

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, slender trees and a thick canopy. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. The text "4. Green Infrastructure" is centered in the upper half of the image in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

4. Green Infrastructure

4.1 Green Infrastructure: Key messages and aims

The context

Green infrastructure is the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces and waterways that intersperse and connect villages, towns and cities. It ranges from pastures and woodland to playing fields and street trees. Within a town, each green infrastructure element may have an obvious primary function but will also bring many other benefits. For example, street trees can enhance a residential area but also serve to reduce airborne pollution, provide shade and shelter, support insects and birds, and mitigate climate change.

Shaftesbury's distinctiveness comes from its elevated position above undulating countryside characterised as 'rolling vales' to the north, west and south. Our historic hilltop town boasts some outstanding open views yet from the surrounding countryside much of Shaftesbury is hidden, nestling amongst the extensive tree cover. Breach

Fields to the west of the town is designated as a nationally important wildlife site, being a rare example of a species-rich neutral grassland. Further to the south, the chalk grassland habitats on Fontmell and Melbury Downs are internationally important.

For townspeople and visitors alike, the experience of walking around the town is marked by hedgerows alive with noisy sparrows, lichen-marked stone walls, footpaths that descend through 'hangings' of mature trees or out into the countryside of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, which wraps around the north, east and south sides of our town.

Any new developments in Shaftesbury should allow residents to move around the town and access schools by foot or by bicycle—safe and accessible walking and cycling routes that enable residents to experience our town's rural setting. New projects should ensure that opportunities for walking cycling and exercising in the fresh air are facilitated, leading to an enhanced sense of wellbeing.

Key characteristics of the wider countryside, as described



in the Dorset Landscape Character Assessment, relate to its diverse pattern of trees, woodland, hedgerow and small-scale fields, watercourses and narrow lanes, and the generally rural and tranquil nature of the area.

We have carried out a survey of green spaces within the Neighbourhood Plan area on foot, with notebook and camera to hand. This is described within the Green Infrastructure Audit (see **Appendix L**).

We have applied the national Fields in Trust standards formula to the amount of green spaces that a community could expect, to assess what is currently provided for; formal sports grounds, equipped play areas, parks and gardens, allotments and accessible open areas. Shaftesbury falls short of the recommended national Fields in Trust standards. That means it is really important to protect the existing open spaces close to where people live.



View of Shaftesbury from Melbury

The Town Council declared Shaftesbury as a *Nature Friendly Town* in April 2025. The Sustainable Shaftesbury Advisory Committee (SuSAC) is progressing further initiatives, and hopes to work with local landowners to establish a 'Green Wheel' around the town as well as a wildlife hub and corridor. Any relevant policy implications arising from these initiatives can be considered in the next review.

Key feedback from consultation

In our consultation exercise on our draft policy ideas, the community told us they wanted the Neighbourhood Plan to protect our slopes and the green and open spaces in and around our town.

86% of respondents to that survey said that they broadly agreed with our green spaces policy intentions. A similar view was expressed in an earlier Neighbourhood Plan survey, carried out in 2014 and 2015. Then, over 85% of people said that protecting and/or enhancing our green infrastructure was important.

Key messages

Based on what local people have told us, we have identified the following aims:

Landscape and topography:

To conserve and enhance the sense of place by ensuring new development integrates with the patchwork of wooded areas, hedgerows, slopes and pathways across the landscape and respects important views both from the town and from vantage points in the wider area.

Bluebells on Pine Walk

History and culture:

To protect and enhance the environment around Shaftesbury's historic sites.

Ecology and biodiversity:

To enhance sustainability in its widest sense by promoting and providing habitats that boost biodiversity; mitigate climate change, noise and air pollution; help with management of surface water and drainage; and provide opportunities for education, recreation and play.

Health and wellbeing:

To protect and enhance a green infrastructure network that sustains wellbeing and incorporates green spaces and amenity areas interconnected by new and improved footpaths and cycleways.

To improve access to open countryside and walking/cycling routes to local towns and villages.

To ensure that there are adequate and easily accessible

formal and informal sports provision and play areas for all residents.

To ensure that there is adequate provision of allotments and communal spaces with opportunities for community growing.



Protecting Shaftesbury's special green spaces

A Neighbourhood Plan can protect many of the green spaces that are particularly special to local people. This protection could be because of their historic or cultural significance, their recreational value, their intrinsic beauty or tranquillity, or for their richness of wildlife.

Provided areas are local in character, within the Neighbourhood Plan area, and not needed for development, they can be designated as Local Green Spaces (or LGS). The rules on what can and can't be designated are defined by National Planning Policy.

Within Shaftesbury's development boundary there are a number of green spaces with tree cover that are important for their contribution to the character of Shaftesbury, but they have either limited or no public access. Historically, many of these were classed as Important Open or Wooded Areas (IOWAs) and these have been identified as Important Treed Areas (ITAs) in this plan.

The trees will have additional protection from felling where they are within the conservation area or have an existing Tree Preservation Order.

The justification for designation of spaces as LGS or ITA is given in **Appendix L**, and more detail is provided in the separate Audit document.



Rott Millennium Green



St James Park



Park Walk



A Shaftesbury Allotment

4.2 Local Green Spaces and Important Treed Areas

What does Policy SFGI1 set out to do?

To protect the important and locally valued green spaces.

Shaftesbury has green spaces that are linked to highly valued historic sites, wooded spaces that contribute to the character of the town and mitigate climate change, and spaces that give access to long views. Other spaces are valuable to nearby residents because they offer play or other recreational opportunities. Such spaces have been designated for protection from development, where they qualify as Local Green Spaces—a designation similar to Green Belt (but at a more local level) based on criteria set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Some important spaces could not be designated at this time. For example, new development at Littledown, to the north of the town, will provide a significant area of parkland giving long views over Gillingham Royal Forest. This will become an important landscape feature and leisure area but cannot be said to be ‘valued’ until public access is made available. It may, however, be eligible for LGS designation in the next review of this Neighbourhood Plan.

A further important space is the semi-natural area with ponds that has been created by the sustainable urban drainage system on the south-eastern edge of the town. This is used for play and dog-walking and is becoming an important asset for the many people living nearby, for whom there is currently no readily accessible alternative. However, part of the area sits within the by-pass corridor (see **Policy SFHE4**) and this potential future development means that protection is not appropriate, as Local Green Space designations are expected to endure beyond the plan period.

POLICY SFGI1

The areas shown on **Map SFGI1** and listed in **Appendix L** are designated as Local Green Spaces (LGS). Other than in very special circumstances, these spaces will be protected from inappropriate development that would reduce their open character or otherwise harm their green character and the reason for their designation.

Development adjoining a Local Green Space should not cause substantial harm to its character (taking into account the reason for its designation) and continued use.

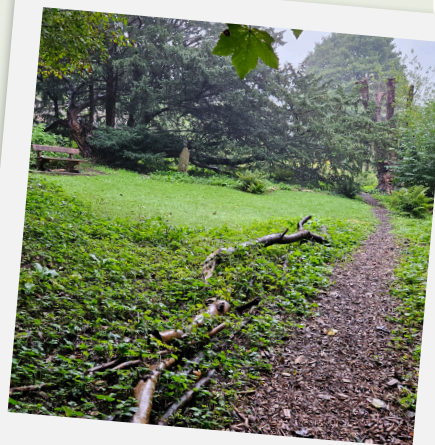
Any reduction in the recreational amenity or ecological value of a Local Green Space must be replaced through, for example, the provision of an alternative green space of equal or better value and as accessible to the surrounding community.

The Important Treed Areas, as shown on **Map SFGI1** and identified within the Green Infrastructure Audit (as referenced in **Appendix L**) should retain their treed character.

Where the loss of trees is unavoidable, replacement planting will be sought in order to maintain the treed character of the local area.



Queen Mother Garden



Bury Litton

Quick Read

What does this policy mean and why is it important?

A Neighbourhood Plan can protect some green spaces. We have identified those in Shaftesbury that are special for their historic or cultural significance, their beauty, their recreational value to people nearby or because they are rich in wildlife.

These spaces that are to be protected have been listed and mapped and the list can be added to when the Neighbourhood Plan is reviewed.

4.2 Local Green Spaces and Important Treed Areas *(continued)*

Map of audited Local Green Spaces (LGS) and Important Treed Areas (ITA)

This map highlights the local green spaces and the important treed areas.

The index of **Local Green Spaces (LGS)** and **Important Treed Areas (ITA)** is featured within **Appendix L**. The Green Infrastructure Audit (accompanying document) provides further details

Since the Plan was first made, the following Green Spaces and Important Treed Areas have been added:

- ▶ Land east of Higher Blandford Road, providing open views to Compton Down and Melbury Hill to the south (**LGS54**)
- ▶ A30 Allotments which opened in October 2021 (**LGS55**)
- ▶ Important treed areas identified on land to the rear of St Edwards Church (**ITA24**), land to the west of St James Park (**ITA23**), north of Breach Common (**ITA22**) and either side of the A30 corridor (**ITA25**)
- ▶ Minor amendments have also been made to better reflect the actual coverage of areas **ITA3**, **ITA5** and **LGS41**

Local Green Spaces and Important Tree Areas
Map Ref: SFGI1

Parkland/amenity space to be considered for LGS designation once established.

Local Green Spaces
Important Treed Areas
1 / 1 ID Numbers (see appendix)

Town Council boundary
Settlement boundary

4.3 Shaftesbury's slopes, views and rural setting

What does Policy SFGI2 set out to do?

To ensure development respects Shaftesbury's topography and its position in the landscape.

Details:

North Dorset's Local Plan has historically offered protection to Shaftesbury's unique setting through what have been called the Slopes Policies. This Neighbourhood Plan updates these policies and the areas it covers, through its new Slopes **Policy Map (SFGI2)**. This provides clarity as to which areas are part of 'The Slopes' – a designation

that dates back to the 2003 North Dorset Local Plan. To produce the map, we have looked at both the landscape character areas (based on assessments undertaken in 2003 and 2008 for Cranborne Chase National Landscape and North Dorset) with additional detail provided by the changing topography (based on contour information to calculate the degree of slope).

View of Shaftesbury and Caterpillar Hill from Win Green



4.3 Shaftesbury's slopes, views and rural setting *(continued)*

i For the detailed slope analysis map, a contour map was used to identify areas where the gradient is 1:15 or steeper (with those areas of 1:5 or steeper comprising the steep slopes).

The analysis used a combination of the 150m contour line and trackways to define the lower boundary of these shallow slopes, after an assessment of the area's topographic and visual prominence.

A further factor regarding the slopes that was not previously considered, is the underlying geology. One of the reasons that little building work has taken place on many parts of the slopes is due to the potential for landslips to occur, primarily beneath the escarpments of the Corallian Group and the Upper Greensand. A geological study undertaken by two members and former member of the British Geological Survey in the 1990s describes the landslips as 'spectacular'.

i For further information can be found in *Geology of the country around Shaftesbury: Memoir for 1:50000 geological sheet 313 (England & Wales), 1995*

<https://pubs.bgs.ac.uk/publications.html?pubID=B01692>

The authors describe the majority of the slopes in the area known as Shaftesbury Undercliff as based in land-slipped Gault, with shallow, successive rotational slips up to 6m deep in places. They also note that there are disturbed slopes below the undercliff which are flatter and more convex. They go on to state that "extensively landslipped slopes of the undercliff are close to limiting equilibrium. Reactivation could easily be caused by cut and fill on the undercliff".

It is therefore critical that the potential instability of our area is fully understood in order to ensure that development does not trigger new, or reactivate old, landslips, and the costs of any remediation measures to ensure slope stability is fully understood. Areas of unstable land have therefore been identified from the GeoSure layers comprising:

- ▶ **Landslides**—areas where slope instability problems may or probably are present (see **Appendix P GeoSure Landslides** for further detail)
- ▶ **Shrink-swell**—areas where ground conditions are predominantly medium to high plasticity (see **Appendix P GeoSure Shrink Swell** for further detail)

Being on the lower hillside slopes, the settlements of St James and Enmore Green are visible both from the hilltop and from distant viewpoints in the surrounding countryside. The steep slopes, the top of the spur, and these lower settlements are all highly sensitive to development as a result.

Tree cover is an important consideration for any new development on the shallower slopes, including on the shallow slopes below the hilltop to the south east of the town.

Developers must make sure that planned development respects Shaftesbury's contours, landscape and 'lie of the land'.



View of Melbury Hill

Extract of Slopes Analysis map

A slopes analysis map shows the influence of topography on the settlement pattern of Shaftesbury; how the town has developed on the flat land of the greensand plateau with limited development on steep slopes to the north, west and south. It shows the distinctive spur of the land to the west upon which the Saxon town was founded and the Medieval town from which the settlement and development has spread on flat land to the east.



Slopes analysis map (source: Bernard Ede)

Medieval settlements such as Enmore Green and St James were located on flatter shoulders of land below the steep slopes. The plateau edges and spur form critical edges which, where tree cover permits, gives Shaftesbury its distinctive panoramic views over the low-lying Blackmore Vale and to the elevated Chalk Downs and Greensand ridges forming skylines to the north and south. Conversely, these edges and slopes are sensitive to development due to ground instability and visual impact

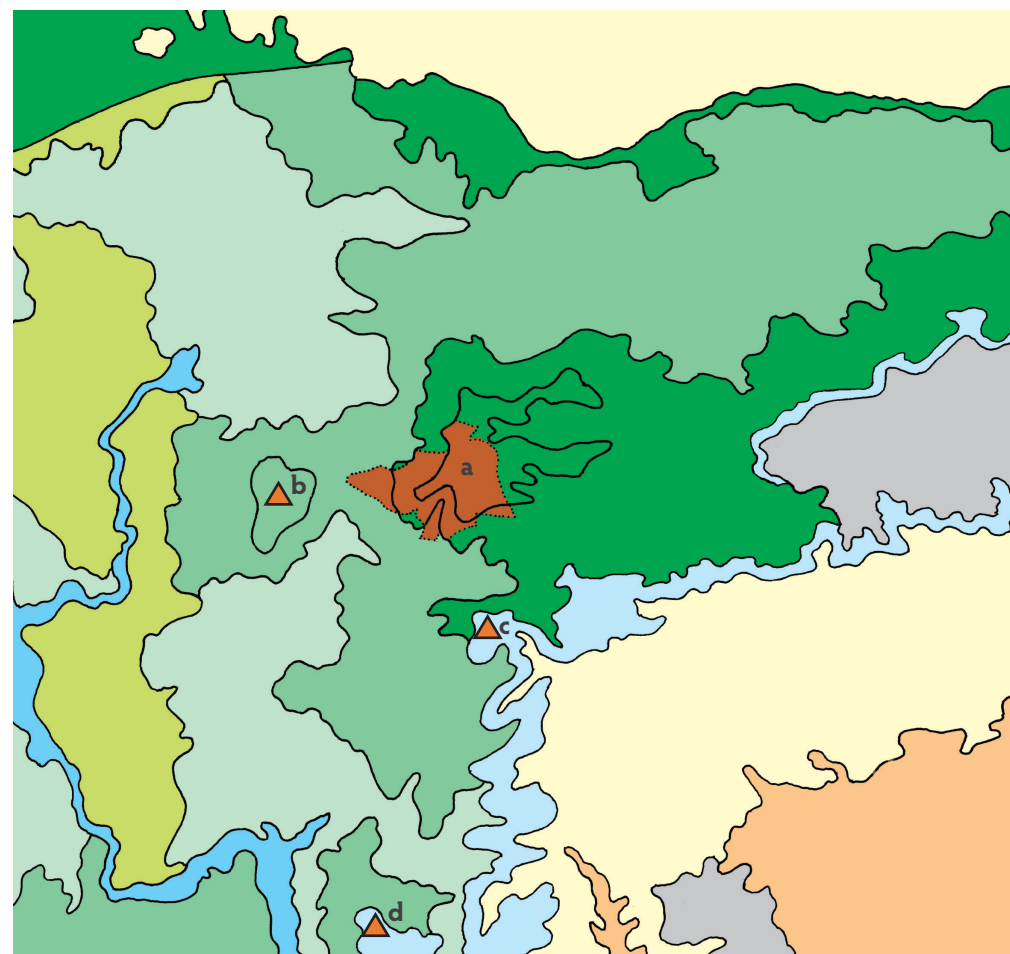
North Dorset and South Wiltshire Landscape Character map

This shows the variety of character areas forming the setting of the town and how the parish occupies land on elevated Shaftesbury Greensand ridge and lower-lying rolling clay vales.

Sources:

Landscape Character Areas for North Dorset (amended), Dorset County Council

Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment Land Use Consultants Final Report December 2005



North Dorset and South Wiltshire Landscape Character

4.3 Shaftesbury's slopes, views and rural setting (*continued*)

Viewpoints

Shaftesbury's distinctive topography (**Map SFGI2a**) provides outstanding views from the town.

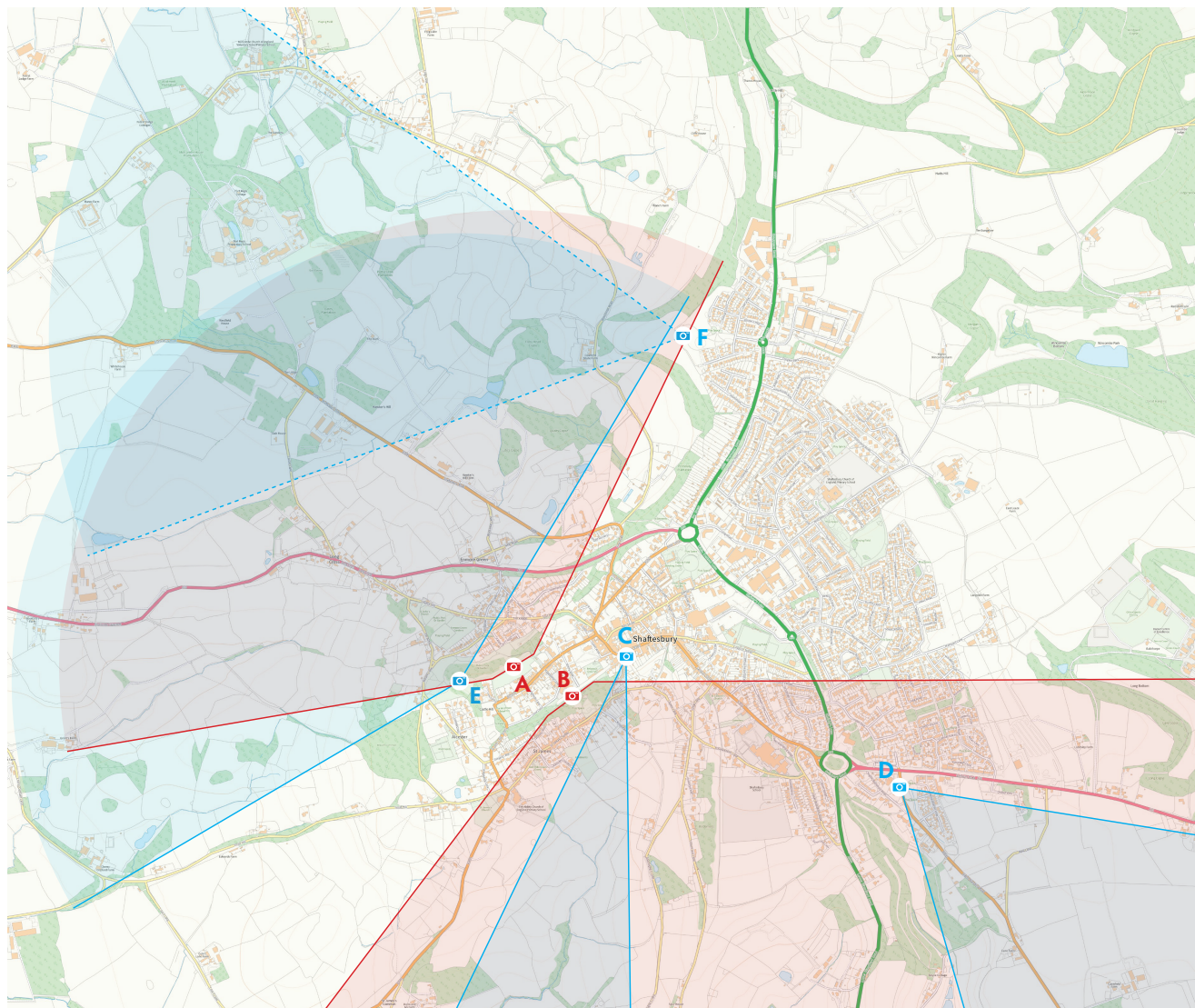
Shaftesbury's best-known view, famous not just in Dorset but also of national and international renown, is that available from Gold Hill (**viewpoint C** on **Map SFGI2a**). This historic cobbled street runs down the steep slope behind the Guildhall and from the top, the view across Blackmore Vale is framed by picturesque cottages and part of Shaftesbury Abbey walls.

A short walk away there are more open views to the south (**B**), and north (**A**) of the spur, and views limited by more extensive tree cover to the west. New development to the north of the town will give public access to further outstanding long views (**F**).

To the south and east of the town, where the land slopes more gradually, there are still notable views. A popular feature of glimpsed views looking south from eastern parts of the town is 'the caterpillar', a group of trees on raised ground that appear on the skyline. Whilst development south of the A30 has partially obscured this view, the relationship between the town and downs to the south can still be appreciated from **viewpoint D**.

- **A** Wide viewpoint from Castle Hill green
- **B** Wide viewpoint from Park Walk
- **C** View from top of Gold Hill
- **D** View from Higher Blandford Road
- **E** View from Castle Hill Mound
- - - **F** Assigned view from Littledown Development

Views from Shaftesbury
Map Ref: **SFGI2a**



Full details of map in **Appendix F**

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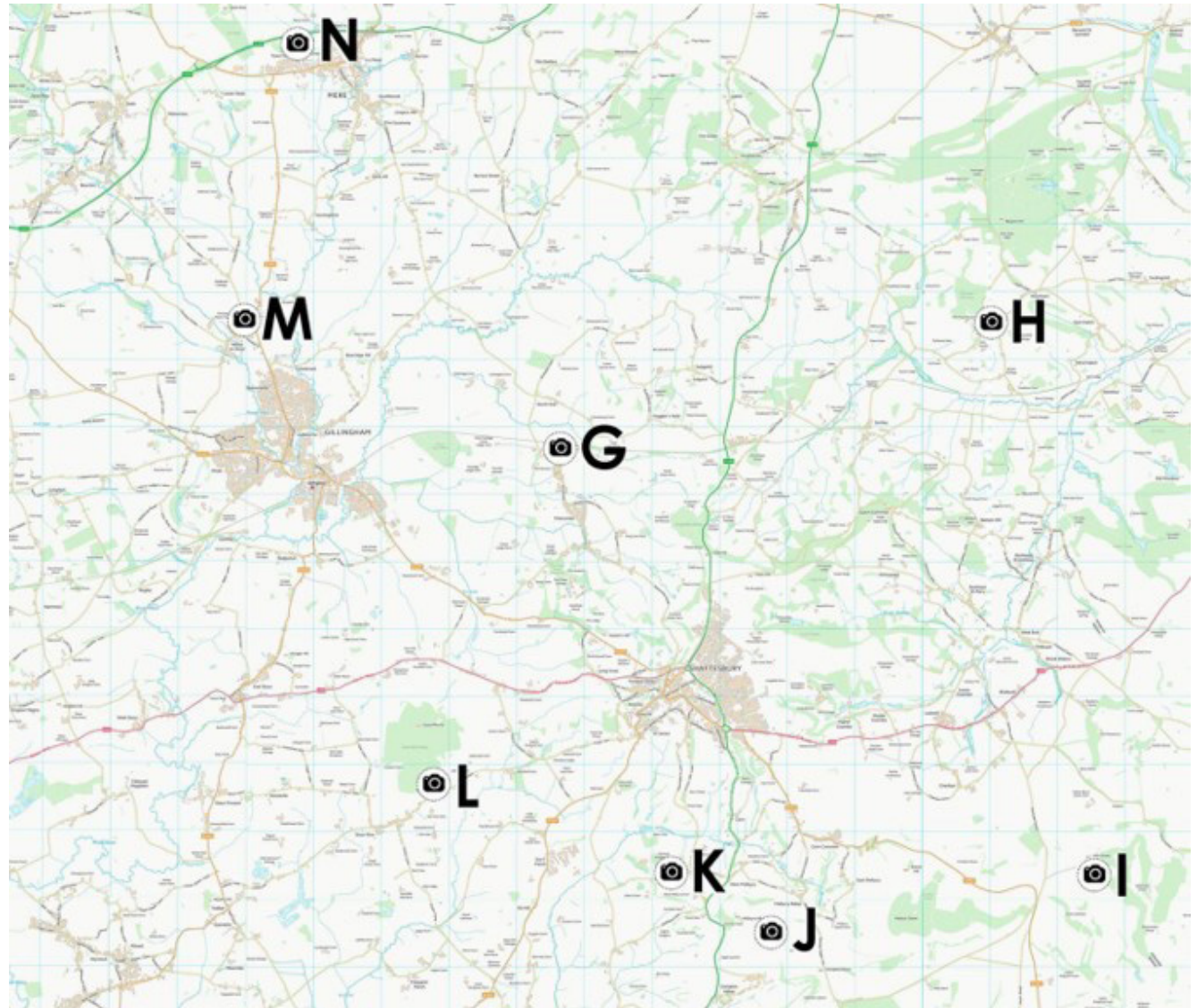
Shaftesbury features on the skyline from many places in the surrounding countryside and a selection of these are indicated on **Map SFGI2b**.

The view of Shaftesbury from Hatch House Hill (**H**) serves to illustrate the importance of tree cover for development around the edge of the town.

Appendix F documents the accessible views, looking both out of and towards the town as seen from the viewpoints on maps **SFGI2a** and **SFGI2b**.

Views of Shaftesbury from the surrounding landscape

Map Ref: **SFGI2b**



- G** Motcombe
- H** Hatch House
- I** Win Green
- J** Melbury Beacon (Compton Down)
- K** Writh Farm
- L** Stour Row
- M** Milton on Stour
- N** Mere



Full details of map in **Appendix F**

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4.3 Shaftesbury's slopes, views and rural setting *(continued)*

Slopes Policy Map
Map Ref: SFG12

— Town Council boundary
— Settlement boundary

— 10m contours
 Unstable land
 Flat, visually sensitive, prominent hilltop
 Steep slopes 1:5 and steeper
 Shallow slopes 1:5 to 1:15
 Plateau edge, generally level areas on higher ground

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POLICY SFGI2

The outstanding character of Gold Hill, and views from the flat hilltop and other key locations as shown on map maps **SFGI2a** and **SFGI2b** will be protected.

On the steep slopes (as shown on **Map SFGI2**) any development that does not preserve the remaining open or wooded areas and their distinct rural character, will generally be resisted.

On the shallow slopes and plateau edge (as shown on **Map SFGI2**), the design, scale and location of the development should not adversely affect the generally undeveloped character of the slopes and should respect the highly sensitive nature of the plateau edge. It should not negatively impact on views from higher and lower ground.

Load-bearing development within areas of unstable land (as shown on **Map SFGI2**) will be required to demonstrate that the site is stable or could be made stable, and that the development is unlikely to trigger landsliding within or beyond the boundaries of the site.

Development on the edge of the town will be expected to respect the environmental context, including green infrastructure, that draws the rural landscape into the settlement and provides a soft edge to the town.

There should be public access to the countryside via footpaths (and where appropriate, bridleways or cycle paths), connected to the wider countryside rights of way.



Quick Read

What does this policy mean and why is it important?

The slopes surrounding our town are really important to residents. These frame the many important views, whether looking down from the hilltop or looking up towards the town. Gold Hill's view is particularly iconic and must be protected.

There are also areas where land stability is a real problem, which has significant costs for development that need to be taken into account.

New developments on the edge of town should blend in with the countryside. The use of trees and hedgerows will help retain that sense of rural setting.

4.4 Landscaping requirements

What does Policy SFGI3 set out to do?

To ensure development respects and enhances the Green Infrastructure network—its green spaces and green corridors—and the contribution this makes to the character of the town, its sustainability and biodiversity, and the general well-being of its residents.

Details:

Shaftesbury's distinctiveness comes from its place in the landscape and its green spaces and corridors, trees and hedgerows. New development must integrate with the existing green infrastructure network across and beyond the town. For example, the original masterplan for the eastern development included proposals for an avenue of trees on each side of the main road to create a 'boulevard', and as a principle this tree-planting strategy should be applied to all the main route corridors into the town.

The map on the following page shows the tree canopy of the town as a starting point in helping identify existing green/wildlife corridors through the town. Whilst work has been undertaken by the Dorset Local Nature Partnership to identify existing and potential ecological networks across Dorset (<https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/dorsets-ecological-networks/>), this does not appear to identify many corridors within the town, and more work on this is proposed as a project in this Plan. Whilst there are fewer opportunities for greening the town centre, even here (for example) more trees could be planted in our car parks. The planting of fruit trees is particularly encouraged (as this forms part of the Shaftesbury Tree Plan and Orchard Town initiative).

Green infrastructure is vital to health and well-being. At the same time, it is a crucial element of adapting to climate change and protecting and improving biodiversity. It

provides wildlife habitat, routes for walking and cycling, space for food growing, enhanced regulation of the climate at a local scale, and contributes to flood water retention and reduced surface water runoff.

It is also important to ensure that landscape schemes are of a suitably high quality and delivered in a timely fashion and in accordance with the approved plans and specifications. The Town Council will work with Dorset Council to help ensure that this is suitably monitored and enforcement action taken where necessary.

POLICY SFGI3

Outside of the town centre, comprehensive landscape proposals should provide buildings with an attractive, verdant setting, having regard to the character of the area, views into and out of the area and potential to connect with other green/wildlife spaces and corridors.

Existing mature trees, native hedgerows, habitats associated with ponds and watercourses and green/wildlife corridors should be retained and included within a landscaping scheme for all new developments, to avoid harm to biodiversity.

Tree planting along the main route corridors into the town should be provided where feasible.

The design of green spaces within a development must:

- ▶ Contribute to the character of the town.
- ▶ Mitigate climate change, contribute to the achievement of net-zero carbon emissions, and provide opportunities for sustainable drainage.
- ▶ Protect and enhance biodiversity.

In addition, where practical, these spaces should:

- ▶ Enhance tree cover.

- ▶ Provide new habitats to enhance the town's ecological network, connecting to existing wildlife corridors where feasible.
- ▶ Enable local food production.
- ▶ Provide educational opportunities.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for play and recreation including walking and cycling.

Planting schemes should use local species appropriate to the site's size and location, taking into account resilience to climate change (a list of tree species that are likely to be appropriate is provided in [Appendix J](#)).

Measures should be taken to ensure future maintenance of any landscaping scheme and green spaces. This could be through the use of conditions or a legally binding agreement that takes account of possible changes in design, planting or maintenance routines, in line with the need to promote nature recovery and mitigate climate change.

Quick Read

What does this policy mean and why is it important?

Planting and open spaces as part of any new housing or other development are important. It should be considered from the outset and done right.

It's important to retain features like ponds, trees and hedgerows that are valuable for local wildlife and mitigate climate change. Suitable arrangements must be put in place so that it's clear who is responsible for maintenance.

Extract from Friends of Earth Tree Canopy Map overlay with aerial photograph
<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/nature/trees-map-where-could-we-create-woodland-england>
This provides a starting point in helping identify green/wildlife corridors through the town alongside the work undertaken by Dorset Local Nature Partnership (<https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/dorsets-ecological-networks/>)



4.5 Dark skies and lighting proposals

What does Policy SFGI4 set out to do?

To protect our dark skies, particularly considering the adjoining Cranborne Chase National Landscape (CCNL) and its International Dark Skies Reserve status.

Details:

One of Cranborne Chase's special qualities is that it does not suffer greatly from light pollution, the glow you get from street lights which means you cannot see the stars in many towns. Cranborne Chase is one of the best places in southern England for viewing the Milky Way and you can often see it with the naked eye.

If we work to keep our night skies dark, then Shaftesbury's economy could benefit from astro- tourism. Stargazing visitors have helped boost the tourism economy of Exmoor, which is also very dark.

Dark skies are also better for animals and bird life, too. Wildlife can become confused, stressed and suffer disrupted sleep patterns when they mistake bright artificial lighting for the sun.



Dark Skies

POLICY SFGI4

Development should be designed to conserve and enhance the quality of the dark night skies and prevent glare affecting the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (CCNL). It should also ensure any lighting arising from the development minimises impacts on biodiversity. In particular:

- ▶ External lighting should be avoided unless required for security or safety reasons.
- ▶ Where lighting is considered necessary, its design should minimise its impact, both on the amenity of the occupants of neighbouring properties, and in terms of light spillage and glare.
- ▶ Light sources should be fully shielded and pointed downwards, so that light is not emitted above the horizontal.
- ▶ Movement sensitive and timed PIR lights, down- lighters or 'wall washers' are examples of lighting schemes that generally have less adverse impact whilst providing appropriate illumination.
- ▶ Any lighting scheme within or visible from the CCNL should meet or exceed the level of protection appropriate to Environmental Zone 1 (as defined by the Institution of Lighting Professionals), with the addition that external LED lighting should not exceed a correlated colour temperature (CCT) of 2,700K.



Astronomy Workshop

Quick Read

What does this policy mean and why is it important?

The Cranborne Chase National Landscape, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) begins just one mile east of Shaftesbury Town Hall.

Maintaining dark skies is not about turning lights out; it's all about, 'the right light, in the right place, at the right time'.