

Appendix 3 - Character Assessment

Character Assessment

To gain a deeper understanding of the Parish for the Neighbourhood Plan, a Character Assessment of the parish was carried out with the assistance of Gloucestershire Rural Communities Council. A Character Assessment describes the appearance and feel of the parish and, in particular, draws notice to the key characteristics and features that help define the parish and what gives it its local distinctiveness and unique identity. The character assessment document forms the basis of the reasoning supporting the Policies included in the Plan. Many of the defining characteristics identified formed the basis of the resulting Design Code.

To aid the process of describing the parish, it was sub-divided into areas of similar land use. The land uses are listed below and the areas that they represent are shown on the accompanying map:

1. Agricultural
2. Permanent Residential a) Somerford Keynes, b) Shorncote
3. Holiday home development (Lower Mill Estate)
4. Travellers' site
5. Industrial (gravel extraction (current and former) and part of the Sewage works)
6. Tourism and recreation
7. Biodiversity
8. Country Parks

1. Agricultural

The majority of the land in the northern half of the parish is used for agricultural purposes.



Figure 1: farmland alongside the infant Thames on the Parish boundary

The western part of the agricultural land is influenced by the infant River Thames, whose flow has been adapted over many years to optimise the operation of water mills and irrigation. The land immediately adjacent to the river operates as a flood plain in the wet winter months. Away from the river, the land gently undulates.

The agricultural land is with hedgerow field landscape feature across candidate are the the parish of Kemble and

Tall trees are not a occasionally appear in coverts, along the edges the approach to the

Keynes from Spratsgate Lane and is visible for a considerable distance when approaching the village from Cirencester.

The heart of this agricultural area is accessed from narrow country lanes (with passing places).

Public rights of way also traverse this area including the Thames path national trail.



Figure 2: Large arable open fields

defined by large, open, arable fields boundaries. There is no distinct this area. (The only possible National Grid pylons which reside in Ewen).

particularly dominant feature but do the hedgerows or in clusters, or of roads. One such tree line defines north of the village of Somerford

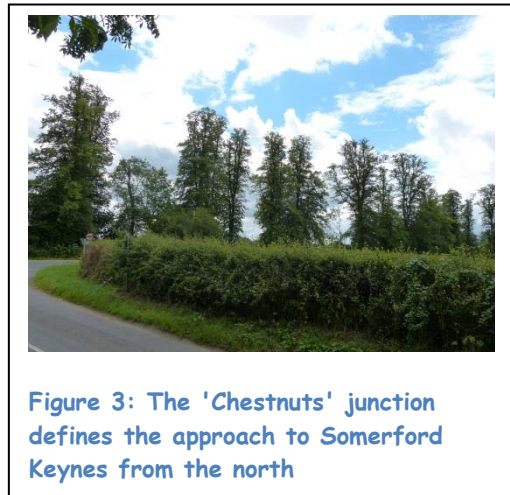


Figure 3: The 'Chestnuts' junction defines the approach to Somerford Keynes from the north

2. Permanent Residential

a) Somerford Keynes



Figure 4: The street scene, Somerford Keynes

The village of Somerford Keynes is the principal settlement within the parish and is located at its geographical heart. The village sits on low-lying land which slopes very gently from north to south.

The predominant use of land is residential with very few exceptions (such as the pub, church, village hall and the occasional holiday let).

Somerford Keynes village has a ribbon layout along a few roads with most dwellings offering views of open countryside. Dwellings are set back from the road and mostly have large gardens (front and rear). Most of the village's traditional, older buildings are located within the conservation area. However, there are a number of pockets of old, traditional buildings located throughout the village (eastern end of Water Lane, the junction of Water Lane and the Street, Mill Lane and Neigh Bridge). The areas between these older buildings have been infilled with dwellings (mainly in the 1970s). Whilst these more recent developments have a uniform building line and appearance, the overall impression of the village is non-uniform.



The appearance of the village is very much that of a traditional, tranquil Cotswold village with the majority of houses being built of Cotswold stone or reconstituted Cotswold stone, and two storeys high. Exceptions include the brick-built 1950s houses and bungalows in Elm View and the occasional bungalow and rendered houses.

The feature of the village is the prevalence of stone walls. In the conservation area, these walls are quite high traditional Cotswold stone walls. The more modern houses' stone walls are usually made of reconstituted stone and lower. Examples of walls are shown in the pictures below:



The majority of houses, both traditional and modern, exhibit a number of features common to Cotswold houses. These include gables, chimney stacks (both brick and stone built), porches and smaller proportioned windows. Roofs are usually constructed from Cotswold stone tiles or reconstituted equivalents. There are, however, a few slate roofs. Examples of these building features from around the village are shown below:

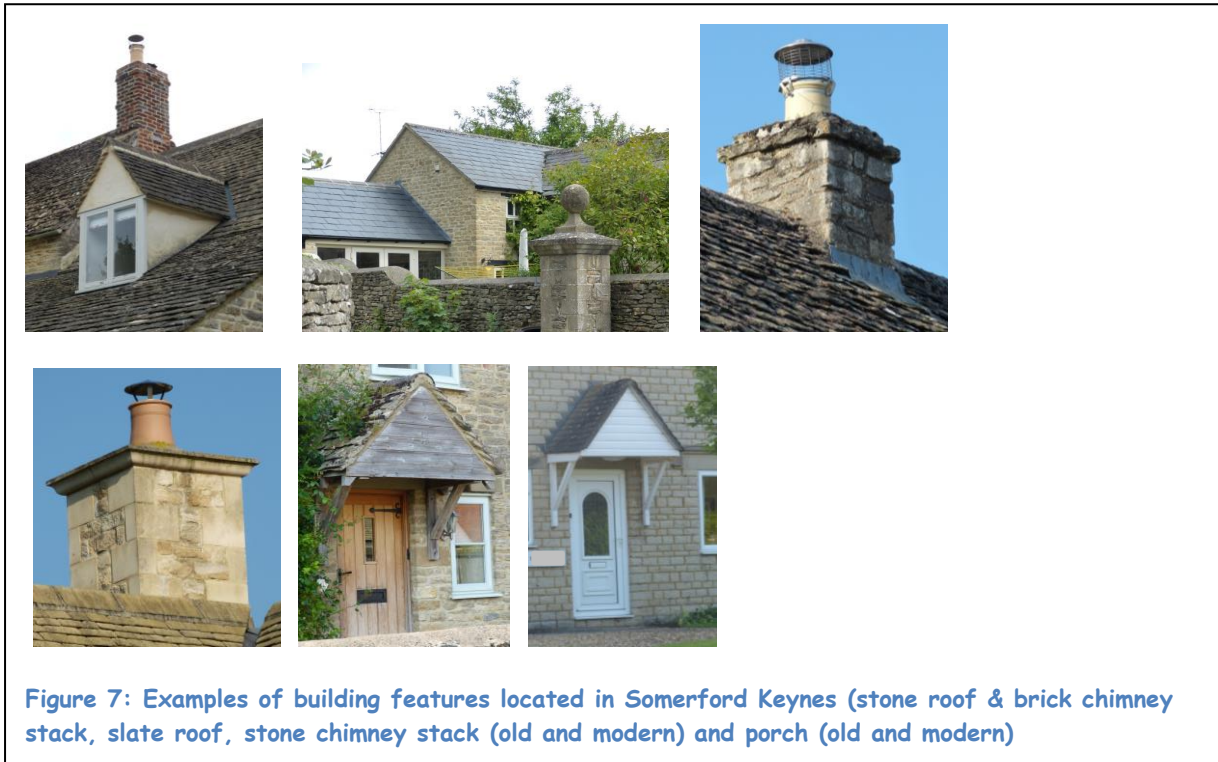


Figure 7: Examples of building features located in Somerford Keynes (stone roof & brick chimney stack, slate roof, stone chimney stack (old and modern) and porch (old and modern))

Somerford Keynes has a conservation area to preserve and protect the historical core of the village. Within the conservation area, there are a number of important built landmarks and these include the church, the Manor House, the Bakers' Arms public house and the Dower Court converted stable block. Defining built landmarks of the village are shown below:



Figure 8: Some of the landmark buildings in Somerford Keynes



Figure 9: The Saxon doorway, All Saints Church

Of these landmark buildings, the most important and most impressive, is the Parish Church of All Saints, Somerford Keynes. Worship on the site began in c685 and one of the few stone-built Saxon parish churches in England was erected there in c715. That church survived for some 500 years, when it was rebuilt and extended in about 1220. However, a small portion of the original Saxon wall, including a distinctive arched doorway, remains today. The church was further extended in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, creating the church on a spot that has seen over 1300 years of Christian worship.

The roads within the village are traditional two-way streets with the occasional cul-de-sac (Elm View and Arlington Fields). It is not necessary for passing traffic to travel through the village as the more major roads of Spratsgate Lane and the Spine Road bypass the village, although this does not eliminate all traffic from the narrow village roads. Outside of the conservation area, most dwellings have off-street parking on driveways laid with Cotswold gravel stone. Where properties have garages, they are either integrated into the main dwelling or are stand alone and built in a style to match the main dwelling. There are pavements alongside the roads in most of the village but these stop considerably short of the final dwelling on all routes out of the village. It is possible to walk along a number of public rights of way from the village. There is, however, no public green space within the village as outlined on the accompanying map. That said there are many open views and lakes and country parks within walking distance of the village. Also, trees are a major feature of the streetscape as there are many mature trees in front gardens to give the village a tree-lined appearance. A particularly valued feature of the streetscape of Somerford is the absence of street lighting.



Figure 10: Looking across the Manor Parkland to the church

b) Shorncote

Shorncote is a small, peaceful, secluded hamlet located in the north east of the parish, accessible only by single track quiet lanes. The name



Figure 11: The narrow lane to Shorncote

translates from Old English as 'the cottage in a muck spot"! The hamlet consists of eight (??) properties and a non-operational, historic church. As with Somerford Keynes, the dwellings have a typical Cotswold stone appearance. All Saints church, whose origins may be traced back to about 1170, is the landmark for Shorncote.



Figure 12: All Saints Church, Shorncote

3. Holiday home development (Lower Mill Estate)

The holiday home development is sited on a flat area containing many attractive, man-made lakes that were former gravel pits. The area outlined on the map currently constitutes the Lower Mill Estate (LME) and its primary purpose is the provision of holiday homes. The facilities that it provides are those often associated with such a development and include communal playgrounds, swimming pools, spa facilities, sports facilities, shop, restaurant and bike and boat hire. There are no facilities that would be associated with a permanent settlement of that size such as doctor's surgery or school.

All development is lakeside, open fronted with designated parking bays and no curtilages (walls, hedges or fences). The roads are narrow (with passing places) to accommodate slow moving vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. All signage is uniform and branded.



Figure 13: Lakeside development, Lower Mill Estate

The building designs are an eclectic mix of modern, contemporary and Cotswold imitation. There are also some of examples of the area's heritage which can be seen in the listed mill building.

The site is contained and screened from surrounding settlements by a 250m deep

'no building' zone between the built holiday home environment and the Spine Road and by tall hedging trees along Minety Road on the site's western boundary. The lakes are well-managed to encourage nature conservation and provide an attractive setting for the area, some of which can be viewed by users of the two public rights of way that traverse the area, one of which is the Thames path national trail.

4. Travellers' site (Four Acres)

The Four Acres travellers' site can be found in the north east corner of the parish, off the main Ewen to South Cerney road and adjacent to the sewage works. The small site consists of three linear roads, along which there are hard-standing pitches for caravans or chalet type dwellings.

5. Industrial (gravel extraction and part of the Sewage works)

Along the eastern side of the parish, there are a number of working gravel pits and a small part of the sewage works resides in the north east corner of the parish. Access to the sites is off the Ewen to South Cerney road and Spratsgate Lane. The workings are screened with hedgerows along these roads to reduce the visual impact on residents.



6. Tourism and recreation

This area includes the sites and former gravel pits that have not been described elsewhere (Lower Mill Estate, biodiversity sites and the two Country Parks). Many of these sites are located on the land used for mineral extraction, now containing man-made lakes. The lakes, and their immediate surroundings, are now used for tourism and recreation. All of these sites are in the south and east of the parish, bordering both the village of Somerford Keynes and hamlet of Shorncote. The uses for the sites include angling, recreational use such as walking and picnicking and a bike hire and camp site.



A notable site is Village Lake (Lake 99). Following gravel extraction in 2003, Village Lake (adjacent to the southern edge of Somerford Keynes) was gifted by Hanson plc to Somerford Keynes Parish Council, who has recently open the site for use as a quiet recreational facility and for nature conservation.

7. Biodiversity

There are a number of important biodiversity sites in the Parish. There are two local nature reserves; Coke's Pit and the Shorncote Reedbeds, Freeth's Mere SSSI and the Swillbrook Lakes. All of these sites are noted for their water birds and wintering birds.



Figure 16: Local Nature Reserves; Coke's Pit and Shorncote Reedbeds.

8. Country Parks (Keynes Country Park and Neigh Bridge Country Park)

Two of the former gravel extraction sites were designated as country parks so are available to the public for enjoyment and recreational use.



Figure 17: The beach at Keynes Country Park

Keynes Country Park (the southern part of which is in Ashton Keynes parish, Wiltshire) is a park for tourism and recreational use and offers many of the facilities associated with such a site such as parking, inland beach, swimming, boat hire activities, cable tow wakeboarding, playground, other recreational activities and café and shop located in the award winning Millennium building. It is a popular attraction defined by the water based and recreational activities that it provides.

Neigh Bridge Country Park offers quieter recreation with the provision of only parking, a picnic area and a small playground. It is aimed at walkers, dog walkers and those that wish to enjoy the peaceful, tranquil environment. The Thames path national trail passes through the site.



Figure 18: Neigh Bridge Country Park



Figure 19: The Thames path and playground at Neigh Bridge Country Park

Both country parks are defined by their lakes, around which are footpaths (both permissive and public rights of way). The lakes have benefitted from vegetation and trees maturing over a number of years to provide a natural balance to the water.

Character Assessment - Land Use Map (April 2016)

