

REPORT TO KIRTLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL ON HOUSING SITE ALLOCATIONS

NOVEMBER 12th 2023

SUMMARY:

This report is the culmination of several months of site assessment work by a local team, supported by consultants, in order to present to the Parish Council recommendations for possible future housing sites in Kirtlington, for incorporation into the Review of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan (MCNP).

BEFORE MAKING ANY RECOMMENDATIONS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO STATE THAT ALL THE SITES CONSIDERED HAD SIGNIFICANT ISSUES, AND NONE ARE CONSIDERED IDEAL FOR DEVELOPMENT.

THERE ARE MAJOR CONCERNS REGARDING TRAFFIC THROUGH THE VILLAGE ALONG THE BUSY A4095, AND INADEQUATE SEWAGE INFRASTRUCTURE, ISSUES WHICH ARE PERTINENT TO ALL SITES.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **SITE KT7 ON HEYFORD RD** IS PROPOSED AS SUITABLE FOR HOUSING ALLOCATION, SUBJECT TO THE LANDOWNERS BEING ABLE TO RESOLVE THE HERITAGE CONCERNS.
2. **SITE KT8 ON HEYFORD RD** IS ALSO PROPOSED AS SUITABLE FOR HOUSING ALLOCATION, SUBJECT TO AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR POTENTIAL ARTEFACTS ADJACENT TO THE INTERSECTION OF THE ROMAN ROADS OF AKEMAN STREET AND PORTWAY.
3. THE ABOVE SITES ARE THOUGHT TO BE SUITABLE FOR SCHEMES OF **14 DWELLINGS ON SITE KT7**, AND A MAXIMUM OF **21 DWELLINGS ON SITE KT8**.
4. THE ASSESSMENT TEAM DO NOT SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF **SITE KT1, 2, 3, OR 4**, AND NOTE THE BALANCE OF OPINION FROM THE VILLAGE THAT THESE SHOULD BE MAINTAINED AS GREENFIELD SITES.
5. IT IS INTENDED THAT THE ABOVE SITES WILL BE REFERRED TO IN THE REVISED NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN, WHICH WILL GO OUT TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION IN SPRING 2024.
6. FOLLOWING APPRAISAL OF RESPONSES FROM THE COMMUNITY AND FROM VARIOUS STATUTORY BODIES INCLUDING CHERWELL DC, IT IS INTENDED RE-EXAMINE THESE RECOMMENDATIONS TO DETERMINE IF THESE TWO SITES ALIGN WITH THE MAJORITY VIEW OF THE COMMUNITY AND CAN BE PROGRESSED TO FORMAL SUBMISSION.
7. FOR ONE OF THE SITES, IT IS THE INTENTION OF THE MCNP FORUM TO CONSIDER ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY LAND TRUST TO DELIVER HOUSING WHICH MEETS LOCAL NEEDS. IT IS TOO EARLY TO SAY WHETHER THIS WILL BE FEASIBLE, BUT IF SO THE PROCESS WILL DETERMINE A SUITABLE MIX OF HOUSING TYPES AND TENURES TO SECURE THAT GOAL, WITH A FOCUS ON AFFORDABLE STARTER HOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, AND HOMES SUITABLE FOR OLDER VILLAGERS.

ACTION REQUESTED: Kirtlington Parish Council (KPC) is asked to consider the process, the site assessments, and the recommendations contained in this report (see Section 12 below) and its appendices. The meeting is asked to provide comments and to decide whether to approve, amend or reject the recommendations.

- 1. BACKGROUND:** A review of the MCNP (originally approved in 2019) was commenced in September 2022, to extend its reach to the year 2040. As regards housing policy for Kirtlington, the original Plan had parish council agreement to support up to 17 additional dwellings in the period to 2031. No homes have been built so far to date. In January 2023, Cherwell District Council (CDC) issued a consultation document (subsequently withdrawn) listing Kirtlington as one of 11 “large” villages expected to take between them 500 new houses in the period up to 2040. The number allocated to Kirtlington was 46. Another named village is Steeple Aston, also in the MCNP area, which was allocated 47 additional homes.
- 2. EXTRA-ORDINARY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING 2nd May 2023:** The PC held a public meeting regarding the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Review, at which there was a presentation from the Chair of the MCNP Forum (of which KPC is a member) regarding the possibility of conducting a housing site allocation process for the village. The aim would be for local people to determine whether there were any suitable sites available, and if so to consider the number of dwellings that could comfortably be accommodated, rather than having both the choice of sites and the numbers decided by Cherwell, or by speculative developers or landowners.

The possibility of doing this arises because where a neighbourhood plan is already in place, and is under review, it has the power to carry out site allocations instead of the local planning authority (Cherwell in this case). With support for this line of action from the following PC meeting, on May 15th, MCNP approached CDC with this intention and secured agreement in July 2023 to conduct site allocation for both Kirtlington and Steeple Aston.

- 3. THE TEAM:** As a result of the May meeting, and by agreement of both parish councils, teams were established in both Kirtlington and Steeple Aston, as part of the MCNP Review, to identify and assess possible housing sites in each village. A common process is being used for both villages on eligibility of sites, the assessment criteria and the basis for scoring, and the community consultation process. The Kirtlington core site assessment team consisted of Kay Chacksfield and Briony Enser from KPC, and Helen Macbeth and Christine Marsh as the nominated Kirtlington reps on MCNP Forum. This group assembled the factual information relevant to the sites and completed the relevant documents. A wider consultation group consisting of Alex Charlesworth (past KPC Counsellor and past planning rep for KPC), Jean Conway (current chair of KPC), Paul Kurgo (planning rep for KPC) and David Richardson (immediate past chair of KPC) were engaged in providing valuable review and input into the process.
- 4. SITE SELECTION:** There are three sources of sites: those previously submitted to CDC (sites KT1, KT2, KT3 and KT7), requests to MCNP by site owners or developers (no sites in Kirtlington), and finally sites nominated by the assessment team (all the other sites). Sites were not eligible for allocation if their site area was below a threshold size (5 houses) or if no access appeared feasible. Such sites could however potentially be developed in future as unplanned “windfall sites” if the problems can be overcome. The sites considered by the team conform to the existing MCNP policies that require any new housing to be immediately adjacent to the settlement area. The 12 sites identified are shown on the map in Appendix 2, and the list of sites and their owners is in Appendix 3.
- 5. INFORMING OWNERS:** All site owners (and those renting the land) were contacted to ask for confirmation of various details, and asked to say whether their site was available for possible development in the period up to 2040. Six sites were stated to be unavailable (sites KT5, KT6, KT9, KT10, KT11, KT12). The remainder of the sites were confirmed as available.

6. **ASSESSMENT PROCESS:** The teams in both villages developed criteria (see Appendix 4) based on national standards, to be as objective and factual as possible. In Kirtlington, this information was published on the village website in late September, as a precursor to a public meeting on October 5th (see below).
7. **THE CRITERIA:** It was initially thought by the assessment teams in both villages that the 31 criteria and the Red/ Amber/ Green (RAG) scoring system devised for it (see Appendix 4) would be the primary driver for decisions about which sites to take forward. However, it quickly became clear that there are numerous other considerations to weigh in the balance, namely:
- **Planning policy:** how do existing national, District and MCNP policies apply to the site?
 - **Planning history:** had planning applications, “call for sites” submissions, tree preservation orders, etc been associated with the site?
 - **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA):** how did the independent report by MCNP’s consultants (AECOM) rate the site in terms of its potential environmental impact? (NB this report is available digitally, on request).
 - **Advice from consultants:** was any other site-specific advice received from MCNP’s consultants?
 - **Legal impediments:** were there any known legal issues that might affect development?
 - **Site owner’s comments:** any views or wishes expressed by the owner
 - **Community feedback:** what comments were made by members of the public before, at, and after the public meetings?

A proforma was devised to capture all the above, and the detail assembled for each available site (see Appendix 1). The proforma concludes with a statement of the “planning balance”, which in the view of the team, taking all the above considerations into account, was the outcome of its deliberations for each site. A recommendation is then made for each site (see section 12 below).

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE MCNP SITE ASSESSMENT SCORING SYSTEM (RAG) IN KIRTLINGTON

As discussed above, the MCNP Site Assessment Score is based on using a ‘Red Amber Green’ (RAG) assessment of 31 criteria, which has been issued by Mid Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Forum. It is designed to create some comparable benchmarking between villages using generic criteria, which have not been developed specifically for Kirtlington. The scoring should therefore not be used in isolation as there are numerous other considerations to weigh in the balance.

Analysis of the spatial relationship between site options and various push (e.g. historic environment designations) and pull (e.g. schools) features cannot be considered a sophisticated analysis. Many of the issues and opportunities that the analysis does highlight are only ‘theoretical’, in that they can be discounted, or assigned limited weight in decision-making, upon closer consideration (e.g. distance calculations).

The RAG assessment of site options should not be overly relied upon, at the expense of a focus on qualitative analysis informed by wide ranging evidence, including the views of stakeholders, and professional judgement. The RAG assessment should certainly not be used as a primary means for arriving at overall conclusions on site options. Any attempt to utilise the analysis in this way would necessitate a process of Multi Criteria Analysis whereby a degree of importance is assigned to each of the performance metrics, and this process is fraught with challenges and has therefore not been attempted.

9. COMMUNICATION: Articles and graphics were placed on the Kirtlington village website, and notices were published in the village magazine Kirtlington Village News, and on the village Facebook page to keep the local community well-informed of progress throughout. An email address was provided so that anyone wishing to send comments could do so. The map showing the availability of the sites is reproduced in Appendix 2.

10. PUBLIC MEETING 5TH OCTOBER 2023: A public meeting was held so that, before the assessment process was completed, the team could hear and take account of views from the village and more widely (approx. 75 people attended). A transcript of the meeting is provided in Appendix 6. One of the items on the agenda was to check whether there were any other sites that should be considered. A subsequent email on this topic suggested considering sites outside the village settlement boundary, but as this was not consistent with the policy of development adjacent to the settlement boundary area, this did not produce any eligible additional sites. Several people spoke both for and against having additional houses constructed in Kirtlington. Concerns raised mainly centred around already existing traffic problems on the A4095, and inadequate provision for the sewage infrastructure, with reference made to incidents of sewage backing up into people’s homes or overflowing onto their land. The majority view, though, was in favour of limited growth and more housing in Kirtlington, specifically low-cost housing for young families and older people. There were some comments on specific sites recorded at the meeting, and more people emailed with views regarding specific sites in the two weeks following the meeting. These have all been taken into account in the assessments.

11. COMMUNITY VIEWS: In addition to the transcript of the October public meeting, a spreadsheet summarising the emailed responses received to date, is in Appendix 7.

12. SITE ASSESSMENTS: The individual proformas for each of the available sites are provided in Appendix 1. The recommendations are extracted from these and reproduced in the table below:

Site	Site location	Assessment Team recommendation
KT1	Corner Farm East	A majority view (6/7) of the assessment team consider that this site is not suitable for allocation. A minority view (1/7) suggests that it should be supported for allocation of a limited number of dwellings.
KT2	Corner Farm West	A majority view (6/7) of the assessment team consider that this site is not suitable for allocation. A minority view (1/7) suggests that it should be supported for allocation of a limited number of dwellings.
KT3	Rye Furlong East (land on the south side of Mill Lane bridleway)	A majority view (6/7) of the assessment team consider that this site is not suitable for allocation. A minority view (1/7) suggests that it should be supported for allocation of a limited number of dwellings.
KT4	Rye Furlong West (land on the south side of Mill Lane bridleway)	The site is unanimously considered not suitable for allocation.
KT7	Jersey Cottages South (land on the east side of Heyford Rd)	A majority view (6/7) of the assessment team consider that this site should be proposed for housing allocation in the Reg 14 consultation, subject to the owners successfully addressing the heritage concerns. A minority view (1/7) of the assessment team do not support this site.
KT8	Jersey Cottages North (land on the east side of Heyford Rd)	A majority view (5/7) of the assessment team consider that this site should be proposed for housing allocation in the Reg 14 consultation. A minority view (2/7) of the assessment team do not support this site.

The eighth assessor did not support development of any site.

13. RANKING OF SITES: It is a requirement of the Neighbourhood Plan that the assessed sites should be placed in rank order of preference. A majority view (6/7) of the assessment team consider that the ranking order should be as below, from most suitable site to least suitable site. One person (1/7) objected to the order of ranking. The eighth assessor did not provide a view.

Most suitable					Least suitable
KT7	KT8	KT1	KT2	KT3	KT4

14. ASSESSMENT OF NUMBERS OF DWELLINGS

The number of dwellings is suggested on the following basis –

- Site KT7 – 14 dwellings using layout proposed on current planning application.
- Site KT8 – matching site density to site KT7, and only using a developable area of 0.7ha in the southern 2/3 of the plot. This would match the adjacent settlement boundary of Akeman Spinney, and reduce the potential impact on any Roman remains adjacent to Akeman Street.
- The density would be appropriate for developments of affordable housing such as a community land trust.

The team has listened carefully to community views regarding further housing in Kirtlington, and has also taken account of the existing MCNP policy which supports an indicative number of 17 additional dwellings for the village in the period 2018-2031 (an increase of 3.8%). The proposed allocation of 35 new dwellings is based on the “bottom-up” approach that has been taken in conducting the site assessment process. That is to say, all possible sites have been considered, the most suitable sites have been chosen, and then thought has been given to how many dwellings should be located on each site. 35 new dwellings would represent an increase of 7.8% in the number of dwellings in Kirtlington. The process has not at any time involved a desire to meet a quota of housing numbers imposed by others. The figure of 46 dwellings (an increase of 10.2%) initially suggested by Cherwell in January 2023 had no evidence to support it, so far as the assessment team is aware.

The assessment team has also borne in mind that the MCNP is founded on the principle that one of its member parishes – Heyford Park – is a strategic housing site, where a large number of new homes are being, and are still to be, constructed. As a consequence the MCNP area is a special case in Cherwell District, such that its “larger villages” - Steeple Aston and Kirtlington – should be treated on their merits for additional housing numbers, rather than having to accept a theoretical number.

The local community has expressed a view that some limited additional housing would be beneficial, but that those limits should be informed by the current difficulties with traffic volumes through the village, and by concerns about infrastructure – particularly the capacity of the drainage system. These concerns have led the team to the view that the previous figure of 17 could be replaced by a figure of the order of 35, ideally on two sites, but that numbers in excess of 35 would cause unacceptable harm to the village in the Plan period.

This is not to say that no other development could take place within the Settlement Areas of the villages in the MCNP area (which includes Kirtlington). There are a number of possible sites where small-scale “windfall” schemes could be supported if they were to come forward, thus assisting Cherwell in its aims to provide additional homes in rural areas.

It is intended that all the above sites will be referred to in the revised neighbourhood plan, which will go out to public consultation in November.

For all the sites, it is the intention of the MCNP Forum to consider establishing a community land trust to deliver housing which meets local needs. It is too early to say whether this will be feasible, but if so the process will determine a suitable mix of housing types and tenures to secure that goal, with a focus on affordable starter homes for young people, and homes suitable for older villagers.

15. CONSULTANTS: MCNP's consultants associated with the site allocation process are:

- O'Neill Homer, Planning Consultants
- AECOM – Housing Needs Assessment
- AECOM – Strategic Environmental Assessment
- AECOM – Masterplanning

16. MASTERPLANNING: MCNP has the opportunity to commission consultants to produce initial outline schemes (referred to as Masterplans) for some of the sites. This will produce graphics that will help in the consultation process that begins in Spring 2024, assisting consultees to visualise how housing schemes might be arranged on the sites. In order to ensure that these graphics are available in time, MCNP has instructed a scheme to be prepared for Site KT8.

17. NEXT STEPS: The Regulation 14 Pre-Submission Consultation will run for a minimum of six weeks. The draft Plan (containing the site allocation policies and much else besides) together with numerous supporting documents (including this report) will be available on MCNP's website, and on each of the member parishes' websites. Hard copy of some documents will also be available. During the consultation period MCNP has arranged for more public meetings to be held in each of the member parishes, where a presentation will be made and feedback welcomed.

The Review team will then collate all the responses, including those from statutory consultees, including Cherwell District Council, and consider what changes need to be made to the policies and the documents. The next iteration will then form the Submission Documents for the Regulation 16 stage, which it is hoped will occur in late Spring 2024. It is then CDC's responsibility to consult again for another six-week period, after which a final version of the Plan will be produced by MCNP Forum. This then goes to an Examiner, who will decide whether the revised Plan can proceed to Referendum. All being well, that should occur in the early summer of 2024, at which point the revised Plan will officially supersede the existing Plan.

18. LOCAL PLAN 2040 CONSULTATION: To return to where this report started, the parish council is asked to note that Cherwell's consultation on their Local Plan 2040 has recently closed. The proposal for Kirtlington (and Steeple Aston) to be one of the large villages that will take a proportion of 500 new houses, remains in the Local Plan which is currently under review. The justification for MCNP's inclusion of site allocation in the MCNP Review remains therefore as strong as it was.

APPENDICES

1. Assessment proformas for each eligible site.
2. Map showing initial categorisation of sites as available or not available
3. List of sites and their owners
4. Initial criteria for assessing sites

5. Scores for RAG-rated criteria
6. Transcript of September public meeting
7. Spreadsheet of community feedback
 - (i) Sorted by Subject
 - (ii) Sorted by Site
 - (iii) List of subjects