

1. Introduction



1.1 Foreword

A Neighbourhood Plan is a community's vision for how its town or parish should evolve. It is not a static document but an ongoing journey—one that adapts as times and priorities change. Shaftesbury's Neighbourhood Plan, initiated in 2018, has steadily progressed, shaped by the dedication of local residents. This latest update, reviewed in 2025 and finalised in July 2026, builds upon previous work, ensuring the town's future remains guided by informed public input and a commitment to sustainability.

The 2018 plan, made in 2021, captured a comprehensive reflection of public opinion on Shaftesbury's future at the time. However, the past five years have presented significant national and global challenges—spanning Brexit, the Covid pandemic, political shifts, and serious environmental concerns—which have necessitated critical updates. This latest version, reviewed in 2025, reinforces and expands upon the earlier vision, ensuring Shaftesbury's priorities remain forward-looking and resilient.

Throughout this journey, collaboration between the town council and volunteers has added practical detail to Shaftesbury's response to the climate and nature emergency. As part of this commitment, Shaftesbury Town Council has declared Shaftesbury to be Britain's first *Nature Friendly Town* and, more specifically, an *Orchard Town*. This means that our vision includes enhanced biodiversity within the town—such as orchards in public places, wildlife corridors linking the urban landscape to the countryside, and the establishment of a developer-free *Green Wheel* to protect natural spaces.

Whilst this Neighbourhood Plan celebrates Shaftesbury's rich history, its true purpose is to shape the town's future and ensure that sustainability and the recovery of the natural world is at the heart of all future development.

To quote Sir David Attenborough: '*We must always remember in defining any human activity that we are a part of nature and not apart from it.*'

Shaftesbury Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Committee



1.2 What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

The Neighbourhood Plan is a set of guidelines that will ensure that planners consider Shaftesbury's heritage and setting and the needs and aspirations of residents when assessing new development.

The government does not allow Neighbourhood Plans to block development. We can't say that we don't want any more houses built, for example. Instead, our plan will help ensure that any new development is appropriate to its setting and is sustainable.



Neighbourhood Plans have no power to demand that new facilities are built, either. We have no authority to request another doctors' surgery, school or car park, for example. But a Neighbourhood Plan can highlight the need for such facilities, and give guidance on where these could be developed and what they might look like, if they do get built.

i The 'planners' are the 'decision makers' who determine planning applications. These decision makers include planning officers, members of the Planning Committee, planning inspectors, and even the Secretary of State. Planners can easily be interpreted as just the planning officers at the Council who, although they make the majority of planning decisions, are not the only ones who can do so.

People want to live in Shaftesbury. We enjoy a strong community spirit. There's a thriving arts sector, interesting independent shops, our lively street market, and good schools. Shaftesbury's setting is stunning. Green slopes, ancient woodlands and the chalk downs surround us. As you climb up through the ancient, tree-lined holloways to reach our historic Saxon hilltop town, you get a sense that this really is a special place.

You probably care passionately about Shaftesbury. That's why you are reading this document. A team of volunteers who feel the same way has created this Neighbourhood Plan, and has also been involved in its review. We're all residents, we all love our town and we want to protect the unique aspects of Shaftesbury life that make this an exceptional place to live.

This plan is a blueprint, a guide for planners when they make decisions about our town's future. The plan is different to any strategy that has been prepared before and it's based on what you've told us. We've surveyed fellow residents to find out what needs to happen to make life better here. Each and every one of the policies in this plan is based on research, evidence

gathering and consultation.

The policies in this document should be used when planners assess applications for new individual homes, housing estates and commercial or community premises in Shaftesbury. The plan should also guide the planners when they need to decide whether property owners may change the use of their premises, from shops to living accommodation, for example. The plan runs to 2031, although it may be reviewed and the plan period extended in the future. The first Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in June 2021 following a local referendum, when over 85% of those voting in Shaftesbury voted 'yes' to this plan.



1.3 Why should I read it?

Some Shaftesbury developments have used high quality building materials, appropriate to their setting within the town or countryside. At the other end of the scale, some projects have paid little reference to their location and their construction and finish has not been well received.

A Neighbourhood Plan can inform planners what our town's residents expect from the style and design of new developments. People who make the decisions which impact on Shaftesbury are not necessarily based here. They may be unfamiliar with our town and our aspirations. With a Neighbourhood Plan in place, developers or local government officials will quickly understand what Shaftesbury people want.

It is important to understand that the Shaftesbury Neighbourhood Plan policies cannot block development that is already part of the wider Local Plan which covers the whole of the former North Dorset district. But Shaftesbury's Neighbourhood Plan can shape where that development will go and what it will look like.

Again, we need to stress that we are not allowed to say 'NO' to any more development. We know that many Shaftesbury residents have strong views about more building. This plan cannot promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area or undermine those strategic policies. But it can highlight those undeveloped green spaces which are especially important to the local community and should be protected. It can also set out what the community expects from any new development.

The wide-ranging policies in the Shaftesbury Neighbourhood Plan touch on nearly every aspect of Shaftesbury life. If you shop or socialise, play sport, work, walk or drive in or around our town, we think that you will find at least one policy which addresses your concerns or experiences.

This Neighbourhood Plan is not a publication that will be forgotten about. It won't sit on a shelf, gathering dust. It may need to be updated as circumstances change in the future. Just like our town, it will need to be adapted to cater for new demands and to embrace fresh ideas.

Through the first review of this Plan, we identified some elements that needed updating or strengthening, and we asked the community for feedback on these changes,

which were then considered by an Independent Examiner. With a few minor updates, he felt that the updated Plan 'should continue to prove to be a useful tool for future planning and change within Shaftesbury over the coming years.' Our hope is that it can continue to preserve the character of our small, unique Dorset town and keep it vibrant. Not just for us, but for the next generation of Shaftesbury residents.

Gold Hill



1.4 How to read this document

We have split the Neighbourhood Plan into two separate parts.

Part 1—Sections 1 to 6 will be of interest to most people who care about Shaftesbury. It explains how Shaftesbury has developed through time and outlines some of the challenges we face today as the town continues to grow.

Part 2—Appendices and Supporting Information contains more technical information, references and evidence. If you are interested in the background behind some of the ideas, you may find it useful.

The plan follows themes. We have colour-coded each section in the hope that it makes it easier to follow.

The **Town Centre** section is blue

The **Housing and Employment** section is yellow

The **Green Infrastructure** section is green

The **Design and Heritage** section is purple

The **Community, Leisure & Tourism** section is pink

Quick Read

We understand that not everyone has the time to read this entire document. It is large! So, we've created a Quick Read option like this. On each page, we have summarised each of our policies or explained technical terms that you might be unfamiliar with. If you're in a rush, you can get an understanding of what we hope to achieve by browsing the quick read notes.

POLICY

The actual planning policies (which are what planning applications are tested against) are shown in shaded panels coloured for the section, like this.

You might be interested in reading more about your local area and seeing how consultants have compared it to other districts of Shaftesbury. You will find separate mini chapters in **Design and Heritage** on:

- ▶ Bimport
- ▶ The Town Centre
- ▶ St James
- ▶ Grosvenor Road, Barton Hill and Cockram's Field
- ▶ Layton Lane
- ▶ Cann
- ▶ Enmore Green
- ▶ East of Christy's Lane

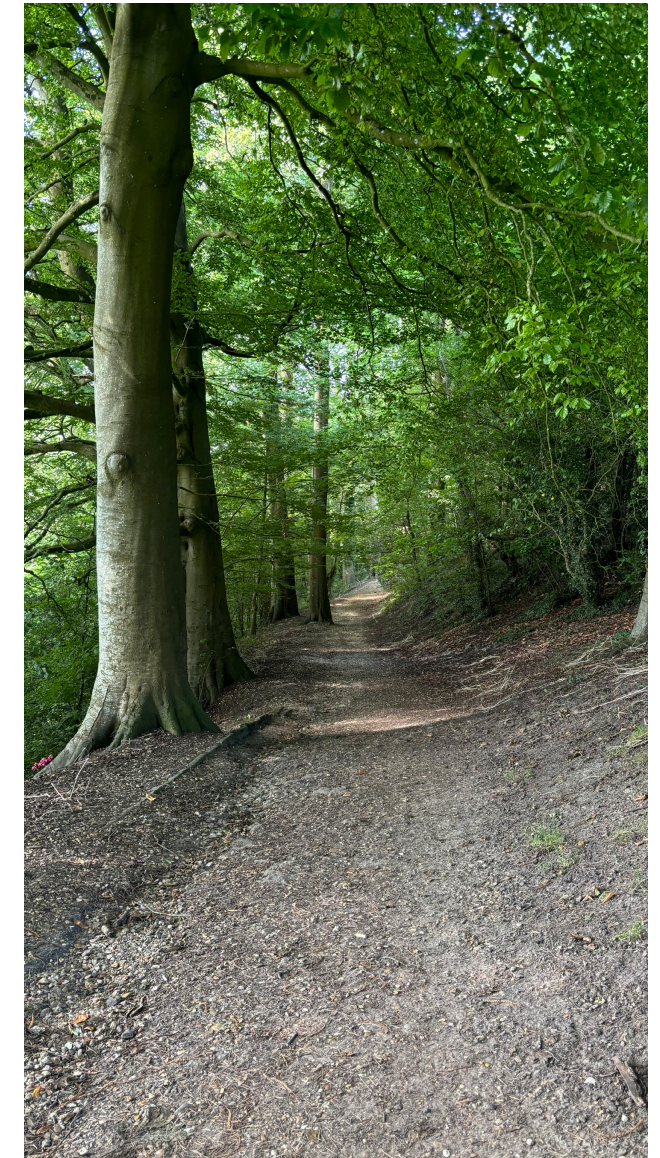
Policies in this plan are written to cater for a wide range of planning applications, which means that some flexibility needs to be built into the policy tests on occasion.

Where words such as '**will**' or '**must**' have been used, this means that the policy test must be complied with and it is not expected that there will be exceptions made to this policy.

Where words such as '**should**' or '**is encouraged**' are used, this means in general it is expected that the policy test will be met, but recognises that there may be exceptions made due to specific circumstances. It does not imply that the policy is optional. If an applicant considers

that their case is an exception, then they should include information explaining the reasons why they consider such an exception should be made.

Pine Walk



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1.6 Our population

The first population Table in **Appendix N** shows the anticipated population growth in the town from 2011 to 2031 and this equates to about a 45% increase. This has been updated based on more recent housebuilding rates (to 2022), projections and the 2021 Census data that is now available.

The second Table in **Appendix N** highlights a 25% increase in Shaftesbury's population from 2011 to 2021, which is the highest in North Dorset (the second highest being a 5% increase at Blandford).

3,234 more people in 2031 v 2011	Equates to 45% increase
1,468 more houses in 2031 v 2011	

Strategic Planning Policies

In preparing the 2016 Local Plan, North Dorset District Council looked to its main towns (including Shaftesbury) to function as the main service centres and to be the main focuses for growth. As part of this work, consideration was given to the amount of development that was needed and would be appropriate for each town. Local Plan Policy 2: Core Spatial Strategy identifies Shaftesbury as one of the four main towns in North Dorset, where growth will be focused.

For Shaftesbury, it has long been recognised that the potential for expansion is limited by the landscape and biodiversity constraints. There are steep 'slopes' to the south, west and north of the town centre, and further development in these directions would either be impracticable, harmful to valuable landscape views or harmful to the heritage of the town. There are also areas protected for their biodiversity value on these slopes. The boundary with Wiltshire Council lies to the east of the town, and edge of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape runs close to this boundary. There are only a limited number of potentially developable sites where the town could grow.

The main planning objectives for the town are included in Policy 18 of the Local Plan, whilst Policy 12 of that document supports town centre enhancement and growth.

A number of more detailed (non-strategic) policies from the earlier 2003 Local Plan have been saved, for example in relation to safeguarding the character of the town.

The Neighbourhood Plan has to work within the strategic framework provided by the adopted Local Plan. Our aims very much fit within this framework and should ensure that changes to the town and surrounding area are positive ones that respect the environment and unique history of the area.

Emerging Dorset Local Plan

In early 2021 Dorset Council published the first draft of its new Local Plan, which will eventually replace the North Dorset Plan. A further draft is likely to be issued in Summer 2026, and the plan should be finalized by the end of 2027. Whilst the first draft is not given any significant weight in planning decisions, it is worth noting that it does not propose any further growth around Shaftesbury other than the sites already planned.

Basic Conditions

Legislation requires Neighbourhood Plans to be accompanied by a Basic Conditions Statement which confirms, for example, that the document meets legal requirements, has regard to national and strategic policies; and will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. This will be checked as part of the Examination of this Plan. A copy of the Statement accompanying the original Neighbourhood Plan can be found on Dorset Council's web-site. <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/shaftesbury-neighbourhood-plan-2019-2031>

1.7 The Neighbourhood Plan area

The Shaftesbury Neighbourhood Plan can only influence decisions on planning and development within the boundaries of the parish of Shaftesbury, the Town Council's area.

Some places that are within walking distance of Shaftesbury Town Centre, and part of the settlement area defined in the North Dorset Local Plan, are not actually in the administrative parish of Shaftesbury. Virginia Hayward's premises on the A350 are in Motcombe Parish, for example.

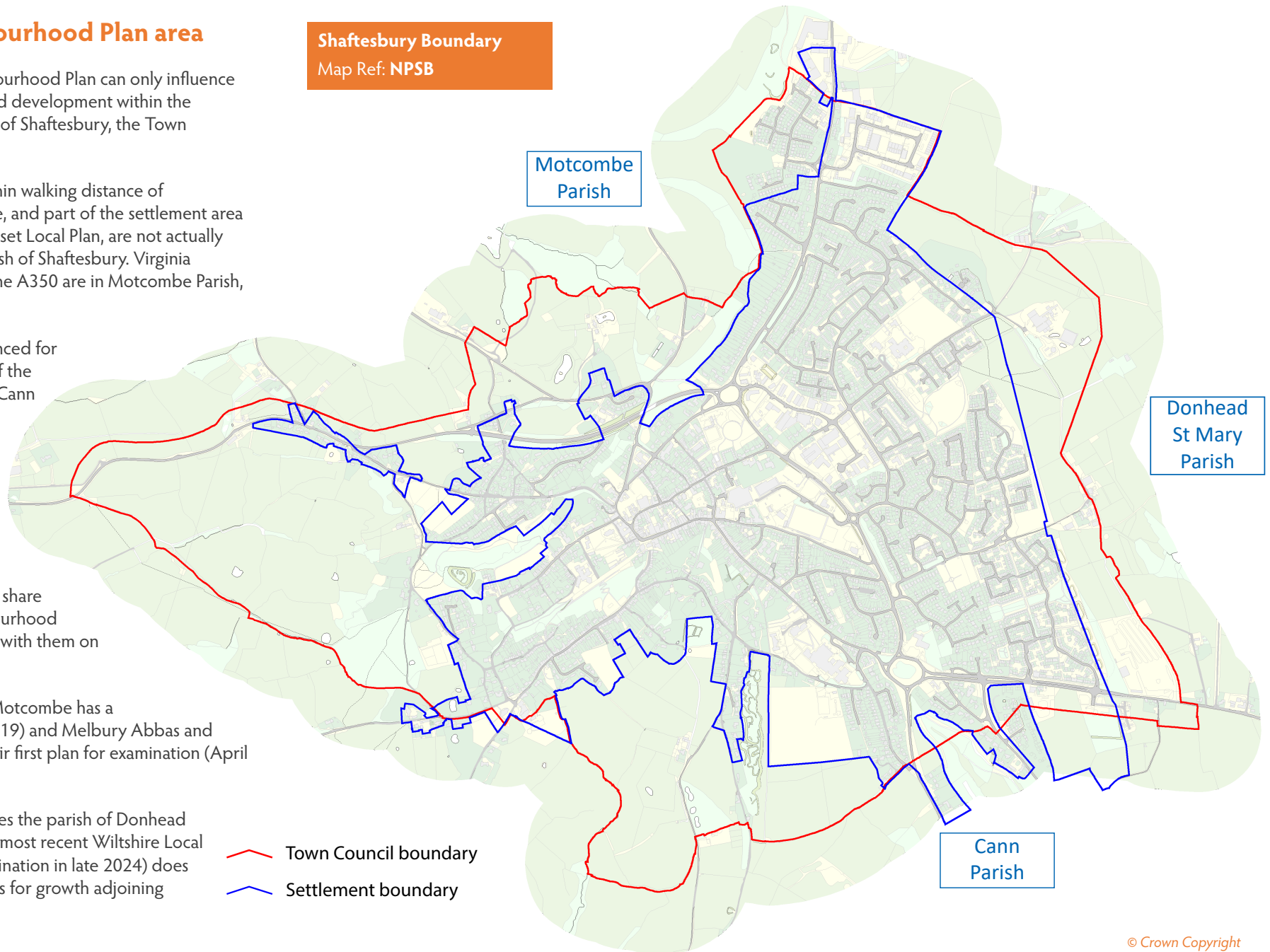
Some of the land ring-fenced for employment use south of the A30 Salisbury Road is in Cann Parish. Parts of the Lower Blandford Road, Higher Blandford Road and Foyle Hill are also in Cann Parish.

We have and will continue to liaise with neighbouring councils to share the Shaftesbury Neighbourhood Plan policies and engage with them on the content of the plan.

The adjoining parish of Motcombe has a Neighbourhood Plan (2019) and Melbury Abbas and Cann have submitted their first plan for examination (April 2025).

To the east of the town lies the parish of Donhead St Mary in Wiltshire. The most recent Wiltshire Local Plan (submitted for examination in late 2024) does not contain any proposals for growth adjoining Shaftesbury."

Shaftesbury Boundary
Map Ref: NPSB



1.8 Aims, objectives and vision

Vision for 2031: “Shaftesbury is the best example of how an historic, hilltop market town adapts and thrives in the 21st century, working towards net-zero emissions whilst keeping its unique identity and character and respecting its beautiful countryside setting and nationally renowned views.”

Shaftesbury is one of England's most historic settlements and was established around the Abbey in the year 888. The town we love today has been shaped by its history as a place of pilgrimage and as a successful market town.

Our street layout reveals a great deal about our heritage. Different areas of our town have their own unique feel and character. Retaining that sense of place and individuality is really important to the Neighbourhood Plan.

The historic ‘core’ comprises a single main street, the High Street, and parallel lanes, like Bell Street and Bleke Street.

The Medieval market town to the east is made up of an irregular grid of streets and lanes, including Muston's Lane and Angel Lane. A pattern of roads spreads out from the town to nearby settlements.

Below the hilltop is St James, an early ‘suburb’ of the town. The settlement follows one long street.

Historic buildings form a major part of the character of Shaftesbury. The majority of modern suburban development is largely concentrated to the east of the historic town. Smaller areas of modern housing are found on the edges of Enmore Green, St James and Cann.

Modern suburban development in Shaftesbury is typical of its period. It has little local distinctiveness.

Open and wooded areas on Shaftesbury's historic hilltop and on the steep slopes around the town include Abbey Park and Castle Hill, both settings for ancient monuments. These, and the long views across the Blackmore Vale to the north, west and south, contribute significantly to the distinctive rural hilltop character of the town and are a magnet for many British and overseas visitors.

The nationally important landscape of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, wraps around the north, east and south sides of the town, which has international acclaim for its dark night skies.

Our work has comprehensively covered all aspects of the town relevant to neighbourhood planning. We have used five different themes to present this:

“We must always remember in defining any human activity that we are a part of nature and not apart from it”

Sir David Attenborough

- ▶ The Town Centre
- ▶ Housing and Employment
- ▶ Green Infrastructure
- ▶ Design and Heritage
- ▶ Community, Leisure & Tourism

There are a number of policies within these headline themes, that will be used to guide planning decisions. These policies aim to:

- ▶ Support projects and proposals that go beyond the current standards for sustainable development,

including zero carbon, significant biodiversity benefits and the take-up of sustainable transport modes

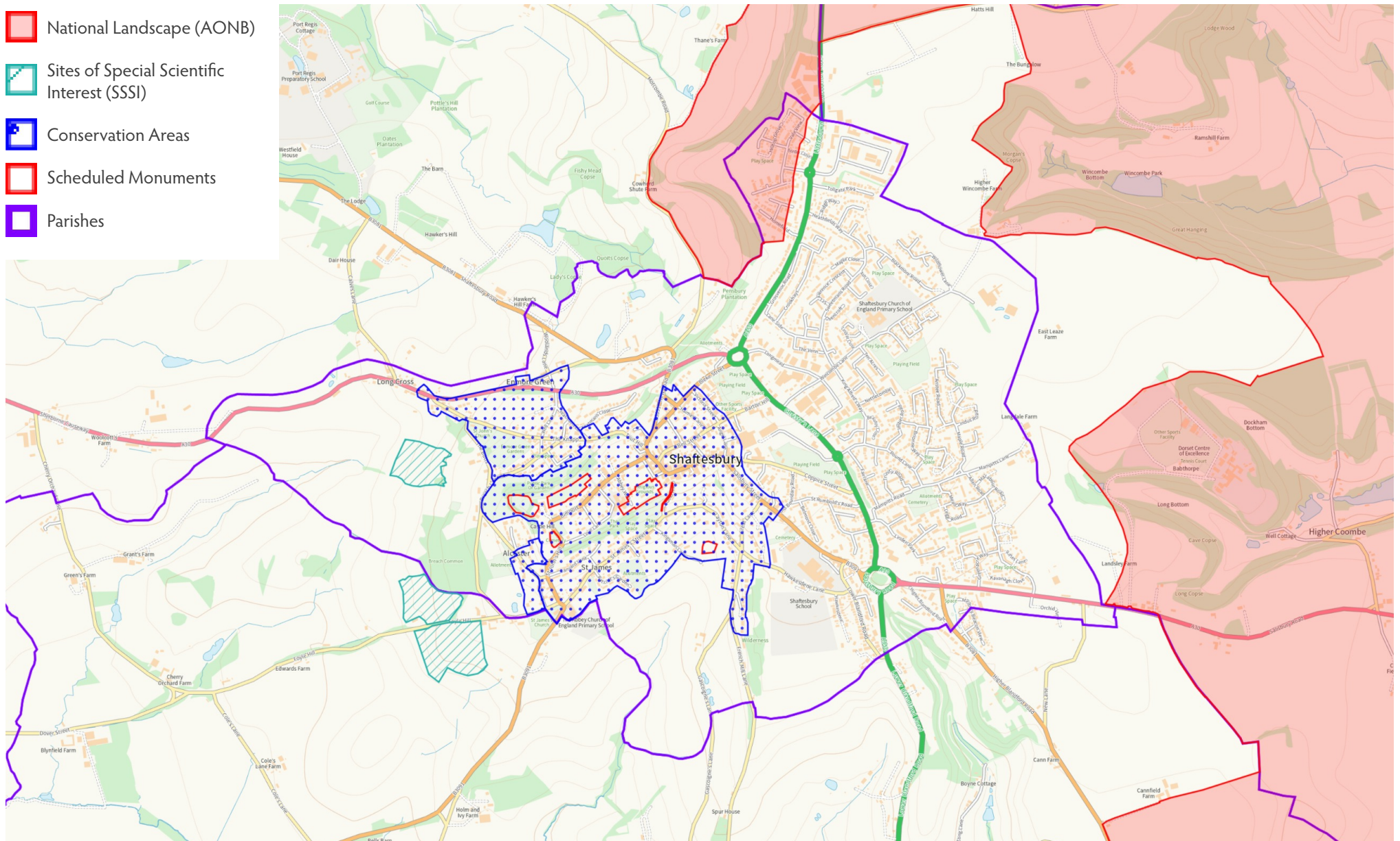
- ▶ Support the vibrancy of the town centre, with its independent shops and markets, and strong association with arts/crafts
- ▶ Ensure further housing and employment provision reflects the needs of local residents and businesses – in this review we have added in specific policies to ensure the sites that are likely to come forward within the town are sensitively developed
- ▶ Protect important green spaces and corridors, and maximise their potential for recreation, walking and cycling links and as wildlife areas
- ▶ Make sure that new buildings are of high quality that complement the best of Shaftesbury whilst being environmentally friendly
- ▶ Establish that the social, educational, healthcare and road infrastructure is sufficient for future needs, and that any improvements are delivered in a timely manner.

Enmore Green



Key environmental constraints

-  National Landscape (AONB)
-  Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
-  Conservation Areas
-  Scheduled Monuments
-  Parishes



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Vision map

Protecting the town's green spaces, trees and countryside

-  Important green spaces and tree groups
-  Visually sensitive slopes

Protecting the town's heritage and key views

-  The town's historic core
-  Viewpoints

Strengthening the town centre and local facilities, such as at Mampitts

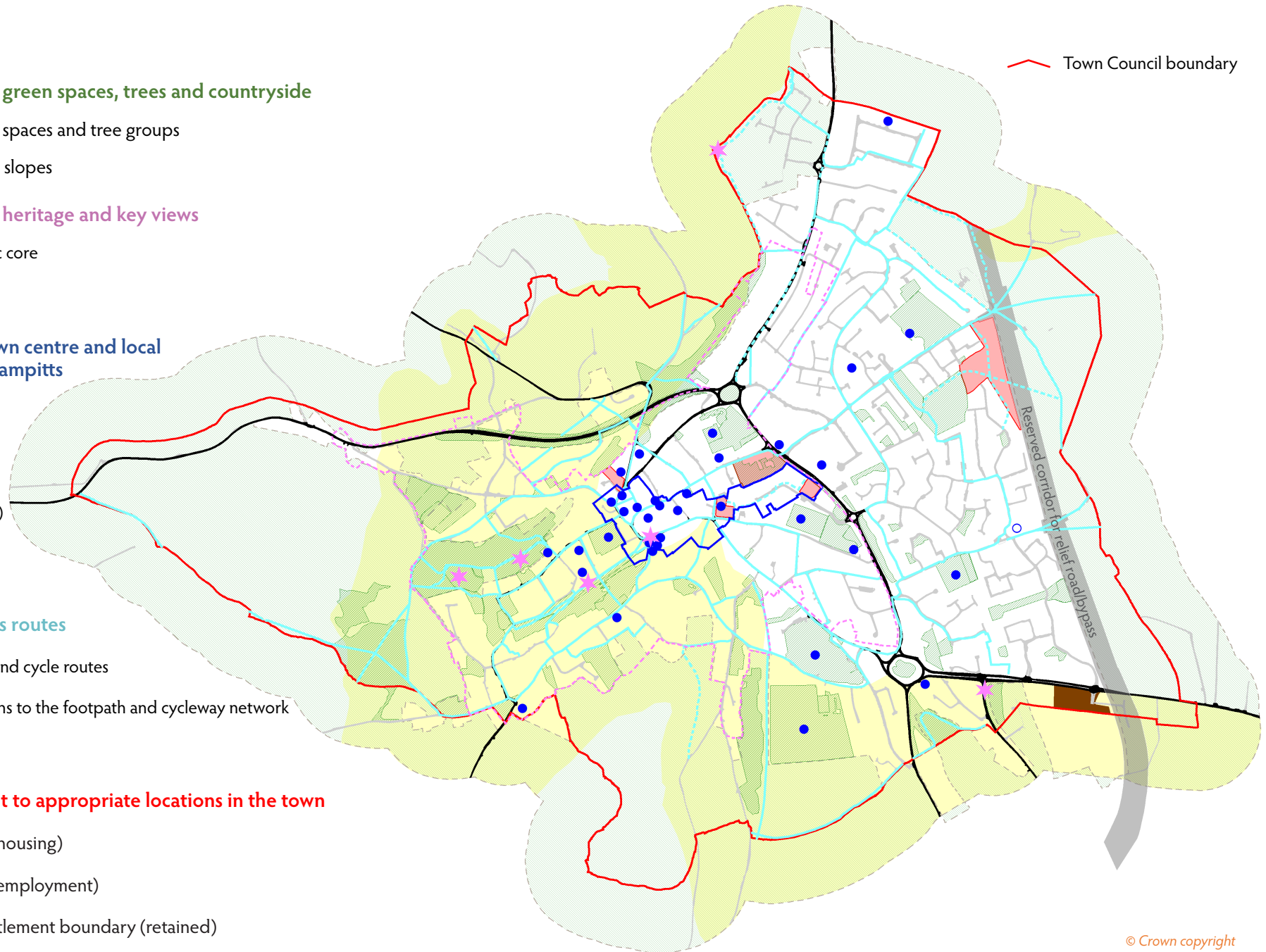
-  Town centre
-  Key community facilities
-  Key community facilities (planned)

Improving local access routes

-  Public footpaths and cycle routes
-  Proposed additions to the footpath and cycleway network
-  Public bridleways

Steering development to appropriate locations in the town

-  Site allocations (housing)
-  Site allocations (employment)
-  Area outside settlement boundary (retained)



1.9 Community views on planning

We have read and assessed the feedback from 'free form' comments from the previous Shaftesbury, Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire (2014), particularly focusing on the questions with the highest response. Free form comments are when someone writes down their ideas or suggestions without answering a specific question, so they are able to raise any topics they are concerned about.

Following on from this, we have run three more consultations. A mini survey was run in June 2018. This checked that the results of the earlier 2014 still held true. In February 2019, we consulted on our draft policy ideas

to check that they were generally supported. And finally, in August and September 2019, we consulted on the first full version of this plan.

There were two questions in the February 2019 consultation that resulted in policy amendments (where a high percentage of respondents disagreed with the policy intentions we had suggested).

Even though many people agreed with the option to accept small scale affordable housing developments outside of the settlement boundary (which could mean building on green fields) over 60% of responses indicated no support for this policy.

We have listened to the community. As a result of this consultation feedback there is no specific policy on affordable housing. There is, however, insight relating to the needs of local people as defined in the Dorset Council housing register and therefore a project is included in **Appendix B**.

Another of our earlier draft policies suggested adding an additional floor to certain buildings in the town centre to create accommodation. Whilst nearly 60% of people agreed or felt neutral with upward extension of single storey buildings in the town centre, there were still a significant amount of responses that did not support this policy intention, so we have not encouraged this change.

Feedback from initial consultation in 2015— summary of key points:

Key Point	Number of responses	Additional comments in free-form text
The importance of protecting and enhancing the quality of housing development	752	205
Concerns about infrastructure, such as roads, public transport, community buildings **	828***	220
Concerns regarding healthcare and medical facilities	967	232
The importance of protecting and enhancing our open spaces and views	967	305
The need to improve the walking and cycling network	666	289

** Includes questions relating to parking, traffic congestion, education provision, road safety, outdoor space, public transport and leisure facilities.

*** An average of 828 responses based on a total of 10 questions relating to infrastructure.

Percentage of residents concerned and personally affected by:

Key Point	Number of respondents concerned	% of responses
GP and health facilities: Had an unacceptable wait for an appointment within the last year	113	73%
Frequently unable to park within reach of where I need to go	68	44%
Traffic congestion: Frequent Delays on Shaftesbury's Roads	73	47%

Feedback from phase 1 consultation (February 2019)—summary of key points:

Key Point	Number of responses	Number of residents	% Residents
Residents who broadly agreed with the Town Centre Policy intentions	160	125	78%
Residents who broadly agreed with the Town Centre Policy intentions	232	132	57%
Residents who broadly agreed with the Housing and Employment Policy intentions	164	143	87%
Residents who broadly agreed with the Design and Heritage Policy intentions	142	118	83%
Residents who broadly agreed with the Community, Leisure & Tourism Policy intentions	158	128	81%

1.10 Climate change

During the drafting of our Neighbourhood Plan, the need for an urgent response to climate change has become more widely acknowledged. Public concern about the impact of a changing climate and the loss of biodiversity is increasingly apparent globally, nationally and in Shaftesbury.

Parliament, Dorset and many other councils, as well as Shaftesbury Town Council, have all declared a 'Climate Emergency'. The UK Government has committed to the achievement of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Shaftesbury Town Council prepared its own Sustainable Communities action plan in 2020. This aims for the Town Council to be carbon neutral by 2030 and explores opportunities for the community of Shaftesbury to also attain that target.

Feedback from the consultation on Shaftesbury's draft Neighbourhood Plan in the Summer of 2019 highlighted an over-arching issue was whether enough had been done to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This is an integral part of all the themes within the plan, so we have taken the opportunity to look again at our policies and projects, reinforcing them where possible.

Since that time, the Town Council has adopted the Sustainable Shaftesbury Action Plan 2023–31.

What can this Neighbourhood Plan help with?

Shaftesbury's townspeople have a high dependence on nearby towns and cities for services and employment, rely on car transport to a significant extent, and are vulnerable to rising energy prices.

Climatic changes and past farming practices have adversely impacted local wildlife and biodiversity.

Our characteristic tree cover is vulnerable to extremes of weather that are becoming more frequent.

The surrounding countryside is known for beef and dairy farming with relatively few local producers of fruit and vegetables. Areas of higher grade farmland lie primarily to the east of the town (including areas of Grade 2 farmland, which is amongst the best and most versatile agricultural land in the country). Farming can also help support

wildlife and sustainable local food production.

We have a substantial elderly population whose health is at risk during heat-waves. Some of our older housing stock is not particularly well insulated or energy efficient.

Cutting carbon emissions can be achieved through reducing our need to travel and by reducing the fossil fuel-derived energy we use in our homes and our businesses. For a more sustainable future we'll need to be:

- ▶ Buying more locally sourced seasonal food, and reducing food and other waste
- ▶ Walking or cycling short distances, and using public transport or electric cars when travelling further
- ▶ Cutting down unnecessary business travel, for example by home-working, working locally and using video conferencing instead of travelling to meetings
- ▶ Retrofitting and decarbonising buildings, so that old and new buildings retain warmth in winter and remain cool in the summer
- ▶ Fitting renewable energy and water-saving devices, and generating more of our energy requirement locally using renewables
- ▶ Managing green spaces for biodiversity and creating places where wildlife can thrive
- ▶ Planting trees and managing pasture to increase carbon capture



Bug & Hedgehog Hotel at Queen Mother Garden



Vision Statement and Masterplan
Shaftesbury's response to the climate and nature emergency

'Think Global, Act Local'

1.10 Climate change (continued)

Many of the policies and projects in the Shaftesbury Neighbourhood Plan will help our transition to a low-carbon future. Our policies will have an impact on any new development, whilst our projects relate to existing buildings and green spaces or focus on making climate-smart lifestyle choices more accessible. Many of these projects align with Sustainable Shaftesbury Action Plan.

The relevant policy and project contributions as refreshed as part of the 2024 update are outlined by themes below:

The Town Centre:

- ▶ Developing the town centre as a safe and pedestrian-friendly public space—**Policy SFTC1** and **Project TC5**.
- ▶ Supporting our vibrant town centre so that people can shop locally—**Policy SFTC2**.
- ▶ Supporting the installation of electric (or other ultra-low emission) vehicle charging points—**Policy SFTC4**.

Housing and Employment:

- ▶ Making environmental sustainability a key consideration if development of new housing is proposed—**Policy SFHE1**.
- ▶ Reducing the need for commuting by requiring housing development to include provision for those working from home and by supporting local employment opportunities—**Policies SFHE2** and **SFHE3**.

Green Infrastructure:

- ▶ Protecting or promoting a network of biodiverse green spaces and green corridors, conserving established trees and hedgerows, planting more trees and ensuring appropriate species are used in new tree and other planting—**Policies SFGI1** and **SFGI3**, **Projects GI1** and **GI3**.
- ▶ Requiring energy-efficient lighting that protects dark skies and reduces light pollution that is harmful to insects—**Policy SFGI4** and **Project GI4**.
- ▶ Encouraging community-supported renewable energy generation—**Project GI5**.

Design and Heritage:

- ▶ Promoting green, environmentally sustainable building standards—**Policies SFGI2**, **SFGI3**, **SFGI4** and **SFDH7**.



Community, Leisure & Tourism:

- ▶ Supporting increased provision of allotments—**Policy SFCL1**.
- ▶ Giving proper consideration to routes for buses, cyclists, footpaths and green infrastructure in our housing developments—**Policies SFHE2** and **SFCL3**, **Projects CL2**, **CL3**, **CL4**.
- ▶ Improving connections with cycle routes beyond the town—**Project CL6**.

