



SSJ Neighbourhood Plan Landscape Capacity of Sherborne St John

SSJ Neighbourhood Plan is indebted to Mrs Natasha Rougier for this study.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sherborne St John Parish is situated on the western edge of the Loddon and Eversley Heritage Area, an area characterised by rivers, ancient woodland, wetland, heath and farmland.

Sherborne St John is a very long-established village, with evidence of a settlement in the Parish from as early as the Iron Age. There are several sites of Roman buildings. The Roman road from Winchester to Silchester passes through the West end of the village. The settlement at Sherborne St John was mentioned in the Domesday Book. The area has long been important as a living and working countryside. Nearly 1000 years ago it was managed by local communities to produce food and raw materials, and today it is still used for farming and forestry as well as for recreation and leisure.

The area currently retains the character of a rural settlement, despite the encroachment of some modern building. This character can be seen as rural and worthy of protection and enhancement.

2. LOCATION

The village is located in a shallow valley at the edge of the Hampshire Downs from which, at the junction of chalk and clay strata, rise springs that form the chalk stream tributaries of the Loddon corridor. These springs were the focal points of the original village. The Vyne Stream flows north east from Sherborne St John through the grounds of the historic sites of The Vyne and Beaurepaire, both Tudor country house estates situated in Sherborne St John Parish, to join the Bow Brook.

The town of Basingstoke lies to the south and east of the village and is largely hidden from view by the rising ground to the south of the village. The gap between the town and the village is open chalk downland, mainly arable and pasture farmland. A shallow valley extends in a south east direction from the recreation ground located on high ground to the north east of the village. From here there is inter-visibility between the village and the recent extension of housing over the original settlement boundary of Basingstoke. Despite this, the visual boundary provided by the ridge line south of the village is important to the integrity of the village. A watercourse flows through this valley to join the Vyne Stream in the Vyne Parklands.

To the **east** of the valley lies Spiers Copse and the extensive adjoining area of woodland called Carpenters Down Wood that are designated SINC (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation). This shallow valley is characterised by arable farmland that is still actively farmed with well-maintained hedges and watercourses, and mature copses. There is an extensive network of way-marked footpaths and bridleways giving access to open countryside, woodland and to the Vyne Park that are used by residents of both the village

and Basingstoke for recreation and leisure. This cultural and intrinsic value should be clearly understood (Village Design Statement 2004 (VDS) - See Sections 8 and 12 for details of this document).

To the **north** of the village lies an area of Reading Beds and London Clay deposits. This supports an abundance of surface water compared to the area to the south and much of the land is actively farmed for cereals and pasture.

3. WATER

Water plays an important part in the landscape of the village linking the east and west parts together. The springs, ponds and alluvial land between the chalk to the south and the sands and clays to the north are a unique landscape element. A pond by the A340 at West End drains under the road and as the Wey Brook (or Weybrook) passes through some disused watercress beds and across the north of the village, eventually flowing to The Vyne. Another spring in the east of the village, near Dark Lane, feeds watercress beds, which are still in economic cultivation, and flows north to join Wey Brook near Sherborne Mill. A third water source rises in a wetland area near the church, designated as a SINC, and feeds a large pond by Church Path from where it flows north to join Wey Brook. These form a characteristic feature of the village and provide an important wildlife habitat for birds, insects and plants. They are part of Hampshire's world famous system of chalk drainage, which provides a uniquely constant, reliable and pure supply of fresh water. Consideration should be given to recognising and protecting the special character and importance of these water sources and streams. The hydrology of the area should also be protected to ensure the preservation of the chalk springs and the unpolluted quality of the local watercourses with their attendant plant associations and fauna (VDS).

4. FOOTPATHS

A network of frequently used **footpaths and bridleways** crosses the agricultural lands and woodlands, linking them to the village and providing highly valued amenity access for the community. These are significant to the community life of the village (Village Design Statement Questionnaire (VDSQ) 94.7%¹) and are a valuable asset, which should be properly maintained in useable condition. They provide a safe link for the children between the village and its school, a meeting place for the village inhabitants and the large number of people who walk for pleasure.

5. HEDGEROWS

Hedgerows form an almost continual link throughout the village. The fields surrounding the village are bounded by hedges of mixed native species and frequently include mature trees. This pattern is continued by hedging as the front boundary to the majority of properties in the village, so that many are partially hidden behind mature hedges and trees of mixed varieties and of predominantly native species, giving the village a very rural atmosphere. This also supports an enhanced bird population in the village of environmental significance and much appreciated by many residents. Care should be taken to maintain existing hedgerows and large trees, particularly those of landscape value and to include new hedges and trees of comparable arboreal content in any new development (VDS).

¹ % of positive responses from the Sherborne St John VDS Questionnaire

6. EXISTING POLICIES

The protection of the nature of Sherborne St John as a rural village is provided for in the Framework, Policy C4 of the South East Plan Regional Spatial Strategy, and Saved Policy E6(iii) of the Basingstoke and District Local Plan 1996- 2011.

7. CONSERVATION AREA

The **Sherborne St John Conservation Area** was designated in recognition of the special architectural and historic interest of the village in 1983. Having designated the Conservation Area, the Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that those elements that form its particular character or appearance should be preserved or enhanced, especially when considering planning applications. The relationship of the built environment of the village with the landscape is an important element of this.

There are a large number of Listed Buildings in the Village. They are all an integral part of the heritage and history of the village. The Vyne, now owned by the National Trust, is the most important of these and has had a significant influence on the character of the village over the centuries.

A large part of the Conservation Area is formed by a series of open spaces, which provide long views of the village and the open countryside beyond. A number of those views are referred to as important views on the Sherborne St John Conservation Area Map. The views South and East from the Chute Recreation Ground are specifically mentioned in both the map and the Conservation Area Appraisal as being important views over surrounding farmland.

8. VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

A **Village Design Statement** (VDS) was produced by the parish council and residents of Sherborne St John in 2004. It is a description of the main features that constitute the 'look and feel' of the village and provided a guide to inform future development decisions. The aim was that changes could be planned and implemented in ways that respect and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the village.

As part of the exercise to produce a VDS for Sherborne St John, a questionnaire (VSDQ) was distributed to households in the parish. The views expressed in the returned questionnaires were used to modify the draft VDS and to provide a quantitative measure, expressed as a percentage of those views, to support the statements in the VDS.

The VDS was adopted by BDBC as Supplementary Planning Guidance in February 2004. It is clear in the importance it places on the **views** in and out of the village and the visual isolation which arises naturally and is still valued, despite the erosion of this caused by the recent and continuing development North of Popley. This visual isolation is a feature of the village which defines the overall character of the area and which is highly valued both by the resident community and by all who use it as an amenity.

From the north, a picturesque, narrow, twisting road leads past The Vyne, through arable land and extensive mature woodland. The view out of the village along this road in the

sector from west to north east, which is best seen from the elevation of the Chute Recreation Ground, is a particularly fine, distinctive feature of the village. The VDS stresses that every effort should be made to preserve it unaltered as a visual amenity of value. The views between Morgaston Wood and the village, and between Basing Forest and the village are also considered important visual amenities. Any development permitted should not impair the quality and character of these publicly available views.

A very high proportion of the respondents to the VDS consultation exercise (VDSQ 95%) believed that the riparian features, the nature of the present buildings and the essential look and feel of the place all argued against any large scale development either within or immediately adjacent to the present village bounds. Small scale developments and infill, especially of smaller, low cost dwellings to “round out” the village were preferred (VDSQ 95%)

Similarly, the VDS recognises the importance of clear land separation between Sherborne St John and Basingstoke:

“The separate identity of Sherborne St .John is seen as vitally important (VDSQ 93.6%) and should be rigorously protected through the application of the concept of a Settlement Boundary. The clear separation between the village and Basingstoke/Popley is regarded as a vital characteristic of the area (VDSQ 91.5%) and the essentially open, agricultural and recreational nature of the land around the village should be retained.”

This has been slightly eroded by the recent and continuing developments north of Popley, but still remains vitally important to the village and it is widely hoped that the new strategic gap proposed in the Basingstoke and Deane draft Local Plan will protect the village.

9. LANDSCAPE CAPACITY STUDIES

These were undertaken in 2008 and 2010 by independent bodies, for Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, in order to assess local sites and their suitability for development.

2008 Landscape Capacity Study

In the 2008 Landscape Capacity Assessment three areas were assessed which include or adjoin parts of Sherborne St John.

1. The first of these is mainly to the South of the village and is described as **Sherborne St John Slopes (BA01)**. It is referred to as a gently sloping landform with an open landscape of farmland, which due to the ridgeline along its southern boundary, is relatively prominent. It has long distance views through the area and a generally rural landscape. The assessment notes that to the West in particular, the openness and vegetation character means that mitigation is not appropriate. It states that there is limited potential for mitigation, as the introduction of new areas of screen planting would have an adverse impact on an area which contains little woodland.

It also notes that it is an area which has scenic beauty and notes that the area is very significant in relation to maintaining physical separation between Basingstoke and Sherborne St John. It states that there are no features to the north of the ridge that development could extend to without adversely affecting the setting of the village. It is assessed as having a low capacity to take development.

The assessment rates the site on the basis of Landscape Sensitivity, Visual Sensitivity and Landscape Value in order to produce an overall Landscape Capacity (possible outcomes are Low, Low/Medium, Medium, Medium/High or High). The overall Landscape Capacity for this site is concluded to be **Low** (the lowest possible capacity for development) which is defined as **'The landscape character could not accommodate areas of new development without a significant and adverse impact on the landscape character'**.

The 2008 study states: 'Occasional, small scale development' (meaning perhaps one or two or tens but not hundreds of houses!) 'may be possible, providing it has regard to the setting and form of existing settlement and the character and the sensitivity of adjacent landscape character areas.'

This area includes the site known as North of Marnel Park, Popley, which has now been granted planning permission for an extensive development of 450 homes, despite its low capacity for development.

It should be noted that most of the rest of this area is included in the proposed Strategic Gap between Basingstoke and Sherborne St John, under Policy EM2 of the Basingstoke and Deane revised Draft Local Plan (recently submitted for formal inspection. See link below).

2. The second area to be assessed was described as **Southern Weybrook Slopes (BA02)** and it includes an area to the South West of the village to the West of the A340. The landform varies from rolling in its elevated southern part, to a more noticeable slope which falls to the northern boundary and Weybrook. The land is mixed farmland and golf course and results in an open landscape, with the continuity of farmland beyond the site resulting in a strong rural character to this area. The landform does have an impact on the local skyline, although views are more enclosed to the north. There is not a great potential for mitigation due to the open nature of the landscape. The assessment notes the proximity of this area to the North Wessex Downs AONB boundary, which impacts its designation. The golf course does limit its tranquility, but the rural farming landscape has scenic beauty and the area is considered significant in defining the physical edge of Basingstoke. It also notes the route of the Roman Road along the eastern boundary. The study concludes that overall this area also has **Low** Landscape Capacity.

It should be noted that much of this area is also included in the proposed Strategic Gap between Basingstoke and Sherborne St John, under Policy EM2 of the Basingstoke and Deane revised Draft Local Plan (recently submitted for formal inspection). See below.

3. The third area assessed is referred to as **Vyne Mosaic (BA03)** and includes a large expanse of land to the North and East of the village. This area is dominated by The Vyne (which is a Grade1 Listed Building and Park) and its grounds, but also includes areas of woodland and arable farmland. The report concludes that the Landscape Capacity of this area is **Low**, as it has a strong and intact rural character, with extensive areas of woodland, many designated, which along with the gently undulating landscape create a small scale character. The Vyne is a well-used visitor attraction and footpaths are also well-frequented. There are nine (9) SINC's covering a large extent of this area. However the report does refer to this area having a limited impact on the settlement edge of Sherborne St John and also considers that there is some potential for mitigation given the extent of woodland.

It should be pointed out that this 2008 assessment is a guide to the whole area referred to.

Smaller plots within the areas would require closer study and evaluation.

2010 Landscape Capacity Study

In 2010, a further more detailed assessment of potential sites for development was carried out and resulted in the Landscape Capacity study 2010. This is of limited assistance as the only area close to Sherborne St John that it studied was a part of Sherborne St John Slopes known as BA104 or Land north of Marnel Park, Popley. Although this area was concluded to have Medium/Low Landscape Capacity, planning permission has now been granted for 450 homes to be built on this site. It should be mentioned that the 2010 report refers to this site as having higher landscape capacity than the wider local landscape character BA01 that was assessed in the 2008 study. The main reasons for this are the influence of the adjacent housing at Marnel Park, the relatively less prominent nature of the western field and the lack of landscape features on the site. It also concludes there is greater opportunity to mitigate the impact of development in this western area. **The assumption must be that the remaining undeveloped area of BA01 remains Low Landscape Capacity.**

The 2010 report also recommends avoiding extending the urban footprint further north and that views from the open countryside to the west should be screened with woodland planting to link with woodland at Marnell Dell and that the height of any development should be designed to prevent visual intrusion on the village of Sherborne St John.

10. POLICY EM2 – STRATEGIC GAPS

The Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011-2029 (currently at the submission stage) includes Policy EM2, which proposes Strategic Gaps to be implemented between some settlements, in order to prevent coalescence and maintain the separate identity of settlements. One of the proposed gaps is between Basingstoke and Sherborne St John (map attached). This should protect these areas from any large scale development.

Development in gaps would only be permitted where:

- a) It would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation; and
- b) It would not compromise the integrity of the gap either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development; or
- c) It is proposed through a Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order, including Community Right to Build Orders.

11. CONCLUSION

The only logical conclusion that can be reached following a study of all the relevant assessments and policies, is that there are no remaining areas in or around Sherborne St John that could accommodate large scale development. The existing character and rural feel of the village is considered important and only small scale development; meaning developments of one or two (or possibly ten to twenty) houses, would be appropriate without having a significant and adverse impact on the landscape and the character of the village. The location of any such small developments should be carefully considered with reference to the contents of this study and to the references listed below.

12. REFERENCES

Sherborne Saint John Village Design Statement 2004 (VDS)
<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/Resources/C/9/%7BC9C68176-487D-4FB8-B951-A284E92EF6A3%7D/Documents/Sherborne%20St%20John%20-%20February%202004.pdf>

Sherborne St John Conservation Area Assessment

<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/16973846-4342-465D-AC6E-555999D0D642/0/SherborneStJohn.pdf>

Sherborne St John Conservation area map

<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/2177853C-0C2E-4359-ABAF-4452C5170D97/0/SherbornestJohn.pdf>

Policy C4 of the South East Plan Regional Spatial Strategy and
Saved Policy E6(iii) of the Basingstoke and District Local Plan 1996-2011.

Basingstoke, Tadley and Bramley Landscape Capacity Study 2008

<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/Resources/8/9/%7B895E4968-9638-4153-9F1E-FD9C39456A06%7D/Documents/2%20Landscape%20Capacity%20Study%20Final%20Report%202008.pdf>

Basingstoke and Deane Landscape Capacity Study 2010

<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/Resources/8/9/%7B895E4968-9638-4153-9F1E-FD9C39456A06%7D/Documents/1%20Final%20Landscape%20Capacity%20Study%202010.pdf>

Submission Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011-2029

<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/Resources/E/E/%7BEE36A71B-F561-4314-8CAF-C12B5F1996B5%7D/Documents/1%20Local%20Plan/02%20Submission%20Local%20Plan.pdf>

Map (inset 35)

<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/Resources/E/E/%7BEE36A71B-F561-4314-8CAF-C12B5F1996B5%7D/Documents/1%20Local%20Plan/14%20Consolidated%20policy%20maps%2011-42.pdf>

Pre-submission Strategic Gap policy map EM2 (Map 7c)

<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/Resources/7/4/%7B74E7A129-52CF-425A-957A-2F3437C7C488%7D/Documents/1%20Local%20Plan/4%20Revised%20Pre-Submission%20Local%20Plan%20Policy%20Maps.pdf>