

SUTTON COURTENAY CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



Sutton Courtenay Parish Council

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The 1872 25 inch OS map of Church Street (Bodleian Library)

Summary

Sutton Courtenay is an ancient village situated on the River Thames just south of Abingdon. The river and its fertile flood plain attracted early settlers, and there is evidence of settlement from the Neolithic period onwards. History on the ground dates from the early medieval period when a combination of the links to Abingdon Abbey; a royal connection and rich agricultural land gave rise to a high status village. The earliest buildings date from the 12th century and the complex network of tracks and lanes throughout the village was established around this time, if not earlier.

The village grew organically over the centuries responding to changing circumstances and opportunities. Always the surrounding agricultural land, initially worked as open fields and latterly as enclosed landscape, supported employment and food production in the village. Buildings developed reflecting changes in technology and fashion resulting in an attractive variety of building types, sizes, date and designs. As transport links improved so connections with the wider world developed. This is most clearly expressed in the twentieth century, when the rail and road connections were significantly enhanced. Whilst this brought economic development it had an impact on the essential character of landscape surrounding the village. Gravel extraction massively increased in scale and with this came use of the sites for landfill, which have been generally poorly reinstated. The development of Didcot A power station utterly changed the visual landscape, though this is soon to be demolished. The main issue now for the character of the village is pressure for housing development. This has been accommodated to date by retaining connections, visual and physical, to the surrounding landscape creating semi-rural rather than suburban developments. Some more recent developments appear to be struggling to achieve this.



View of Sutton Courtenay from the west, with buildings screened by mature trees and hedges (Spring 2019)

Introduction

The neighbourhood plan area of Sutton Courtenay includes the picturesque historic core of the village, the centre of which is designated as a conservation area; its more modern extensions into open countryside and the surrounding land which forms its setting. This setting has been seriously compromised in the twentieth century and it is here that there is the greatest potential for change. The spirit of government advice and policy is that development should enhance heritage assets and their setting, in this case the conservation area and the many listed buildings within the village, and development should not cause harm. This assessment seeks to identify the essential character of different parts of the area so that any development proposals can be informed by this and the character reinforced and enhanced.

This study looks at the historical development of the village and how it is inextricably linked to its surrounding countryside. This, once rich, agricultural land gave rise to settlement in pre-historic times and the village has probably been continuously settled since then. Certainly, there is documentary evidence for settlement here since the 7th century. It appears both from archaeological and documentary evidence that this has always been a high status village. This is expressed in many of the buildings in the village and the layout of plots and open spaces which have survived development pressures in the recent past.

The layout of the village is determined by its location adjacent to the River Thames, the reason for the rich agricultural land supporting mixed farming, and also an important factor for transport and trade. The extensive network of tracks and paths connect the village to its former open fields which surround the village. Some of these tracks are possibly much earlier and relate to Anglo-Saxon or even pre-historic routes across the area. These paths continue to be well used for recreational purposes as well as communication within the village.

Two factors, initially unrelated, have had a significant impact on the traditional character of the village. Gravel extraction, which was first documented at the end of the eighteenth century, expanded massively in the twentieth century, particularly to the east of the village. The rich agricultural land was destroyed to be replaced by gravel pits and landfill. The development of Didcot, just to the south, as a railway centre facilitated the development of these industries. The growth of the wider area in the second half of the twentieth century and the easy transport of a bulky material like coal meant that this was also a prime location for the massive Didcot A power station, whose presence looms over much of the southern part of the village. Its proposed demolition in summer-autumn 2019, provides an enhancement opportunity.

The wider setting of the neighbourhood plan area includes Milton Park, a business and technology park, the proposed Didcot Garden Town to the south and the ever-expanding town of Abingdon to the north. The area is, therefore, very sensitively located and includes the critically important open space which preserves the green space about these settlements and prevents coalescence.

The character of a village can be difficult to define as it is made up of intangible as well as tangible elements. The physical characteristics of a village and its surroundings can

determine the quality of life and changes can either enhance the life of the village or diminish it. This assessment seeks to identify the essential characteristics which not only constitute its physical make up but which also encapsulate its spirit and give it life.

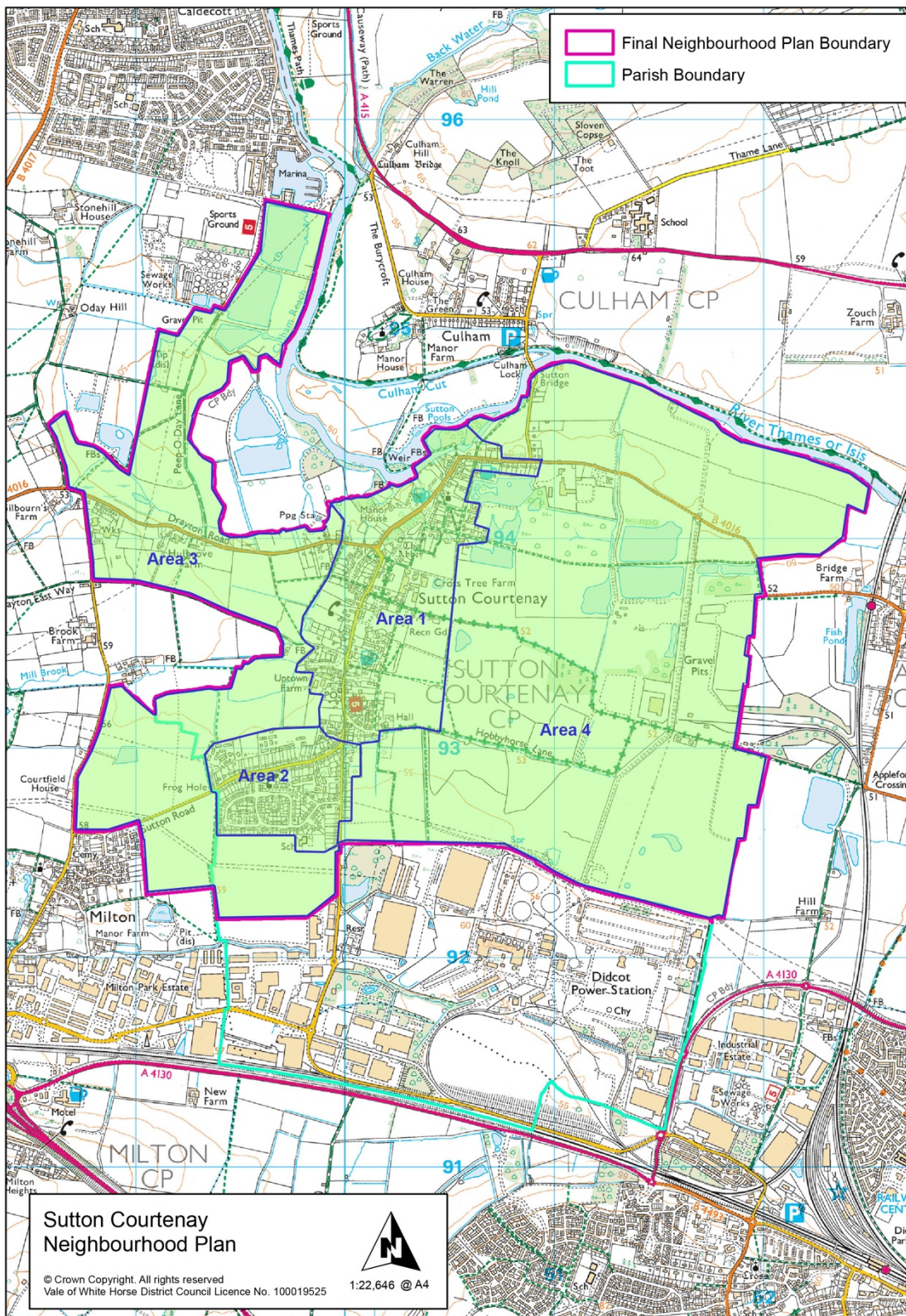


Figure 1. Neighbourhood Plan area showing character areas

Methodology

The historical development of the parish has been researched with the help of local historians in the village¹ and using published and unpublished material in the Bodleian Library, the Oxfordshire History Centre, the Historic Environment Record and the online Historic Landscape Characterisation for Oxfordshire. A visual survey of the area was undertaken on a number of visits during February-April 2019. The character of the area was articulated using the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit, modified as necessary to accommodate the particular characteristics of the area.

For the purposes of the survey, the neighbourhood plan area was divided into four character areas, see figure 1. 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. 'Significance' is defined in the NPPF as:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

The articulation of this interest is informed by Historic England's *Conservation Principles* 2008 and the draft revised *Conservation Principles*, 2017.

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Context

i. Location and setting

Sutton Courtenay lies about 2.5 miles south of Abingdon on the flood plain of the River Thames. It is a linear village stretching from the River Thames in the north to the outskirts of Didcot in the south. To the west is open agricultural land which divides it from the adjoining villages of Drayton and Milton. To the east of the village is degraded open land which has been subject to gravel extraction and landfill. This extends all the way to the next village of Appleford. Beyond the river to the north is the small village of Culham, surrounded by farmland and also some gravel extraction. To the south is Didcot power station and Milton Park, see figure 2.

¹ I am grateful to Mary Thompson for sharing her research on the village with me.



Figure 2. Satellite image of Sutton Courtenay and its setting (Google maps, 2019)

The village has good connections to the national road network via the A34 trunk road which lies to the west. The B4016 runs east-west through the parish connecting the village with Drayton to the west and Appleford to the east. This forms the main route through the north part of the village. Milton Road to the south connects the village with Milton and High Street/Harwell Road connect the centre of the village with Didcot. The nearby Didcot Parkway railway station provides excellent communications to major cities nationally, with frequent trains to London and the south west. The village is connected to Culham and Abingdon to the north via the river crossing at Sutton Bridge.

The land is all low lying, under 60m. There are numerous watercourses draining into the Thames, including Ginge Brook and Mill Brook and much low-lying land is waterlogged. This is due, in part, to gravel extractions, as are the numerous artificial lakes, principally to the east of the village.

The population of the parish in 2011 was 2,421. Whilst no reliable up-dated figure will be available until after the 2021 census, the population of the village will have increased as a result of the new housing developments which have taken place since 2011. The traditional employment of agriculture and related occupations has been replaced by commuting and work relating to Didcot power station, gravel extraction, Milton Park and the research establishments at Harwell, Culham and Rutherford laboratories.

ii. Historical development

The area has a very long history of settlement, going back 8,000 years². The rich, fertile soils attracted settlers over centuries and the area may well have been continuously settled over

² Sutton Courtenay, A Village Appraisal, 1995

this period. There is archaeological evidence for Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements and there are the remains of a Roman Villa at Dropshort, now Hulgrave Farm which was excavated in 1966 and further Roman settlement near Bridge Farm to the east. Several early Anglo-Saxon huts have been excavated as well as a large Anglo-Saxon hall, possibly the largest in Britain³. This has links to other Anglo-Saxon settlements along this stretch of the Thames, at Appleford, Long Wittenham and Dorchester. Evidence on the ground for Anglo-Saxon settlement lies in the layout of the early core of the village and possibly in the causeway and weirs that separate the millstream from Sutton Pools which may date from this period⁴.

The monastery at Abingdon was endowed with the manor of Sutton in 688. In 801 Sutton became a royal vill, with Abingdon monastery retaining the church and what is now the Abbey. This was never actually an Abbey but a grange for Abingdon Abbey. The presence of both the Church and the Crown suggests this has long been a settlement of some standing. The royal connection is documented with Queen Matilda's residence here in 1100-1101 and it is likely that she gave birth here in 1101-2 to a daughter who became Empress Matilda, mother of Henry II. A close ally of Henry II was Reynold de Courtenay, who received the grant of the manor from Henry II in 1175 in return for support given in gaining the English crown and it was he who gave his name to the village. The royal connection survives today as the Dean and Canons of Windsor are still one of the patrons of the DAMASCUS Parish.

The heart of the village was developed by the medieval period and the footpaths connecting it to adjacent villages, such as Drayton East Way and Wallingford Old Way were probably established by then. These may well have been established much earlier and may relate to pre-historic development in the area.

The high status of the village at this date is expressed in the early buildings in the centre of the village around The Green. Whilst it is not unusual to find a medieval church and manor house in close proximity, in Sutton Courtenay there are also the high status buildings of the Norman Hall and The Abbey, dating from the 12th - early 13th centuries. The village benefitted and grew as a result not only of the rich agricultural land but also because of its position on the River Thames. Several substantial houses survive from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicating the relative wealth of the village. River trade was important and a wharf developed near the north end of Church Street. It was here that a paper mill was established in the late seventeenth century. Its claim to fame was that it obtained a contract for making paper for bank notes for the recently established Bank of England. The contract for this was lost in 1724, when it was discovered that the paper was open to forgery. Paper production continued until around 1880.

John Rocque's map of 1761 gives a picture of the village in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, see figure 3. The layout of the village streets and paths is much as it is today. The settlement straggles along High Street and Church Street with the majority of properties fronting directly onto these principal routes, though buildings are shown rather

³ Naomi Brennan and Helena Hamerow, 'An Anglo-Saxon Great Hall Complex at Sutton Courtenay/Drayton, Oxfordshire; A Royal Centre of Early Wessex?', *Archaeological Journal*, March 2016

⁴ This is discussed in John Fletcher, *Sutton Courtenay: The History of a Thames-side Village*, 1990, pp.14-16 though no references are given to substantiate this.

diagrammatically. These roads are crossed by the ancient west-east tracks including Drayton East Way and Wallingford Old Way. Some houses have long rear plots and there is a cluster of development around the junction with Drayton Road and off what is now Frilsham Street.



Figure 3. Rocque's map of 1761 (Bodleian Library)

The surrounding land was principally in agricultural use with meadow land bordering the river and arable fields and pasture elsewhere, including Oday Common. Wheat, barley and oats were the principal crops.

The 1804 Enclosure Map, see figure 4, presents a similar picture although this map shows buildings more accurately. There is more development around The Green, where properties are set back from the highway and front on to The Green. The Abbey, Manor House, Norman Hall (then called Manor Farm) and their associated buildings are set back from the principal road.

Unsurprisingly, land use surrounding the village is similar. Orchards are noted in the garden plots and closes in the heart of the village. There was a potato ground, let to 'sundry poor occupiers' and several areas of allotments. One in particular is of interest as it was located away from the village, in Oday, on land shown in Rocque's map as Oday Common. In what was a fairly small field are 35 allotments, many of standard size and accessed by private roads, see figure 38. No trace of this survives today. Also shown on the enclosure map are several small gravel pits, the forerunners of the extensive gravel extraction which took place during the twentieth century and which continues today.



Figure 4. Enclosure map of 1804 showing the historic village (Oxfordshire History Centre)⁵

There was very little discernible change in the layout of parish between 1804 and 1840, when the tithe map was produced, see figure 5. The small allotments in Oday had been replaced by four fields but the private roads serving them are still discernible on the tithe map. Whilst there is some subdivision of fields, the layout was largely the same as in 1804.

⁵ This is a very large map on stiff vellum which does not open flat so there is some distortion of the image



Figure 5. Tithe map of 1840 showing similar plot boundaries to the 1804 enclosure map (Oxfordshire History Centre)⁶

Communication and trade was improved by the construction of a toll bridge over the Thames in 1807 to replace the ferry. This remained as a toll bridge until 1939 when it was opened to the public without charge. The village grew commensurately, though mostly in the southern half of the settlement. The 1870s OS series of 25-inch maps show the village layout more or less as it was at the beginning of the century though more densely developed, see figures 6 and 7. Along Church Street, the almshouses, endowed by Francis Elderfield, were built in 1820 and several of the larger houses were altered or extended.

⁶ A surveyor's draft of this rather sparse map, with more information, is in the possession of the local history group, currently looked after by Mary Thompson

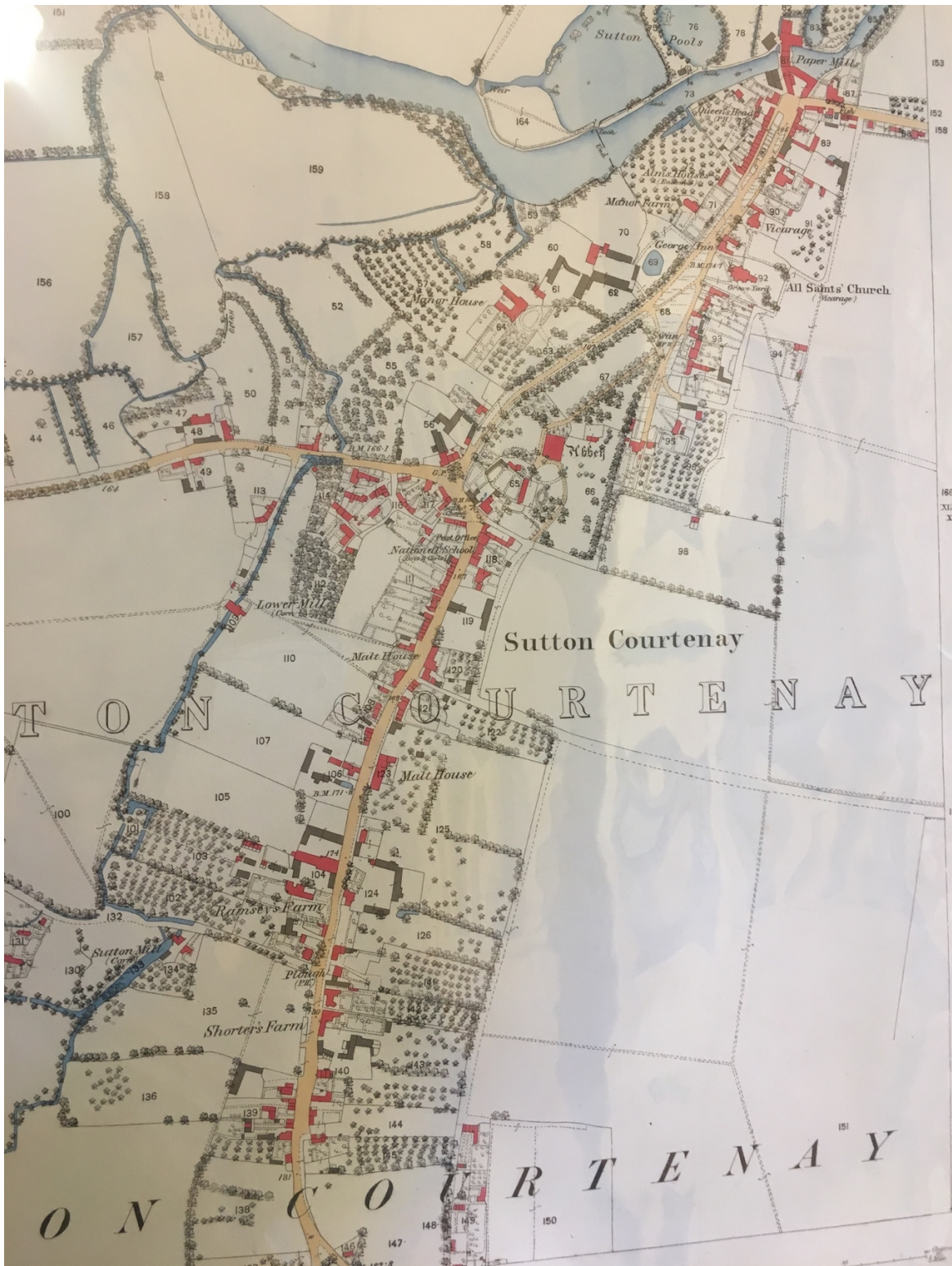


Figure 6. 1872 OS map of High Street and Church Street (Bodleian Library)



Figure 7. 1876 OS map of Frilsham Street and Harwell Road (Bodleian Library)

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the addition of the National School and the Independent Chapel at the junction of the High Street and Drayton Road, and the Baptist Chapel at the southern end of High Street. There are some isolated farmsteads at this date and a number of cottages on Frilsham Street where the Village Hall now stands.

Land use was still mostly arable in large fields, with pasture bordering the river and brooks and also small plots of pasture immediately adjacent to the village. There were several orchards associated with houses in the village, some osier beds on an island in the river and small areas of wood. The land to the north of Frilsham Street was laid out as allotments gardens, some of which survive today.

Going into the twentieth century very little change in the village occurred other than alterations and extensions, and limited new development. Some changes indicated an increase in status of some of the buildings. For example Shorters Farm became Sutton Courtenay House and some outbuildings were demolished, presumably farm buildings and others have been replaced with glasshouses. The Malt House was subdivided and a new development, The Grange, built to the rear. This was later renamed Lady Place and the name survives in the housing development on the site which followed the destruction of the earlier house by fire in the late twentieth century.

The relatively high status of parts of the village was reinforced at the end of the nineteenth century when Lord Wantage gave the manor to his cousin, Captain Harry Lindsay and his

wife, Norah, who entertained the great and the good in lavish style at weekend parties. It was Norah Lindsay who created the existing garden at The Manor House, which is registered grade II. In 1912 Prime Minister Asquith settled in the village at Walton House and built 'The Wharf' at the north end of Church Street. He also acquired the Mill House. At the same time, the increasing use of the river for leisure activities was marked by the appearance of boathouses.

There was an increase in gravel extraction which continued and expanded throughout the twentieth century, initially to the west of the village and then major works developed to the east of the village. In the latter part of the twentieth century the gravel pits were used for landfill brought in by rail via Didcot.

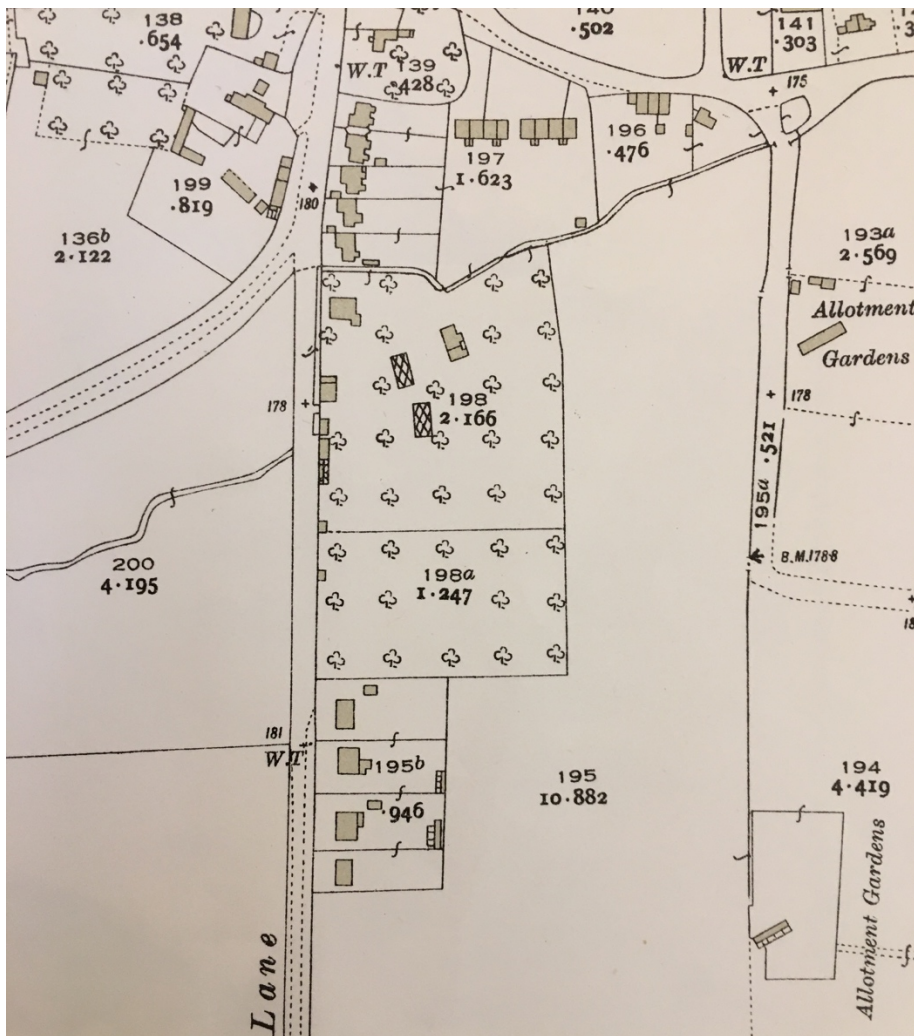


Figure 8. 1933 OS map showing the beginnings of ribbon development along Sutton Courtenay Lane (Harwell Road), terraced housing along Frilsham Street and allotment gardens (Bodleain Library)

Development in the early twentieth century included terraced and semi-detached houses along Drayton Road, some detached buildings between Drop Short (Hulgrove Farm) and Gilbourn's Farm and limited ribbon development along Milton Road and Sutton Courtenay Lane (Harwell Road) towards Didcot, see figure 8. The real change in the built form of the village came in the second half of the twentieth century with the development along the edges of the village and extending into open countryside. The 1950s -60s housing along

Milton Road, and Harwell Road and the housing estate and school between the two was developed in response to post-war housing shortage. Subsequent development in the 21st century to the north of Milton Road and along Appleford Road repeats this characteristic. Other development includes infilling of the back plots between High St and Ginge Brook and commercial development at some of the farms.

iii. Layout

Sutton Courtenay is principally a linear village stretching north-south along Church Street, High Street and Harwell Road. The historic core of the village is concentrated here whilst more recent development is found infilling back plots and extending along the secondary routes of Milton Road, Brook Street and Appleford Road. It is bounded to the north by the River Thames and to the south by Didcot. A major extension of the village to the west dating from the 1950s-60s intrudes into the western agricultural land and this is currently being extended further to the north.

Land to the west is flat and remains largely in agricultural use. Land to the east, formerly arable and pasture land, has suffered from much gravel extraction. It is now characterised by a degraded landscape with ponds and poorly reinstated infill.

iv. Views

The village is characterised by a wide variety of views. There are views of a typical picturesque village, obtained along the winding High Street and Church Street particularly those featuring the church, pub and village green, see figure 9. Historic buildings in a variety of styles, dates and materials line the streets. There are enticing views along tree-lined footpaths and tracks leading out into open countryside, see figure 10. In addition there are equally attractive views alongside the river and Sutton Pool and looking over the river into the mature gardens of the houses along Church Street, see figure 11.



Figure 9. View of The Green with church and historic houses (Summer 2019)



Figure 10. View from Churchmere Lane towards Millennium Common (February 2019)



Figure 11. View of Sutton Pools (February 2019)

In contrast to this, there are views looking south from various parts of the southern part of the village which are absolutely dominated by the cooling towers and chimney of Didcot A power station. These are due to be demolished in summer 2019. Whilst Didcot B power station will remain, this is not as prominent in the landscape.

The footpaths and tracks leading out of the village have open views of the countryside setting of the village. To the west, are the flat open fields mostly in agricultural use. To the east views are of the degraded landscape of gravel working and landfill crossed by electricity pylons leading from Didcot Power Station, see figure 12.



Figure 12. View east of the village from Appleford Road (February 2019)

Character area 1 – The historic core of the village

There is a marked difference in character between Church Street, forming the northern part of the historic core of the village and High Street comprising the southern part. Frilsham Street, at the southern end of the village is different again, though not markedly so. All the designated heritage assets lie within the core of the village, which is acknowledged by its conservation area designation, highlighting the historic importance of the village. These include an extraordinary number of heritage assets of national importance as well as those of regional importance, i.e. 3 Grade I listed buildings, 6 Grade II* listed buildings and 38 Grade II entries, some of them covering more than one building and there is a Grade II registered garden, see figure 13. In addition, there are many buildings of local importance, not designated.

A - Church Street

At the heart of the picturesque historic core is the village green with a typical juxtaposition of church, inn and principal buildings set around it. The war memorial is prominently positioned as its focus. The rubblestone Church of All Saints' with its squat tower is set in an attractive churchyard which fronts directly onto Church Street and stretches back to the back lane of All Saints Lane. Its neighbour, The George and Dragon Inn with its cobbled forecourt, has a more prominent presence on the street reflecting its importance both historically and today. The houses surrounding The Green are generally quite large and set

in generous plots, reflecting the relative wealth and high status of the village over the centuries. The grade I listed medieval houses of the Manor House and Norman Hall on the west side of Church Street and The Abbey to the south of The Green, are all in exceptionally large plots with mature gardens which contribute to the openness and attractive rural character of the centre of the village. Those houses fronting the east side of The Green are more modest in scale, though several are nevertheless substantial. Attractive front gardens make a positive contribution to the picturesque quality of the village scene here.

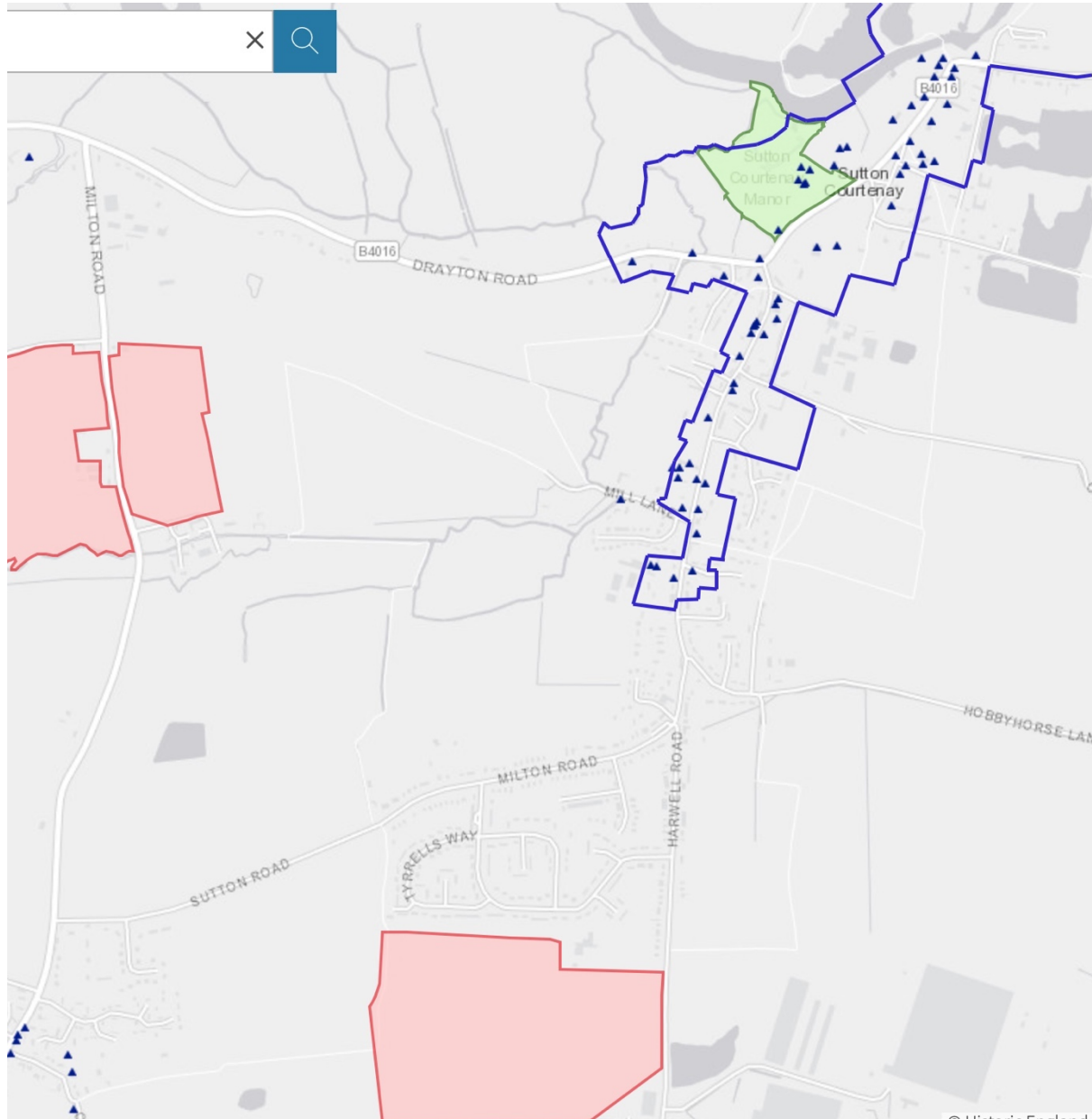


Figure 13. Map showing designated heritage assets: red = scheduled monument; green = registered garden; blue triangles = listed buildings/structures; blue line = conservation area boundary (Historic England, online Search the List and Vale of White Horse website)

To the north of The Green the road narrows before turning sharply eastwards leaving the high boundary wall of Mill House to enclose the view. The houses are more closely spaced and form a continuous run in places. Overall the street is one of a typical and attractive mix of historic buildings, principally houses, of a variety of dates, size, style and materials reflecting the piecemeal, organic development of the village over centuries, see figures 14-

18. There are examples of timber framing, rubblestone, brick, render, plain tiles and thatch, and weatherboarding on a former farm building. Of particular note are the almshouses, dated 1820 which are single storey, built of brick with a central pediment; the large, square, timber-framing of Tudor Cottage, the brick-built, early-nineteenth century Walton House, former home of Prime Minister Asquith and the eighteenth-century Mill House, possibly incorporating an earlier core.



Figures 14-18. A range of buildings types, size, date and materials found on Church Street (February 2019)

As the principal route through the village, Church Street carries a significant amount of traffic, which is sporadic rather than continuous. There are no engineered footpaths. The footway alongside the road varies in width and is mostly surfaced in rough stone with a grass verge to the west side, creating an appropriately informal and historic setting. Lack of off-street parking means the aesthetic value of the public realm here can be diminished by on-street car parking. Leading off the main road, Churchmere Lane and All Saints Lane form the principal tracks of the footpath network in this part of the village and, by contrast are like quiet country lanes. They are without through traffic and are mostly informally surfaced, often edged with wild vegetation, reinforcing the rural character of the village. Churchmere Lane leads out via a wooded area, to the Millennium Common and open countryside to the east, see figure 10, though the latter is sadly marred by gravel workings.

These lanes have accommodated a reasonable amount of infill development which has generally been sensitively sited in an informal layout, and of varying design, allowing the village to grow without impacting on its essential character. Houses do not dominate views within the lanes but are mixed in with natural greenery, open plots and mature gardens,

which all contribute to their rural character. Several of these are bounded by rubblestone walls which helps modern development fit easily into the surrounding area. Further development has occurred along Appleford Road, as ribbon development and there is modern development at Amey Close and Heritage Park which fit less comfortably with the established character of the village. Cross Tree Farm retains its character of a working farm. The water-filled former gravel pits butt up to the edge of the built up area and now have established vegetation and wildlife. These provide additional features of interest. Despite the amount of development, the overall ambience of the back lanes and footpaths is peaceful. The footpaths are well used for recreational purposes.

The presence of the River Thames is not obvious from the heart of the village. The houses on the west side of Church Street have gardens which run down to the river but these are not publicly accessible. Only the footpath at the north end of Church Street leads on to the river at the site of the former wharf. Here there are good views of the river. The footpath leads alongside the riverbank on the north side of the river with views of private gardens on the opposite bank. Boathouses and pleasure craft indicate the importance of leisure use of the river. The roar of water signals the presence of the weir and Sutton Pools which open out to the north. Spectacular views across this stretch of water towards Culham Cut are completely different from any other views in the village, see figure 11.

B - High Street

The junction of Church Street, Brook Street and High Street marks a shift in character in the historic core. The few houses on Brook Street are detached and in generous plots, mostly set back from the road. By contrast, on High Street the houses are generally built up to the highway edge or else bounded by rubble stone walls which enclose the street. The street is of generous width and has a similar mix of house types, size, styles and dates as Church Street, see figures 20-21. The north end of High Street has earlier buildings fronting directly onto the highway, where there are a mix of dates from the seventeenth century through to the twentieth century. Here, the houses run almost continuously with no gaps, see figure 19.



Figure 19. High Street looking north (February 2019)



Figure 20. This shows a typical range of building materials including timber frame, thatch, brick, stone, render, plain tile and rubble stone (February 2019)



Figure 21. There are several examples of blue-grey bricks used with red brick for decorative effect (February 2019)

As the road widens towards the south, a grass verge and trees line the road in places. There are views out to open countryside to the west where plots are undeveloped. Well-planted

gardens contribute to the attractive character of the street and reinforce its semi-rural character. There is a picturesque jumble of roofs interspersed with vegetation which gives a visual richness enhanced by the winding character of the High Street.

On the whole, more modern development, which increases towards the south of High Street, fits in comfortably with the historic streetscene, being of similar scale and sensitive layout. The retention of mature hedges and trees along the street facilitates this integration of old and new, see figure 22. An exception is the Lady Place development which is slightly dominating because it is higher than other development, of different scale and form and also has gated entrances which slightly set it apart from the rest of the High Street.

The importance of the village's agricultural origins is seen in several farms and farm buildings which survive on the High Street, such as Uptown Farm and Southfield Farm. This latter is an early, timber-framed building with later alterations and a wonderfully irregular roof. Traditional farm buildings continuing down the plot reinforce the agricultural character of the site, see figure 23.



Figure 22. Established trees and wall help new development to fit into the street scene (February 2019)



Figure 23. Southfield Farm showing a variety of building materials and farm buildings (February 2019)

Several lanes and footpaths lead off the main road to east and west, some to modern developments, filling in rear plots and some leading enticingly to hidden corners of the village, such as Mill Lane and Old Wallingford Way. These tracks originally connected the village to its surrounding open fields and meadows. Some, as mentioned above, may be of even earlier origin, dating to the Anglo-Saxon period and linking to other Anglo-Saxon settlements along the Thames, for example at Appleford and Wittenham or possibly dating from pre-historic times. They now form part of a substantial network of routes running throughout the village and out into the surrounding countryside.

Views northwards take in the historic village street and terminate at the junction of High Street and Brook Street. Mature trees in the grounds of The Abbey rise above the boundary wall. Looking south, towards the southern end of High Street, views become dominated by Didcot A Power Station, with the three cooling towers and chimney looming above the houses. Whilst their presence is obscured in places, they feature significantly in many views from the southern part of the village. Demolition is due to take place in summer 2019. Didcot B Power Station will remain but this is nowhere near as dominating.

C - Frilsham Street.

In common with the southern end of High Street, this small area at the southern end of the village is dominated by views of the power station, see figure 24. When the power station is obscured, the character is one of an attractive semi-rural area with views of open countryside, see figure 25. A cluster of around a dozen houses existed in 1761 with what is now Frilsham Street being a main route to Appleford across the open fields east of the

village. The Glebe House is one of these, see figure 26. Similar plots are shown on the enclosure map of 1804 and the 1876 OS map shows the development of allotments here, some of which remain. It now comprises a mix of houses including the houses dating from the eighteenth century and earlier nineteenth century, early twentieth century terraces, 1930s semi-detached houses and some later 20th century houses, see figures 27-30. Hobbyhorse Lane, a continuation of Frilsham Street eastwards, formerly called Pulpit Lane, still leads to out to open countryside along the ancient track to the former open fields, though now these are characterized by poorly reinstated landfill and gravel pits.



Figure 24. Didcot A power station dominating views along Frilsham Street (February 2019)



Figure 25. View along Frilsham Street (Spring 2019)



Figure 26. Glebe House (February 2019)



Figures 27-30. Different house types along Frilsham Street and Town Close (February and March 2019)

In common with other areas of infill housing, modern development generally fits in comfortably with its surroundings, although the design and layout of Town Close is clearly distinct. Paths running north and south off Frilsham Street, demarcate the historic boundary of the built-up area of the village, shown on Rocque's map of 1761. These connect to the rest of the village. The village hall, situated at the end of the lane, marks the edge of the village at this point.

Apart from the power station looming in the middle distance, electricity supply lines and cabling feature in views along the lane. Views looking eastwards down Hobbyhorse Lane are of open countryside, see figure 31.

Throughout the core of the village, the level of streetlighting is low, as is appropriate for the rural setting of the village.



Figure 31. View from Frilsham Street to open countryside (Spring 2019)

Heritage significance

The importance of the historic environment in the neighbourhood plan area is paramount. Not only are there nearly 50 designated heritage assets, including the conservation area covering the historic core of the village, there is much known archaeology illustrating past human activity in the area. The heritage significance of the neighbourhood plan area is therefore a crucial consideration.

Significance is assessed using Historic England's Conservation Principles, 2008 and also referencing the draft revised Conservation Principles which aligns the assessment more to terms used in the legislation i.e archaeological, architectural, artistic and historic interest.

The area has possibly been continuously settled for 8,000 years, the rich agricultural land and the River Thames being prime incentives for settlement. There is evidence of Neolithic, Iron Age, Bronze Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlement as well as the presence on the ground of buildings from the early medieval period onwards. Whilst the area's early development is not fully understood, the continued use of the area, ceremonial burial sites and high status settlement give the area extraordinary archaeological interest. The whole area therefore may be considered to be of *high evidential value and archaeological interest*.

The historical development of the village is illustrated in its layout and its buildings. The group of high status medieval buildings illustrate the rich agricultural background and the royal connection with the village. Examples of houses from the early modern period onwards illustrate developments in housing construction, for example as brick replaced timber framing and tile replaced thatch as a roofing material. Development in the production of glass is illustrated in the larger window openings from the seventeenth century onwards. The focus on the front of the house as an expression of status is seen in many examples and changing fashions are expressed in alterations to many houses.

The survival of farms and farm buildings illustrates the close connection of the village with its surrounding farmland. Further evidence of this is seen in the network of paths and tracks leading out into the former open fields which surround the village. Ancient plot boundaries survive expressed in the various land uses within the village, including footpaths, modern housing developments, allotments and open areas of land.

From its early royal connection comes its association with major nationally and internationally important figures. The documented confinement of Queen Matilda for her first child and probable confinement of her second child, Matilda, mother of Henry II enhanced its status. A close ally and supporter of Henry II, Reynold de Courtenay gave his name to the village thereby ensuring its permanent association. Subsequent lords of the manor and rectors of the parish have been nationally important figures including Thomas Bekynton, Bishop of Bath and Wells; Nicholas Colnet, doctor to Henry V and Thomas Brunce, Bishop of Norwich. Norah Lindsay developed the registered garden at the Manor House in the early twentieth century. Prime minister Herbert Asquith settled here in 1912 and remained until his death. He is buried in All Saints' Churchyard with a fine chest tomb marking his grave. David Astor also lived in Sutton Courtenay having acquired the Manor House in 1945. There is a memorial to him in the church yard. His friend George Orwell (Eric Blair) is also buried here and his grave attracts visitors from far and wide. *Historical value/interest is high.*

Aesthetic value and architectural interest lies in picturesque historic core of the village centred on the village green with church, public house and medieval houses with attractive mature gardens contributing to the rural character of the village. Many of these buildings are designated heritage assets and many more worthy of being on a local list. Aesthetic value lies in the fortuitous composition of houses of all dates, size, styles and materials sited

along the principal roads and around The Green; it lies in the inviting lanes and footpaths leading out to hidden corners of the village and to the magnificent views of the river. *Aesthetic value and architectural interest is considered to be high*

The church is the principal building of communal value which is at the heart of the community. The village green and its war memorial are both important elements which hold meaning for local people. The George and Dragon public house could also be held to have communal value as it is part of the identity of the village. Similarly the medieval buildings associated with the early history of the village are part of its identity.

The footpath network, formerly linking to communal open fields but now used to connect different parts of the village and for leisure also hold communal value within the village. *Communal value is therefore assessed as high.*

Character Area 2 - twentieth/twenty-first century development to the south west

The small, densely-developed area of the south west built-up part of the village is entirely residential. It has grown around early ribbon development along Milton Road and Harwell Road in the 1930s-1950s. The road frontage of Harwell Road and Milton Road was almost continuously built up by 1959. A mix of house types and styles characterise this early development of the area, including a number of bungalows. Most dwellings have quite generous plots with much mature vegetation contributing to the semi-rural appearance of the area, see figure 32. The historic presence of allotments to the east of Harwell Road is expressed in the garden centre and florists immediately adjoining the site.



Figure 32. Milton Road looking west showing low density development, generous plots and mature trees lining the road (Spring 2019)

A housing estate including shops and school, see figures 33 and 34, was built between 1957 and 1962 to the south of Milton Road and west of Harwell Road. This has a typical layout of an estate of that period, with houses sited along two circular roads centred on culs-de-sac. Roads are of a generous width, with grass verges and houses set back from the highway, resulting in a spacious feel to the estate.



Figures 33 and 34. School and shops on the housing estate (Summer 2019)

Houses are fairly uniform with pairs of semi-detached houses interspersed with some terraces. Almost all are two-storey with pitched roofs and constructed of brick, though Katchside has a number of bungalows. Front gardens contribute to the green character and have a variety of boundary treatments. However, some front gardens have been lost to car parking, the alternative being on-street car parking. The layout allows for some opening out of the verge to create small greens, which now have mature trees. Combined with views of open countryside, this reinforces the semi-rural character which is found throughout the settlement, see figures 35-36. Dominating views to the south east are the cooling towers and chimney of Didcot A power station. These views will be transformed when the power station is demolished.



Figures 35-36. Typical views of the housing south of Milton Road (Spring 2019)

To the north of the ribbon development on Milton Road, further residential development is underway. Here houses are mostly 2 storeys high, with some 2 ½ storeys, set around culs-de sac and generally plot sizes are much smaller. There is a mix of house types, styles and materials, none particularly locally distinctive. There are views directly towards surrounding open countryside, see figures 37-38.



Figures 37-38. Typical views of 21st century housing north of Milton Road (Spring 2019)

The estate developments are fairly self-contained in terms of character and have little reference in layout and design to the rest of the village.

Heritage significance

Although the large field to the immediate south of Tyrells Way and Bradstocks Way is a scheduled monument, the area has been almost completely developed leaving little archaeological potential. *Evidential value is therefore low*

Historical value lies in the expression of change in the village during the twentieth century. The isolated development along Harwell Road and Milton Road at the beginning of the century was encapsulated in the ribbon development of the 1930s and later, with houses having very large plots. The post war housing shortage in the wider area was resolved by the development of the Tyrells Way/ Bradstock Way/ Barretts Way development. This illustrates the concern to provide a high standard of housing and environment in post war developments. Continued pressure for growth in the 21st century is expressed in the higher density development to the north of Milton Road. *Historical value is medium*

The generous road width, grass verges and relatively low building height combined with the open setting of the surrounding countryside, give most of this area a very spacious feel. Mature vegetation both within the verges and in private gardens contributes to its semi-rural character. Despite alterations to many houses, the earlier estate has retained much of its original designed character. *Aesthetic value is medium*

Whilst there is no communal value embodied in the private residential area, the school is a major communal asset. *Overall, communal value is low*



Figure 39. The raised track of Peep O'Day Lane (Spring 2019)

Character area 3. Land to the west of the village

This can be divided into two distinct landscape areas. That to the north of Drayton Road and the land to the south.

The land to the north includes the cycle path and bridle way of the former Peep-o-Day Lane, now called Hanson Way, leading north to Abingdon. This track is raised on a causeway and has a hedge boundary to it creating an attractive route, see figure 39. A former gravel pit occupies the whole of the northern section with the remainder of the land being marshy and rough grassland.

Rocque's map of 1761 shows this land as Oday Common whereas the rest of the land is all shown in arable cultivation. Historically, this was open field enclosed during the nineteenth century. It is part of this area that is shown on the enclosure map as small allotments, 35 in number and mostly of a standard size, see figure 40.

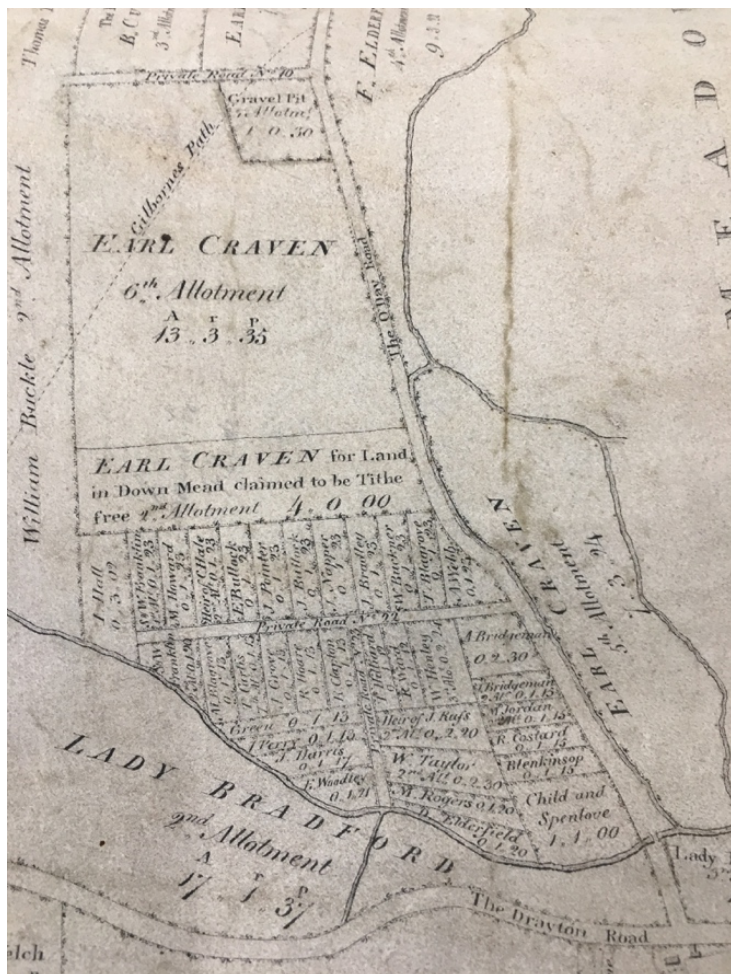


Figure 40. Detail of the enclosure map of 1804

How productive these were is questionable as they had largely disappeared by the time of the tithe map in 1840 and there is no sign of them by the 1870s, just a vestige of the access road. The field boundaries, however, are still discernible here, as can be seen in the satellite photograph, see figures 41 and 42.

Also of note on the enclosure map is a small gravel pit, the forerunner of the much larger gravel pits which have now despoiled much of the earlier landscape. The main heritage value of the land is its open character which forms the setting for the village.



Figure 41. 25 inch OS map 1870s (Bodleian Library) Figure 42. Satellite photo 2019 (google maps)

To the south of Drayton Road, the neighbourhood plan area extends into the neighbouring parish of Milton to take in the fields up to the boundary of Milton village. Here the agricultural value of the land has been retained, apart from the land taken up by the highways depot, with arable and pasture predominating.

The area includes a mix of land subject to ancient enclosure and larger fields enclosed in the nineteenth century. Some hedgerows remain as field boundaries but the landscape is predominately large, flat open fields, see figure 43.



Figure 43. Flat open fields characterising the land west of the village. Note the new development north of Milton Road in the background (Spring 2019)

The area is very rich in archaeology. A Neolithic cursus runs to the immediate west and there is evidence of Bronze age barrows, and Iron Age settlement. Immediately to the south of Drayton Road just near Peep-o-Day Lane is the site of a Roman Villa, at Drop Short,

now called Hulgrove Farm. Extensive and important Anglo-Saxon settlement has been excavated just nearby to the south of the ancient track of Drayton East Way and close to the village of Milton, which was possibly a royal centre⁷. Whilst this is outside the neighbourhood plan area, it is immediately adjoining it. Also, to the immediate south of the school, is a large scheduled area of known archaeology.

The land is crossed by the ancient track of Drayton East Way, the origins of which are unknown but it could date to pre-historic times. It remains a well-used track connecting Sutton Courtenay with Drayton.

Heritage significance

The area appears to have been continuously settled from the Neolithic period and it is therefore likely that all the land to the west of the village has high archaeological potential. Where development has already taken place, archaeological interest will be limited.

Evidential value/archaeological interest is therefore very high

Historical value lies in survival of field boundaries and as the setting for the village. The experiment, if that is what it was, of the allotments, must have a story behind it. The historical value is enhanced by the survival of map records. *Historical value/interest is high.*

Peep-O-Day Lane and Drayton East Way are both ancient tracks now used for pedestrians and cyclists connecting to adjoining settlements. *Communal value might therefore be considered to be medium.*

The land has little aesthetic value. Its principal characteristic being that it is open undeveloped land.

Character area 4 - land to the east of the village

The much larger expanse of land to the east of the village was formerly open fields, with some ancient enclosure but mostly enclosed in the nineteenth century. The ancient enclosure in the south-east corner of the parish is no longer discernible as such. Along with much of the rest of this area it has been subject to extensive gravel extraction, a use which continues today on much of the land. This is expressed in water-filled pits, plant and machinery, exposed spoil and man-made bunds, see figure 12.

The area has also been subject to much landfill. Reinstatement has been poor so now the landscape generally has a degraded appearance. Only the fields alongside the river and some immediately adjacent to the village remain in agricultural use. It is here that historic field boundaries survive.

Old Wallingford Way and Hobby Horse Lane are ancient tracks that lead across these former open fields that continue the route through to Appleford, Long Wittenham and on to

⁷Naomi Brennan and Helena Hamerow , *Archaeological Journal*, 2005, vol 172, No. 2, 325-350pp, 'An Anglo-Saxon Great Hall Complex at Sutton Courtenay/Drayton, Oxfordshire:A Royal Centre of Early Wessex'

Dorchester. These are now well-used public footpaths. To the north, leading on from Churchmere Lane is another track running by the former gravel pits, through woodland and on to the Millennium Common. Commercial use associated with gravel extraction and some housing development fronting on to Appleford Road have extended onto the site former open fields.



Figure 44. View from Appleford Road (Spring 2019)



Figures 44-45. View of the landscape affected by gravel extraction and landfill, east of the village (Spring 2019)

Although there are some views from the public footpaths across open countryside are attractive, many are not, see figures 44-45. Evidence of gravel extraction and landfill is almost ubiquitous, in water-filled pits, rough grassland, plant and equipment and traffic. The proximity Didcot power station accounts for the pylons crossing the landscape further

detracting from its rural character. And it is the cooling towers and chimney of Didcot A power station that absolutely dominate views to the south, see figure 46. When demolished it will leave the much less visually intrusive chimney of Didcot B power station visible but not dominating views south.

As with land to the west of the village, it is likely that the land has been continuously settled since pre-historic times. Although there are no scheduled sites within the area, there are scheduled sites just to the north of the river and to the east of Appleford. A current archaeological investigation of land in the north east corner of the parish, adjacent to Appleford has revealed the remains of a Roman villa.



Figure 46 Didcot A power station viewed from Appleford Road (Spring 2019)

Heritage significance

The evidence of continuous settlement since the Neolithic period suggests that the whole of the parish has rich archaeological potential. This land to the east of the village is no exception. However, much of the land has been already excavated and filled, so archaeological potential on these sites is limited. *Overall evidential value/archaeological interest is considered to be high.*

Historically, the land has value as the former open fields of the village. The tracks leading out of the village connecting the fields to farms within the settlement illustrate the open field system of farming. Gravel extraction and landfill are the uses most clearly expressed now, which reflects the twentieth century growth of the area and its proximity to Didcot and the rail network.

The physical evidence is enhanced by the documentary records of the Enclosure Award and tithe map. Earlier map evidence also reinforces historical value. *Historic interest and value is high.*

Aesthetically, the main value lies in the openness of the land. The tracks crossing the former open fields are attractive in places, where woodland or hedgerows have enclosed them, but otherwise, the village has lost its much of its traditional landscape setting, particularly in the east and *aesthetic value may be considered to be low.*

As former open fields the landscape and tracks crossing it had high communal value. This was obviously diminished with enclosure but the routes across the land connecting the village to its setting remain. These are an important part of life in the village. The Green is a historic communal open space which lies at the heart of the village continues to be valued as such. The Millennium Common was specifically created for communal village use as were the village hall, the recreation ground, sports facilities and children's play area. As a result, *communal value can be considered to be medium.*

Conclusion

The character of this ancient village is expressed on the ground in its layout, buildings, spaces and its surrounding fields. Its high status and medieval origins can be seen in the 12th century buildings set in large grounds and in the church. Changes over time are expressed in buildings of varying dates, styles, materials and design. The network of lanes and tracks linking it to its surrounding landscape illustrate the open field system of farming and some of the surviving field boundaries express changes in the landscape with enclosure. The inextricable link between village and surrounding farmland survives despite the changes in farming practice and use of the land.

Gradual change over the centuries has been accommodated without destroying the essential character of previous ages. The character of the village and its surroundings has been challenged by the much faster rate and the nature of change in the second half of the twentieth century. It now accommodates extraneous uses and a population drawn from a much wider area.

Despite this, it retains its village character and the surrounding countryside remains important to the significance of village. It allows the historic development of village to be understood and contributes to a large degree to its character. Housing development has mostly veered towards semi-rural rather than suburban in character. Open countryside can be experienced in all parts of the built up area. The surrounding land, although degraded in parts, retains its essential character of openness, of being undeveloped. This prevents coalescence with neighbouring settlements and allows the village to be read as a traditional, historic, rural settlement.

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