was gifted, and in part sold, to Oxford University. Conditions of the deed inhibited development. Farmoor's development dates principally from just after WWI development with a major change resulting from the development of the reservoir in the 1970s.

The growing population of the parish was increasingly dependent on Oxford for employment and by the late 1950s high land values and house prices were influencing the socio-economic spectrum.

Boundary changes conveyed half of Botley tything to North Hinksey. In 1974 local government reorganisation transferred Cumnor from Berkshire to Oxfordshire and the parish now lies within the Vale of White Horse District.

The development of the A420 by-pass from Botley to Cumnor in the mid-1970s relieved the local roads of much of the through traffic but, in doing so, it effectively cut the northern part of the parish in two leaving only the underpass of the B4044 as a connection.

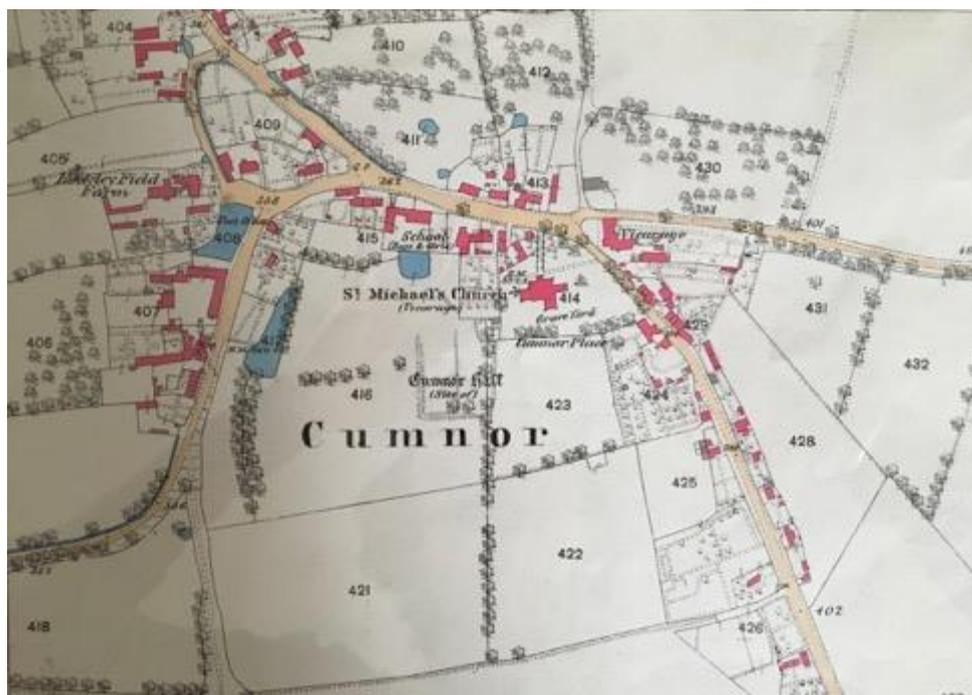
#### **4. Assessment of character and special interest**

Change throughout the history of the parish was gradual until the twentieth century. Until then it was a typical rural parish with the village as its central focus surrounded by agricultural land and ancient woodland. Major twentieth century development has changed the nature of large parts of the parish, in Dean Court, Cumnor Hill, Farmoor and in Cumnor Village itself. Notwithstanding this, large parts of the parish remain essentially rural with agriculture dominating the landscape.

Whilst the varied character of the parish reflects the complexities of its development, three broad categories of character can be identified: the historic village centre; the surrounding open, essentially agricultural landscape and post-1900 housing development. Within each broad category there is much local variation. The exact nature of these variations are detailed in the individual character assessments for each ward.

### ***i. Historic village centre***

The historic centre of the village is designated a conservation area and the Council's Conservation Area Appraisal, January 2011, which comprehensively addresses the character of this area, should be referred to for a detailed assessment of the character of the historic centre.



*Fig.4 1876 OS map of Cumnor village*

The historic settlement is dispersed along the main routes through the village, see Fig.4. Key characteristics of the centre are its historic buildings, low density of development, mature hedgerows and trees and stone boundary walls defining the principal routes through the village. There are many open plots of land traditionally used as gardens, closes, orchards and fields. Whilst some of these have been infilled with twentieth century housing of varying dates, many remain as a reminder of its agricultural past. The largest open plot in the centre of the village is that of the site of Cumnor Place, the medieval hall demolished in 1810. Several bodies of water, including the village pond, are the remnants of the medieval fishponds.

Key buildings in the village are found on High St, which is the ancient focus for this dispersed village. This is the junction of the main roads through the village. The Church of St Michael stands adjacent in an elevated position, set within a generously-sized churchyard. Loose clusters of dwellings in an irregular layout interspersed with farmhouses and farm buildings give variety to the built form. Twentieth century buildings mostly front onto the main routes which reflect the layout of the historic village. Traditional buildings, many of them listed, are

generally constructed of rubble stone with tiled or thatched roof and twentieth century buildings are mostly of brick and slate. There were several farms within the village and this is reflected in the surviving farm buildings, see Fig.5.



*Fig.5 College Farm*

The historic form of the village still dominates with well-used tracks and footpaths connecting the disparate parts. These cross the open fields and closes within the village giving immediate access to open countryside.

The openness of the built form allows views within and across the village. The church features many views. Being in an elevated position, there are views through the open spaces, over the undulating countryside surrounding the village. As well as open views there are intimate closed views along footpaths and lanes, with overgrown hedgerows and wild flowers reinforcing the strong rural character of the village, see figure 6.

## **Significance**

### *Evidential Value*

There is evidential value in the open land in the centre of the village forming the site of Cumnor Place. There are records of the building prior to its demolition and there are clearly building remains below ground as well as the remnants of fishponds. Evidence of the medieval farming system can be found in the ridge and furrow surviving to the north of College Farm and in some of the field boundaries. The extensive archaeological finds in Farmoor and elsewhere in the parish suggest that the area as a whole may well have much archaeological potential.

There may be evidential value in some of the early buildings within the village whose development has not been investigated. **Evidential value is considered to be high.**



*Figure 6 Strong rural character within the village*

#### *Historical value*

This lies in the many multiphase buildings whose alterations and extensions reflect the changing needs and circumstances of the owners. The range of types, sizes and building materials indicate how building technology and fashions have changed over time. The size and type of farm buildings tells the story of farming over the centuries.

The track of The Leys (or sometimes known as Long Leys) illustrates the importance of this route linking with a main crossing point of the River Thames via the ferry.

The story of Amy Robsart at Cumnor Place has national importance and adds associational historical value.

The illustrative and associational values combine to give a **high historical value.**

#### *Aesthetic value*

Aesthetic value lies in the loose clusters of picturesque historic buildings contrasting with the openness of the village layout. Views within and out of the village are an important characteristic. The dominant siting of the Church visible in several views within the village has high aesthetic value. Some mediocre twentieth century building and the loss of original detailing on historic buildings diminishes aesthetic value. **Overall, aesthetic value is medium.**

### *Communal value*

Within the centre of the village are all the communal facilities of the village, the church, the old school, shops, post office, recreation ground, war memorial and playing fields. The well-used historic footpath network running through the centre connects this dispersed settlement to its centre. **Communal value is high.**

### **ii. Open countryside**

The land surrounding the village and the twentieth century housing is characterised by gently undulating, unspoilt countryside rising to the wooded slopes of Wytham Hill in the north and the Cumnor Hurst to the south. Hurst means wooded hill and interspersed amongst arable fields are patches of ancient woodland. The land to the west bordering the river is much lower and fairly flat. Farmoor reservoir occupies the site of Cumnor Mead, the flat meadows of the parish, see Fig.7. Isolated farmsteads, mostly pre-enclosure, contain much information about past farming in the parish. Agriculture was the principal economic activity in the parish until the twentieth century. Chilswell, an isolated manor in the south east of the parish, lies on the unmade road linking to the old turnpike road.



*Fig.7 View from Tumbledown Hill towards Farmoor*

The lanes and footpaths leading to the river have had no through traffic since the ferry ceased and their character is one of deep countryside. Other lanes and tracks are reminders of principal routes through the parish before motorised vehicles. The long straight track from Henwood to Harcourt Hill may have been the very early route from the west into Oxford crossing the River Thames at the original Oxenford. These are well-used tracks connecting the dispersed settlements to each other and the village centre. The Leys, which leads from the village to the old river crossing at Bablockhythe, passes the Physic Well, a sulphurous well on the edge of the woods bordering the lane.

The development of the Eynsham Road and the replacement of the ferry with Swinford Toll Bridge and its associated toll house was a major improvement. Similarly, the building of Cumnor Hill enabled much easier transport up the eastern slopes of the parish, facilitating improved communication with Oxford.

From the higher points in the parish are extensive views over the surrounding countryside, the Vale of White Horse to the west and Oxford to the east. It is these latter views that inspired Matthew Arnold.

## **Significance**

### *Evidential value*

Various excavations in the parish have revealed that there is evidence of Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon settlement in the area. The Historic Environment Record suggests that it is likely that there is considerable archaeological potential throughout the parish.

**Evidential value is therefore high.**

### *Historical value*

The field pattern and farmsteads scattered throughout the parish contain evidence of farming over the centuries. Changing farming practices, and the impact of enclosure can be read in the farm buildings and the landscape. The documentary evidence of the Enclosure Map and Award gives additional value. The routes through the village illustrate transport development over time. The major road improvements of the Eynsham Road with Swinford Toll Bridge and Toll House and of Cumnor Hill illustrate the importance of transport for economic development.

Associational value lies in the connection with Matthew Arnold, a national figure whose poetry was inspired by this landscape and the views it afforded over Oxford's 'dreaming spires'. **Historical value is medium-high**

### *Aesthetic Value*

The attractive open countryside has considerable landscape value, especially given its proximity to Oxford. However, looking from the heritage perspective its aesthetic value lies in its views, both distant views, principally over Oxford, and near views which are characteristic of traditional farming of the area. This includes a number of listed farmsteads and farm buildings. **Aesthetic value is high**

### *Communal value*

Whilst the footpaths and tracks through the parish are well-used, they are not in themselves the focus of any communal activity. Much of the open countryside is in private ownership and has no communal value. Farmoor Reservoir is a major development which has public access, and valued recreational use, but limited heritage value. **Communal value is considered to be medium.**

### **iii. Post 1900 housing development**

Although housing development occurred in different parts of the parish at different times in the twentieth century, each telling a different story, these developments have some broad similarities. Principal amongst these is that they are all fairly low rise and more or less low density. Open spaces, generous gardens and greenery characterise them. In many areas, houses are well screened from public view by mature gardens. The discretely-sited, low-rise development in Farmoor is equally hidden from general view. In contrast the twenty-first century developments of Kimmeridge Close and Tilbury Fields are much more prominent, higher density, higher rise and generally of a different grain to other housing developments in the parish.

The differing dates and characteristics of the various housing developments are a response to a range of development pressures from the early twentieth century onwards. The main roads were developed first and are good examples of classic ribbon development, which the Oxford Green Belt sought to control. The earliest twentieth century housing is found up Cumnor Hill, with large Edwardian houses set in very generous plots. This set the pattern for other development around Cumnor Hill. 1930s and 1950s housing at Dean Court follows typical layouts of the time, with a range of house types and sizes from small bungalows to large three/four bed roomed houses. The housing in much of Farmoor has an air of 1930s rural encroachment even though some housing is much later. Housing of the later twentieth century is of varying quality but all share the same characteristics being fairly low rise, low density and having open green spaces appropriate for the semi-rural setting.

Different in nature but sharing similar characteristics is Tudor Court, the mobile home park in Dean Court. This provides valuable accommodation different from the rest of the area but screened from most views and has a neutral visual impact.

The surrounding hills of open countryside are clearly visible from most developments giving a semi-rural feel to this suburban development. This is reinforced by the open green spaces designed in several estates and the contribution by mature private gardens, especially those on Cumnor Hill which shelter much wildlife. Attractive, unspoilt countryside is readily accessible to all areas.

These developments have generally related to ancient field boundaries as they have been developed in a piecemeal fashion over time and these are still discernible even where the area is totally developed. Historic tracks remain, such as the informal footpath and road marking the eastern boundary of the parish, as reminders of its rural past.

Despite modern housing and twentieth century infill, Chawley village is still distinct as a historic core. The farms and farm buildings survive, several of which are Grade II listed. The ancient tracks leading out of the village are now truncated by the A420 bypass. Brick Kiln Farm was the base of the brick and tile works. Bertie Road and Norreys Road were laid out on the site of the brick drying fields when the brickworks went into decline.

## Significance

### *Evidential value*

Works associated with developing land for housing will have mostly destroyed any archaeological evidence. **Evidential value is therefore low.**

### *Historical value*

The different phases of housing development, their nature and scale, illustrate the different pressures of development throughout the twentieth century, pressures which extend into the twenty-first century. The vestiges of the historic landscape expressed in boundaries, tracks and surviving historic buildings are all the more important, having lost their context, as evidence of the past. Chawley is an important survival of a small village subsumed by larger development. **Historical value is medium.**

### *Aesthetic value*

This lies mostly in the typical characteristics of visually low key, low density housing with mature trees and hedges which connect to the surrounding countryside. Views out to open countryside reinforce the semi-rural nature of the location and its strong connection with its rural past. Twenty-first century housing on the whole is at odds with this. **Aesthetic value is medium.**

### *Communal value*

Although roads and footpaths through the developments are publicly accessible, communal value is limited as these are private housing developments. **Communal value is low.**

## 5. Summary of significance

This assessment of heritage significance has sought to articulate what it is about the parish that matters and why. The degree of value ascribed in the assessment is acknowledged to be debatable and it is relative compared to other areas. More important than arriving at absolute values is the identification of elements of the historic environment which have a degree of significance so that this can be conserved and, preferably, enhanced through the neighbourhood plan.

Overall, the parish has high evidential value based on the archaeological work done to date. In areas of twentieth-century development, this potential is significantly diminished. Historical value is also high. In an area which has been subject in parts to a major transformation in the twentieth century, all those elements that survive linking the parish to its the past are much valued, as are its associations with locally and nationally important figures of the past. Multiphase houses and farmsteads each tell their story. Historic tracks, footpaths and roads tell a different, equally important story and even the layout of the fields has historical value.

Whist the aesthetic value of the much of the twentieth-century housing might in places be questionable, the area is highly valued aesthetically for the general low density, low rise character of most of the development; its semi-rural feel and its visual links to open countryside. This gently undulating landscape, in mixed farming use, with its scattered

patches of ancient woodland is attractive and unspoilt and much valued because of its contrast to the densely developed city of Oxford close by.

The principal elements of the parish embodying communal value lie in the historic centre of the village and in the well-used public footpath network. Otherwise, the area has low communal value.

### **6. Negative features**

Some negative features have been identified which diminish the special interest and character of the area. These issues form the basis of some of the policies in the neighbourhood plan and should be addressed wherever possible when proposals for development are put forward. These include:

1. The inappropriate scale and density of 21<sup>st</sup> century housing developments
2. Noise from the A420
3. The lack of safe footways/cycles routes connecting Farmoor to the rest of the parish, especially along Eynsham Rd
4. Traffic noise and fumes up Cumnor Hill
5. Aircraft noise from Brize Norton, especially at night
6. The loss of original detailing on traditional buildings
7. The intrusive nature of the electricity pylons running through the Parish from the housing estate at Tilbury Lane through the open countryside of Farmoor.