

# CROWMARSH PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

## BASELINE REPORT



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## OBJECTIVES AND CONSTRAINTS

This Baseline Report identifies the key social, environmental and economic characteristics of Crowmarsh Parish. It provides a shared resource and reference point for all parties contributing to the Neighbourhood Planning Process. It is nevertheless a live and evolving report.

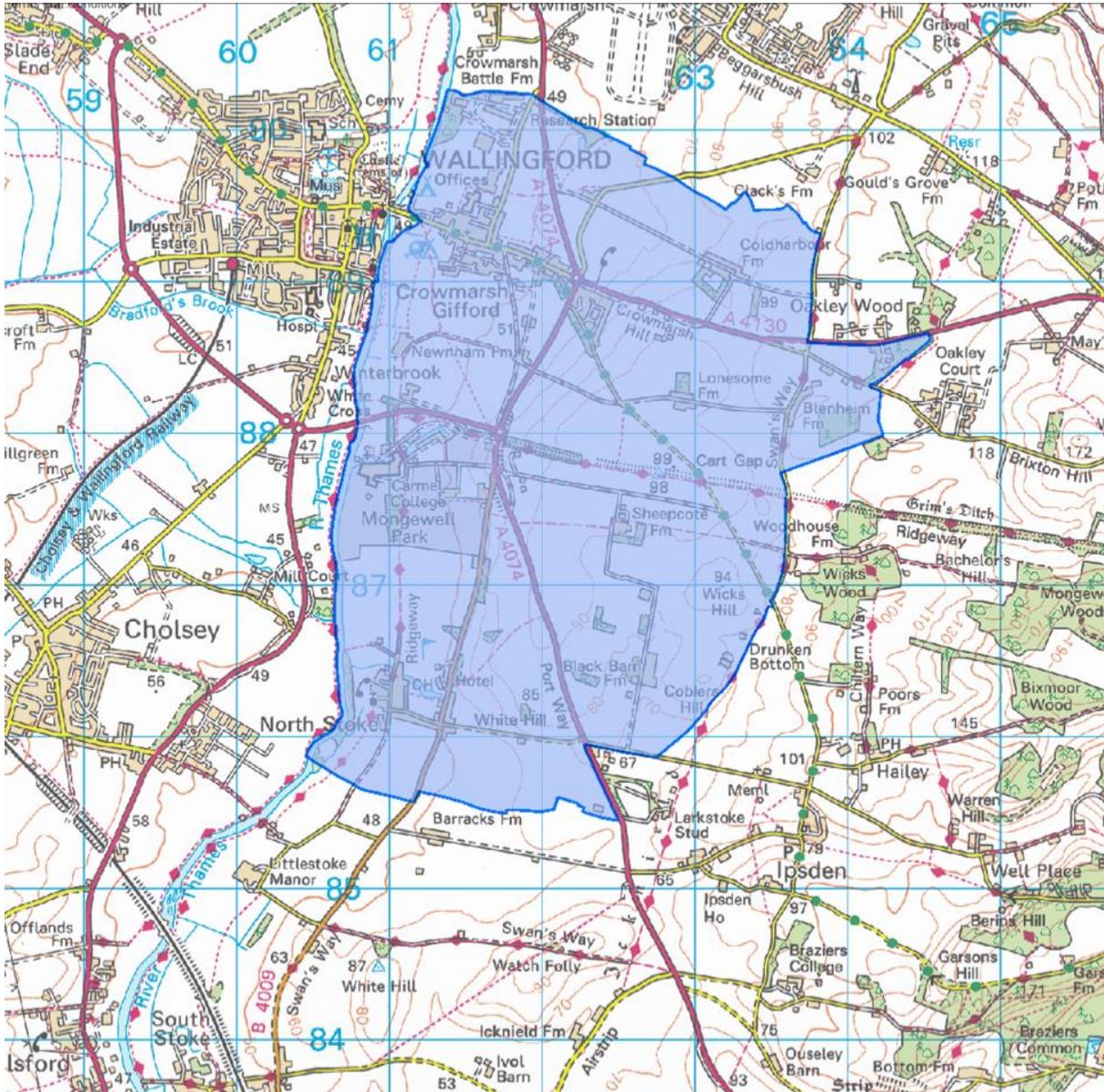
Neighbourhood Plans are a new type of planning document that were introduced by the Localism Act, which came into force in April 2012. Neighbourhood Plans are intended to give local people a greater say in the future of their communities. However, Neighbourhood Plans must conform to the overarching strategic policy framework, which in this case includes:

- the National Planning Policy Framework (2012),
- the adopted saved policies from SODC Local Plan (2011),
- the adopted SODC Core Strategy (2012), and
- the emerging strategic policies of the new SODC Local Plan 2031.

The Neighbourhood Plan cannot be used to resist appropriate development that is required. However, the Neighbourhood Plan must consider how development needs are met so that it could be used to influence the type of development that takes place in a neighbourhood area, where it takes place, what it looks like and the mix of uses proposed that are to be included. The neighbourhood Plan sets out a vision for the future of Crowmarsh Parish over the next 15 years and provides a strategy to manage development and identify improvements along with a land use framework for development.

## CROWMARSH PARISH

Crowmarsh Parish borders Benson Parish to the north, Nuffield to the east, Ipsden to the south east, South Stoke to the south; across the River Thames is Cholsey Parish to the south west and Wallingford Town to the west. Wallingford traverses the river at Wallingford Bridge into what would otherwise be Crowmarsh Parish with a small bridgehead and the adjacent Riverside Park area which was gifted to Wallingford Town Council.



Crowmarsh Parish outlined in blue; blue grid lines are 1km apart  
[OS data reproduced under licence]

Crowmarsh is a large Parish in area with Crowmarsh Gifford designated as one of the 'Larger Villages' within the curtilage of South Oxfordshire District Council. Crowmarsh is situated alongside the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is adjacent to the riverside flood plain. Crowmarsh Gifford enjoys access to the market town of Wallingford via the ancient river bridge.

North Stoke is a smaller rural village also adjacent to the river. Mongewell is a hamlet centred on Mongewell Spring which includes the buildings of the former Carmel College Jewish Independent School; one building is now owned and occupied by CABI (see below), the remainder are unoccupied. The Parish lies midway between Reading and Oxford.

Crowmarsh Gifford developed from the cross roads of the north-south Oxford to Reading road and the east-west Henley to Wallingford road which continues west towards Didcot. The cross-roads was off-set, and until the by-pass for the A4074 was constructed through the east of the village, was a cause of much congestion despite traffic light control. Only two of several pubs survive near the cross roads, The Bell and the Queen's Head. The Street is the main east-west highway today, carrying traffic from Wallingford Bridge through the cross roads with Benson Lane and Old Reading Road and uphill towards a busy roundabout crossing the A4074, the Oxford to Reading road.

Crowmarsh Gifford village currently consists of 542 dwellings, mainly comprising detached and semi-detached houses and maisonettes and some flats; North Stoke has 100 dwellings and Mongewell has just 47 (data from *Crowmarsh News* distribution list, May 2017). The key population statistics for Crowmarsh Gifford (2011 census) are:

All residents	1207
Number of households	483
Average household size	2.53
Residents in households	1199
Residents in communal living	8
Average age	39.8 years

The distribution of dwelling types according to the number of bedrooms was:

1 bedroom	15
2 bedrooms	115
3 bedrooms	210
4 bedrooms	110
5 or more bedrooms	33

Occupations of the workers in the village broke down as:

Professional	163
Associate professional and technical	99
Managers, Directors and Senior Officials	99
Administrative and secretarial	63
Skilled trades	58
Caring, leisure and other services	54
Others	97

Only 45 households (9%) in Crowmarsh Gifford did not own or have access to a car or van in the 2011 census, while 42% of households had one car, 35% had two cars and the remaining 14%, 17 households in total, had 3 or more cars or vans.

The Parish hosts a large scientific campus at Howbery Park which is the home of Hydraulics Research and which now hosts a large contingent of staff from the Environment Agency as well as other smaller, mainly scientific units. Next door, also in Benson Lane, is the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology with staff from the British Geological Survey and the Meteorological Office embedded within it. On the new By Pass to the south of Crowmarsh, Nosworthy Way, is CABI, Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International. Collectively these scientific institutions employ in excess of 600 technical and support staff. However, few of these people live in the Parish with most staff commuting in from surrounding towns, principally, Didcot, Reading and Oxford.

Crowmarsh Gifford has two builders' merchants, both located in The Street, and an agricultural merchant situated in the middle of Lower Betts Field on the west side of the A4074. Crowmarsh also has a village shop. It is otherwise dependent on retail facilities in Wallingford, Benson and Cholsey though many residents prefer to use larger supermarkets in Didcot and elsewhere or order their weekly shop via the internet.

Until January 2015 Crowmarsh Gifford was also home to the South Oxfordshire District Council at which time it was forced to move out of its premises in Benson Lane due to an arson attack. The derelict and abandoned building remains a monument to that attack and is home to a large community of vermin. The site is in desperate need of redevelopment.

Crowmarsh has a primary school and pre-school. The school currently enjoys an OFSTED 'Good' status, and as such makes the Crowmarsh Gifford School catchment a desirable place to live for families with young children. Most of the primary school children progress to secondary school in Wallingford. The primary school is situated on a confined site with no room for further expansion. Parking is a problem during the morning and afternoon arrival and departure of children accompanied by parents.

The village of Crowmarsh Gifford has a recreation ground and a village hall. These are under the ownership and management of Crowmarsh Parish Council or trusts and committees. The village hall is a popular venue for a variety of social activities ranging from Beavers to U3A, exercise activities as well as children's parties, occasional wedding receptions and an annual music festival. The recreation ground offers a childrens' play area, tennis courts, and a basketball square and is home to Crowmarsh Youth Football Club which hosts an annual summer Six-a-Side Tournament weekend, and to the village cricket team. The pavilion not only offers changing facilities but has a large meeting room which is popular with a variety of social groups such as the Photography Club as well as exercise clubs. Adjacent to the recreation ground is a nature area with good footpath access. Other leisure facilities include The Springs Golf Club at North Stoke which currently has a membership of over 400.



Crowmarsh Gifford  
Village Hall

Tourism focuses on visitors to both Wallingford and the Chiltern Hills. Some tourists arrive by boat via the river, the majority by road. Crowmarsh Gifford offers two non-residential caravan and camping sites, both close to Wallingford Bridge. There is currently one bed and breakfast address in Crowmarsh Parish but no hotels.

The closest mainline railway station is Cholsey, 5 km away. However Didcot, Goring, Reading and Oxford can all be reached by bus transfer via Wallingford; there is a half hourly bus service through Crowmarsh to both Reading and Oxford during weekdays, hourly on Sundays.

## **CROWMARSH – ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE**

Much of Crowmarsh Parish lies beneath the scarp slope of the Chiltern Hills in the Thames river flood plain. During prolonged wet weather groundwater draining through the chalk beneath the hills backs up in the flood plain as the river level rises. This makes certain areas of Crowmarsh and Mongewell liable to flood, with a very shallow water table beneath some residential areas. The school at Crowmarsh is on a particularly wet site, exacerbated by a nearby storm drain in Old Reading Road which occasionally overflows towards the school grounds. There is an ephemeral spring in The Street at the top end of Crowmarsh village adjacent to house number 119. This flows down a ditch and then onto the pavement and down the road gully. Although an inconvenience it does not put housing at risk but serves as an illustration of the seasonal shallow water table.

The river flood plain comprises gravel deposits bound in sands, silts and clays with local clay lacustrine lenses. It is an important area not only from a habitat perspective but it is used by the Environment Agency as a preferred area of flooding during periods of high river stage. Up to a certain level the river can be controlled by closing the weir at Goring allowing the river to rise overbank up to Benson Lock. This provides a safeguard for housing within the flood plain in lower reaches of the river, notably at Purley-on-Thames. No housing or other infrastructure is at risk in the Goring to Benson stretch of the river, including those parts of the flood plain within Crowmarsh Parish. It is essential, therefore, that this area is maintained as meadow for this purpose.

The Parish contains riverside meadows that sustain important grassland for cattle. To the west the higher ground offers large areas of Grade II Agricultural land which supports arable cultivation producing crops for human consumption rather than animal food stock. These activities need to be nurtured and encouraged. Proposed changes in use for non-farming purposes need to be assessed carefully in terms of benefits and disbenefits especially if lower grade land is available for building development. A small part of the Parish is given over to woodland providing a diverse environment and a range of habitats.

Local fauna include hedgerows of blackthorn and hawthorn, a range of indigenous trees, including black poplar; few elm trees survived the recent Dutch Elm Disease outbreak. A particular feature in the area is the occurrence of large balls of mistletoe slung high up on selected species. The riverside area is home to the roe deer, whereas the larger deer are a common sight within the Chilterns. Foxes and badgers are distributed across the Parish area, foxes now particularly keen on the waste bins at the Riverside Park area at Crowmarsh Gifford during the early hours of the morning. Bats are commonplace and there is a wide variety of bird life including the now common red kite, while the much rarer kingfisher and heron work the river. There are many other species common to the area.

A number of protected species are at home in the Parish. The field to the east of Benson Lane in Crowmarsh village is home to barn owls which can be seen in flight adjacent to the wooded Marsh Lane footpath, while the edges of the same fields are home to numerous adders, increasing in distribution towards the stream flowing across the northernmost apex of this land. Other protected species such as the stag beetle are also common on the arable land and adjacent areas.

The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty secures the protection of a large area of Chalk Downland, most of which lies outside the Parish. However, Crowmarsh and Mongewell lie in full view of the Downs and great care is needed to ensure that any development in these areas is sympathetic to the guidelines controlling this defined Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. However, land within the controlled area that can be designated as degraded, i.e. part brownfield, or in need of redevelopment can usefully be considered for development if this would increase its visual and amenity appearance (Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2014-2019, Policy D5).

Crowmarsh has a long and exciting history, although as its name suggests, was once a marsh offering an ideal habitat for crows. After the Norman Conquest of England most of the land was granted to Walter Giffard, later Earl of Buckingham (hence Crowmarsh Gifford). In due course it came into the possession of William Marshal, 1st Earl of Pembroke and remained with his heirs until later passing back to the Crown. Nearby Newnham Manor was originally granted by William the Conqueror to Miles Crispin, but by 1428 was owned by Thomas Chaucer. After his death it was passed to his daughter Alice, wife of William de la Pole, 4th Earl of Suffolk.

In 1139 King Stephen built a wooden fort in Crowmarsh. This was the first of a series of forts built to oppose Wallingford Castle, which supported his cousin Matilda during the civil war known as The Anarchy. The forts were probably dismantled as a result of the Treaty of Wallingford of 1153. The fort at Crowmarsh Gifford included a 20 m wide ditch surrounding an enclosure measuring 50 by 35 m.

The Church of England parish church of Saint Mary Magdalene was built in about 1120. The north door, south door, three windows in the south wall, chancel arch and font are all Norman. A north transept with a pointed arch was added in about 1200. The building was restored in 1836 and 1868. Musket holes in the back (east door) are said to result from Cromwell ousting members of the Wallingford garrison from sanctuary in the church during the siege of Wallingford Castle.

In 1701 agriculturist Jethro Tull invented his revolutionary seed drill at Howbery Farm. In 1770 Mongewell Park was acquired by Shute Barrington, then Bishop of Llandaff. He was buried in Mongewell Church. The Jacobean country house Howbery Court (Howbery Park) was built in about 1850 for local MP William Seymour Blackstone.

## SUSTAINABLE CROWMARSH GIFFORD – RESIDENTS’ CONCERNS

Crowmarsh Parish and its three separate communities are currently sustainable. However, some of the available support for these communities is at or near capacity and are consequently of concern:

**Education:** Crowmarsh Gifford Church of England Primary School was ranked in the top 200 primary schools in England and Wales by the *Sunday Times*. The school is one of the key attractions for residents with young families to want to come and live in Crowmarsh.

The school currently has a maximum of 210 places, with a single year age intake. This equates to 30 pupils per class. The majority of the school buildings were originally built in the early 1970s and designed for just 90 pupils. In the ensuing years there has been a certain amount of internal reorganisation, with the addition of two extensions to provide the current seven classrooms. In the early part of this century Crowmarsh Gifford Pre-School moved on to the site.

The administration office, hall, staffroom and storage capacity have basically remained as the original design. The current number of staff is twenty-eight, up from the original ten.

Two of the main problems with the current layout of the school buildings are that the school hall is far too small and has to be used as a corridor for access between Key Stage One and Key Stage Two so that activities in the hall are subject to repeated interruption. Since the introduction of free school meals for all Key Stage One pupils the school kitchen is of an inadequate size and school lunch has to be taken in two sittings. The school roll stands at 206 (April 2017).

The Governing Body is adamant that it will not dilute its educational status by introducing mixed aged classes. Mixed classes would have a detrimental effect on the quality of education received by those mixed year pupils. The Governing Body, however, would consider expanding to a double year intake (420 pupils), with two classes of 30 pupils per year. However, it recognises that this could not be achieved on the present site.



Crowmarsh Gifford Church of England Primary School

**Medical:** The Wallingford Medical Centre cannot cope with the present demand from the Wallingford catchment area. It has the highest patient to doctor ratio of any medical centre in England. Appointments are difficult to obtain and patients are asked to use other facilities such as A&E as much as possible. Dentistry is available in Wallingford.

**Traffic and Wallingford Bridge:** The ancient bridge between Crowmarsh Gifford on the one side of the River Thames and the town of Wallingford on the other is barely capable of sustaining present traffic levels. It is limited to one way traffic controlled by traffic lights. With extensive new building development in Wallingford and existing proposals for new housing in Crowmarsh the bridge will likely become impassable for much of the day. Traffic build-up occurs during the morning and evening rush and at other peak times when traffic is heavy. A serious issue is air pollution, caused by standing traffic at the traffic lights in Wallingford, where monitoring indicates pollution levels to be above the acceptable limits. This is one of the three designated AQMAs in the District. A knock-on effect of traffic congestion is the disruption of bus schedules.

**Access to retail facilities:** Crowmarsh Gifford has just one small shop. However, retail facilities are limited in Wallingford, with its numerous pizza parlours, coffee shops and charity shops but only one supermarket. Many Crowmarsh residents with access to cars prefer to shop in Didcot or further afield, however, those without transport are obliged to depend on Wallingford while others use web-based delivery services. New housing in Wallingford and in Crowmarsh Gifford will need new and affordable retail facilities.

**Jobs and housing:** There are few new job opportunities in Crowmarsh Gifford and Wallingford. Opportunities for school leavers are essentially poorly paid, mainly within the retail and catering trades. There are few moderately priced one and two bedroom starter homes available in the Parish suitable for the younger members of the community.

**Utilities:** The utility provision in Crowmarsh Gifford is ancient, outdated and of inadequate capacity. The sewerage system is under constant repair; the electricity supply fails in high winds.

Given these six concerns, the communities within Crowmarsh Parish are very conscious that any new proposals for significant numbers of new housing could tip the balance of sustainability in a number of different ways. The Crowmarsh village has, therefore, assiduously protected the Grade II Agricultural land east of Benson Lane and north of The Street as this could be developed to a scale of 450 new dwellings – doubling the size of the village and rendering the whole community unsustainable. A smaller plot of land behind Newnham Manor is favoured by the majority of the community to allow some development but at a scale that can be better assimilated by the neighbourhood and its infrastructure.



Children's playground at the Recreation Ground in Crowmarsh Gifford

## **NORTH STOKE AND MONGEWELL**

North Stoke is a small village of approximately 100 homes, the majority of which are situated between the B4009 and the River Thames. There is a small amount of ribbon development along the B4009. It is not on mains drainage and all dwellings have cesspits. It has a small village hall, a playing field, golf course and a church, but no other community facilities. The former Springs Hotel which closed in the last ten years, has been the subject of a planning application for redevelopment to convert the original building and build new residential units to form 19 dwellings.

Mongewell is a hamlet with no facilities. The former Jewish public school of Carmel College, which closed in the early 1990s occupies the majority of the hamlet. The ancient Grim's Dyke transverses the hamlet. There are a number of listed buildings in the college grounds. The majority of the 47 homes are the former staff accommodation for the college, these are situated along the Ridgeway and the college grounds. In 2013 South Oxfordshire District Council approved an application for 166 residential units to redevelop the former college. Work on this site has yet to start.

## PARISH COUNCIL SURVEY NOVEMBER 2016

Between 29 October and 25 November 2016 Crowmarsh Parish Council carried out a residents' survey to gather the views and ideas of those living in the community on future new housing in Crowmarsh. The survey was open to all residents of Crowmarsh, North Stoke and Mongewell, and was publicised on the Parish Council website as well as its Facebook page. It provides insight into the aspirations of the villagers and how they want the Parish to progress over the next 15 years. There is more information on the survey report page, including the need for pedestrian crossings on The Street and the A4074 (Crowmarsh Parish Council web site):

*How many new houses do you think Crowmarsh should have over the next 15 years?*

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
20-50	24.5%	37
51-100	45.0%	68
101-150	19.9%	30
151-250	7.9%	12
250+	2.6%	4
Population	151	

*What types of housing would you most like to see?*

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
1-2 bedroom starter homes	52.7%	79
2-3 bedroom family homes	66.0%	99
1-2 bedroom apartments	20.7%	31
3-5 bedroom homes	21.3%	32
houses to buy	63.3%	95
houses to rent	24.7%	37
shared ownership	29.3%	44
Other (please specify)	16.7%	25
Population	150	

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*What other amenities do you think Crowmarsh would need or benefit from?*

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Crossing on A4074	58.4%	87
Crossing on The Street	51.7%	77
Indoor sports hall	35.6%	53
More allotments	13.4%	20
Playground improvements	28.9%	43
Scout hut	16.8%	25
Other (please specify)	33.6%	50
Population		149

*Where do you think is the best place(s) for new houses in Crowmarsh Gifford?*

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
A Behind Benson Lane / The Street	16.0%	24
B Behind Newnham Green	4.7%	7
C Behind Newnham Manor	52.7%	79
D Howbery Park	16.0%	24
E Former SODC site	75.3%	113
Other (please specify)	15.3%	23
Population		150

## SUMMARY

The Neighbourhood Plan considers how development needs are to be met over the next 15 years. The Neighbourhood Plan sets out a vision for the future of Crowmarsh Parish and provides a strategy to manage development and identify improvements along with a land use framework for development.

Crowmarsh Gifford is designated as one of the 'Larger Villages' within the curtilage of South Oxfordshire District Council. Crowmarsh is situated adjacent to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and adjacent to the River Thames flood plain. It enjoys access to the market town of Wallingford via the ancient river bridge. North Stoke is a smaller village, and Mongewell is a hamlet centred on Mongewell Spring. Crowmarsh Gifford village currently contains 340 dwellings mainly comprising detached and semi-detached houses and maisonettes and some flats; North Stoke has 100 dwellings and Mongewell has just 47. Much of the Parish lies between the scarp slope of the Chiltern Hills and the River Thames flood plain. The Parish has a rich and colourful history.

Concerns of parishioners focus on sustainability. They include Education and the capacity of Crowmarsh Gifford School, traffic and Wallingford Bridge, medical and the capacity of the Wallingford Medical Centre, access to retail facilities, jobs and housing, and utilities. Crowmarsh Gifford villagers are overwhelmingly in favour of developing the now abandoned SODC office site in Benson Lane and they favour housing development behind Newnham Manor before any other part of the village is considered. The village is also keen to see pedestrian crossings on The Street for schoolchildren and on the A4074 for access to Crowmarsh Hill.

## KEY DOCUMENTS

National Planning Policy Framework (2012)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

Adopted saved policies from SODC Local Plan (2011)

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Summary%20of%20Policies.pdf>

Adopted SODC Core Strategy (2012) <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/core-strategy/adopted-core-strategy>

Emerging strategic policies of the new SODC Local Plan 2031

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-second-preferred-options-consul>

2011 census <http://www.ukcensusdata.com/crowmarsh-e00145787#sthash.SSbuWNdy.dpbs>

Benson Local Neighbourhood Plan <http://www.bensonplan.org/pre-submission-plan/>

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Neighbourhood Plan

[https://files.smartsurvey.io/2/0/MU4J5ZKF/Brightwell cum Sotwell Neighbourhood development Plan .pdf](https://files.smartsurvey.io/2/0/MU4J5ZKF/Brightwell%20cum%20Sotwell%20Neighbourhood%20development%20Plan.pdf)

Woodcote Neighbourhood Plan

[http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-05-23%20Woodcote%20Neighbourhood%20Plan\\_0.pdf](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-05-23%20Woodcote%20Neighbourhood%20Plan_0.pdf)

*Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014-2019; A Framework for Action.* Chilterns Conservation Board (2014)

Crowmarsh Parish Council survey results 2016 <http://crowmarshgifford.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Residents-survey-Results.pdf>