



BLUNSDON EAST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SUBMISSION DRAFT 2019

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FOREWORD

The Localism Act 2011 introduced Neighbourhood Planning into the hierarchy of town planning in England, giving communities the right to shape their future development at a local level.

A neighbourhood plan is a new type of planning document, created as part of the Government's new approach to planning by the Localism Act 2011, to allow local communities to have a direct influence on shaping what goes on in their areas. The Blunsdon East Neighbourhood Plan ("BENP") must comply with higher levels of planning policy, the National Planning Policy Framework, as revised February 2019 ("NPPF") and the adopted Swindon Borough Council Local Plan 2026 ("SBCLP 2026").

In March 2013, Blunsdon St Andrew Parish Council resolved to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for the area of the Parish to the east of the A419 Trunk Road – which bisects the Parish into two distinguishable areas of the old Blunsdon Village and the newer Northern Expansion of Swindon.

Following the Community Governance Review 2016/17 undertaken by Swindon Borough Council Blunsdon St Andrew Parish Council was divided creating a new Parish of Blunsdon. The designated plan area is located within the boundary of this new Parish to the east of the A419.

Following on from these decisions the BENP has been prepared by Blunsdon Parish Council, a qualifying accountable body, and covers the period from 2019 to 2026. It was developed by a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (BENPSG), comprising of volunteers drawn from members of both the Parish Council and from the local community. This group has undertaken extensive consultation with residents and others with an interest in the area and has considered these views in preparing this plan.

The BENP reflects community-wide comments, observations, concerns and aspirations about the Parish's future, bringing them together with census information, strategic and statistical evidence into a "living promise" that mirrors the community's overwhelming desire to make the BENP area an even better place to live and work, both now and for future generations.

The BENP has set out a vision including a Village Design Statement and detailed character area assessments for the area. Identified are four themes which lead to a number of policies to meet the vision and deliver the objectives. It deals with a wide range of issues ranging from future housing development, infrastructure, road safety, services, environment and history & heritage.

The BENP, together with references to supporting documents, is set out in this document.

Once the Plan has been made, following a favourable local referendum, the BENP will form part of the development plan and become, with Swindon Borough Council's Local Plan, the starting point for deciding how the area will develop in the future.

Jan Jankinson
Chairman.



INTRODUCTION

Why is a Neighbourhood Plan necessary?

- 1.1. Blunsdon has always been separated from the urban area of Swindon and has always been a rural community. However during the sixties, seventies and eighties it has grown organically around the core of the Village through infill and new housing. In parallel to this, large areas to the north of Swindon were the subject of substantial urban expansions (Abbey Meads, St Andrew's Ridge and Ash Brake). Since then through the development of the SBCLP 2026 north Swindon has grown massively through Redhouse, Oakhurst and Tadpole Garden Village. Part of the plan was the creation of the strategic allocation of Kingsdown NC5 an urban extension to the North Swindon expansion into the BENP area. This expansion has led to a variety of local challenges including pressure on infrastructure, landscape and green space, heritage assets, core services, existing resources like health care and provision of school places. All these combine to provide an opportunity for the village to utilise a neighbourhood plan, to have greater influence over development so that Blunsdon enjoys, in the words of the NPPF 2019, "a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being;"
- 1.2. To this end the BENP was framed to help to ensure a cohesive approach to the management of its sustainable growth. The constraints and challenges encountered have informed the following key objectives for this Neighbourhood Plan.

To assist the community in strengthening its community spirit and to integrate recent and future newcomers – A place people want to live.

To preserve the main village settlement's historic built environment which is vital to Blunsdon's sense of place – A pride in our Heritage.

The need to retain, improve and develop local facilities and to ensure new development creates social and commercial opportunities for the benefit of all residents – Supporting the Community.

To ensure the preservation of the character of the area and local landscape and areas surrounding the village for the benefit of both residents, wildlife and the environment – Conserving Nature and the Environment.



1.3. It is essential that the community acknowledges the importance of the above and realises that it needs to address the opportunities, challenges and constraints by planning locally for its future. Having started the process by commencing a Village Plan, the Parish Council has embraced the opportunity provided by the Localism Act 2011 and NPPF 2019.

1.4. In this context the purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is:

To clearly describe the full range of social, economic and environmental influences in the BENP area and set out the issues that these raise for the future of the area.

To set out a clear vision and strategic plan for sustainable growth of the plan area which reflects the views of the whole community;

To provide a planning framework to guide future regeneration, environmental enhancement, community investment and development decisions in the neighbourhood. This planning framework will support the strategic development needs in the existing SBCLP 2026;

To set out prioritised projects which reflect the aspirations of the community and which, when implemented, will help to deliver the vision for the area;

To set out policies which can be taken into account when Swindon Borough Council is making planning decisions, negotiating developer contributions or deciding how to allocate funding derived from other sources such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the new Homes Bonus

Submitting Body

1.5. The BENP is submitted by Blunston Parish Council, which is a qualifying body as defined by the Localism Act 2011.

1.6. In developing a neighbourhood plan the submitting body is required to comply with a variety of legislation and compliance which will be assessed by both Swindon Borough Council and an appointed Examiner.

1.7. Full details of compliance with planning requirements at both National and Local Level, via the NPPF 2019 and SBCLP 2026 are set out in the Basic Conditions Statement. This statement also sets out how requirements to meet European Union requirements on Environmental Impact and Habitat Regulations are achieved. An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken and this is included in the Plan documentation.

1.8. Blunston Parish Council confirms that this Blunston East Neighbourhood Development Plan:

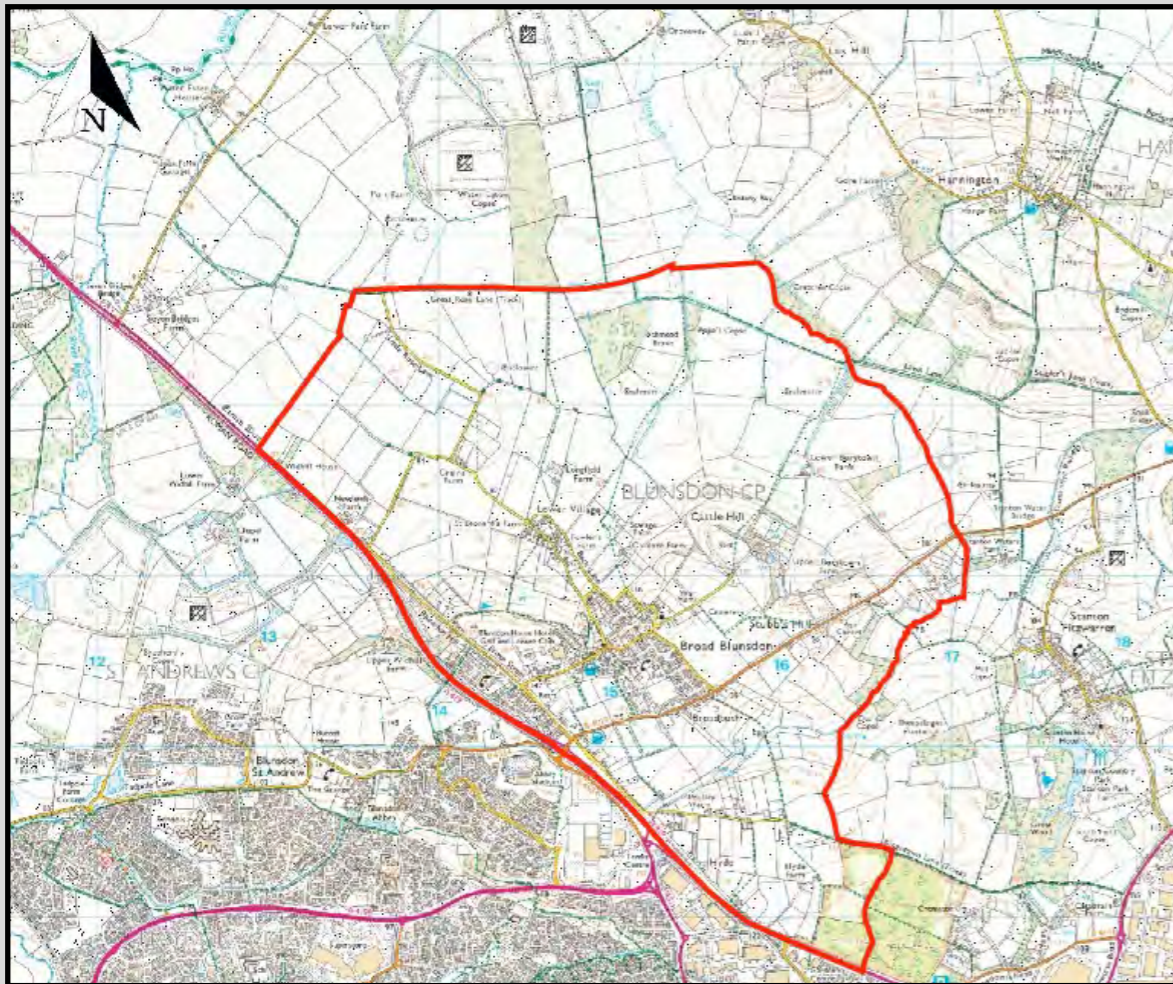
relates only to the designated area within the Parish of Blunston and to no other Neighbourhood Areas; and

is the only Neighbourhood Development Plan in the designated area. No other Neighbourhood Development Plan exists nor is in development for part or all of the designated area.3. Blunston East Neighbourhood Plan Area



The Blunsdon East Neighbourhood Plan Area

- 1.9. The BENP applies to the major part of the Parish of Blunsdon in the Borough of Swindon designated as Blunsdon East. A copy of the SBC decision notice is set out in Appendix H.
- 1.10. Following on from discussions with Swindon Borough Council, and local consultation the designation of the BENP plan area, as set out on the map below, was approved by the Council on 5th August 2013.

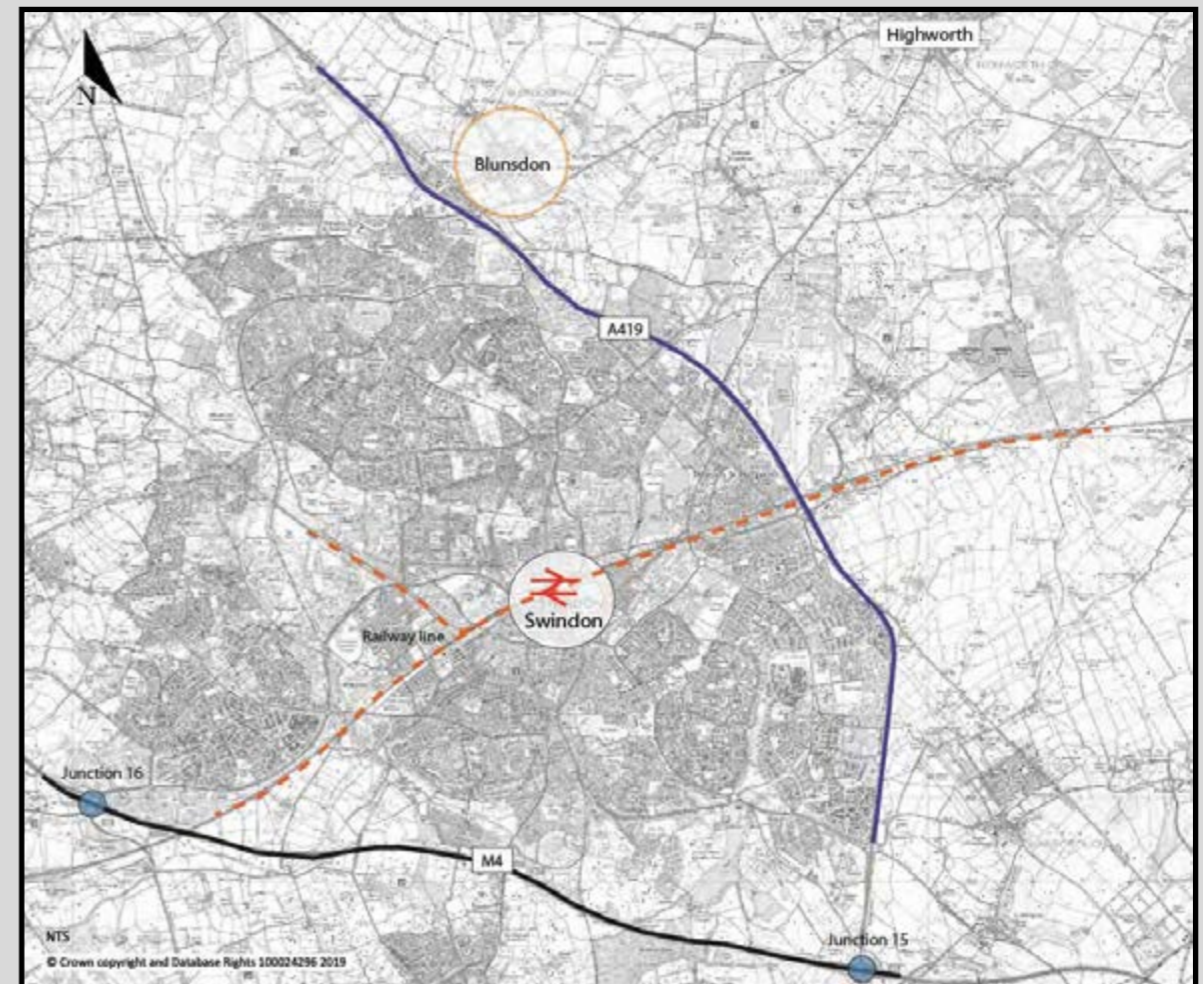


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FIG 1 Blunsdon East Neighbourhood Plan Area

Blunsdon Location

- 1.11. Blunsdon is located in and adjacent to the western limit of the Midvale Ridge National Character Area. FIGS 2 and 1 respectively show both the local context of the district and the neighbourhood plan area within it.



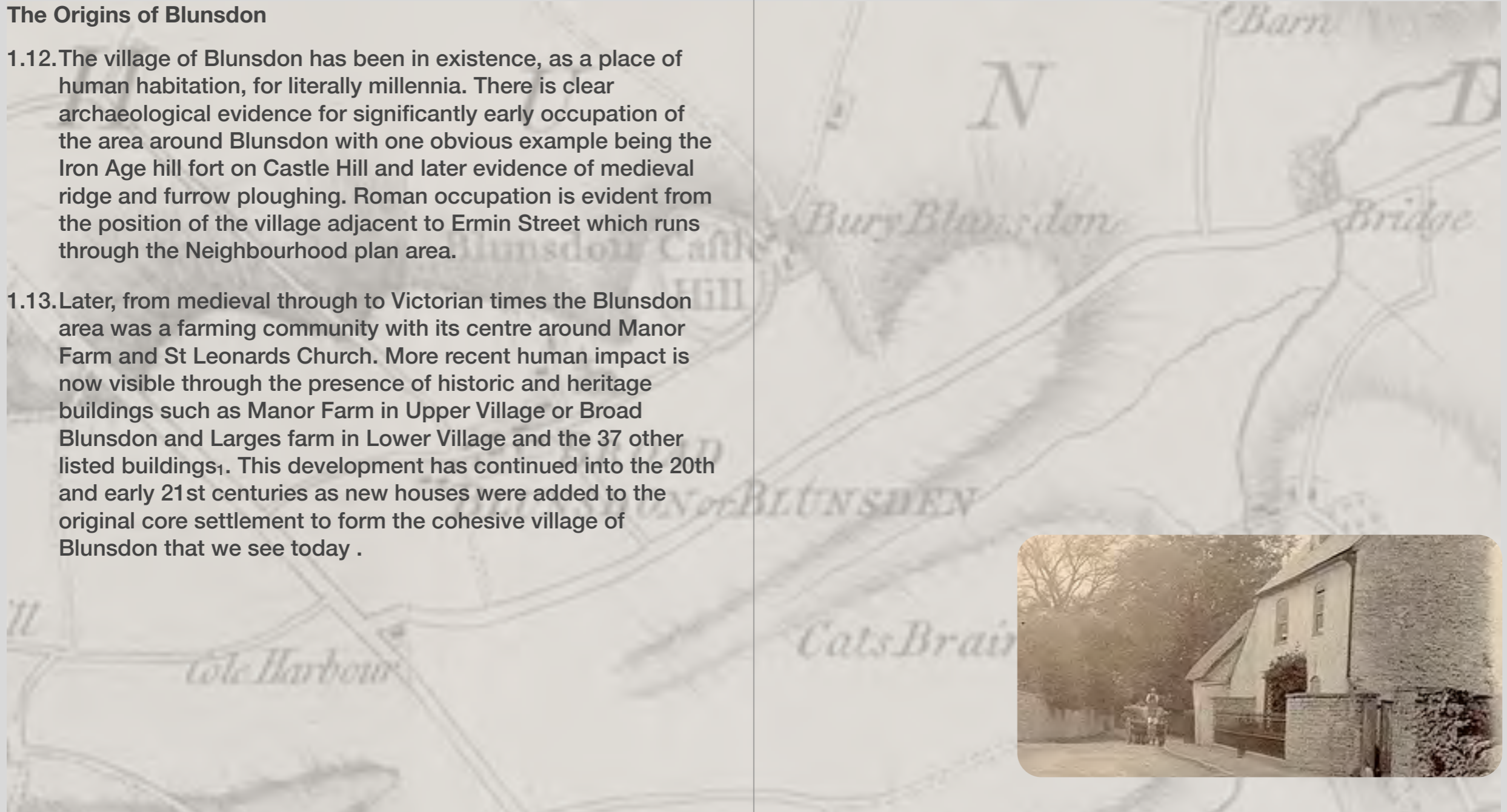
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FIG 2 Location of Blunsdon

The Origins of Blunsdon

1.12. The village of Blunsdon has been in existence, as a place of human habitation, for literally millennia. There is clear archaeological evidence for significantly early occupation of the area around Blunsdon with one obvious example being the Iron Age hill fort on Castle Hill and later evidence of medieval ridge and furrow ploughing. Roman occupation is evident from the position of the village adjacent to Ermin Street which runs through the Neighbourhood plan area.

1.13. Later, from medieval through to Victorian times the Blunsdon area was a farming community with its centre around Manor Farm and St Leonards Church. More recent human impact is now visible through the presence of historic and heritage buildings such as Manor Farm in Upper Village or Broad Blunsdon and Larges farm in Lower Village and the 37 other listed buildings¹. This development has continued into the 20th and early 21st centuries as new houses were added to the original core settlement to form the cohesive village of Blunsdon that we see today .



¹ See Appendix E for full list and map

Blunsdon's place in the environment

1.14. The BENP area is situated predominantly within both the National Character Areas (NCA) named as the Mid Vale Ridge NCA09 and Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA108.

1.15. The Midvale Ridge National Character Area (NCA) is a band of low-lying limestone hills stretching east-west from the Vale of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire to Swindon. It is surrounded by the flat lands of the Oxfordshire clay vales, giving extensive views across the surrounding countryside. It is a predominantly agricultural area with a mixed arable/ pastoral farming landscape, cereals being the most important arable crop. The settlement pattern is characterised by small nucleated villages along the top of the ridge and along the spring lines. The area is significant for its geological sites and the unusual geology gives rise to habitats that are uncommon in the south of England. These in turn support a variety of rare plants and invertebrates. The NCA is notably more wooded in character than the surrounding Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA with about 9 per cent woodland coverage.

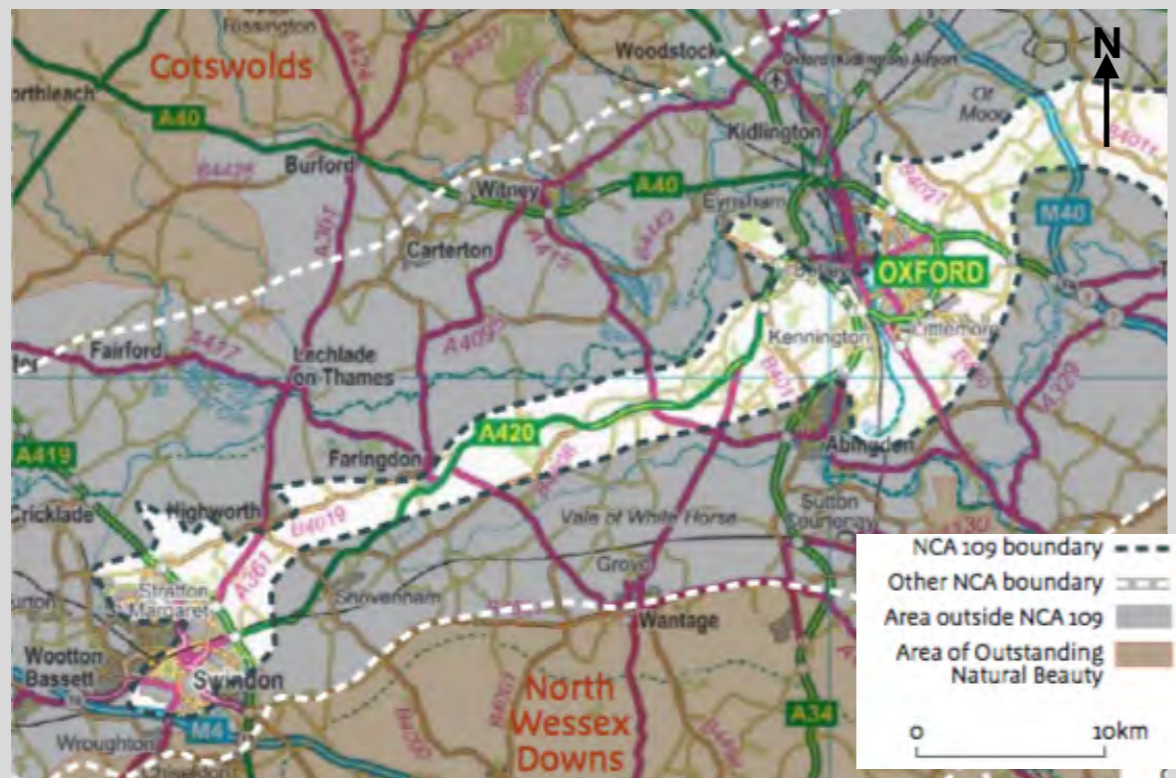


FIG 3 National Character Area 109 - Midvale Ridge

1.16. Evidence of previous land use is still clearly visible from iron-age and Romano-British settlements. The continued expansion of Swindon will present challenges for preserving the landscape character and biodiversity of the ridge but also opportunities for improving the provision of green infrastructure and access.

1.17. The description of the Midvale Ridge sets out a number of Statements of Environmental Opportunities (SEO) which the BENP both recognises and seeks to encapsulate in its own policies. The Midvale opportunities are.

- ◆ SEO 1: Maintain the historic environment and cultural character of the Midvale Ridge by ensuring that permitted development is well integrated to preserve local distinctiveness and sense of place and providing green space and recreational opportunities for the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors.
- ◆ SEO 2: Manage, enhance and expand the valuable semi-natural habitats of the Midvale Ridge such as fens, grassland and calcareous heathland to benefit biodiversity, prevent soil erosion, improve water regulation and quality, support pollinators and protect and enhance wildlife corridors.
- ◆ SEO 3: Manage and enhance the woodland cover and expand areas of native broadleaved woodland to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, for carbon sequestration, to prevent soil erosion, improve water quality, supply renewable fuel and to provide access and recreation opportunities.
- ◆ SEO 4: Maintain and enhance the National Character Area's internationally important geological heritage for the educational benefits it provides, its contribution to a sense of place and history and to increase recreational opportunities.

Village Design Statement

1.5. In recent years, new approaches have been developed to help local communities identify and conserve local character in each area. Therefore, local communities can produce their own Village Design Statements (“VDS”) These describe the distinctive character of individual villages and the surrounding countryside and identify design principles which should influence any future development in individual settlements.

1.6. The concepts were developed and introduced by Natural England's predecessors the Countryside Commission and Countryside Agency, and through the Localism Act and the NPPF 2019, as a means of helping to conserve and enhance local distinctiveness.

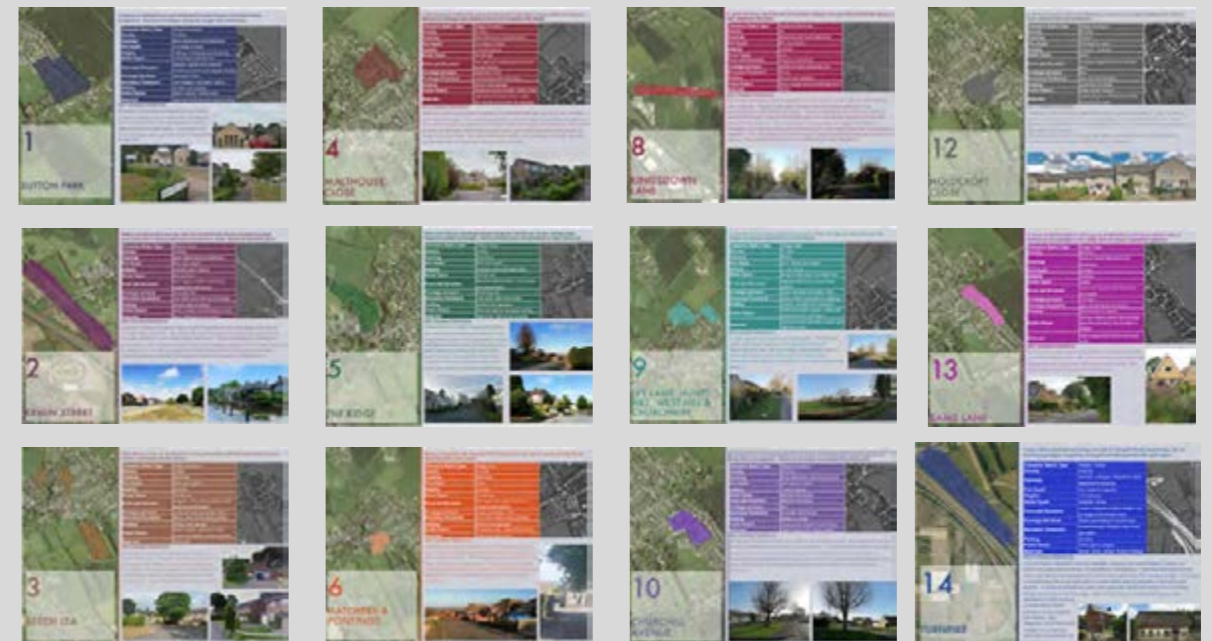
1.7. The BENP VDS has the following main objectives:

To describe the distinctive character of the village and the surrounding countryside

To demonstrate how this local character can be protected and enhanced in new developments

To influence future policies when the planning authority is updating the Local Plan

1.8. To reinforce this a group of volunteers were asked to carry out character assessments across distinct parts of the village. These have been integrated into the VDS and have outlined principles within those areas which developers should incorporate when designing places, buildings and extensions. The design principles will be used to secure identity, character and distinctiveness and provide supplementary guidance to the SBCLP 2026 and the Swindon Residential Design Guide 2016 in the determination of planning applications within the BENP area.



Basic Conditions Statement

2.1. A Basic Conditions Statement has been prepared to accompany the BENP: see Appendix A. This sets out the process and compliance with planning legislation and other requirements that need to be met in preparing a neighbourhood plan.

European Legislation

2.2. The Basic Conditions Statement also sets out how requirements to meet European Union requirements on Environmental Impact and Habitat Regulations are achieved.

2.3. An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken and this is included in the Plan documentation – see Appendix B.

Consultation

2.4. A Statement of consultation has been prepared which sets out the consultations that have been undertaken demonstrating that the plan fully accords with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011. These consultations have met the requirements of Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. A detailed statement is set out in Appendix G.



BLUNSDON - A VISION

The Vision

3.1. Our starting point for preparing this plan was to ensure that the residents of the BENP area were given the opportunity to decide what should happen in their community and where it should take place. The vision has been defined by the desires and aspirations of local residents and other stakeholders of BENP. The objectives and policies that are set out in the BENP derive directly from the views and opinions expressed in the Residents Surveys and at many other consultation events hosted by community volunteers. The community has said it wants the Plan to shape the future so that:

'Blunston will continue to be a safe and tranquil rural area with a strong community spirit and a diverse population. It will value its unique rural setting on the Mid Vale ridge and its historic heritage while improving communication links with Swindon and the wider area.'

3.2. This vision encapsulates the view of the residents and other stakeholders of BENP and is supported by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group looking to 2026. To achieve this vision we have followed four themes, set out opposite each of which is supported by a number of objectives and policies, which are set out in the following pages.

3.3. The policies set out in this plan are designed to meet these objectives and to meet the aspirations set out in the Vision for Blunston.

A PLACE PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE

A PRIDE IN OUR HERITAGE

SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

CONSERVING NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT



A PLACE PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE

- 3.4. To maintain the village character of Blunsdon by managing development on the scale envisaged in the SBCLP 2026. In practical terms this will be limited to small scale low density developments over the plan period.
- 3.5. To maintain areas of separation to protect the unique identity of Blunsdon and prevent coalescence with adjacent, existing and proposed urban areas such as the strategic allocated site at Kingsdown (SBCLP 2026 Policy NC5), while ensuring connectivity and integrated development.
- 3.6. To benefit from the new sustainable links, rights of way and environmental enhancements to be delivered at the strategic allocated site of Kingsdown. The VDS character assessments (CA) should also be used to influence the future design of areas such as Kingsdown, for example CA7- Broadbush and CA8- Kingsdown Lane.
- 3.7. To ensure the objectives above are achieved through collaborative solutions for infrastructure, public realm and road safety and to ensure that Blunsdon grows sustainably with regard to suitable community facilities’.

A PRIDE IN OUR HERITAGE

- 3.8. To protect and enhance the heritage and historic sites within the BENP area for the benefit of present and future residents and the community.
- 3.9. To ensure developments and alterations are sympathetic and appropriate.
- 3.10. To recognise and promote the area’s heritage and history.
- 3.11. To register and protect Assets of Community Value within the BENP area.
- 3.12. To protect valued views in and out of the village and the approaches from the West, North and East as detailed in the VDS, Character Assessments.

SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

- 3.13. To ensure opportunities for home working and employment on existing sites and to consider future use of land for employment where this would be compatible in size and scale with the village setting.
- 3.14. To enhance the lifestyle of the Community by:
- ◆ Working with partners to ensure access to superfast broadband network to support employment and leisure activities;
 - ◆ Improving footpath and cycle links;
 - ◆ Maintaining and improving existing open spaces;
 - ◆ Providing allotment space;
 - ◆ Protecting and improving sports facilities and play areas;
 - ◆ Encouraging the addition of open space and green infrastructure both within the design of each individual development and the wider environment

CONSERVING THE ENVIRONMENT

- 3.15. To preserve, improve and enhance the green infrastructure, open spaces and environmental assets within the BENP area.
- 3.16. In accord with SBCLP2026 policies EN1, EN2, EN4, and EN5 to support the development of the community forest and provide habitats that sustain and improve the biodiversity of the area to include the protection and retention of existing trees and hedgerows.
- 3.17. To preserve special views from the hilltop village, to mitigate against the disruption of these views and protect views in to the village.
- 3.18. To reduce light pollution to minimise risks to health, hazards to road users and to encourage the presence of nocturnal wildlife.

Objectives	Policies
<p>To maintain the village character of Blunsdon by managing development on the scale envisaged in the SBCLP 2026. In practical terms this will be limited to small scale low density developments over the plan period.</p>	<p>P1 – Allocation of sites for housing P2 – Housing Developments on non-allocated sites</p>
<p>To maintain areas of separation to protect the unique identity of Blunsdon and prevent coalescence with adjacent, existing and proposed urban areas such as the strategic allocated site at Kingsdown (SBCLP 2026 Policy NC5), while ensuring connectivity and integrated development.</p>	<p>P3- Rural Buffers</p>
<p>To benefit from the new sustainable links, rights of way and environmental enhancements to be delivered at the strategic allocated site of Kingsdown. The VDS character assessments (CA) should also be used to influence the future design of areas such as Kingsdown, for example CA7- Broadbush and CA8- Kingsdown Lane.</p>	<p>P4– Early Community Engagement with Developers P5 – Preserving the design and character of Blunsdon Village</p>
<p>To ensure the objectives above are achieved through collaborative solutions for infrastructure, public realm and road safety and to ensure that Blunsdon grows sustainably with regard to suitable community facilities</p>	<p>P6 – Road Safety, traffic congestion and pollution P9 - Infrastructure Requirements and Funding for Community projects</p>

4.1. The following policies are designed to support the overall aspects of the vision for the BENP area to make it a place people

Policy 1: Allocation of Sites for Housing

Intent

- 4.2. This policy reflects the national and local need to increase the supply of housing. Policy SD2 (para 3.26) of the SBCLP 2026 notes that “the scale of development at individual settlements should be proportional to the size and function of the settlements”.
- 4.3. In consultations BENP residents have consistently expressed their strong opposition to further large-scale developments due to the negative impact on local services and traffic congestion causing pollution. At the consultation of April 2014 there was marked consensus with over 90% of responses agreeing or strongly agreeing with the following statements:
- Q9** *We have enough houses*
- Q11** *I am worried about future housing plans*
- Q12** *Plans to extend the urban area in Blunston by 1650 houses will adversely affect the area*
- 4.4. Nevertheless, the BENP Steering Group wanted to take a positive approach and consulted the community again in July 2018 to identify the local appetite for plan-led development in the village.
- 4.5. Large scale or major development was not acceptable to the community but 79% of respondents agreed that it was appropriate for the BENP to allocate minor developments on small sites, where ‘minor development’ is taken to be between 1 and 9 dwellings inclusive as defined by the Department of Communities and Local Government²
- 4.6. This policy sets out sites that have been identified for development within the BENP area.

² Planning Applications Decisions - Major and Minor Developments, England, District by Outcome as found on:
<https://data.gov.uk/dataset/planning-applications-decisions-major-and-minor-developments-england-district-by-outcome>

Policy 1: Allocation of Sites for Housing

Planning applications for minor developments on the three sites allocated within this plan will be supported where: -

- ◆ They comply with all other policies in this plan especially, but not exclusively, Policy 4 which encourages early interaction with developers and Policy 5 regarding the Village Design Statement; and
- ◆ They comply with the provisions of the Development Brief outlined in Appendix J; and
- ◆ There are no adverse impacts on the natural and historic environment of the area or the built environment of the BENP area, or such impacts are appropriately mitigated; and
- ◆ Flood Risk Assessments and drainage strategies in accordance with Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 Policy EN6: Flood Risk are provided





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FIG 7 Site put forward across Blunston

4.7. Sites that are shown in Appendix J (AECOM Report Fig 2-1 and table 2.1.1) and those identified as meeting the BENP Site Allocation Criteria for potential development are set out in the subsequent table.

4.8. Following a call for sites, 9 potential sites were put forward for selection (Appendix J AECOM Report Fig 2-1 and table 2.1.1). These were put to the community in July 2018, and following analysis of feedback, 5 sites were shortlisted for further consideration. Various selection criteria were applied, and the process resulted in the selection of three sites for small-scale development as follows:

FIG 8 Sites allocated for residential development

Site Ref	OS Grid Ref	Location	Size (ha)	Potential allocation
D	152902	Dinton Broadbush	0.11	2 dwellings
B	148901	Blunston Land Ltd	1.00	9 dwellings
A	148902	Land East of Ermin St	1.00	9 dwellings

4.9. Appendix J contains a development brief to guide development of the three sites in a consistent and plan-led fashion, taking account of the sites' opportunities and constraints.

Justification

4.10. The BENP area has already been subject to levels of development considerably in excess of the requirements of the Adopted Local Plan. Paragraph 3.26 of the SBCLP 2026 states that 'Other Villages' (of which Blunston is one, together with Wanborough; Chiseldon; Bishopstone and Hinton Parva; Badbury; Liddington; Hannington; Castle Eaton; and Stanton Fitzwarren), should contribute at least 100 dwellings.

4.11. Notwithstanding, 521 dwellings have already been approved within the BENP area at:

- ◆ Hillside 65 dwellings - S/13/1223 & S/17/0455
- ◆ Blunston Heights 57 dwellings - S/15/0364
- ◆ Blunston Chase 69 dwellings - S/14/1304
- ◆ Reservoir site High St 52 dwellings - S/16/2034
- ◆ Holdcroft 54 dwellings - S17/0528
- ◆ Golf Course 100 dwellings - S/17/1032
- ◆ Sams Lane 70 dwellings - S/18/0405
- ◆ Blunston Land 43 dwellings - S/19/0294

- 4.12. In addition, under the SBCLP 2026, the BENP area is scheduled to receive an additional 1,650 houses under the strategic allocation of Kingsdown NC5 Urban extension area. Existing infrastructure within the BENP area such as highways, school facilities, health care provision and shopping amenity does not support further large-scale development (the Kingsdown NC5 development provides specifically for its needs). Further large-scale developments would significantly and adversely impact the amenity of existing residents.
- 4.13. The call for potential development sites produced only 9 nominations³. These nominated sites, as well as those already nominated under the SHLAA process, were evaluated for suitability against defined criteria and for compatibility with the overall BENP. Details of the site selection and evaluation process are set out in Appendix J.
- 4.14. The age profile of current residents is set out in the Equality Impact Assessment in Appendix B and is defined as “ageing”. By allocating small-scale housing development at a low density it is hoped that this will help meet the needs of local residents wishing to remain in the village - particularly if bungalows are provided.
- 4.15. Site B is within the setting of Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area. Development proposals should retain the existing open rural setting of the Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area. In order to mitigate against potential indirect harm to this setting, development should be restricted to the western part of the site and proposals should demonstrate appropriate consideration of siting, density and scale.
- 4.16. Development proposals for Site B should also demonstrate how the nearby listed milestone will be protected whilst the development is being built out.

³ Of these 3 have been subject to formal application.



Policy 2: Housing Development on non-allocated sites

Intent

- 4.17 To conform with both the NPPF 2019, and the SBCLP 2026 Policies.
- 4.18. To provide constructive guidance on development proposals for sites not identified in Policy 1.

Policy 2: Housing Development on non-allocated sites

Proposals outside the sites identified by Policy 1 will be supported where they are of a small scale and are either within the settlement boundaries or are classed 'rural exception sites' providing affordable housing or starter homes⁴, in edge of settlement locations.

Within the settlement boundary proposals for minor residential development will be supported where:

- ◆ They comply with SBCLP 2026 and the Swindon Residential Design Guide 2016
- ◆ They comply with all other policies within the BENP and the Village Design Statement
- ◆ They conserve and enhance the natural and historic built environment of the BENP. Where there is potential for development to result in harmful impacts appropriate mitigation measures will need to be proposed.

Outside the defined settlement boundary as defined by the SBCLP 2026 Proposals Map, land is defined as 'open countryside' and development proposals here will not normally be permitted unless they comply with rural development policies in SBCLP 2026. Rural exception sites which meet identified local need and which comply with SBCLP Policy HA5 will be supported.

⁴ A starter home means the official definition in the Housing and Planning Act 2016

Justification

- 4.19. The SBCLP 2026 is not sufficiently bespoke to the unique character and village setting of the BENP. Therefore, in response to community consultation a VDS was created to provide additional detail and guidance on housing needs and design both for development of the BENP allocated sites subject to Policy 1, and for additional development supported by this Policy.
- 4.20. Support for affordable housing as rural exception sites supports SBC's 'Swindon Strategic Housing Market Assessment' 2012 which indicated that there is a shortfall in the provision of affordable housing across the Borough. (Appendix F). Based on SBC figures (as collated in the AECOM report – see Appendix J), 30% of the approved dwellings are classed as affordable so the BENP area has already contributed to the overall SBC shortfall.
- 4.21. It is clear that the bulk of new housing within the BENP area doesn't meet this need, due to pricing levels. The average house price in Broad Blunsdon over recent years has been £436,000. This is 159% of the average house price across all areas of Swindon⁵ and more than double the average house price for first time buyers for the area as standard two-bedroom first-time buyer homes costs between £170,000 and £180,000⁶.



⁵ <http://www.plumplot.co.uk/Swindon-house-prices.html>

⁶ <https://www.homesandproperty.co.uk/property-news/home-buyers-are-flocking-to-swindon-i>

Policy 3: Rural Buffers

Intent

- 4.22. To ensure that the village of Blunsdon retains its individual character as a rural village and remains a distinct entity from the Swindon urban area.
- 4.23. The BENP Landscape & Visual Sensitivity Analysis identifies a number of key views within the designated BENP Area which should be preserved and the creation of rural buffers is essential to this objective.
- 4.24. To facilitate the objectives of SBCLP 2026 specifically paras 3.26, 5.86 and 5.107 and SBCLP 2026 Policies SD2 and NC5f.
- 4.25. To mirror the policies for other non-urban village settings as set out in the SBCLP 2026 particularly RA2a, NC1g and NC3e, HA5 and para 5.127.
- 4.26. To meet the environmental objectives set out in the National Character area Profile for the Midvale Ridge 109.



Policy 3: Rural Buffers

The character and identity of Blunsdon Village will be preserved and enhanced by:

- ◆ The establishment of three rural buffers as shown on FIG 9 which should remain as open countryside.
- ◆ Ensuring that Blunsdon remains a separate and distinct entity separated from the Swindon Urban area.
- ◆ Respecting the local landscape character including its setting and views into and out from the village.
- ◆ Respecting the setting of the Broad Blunsdon and Lower Blunsdon Conservation Areas by conserving their special character and appearance.

Development proposals in these Rural Buffers will only be supported where they are in accordance with SBCLP 2026 Policy EC5 (Farm Diversification) or are an essential requirement directly related to the economic or social needs of the rural community⁷. Where there is potential for development as set out in this policy and which results in harmful impacts, appropriate mitigation measures will need to be proposed.

⁷ For example Local Open Space, Allotments, recreation and sports facilities that do not harm the visual separation of Blunsdon from adjacent urban areas

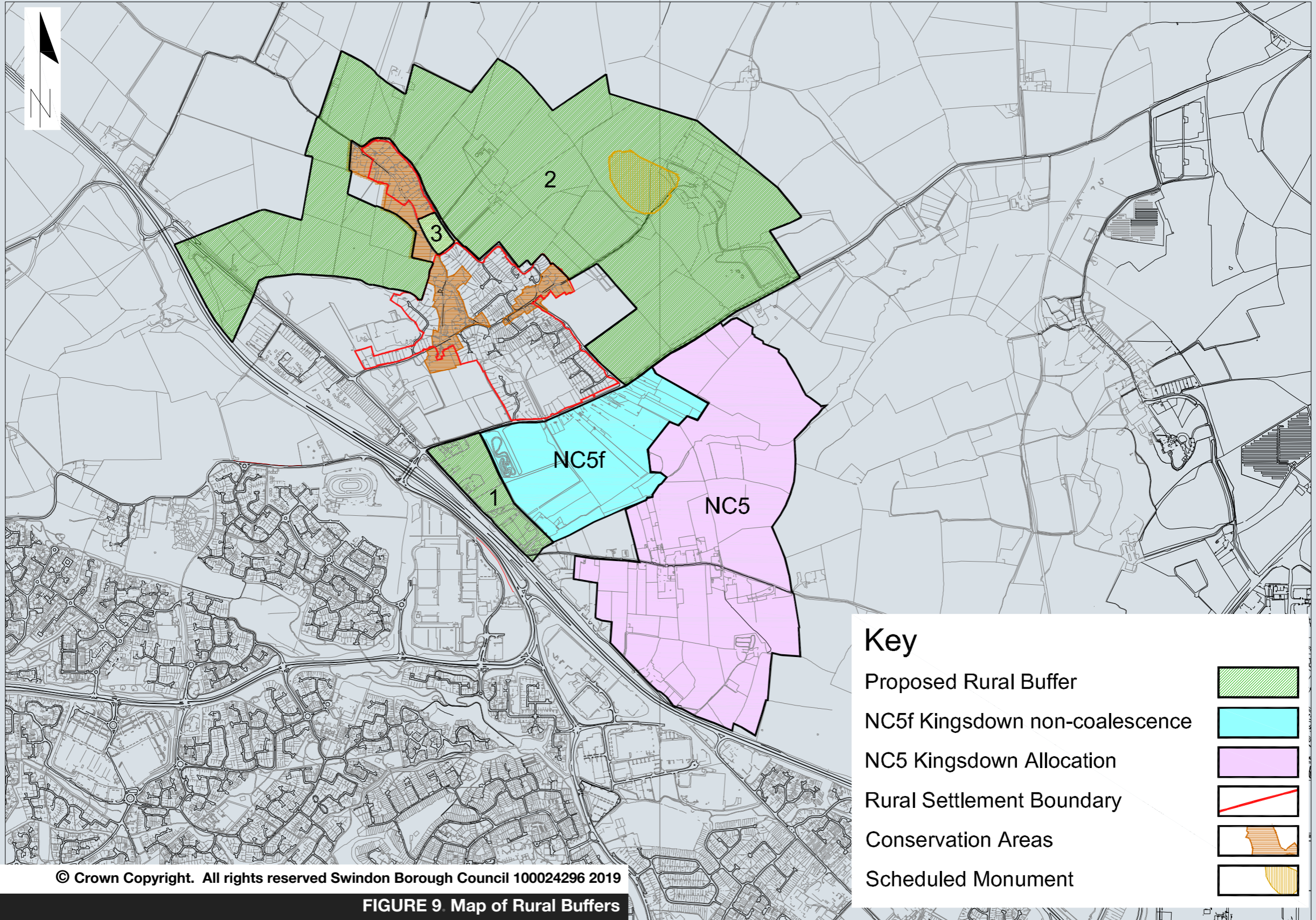


FIG 10 Justification for Rural Buffers

	Description	Justification	
NC5f	Land to the south of the B4019 between the Village and the allocated strategic site of Kingsdown NC5	SBCLP 2026 under policy NC5 establishes a principle of non-coalescence between the new development and the existing settlement as follows: f. The character and identity of Broad Blunsdon, including Broadbush, shall be protected by a principle of non-coalescence between the settlements. The area designated by the BENP covers the area already identified by SBC in the Local Plan 2026.	
1	Land to the west and adjacent to the NC5 non-coalescence area	This area completes the green space between Blunsdon village and the urban area of Swindon, including NC5, and supports SBCLP 2026 Policy NC5 which states “The character and identity of Broad Blunsdon, including Broadbush, shall be protected by a principle of non-coalescence between the settlements.”	
2	Land surrounding the village envelope, following the contours of the Mid-Vale Ridge	This area is important to ensure that any development adjacent to the settlement boundary to the east of the village does not join up with the Kingsdown NC5 area and create an urban expansion stretching from the south, across the B4019 and up to the existing settlement boundary close to the Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area, St Leonards Church and the local cemetery. This accords with SBCLP 2026 policies NC5 and SD2 para 3.26 “the villages in the borough have distinct characteristics and features that are worthy of protection and enhancement, and therefore development should be at a scale in keeping with the historic form and character of the village”. “The character and identity of Broad Blunsdon, including Broadbush, shall be protected by a principle of non-coalescence between the settlements.” Allocation of this area is critical to preserve the overall tranquillity of the village particularly that of the local cemetery. This area surrounding this historic Stubbs Hill Anti-Aircraft battery also supports the SBCLP 2026 policy EN10 in protecting the historic environment, including listed buildings and any archaeological features. (Archaeological features in this location are listed in the Wiltshire and Swindon Historic Environment Record as MWI 16873 Stubb’s Hill Battery and MWI 14649 Undated trackway). The Buffer to the west of the Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area and the A419 is intended to safeguard and provide a defensible boundary between the village and Tadpole Farm and any future development in that area.	
3	Land between Upper and Lower Village formed by Ivy Lane, Front Lane, Back Lane and the wooded area south of Grove House	This area of land is the clear dividing line between Upper and Lower Villages. The Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area Appraisal states “Open space between the built form of Lower Blunsdon and Broad Blunsdon separates the two settlements and maintains the individual identity of each.” In addition, a planning inspector stated that “I agree that the field [referring to the above paddock]...play[s] a vital role in maintaining the separate identities of the two parts of Blunsdon.” Ref: T/APP/X3920/A/88/103837/P4 29th March 1989	

Justification

4.27. In order to determine the extent of the rural buffers, each area was assessed with the following principles in mind:

- ◆ topographical features - hills, ridges, valleys, which if breached would adversely affect a settlement's separate distinctiveness;
- ◆ visual coalescence - views into and out of settlements which should remain free from further development to retain the openness of the landscape character;
- ◆ setting to the village - using an assessment of the surrounding countryside and each settlement's relationship to it through a LVSA (Connected Landscapes LVSA Appendix I);
- ◆ defensible boundaries - appropriate boundaries such as roads, rivers or fields.

4.28. The BENP area consists of the village of Blunsdon, a number of Conservation Areas, and areas of open, mainly agricultural, countryside and the BENP area should continue to exist as an area separated from the urban area of Swindon.

4.29. BENP supports reasonable, orderly and well-designed small-scale developments which are directly related to the economic or social needs of the rural community and retains and enhances the character of the BENP area.

4.30. The concept of rural buffers is in line with a number of planning requirements both national and as established by SBC, particularly:

- ◆ NPPF para 170
- ◆ SBCLP 2026 paras 3.26, 5.86 and 5.107
- ◆ SBCLP 2026 policies SD2 and NC5f

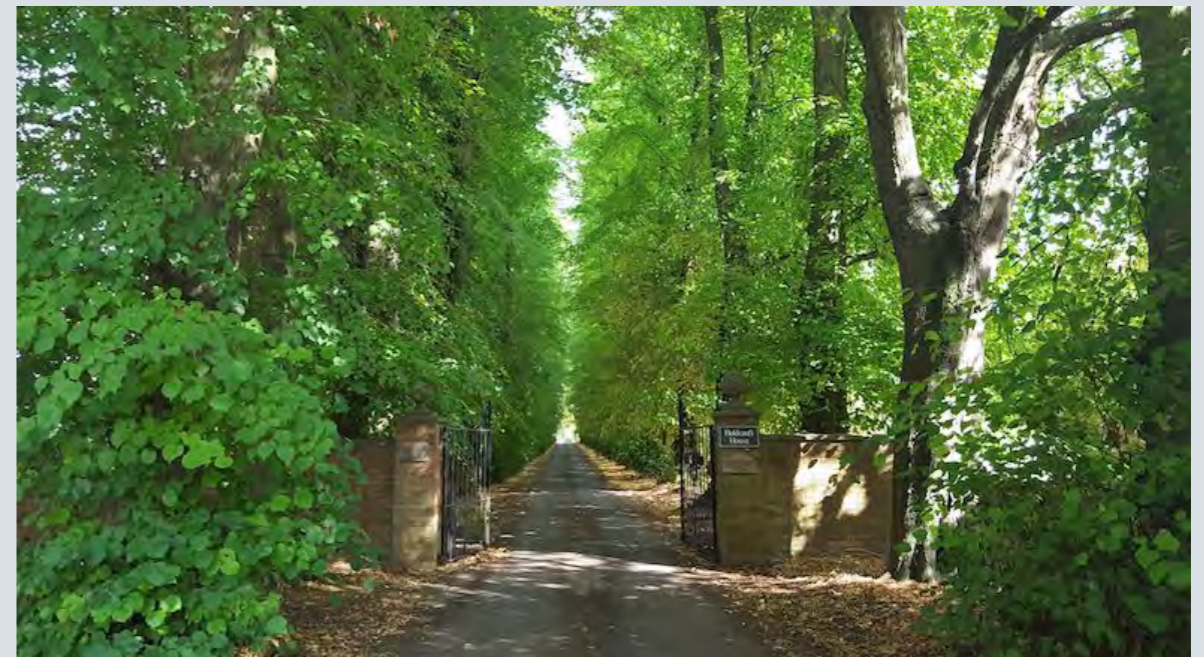
4.31. This policy mirrors the policies for other non-urban village settings within the SBC area and is therefore derived from the SBCLP 2026 particularly:

- ◆ SBCLP 2026 policies RA2a, NC1g, NC3e and HA5 a
- ◆ SBCLP 2026 para 5.127

4.32. Although not carried forward into the current SBCLP 2026 the immediately preceding version SBCLP 2011 (ENV10, ENV24) required the creation of 'rural buffers' to ensure that villages surrounding Swindon did not become part of the urban area.

4.33. During consultations held with local residents, particularly from the responses to question 19 of the questionnaires collated in April 2014, 71% of respondents identified areas to ensure the separation of the village from the urban areas of Swindon. These responses formed the basis for the areas of rural buffers contained in this policy.

4.34. Based on outputs from consultations in November 2017 the Parish Council commissioned an independent Landscape & Visual Sensitivity Analysis ("LVSA") (Appendix I) from Connected Landscapes. This report concluded (section 6.3 of the LVSA) that: "The balance between built form and the more natural environment (albeit one that is heavily managed through agriculture) which characterises the local landscape is assessed as being of medium sensitivity to appropriately-located small-scale development, but high sensitivity to large-scale development, especially any which substantially extends or lies outside of the existing settlement boundary."



Policy 4: Early Community Engagement with Developers

Intent

- 4.35. To comply with NPPF 2019 paragraphs 128 and 129, which require the evolution and assessment of 'design quality to take account of the views of the local community' and 'to include workshops to engage the local community'. Applicants should be encouraged if not already required by law to engage with the local community before submitting their applications, NPPF 2019, paragraphs 39 and 40.
- 4.36. To engage with the developer(s) of the strategic Kingsdown site NC5 so that local community views are fully considered during the design and construction phases of the development.
- 4.37. To ensure that the local community is aware of and understands any planning application to be submitted or any proposed changes to already submitted or approved applications.



Policy 4: Early Community Engagement with Developers

For developments generally

In the initial development and design stage prior to submitting a planning application to SBC, developers are encouraged to engage with the local community to understand particular local views about the proposal (SBCLP 2026 Policy LN1)

Developers are particularly encouraged to engage with the community prior to submitting any planning application to discuss issues including, but not limited to:

- ◆ Modelling of traffic flows and mitigation to avoid possible congestion and 'rat-running' through the village;
- ◆ Public transport options including a review of bus services, new footpaths (including the changes to the Heritage Trail) and cycle ways;
- ◆ Provision or enhancement to core services;
- ◆ The upgrading of the Recreation Ground, pavilion and parking areas to further support increased demand and accessibility issues.
- ◆ How developer contributions can be utilised to improve and/or mitigate deficiencies in local infrastructure or where local infrastructure is at capacity (see BENP P10 & SBCLP 2026 Policy IN1).

- 4.38. To comply with the requirement of the Statement of Community Involvement, applicants should be encouraged to demonstrate that the views of the local community have been sought and taken into account in the formulation of development proposals. The level of detail provided should reflect the scale of the development.

Policy 4: Early Community Engagement with Developers

For development on the Kingsdown NC5 site

This plan encourages the formulation of a separate Design Code for the Kingsdown Development, NC5, informed by Policy 5 – Village Design Statement and asks that this forms part of the early community engagement with developers.

The BENP community will engage with the developers of the Kingsdown strategic allocation in order to ensure that:

- ✦ any area of non-coalescence or rural buffer is treated as a minimum standard (Policy 3 & Policy 5)
- ✦ as many of the existing hedgerows and trees as possible are retained and to allow enhancement and replacement where retention is not possible. This is to ensure net biodiversity gain, landscape character and provision of a network of green infrastructure corridors (Policy 12);
- ✦ the development provides key infrastructure, such as primary school, open space, pitches and a local centre;
- ✦ local facilities are linked to existing or new rights of way to enable and encourage sustainable movement around the village by foot and bicycle;
- ✦ traffic mitigation measures required eg traffic calming and measures to minimise rat running through Broad Blunsdon are carried out as per SBCLP 2026 Policy NC5.

Justification

- 4.39. The Plan recognises that, under SBCLP 2026 NC5 - Kingsdown, a number of new houses and ancillary development will be completed at the southern end of the plan area albeit as an urban extension connected to Urban Swindon by a bridge over the A419. It also recognises that there may be a limited number of applications for infill development and extensions to existing dwellings.
- 4.40. NPPF 2019 (para 39) states “Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better co-ordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.” The BENP fully supports this concept of early discussion with developers engaging with the local community, primarily the Parish Council, before any applications are submitted.
- 4.41. Early engagement will lead to issues being raised and for an increased potential for these to be resolved at an early stage allowing a smoother translation into a full planning application.
- 4.42. It is also important that both developers and Swindon Borough Council engage with the local community throughout the planning process especially where proposals are altered part way through the planning process so that community views are fully understood. This should apply whether the changes require a new application or where application to vary under section 73 is made.
- 4.43. Consultation on variations should initially be conducted through the Parish Council which will encourage involvement of the wider community.

Policy 5: Preserving the design and character of Blunsdon Village

Intent

- 4.44. To support the objectives of the BENP in preserving the character of the village, a Village Design Statement has been prepared for the BENP area. This Statement supports a number of SBCLP 2026 policies and the principles and urban design principles derived from SBCLP 2026 Policy DE1.
- 4.45. The Village Design Statement (VDS), Appendix C is an important tool for use in helping to protect the character of the BENP area. It is the principle statement to help influence decisions on design and development. The VDS sets out the character of the village and its environs included within the BENP area against which planning applications may be assessed. The VDS is not concerned with whether development should take place but with how planned development should be carried out, so that it is in harmony with its setting and contributes to the conservation and, where possible, enhancement of the local environment.
- 4.46. The VDS does not specifically cover the strategic Kingsdown site as it is considered that this will have a separate identity and hence be subject to specific and localised design guidelines. However, it is hoped that the VDS will be used as a guide for the development as well as being subject to input from the local community through engagement with developers.

Policy 5: Preserving the design and character of Blunsdon Village

All development within the BENP area, other than that within the Strategic Site NC5, is required to comply with the VDS.

Development proposals should demonstrate how they comply with the design principles contained within the VDS.



Justification

- 4.47. Any proposed development or change should be informed by an understanding of the history, status and character of Blunston and the essential need to protect and enhance the quality of the built and natural environment.
- 4.48. It is recognised that it is not just the larger developments that can adversely affect the environment, a small extension or alteration to a house or garden can change the character of a place, as can minor changes to open spaces, paths, roads, verges, hedges, windows, fences and railings.
- 4.49. There is a desire for the maintenance of the village character and it is important that a common ethos is agreed for all development. The VDS is intended to positively influence all decisions on the choice of design details that might have an impact on the quality and character of the area.
- 4.50. The conservation areas appraisals already provide a degree of protection for those designated areas and the VDS serves to dovetail with those appraisals. These appraisals, management plans and the accompanying maps have been prepared in collaboration with Blunston Parish Council.
- 4.51. A Landscape Visual Sensitivity Analysis (“LVSA”) was commissioned from an independent consultancy. The full report is set out in Appendix I and it concluded that:

Section 4.37

The published county and, particularly, district level landscape character assessments are considered to accurately reflect the character of the landscape surrounding Broad Blunston and Lower Village. Views to and from the higher ground where Broad Blunston is located are noted as being both important and sensitive (see also Appendix 5: Topography).

Section 4.38

The landscape is undesignated at either national/statutory or local/non-statutory levels (see Appendix 6: Environmental Designations and Local Plan Policies) but is nevertheless an attractive edge-of-settlement agricultural landscape with strong field boundary vegetation. The latter results in sometimes limited inter-visibility, though elsewhere the topography allows long views across the Thames Vale. The local landscape is therefore considered to be of medium value.



Policy 6: Road Safety, traffic congestion and pollution

Intent

- 4.52. This Policy is intended to support the Vision of Blunsdon continuing to be a tranquil village and will also help to improve the environment and maintain 'road safety, in the the interest of promoting sustainable travel and in compliance with NPPF healthy living'.
- 4.53. At every consultation a majority of comments related to increased traffic flows and the inadequacy of current road capacity and the safety and pollution issues that this causes.
- 4.54. As per the Highways England comments on the Kingsdown development outline planning application S/OUT/17/1821 "The (Coldharbour) junction as a whole is forecast to operate above capacity." Developers and SBC are encouraged to consider the cumulative effect of all approved developments on traffic flow, road safety and pollution levels.
- 4.55. The use of developer contributions for road safety and environmental issues derives directly from the SBCLP 2026 Policy NC5 which states that development should include:
- ◆ mitigation contributions for the highway network;
 - ◆ vehicular access routes from Cold Harbour Junction and the B4019 east of Broad Blunsdon, designed in such a way to discourage additional trips through Broad Blunsdon and Broadbush and protect the amenity of Kingsdown Lane including appropriate green infrastructure;
 - ◆ measures to minimise 'rat-running' through Broad Blunsdon village and from Cold Harbour Junction;

Policy 6: Road Safety, traffic congestion and pollution

To maintain Blunsdon as a 'tranquil rural area' developers should actively consider steps which will offset any adverse impacts on road safety or pollution caused by increased traffic flows through the village during the construction and thereafter as set out in the SBCLP 2026 Policies TR1 and TR2 and NPPF 2019 paras 108 and 109.

Developers, during pre-application consultation and within planning applications including any Statement of Community Involvement, should provide suggestions on how their contributions can be used to enhance or mitigate the effects of traffic flow, promote road safety and minimise air, light and noise pollution.

Traffic Congestion Proposals that accord with the policies in the BENP and result in improvements to the free flow of traffic in the village, promote road safety and minimise air, light and noise pollution will be supported.

Road safety, traffic congestion and pollution are a priority for Blunsdon and developers are strongly encouraged to discuss the above traffic mitigation measures with the Parish Council at the earliest possible stage in the planning process.

Justification

- 4.56. While it is recognised that the BENP cannot deal with highways matters directly the safety of pedestrians and other road users remains a key priority. The residents in the BENP area are particularly concerned about the increase in traffic and its impact on road safety and pollution that local developments have caused, in particular along Broadbush at the 'Cold Harbour' junction and the rat running through the village. This concern will only increase with developments that have already been approved, that may be approved and are supported by the SBCLP.

4.57. As set out by Highways England in response to planning application S/OUT/17/1821, with this planned growth there will be increasing strains put upon the transportation network in the BENP and its rural location.

4.58. To manage this growth in traffic appropriately, it is likely that measures to improve and enhance road safety, and minimise the impact of pollution, will need to be considered in key areas.

4.59. New development can potentially bring forward road safety infrastructure improvements. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and other developer sourced money may be used for community identified road safety projects including proposals to reduce or minimise pollution.

4.60. Poorly designed and/or installed outdoor lighting can create a hazard to motorists, cyclists and pedestrians in transit at night. Impact of lighting is considered in detail in Policy 13 – Dark Skies below.



Objectives		Policies
To protect and enhance the heritage and historic sites within the BENP area for the benefit of present and future residents and the community		P5 – Preserving the design and character of Blunsdon Village
To ensure developments and alterations are sympathetic and appropriate.		P5 – Preserving the design and character of Blunsdon Village
To recognise and promote the area’s heritage and history.		P5 – Preserving the design and character of Blunsdon Village P7 – Protection of community facilities and locally important assets
To register and protect Assets of Community Value within the BENP area.		P7 – Protection of community facilities and locally important assets P9 - Infrastructure Requirements and Funding for Community projects
To protect valued views in and out of the village and the approaches from the West, North and East as detailed in the VDS, Character Assessments.		P11 - Preservation of Views of local importance

5. The following policies aim to conserve and where appropriate enhance the significance and setting of all heritage assets.

Policy 7: Protection of Community facilities and locally important assets

Intent

- 5.1. Consultation for the BENP identified a number of areas of land and/or buildings which are integral to the functioning of the community. This policy seeks to ensure that such facilities are preserved or enhanced for the benefit of the community.
- 5.2. To recognise and protect all the significant historic and heritage sites including those highlighted in the VDS (Appendix C) and the Blunsdon Heritage Trail. (Appendix D)
- 5.3. Community facilities will be enabled through appropriate CIL and Section 106 planning gain contributions from developers to ensure adequate services and infrastructure provision.

Policy 7: Protection of Community facilities and locally important assets

Development proposals that will enhance the viability and value of community facilities will be supported. (ref SBCLP 2026 Policy CM4)

A non-exhaustive list of community facilities is set out below and any development is expected to conserve and enhance them and any other sites which may be considered as such assets:

St Leonards Church The Rec ground pavilion

The Cold Harbour Pub The Doctor's surgery

The Village Hall The Methodist Church

The Village shop The Baptist Church

The Stubb's Hill Anti-Aircraft Battery

The Heart in Hand Public House and Hall

Proposals for new or extended community facilities for the BENP area, including within Kingsdown NC5, will be supported particularly where they will be accessible for all residents of the BENP area



Justification

- 5.4. The community at all levels benefits from certain facilities and, in order to preserve those benefits, it is important that the character and usage of those facilities is not diminished.
- 5.5. Where proposals are made to alter the use or character of such facilities it will be necessary to consider whether retention of the facility is economically viable and whether it can still deliver value to the community.
- 5.6. Where the facility is seen to be of benefit to the community and remains economically viable then consideration should be given to the acquisition of that facility to provide ongoing value to the community. This is in accordance with Part 5 of the Localism Act 2011.
- 5.7. The BENP sets out strategic objectives derived from the first consultation and questionnaire with its residents and the two that specifically apply to this policy are:
- ◆ Heritage/History: To protect and enhance the heritage and historic sites within the BENP area for the benefit of present and future residents and the community at large.
 - ◆ Environment: To protect and preserve the landscape context and rural views in and out of the village and to preserve and enhance the environmental assets within BENP area.
- 5.8. Feedback from the local consultations identified many local facilities that should be preserved and a method of recognising the significant History and Heritage sites within the BENP is the development of the Blunston Heritage Trail. Details of the trail and identified locally important facilities are set out in Appendix D.



Objectives		Policies
To ensure opportunities for home working and employment on existing sites and to consider future use of land for employment where this would be compatible in size and scale with the village setting.		P8 – Employment
To enhance the lifestyle of the community by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Working with partners to ensure access to superfast broadband network to support employment and leisure activities; 		P8 – Employment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Improving footpath and cycle links; 		P9 – Infrastructure Requirements and Funding for Community Projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Maintaining and improving existing open spaces; 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Providing allotment space; 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Protecting and improving sports facilities and play areas; 		P10 – Green Infrastructure, Open Space and Sports Facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Encouraging the addition of open space and green infrastructure both within the design of each individual development and the wider environment. 		P5 – Preserving the design and character of Blunsdon Village P10 – Green Infrastructure, Open Space and Sports Facilities

6. These policies aim to retain conserve and enhance the benefits of the existing open space, play areas and sports facilities and to enhance and improve green infrastructure.

Policy 8: Employment

Intent

- 6.1. This policy seeks to ensure that there are enhanced employment opportunities within the BENP area which meet the following requirements:

Policy 8: Employment

The BENP encourages proposals that will enable homeworking, co-working or provide new local employment opportunities, subject to the policies contained within the BENP and SBCLP 2026 provided that:

- ✦ There are no harmful impacts on residential amenity through smell, dust, noise, pollution, increased traffic movements, transit of heavy good or other interference with the quiet enjoyment of residents; and
- ✦ There are no harmful impacts on the natural and historic environment of the area or the built environment of the BENP area and proposals comply with other BENP policies; and
- ✦ There is no unacceptable traffic impact within the BENP area. Where any proposal could generate heavy goods traffic, they must demonstrate with the assistance of a Transport Statement that the proposal will not have an unacceptable traffic impact.

Proposals that comply with this policy will be supported

Justification

- 6.2. Most employment for residents of the BENP area is provided either in Swindon or further afield resulting in the need for employees to use private transport to travel to work (due to the limited availability of public transport) and hence creating additional traffic movements at peak hours. This impacts on the overall levels of traffic and pollution within the village.
- 6.3. Public transport links to the area are provided only by a limited bus service which necessitates most workers using cars to get to work. This adds to the stress already in existence on the current road network as well as adding to local pollution levels.
- 6.4. The ability to work effectively from home would reduce the impacts of traffic and pollution in the local area.



Policy 9: Infrastructure Requirements and Funding for Community Projects

Intent

- 6.5. It is a general requirement that development can in some circumstances by means of a financial contribution make an appropriate contribution to the local community which is payable either to the Parish Council or managed by Swindon Borough Council. This policy seeks to encourage the direction of funds received into specific facilities that will be of benefit to the community as a whole.
- 6.6. When projects are identified the Parish Council will seek external funds for such a project or will seek matching funding sources to maximise investment opportunities.

Justification

- 6.7. Legislation requires that development at all levels contribute towards the good of the community and to cover the expenses that will fall to the local community relating to their developments. For instance, the building of new housing requires the provision of services, such as education, to the residents.
- 6.8. In circumstances where that provision cannot be met on site but is provided for by means of an offsite financial contribution from a development, this policy seeks to ensure that any financial contribution is received to support the delivery of prioritised community projects.
- 6.9. Where on-site or off-site infrastructure is required and there is an expectation that it will be owned or managed by the Parish Council, the landowner/developer will be expected to approach and discuss this with the Parish Council. In advance of submission of any planning application. Any application submitted should be supported by a statement that identifies the level of discussion or any agreement with the Parish Council.

Policy 9: Infrastructure Requirements and Funding for Community Projects

Any financial contributions received through the Community Infrastructure Levy for direct local benefit agreed under Section 106 or otherwise generated by development within the boundary of the Parish and paid over to the Parish Council should be used to support projects listed below, but not exclusively.

Any developer contributions received by the Parish Council from the LPA on developments within the BENP area or from areas which affect it will be allocated to Community projects agreed at the time and may include Traffic mitigation projects.

A list of projects will be developed by the Parish Council. This list will be reviewed annually through discussion with members of the local community, users of Parish facilities and through the Annual Parish Meeting.

Projects listed to date which may merit use of external funding include:

- ◆ Highways improvements and road safety measures;
- ◆ Enhancement to the conservation areas;
- ◆ Enhancements to the Blunsdon Heritage Trail;
- ◆ Rights of way and cycle network;
- ◆ Provision for connection to efficient broadband services;
- ◆ Provision of allotments;
- ◆ Development and enhancement of Multi-Use Games Area;
- ◆ Improvement to the existing sporting facilities associated with the Recreation Ground to encourage or extend the use of available facilities;
- ◆ Enlargement of existing cemetery provisions for the local community.

Other projects that comply with policies and aspirations within this plan may also be supported.

CONSERVING THE ENVIRONMENT 7

Objectives	Policies
To preserve, improve and enhance the green infrastructure, open spaces and environmental assets within the BENP area.	P10 – Green Infrastructure, Open Space and Sports Facilities
In accord with SBCLP 2026 policies EN1, EN2, EN4, and EN5 to support the development of the community forest and provide habitats that sustain and improve the biodiversity of the area to include the protection and retention of existing trees and hedgerows.	P12 – Protection of Trees and Hedgerows
To preserve special views from the hilltop village to mitigate against the disruption of these views and protect views to the village.	P11 – Preservation of views of local importance P9 – Infrastructure Requirements and Funding for community projects
To reduce light pollution to minimise risks to health, hazards to road users and to encourage the presence of nocturnal wildlife.	P13 – Dark Skies

7. These policies aim to retain and enhance:

- ◆ The benefits of the existing conservation areas;
- ◆ Green infrastructure, community forest and Biodiversity in line with SBCLP 2026 policies EN1, EN2 and EN3;
- ◆ The presence of nocturnal wildlife in an essentially rural area;
- ◆ The open spaces within the BENP area;
- ◆ The exceptional views and vistas enjoyed by residents

Policy 10: Green Infrastructure, Open Space and Sports Facilities

Intent

- 7.1. The availability of green space and the protection of local history and heritage assets were identified as 'most important' in the first questionnaire and the designation of a village green was also strongly supported in the second questionnaire. The most important central space that serves as a village green, and most supported in the questionnaire feedback, is the Recreation Ground. Historically it has been the space most often used for village events. It is therefore proposed to designate this as a Local Green Space.
- 7.2. It is vital that the Recreation Ground is protected and preserved as an informal Village Green that continues to remain open to residents. It is the BENP area's only formal outdoor playing space.
- 7.3. This open space has a significant visual impact on the BENP area and designating it as a Local Green Space will protect this important site into the future.
- 7.4. As part of a healthy community it is important that leisure facilities are provided. A number of sporting opportunities already exist in the BENP area and these should be retained and enhanced wherever possible.
- 7.5. Ensure that any other identified green spaces put forward by the community are considered for designation given the level of housing pressure on the village, and the need for breathing space, play areas and leisure facilities.

Policy 10: Green Infrastructure, Open Space and Sports Facilities

The Parish Council has a statutory duty to ensure net biodiversity gain and order to reflect the demands and aspirations of residents and preserve its' crucial role in the village, the Recreation Ground shown on FIG 9 is designated as a Local Green Space. Development on the Recreation Ground will only be permitted where it promotes and enhances the recreational use and visual attributes of open space.

Proposals to expand opportunities for sport and recreation within the BENP area will be supported where they are in compliance with other policies in this plan.

Existing sports, recreational and allotment sites (as shown on the map below) are protected from development unless alternative provision can be made locally of equivalent or better size, quality and accessibility in accordance with SBCLP 2026 EN3;

In order to maximise opportunities for contributions towards green infrastructure and the Great Western Community Forest, where appropriate, development proposals should comply with SBCLP Policies EN1, EN2.

Justification

- 7.6. The SBC Open Space Audit and Assessment Review 2014 Part A: Report rated Blunsdon as average for quality of open space and only average/poor on accessibility. The report also stated that Blunsdon had an under-provision in play spaces, open spaces and allotments. The volume of additional housing built since then has exacerbated the situation and more should be done to correct this under-provision.
- 7.7. Opportunities should be maximised to enhance connectivity between developments for walkers and cyclists.

7.8. It is vital that the Recreation Ground is protected and enhanced to ensure preservation of open space open to residents at this crucial central location. Blunston is short of open space as discussed above, and this site being particularly important to the local community meets the criteria for designation as a Local Green Space in the NPPF 2019, paragraphs 99-101.

7.9. These open spaces have a significant visual impact on the BENP area and efforts should be made to incorporate the use of these spaces where possible.

7.10. This aim is supported by the NPPF 2019 paragraphs 96-97.

7.11. Retention and expansion of open spaces and sporting facilities is a crucial element in establishing and preserving the health and well-being of the community.



FIG 11 Existing Open spaces and Sports Facilities

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Key

- 1 Millennium Garden
- 2 Burytown Copse
- 3 Recreation Ground
- 4 Children's playground & tennis courts

Policy 11: Preservation of views of local importance

Intent

7.12. Landscape setting is an important part of this area, as the views of the surrounding land are a significant input to its character which reinforces the distinctive identity as a rural settlement on and above the Thames plain. There are spectacular views both from and into the village from many viewpoints. Northwards, there are some exceptional panoramic views over the Thames valley towards the Cotswolds, and back inwards towards the village.

7.13. Southwards, the views are blocked by new developments; nevertheless, some open views of fields are visible and provide some evidence of the settlement's pastoral origins, helping to depict its rural location. There are good views from the public footpath from Broadbush to the tributary of the Bydemill Brook.

7.14. There is a desire to seek compliance with the Statement of Environmental Opportunity SEO1 contained in the Midvale Ridge National Character Area profile.

7.15. Based on outputs from consultations in November 2017 the Parish Council commissioned an independent Landscape & Visual Sensitivity Analysis ("LVSA") (Appendix I) from Connected Landscapes. This report concluded that "6.5 Six of the nine views are assessed as being of high sensitivity to residential development, with the remaining three views considered to be of medium sensitivity."

7.16. The intention is to preserve the views which surround the Village and are considered by the residents to be of high aesthetic value. Details of a number of the views which are of merit and worthy of preservation, as determined by the residents during the consultation process, are set out in the table⁷ and on the map at FIG 14 and are:

⁷ See Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Analysis, Connected Landscapes, December 2017.

7.17. In addition to the views identified during the consultation process the Blunsdon Conservation Area Appraisal⁸ identifies 6 further views which should be protected (FIG 12). These views should be included within the terms of this policy as well as retaining protection from their conservation area status.



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FIG 12 Views and Vistas in Conservation Area Appraisal

Policy 11: Preservation of views of local importance

Development proposals should conserve and enhance the key views and vistas identified by the LVSA⁹ and in the Conservation area appraisals.

Opportunities to avoid the use of overhead cables in the future and to remove or reroute cables to ground level should be taken where possible.

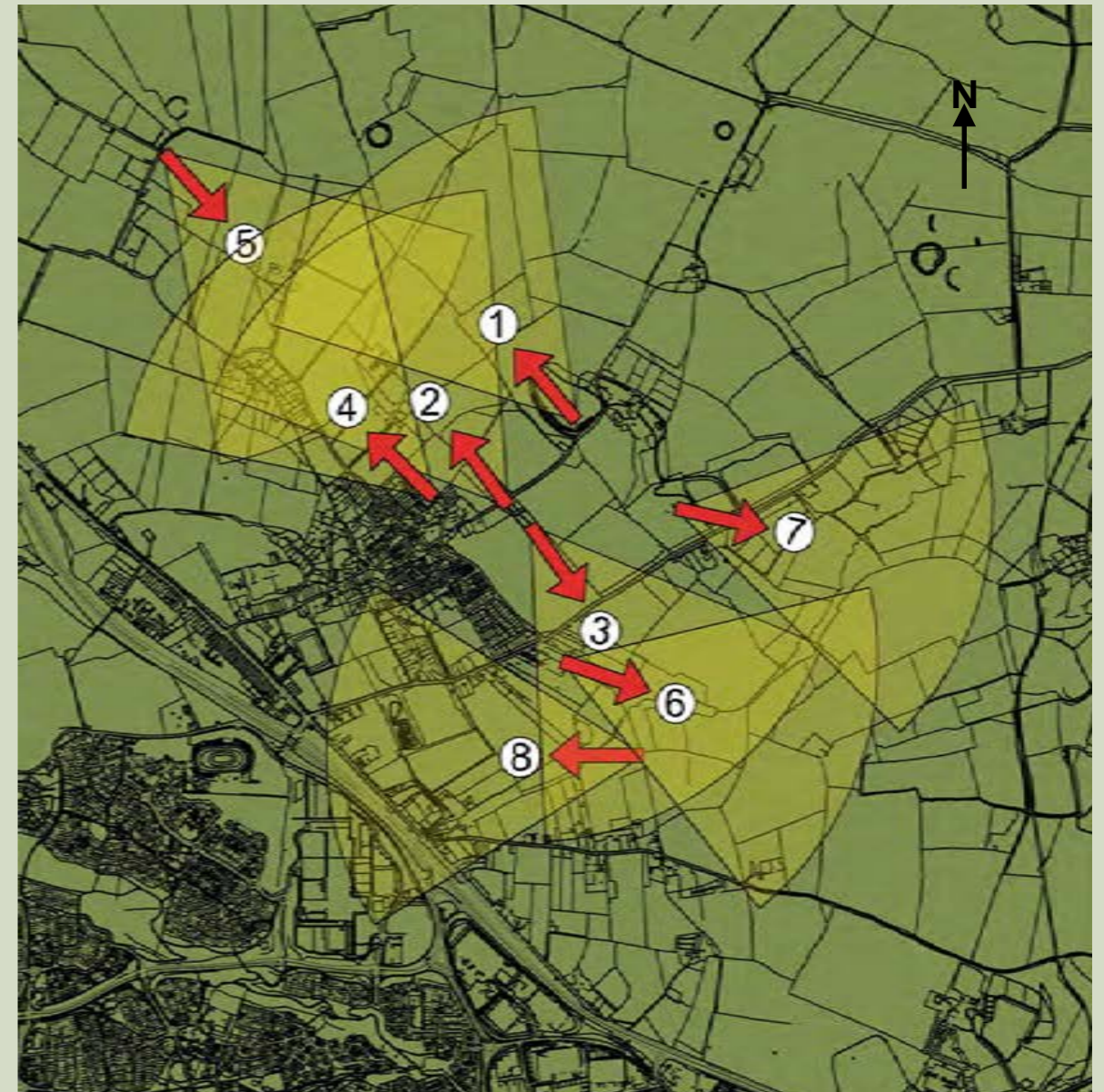
Where appropriate any proposals for developments should be accompanied by a detailed Landscape Statement to include impact on the specific views details listed in this plan.

⁸ https://www.swindon.gov.uk/.../conservation_area_appraisal_broad_blunsdon.pdf

⁹ Full details are set out in the LVSA report contained in Appendix 1.

FIG 13 Extract from Landscape & Visual Sensitivity Analysis

VP no.	OS Grid reference	High Sensitivity	Medium Sensitivity
		Description	
1	SU 15745 91115	Public footpath crossing Castle Hill, looking north/north-west	
2	SU 15467 90819	Field gateway on Burytown Lane, looking north-west	
3	SU 15577 90733	Blunsdon Cemetery, looking south-east	
4	SU 15250 90832	Field gateway on Churchway, looking north-west	
5	SU 14264 92064	South-east end of Little Rose Lane, looking south-east	
6	SU 15714 90242	Public footpath heading south-east from Broadbush, looking south-east	
7	SU 16093 90748	Public footpath on Stubb's Hill, looking east and south	
8	SU 15979 89880	Public footpath to north of Kingsdown Lane, looking northeast	
9	SU 14933 90926	Junction of Back Lane and Ivy Lane, looking north	



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FIG 14 Key Views and Vistas in LSWA



Justification

- 7.18. Much of the BENP area is located on a ridge giving rise to a number of views over extensive countryside as well as being visible from many sides.
- 7.19. The Heritage trail provides a number of views both into and out of the village.
- 7.20. To encourage any development, through the VDS, even at individual house level, to be cognisant of the valued views into and out of the village and the approaches from the West, North and East as detailed in the VDS, Character Assessments (Appendix C). Also to preserve those views where they are panoramic or only glimpsed between buildings;
- 7.21. This policy supports the Midvale Ridge statement SEO1 which seeks to ensure maintaining of “the extensive views across the surrounding country side.”
- 7.22. Key views have been identified which link into and form a crucial element of the Blunsdon Heritage trail. (see ii)
- 7.23. Both Conservation Area Appraisals refer to the importance of views. That for the main village identifies specific views (see the map 7) while that for Lower Village states:



- 7.24. Landscape setting is an important part of the special interest of this conservation area. Views of surrounding land, especially looking south to the ridge, contribute significantly to the character of Lower Blunsdon. Elsewhere, wide gaps between buildings and views through, and out of, the area are important for the character of the village.
- 7.25. As part of the neighbourhood plan consultation process and through the commissioning of a Landscape Visual Sensitivity Analysis (“LVSA”), 9 important views were identified and 6 views highlighted in the CAAP’s surrounding the village that are considered “of merit and worthy of preservation” because they provide the undeveloped setting to the hilltop village.



Policy 12: Protection of Trees and Hedgerows

Intent

7.26. Trees which are covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) and those in Conservation Areas are subject to specific control. Many trees, however, are not subject to these controls and when affected by development proposals require specific protection.

Policy 12: Protection of Trees and Hedgerows

Development proposals must seek to retain trees and hedgerows of amenity value and biodiversity value whenever possible.

Development proposals affecting trees and hedgerows must be accompanied by an arboriculture survey which justifies any felling in terms of the health of trees or danger presented by any tree as a result of its condition or position.

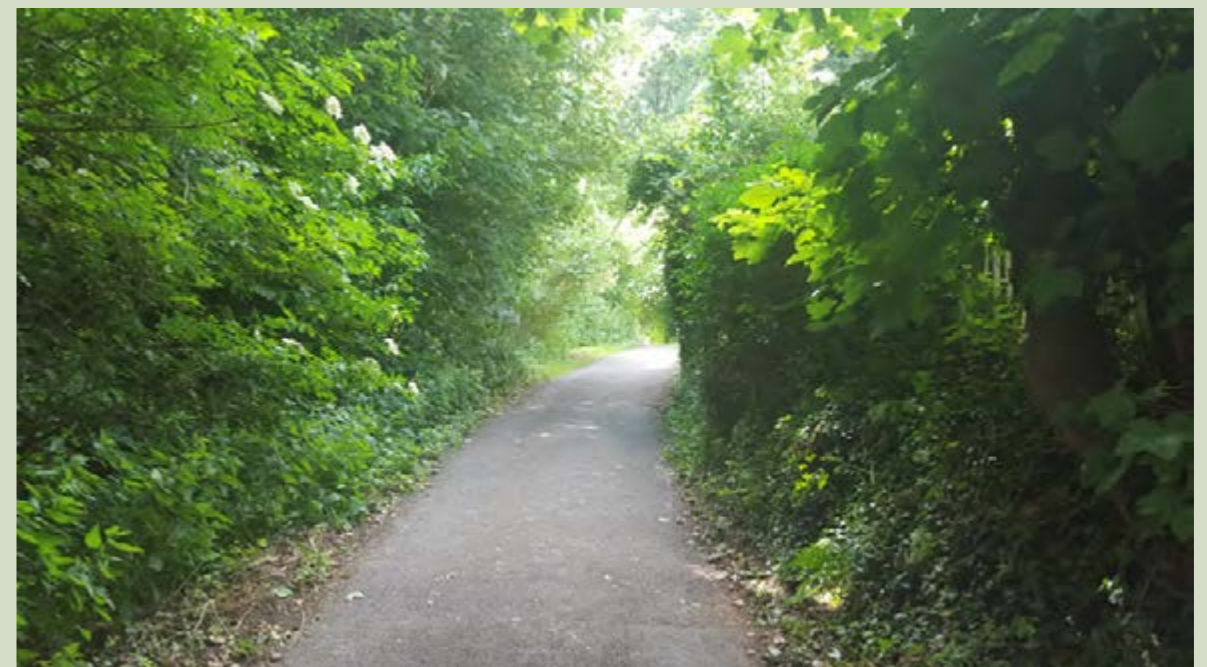
Existing hedgerows and trees should be retained for visual and ecological importance such as biodiversity gain, landscape character and to secure networks of green infrastructure. If the removal of a hedgerow or tree is proposed, adequate justification must be provided and where appropriate, compensatory planting provided in the near vicinity. Replacement planting should be of sufficient value to compensate for the loss of amenity of mature trees, hedgerows and the biodiversity they support.

Proposals should include information as to how trees and hedgerows that are to be retained, will be protected during construction.

Justification

7.27. As set out in the LVSA and the VDS much of the area included within the BENP area has been used for agricultural purposes for many years even centuries. The resultant hedgerows and standing trees therefore form an essential part of the landscape, are integral to preserving the character of the area and hence are worthy of protection.

7.28. The strategic Great Western Community Forest ("GWCF") which Swindon hosts is a project that has been planting trees and developing wooded areas for over 10 years. Locally trees and hedgerows are an important part of the landscape as set out in the LSVSA undertaken for this plan (see point i) and in the more general assessment of the landscape for example analysis of the character of the Midvale Ridge.



Policy 13: Dark Skies

Intent

- 7.29. To reduce light pollution in the BENP area and to improve views of the night sky.
- 7.30. To avoid any increase in risk to human health and hazard to road users.
- 7.31. To support the natural biodiversity through encouragement of nocturnal wildlife in an essentially rural area.

Policy 13: Dark Skies

Developments should be designed to reduce the occurrence of light pollution and are required to demonstrate how they will contribute towards minimising light pollution. Information on these measures must be submitted with applications.

Any lighting scheme that would normally require planning permission (e.g. floodlighting, lighting on poles etc.) or development that includes such a scheme would not be supported unless accompanied by a Lighting Assessment.

The Lighting Assessment should:

- ✦ Demonstrate that all available and feasible mitigation solutions would be implemented to reduce light pollution to a minimum so as to avoid loss of visual amenity to those residing within or visiting the BENP plan area and to reduce impact on nocturnal wildlife.
- ✦ Demonstrate that the proposed lighting scheme is unavoidable to ensure road and personal safety of the development and that the benefits significantly outweigh the negative impact including any impact on nocturnal wildlife: and
- ✦ Set out the operating hours of the light impact and demonstrate that these have been reduced to a minimum.

Justification

- 7.32. The majority of the BENP area is not lit at night which reduces overall light pollution and contributes to the benefit of “dark skies” in the area.
- 7.33. Paragraph 180 (c) of the NPPF 2019 supports planning policies and decisions that reduce the impact of light pollution especially in “intrinsically dark” landscapes and nature conserva
- 7.34. Scientific evidence suggests that exposure to artificial light at night can present significant risks to human health¹⁰
- 7.35. Poorly designed and/or installed outdoor lighting can create a hazard to motorists, cyclists and pedestrians in transit at night.
- 7.36. Dark skies are important for nocturnal wildlife such as bats and owls.
- 7.37. In clear skies it is possible to enjoy a bright view of the stars and this is valued by local residents.

¹⁰ International Dark Sky Association <http://darksky.org/our-work/public-policy/>

8. Implementation

- 8.1. Once approved the BENP formally becomes part of the development plan for Swindon Borough. It is the responsibility of the Parish Council assisted by the BENP steering group to monitor progress against the objectives of the BENP and the implementation plan to ensure that the aspirations of the community are being met.

9. Monitoring

- 9.1. Monitoring may lead to a review of the BENP in due course to keep it up-to-date and relevant. Formal amendments to the Plan will have to follow a similar process as was used to prepare the original Plan. The Parish Council will undertake regular reviews and report accordingly.

APPENDICES

A - Basic Conditions Statement

B – Equalities Impact Assessment

C – Village Design Statement

D – The Blunsdon Heritage Trail

E – Scheduled monuments, Listed Buildings and Archaeological sites

F- Evidence Base

G – Statement of Consultation

H – Decision Notice

I – Landscape Visual Sensitivity Analysis

J – Assessment of potential development sites

K - Kingsdown NC5 Policy and Map