

Design and Character Supplementary Planning Document
Companion Guide : Cobham, Oxshott, Stoke D'Abernon
& Downside

April 2012



1 Producing the Cobham, Oxshott, Stoke D'Abernon and Downside Settlement Area Character Assessment	2
2 How to use the settlement area and sub-area analysis	3
3 Cobham, Oxshott, Stoke D'Abernon and Downside Character Assessment	4

1 Producing the Cobham, Oxshott, Stoke D'Abernon and Downside Settlement Area Character Assessment

This companion guide forms an integral part of the Elmbridge Design and Character SPD. The guides provide a reference source for considering the character of an area as part of the design process for new development.

1.1 The following Character Assessment for Cobham, Oxshott, Stoke D'Abernon and Downside has been developed in partnership with the local community assisted by design consultants (Forum Heritage Services and Context 4D) and Elmbridge Borough Council.

Community Involvement

1.2 On 12 April 2011, a community workshop was held at Cobham Village Hall, which allowed local people to talk about the character of their local area and how future development in Cobham may be designed.

1.3 Community participants included:

- 3 members of the Cobham Conservation and Heritage Trust
- 1 member of Stoke D'Abernon Residents Association
- 1 representative from Envisage, community group for Cobham, Downside, Oxshott and Stoke D'Abernon
- 1 member of the Cobham and Downside Residents Association
- 1 member of the Cobham Conservation Area Advisory Committee
- 1 member of the Danes Court Estate, Oxshott
- 1 member of the Knott Park Residents Association
- 2 Cobham Labour Party representatives for Cobham, Downside, Oxshott and Stoke D'Abernon

1.4 As well as providing a wealth of information about their local area, they were instrumental in the subdivision of character areas and the identification of key features.

1.5 The second half of the day concentrated on the design process and enabled community participants to understand how the new SPD would work. As well as understanding the theory, participants had the opportunity to appraise the context and setting of a site in practice using maps and notation charts to assist them. The site chosen for this academic exercise was to the rear of a shopping parade. Issues discussed were the impact on the conservation area, the need for glimpses and the protection of residential amenity. The site visit also allowed community representatives to walk about the district centre pointing out buildings of historic importance, developments that worked well and not so well and the overall vibrancy of the High Street.



Community representatives on site

1.6 A range of design issues were discussed throughout the workshop day and these have been incorporated into the assessment within the general settlement and specific sub-area community issues text boxes.

1.7 A full and productive feedback session held on the 14 September 2011 allowed participants to add any additional comments, clarification and further information.

2 How to use the settlement area and sub-area analysis

Step 1: Identify the settlement area and sub-area your development site falls within, using the character area map to help you. The maps also provide an overview of the wider context of the area.

Step 2: Read the introduction to the settlement area, which gives a brief overview and a summary of key features, providing you with a snapshot of settlement character and highlighting key issues identified from community workshops.

Step 3: Read the sub-area analysis, taking note of specific local concerns and where to find additional design guidance.

2.1 In order to inform your design proposal, it is important to evaluate and understand the key characteristics of the settlements and their sub-areas. Understanding an area's character will help to deliver high quality development that contributes to the distinctiveness of the local area and sense of place. In order to do this effectively, the Borough has been subdivided into 8 settlement areas, reflecting those in the Core Strategy. Each settlement area has been further divided into sub-areas, derived from fieldwork and group discussions at the community workshops.

2.2 The sub-area analysis describes its predominant characteristics such as building types, use, scale, grain, tree cover and any heritage assets. Reference may be made to specific design guidance you should take account of when considering your development proposal. In some instances, reference is also made to case studies that may be particularly relevant to the type of development likely to occur in the sub-area. These are contained within the main document and illustrate the process of understanding local character through context and site appraisal, which will generate a

design concept and indicative design. Each case study offers just one solution to how a site could be developed and there may be instances when other case studies are relevant, depending on the nature of the development.

2.3 Where the community workshop identified specific issues affecting a particular sub-area, a box is included to highlight these concerns. This is intended to help you carefully consider the local context and the sensitivities of the site's surroundings. It provides an opportunity to show how you might address specific concerns highlighted in relation to sub-areas. These may not be exhaustive but are provided as prompts for consideration.

2.4 For sites that fall on the edge of two sub-areas or settlement boundaries, you will need to take into account adjoining sub-areas, which may have an impact on the context of the site. In many ways the design requirements of these sites are more complex to resolve as they may be at a key transition between one type of development and another.

2.5 You should use the settlement and sub-area analysis as a starting point to develop a clear context for your proposal. This should be considered in more detail through the site visits etc, taking account of the specific location of the development.

The analysis of character and context should be an integral part of a Design and Access Statement.

3 Cobham, Oxshott, Stoke D'Abernon and Downside Character Assessment



Introduction

3.1 The Cobham, Oxshott, Stoke D'Abernon and Downside settlement area is the largest in the Borough. Cobham, the main settlement, lies between Esher to the north-east and Leatherhead to the south-east, in the valley of the River Mole. The district centre is the fourth largest in the Borough and has a large out of town superstore to its north. The commons and Green Belt to the north of Cobham presents a significant physical barrier between this settlement area and the rest of the Borough. To the south and east the Green Belt wraps around the settlements with Downside set within the Green Belt.

3.2 During the 19th century there were a number of urban extensions to the town, principally to the north-east. The volume of commercial activities, despite a reduction in traffic using the London-Winchester route increased in the Cobham area. This increased further around the end of the 19th century partly due to the opening of the London and South-Western Railway with a station at Stoke D'Abernon to the south-east and Oxshott to the east. Development continued around these transport hubs from the turn of the last century and during the inter and post-war periods which saw significant development of the larger private estates, for example Birds Hill Estate to the north-east of Oxshott. In the case of the areas around, and particularly to

the south of Oxshott station, this often involved the demolition of a large house and development within the grounds forming the series of small to medium size estates seen today.

3.3 The area generally comprises large houses in semi-rural settings, with large semi-private and private estates. However, the older expansion of Cobham and later post-war estates to the north and east of the town centre do provide some more varied housing including terraced cottages and ex-local authority estates.

Summary of the key features

- Located between the A3 and M25 transport corridors with a train line passing through the centre of the settlement area
- Series of separate communities of varying scale most of which (with the exception of Downside) have been linked through development
- Important service centre at Cobham, which retains some of its historic character and scale (a conservation area is centred upon Church Street to the southern end of the town)
- Pockets of Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war extensions to Cobham giving it an urban capacity and sustainability
- Large semi-private and private residential estates with a strong established landscape structure which provides a high quality landscape setting
- Strong sense of the rural setting percolating into the urban areas – particularly in relation to the River Mole
- All individual settlements have a strong sense of community
- Generally a soft urban edge to the southern boundary of development in relation to the open countryside
- Significant number of heritage assets, including listed buildings and those that lie within one of the five conservation areas.⁽¹⁾

1 For more information please see the heritage web pages at <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/planning/heritage/default.htm>

Issues identified from the community workshops

- The scale of new buildings often dominate their plots and change some of the important established patterns of development seen on some of the older residential estates
- Concerns that visual aspects of some of the developments can be out of keeping with their environment
- Changes to the historic lanes which survive in some parts of the settlement area was seen as detrimental to the important character of these areas
- Hard boundaries, such as walls and fences, are replacing softer landscaping
- The quality of the materials being used in new development in highly sensitive areas could be improved – particularly in relation to alterations or development within conservation areas and other sensitive areas
- There are concerns regarding the architectural quality of replacement buildings in sensitive areas
- New gates and the increased use of walls and fences around houses and flatted development is changing the character of some areas and isolating the residents of these developments from the wider community
- Poorly defined roofscapes and the lack of chimneys on new large scale buildings, particularly

flatted development, has reduced the visual quality of the townscape.

- It was felt that the settlement area was generally under-served by conservation areas and that there was potential for review of the existing conservation area boundaries; particularly Church Cobham and The Tilt Conservation Areas and possible new designations in the Street Cobham area



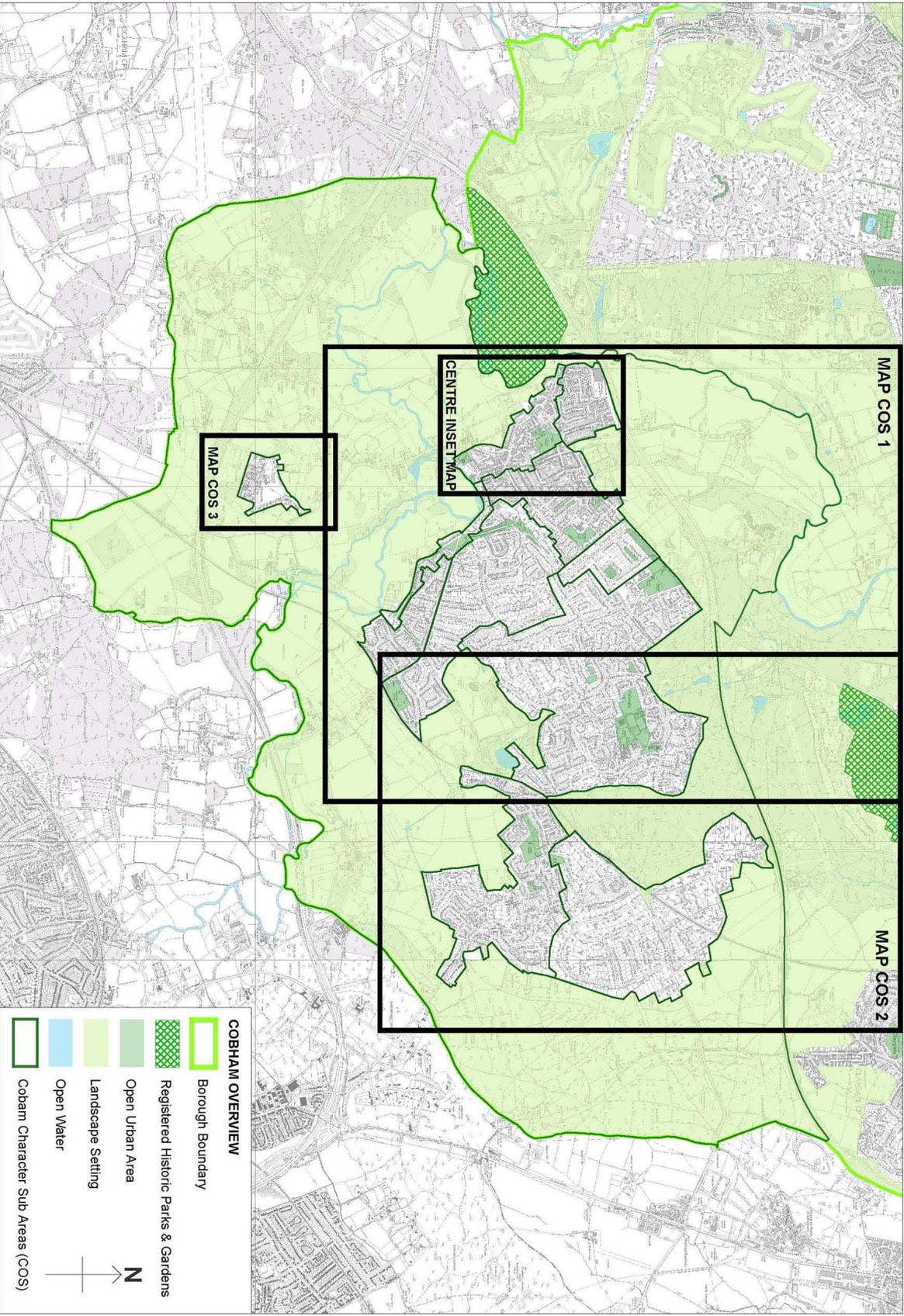
Cobham Mill

Local Landmarks

As featured in settlement map COS1

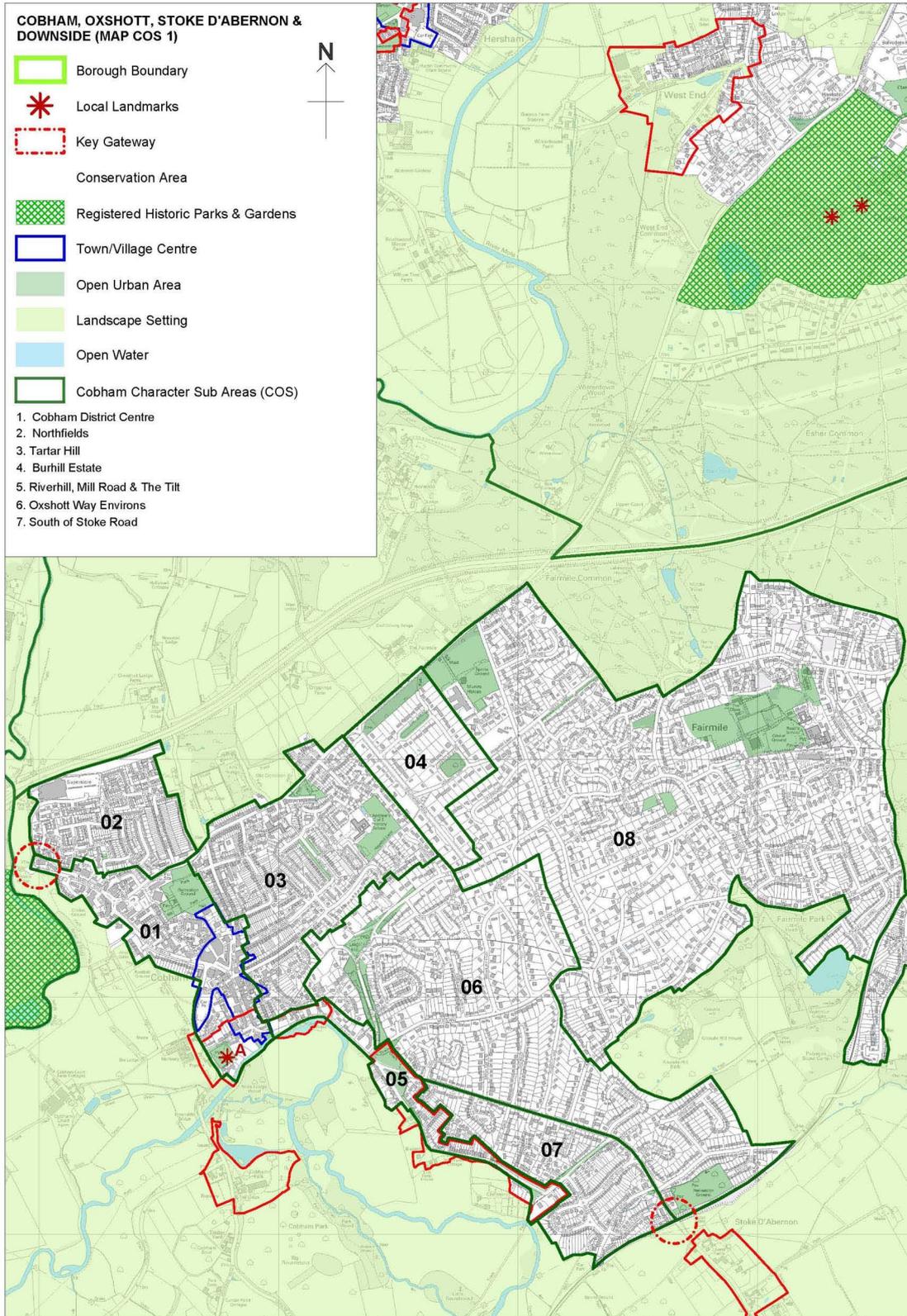
A. West tower of St Andrew, Church Street

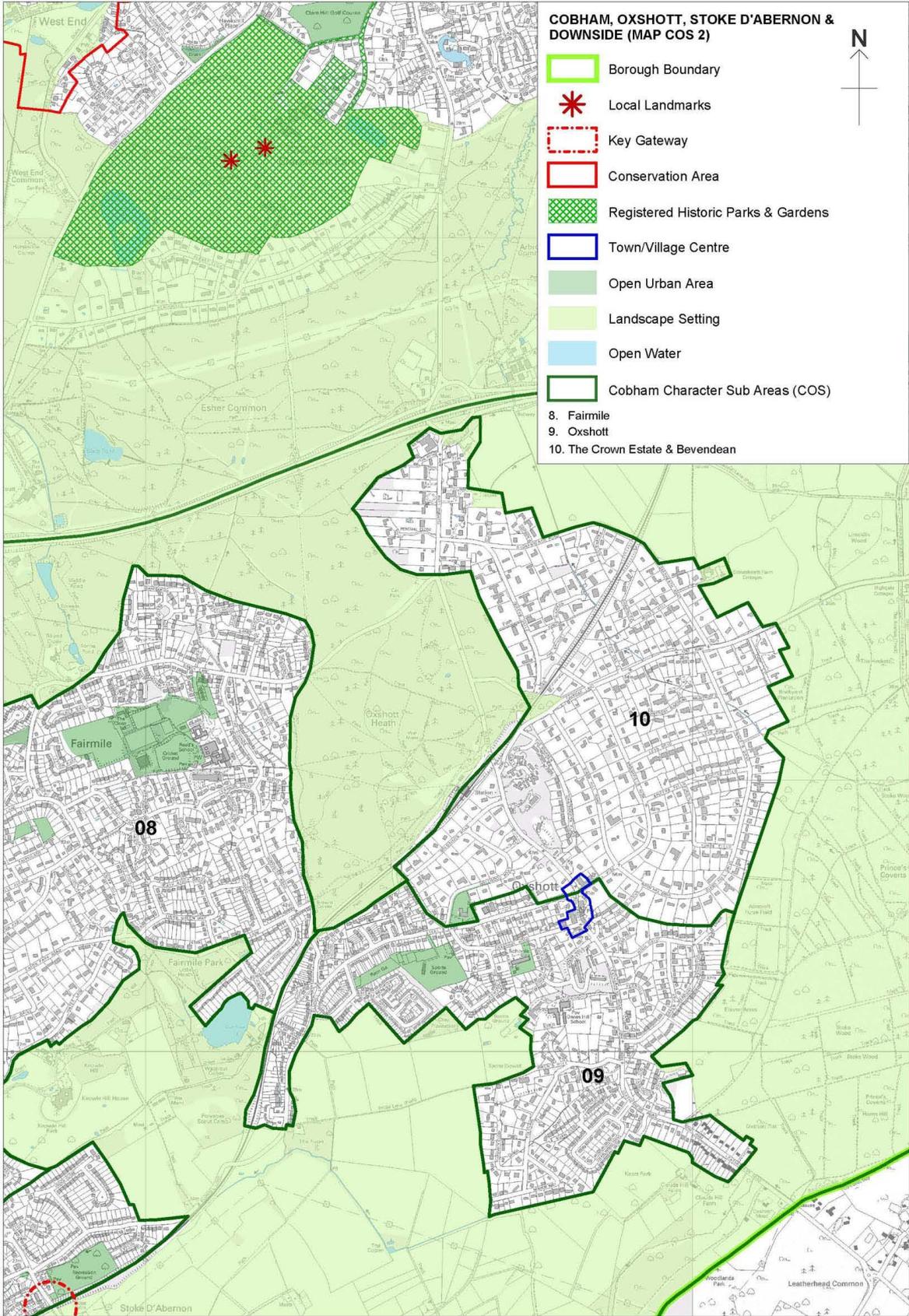
3.4 The following maps can be viewed in more detail using the Council's interactive mapping system 'My Elmbridge' which is located on the Elmbridge Borough Council homepage.

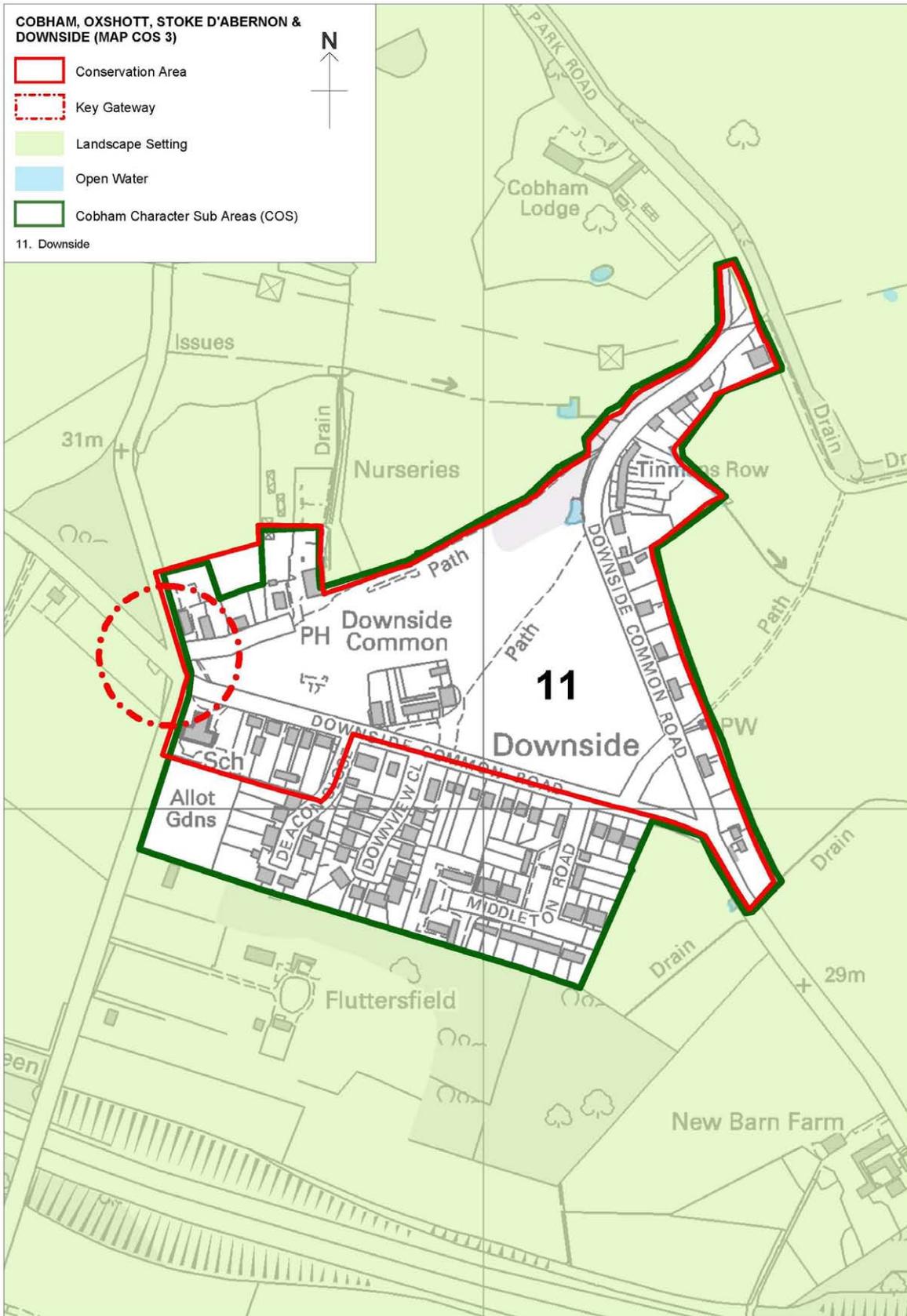


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The sub-areas

COS01: Cobham District Centre

Overview

3.5 The centre of Cobham, defined as a district centre, was historically two separate areas: Street Cobham and Church Cobham with the latter now the main shopping area and linked by mostly 20th century development.

3.6 This development to the south side of Between Streets retains the original character of individually designed two storey dwellings set in wide grass verges making for a pleasing entrance to Church Cobham.

3.7 The main shopping centre is further shaped by the significant amount of green areas in the three main approaches to the Centre ie from the south the Leg O' Mutton field; from the west the very wide grass verge the length of Between streets mentioned above; and from the east green area of The Tilt leading to the River and then the High Street.

3.8 There is a mixed use centre including a supermarket, with older sections to the north and Street Cobham to the south.



Street Cobham, Portsmouth Road (south side)

3.9 The southern section to Church Street is a conservation area.



Church Street, part of the designated conservation area

3.10 The River Mole is of considerable importance in relation to the growth of the village.

3.11 Whilst Victorian development has expanded the immediate urban extent of the original village, the centre has retained its two distinct areas of commercial focus – the High Street and Church Street (Church Cobham), and around the junction of Portsmouth Road and Tartar Hill (Street Cobham).

3.12 Despite some poor development in the 1960s the transitional spaces between residential and commercial areas are successful and well integrated.

3.13 Buildings are rarely more than two and a half storeys with much of the High Street being two storeys.

3.14 There is significant use of dormer windows, gables and skylights in roofs.

3.15 Despite much 20th century redevelopment of the commercial areas, the built form has managed to retain a fine grain, particularly in relation to the retention of small shop units in a traditional high street setting i.e a long line of shops either side of the road. This has retained a pleasing rhythm and variation to the townscape despite some differences in architectural quality.



Small scale retail units, High Street

3.16 There is a remnant survival of early plot division to the rear of the main streets.

3.17 Plot boundaries and occasional buildings survive which make an important contribution towards the character and appearance of these areas.

3.18 There is a notable lack of trees within this part of the settlement area. The exception to this is the western end of Church Street where trees to the churchyard bring some greenery into the townscape.

Specific issues raised at the Community Workshop

- Loss of retail units to restaurants and cafes, which impacts on the character of the relevant streets
- Some general improvement to shop fronts despite the indifferent architectural quality of the host buildings
- The potential for infill to be insensitive and detrimental to the surrounding development, both old and new

Opportunities

3.19 Potentially there may be opportunities for sensitive infill development and possible redevelopment of retail units with associated

mixed uses, small office space or residential above and behind shops. Please refer to **Case Study CS4, CS5 and CS6** for guidance.

3.20 Specific design guidance on commercial development at **section 6** may also be relevant.

COS02: Northfields

Overview

3.21 This sub-area is to the north of the commercial centre (COS01) and is bounded to the north by the A3.

3.22 To this edge, there is a large and prominent retail superstore.

3.23 The remaining area is residential with mostly two storey semi-detached housing and some short terracing dating from the 1930s and the post-war period.



Northfield Road, Northfields

3.24 Houses are set on a fairly rigid street plan and there are some shared spaces and parking courts.

Opportunities

3.25 This area has limited scope for development with houses having sufficient space to accommodate extensions and alterations which will enable continued small-scale development as individual households expand.

3.26 For further advice of this, please see the **Home Extensions Companion Guide**.

COS03: Tartar Hill

Overview

3.27 A fine grained character area of two principal phases; a late Victorian/Edwardian extension to the town characterised by a tight network grid of streets with terraces and semi-detached houses with small front gardens strongly defining the townscape. Roads include the lower parts of Hogshill Lane, Cedar Road and Spencer Road.



Spencer Road, Cobham

3.28 The second phase is the further development along principal routes (some existing such as the upper part of Hogshill Lane) and some new roads such as Freelands Road both of which are lined with larger houses set back in gardens.

3.29 The consistency of style to houses in streets with shared architectural characteristics gives a cohesion to streets within this sub-area.

3.30 Houses are generally two storey with terraced, semi-detached and detached houses usually set in regular, relatively modest, plots (in relation to the settlement area).

3.31 St Andrew's primary school to the eastern edge of the sub-area is set in generous open green space and forms part of the transition between this area and the Burhill Estate to the east (COS04).

3.32 A notable characteristic to parts of this sub-area are wide verges with houses set back in long front gardens.

3.33 Many of the front gardens have become hardstandings for parking, which has had some impact on the character of parts of the sub-area.



Loss of front gardens to parking spaces, Tartar Road

Opportunities

3.34 Development is likely to take the form of extension and alteration of existing housing stock rather than replacement and intensification. This is particularly evident in relation to the older properties in this sub-area.

3.35 For further advice on how to achieve high quality home improvements, please see the **Home Extensions Companion Guide**.



Conversion of the roofspaces of older properties with the addition of rooflights

COS04: Burhill Estate

Overview

3.36 The Burhill Estate is a private estate of large mostly two storey houses set in very large plots.

3.37 The houses are set back from the private road behind mature boundaries.

3.38 Verges to the roads and communal greens add to the quality of this estate.



Icklingham Road, Burhill Estate

Opportunities

3.39 There could be potential for some of the very large plots to accommodate additional dwellings.

3.40 Any development would need to carefully consider the established plot sub-division and other possible constraints

such as mature trees within or on the boundary of the site. Please refer to **Case Study CS1 and CS2** for further advice.

COS05: Riverhill, Mill Road and The Tilt

Overview

3.41 This sub-area is strongly defined by its close proximity to the riverside and comprises generally older, more individually designed buildings, some of which are statutory or locally listed and/or within a conservation area.



Buildings fronting the riverside

3.42 The riverside forms an attractive backdrop of trees and natural habitats immediately adjacent to houses. This is particularly evident on The Tilt .

3.43 Houses are generally semi-detached (often in attractive pairs) or detached, and rarely over two storey, and predominantly traditional in scale and use of materials.

3.44 The Tilt, once part of an extensive green stretching to the north (remnants of which survive in COS06 to the north), has a strongly defined character with its series of open green spaces enclosed by generally modest older housing, and a public house.

3.45 The openness of these spaces gives rise to extended views, giving emphasis to the rooflines at the edges of these green spaces.

3.46 Away from the main road, these well defined areas are surprisingly tranquil and are highly valued as amenity spaces.



Houses fronting The Tilt

3.47 Front gardens are generally small with some buildings set to the edge of the pavement.

3.48 There is a notable lack of trees in this part of the settlement area either in public spaces or private gardens.

Specific issues raised at the Community Workshop

- The appropriate use of materials in relation to the conversion of historic buildings is a high priority

Opportunities

3.49 Development would mainly involve extensions and alterations to properties. Please see the **Home Extensions Companion Guide** for further advice.

3.50 Due to the number of statutory listed buildings and the designated conservation area that covers part of the sub-area, care needs to be taken when designing proposals.

3.51 The use of materials need to be considered carefully – please refer to **section 5** on materials.

COS06: Oxshott Way environs

Overview

3.52 The sub-area mainly comprises a private estate of detached houses set in generous plots.

3.53 Although not in the Oxshott Way, some of the roads that lie north of Stoke D'Abernon (Blundel Lane, Lodge Close and Evelyn Way) are included in this sub-area as they share similar characteristics in terms of layout, housing type and size of plots.

3.54 Houses are generally two storey and set back from the roadside.

3.55 A notable characteristic is the offset building line of earlier houses to the majority of roads (for example Broad Highway and Oxshott Rise). This was to preserve the southerly aspect of the plots and creates a very distinctive townscape in this part of the settlement area.



Houses to Oxshott Way

Opportunities

3.56 The consistency of the house types, and the way they address the roadside, gives rise to a distinctive form of development which should be reflected in future change in this sub-area. Please refer to principles in **Case Study CS1** for further advice relating to replacement dwellings/buildings.

COS07: South of Stoke Road

Overview

3.57 Located between The Tilt COS05 and Oxshott Way Environs COS06 north of Stoke Road, the character of residential development is quite different south of Stoke Road. There is a general mix of housing type and layout with housing located in smaller cul de sac arrangements at a slightly higher density.

3.58 This sub-area also includes the Stoke D'Abernon railway station and associated shopping parade around the station hub.



Station environs, Stoke D'Abernon

3.59 Housing in the general vicinity of the station is at a higher density and has distinctive narrow roadways, dominated by parked cars.



Winston Drive, Stoke D'Abernon

3.60 Front gardens have largely been given over to parking which has altered the character of this area over time.

3.61 The railway line, and to a lesser extent the riverside, form a strong edge to the development in this sub-area.

3.62 The approach and exit over the railway is a strongly defined 'gateway' to the settlement area, with the character to the south dramatically changing to that of rural Surrey.

Opportunities

3.63 Development to some parts of this sub-area could potentially achieve higher densities than other parts of the settlement area particularly in relation to the focus of mixed uses around the railway station – see Case Studies CS1, CS2 and CS3 for advice.

COS08: Fairmile

Overview

3.64 This is a large sub-area which is predominantly a number of private estates.

3.65 The area includes a series of much older sections which have provided a framework for the development seen today.

3.66 Like other parts of this settlement area, it was developed from a single estate and retains mature planting, specimen trees and other features relating to the earlier land uses and lanes and tracks which still retain much of their rural character.

3.67 The character is reinforced by natural boundaries to properties and the lack of pavements or street lighting.



View along Water Lane

3.68 The semi-rural character extends to most of the sub-area with mature soft boundaries often including mature trees with houses set well back in mature landscaped gardens.



House on Leigh Hill Road

3.69 Given the survival of such large sections of historic landscapes, the area still retains a semi-wooded appearance in places, with houses set within this high quality landscape.

3.70 Knowle Hill and Knowle Hill Park are significant green spaces to the southern edge of the sub-area with a high degree of tree cover to edges which form a high quality landscaped setting for houses backing onto the park (also to sub-area COS07).

Specific issues raised at the Community Workshop

- Concerns with regard to the architectural quality of replacement buildings, particularly the over-used neo-Georgian style which tends to dominate replacement building styles
- Concerns with regards to the replacement of soft boundaries – hedges, trees and post and rail fences with hard edged boundary treatments.

Opportunities

3.71 There are potential opportunities throughout this sub-area for new development.

3.72 A high architectural quality is required which should reflect (in terms of scale, quality of materials, massing and layout) some of the essence of well executed older houses on the estate, particularly in relation to materials. See **section 5** for general design guidance on these matters.

3.73 Regard should be had to advice featured in **Case Studies CS1, CS2, CS3** and **section 5 (boundaries)**.



Soft landscaping replaced with hard boundary treatment – Leigh Hill Road

COS09: Oxshott

Overview

3.74 The local mixed use centre of Oxshott has a strong semi-rural village character.

3.75 It largely comprises a series of small to medium developments usually set around a crescent or cul-de-sac.

3.76 These mini estates which lack connectivity have derived from a series of large houses with grounds which have been progressively sold off and developed as separate parcels – such as Danes Way, Knott Park and the Waverley Road estate.

3.77 Whilst the majority of housing is medium to large detached, there is variation in scale with some single (for example Waverley Road) but mostly two storey housing.

3.78 Buildings are rarely more than two and a half storeys.

3.79 Houses are set back in mature gardens often with soft landscaped boundaries with trees to the front and back of properties.



Oxdowne Close – a small cul-de-sac development of houses

3.80 Tree cover is a strong characteristic of this part of the settlement area and defines longer views along streets and lanes with houses often partially obscured by the vegetation.

3.81 In places, particularly fine specimen trees survive adding to the landscape quality.



A fine specimen tree to the front garden of a house in Fernhill

3.82 There is also significant variations in topography to this part of the settlement area with steeper sections often wooded, adding to the semi-rural character of most of this sub-area.

Opportunities

3.83 Given the variety in plot sizes and the variation in densities, future housing development in this area could potentially support higher densities, where there are no restrictions other than those raised by the planning system (such as long standing covenants present on some housing estates).

3.84 Careful consideration should be given to the retention of the landscape qualities of the area specifically with regards to trees and mature hedges and boundaries. Please see **Case Study CS1** and **section 5 (boundaries)**

COS10: The Crown Estate (Birds Hill Estate) & Bevendean

Overview

3.85 Both of these areas are part of the Crown Estate which is recognised in Policy CS17 of the Elmbridge Core Strategy as being an area of special low density residential development.

3.86 The Birds Hill Estate is a private estate with limited access and no through public access.

3.87 Between the Birds Hill Estate and Bevendean is Pinewoods, a much extended late 19th century Grade II listed house. Within the grounds of this house, groups of relatively modest houses built in the late 20th century, The Gables and The Warren, enjoy the mature landscaping of the former grounds of this large house (Clarendon Park).

3.88 Houses are set within very large plots often completely obscured from view by mature beech hedges and trees.



Bird Hill Estate – general view

3.89 Generally between two and three storeys, they vary in orientation and location within the plot.

3.90 There has been much relatively recent replacement of existing houses with considerably larger houses, often with garaging and further outbuildings. This is slowly changing the character of the sub area, particularly of the Birds Hill Estate.

3.91 The design of buildings is often classically inspired, but fails to achieve the subtlety of material use, and quality of detailing, that the classical idiom requires.

Opportunities

3.92 These areas are essentially defined by their very low density. Their landscaping in the form of high hedges makes for a very uniform and landscaped street scene.

3.93 Development should seek to retain the established landscape character, particularly in relation to front boundaries.

3.94 Proposals should have regard to **Case Study CS1** in relation to replacement dwellings and **guidance on boundaries at section 7.11**.

COS11: Downside

Overview

3.95 This sub-area is separated from the main urban expansion of the Cobham, Oxshott conurbation by Green Belt (principally Cobham Park and Chilbrook Farm).

3.96 Downside is defined by the large Green, itself a remnant of a much larger area of common land which was enclosed over time.

3.97 Small cottage scale houses surround the Green in addition to a public house and small school.

3.98 The scale and mix of uses give the area a distinct village feel.

3.99 The sub-area is strongly influenced by its rural setting (particularly to the north) which directly links to the triangular Green which in turn is defined by the surrounding lanes and footpaths.

3.100 The open character of this landscape setting is particularly important to the character of the village.

3.101 To the south of the Green there are a series of modest, two storey semi detached post-war housing developments as well as some short terraces which reflect the form of development fronting the Green.



Houses to Middleton Road

3.102 There is a designated conservation area which covers the green and all buildings which enclose this space.

3.103 The school, public house and a small number of houses, including Tinmans' Row to the north-east corner are all Grade II listed.

3.104 Of particular note is the openness of the green space enclosed by modest traditional buildings.

3.105 The views across the green are important and highlight the need to maintain the existing roofline.



View of houses from the green space to the centre of Downside

3.106 Trees and hedges also line the edge of the green and in some places obscure the built form.

Opportunities

3.107 Due to its Green Belt designation, there are limited development opportunities in this sub-area.