

Housing and Development

The initial villages survey identified housing development concerns, including references to 'in-fills' and lower cost housing, to be addressed in the subsequent main survey. The outcome of the main survey was that 89% of residents felt housing development is an important issue for the community and in that context 74% stated they did not want 'greenfield' sites developed in and around the villages. Over 70% expressed a preference for small to medium houses in any new and 'backland' developments, probably reflecting a desire for more affordable homes for younger families and the elderly. Only 12% of residents were in favour of any 'greenfield' development and 16% in favour of new social housing.



The less controversial way of building houses

In a wider sense this reflects the strong positive feelings expressed about the rural, peaceful nature of the villages and equally strong negative feelings over the effects of creeping urbanisation. In this context it should be borne in mind that with a population density of 4.4 persons per hectare Shiplake is one of the most densely populated smaller villages in South Oxfordshire, which has an average population density of 2 persons per hectare.

Background

SODC has a Core Strategy which was approved by central government earlier last year and is valid until 2027. Included in the Core Strategy is South Oxfordshire's plan to meet housing targets set by government. Within that plan the villages of Lower

Shiplake and Shiplake Cross are classified as two smaller villages, unsuitable for large scale sustainable development. The plan therefore only recognises the two villages as suitable for 'in-fill' and 'backland' development. The pressure at national level, however, to build more houses is exposing villages like ours to predatory large scale development schemes.

Building of small to medium houses

The predominant development in the last ten years has been 'backland'. The applications, on relatively small expensive plots, have inevitably been for larger houses. Through the planning process the Parish Council has sought to ensure that such developments are not excessive in scale. However, SODC is the approving authority in these cases and they are mainly approved when consistent with planning guidelines.

Should the requirement for smaller, more affordable houses become a larger issue, the Parish Council may have to investigate addressing such concerns with a plan to identify a suitable site.

Greenfield site development

As stated earlier, the smaller villages of Shiplake are excluded from large scale development within the Core Strategy. However, there are 'greenfield' areas adjacent to our villages that have attracted the attentions of developers e.g. Thames Farm. The SVP Steering Group, in responding to residents' wishes, supports the Parish Council's efforts in opposing such applications.



A greenfield site development?

The key criteria for rejecting such applications are non-compliance with SODC's Core Strategic Plan where development will:

- unacceptably erode the rural character of the villages' landscape
- unsustainably impact infrastructure including schools, roads, pedestrian safety etc.
- place untenable pressure on amenities
- result in non-compliance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

In the 2013/14 SODC review of parish boundaries, the Parish Council has asked that those areas of Harpsden Parish, which is effectively part of Lower Shiplake (parts of Northfield Avenue, Bolney, Reading and Woodlands roads), be included in Shiplake Parish. This would enable the parish to address issues such as housing development more effectively.

Urbanisation

The villages of Shiplake are no strangers to change and have seen considerable growth in the last 50 years. Lower Shiplake in particular has seen a 56% increase in the number of dwellings since 1970 and that growth, together with increases in population in the surrounding areas, has put pressure on the infrastructure, be it schools, highways or the railway. It is unlikely that these pressures will subside. Indeed the electrification of the railway and extended gravel extraction at Sonning could be added to the list. To ensure that the characteristics of the villages, most valued by residents are retained, the SVP SG suggests that the Parish Council establish a group to look at these matters and develop a plan that enables the villages to cope with such change, without sacrificing those aspects residents value enormously.

How an application is decided

SODC is the local authority responsible for housing and development planning and below is a simplified schematic of the process.

