



MCNP Housing Site Assessments – Update, September 2023.

This Update has been produced in advance of the Public Meeting on Wednesday, September 13th at 7.30pm in Steeple Aston Village Hall. It is intended to give those intending to come to the meeting an opportunity to consider the findings so far of the site assessment process. It should be read in conjunction with the Map, site list, and the Assessment Criteria. For those unable to attend, please see the last paragraph.

- The Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan (MCNP), written and developed by local people, was officially adopted in 2019. It includes planning policies that support housing development in Steeple Aston, Fritwell and Kirtlington, but which also limit the extent of growth to about 5% of existing dwelling numbers in the period to 2031. In Steeple Aston’s case, the growth figure was 20 dwellings. The MCNP is now under review by the Forum of 12 parishes, including Steeple Aston, presenting the opportunity to improve existing policies and add new ones in response to climate change and environmental protection. It is also an opportunity to look again at local housing need and ways of meeting it.
- In January 2023 Cherwell DC published a first version of its proposed Local Plan to 2040 (subsequently put on hold). Proposals in the draft Plan suggested that Steeple Aston and Kirtlington (the two “large villages” in the Mid-Cherwell NP area), might be expected to take 46 and 47 new houses respectively during the plan period. This represents growth of the order of 11%. The proposal prompted our first public meeting in Steeple Aston in February to gauge community reaction.
- Latest position: Following local elections and a change of political control, Cherwell have now re-started their Local Plan process with the same policies that we saw in January, but with some of the detail now omitted. The policy for rural areas remains as it was, with a proposal to distribute 500 new homes around the same 11 “large villages” as before, but specific numbers per village have been withheld. There is renewed emphasis on the ability of neighbourhood plans in these areas to allocate housing sites, if they wish to do so.
- As a result of the February meeting, and of agreement by both parish councils, teams were established in both Steeple Aston and Kirtlington, as part of the MCNP Review, to identify and assess possible housing sites in each village. A common process is being used for both villages on eligibility of sites, the assessment criteria and basis for scoring, and the community consultation process. Contact with land owners/ interests has been undertaken. The Steeple Aston team consists of Martin Lipson, Caroline Edwards, Paul Rodgers, and Philippa Tickle (from Duns Tew).

- There are three sources of sites: those previously submitted to CDC (sites 2,4, 6 and 7), requests to MCNP by site owners or developers (sites 1, 2 and 7), and finally sites nominated by the assessment teams (all the other sites); however, the process is still open to further ideas. Sites were not eligible for allocation if their site area was below a threshold size (5 houses) or if no access appeared feasible. Such sites could however potentially be developed in future as unplanned “windfall sites” if the problems are overcome. The 16 sites assessed are shown on the accompanying map, and on the list of sites and their owners.
- Owners have indicated whether the sites are available for development now, at some future date, or not at all. There are six sites in the last two categories, identified in mauve on the map. At the time of writing, two owners have not stated their response (sites 9 and 11).
- The criteria attached here are based on national standards and are as objective and factual as possible. Whilst it will not be practical at the meeting to go through all 31 criteria for each of the 16 sites, your observations are welcomed on the criteria themselves, and on how they apply to individual sites. Your comments at the meeting, or by email (see last paragraph), will supplement the views of the assessment team in arriving at final recommendations.
- The criteria have led to some broad classifications of the sites. The map indicates three of the sites assessed which are **not adjacent** to the village settlement areas (sites 1,2 and 7, shown in yellow). They could perhaps be considered as possible “rural exception sites”, but are probably not eligible for allocation. Five “**backland sites**” are also identified on the map (sites 3,4,9,11 and 15, shown in a khaki colour): these are sites that are generally behind existing dwellings, suffer from difficult access issues, and might produce housing with a sub-optimal relationship with the rest of the village. Two **frontage sites** are identified that do not suffer from those problems, but might have other issues (sites 6 and 8, shown in green).
- Existing MCNP policies require any new housing to be immediately adjacent to the settlement area; of the 5% addition (20 dwellings) over 12 years, 10 have already been built in Steeple Aston. A similar policy for the Review would suggest about 25-30 more in the period to 2040, starting with a fresh slate from 2024.
- However, the February meeting was clear that the numbers should be informed by the preferred sites, and by community preferences, not by a top-down approach. At this stage, we do not know if one or more sites, or indeed none at all, will be recommended.
- So no decisions regarding preferred sites have yet been taken: community views are an important part of the process. Recommendations will go to the October meetings of both PCs, then to the MCNP Forum. An independent evaluation of all the sites from our consultants will also be taken into account.
- In November, the draft MCNP Review, incorporating any recommendations on housing allocation in the two villages, will go out to public consultation. In Spring 2024 a further draft will be formally submitted to Cherwell, who will consult once again. An Examiner will then be appointed to decide whether the Plan can proceed to referendum, planned for early Summer 2024. Success at referendum brings the revised Plan immediately into force.

- Any site or sites to be allocated will have a recommended maximum number of dwellings per site, and can require a particular mix, type, design etc., as well as community facilities, if needed. At the February meeting, a strong preference was expressed for suitable housing for older and younger people in the village, and for much of it to be affordable in a way that many homes in the village are not.
- It may be possible to achieve such an outcome, with landowner support, by establishing a community-led housing process (eg with a Community Land Trust). Discussions with experts in this field are underway. There are many hurdles to overcome before any such schemes could begin on the ground.

Thanks for reading this update. We hope you will be able to attend the meeting to hear what others have to say, and to raise your own questions or comments.

If you're not able to attend, please email any questions or comments to mcnpsites@gmail.com either before or after the meeting, and we will do our best to reply.

Steeple Aston Site Assessment Team