

Appendix 5b to Downton Neighbourhood Plan

Notes on the Landscape

Urban green infrastructure

There is a varied landscape within Downton village and the green infrastructure consists of:

Downton Moot Garden, on the East side of the river Avon, is run by a charity but there is full public access to the 8 acre garden, which was created in the early 18th century out of the ruins of a substantial 12th century earthwork castle. There is plenty of free car parking adjacent to The Moot.

The Millenium Green, further down Moot Lane is also run by a charity and offers public access to a watermeadow alongside the River Avon. It is within the floodplain and Development Restraint Area surrounding the sewage plant.

Moot Lane Recreation Area, next to Downton Moot Garden, is a Council owned playing field. It is on the site of a Scheduled Ancient Monument and has a restrictive covenant protecting it from development

The Memorial Gardens, in the Borough next to the Memorial Hall, were gifted to the village in memory of 2nd. Lt. Edward Bonvalot who died in the Great War. The gardens are managed by the Parish Council, and include a playground and sundial. Part of the gardens is used by the Primary school as a play area.

The Borough Greens are village greens dating back to Downton's Medieval origins and are leased to the Parish Council by Longford Estate.

At Downton Leisure Centre, situated off Wick lane on the west side of the river, are a football playing field used by Downton Football club, outdoor tennis courts and a bowling green..

The Water Meadows. There are public footpaths across the water-meadows on the West side of the river with easy access from The Borough and South Lane, although the paths to the South do not extend down to the river.

Two fields accessed from South Lane are used for parking: behind the White Horse and behind Downton Baptist Church. These are privately owned and outside the Housing Policy Boundary.

There are several village houses with large tree lined gardens managed by their owners or tenants.

Downton Moot Garden, the Playing Field, Millennium Green and Memorial Garden and have some protection against development and this is reinforced by Landscape Policy LC5 in the Downton Neighbourhood Plan.

Land Use

1. **Changes.** Land use evolves over time and the following provides some examples of recent changes in the Neighbourhood Plan area:

- Historic extensive sheep farming with abandoned watermeadows has given way to more cattle herds and to arable crops.
- Within the past 10 years some of Barford Down was left fallow under the EU Set-aside scheme although it is currently back in production.
- Some land is now operated under the Natural England Environmental Stewardship schemes for nature conservation.
- Plantations of Poplar trees, originally intended for match making, are now mature and suffering from wind-blow but may be suitable for bio-mass fuel pellets.
- Recreational use has increased with temporary summer caravan meetings, wedding reception venues in historic buildings and cycle events along Downton's roads.
- Angling on the river Avon in Downton has declined from times when The Bull inn was visited by anglers from well outside the area
- Future land use may include renewable energy, as evidenced by proposals for a large solar farm on Witherington Down. Other possibilities include: growing of bio-mass fuel; siting of wind turbines on the downland ridges; and the re-introduction of a hydro-power system on the river in Downton.

2. **Current land use.**

The landscape has been formed by centuries of human managementⁱ. Current use within the Downton Neighbourhood Plan area includes:

- Fishing in ponds adjacent to the river for fish farming and coarse angling.
- Angling/coarse fishing on the river Avon from its banks, with various landowners holding riparian rights, some leased to angling clubs.
- Trout farming at Trafalgar Fisheries and Barford Fish Farm
- Farming on the floodplain and adjacent terraces area, mostly by grazing (beef and sheep).
- Farming on the downland and sloping valley sides for both arable & cereal crops and grazing.
- Equestrian use of some paddocks, linked to the bridleways.
- Forestry in the small woods, some of which have sporting use.

Farm buildings, utilised as rural businesses units (Botley's Farm), office space and premises for receptions (Trafalgar Park, Barford Park Farm), have very little impact on the landscape apart from the need to provide suitable access and parking.

Landscape Policy RE1 in the Downton Neighbourhood Plan has been drafted with the aim of enabling the rural use of land to continue to evolve so the landscape can continue to be managed.

Landscape related policies

Wiltshire Core Policy 51ⁱⁱ deals with landscape though not specifically with the Avon Valley that Downton straddles. Hampshire, just to the South of the Downton Plan area has a relevant landscape strategyⁱⁱⁱ that provides a description of the Avon Valley. The urban landscape comes under Wiltshire Core Policy 52 on Green Infrastructure.

The Wiltshire Core Strategy refers to the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which runs through the western side of the Downton Neighbourhood Plan area but does not extend to the village boundary and only encompasses the downland above Wick Farm and only contains a few farm buildings.

The Core Strategy also refers to the New Forest National Park, which is approximately 2 miles to the Southeast and also above the Avon Valley. The New Forest heath and woodland is a distinctly different landscape to the Avon Valley, which is a wide floodplain with side terraces and farmed valley sides containing scattered small woods.

The NE part of the Neighbourhood Plan area encompasses part of Barford Down and Witherington Down, which are extensions of the chalk escarpment from Dean Hill and Pepperbox Hill above the Wiltshire Village of Whiteparish. Some of this downland, extending to the fringe of the Downton Neighbourhood Plan area by Pepperbox Hill, is an SSSI for nature conservation with Open Access provided by the CROW Act.

The conclusions from the above are that the landscape surrounding Downton is; i) not well defined in the Wiltshire Core Strategy, ii) is distinctly different to the nearby New Forest in Hampshire and to Cranborne Chase and iii) has more in common with the Hampshire villages further down the Avon Valley, of Breamore & Woodgreen than with the nearby South Wiltshire parishes of Alderbury, Redlynch and Whiteparish.

Statutory bodies

Much of the land use is subject to regulation by Statutory Bodies:

- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) regulates farming.
- The Environment Agency has responsibilities for the floodplain.
- OFWAT is the economic regulator of the water and sewerage sectors and in particular Wessex Water's infrastructure for Downton and on the river Avon.
- Natural England has responsibilities for the River Avon System SSSI, other SSSI sites at Clearbury Ring and Pepperbox Hill, and land under the Environmental Stewardship scheme.
- English Heritage holds the register of listed buildings, of which there are several in Downton including the Downton Moot Garden.

- The Forestry Commission is responsible for issuing Felling Licences for woodland management, with a requirement to consult with the Council. Wiltshire Council (planning) is responsible for tree management in the Conservation Area.

The Downton Neighborhood Plan cannot over-ride these regulations, but may influence how they are applied in the Plan area.

ⁱ The Illustrated History of the Countryside, O. Rackman, Duncan Bird Publishers, 1994, ISBN 1-84188-104-X

ⁱⁱ Wiltshire Core Strategy Pre-Submission Documents

ⁱⁱⁱ The Hampshire Landscape: a Strategy for the Future