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Character Appraisal

An Introduction

WHY IS CHARACTER IMPORTANT?

We all aspire to live in a place where we feel proud to live. There are many things that make the places we live in special, these may include a strong sense of community (as with Sturminster Newton) or useful facilities and services. Another of these important features that makes for a great place to live is a high quality environment, that may include a fine historic setting, beautiful trees, attractive streets, well designed houses, countryside views etc. All these elements can be described as being features of character and are therefore an essential ingredient of a desirable living environment.

Previous public consultation for the Neighbourhood Plan has shown that people value community above all else, but there were several other features that were considered to be very important, all of which could be related to character. Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan will seek to find ways of enhancing and protecting those features that people value. However, not all aspects of character are positive in this respect and so the Neighbourhood Plan will also seek to encourage ways in which character in the town and parish can be improved and enhanced, thus enriching the lives of its residents and adding to the attraction of the area.

This character study seeks to build an evidence base upon which policies and proposals, in which character is an issue, can be justifiably made.



SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CONSULTATIONS & STUDIES

In order to best tailor future policies and proposals of Neighbourhood Plan it is critical that an objective baseline is used to ensure that policies are based on fact and evidence, not unsubstantiated opinions or conjecture. A review of documents relating to the character of the parish has been carried out. The following are brief summaries of the findings and comments on these earlier documents.

The Sturminster Newton Town Design Statement, 2008

The Town Design Statement (TDS) remains largely relevant to the town today and still stands as a Supplementary Planning Document. The TDS divides the town of Sturminster Newton into several character areas, excluding the wider parish. These character areas were used in the TDS to inform the Design Guidelines included in the document. Although some changes have taken place in the town since these character areas were defined, they are still relevant and can be used to inform decision making.

Although the Design Guidance notes are still appropriate, they are not always followed by developers as was originally intended. The Neighbourhood Plan has an opportunity to reinforce these Design Guidelines, and apply them as policy so that future developments are obliged to comply with them.



North Dorset District Council Local Character Areas Assessment, 2008

This large scale character assessment gives a helpful insight to the wider character of the district. The parish of Sturminster Newton falls into four separate character areas, as defined here. These are: South Blackmore Rolling Vales, Upper Stour Valley, North Dorset Limestone Ridges, and Blackmore Vale. There are features that are common throughout these different character areas, which gives a sense of consistency, although there are other features distinctive to each character area.

The District Council Local Character Area Assessment gives a broad overview of the parish landscape characteristics, but it gives little detail that might guide specific Neighbourhood Plan policies.



Dorset Historic Towns Project, Sturminster Newton, Historic Urban Characterisation, 2011

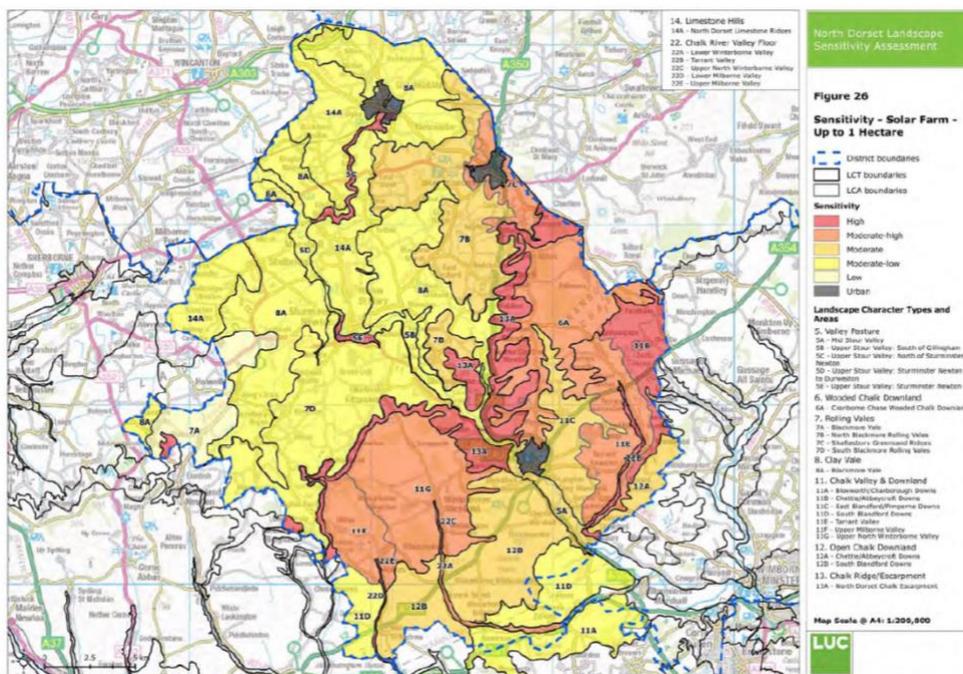
A survey of the history of the town was undertaken with the objectives: to achieve a better understanding of how the historical dimension has influenced the modern townscape; to identify what historical features and structures survive within the modern town; and to better comprehend the contribution made by this historic dimension to the present character of the town.

The survey found that the town originated as an early Saxon royal manor and minster church, but little more is known until the 15th century when Town Bridge was built and St Mary's Church rebuilt, probably on the site of the original minster. A fire destroyed much of the northern part of the town centre in 1729.

The medieval town centre plan has changed very little, with the focus on Market Cross. There were later suburban developments on the southern and western fringes but the majority of development was to the north, generated by the arrival of the railway and the boom of the cattle market. The historic buildings that remain generally date from the 18th and 19th centuries. Medieval structures that remain include 15th century Market Cross, St Mary's Church, Town Bridge and the ruins of the 14th century Sturminster Castle.

The historic buildings make an important contribution to the character of Sturminster Newton. Surprisingly little modern infill has taken place behind the historic frontages, town centre development has been small scale, with larger development north of the railway line.

The medieval town plan is still largely complete. The surviving market reflects the importance of the town's rural commerce. The historic character of Sturminster Newton is influenced by its distinctive setting, and the surrounding landscape is fundamental to the town's character.



Landscape Sensitivity to Wind & Solar Energy Development in North Dorset District, 2014

A study of the North Dorset landscape was carried out to assess its sensitivity to wind and solar energy developments. The assessment used the character areas, as set out by North Dorset District Council, to divide the district and assess each area by using an established criteria to determine a sensitivity rating (Low, Moderate-low, Moderate, Moderate-high and High).

The assessment of the areas comprising Sturminster Newton parish can be summarised as follows:

South Blackmore Rolling Vales- landscape of irregular field patterns, hedgerows, small woodlands all create human scale, sensitive to development. Sensitivity to Wind developments are Moderate high to High. Sensitivity to large Solar developments are High, especially when sites can be viewed from elevated positions. Smaller solar developments on screened sites would have a lower sensitivity.

Upper Stour Valley- A small area of strong historic and recreational character. Highly sensitive to any wind or solar development.

North Dorset Limestone Ridges- A rural area of undulating terrain and plateaus. Generally Moderate to High sensitivity due to intimate and tranquil character of the area. Wind and solar developments would be more sensitive on sloping ground, especially towards the Stour valley.

Blackmore Vale- An area of homogenous rural character with a very human scale. The area makes valued setting for the chalk escarpments. Sensitivity to wind development is Moderate to High, especially where there are long views. Sensitivity to solar development is Moderate-low to High.

Generally, due to the scale of landform, pattern, quality and character of the landscape, Sturminster Newton parish is of moderate high sensitivity to wind and solar development, with no areas having been assessed as low sensitivity.

Neighbourhood Plan Autumn 2014 Consultation Results

This consultation event was well attended and the results have been helpful in guiding the Neighbourhood Plan. The key findings relating to character are as follows:

- Both the future role and the identity of Sturminster Newton are considered very important to the future of the town that needs to remain the heart of the rural community
- The Exchange site should be used as a focus for community services.
- Views and open green space in the town are highly valued by its residents and should be protected.
- The high quality landscapes surrounding Sturminster Newton should be protected and the transition between town and country must be sensitively handled.
- New residential developments should consist of a mix of house types, built to a high quality and be of distinctive yet sensitive design.



LOCAL CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS

Although the above studies were valuable in providing background information to the Neighbourhood Plan, there were still gaps in the material that would be needed to develop specific policies and proposals. Therefore it was decided that further assessments should be carried out in order to provide a better evidence base.

PARISH CHARACTER STUDIES

Town Character

The existing Town Design Statement (TDS) already identifies character areas around the town and so this aspect did not require additional study (apart from some specific Character Elements as set out below). This character study is very helpful in identifying, in general terms, the features which comprise the different parts of Sturminster Newton town and the study can be used as a useful piece of background information. A summary of this study can be seen on the following boards.

Rural Character

As the TDS character study only covers the town, and not the surrounding parish, a landscape character assessment of the rest of the rural areas was carried out. A summary of this character study can be seen on the following boards. Together the TDS character study and this parish character study provide information on the character areas of the entire parish, although not all of the information is presented here.

ADDITIONAL CHARACTER ELEMENTS

In order to add further detailed information to the general character studies, assessments of some specific character elements were carried out. These included; open spaces, views, buildings, and trees.

Assessment checklists and guidance notes were written for each of these character elements and distributed amongst a volunteer team, who were each given areas of the parish to survey.

The volunteers carried out desktop and on-site studies to complete the checklists and the information was processed and compiled onto an on-line mapping system.

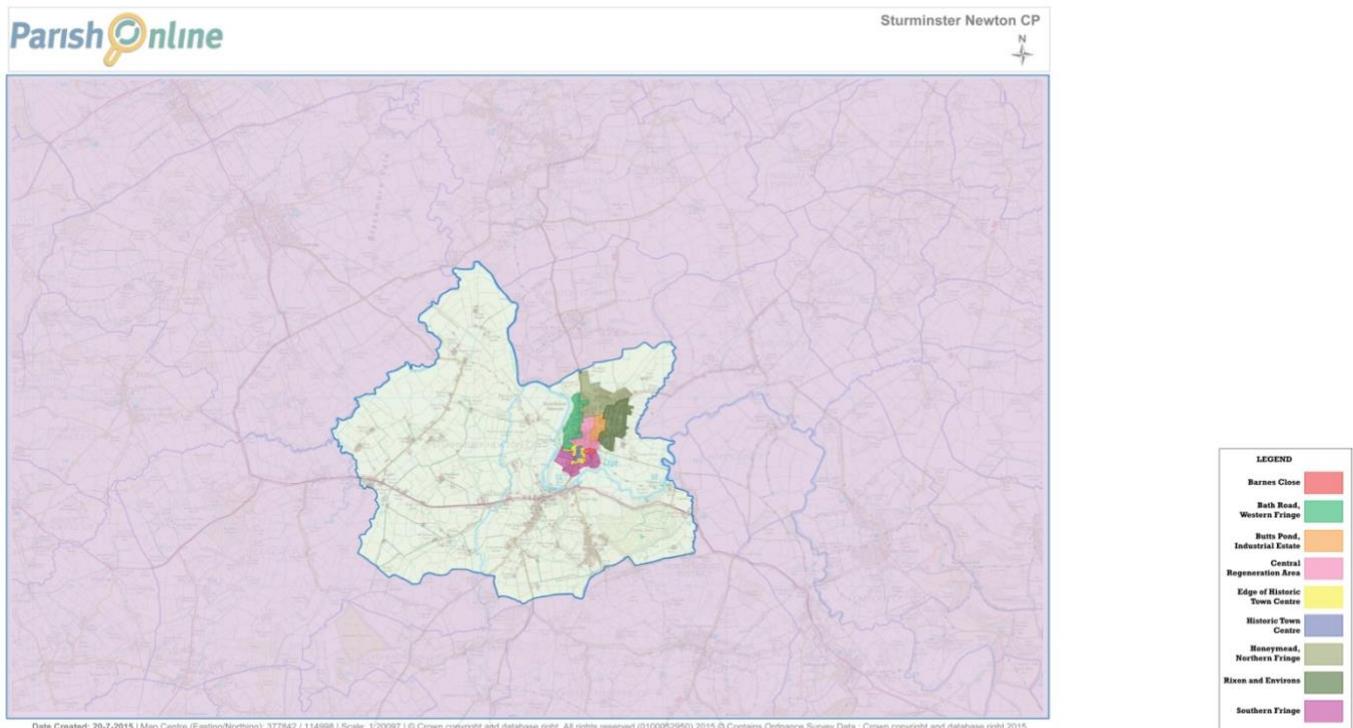
The assessment information has been analysed and these will help to inform future Neighbourhood Plan policies and proposals.



Town Character Areas

The following is a summary of the Sturminster Newton's character areas, as set out in the Town Design Statement.

Plan 01 - Town Character Areas



Barnes Close

An inward-looking 1970s - 80s estate development on the edge of the old town.

Layout: Cul-de-sac development with two principal courtyards including communal gardens. Rear parking and garage yards. Layout radically different from the intricate and organic layout of the adjacent old town. Rear aspect elevations do not contribute positively to the wider townscape.

Fronts: Standard terraced house type fronting onto attractive and well planted courtyards.

Backs: Small rear gardens and plain utilitarian access and parking areas.

Building character and form: Principal blocks to a plain standard design, slightly staggered and stepped down the slope. 1 and 2 storey terraced blocks with low-pitched roofs, without chimneys. Blank end walls. Rear garages in standard flat-roofed blocks.

Materials

Walls: Mottled mid-brown bricks. Attractive, but not locally characteristic.

Roofs: Brown-grey concrete double-Roman tiles.

Hard space: Barnes Close is designed and laid out and built to contemporary standards/materials. Rear garage courtyards strictly utilitarian.

Landscape: Green, well-planted courtyards significantly mitigate this otherwise rather characterless development.



Bath Road, Western Fringe

An extended leafy residential suburb with some extensive views to the west.

Layout: Originally ribbon development along Bath Road with additional cul-de-sac development to the west. Incremental pattern of development with progressive infilling of fields and large gardens.

Fronts: Houses adjacent to Bath Road face the road, often with deep set-backs, particularly towards the north. Cul-de-sac development also faces the road, but plots are smaller, as are set-backs. Some houses adjacent to the western boundary face westwards overlooking open country (See panorama in section 02.02, Landscape setting).

Backs: Secluded back gardens.

Building character and form: Some older traditional houses but mostly Edwardian and inter-war along Bath Road. Cul-de-sac development generally more recent. Building character substantially individual, often Arts and Crafts influences. Buildings generally traditional in manner.

Materials

Walls: Various including painted render, local stone exposed timber frame, but generally red brick.

Roofs: Mostly red-brown tiles.

Hard space: Bath Road has a pavement on one side with street lighting and can appear cluttered especially with telegraph poles. Cul-de-sacs often have no pavements. Scale of more recent roads can appear unnecessarily wide.

Landscape: The mature leafy setting is an important and cohesive character element except in the extreme southern area. Many trees are prominent on the skyline within and beyond the town. Higher density infill development could threaten the tree cover.



Southern Fringe

A leafy low-density residential area between the town centre and open countryside.

Layout: Generally rather irregular and dispersed except where some post-war development occurs (i.e. Durrant). Low density plots with houses often set in large well-planted gardens.

Fronts: Frontages vary considerably from edge of pavement development to houses set well back within plots, orientated irrespective of roads and plot orientation. Nonetheless streets and lanes have some well-defined frontages, often substantially defined by walls, hedges and outbuildings.

Backs: Secluded gardens behind or surrounding houses.

Building character and form: A wide variety of building ages, character and mass and form, ranging from medieval vernacular buildings to large Victorian villas and 20th Century bungalows. Building height ranges from 1 - 2.5 storeys. Pitched roofs and chimney stacks a common feature.

Materials

Walls: Red brick, limestone and painted plaster.

Roofs: Generally red-brown tiles, slate and some thatch.

Hard space: Narrow leafy lanes predominate, often without pavements. Minimal street furniture and limited lighting.

Landscape: The mature, leafy landscape setting is the principal unifying feature of this Character Area. Many boundaries are defined by well-established hedges. Large gardens accommodate many large and mature trees that have a significance in wider views of the town.



Central Regeneration Area

An area of diverse uses, but all either recently developed or potentially available for development or redevelopment. This area covers a very diverse range of land uses and individual types and characters of site that cannot readily be classified.

Sites include the following uses: Community, residential, retail and office development on the former Cattle Market and creamery sites, Drovers residential development. Flats. A builder's yard. Railway Gardens park. Undeveloped fields.

This Character Area lies between the old town to the south and the more recent major extension to the north. There is an opportunity with future development to restore the division between these two parts of the town: a process which has already begun in recent schemes. Future regeneration schemes should take their references from the layout, materials, landscaping and streetscapes that give the old town its character, whilst also respecting and enhancing neighbouring Character Areas.

It might be noted that all the potential redevelopment sites currently have unattractive frontages, and that there is therefore a real opportunity to significantly enhance this part of the town through the redevelopment process.



Edge of Historic Town Centre

An attractive and quiet edge of town centre area full of interesting detail and incident and of generally traditional appearance.

Layout: Mostly narrow, winding streets radiating from town centre. Lower density than town centre, often with gaps between buildings. Entrances from Market Place and Market Cross invite exploration. Some larger modern buildings and associated parking, such as the telephone exchange and the hall in Brinsley Place can compromise the intimate character of the area.

Fronts: Facing street and generally tight to back of pavement, defining an intimate, enclosed street. Short terraces characteristic, but with intervening entrances and gardens defined by walls or hedges.

Backs: Gardens or yards generally screened from the street.

Building character and form: Varied, but generally residential town vernacular and Victorian. Simple building forms, but individually different. Invariably 2 storeys.

Materials

Walls: Predominantly red brick and limestone.

Roofs: Mostly red-brown tiles but with some slate and thatch.

Hard space: Limited by narrow streets. Tarmacadam predominates but kerbs often stone. Minimal street furniture. Occasional street lighting, but columns and lumieres of rather utilitarian design.

Landscape: Generally hard spaces, but vegetation in private gardens makes an important contribution to the street scene. Tubs, window boxes etc., add much to the intimate and personal quality of these streets.



Historic Town Centre

Historic high density development around central spaces

Layout: 1 principal central space (Market Place). 2 irregular secondary spaces (incl. Market Cross). Enticing entrances to side streets. Entrance to town centre; From south, progressive, well integrated arrival. From north, lacking distinctiveness and a sense of arrival.

Fronts: Near continuous and well defined. Buildings face directly onto street at back of pavement.

Backs: Irregular and varied with linear extensions, service yards and gardens.

Building character and form: Northern part, substantially Georgian or Neo-Georgian. Southern part, strong vernacular influence. All buildings face directly onto street. Simple pitched roof form. Generally 2-2.5 storeys with occasionally 3 storeys. Dormers common, but often crude recent additions.

Materials

Walls: Predominantly render, generally painted white. Red brick. Local limestone.

Roofs: Slate. Red-brown tiles with thatch in southern part only.

Hard space: Recent hard landscape improvements raise quality of central space but principal road surface still predominates. Generally free from clutter of street furniture, signage etc. Lighting columns and lumieres of rather utilitarian design.

Landscape: Town centre spaces: Principal space (Market Place) without trees. Climbers on Swan Inn introduce some vegetation. Tree cover and other vegetation otherwise very limited in town centre. Small trees, shrubs and hedges in back gardens.



Honeymead, Northern Fringe

An area of large higher density post 1980s residential estates on the northern extremities of the town.

Layout: More irregular layout than other post-war development. Circuitous through routes and cul-de-sac layouts.

Fronts: Earlier development of mostly detached houses facing or slightly oblique to the road. Later development denser with irregular terraces of varied buildings.

Backs: Earlier development with secluded rear gardens. Later development has mostly small walled gardens contained within perimeter blocks.

Building character and form: Earlier development more varied than previous estate types but general forms, massing, materials and details regularly repeated. 1-2 storey development. Architectural style has general Arts and Crafts features but of a kind ubiquitous throughout the UK. Later development has larger and more compact buildings of generally greater mass. Architectural style generally Neo-Georgian in style with considerable variation in scale, orientation, height (2-3 storeys), and materials. The taller buildings appear oversized in this setting.

Materials

Walls: Mostly red brick. Later development has a greater variety of materials, including different colours of brick.

Roofs: Red and brown tile. Slate.

Hard space: Wide standard design roads, often at odds with the traditional and dense character of the built development, made worse by on-street parking throughout. Most roads and pavements tarmacadam, but some variation, especially in cul-de-sacs.

Landscape: Often narrow shrub and flower beds between back of pavement and building face. The area appears to be generally weak in tree planting, especially forest-scale trees. Very weak edges to open countryside.



Rixon and Environs

Substantially ubiquitous post-war estate development.

Layout: Originally relatively low density ribbon development up Rixon Hill with a later council estate generally laid out along contours. Also some more compact recent estate development in the south of the area. The area includes several cul-de-sac layouts.

Fronts: Houses face roads beyond front gardens. No rear access.

Backs: Relatively long gardens behind, backing onto other gardens, but often not very secluded.

Building character and form: On Rixon Hill building character and form is quite varied, but elsewhere simple standard repeated house types typical of estate development. Generally 1 or 2 storey. Pitched roofs, often with blank end gables. Most houses have chimneys. Originally without dormers, but increasingly common with loft conversions.

Materials

Walls: Invariably red brick, but also painted render. Some old buildings on Rixon Hill built of limestone.

Roofs: Invariably red-brown tile.

Hard space: Standard, relatively wide tarmacadam roads with concrete kerbs and pavements. Few drives, so much parking along roads. Utilitarian street lighting.

Landscape: Vegetation generally very limited except for garden hedges. Relatively few trees, especially large mature specimens. Where these do occur, they are notable and do much to improve the local environment.

Low quality public space at Alder Road.



Butts Pond Industrial Estate

A ubiquitous but contained industrial estate

Layout: The Butts Pond Industrial Estate is situated in the bottom of a shallow valley between Market Hill and Rixon Hill. The estate is laid out along a single spine road with the various premises facing onto it beyond a forecourt space. A principal pedestrian route between the northern part of the town and the town centre runs the length of the site.

Fronts: The industrial estate has a range of utilitarian buildings that face onto the main access road behind a mass of foreground clutter including parked vehicles.

Building character and form: A range of utilitarian sheds with low pitched roofs.

Materials

Walls: Painted profiled steel and some brick.

Roofs: Profiled steel.

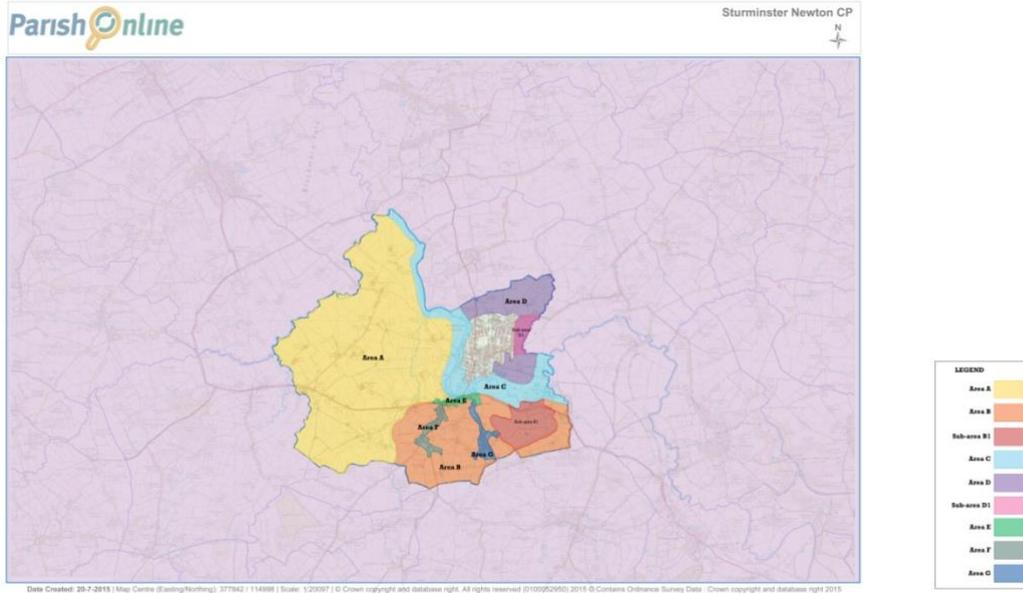
Hard space: Large, unattractive, areas of hardstanding surround the buildings

Landscape: The entrance to the estate off Butts Pond/Rixon Hill is relatively discrete being screened by trees and shrubs. There is minimal landscape treatment within the estate but there is some partial screening around its edges.



Parish Character Areas

Plan 02 - Parish Character Areas



The following is a summary of the Sturminster Newton parish character areas.

Area A

Rural Lowland

This area covers most of the west of the parish and includes the hamlets of Bagber and Puxey. This is generally a very attractive rural landscape area, although many of the farms have been modernised, with the construction of large industrial style sheds now common throughout the British countryside.

Landscape: The gently undulating landscape is generally agricultural, mostly arable and pasture land with large fields.

Settlements: Scattered farms, typically on the higher ground, and cottages throughout.

Views: Due to the open nature of the undulating land, there are many fine views in and around this area of the parish.

Buildings: The building ages and styles vary but in the main they are stone or brick built with red tile or thatched roofs. Some of the more attractive and distinctive buildings include the old chapel and the old school house along Chapel Road, and Bagber House Farm.

Vegetation: Fields are surrounded by dense hedgerows with occasional mature deciduous trees growing within the hedges and fields. Large mature oak trees are a particular feature of the landscape. There are also occasional tree groups, coppices and small woodlands which break the horizon and add texture to the agricultural landscape.



Area B

Rising Uplands

Area B covers much of the south of the parish, bounded by the A357 and the River Divelish. Overall, the quality of the landscape character is reasonably attractive and contains some fine features.

Landscape: The topography is, on the whole, steeper than the gentle undulations of Area A, and the chalk scarp just beyond Okeford Fitzpaine to the south creates a notable backdrop. Agricultural, mostly pastoral with some arable. The fields sizes are medium to large.

Settlements: Generally scattered farms and cottages.

Views: Attractive glimpsed views across lower lying ground. Rudge Hill solar farm located in a slightly lower lying field between Glue Hill and Broad Oak, which is quite well concealed from most parts of the parish but can be seen clearly when in closer proximity, from the surrounding hills in Broadoak and has a considerable visual impact. Fiddleford Mushroom farm, just outside the southern parish boundary, along Angers Lane is particularly visually detracting feature, especially when seen from Copse Lane travelling north.

Buildings: Of mixed age and style throughout. Some attractive older cottages of local vernacular.

Vegetation: Fields bounded with dense and mature hedgerows. Individual oak trees punctuate the hedgerows. Occasional tree groups and small copses throughout which give the area a well vegetated appearance. To the west is Piddles Wood (Sub-area B2), an ancient oak and hazel coppice, is a local landmark. The woodland is a designated SIII and hosts a wide range of flora and fauna.



Area C

River Valley

This character area follows the River Stour, through the parish. This character area is particularly attractive and of high quality. It is distinctive and special to the parish of Sturminster Newton.

Landscape: To the north the river valley is generally quite open and the river meadows rise gradually into the undulating landscape. Further to the south the transitions are steeper and more noticeable. Here the river meadows, although wide, open and flat, feel somewhat enclosed by the surrounding landscape.

Settlements: No major development.

Views: As the river valley is a very open landscape, it contains many fine views; up to the town, along the river and out to the countryside beyond. One of the most distinctive views, within this character area is a view from the A357, just below Piddles Wood, as one travels west. Here one can see across the Stour to Sturminster Newton, and clearly visible are the tower of St Mary's Church, the white frontage of Stour Grange and a few significant trees which break the horizon.

To the west of Sturminster Newton, a footpath leads from the town and across the river by means of an attractive iron footbridge. Looking north from the bridge one can see up-stream to the old railway bridge.

Buildings: Being mostly floodplain, there are few buildings, though some of the buildings that do exist here are of real significance to the parish. These include Fiddleford Mill, Fiddleford Manor, Town Bridge and Sturminster Mill

Vegetation: Like much of the rest of the parish, significant trees and tree groups are throughout the area. However, there is a notable change in tree species, from the oak and ash of the surrounding parish to poplars and willows.



Area D

Town Edge

This character area covers much of the town's northern and eastern boundaries. The overall landscape quality of this area is not as high as the rest of the parish. There are no particularly positive, distinctive, features and the general aesthetic is dominated by the urban sprawl of the housing developments within the town.

Landscape: The landscape is gently falling away from the ridge on which the town lies. The fields that comprise the majority of this area are arable and pastoral. Sub-Area D1 lies between the B3091 and the parish boundary. The land slopes more steeply down to the open countryside beyond parish and the houses along Manston Road rise above the horizon and break the skyline.

Settlements: Edge of town housing abuts this area, both fronting and backing onto the fields. This area seems much more urbanised in comparison to other parts of the parish due to the close proximity to residential developments.

Views: Generally, throughout this area, there are views out over the surrounding countryside, sometimes wide and expansive, particularly to Hambledon Hill or to the river valley below. The point of entry into the town, from along the Manston Road, is particularly unattractive, the hedge-lined, winding road abruptly changes at the threshold of the town and is visually jarring.

Buildings: There are generally few buildings, just small farm developments and, within Sub-Area D1, the large and industrial units of Sturminster Self-Storage which are relatively well screened by vegetation.

Vegetation: Although there are dense hedgerows, with mature trees within them, around the fields, the general lack of tree growth in the adjoining part of town accentuates the effect that the built form has over the countryside. Just beyond the parish boundary, on an area of high ground to the north, lies Twinwood Coppice. This small but densely treed area forms a notable landmark in the locality, and can be seen throughout much of the parish.



Area E

Newton

This character area covers the part of Newton village which stretches along the route of the A357, sometimes referred to as Newton Hill.

Landscape: The road rises and falls through the village. Dominated by a road. Narrow pavements.

Settlements: Linear development largely fronts on to the main road. There is a focus of historic features at the river crossing, here are the remains of Sturminster Castle (a 14th Century Manor House), Sturminster Mill and the bridge.

Views: Attractive view corridor along the main road

Buildings: A variety of building styles, many houses of historic and architectural merit. A mix of local building materials, such as stone, timber and thatch. Frontage of the North Dorset Business Park, on the western edge of this character area, is a discordant element in this largely historic environment.

Vegetation: Leafy and well treed, and on the whole the transition between built form and the surrounding landscape is smooth and gentle.



Area F

Glue Hill

Character Area F covers the northern part of Newton village, Glue Hill. The Glue Hill area of Newton does not have any clear or memorable identity, in contrast to Newton Hill.

Landscape: The generally open landscape rises upward, away from the river valley below and the houses are interspersed with small green fields. .

Settlements: The development is linear and straggling.

Views: Glimpsed views out to the north, over the Stour valley below.

Buildings: Whilst there are numerous older vernacular and Victorian era cottages these stand alongside a variety of post-war buildings, sometimes of a suburban character, the development fails to read as a coherent mass.

Vegetation: with few mature trees and only occasional tall hedgerows.



Area G

Broad Oak

This character area covers the village of Broad Oak on the southern side of the parish. The combination of scattered housing, open landscape and distant views give this character area a distinct airy character of its own.

Landscape: The land rises on the up, along the narrow road.

Settlements: Linear development, with occasional breaks.

Views: Attractive yet, distant views across the vale below.

Buildings: The scattered houses, on either side of the road, are of a considerable variety, though few are of particular architectural merit.

Vegetation: Transitioning from the well treed river valley to more open countryside. The hedges and trees are of prominent nature.

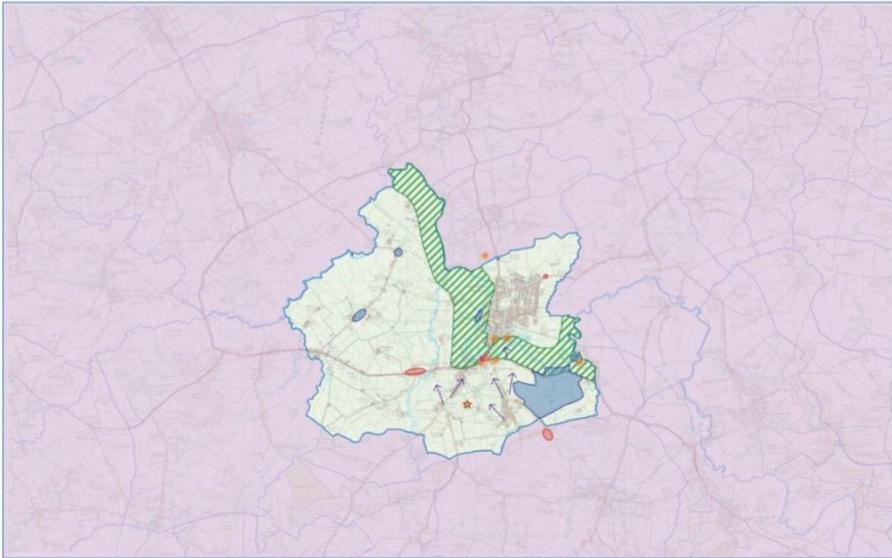


Character Features

River valley setting- Distinctive, high quality landscape defined by the river Stour valley. Edges mostly defined by visual watershed.

- 1- Manor House, Bagber. Fine historic manor house with close association with surrounding rural landscape.
- 2- Bagber School House. Attractive former school house in well treed setting.
- 3- Colber Bridge. Fine iron footbridge with attractive views of river valley and remains of railway bridge.
- 4- Fiddleford Mill. Attractive area of historic buildings within a riverside setting.
- 5- Piddles Wood. An ancient broad leaf woodland of high ecological and recreational value.
- 6- Manston Road. Unattractive and abrupt transition from rural landscape to suburban development.
- 7- Rolls Mill. Incongruous and unsympathetic street frontage.
- 8- Fiddleford Mushroom farm. Unattractive and visually intrusive agricultural development.
- 9- Twinwood Coppice. Small coppice of trees on higher ground, forming a distinctive local landmark.
- 10- Sturminster Newton town centre. An historical market town centre.
- 11- St Mary's Church. A fine 15th century church building with a tower.
- 12- Sturminster Mill. An attractive old mill building dating back to the 15th century. A fine local landmark.
- 13- Town Bridge. A medieval six arch bridge crossing the river Stour.
- 14- The Bull. An attractive low, thatch roofed public house in a prominent setting.
- 15- Fiddleford Manor. A manor house, dating from the 14th century, closely associated with the river Stour.

Plan 03 - Analysis of Character Features



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General Notes

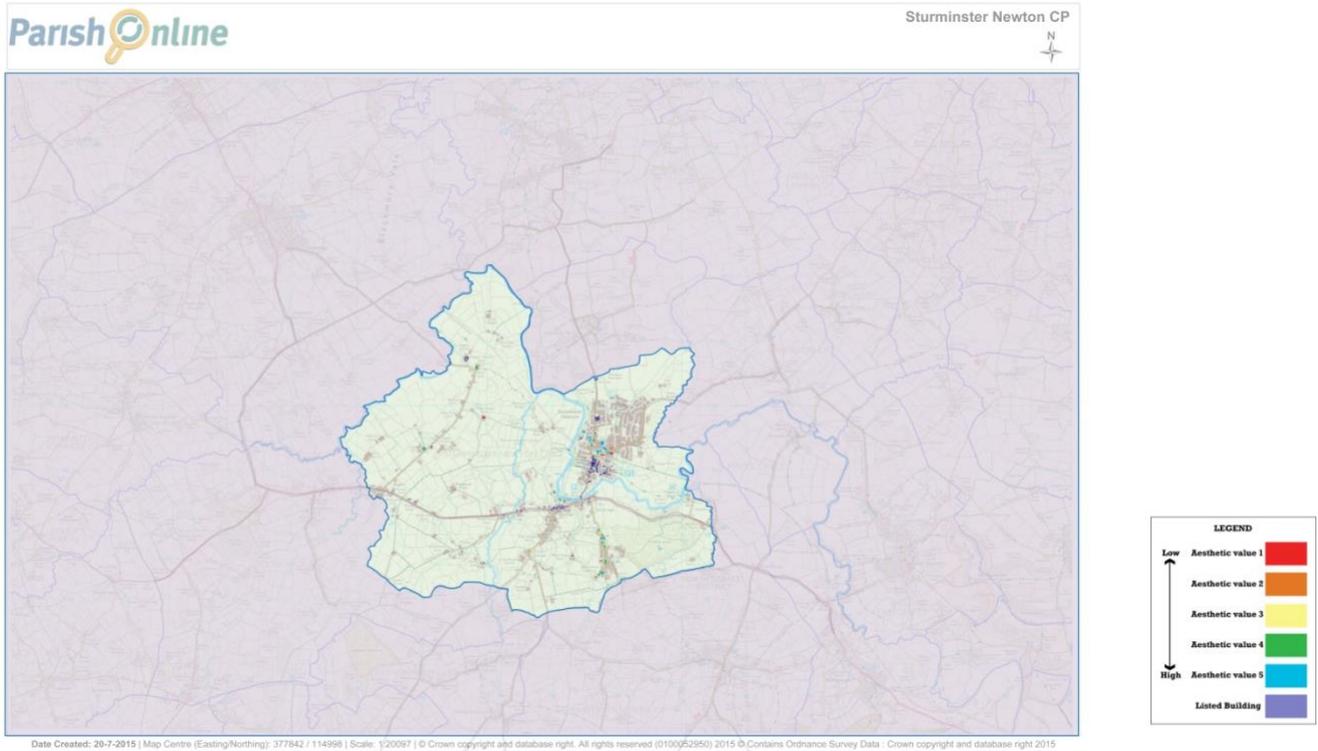
Plan 02 shows the parish character areas. Although there are marked differences between the character areas, it is important to understand that the parish has a cohesive quality of attractive, tranquil rural character. Of particular note are the dense hedgerows which line the roads, tracks, footpaths and fields. The individual oak trees that occasionally punctuate the hedgerows are also a distinguishing feature of the parish. The traditional finger-post way marking signs scattered throughout the parish are attractive and distinctive, but many of them are in need of repair and maintenance.

Plan 03 gives general analysis and shows the significant character features of the parish. There is a general high quality character throughout the parish, but the river valley setting is the main feature. It boasts historical features, recreational areas, a network of attractive views and a close relationship to the town. For these reasons the river valley is of enormous significance and Neighbourhood Plan policies should ensure that it is protected.

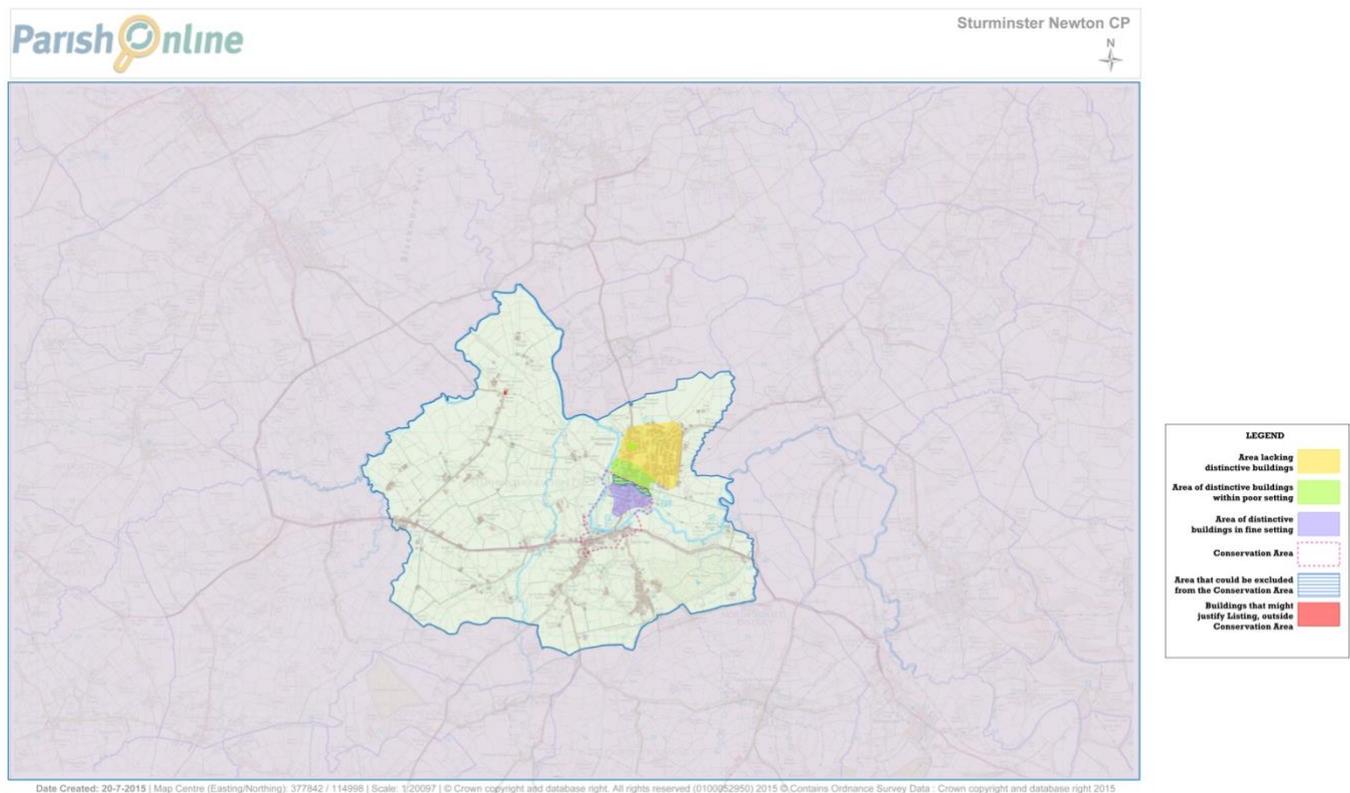
Important Buildings, Assessment & Analysis

Plan 09 - Listed Buildings and Buildings of Important Character

This plan shows the buildings of important character and buildings which are currently Listed. Volunteers were asked to make assessments of the aesthetic value of each important character building. This not only gives an indication of the quality of the building in its own right, but also provides an assessment of the building in its setting, in recognition of its context. This is particularly relevant in a setting where the contribution of a particular building is raising the quality of the townscape. A building of intrinsically average value could have a significant affect in improving the appearance of an otherwise poor quality streetscape. This information has been ranked from 1 to 5, five being the most aesthetically valuable.



Plan 10 - Analysis of Built Environment



Volunteers were asked to identify and assess buildings that they thought were important to the character of Sturminster Newton parish. This information provides interesting findings which can help to protect and improve the appearance of existing and future buildings and townscapes.

The old town centre boasts many fine, listed buildings which lie within the conservation area. Undoubtedly, these buildings should be protected and preserved, as they are, under current legislation.

Where quality buildings exist in relatively low settings there may be opportunities to improve their surroundings. Just to the north of the old town centre, around the line of the former railway and The Exchange, there is a cluster of high quality buildings in poor quality settings. In view of the divide in character quality between the north and south of the town, the development of high quality buildings in the area of the former railway is positive and should be continued where possible but their setting needs to be of an equally high standard and should be improved. Public realm improvements may be achieved as part of a wider, more comprehensive redesign of this part of the town which seems disconnected, physically and visually from the town centre.

With the exception of the former workhouse, much of the north of the town lacks buildings of important character. It seems surprising that no buildings in the recent Honeymead development have been identified as important, especially given the care taken over the layout and build quality of the scheme. It is likely that weaknesses in the planning of the site, in terms of place making, views, landscape and open space, may account for this effect.

Almost all of the currently Listed and fine buildings are contained within the Conservation Area. It is only the Manor House at Bagber that would seem to justify Listing or Local Listing. In the future, the buildings assessed as the highest aesthetic value could be considered for Local Listing.

The housing in the Rixon area generally lacks distinctiveness with little opportunity to improve the architectural quality as the area is all but entirely developed. However, it is recommended that consideration is given to proposals for improvement, notably the enhancement of open space and general public realm, and planting that will become visually significant and add character and quality, creating local landmarks and softening the skyline.

The northern most part of the Conservation Area up to the line of the former railway, is probably designated more for convenience than justification. This part of the Conservation Area does not demonstrate the qualities one would expect in such a designated area. And so it is suggested that consideration should be given to its removal from the Conservation Area. However, there is a continued move to improve the part of town north of the railway line and removal of the designation must not be seen as an opportunity to reduce standards here, especially given the heritage of the railway and desire to complete the Trailway. Rather, it should provide greater opportunity for the creation of more innovative developments, with their own distinct character, which would improve the townscape quality. Exciting opportunities for change could be created here, in particular the area between the Old Town and The Exchange, which could benefit from a less constrained approach.

Suggested Neighbourhood Plan Proposals relating to Buildings:

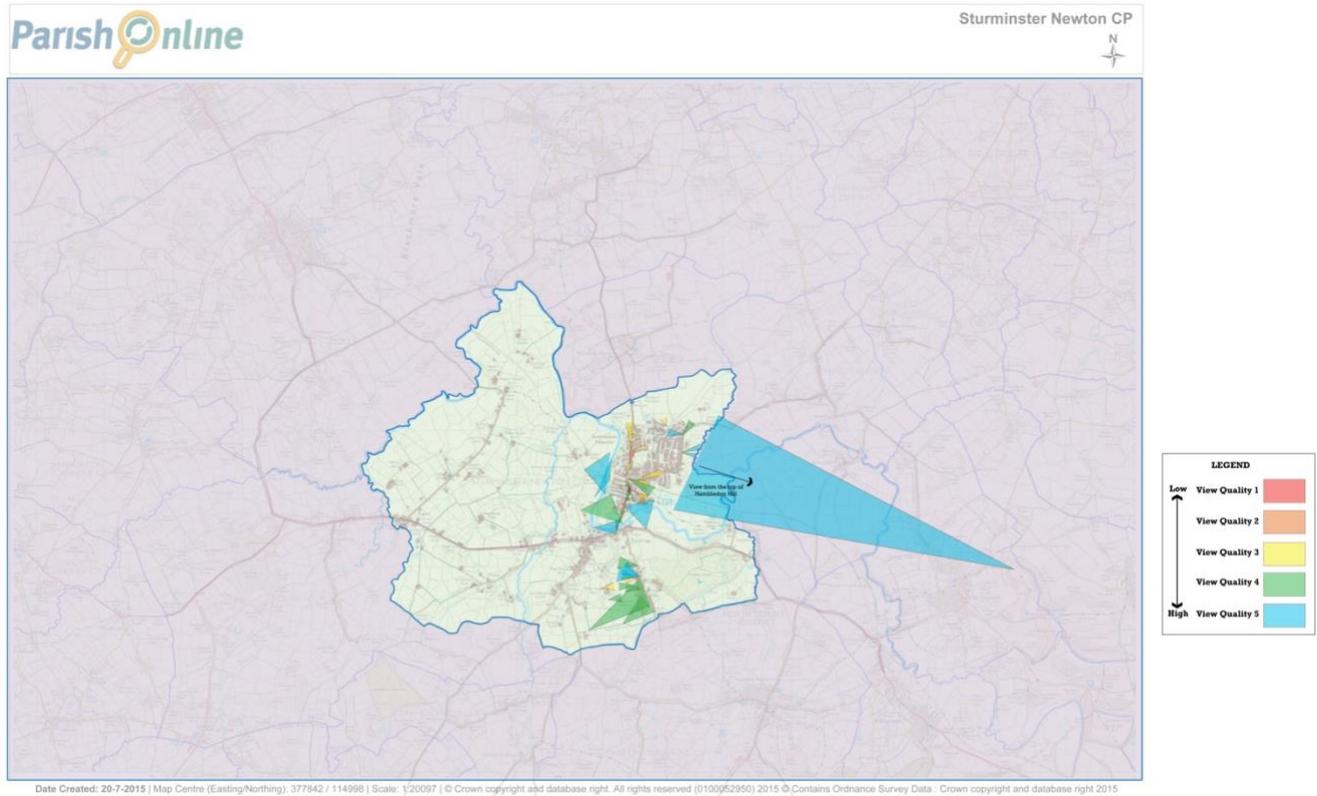
- Proposals for improvements to landscape and trees in Rixon area
- No further extension to the Conservation Area seems necessary
- Possible Listing or Local Listing of Bagber Manor House
- Consider Local Listing buildings of highest aesthetic value in future assessments
- Removal of the Conservation Area from around The Exchange and Station Road and line of the former railway.
- Public realm improvements around the line of the former railway as part of a comprehensive redesign to better incorporate this part of town into the old town centre.



Important Views, Assessment & Analysis

Plan 07 - Principle Views/ Volunteer Assessment

Volunteers were asked identify important views and to make assessments of their importance to the character of the parish and rank them from 1 to 5, five being the highest quality- taking into account both positive and negative aspects to give an overall score. In the assessment the volunteers were asked to consider; distinctive features, view points, background, foreground and composition. This plan shows the results of those assessments.



The General View Areas, as shown on Plan 08, relate closely to the character areas set out on Plan 02. A value judgement has been given to each of the General View Areas, as set out on Plan 08. These are ranked on a scale of 1-5, five being the highest quality View Area.

Much of the Rural Lowland to the West of the parish is gently undulating and offers many fine views over the rolling countryside. There are few specifically memorable views, but the area has a generally open out-look with pleasant views throughout. Value score: 4

The Rising Upland of the lower chalk scarps on which Newton and Broad Oak lie has many fine views that can be glimpsed between the trees, tall hedgerows and buildings. Many of the views are orientated to the north east and north west, overlooking the river valley and beyond. A solar farm has been developed in the valley between Glue Hill and Broadoak. Although this development is not visible from much of the parish, it is quite visually intrusive within the more immediate surroundings. Value score: 3

The River Valley corridor has a large number of high quality, interrelated views, from numerous points along the course of the Stour, and there are too many to identify individually. However, of particular note are the views north from the A357, on approaching the town from the south east, looking over the river towards the town, with the church tower and Stour Grange clearly visible. The views of Sturminster Mill, in the area around Town Bridge and the views from Stalbridge Lane, looking east towards the town are also particularly attractive. This is a highly valuable and sensitive landscape character area and the Neighbourhood Plan should ensure it is protected. Value score: 5

Looking east, from several points within Sturminster Newton, the landmark Hambleton Hill can clearly be seen. From Town Bridge, travelling north up Bridge Street, there is a corridor of attractive views which continues up into the town centre. Just north of the town centre, near the line of the former railway, the corridor of fine views

breaks where there is an area of low quality development and unkempt street frontages, including the former builders yard. The corridor then resumes, albeit in a more suburban nature, along Bath Road before exiting the town.

There are many fine, contained views within the old town and few very few in the more recent developments. Future developments should aim to create views which will instil a sense of place and improve orientation. This may be done by utilising careful layouts and suitable planting. They should be encouraged to relate to key views out of the town, where appropriate. Value score: 3

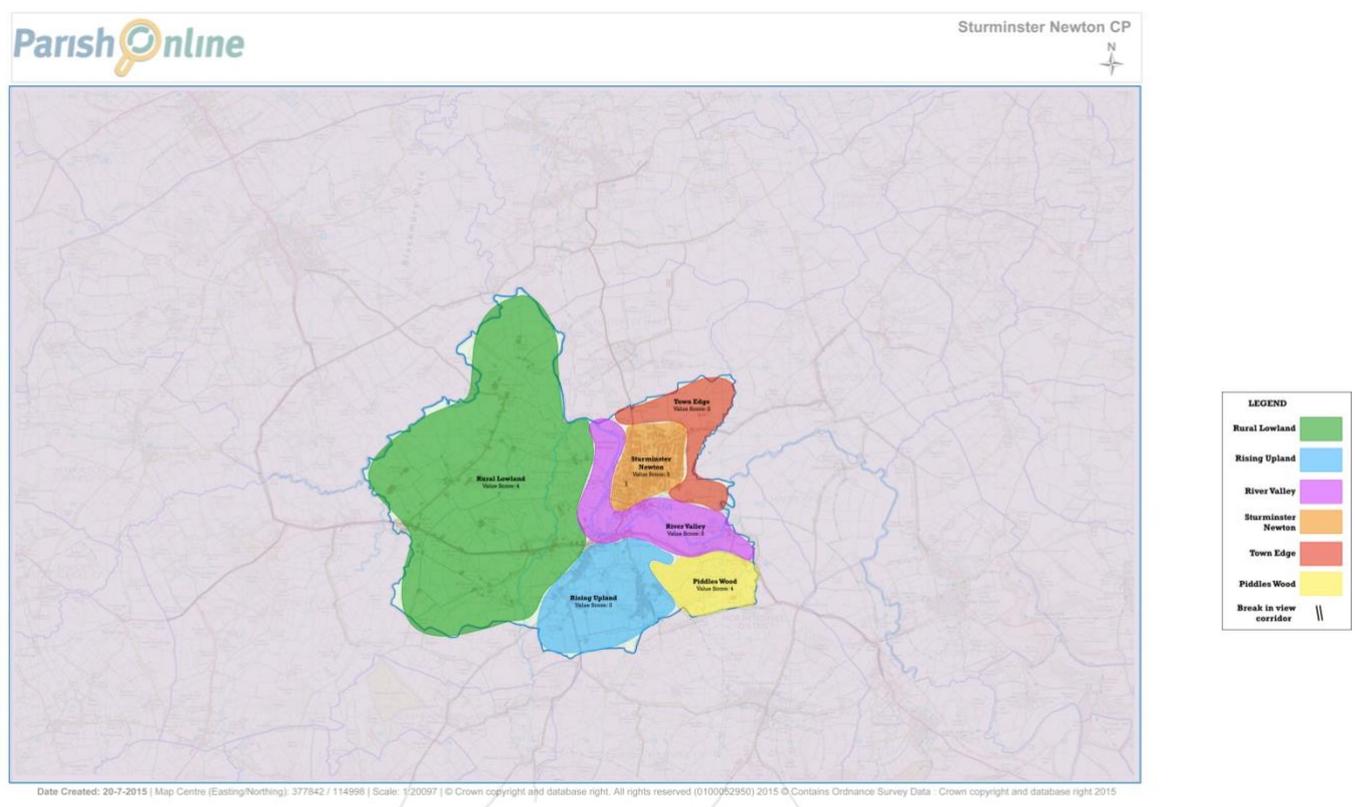
From the Town Edge looking west into the town, there are several areas of new development which appear stark and somewhat inappropriate in the landscape. Notably the former creamery site, when looking along the Trailway and Honeymead when looking from the east. These developments lack the gentle transitions into the surrounding landscape that the older parts of the town enjoy. Increased tree planting, lower development density and thoughtful layouts can improve these rural edges in future developments. Value score: 2

The attractive area of Piddles Wood and the valley to the south are visually enclosed and generally only features short and contained, yet attractive views. Value score: 4

Inappropriate agricultural development, insensitive new house-building, and a lack of tree and vegetation management are all possible threats to the fine views in the parish and should be carefully controlled. Wind and solar farm developments are likely to have significant negative visual impact on the generally sensitive landscape character.

Suggested Neighbourhood Plan Proposals relating to Views:

- Possible policies on the transition of new developments into the landscape
- Policies to control inappropriate development (including agricultural developments and renewable energy resources) within the sensitive areas of the landscape, particularly the river valley.
- Policies to protect and improve road frontages along important view corridors (Bridge Street, Bath Road)
- Creation of strong views within new developments
- Policies to protect the highest quality views against new developments
- New developments to relate to existing key views
- Policies on the careful management of trees and vegetation in order to maintain important views

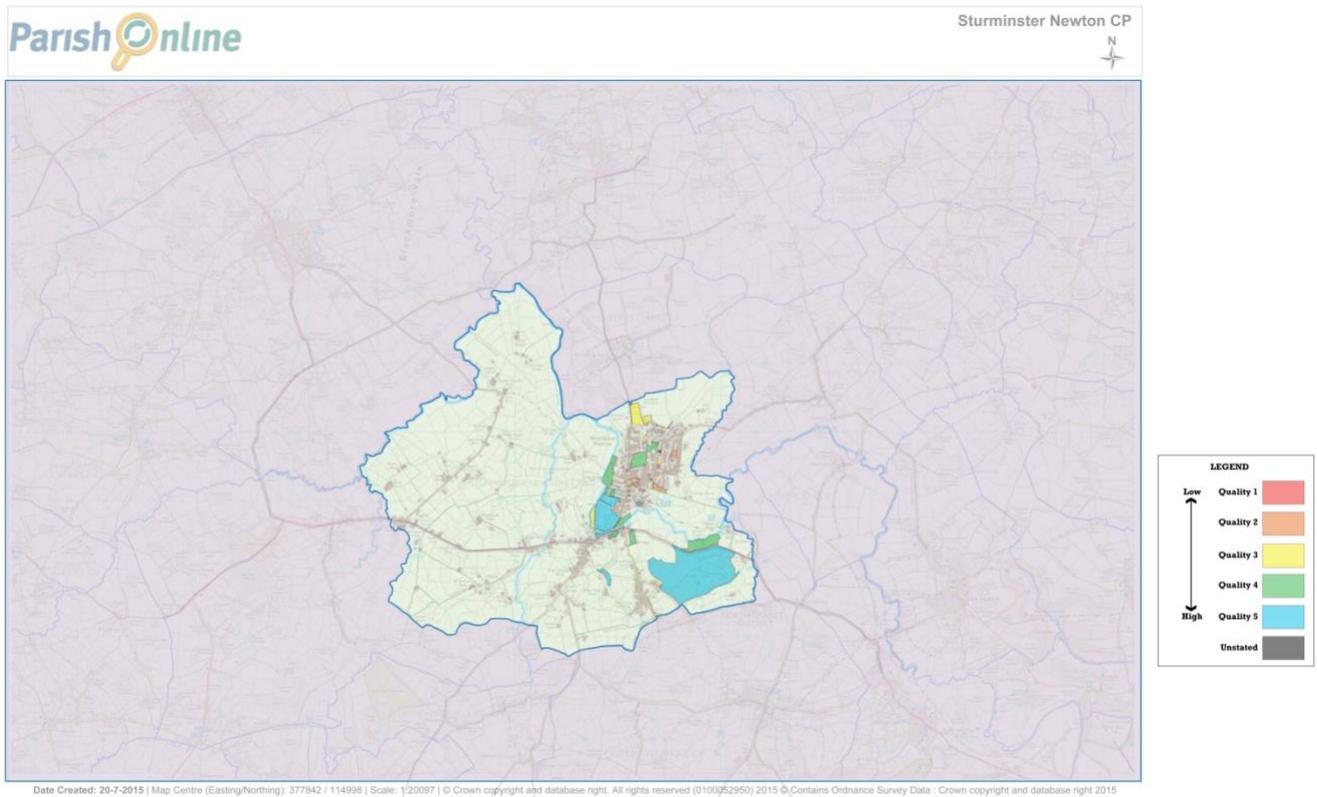




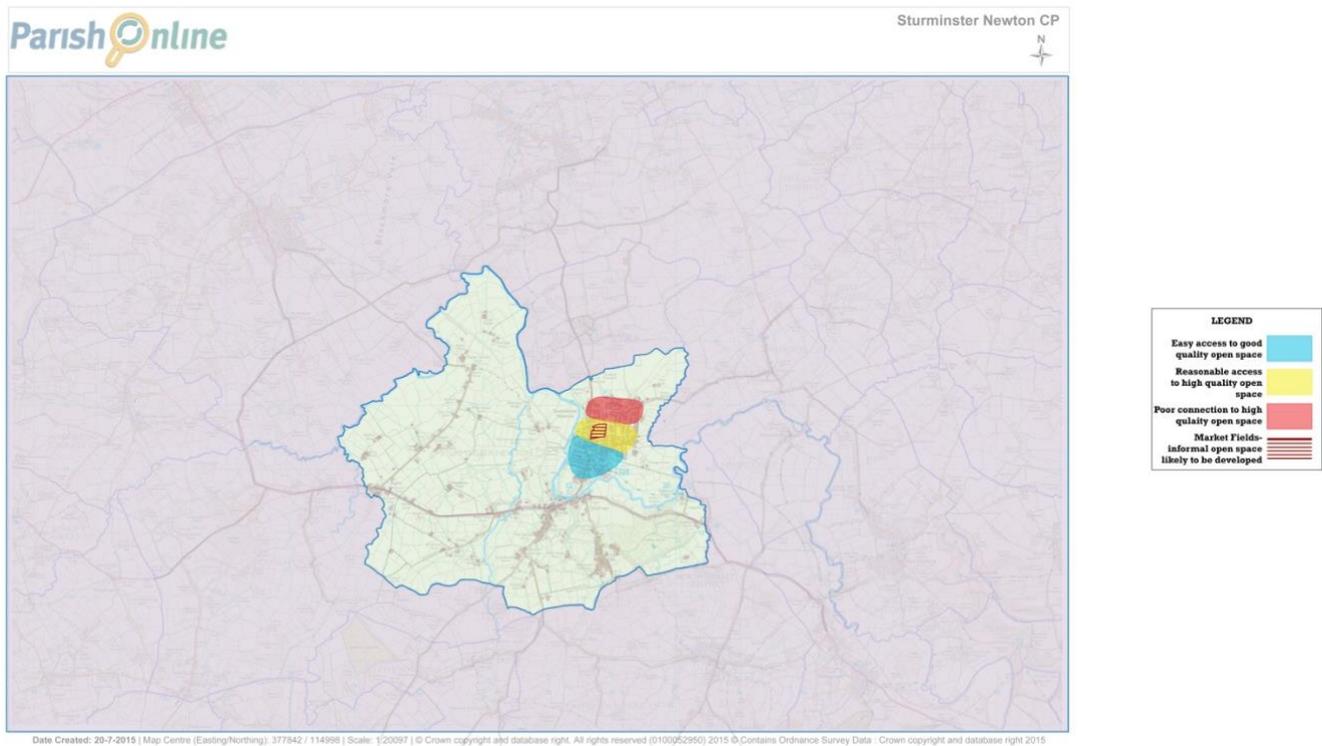
Open Spaces, Assessment & Analysis

Volunteers were asked to identify and survey open spaces within the parish and give a general assessment of the overall quality of each site. They were asked to consider the comfort of the site, the state of maintenance, views, whether it is a place in which it is pleasant to spend time or not and rank the quality from 1 to 5, five being the highest quality.

Plan 04 - Open Spaces Quality Assessment



Plan 05 - Locations of Quality Open Space



Publicly accessible open spaces, throughout the parish were assessed. Some of these are existing open spaces and others are informal open spaces. Some additional potential open spaces were also identified. Existing open spaces are sites that are in some kind of recognised formal usage. Informal open spaces are sites that do not

obviously allow for recreational use but are accessible to the public. Potential open spaces are sites that could be opened for some kind of recreational use, formal or otherwise.

Existing open spaces that have been assessed as being of the highest quality could be considered for Important Open or Wooded Areas (IOWA) designations where they do not already apply, in order to protect them against development. These designations should be on the grounds of recreational, wildlife, landscape or historical value- depending on the relevant attributes of each site.

Plan 04 shows the distribution and relative quality of open space. It is clear that the north of the town does not enjoy the same close association to quality open space as the south does. Although there are areas of open space in the north, these are either quite small or not of particularly high quality.

Plan 05 shows that not only does the southern part of the town enjoy more quality open space but it also has better connections to the surrounding countryside, which broadens its recreational potential. It is important to note that the anticipated development of Market Fields will reduce the amount of quality open space in the northern part of town.

In order to improve access to open space in the north, allowance for significant and high quality open spaces should be made here, along with better connections to the countryside. If this issue is not addressed, further developments in this part of the town may only further exacerbate the problem.

Areas of greenfield land to the north of the town have been earmarked for major development in the foreseeable future, but this part of town has the poorest provision and quality of open space, together with the poor connections to the fine rural landscape that other parts of the town enjoy. Neighbourhood Plan policies should require new developments here to address the lack of high quality open space, in a way that is appropriate to the character of the town.

As far as Neighbourhood Plan policy is concerned new development in this area should address this issue by the provision of high quality open space.

This might include: 1- the provision of new facilities, 2- improvements in existing spaces, 3- creation of pedestrian links to the wider footpath network and the surrounding countryside. These might be achieved through Section 106 agreements funding levies.

Plan 06 shows the potential for future improvements of the footpath network, around the town. The orange routes all demonstrate the existing routes, which in general are very commendable but could form the basis of a much more comprehensive and coordinated strategy if the missing sections, shown in purple, were to be implemented. It can be seen that inner and outer footpath rings, connecting to the existing and intended Trailway and Stalbridge Lane could be created. Connecting 'spokes' could also be established. Perhaps more importantly new footpath connections should be created to link areas of anticipated growth to the existing footpath network. This coordinated network of footpaths would allow for a stronger connection between the town and the rural parish, and would be a truly valuable recreational resource. It is accepted that some of this may be difficult to achieve but this strategy would respond to the aspirations of the town, as expressed in public consultations.

Currently the Trailway is an under utilised resource. Extension of the route to Stalbridge and improvements of the point of arrival in Sturminster Newton would increase the desirability of this attraction. Stronger links to the town centre and other features of the parish, such as the museum, mills and manor, could be established through public realm improvements and better signage and information.

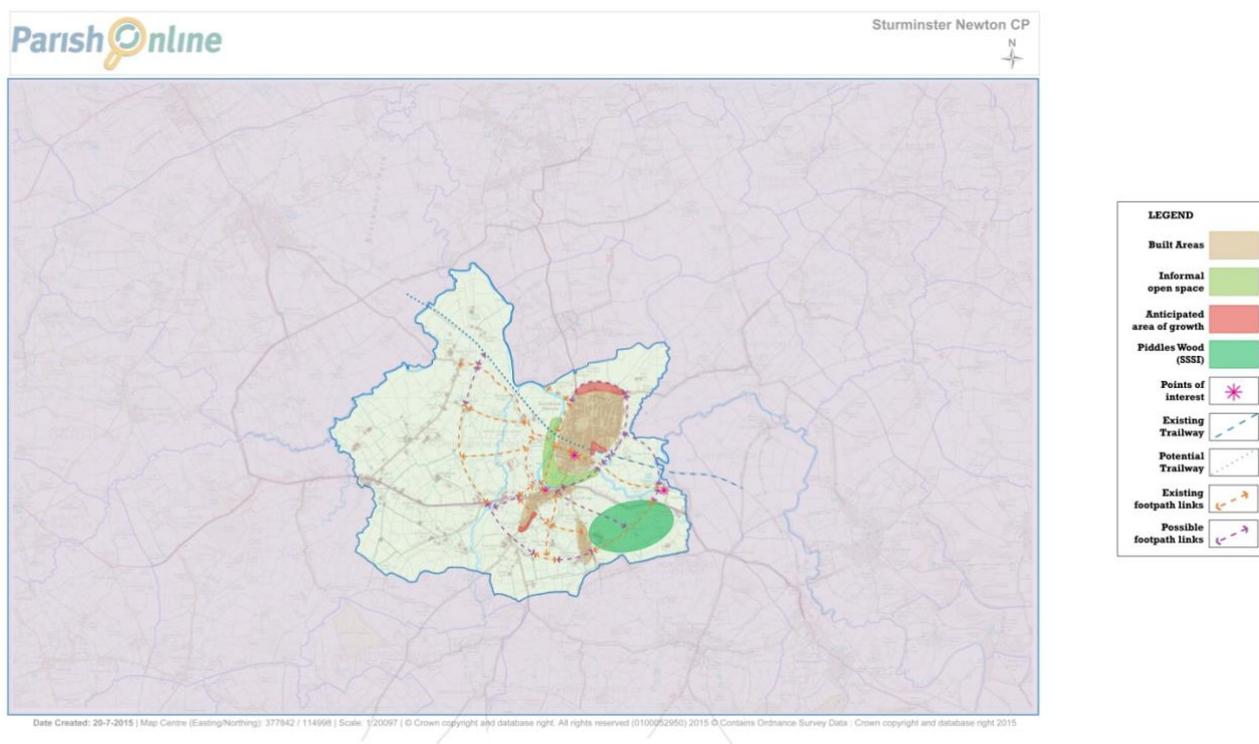
Although there are occasional open spaces outside the town, within the villages and hamlets, they are few and far between. Generally, the rural nature of the parish allows for easy access to the countryside from these settlements. However, if development is to take place within the villages, more specific recreation provision should be considered.

Suggested Neighbourhood Plan Proposals relating to Open Space:

- Consider the highest quality open spaces for IOWA designation

- Policies on the requirement for high quality open space in the north of the town relating to any new housing developments
- Improvement of Trailway terminus
- Continuation of the Trailway
- Creation of improved footpath network, both directly adjacent to the town and across the wider parish
- Consider the provision of open space associated with new housing developments in the villages.

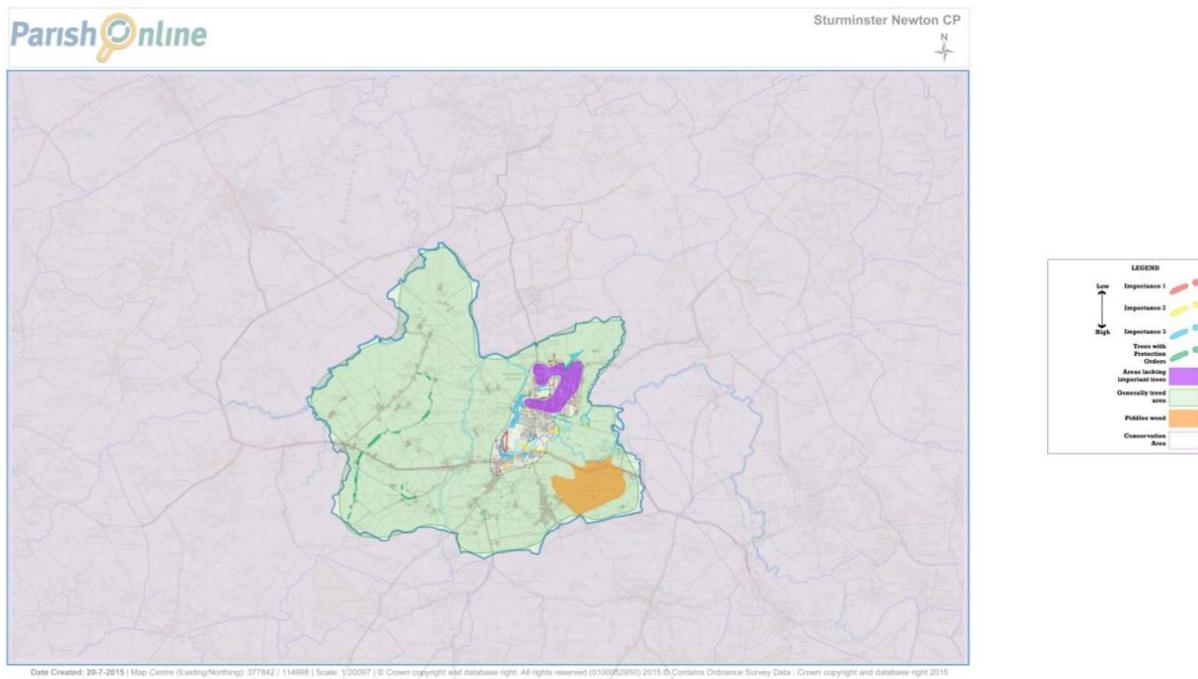
Plan 06 - Possible Future Improvements



Trees & Tree Groups, Assessment & Analysis

Volunteers were asked to identify important trees and tree groups, and to make assessments of their importance to the character of the parish, ranking them from 1 to 3, three being the most important. This plan shows the assessment data, along with the currently protected trees and analysis of the information.

Plan 11 - Important Character Trees Assessment and Analysis



The trees and hedgerows around the town and throughout surrounding countryside are critically important to the character of the parish. Of course this is a general feature of the Blackmoor Vale and beyond but its intrinsic value should not be overlooked. Plan 11 shows the relationship between important trees and the parish.

The generally treed nature of the rural landscape is of high value and important to the traditional character of the parish, consisting of individual trees, hedgerows, tree groups, small coppices and woodlands. The loss of individual trees is of no direct consequence to the rural parish (unless specifically protected), but it is the overall distribution of trees across the rural landscape that gives it such high quality character. In rural areas, an allowance could be made to permit individual trees to be felled, in the age-old traditions of the working rural landscape, but that would strongly resisted any widespread loss of trees.

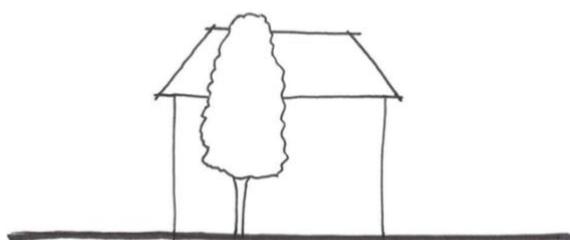
Piddles Wood is an important character feature in the landscape of the parish, and is already protected as a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. However, felling and other management practices should be allowed to be carried out, so long as it retains its visual entity as a woodland, as well as its aesthetic, historic and wildlife value within its boundaries.

Within the town there are many trees which have been identified as important, but mostly within the Conservation Area. Some of these trees contribute significantly to their settings and would be a great loss if they were to be felled. The most important trees outside the protection of the Conservation Area could be considered for Tree Preservation Orders.

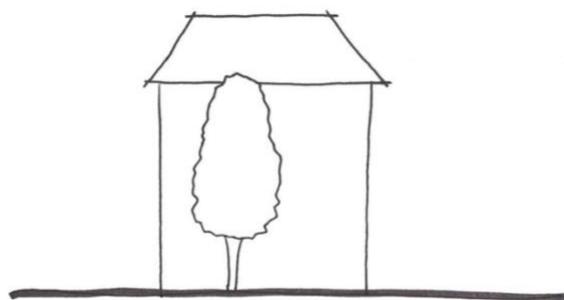
There are notable areas of the town, generally towards the north, where no trees of importance were identified. The townscape character of these areas could be much improved with additional tree planting, to soften the hard aesthetic and break the rather monotonous rooflines. In more recent developments, including Honeymead, new trees have been planted but are not yet mature. It is critical that, despite the young nature of these trees, they are seen as important to the future character of the townscape and retained.

Throughout the parish, both within the town and the rural areas, there are significant numbers of ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior*). In recent years the common ash species has come under threat from a fungal disease, known as ash dieback, which has already caused the loss of many thousands of Ash trees in continental Europe. There have been confirmed cases of ash dieback in Dorset, and significant loss of ash trees in the Sturminster Newton parish seems more than likely. Native alternatives to ash such as alder, aspen, beech, birch, cherry, field maple, hornbeam, oak, lime, rowan and willow should be considered for future tree planting, and replacement where necessary, though this is dependent on site conditions and management objectives.

With increased building sizes, as seen in some of the more recent developments in Sturminster Newton, it becomes more difficult for trees to mitigate the hard built forms. Where the roof lines are lower, trees can rise above the buildings, breaking the skyline and softening the overall aesthetic. With taller buildings this is not possible. Also, trees and tree groups on higher ground have a greater impact on the character of an area than those on lower ground, due to their visual prominence in the skyline. These considerations could have a bearing on the character of future developments in the parish.



2 Storey



3 Storey

Suggested Neighbourhood Plan Proposals relating to Trees:

- Possible policies to guard against large-scale tree removal in rural areas
- Possible Tree Protection Orders applied to important trees in town, outside the Conservation Area
- Proposals to increase tree cover in northern parts of the town
- Retention of new, not yet mature, trees in recent developments
- Replace trees lost to ash dieback with suitable alternative species
- Possible policies to improve tree cover, and relationships with buildings, in new developments (including forest size species)



