

**CHILD
OKEFORD
VILLAGE
DESIGN
STATEMENT**

Child Okeford Village Design Statement

North Dorset District Council

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Village and Town Design Statements (V/TDS) offer a framework for engaging local people in the debate about how new development can fit into the existing pattern and surroundings of both the local built and natural environments. V/TDSs offer a practical tool in addressing local communities' genuine and legitimate concerns on the potential impact of new development on local character, and if used properly, can help developers understand local people's views and perceptions at the outset of the design and development process.

The document is supplementary to the existing Local Plan and sets out design principles for new development in Child Okeford.

If you require further information you can contact the Planning Policy team.

By email: Planningpolicy@north-dorset.gov.uk

By post: Planning Policy Manager
North Dorset District Council
Nordon
Salisbury Road
Blandford Forum
Dorset
DT11 7LL

By phone: 01258 484211

Web: www.north-dorset.gov.uk

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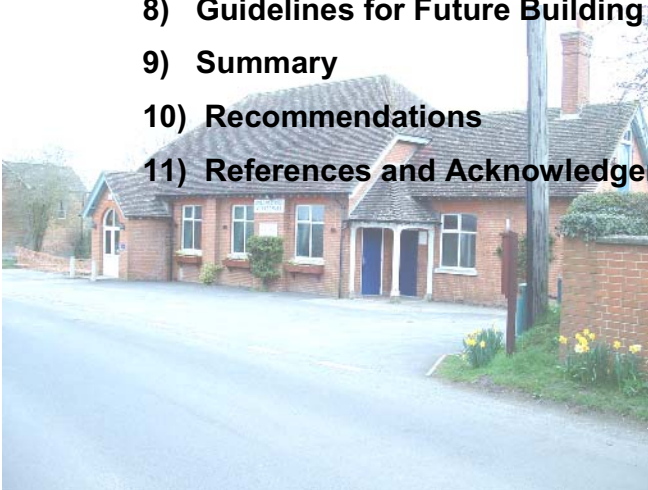
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1) Introduction

- 1.1 “Child Okeford is a rural community and that is how we want it to remain.” This statement captures the sentiment of the whole village. In a comprehensive survey of the residents 45% wanted no further growth and the remaining 55% wanted only very modest growth that involved small affordable homes.
- 1.2 The character of the village is encapsulated within the Conservation Areas with a mix of older terrace houses and smaller detached and semi-detached houses, all in different styles and built using traditional building and roofing materials. However inappropriate development, even in these Areas, has started to undermine this essential character.
- 1.3 Virtually all the houses in the Conservation Areas face in towards the road and originally had a rear outlook to open country. There are no pavements in these Areas and in some parts the roads are grassy banked and the houses hidden behind hedges. Significant trees abound along the approach roads to the centre of the village and are a very important part of the whole landscape. A survey of the villagers shows that there is ‘a strong desire to maintain and enhance the village environment and its surroundings’. There is particular emphasis on hedgerows and trees, with 83% of residents wishing ‘to see native species planted when new planting takes place’.
- 1.4 The problem, identified in the Parish Plan, is how do we maintain the rural character of the village in the face of the current trend for urbanisation, pressure from developers for both infilling and larger ‘executive’ homes, a planning system that goes to the extreme of designating domestic gardens as brownfield sites and the difficulty of getting the local voice to have a meaningful influence on planning decisions?
- 1.5 One of the more important tools in addressing these problems is the production of a Village Design Statement which describes the physical character of the village as it is now through the eyes, opinions and experience of the villagers. It is a document that tries to influence the shape of the settlement and the character, scale and style of development in the village. It should be a blueprint for future building in the village. It is a Strategic Assessment where the physical environmental features and developmental criteria of the village are identified and agreed by the residents. These assessments have been developed in the light of the findings of extensive consultation to establish a baseline of where the village is now and where it should go in the future. The local history provides useful background information on how the physical, economic, social and cultural origins influenced the present character of the village. All of these factors are interrelated and are used to establish a Sustainability Appraisal of the infrastructure of the village, how it relates to the current residential capacity, and how the village should develop for the better.

- 1.6 The Village Design Statement sets out design principles based on the distinctive local character and requirements of the village to provide guidelines for Developers, Builders, Architects and Designers and for the use of the Officers and Members of the Local Authority so that they are aware of the assessed character of the village and the requirements of the local community. It will also provide guidelines for residents to ensure that extensions and alterations are in sympathy with the existing buildings and landscape.
- 1.7 The guidelines in this Village Design Statement supplement policies contained within the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan and the North Dorset District Council Local Plan and should be read in conjunction with the latter.
- 1.8 The Village Design Statement differs from the Parish Plan in that it deals exclusively with character, style and materials of all new buildings or extensions to existing housing to ensure that any permitted development is appropriate to its surroundings and the character of the village. The Parish Plan covers many other aspects of the village and village life and sets out the local community's desires and the agenda for trying to achieve these. It is a blueprint for the future of the village and a guideline for Parish Council policies. The Village Design Statement goes through a formal consultation process carried out by the District Council and eventually becomes an official document in the planning process.
- 1.9 The Village Design Statement and the Parish Plan, which should always be considered together, should influence the policies and implementation of the Local Development Plan.
- 1.10 Adoption of the Village Design Statement by the North Dorset District Council as a Supplementary Planning Document will ensure that, where relevant, it will be an important element in the consideration and determination of planning applications. It will also be of value in the consideration of appeals against planning decisions.

2) The History and Setting

2. Acford, Chyld Akford, Child Acford, Chillockford, Childeokeford, Chylde Hanford, Chillacford, Chyld Okeford, Chele Aukford, Child Okeford, Child Oakford, Child Ockford, Childe Okeford. From 1086 to 1600 the village changed its spelling, but not the sound of its name, nine times. Then it changed again, three times, before it returned to its seventeenth century name of Child Okeford.



Jan Jansson c 1650



R Creighton c 1830

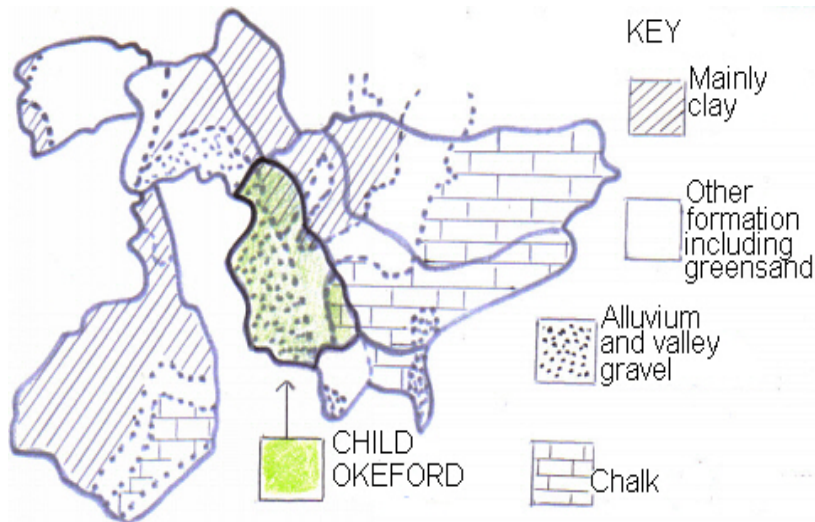
2.2 The village nestles in the natural amphitheatre that is formed by the ramparts of Hambledon Hill. Its other natural boundary is the River Stour that wends its way from Sturminster Newton, 4 miles upstream, to Blandford Forum, 6 miles downstream. Both these features influence the village.



Figs. 1 & 2 Hambledon Hill.

2.3 The Hill, a magnificent chalk outcrop topped by an Iron Age Fort, dominates the village providing a delightful backdrop as well as pasture for cattle and sheep and year round recreational facilities for adults and children (*Figs. 1 & 2*). The river has a more complex effect on the inhabitants. It too has provided food to generations of villagers. For years it flooded the water meadows which were divided by stone markers so that each farmer would have their share of the sweet grass but, as the years have passed the river has been dredged and then constrained, so that the flooding now is not so gentle. When there is heavy rain up river the village can be cut off from the neighbouring villages of Manston and Shillingstone. The village is also

situated above a run of springs, this means that there is often unexplained surface water and gardens have the remains of old wells. The geological map of the village (*Map 1*) shows a large percentage of alluvium and valley gravel. This naturally fertile mixture, the remains of an ancient river, has been added to by generations of farmers and villagers to produce a rich fine soil. Of interest is the distribution of clay as also shown on the geological map at the Manston end of the village. This could account for the mention of a brick works one mile south of Gold Hill.



Map. 1 The geology of Child Okeford showing distribution of clay and chalk etc.

- 2.4 There are four roads out of the village to Shaftesbury in the north, Blandford Forum to the east, Shillingstone in the south and Sturminster Newton to the west. It is along these roads that the village began to evolve since it was mentioned in the Domesday Book. This has been a settlement site since before it was first recorded in 1086. (Notes taken from Dorset Redlane Hundred). One of a group of three parishes which share the name Okeford, 'oaktree ford' from ac and ford; the others being Okeford Fitzpaine and Shillingstone, 'Shilling Okeford.' 'The original site of the ford is lost but may have been where Hayward's Bridge crosses the River Stour; *Hayford Bridge* is first recorded in 1268.' The distinguishing affix *Child* is probably from *cild* in the sense 'son of a royal or noble family'. Although this particular reference is obscure it may refer to Earl Harold, son of Earl Godwin who held one of the two Child Okeford Manors. Equally it could originate from a Saxon topographical term *celde* or *cielde* 'a spring'. Hutchinson writes that there were always two manors at Child Okeford, each assessed at 5 hides, Okeford Superior or Upper and Lower Okeford, Infra.
- 2.5 There are many fascinating names mentioned over the years, for example Edith atte Brouke is recorded at Millbrook in 1327. Melway Lane was once Millway's Lane, referring, perhaps, to one of the three mills recorded in the two manors of Ackford. There is mention of a mill on the River Stour in

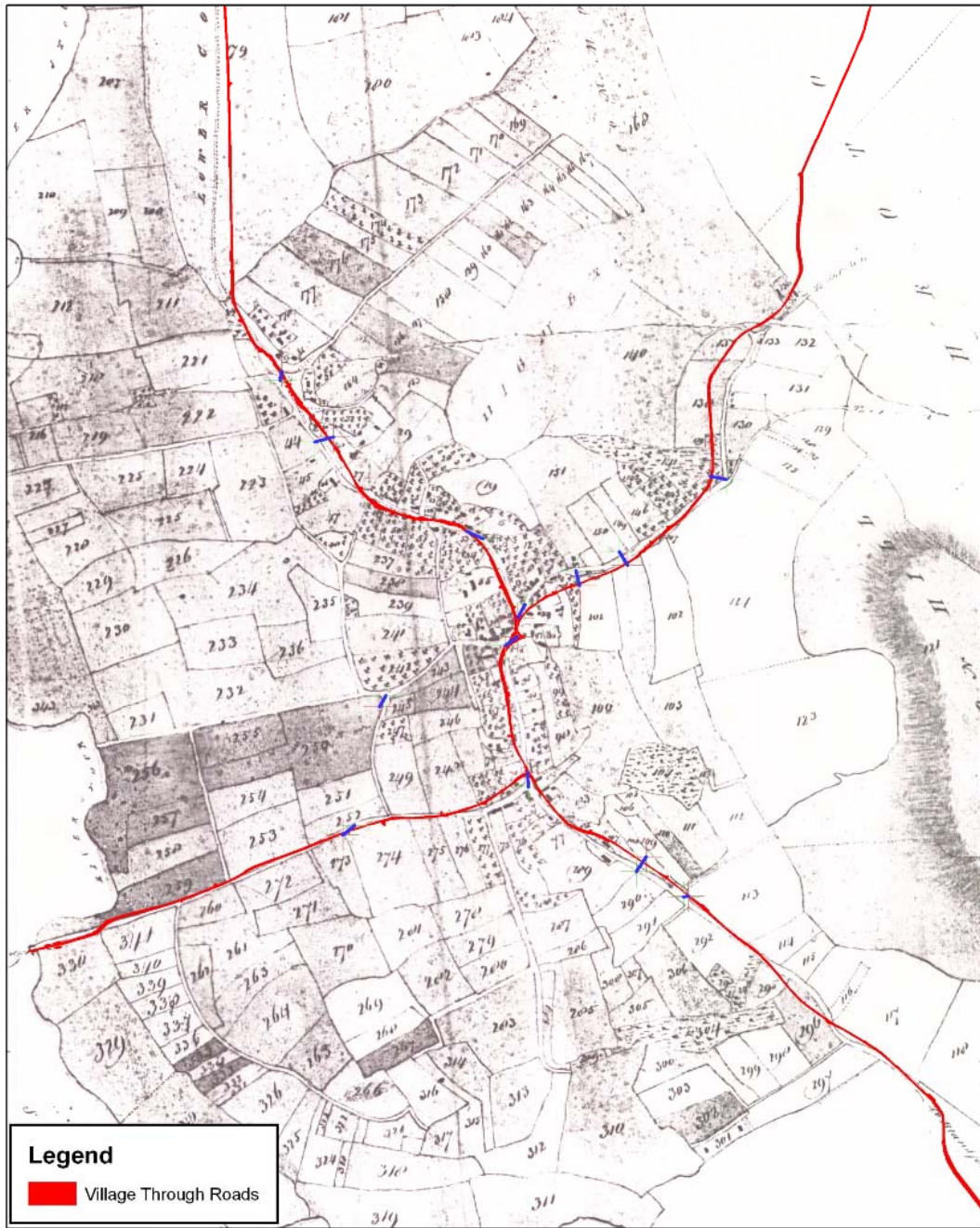
1372. To this day field names are recalled in the names of estates and houses, Chalwell, for example, and Netmead.

- 2.6 There are now over 500 dwellings in Child Okeford (*Map 5, Page 13*), their positions show that the village developed in 'ribbon' fashion along the original roads leading to the centre of the village from the very beginning (*Map 2, Page 7*). The route and pattern of those roads remains the same today.
- 2.7 The footpath links through the village and round the outskirts recall the days when labourers walked daily to the farm that was their place of work (*Map 3*). They also linked village to village.



Map. 3 Child Okeford Footpath Network

- 2.8 Terraces of houses along, what is now, Shaftesbury Road, reflect the need for the equivalent of social housing in the late 18th century with the quarry tiles being laid straight onto sand to form the ground floor. There were more than ten farms listed in Kelly's in 1865, 9 in 1895 and 10 farms and 6 smallholdings in 1935. The demise of the farms, down to four working farms by 2005 and none in the centre of the village, has caused the loss of the businesses that existed to service them (forge, saddler, butcher, cobbler, laundress, dress maker, tailor, fish dealer, wheelwright, draper and grocer, tallow chandler, blacksmith, hardware shop, two bakeries, carpenters/coffin maker, cider makers/orchards, telephone exchange, and more. There were originally two public houses and two off licences, one of which later became the Saxon Inn. The only clue to the existence of these trades is left in house names.



Map 2. 1834 Map of Child Okeford

2.9 The 505 dwellings listed in the 2001 census show that at that time 2.2% were second homes, 81.5% owner occupied, 10.1% social/housing association rented and 6.2% other tenure. 1.9% of the population were living in a communal establishment. The age of the parishioners (31.7% above the age of 64 years) is higher than the norm for North Dorset in a District which is in the overall national 'top ten' for age of population, while the number of children living in the village is recorded as 15.6%, 4% lower than the whole of North Dorset.