Stratfield Mortimer

Design Guidance and Codes

Final Report
May 2025

Delivering a better world

Quality information

Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
Lavenya Parthasarathy **Graduate Urban Designer**	Ben Castell **Director**	Annabel Osborne **NP Officer Locality**
Grace Peckmore **Industrial Placement Student**	Jimmy Lu **Principal Urban Designer**	

Revision History

Issue no.	Issue date	Details	Issued by	Position
4	23.05.2025	Final Report following review by Locality	Jimmy Lu	Principal Urban Designer
3	06.05.2025	Final Draft Report	Jimmy Lu	Principal Urban Designer
2	16.04.2025	Comments on draft report by the NPSG	Bob Coe	NPSG Member
1	10.03.2025	First Draft Report	Jimmy Lu	Principal Urban Designer

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The Mortimer Common war memorial

1. Introduction

This document aims to empower the local community to influence the design and character of their neighbourhood, and deliver attractive, sustainable development that meets the needs of local residents.

1.1 Background

Through the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Neighbourhood Planning Programme led by Locality, AECOM has been appointed to provide design support to the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG) by preparing this Design Guidance and Codes document.

The NPSG seek to establish design guidance and codes to influence the character and design of future development across the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Area (NA), including the village of Mortimer and the surrounding countryside.

Stratfield Mortimer is a civil parish, overseen by West Berkshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority (LPA). Mortimer is classed as a Rural Service Centre within the West Berkshire Local Plan (2017) and have been provided with a minimum growth target of 110 homes within the Plan period.

At the time of writing, this target is underway to be met through recent developments, however the NPSG may choose to allocate further sites. This will be decided as part of the Neighbourhood Plan review.

This document seeks to provide important clarity for future development by setting codes and guidance which meet the aspirations of local stakeholders and support the delivery of high-quality, sustainable development.

The design codes and guidance within this document form part of the evidence base for the updated Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan on design-related issues.

Figure 01: St. John's Church, situated at the village centre.

Figure 02: The historic fairground is well-used by local residents for public recreation.

1.2 Process and engagement

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group conducted consultations to obtain the view of residents on topics relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan. Respondents noted that new homes often lack adequate garden space and tend to appear overcrowded. They support preserving trees and maintaining native vegetation. Some also raised concerns about insufficient parking and public open space. There was also mention of school-related congestion, sub par pedestrian and cycling routes. It was agreed that quiet lanes should remain unchanged and that off-road parking for the junior school is supported. Use of traditional materiality is preferred but modernity is not opposed. Also decorative features like timber bargeboards and brick detailing are valued for maintaining local character.

These insights will guide the development of a Neighbourhood Plan that reflects the community's priorities and preserves its unique character.

Figure 03: A brief chronological breakdown of the key elements and milestones used throughout the duration of the production of this document.

1.3 How to use this document

This document will be used differently by different people in the planning and development process.

A valuable way codes and guidance can be used is as part of a process of co-design and involvement that seeks to understand and takes account of local preferences for design quality. As such the codes and guidance can help to facilitate conversations to help align expectations, aid understanding, and identify key local issues.

The resulting design guidance and codes can then set out how to adequately respond to these issues in future development.

Design codes and guidance alone will not automatically secure quality design outcomes, but they will help to prevent poor outcomes by creating a rigorous process that establishes expectations for design quality.

What follows is a list of actors and how they will use the design guidelines:

Potential users	How they will use the design guidance and codes
Applicants, developers, & landowners	As a guide to the community's and the Local Planning Authority's expectations on design, allowing a degree of certainty – they will be expected to follow the guidance and codes as planning consent is sought.
Local planning authority	As a reference point, embedded in policy, against which to assess planning applications. The guidance and codes should be discussed with applicants during any pre application discussions.
Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council	As a guide when commenting on planning applications, ensuring that the guidance and codes are complied with.
Local community organisations	As a tool to promote community-backed development and to inform comments on planning applications.

Table 01: A list of potential users of this document and how they will apply the design guidance and codes.

1.4 Policy context

National and local policy documents provide valuable guidance on how to bring about good design and the benefits accompanying it. Certain documents are for the purpose of ensuring adequate planning regulations are in place to check that development is both fit for purpose and able to build sustainable, thriving communities. Other documents are more technical and offer specific design guidance which can inform the design codes.

Additionally, these following documents have informed the design guidance and codes within this report to ensure they are best aligned with the needs and opportunities identified for the NA:

NATIONAL LEVEL

2007 - Manual for Streets

Department for Transport

Development is expected to respond positively to the Manual for Streets, the Government's guidance on how to design, construct, adopt and maintain new and existing residential streets. It promotes streets and wider development that avoid car dominated layouts but that do place the needs of pedestrians and cyclists first.

2024 - National Planning Policy Framework

MHCLG

Development needs to consider national level planning policy guidance as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG). In particular, NPPF Chapter 12: Achieving well-designed places stresses the creation of high-quality buildings and places.

2021 - National Design Guide

MHCLG

The National Design Guide (Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021) illustrates how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice.

2021 - National Model Design Code (Part 1 & Part 2)

MHCLG

The purpose of the National Model Design Code is to provide detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies to promote successful design. It expands on the ten characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide, which reflects the government's priorities and provides a common overarching framework for design.

Stratfield Mortimer is a civil parish, overseen by West Berkshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority (LPA). The following planning and design documents were reviewed to understand the policy context under which this document has been produced. These include key documents such as the area's Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD).

Local planning policies and guidance		Adoption date
West Berkshire District Council	West Berkshire Local Plan Review	Emerging
	Core Strategy Development Plan	2012
	Housing Site Allocation Development Plan Document (DPD)	2017
	Sustainable Drainage Systems Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	2018
	Quality Design SPD	2006
	Housing Extensions Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)	2004
	Shopfronts and Signs SPG	2003
	Cycle and Motorcycle Advice and Standards	2014
Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council	Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan Review	Emerging
	Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan	2017
	Landscape Capacity Assessment	2017

1.5 Area of study

The area of study is the civil parish of Stratfield Mortimer in West Berkshire. It is located 10 km south of Reading, 12 km north of Basingstoke, 18 km east of Newbury, and 65 km west of London.

The Neighbourhood Area includes the linear village of Stratfield Mortimer and the larger village of Mortimer Common, also known as Mortimer. In order to avoid any confusion, this document will use 'Stratfield Mortimer' to refer to the entire parish/NA.

The north-west of the parish is dominated by areas of woodland. The parish is partly crossed by two streams: Lockram Brook north of Mortimer Common and Foudry Brook, a chalk stream east of Stratfield Mortimer.

The NA is rich in historical significance, with roots dating back to the Domesday Book, and it retains many traditional features, including ancient woodland and remnants of historic landmarks like the Mortimer Common. The surrounding landscape offers a network of walking trails and bridleways.

With its proximity to both Reading and Basingstoke, Stratfield Mortimer is well connected while preserving a peaceful, village atmosphere. The area is popular with families, commuters, and retirees, offering a blend of rural tranquillity and easy access to urban centres. The local railway station provides convenient links to major towns, enhancing its appeal as a desirable residential area in the heart of the English countryside.

3,931
RESIDENTS
2021 CENSUS

1,222ha
STUDY AREA

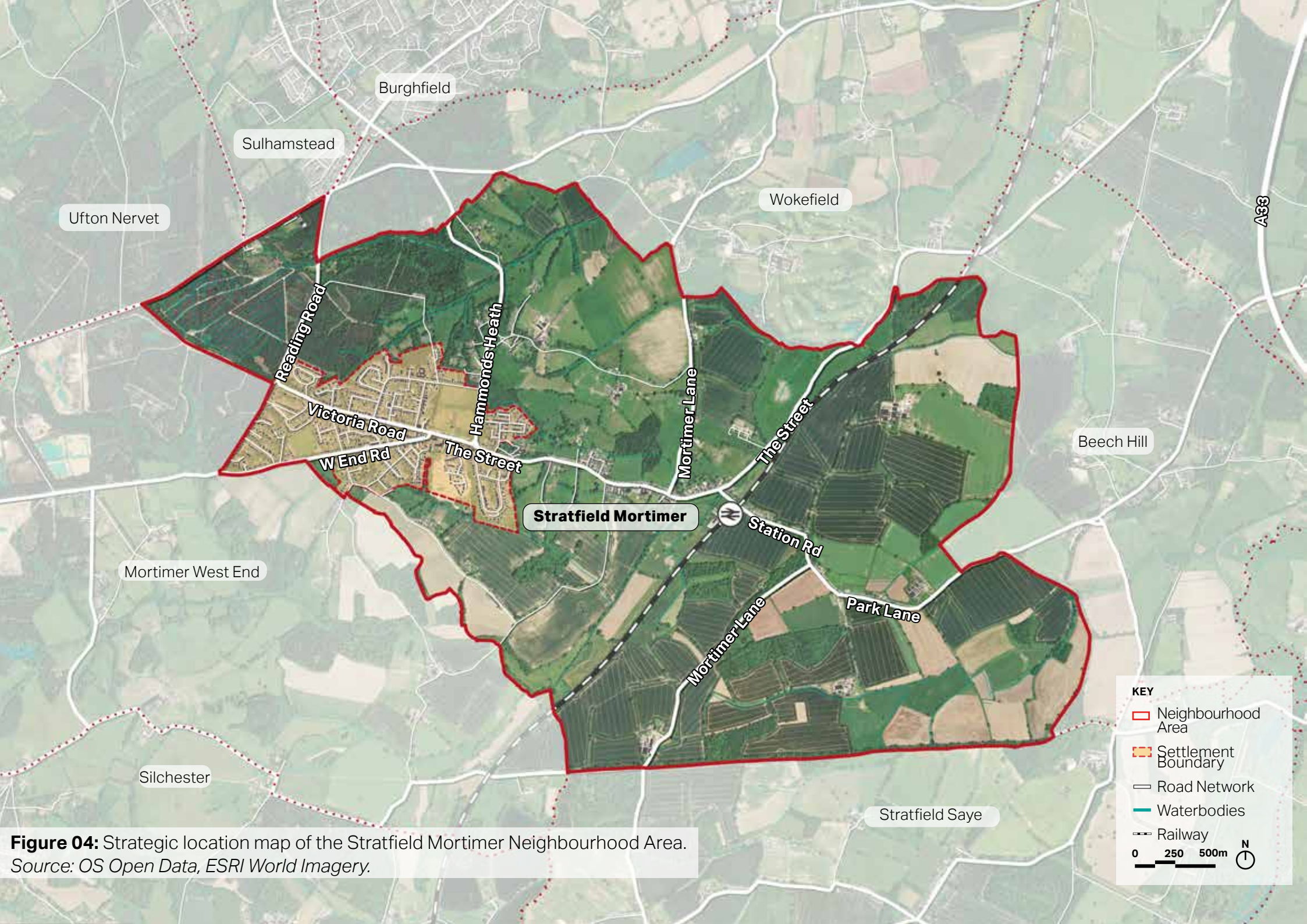

Figure 04: Strategic location map of the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Area.
Source: OS Open Data, ESRI World Imagery.

Parish area analysis

02

Decorative features like blue brick arches and quoins are valued for maintaining local character.

2. Parish area analysis

This section presents a snapshot of the Neighbourhood Area today to inform the design objectives of the Design Guidance and Codes. It provides an overview of Stratfield Mortimer's heritage, landscape and movement network.

Figure 05: Grade II Listed Church of St. Mary, built 1869

Figure 06: Traditional brick detailing and lush front gardens.

Figure 07: Example of green, tree-lined road, West End Road

Figure 08: The Fairground, at the heart of the village, features 20 acre of play, recreation and grazing areas.

2.1 Overview

Land use

The parish encompasses approximately 9.67 square kilometers, characterised by a blend of residential areas, agricultural lands, and woodlands. The southern and southeastern regions are predominantly agricultural, interspersed with woodlands and traversed by the Foudry Brook. The village itself ascends Mortimer Hill from the brook, seamlessly integrating with Mortimer Common at the hill's summit.

The village features a mix of detached and semi-detached homes, complemented by terraced houses and flats. This composition aligns closely with West Berkshire's housing averages. Residential zones are interwoven with essential community facilities, including schools, and healthcare services.

The village functions as a rural service centre, maintaining its traditional facilities while accommodating new developments to serve both residents and neighbouring communities. Local amenities include a surgery, dentist, pharmacy, post office, hardware shop, supermarkets, and restaurants.

Pattern of development

Stratfield Mortimer contains different patterns of development, unified by low overall densities and building heights that help it retain its rural character.

Development patterns are primarily linear for the oldest parts of Mortimer village west of the train station. It consists of small building clusters established along The Street and interspersed with unbuilt land. Buildings are arranged in an informal pattern, with large variations in setbacks, orientations, and plot sizes.

Victorian and Edwardian developments situated central in the core village, in contrast, contain more formal layouts, with usually regular long and thin plots. The building line is set back a short distance from the road and is consistent with small amounts of variation. Roads form a more interconnected network.

20th-21st century development mainly take the form of short cul-de-sacs. Building lines and plots are consistent within the same cul-de-sacs but vary between different developments. The smallest and densest plots in the village are found in these areas.

Public realm

The public realm in Stratfield Mortimer fosters community engagement and enhances residents' quality of life. At the heart of Mortimer Common lies The Fairground, a 20-acre area managed by the parish council for public recreation, serving as a central hub for community events and activities.

The village is well served by community facilities, including the community centre and cricket pavilion located on The Fairground, both available for hire. St. John's Hall functions as the main village hall, accommodating the Mortimer Pre-School and regularly hosting amateur dramatic performances. The parish is also enriched by extensive areas of public woodland, offering residents a range of opportunities for outdoor recreation and engagement with the natural environment.

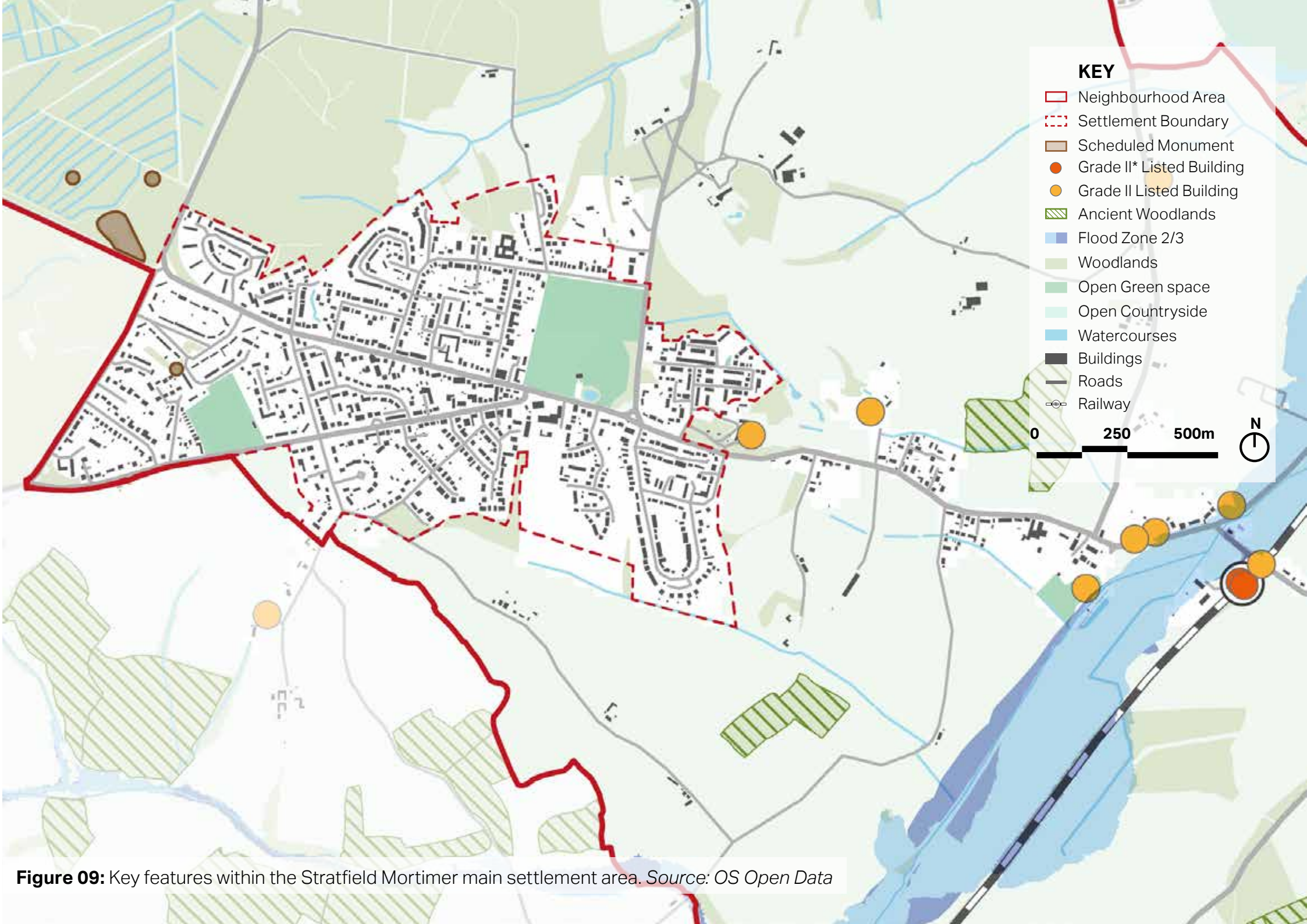

Figure 09: Key features within the Stratfield Mortimer main settlement area. *Source: OS Open Data*

2.2 Heritage and Built Form

The origins of Stratfield Mortimer are deeply rooted in the Anglo-Saxon period, with the name "Stratfield" derived from "street" (likely referencing the nearby Roman road, Calleva Atrebatum), and "Mortimer" coming from the influential Mortimer family who once owned land here.

The village likely began as a small agricultural settlement in Saxon times. After the Norman Conquest in 1066, it was part of a manorial system, and the Mortimer family played a key role in its development during the medieval period. By the 16th and 17th centuries, Stratfield Mortimer had evolved into a more structured village, with increasing emphasis on farming and local trade.

The opening of Mortimer Station on the Reading to Basingstoke railway line in 1848 brought increased connectivity to the area. This led to the growth of Mortimer Common as a planned village and the establishment of new buildings, as well as a shift in the local economy. The village became a more attractive place for residents commuting to nearby towns and cities, and local services and amenities expanded.

Today, the village is characterised by its mix of detached houses, cottages, and modern residential estates, surrounded by open countryside and wooded areas. The historic core retains its historic charm, with traditional cottages and period houses built predominantly in red brick, flint and timber. These older buildings often feature slate roofs, reflecting the architectural styles typical of rural Berkshire.

The Fairground is a large open green space which serves as a community hub and gives the village an open, spacious feel in contrast to the more enclosed streetscapes near the historic core.

The village's centre is anchored by small shops, a church, and community amenities, with winding roads that reflect its organic growth over time.

Listed Buildings

There are a total of 15 Listed Buildings in the Neighbourhood Area. Of these, 13 are Grade II listed and 2 are Grade II* Listed.

Heritage assets in Stratfield Mortimer include several Listed Buildings, such as St. Mary's Church, a notable medieval structure dating back to the 13th century, and Mortimer House, a significant historic residence.

Scheduled Monuments

Stratfield Mortimer contains 4 Scheduled Monuments, reflecting its rich historical significance. Round barrow cemetery at Holden's Firs is a significant archaeological site dating back to the Bronze Age (approximately 2400–1500 BC). This group of prehistoric burial mounds reflects early funerary practices and offers insight into ritual and social structures of the time.

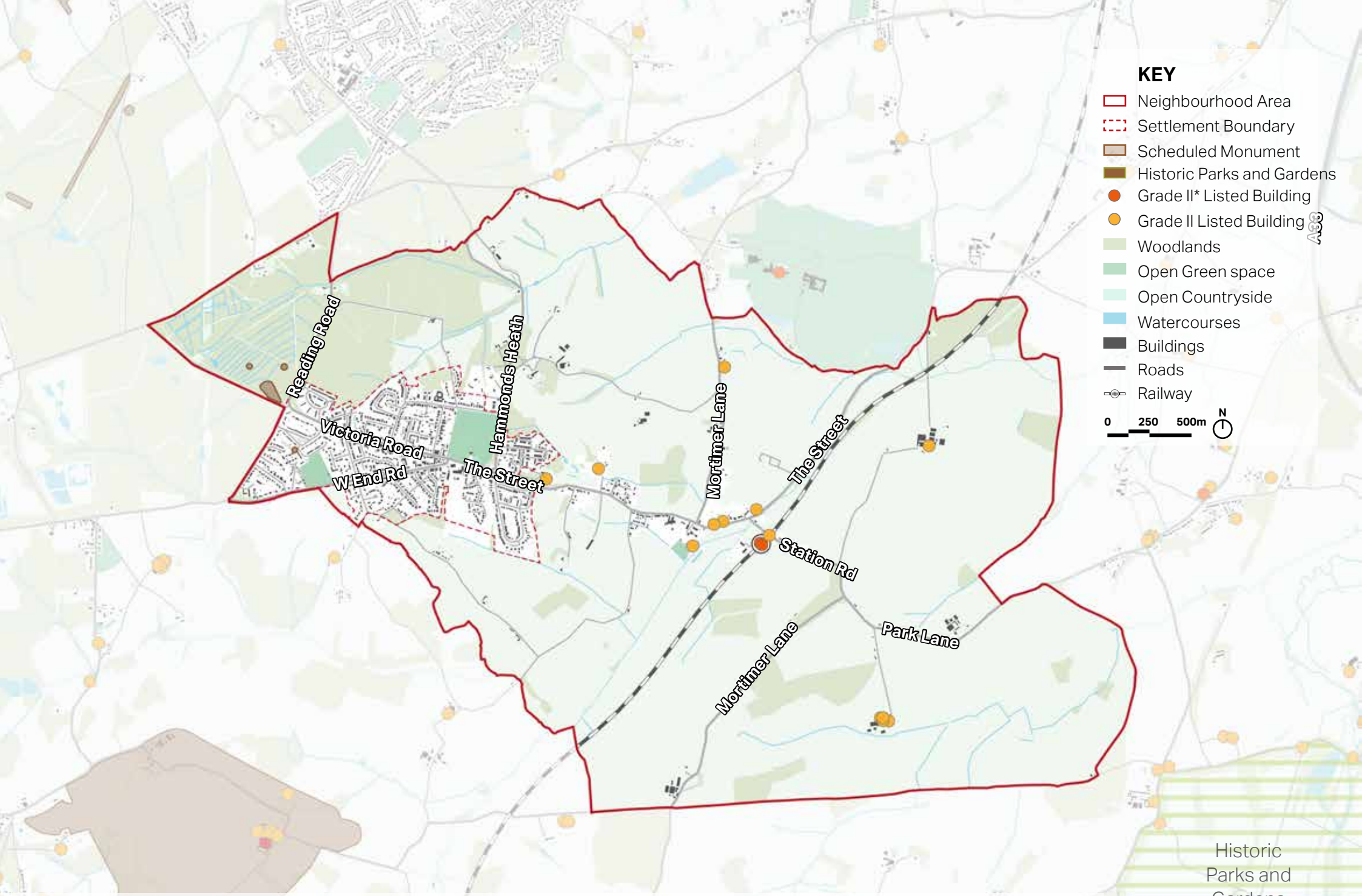

Figure 10: Heritage features within the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Area (NA). *Source: OS Open Data, Historic England*

2.3 Landscape and spatial setting

Stratfield Mortimer's spatial setting is characterised by its surrounding countryside, ancient woodlands, and agricultural fields. The village is surrounded by rich natural features that contribute to its rural charm and ecological significance.

Landscape designations

The NA is home to several ancient woodlands, remnants of long-established natural ecosystems. Woodlands are valuable for biodiversity, featuring species of trees, along with rich undergrowth that supports wildlife. There are also traditional orchards within the NA, a landscape feature associated with rural life in England. These orchards are vital for biodiversity, supporting a variety of wildlife. They are often recognised for their heritage value as well as their contribution to local food production.

Stratfield Mortimer lies near the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (prev. AONB), although not within its boundaries. This designation emphasises the area's scenic value, with the undulating terrain and patchwork of farmland and woodland contributing to the NA's aesthetic appeal.

Several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are located near Stratfield Mortimer, protecting areas of ecological importance. The nearby Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows SSSI site encompasses valuable woodland and meadow habitats, with a diversity of plant species, ancient woodlands, and wetlands.

Watercourses

The NA is crossed by several small streams and watercourses, which contribute to the area's drainage and ecological diversity. These streams feed into the wider river systems of the Kennet and Thames. One of the key waterways includes the Foudry Brook, a chalk stream. The Foudry Brook originates from several springs near the village of Baughurst, flowing eastward and then turning north, before joining the River Kennet just south of Reading. The proximity of woodlands and watercourses creates valuable wildlife corridors, supporting a range of species.

Flood risk

Parts of Stratfield Mortimer are located in flood-prone areas, particularly around the Foudry Brook and other watercourses that run near the NA boundary. The area's geology consists of a chalk base, overlaid with a layer of clay. This creates the typical characteristics of a clay stream, where water levels can rise quickly after heavy rainfall due to increased surface runoff from the surrounding land.

In July 2007, Mortimer experienced an exceptional rainfall event, recording 84.2 mm of precipitation—the highest in 20 years. This intense rainfall led to significant surface water flooding, impacting local infrastructure and properties. The event highlights the village's vulnerability to flash flooding.

The Environment Agency (EA) classifies areas into Flood Zones 2 and 3, indicating moderate to high flood risk from rivers and streams, although the village core itself is less affected.

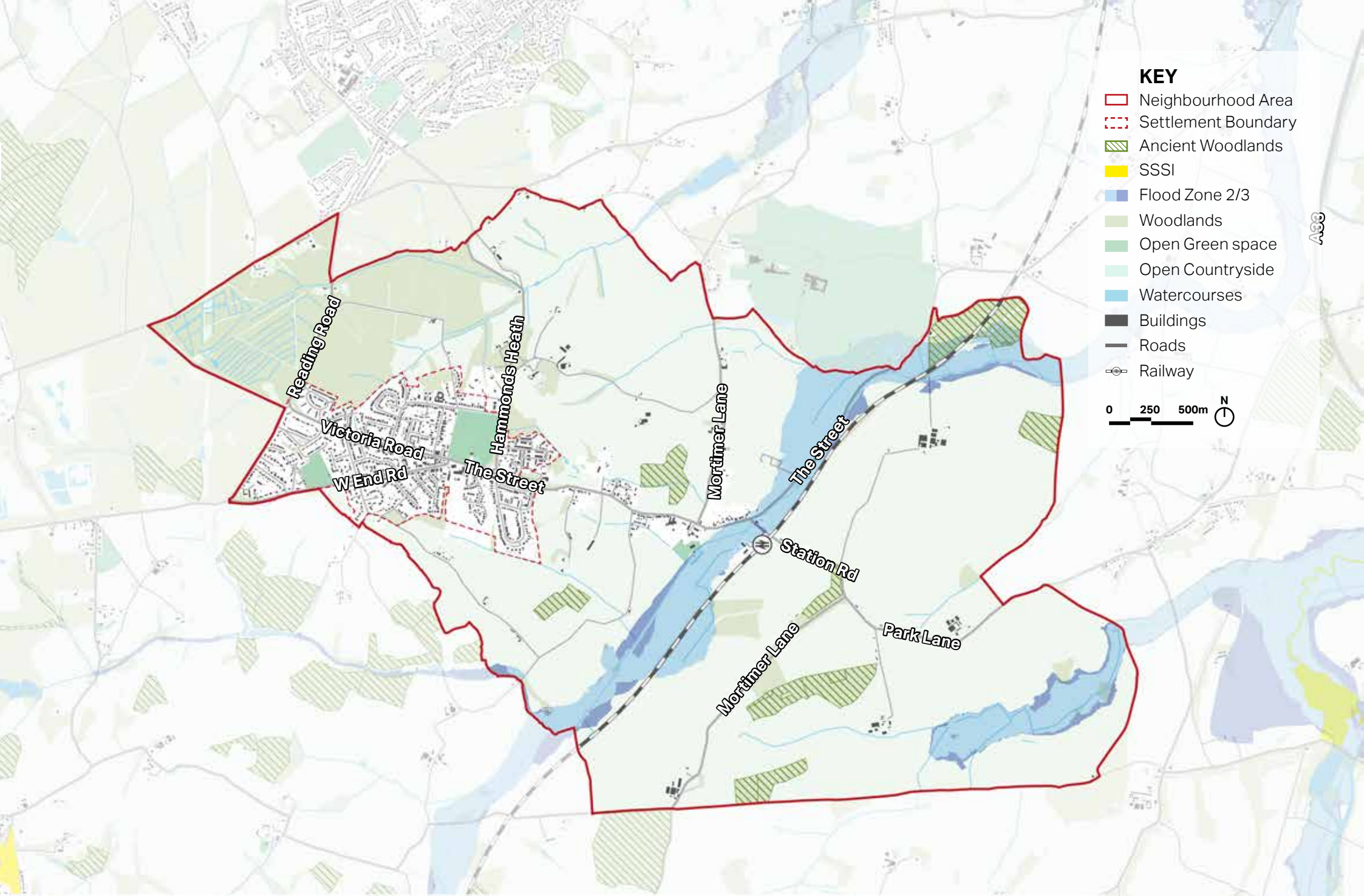

Figure 11: Landscape features within the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Area (NA). *Source: OS Data, Natural England*

2.4 Movement and Connectivity

Roads

The village is primarily served by The Street and Victoria Road, which constitute its main spine and provide essential road links to nearby towns and cities.

The A33, a more significant route, is located just east of the village and offers a direct route between Reading and Basingstoke. The proximity to the M4 motorway, via Junction 11 at Reading, offers a quick link to London to the east and Bristol to the west. The B3349 runs through Spencers Wood and Riseley. These roads enable efficient vehicular movement and support local commuting patterns.

Public transport

Mortimer Station is located 1.2 miles east of the village, and with no bus service to the station, it is approximately a 30 minute walk from from the centre. The train station is a key element of the village's transport network. The station sits on the Reading to Basingstoke line, providing regular services to both towns. These rail connections make Stratfield Mortimer a popular choice for commuters, offering a 15-minute train journey to Reading, which has further connections to London Paddington, Bristol, and the rest of the UK rail network.

The only regular bus service from the village itself, the 2A, goes into Reading via Burghfield. Although these services are not frequent, they help connect the NA to wider transport hubs.

Active travel

While there are no National Cycle Network (NCN) routes directly passing through Stratfield Mortimer, nearby NCN Route 23 runs through Basingstoke and Reading, both easily accessible by road. This cycle route connects Reading with Southampton, offering scenic routes for cyclists in the wider region.

Stratfield Mortimer is interwoven with numerous public rights of way (PRoW) that facilitate pedestrian movement and promote recreational use. Alongside the public rights of way, the area benefits from an extensive network of permitted footpaths, including those across land managed by the Englefield Estate. These footpaths and bridleways extend into the surrounding countryside, connecting the village to nearby hamlets and natural landmarks.

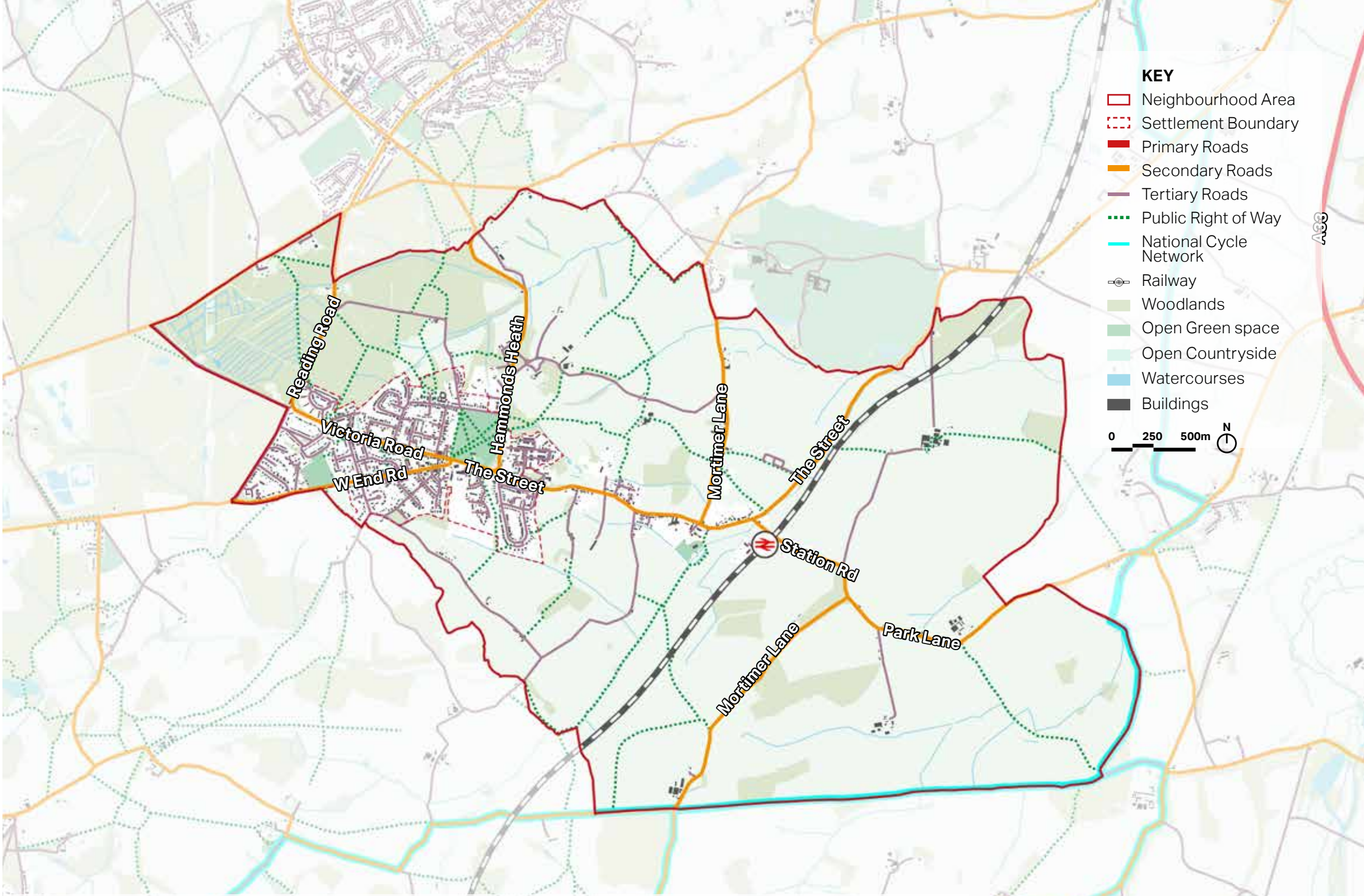

Figure 12: Movement features within the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Area (NA). *Source: OS Open Data*

Design guidance and codes

03

Site context showing a dwelling with a prominent front tree and driveway access.

3. Design guidance and codes

This chapter provides guidance and codes on the design of new development and the extension of existing properties in the parish. Where possible, local images are used to convey design guidelines. The design guidance and codes support the Neighbourhood Plan and should be read in conjunction with relevant local policies.

This chapter is a set of general design considerations appropriate for Stratfield Mortimer's rural environment, and should be addressed by applicants and their design teams. Where guidance is already covered by national, district or parish level planning/ design guides in, relevant links are provided.

There is also a set of specific design codes in relation to the key characteristics of the parish that are not covered by existing planning/ design guidance. The codes are specific instructions which give clear directions for the development of design proposals.

Both the design considerations and the design codes focus on housing development, such as small scale or infill, as well as potential conversions or extensions. In addition, more strategic design guidance will also be included to cover potential larger developments coming forward.

The purpose of both the design considerations and the design codes is to ensure that development in the parish is place-specific and responds sensitively to the local context. New proposals will be expected to apply the codes to reflect the vernacular style of the Neighbourhood Area (NA).

Please note:

Both design codes and guidelines are contained within this document, highlighted within dark blue boxes as shown here. The difference between codes and guidelines is summarised below:

Design codes: are mandatory requirements for design issues and are expressed with the word **MUST.**

Guidelines: set out aspirations for design that is expected to be delivered and are expressed with one of two words:

- **SHOULD** reflects design principles that are strongly encouraged.
- **COULD** reflects design principles that are suggestions.

3.1 General design considerations

Access and movement

- Development should propose streets that filter traffic and speed, to retain Mortimer's rural setting. For smaller schemes (such as Tower House Farm or Strawberry Fields), this can be achieved through a simple, legible street hierarchy, typically comprising secondary streets, shared surfaces, and edge lanes, rather than formal primary routes;
- Development should link up with the with well connected streets, footpaths, and PRoWs within and surrounding the Parish;
- Development should feature streets that meets the needs of all users; pedestrians, cyclists, and those with disabilities; and
- Development should incorporate street planting, such as native trees, hedgerows, grass verges, and informal landscaping, to reflect and reinforce the village's distinctive green and leafy character, where built form is softened by vegetation and streets blend into the surrounding rural landscape.

Parking and utilities

- Parking should be well integrated and should not dominate the public realm, so that it is in keeping with the Parish, which features predominantly on plot parking;
- High-quality and well-designed soft landscaping, hedges, hedgerows and trees should be used to increase the visual attractiveness of parking;
- Driveways must be constructed from porous materials, such as gravel to minimise surface water run-off and help mitigate flooding and to maintain the rural character of the Parish;
- Garages must not dominate the appearance of dwellings and must not reduce the amount of active frontages to the street;
- Electric vehicle charging points, both for off-street and on-street parking, should be integrated into the design. Provision should meet or exceed current Building Regulations, with a recommended minimum charging capacity of 7kW for residential units, to ensure practicality and future resilience.;
- Adequate provision should be made for bin storage, including areas for waste separation, holding and recycling;
- Adequate provision should be made for cycle parking, on public and private land; and
- Mortimer is a dark village by design, and new development should not introduce external lighting unless it is essential for safety. Any proposed lighting must be minimal, low-level, and designed to preserve dark skies, avoiding upward spill and unnecessary illumination.

Green infrastructure and landscape

- Development should provide adequate public open space in terms of both quantity and quality, in line with West Berkshire Council's policies and standards for open space provision;
- Development should identify existing biodiversity assets and corridors and contribute to their preservation and enhancement and should maximise opportunities for the restoration, enhancement and connection of natural habitats. Development should promote green links (cycle ways, footpaths, tree lined streets) which connect with existing neighbourhoods within the Parish;
- Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs) should be provided in accordance with NPPF, to manage surface water runoff, reduce flood risks, and promote environmental sustainability; and
- Development should demonstrate a connection to landscape setting of the Parish and propose a design that does not undermine the existing qualities of the area.

Built form

- Development should respect surrounding buildings in terms of scale, height, form, and massing, which is generally low;
- Development should retain and incorporate existing building features which add richness and character; Buildings should front onto the street and avoid blank facades;
- Any potential new development outside the settlement boundary should overlook public green spaces to ensure natural surveillance;
- Development should propose a combination of soft and hard boundary treatments to reinforce the existing character of the Parish, which combines walls, fences and hedgerows;
- Development should propose designs that allow for building lines and setbacks which match the built character of Mortimer;
- The massing of landmark buildings (i.e. those on corners or at the end of a street) could be slightly larger, or more intricate than the surrounding street to help them stand out;
- Development should include a range of house types and sizes to allow for a variety of options; and
- Infill development should complement the street scene into which it will be inserted. Thus, building lines, boundary treatments, massing, heights should reflect the surrounding context.

3.2 Biodiversity

There are pockets of woodland and greenery within and surrounding Stratfield Mortimer which play a critical role in climate resilience and enhancing biodiversity. These areas are maintained, offering ecological benefits such as carbon storage and wildlife habitats. Greenery is an important characteristic of the village area and so is highly valued by the residents. Green corridors are also actively integrated into the village's landscape, serving as essential links between natural habitats. This supports the local wildlife whilst also providing residents with access to plenty of green space.

Flood risk is present in the village, particularly due to surface water runoff exacerbated by heavy rainfall events, such as the 2007 storm. The village's topography and drainage infrastructure contribute to the flood pattern, with the significant network of blue infrastructure primarily composed of smaller tributaries branching off West End Brook to the south and Lockram Brook to the north.

However, during extreme weather events like the 2007 storm, these features, such as ditches and minor streams, were overwhelmed and contributed to the flooding, rather than alleviating it. Most of the flood zones 2 and 3 are aligned with Foudry Brook, which flows alongside the railway line, and these areas remain particularly vulnerable to surface water flooding.

Figure 13: Greenery is an important characteristic of the village area and so is highly valued by the residents.

For District level guidance on biodiversity net gain - please refer to the **West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Development Plan** Policy CS17 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' (page 80)

B1 - Biodiversity Net Gain

- New developments **should** prioritise tree planting, identify existing biodiversity corridors, and contribute to their preservation and enhancement.; and
- Biodiversity interventions in the public space **could** help improve the environment as well as inform and educate the community about the existing species and habitats.

B2 - Wildlife Corridors

- The layouts of roads, front and back gardens, and green spaces **must** be considered to aid in creating wildlife corridors;
- Blue assets can also contribute to biodiversity connectivity. Therefore, the Foudry Brook, and the many other existing ditches and streams within the parish **should** be considered in design proposals. This **could** be in the form of ponds or pollinator gardens when planning for wildlife corridors; and
- Wildlife-friendly features that support movement and habitat should be included. Bird or bat boxes, bee bricks and bug hotels **should** be installed to enhance biodiversity and wildlife.

Figure 14: Rural paths lined with hedgerows provide vital habitats for wildlife.

Figure 15: Green verges, such as those near Stephens Firs, could be introduced to create and enhance wildlife corridors.

3.3 Eco-Design

Many homes in the village have adopted rainwater harvesting systems to their properties. These systems collect and store rainwater for non-potable uses, such as irrigation. By utilising this rainwater, residents can reduce their mains water usage and contribute to more sustainable water management practices.

Also, in the more recent housing development, Tower Gardens, there has been an attenuation pond implemented, which is designed to manage surface water runoff effectively. Attenuation ponds play a crucial role in flood prevention, capturing excess rainwater and slowly releasing it into the drainage system. By mitigating flood risk, this attenuation pond not only protects the local infrastructure but also enhances the resilience of the community against heavy rain fall.

There is also a presence of solar panels throughout the village, which is a testament to the community's focus on renewable energy and the environment on the whole.

Stratfield Mortimer is a dark village, with minimal light pollution due to its rural setting and distance from major urban centres like Reading and London. Unlike neighbouring areas such as Burghfield Common and Reading, which experience higher levels of light pollution from urban sprawl, Mortimer benefits from a clearer, more vibrant view of the night sky, helping to preserve its rural character and natural environment.

This section will focus on some design guidelines and suggestions for properties to improve their energy efficiency.

Figure 16: Local example of rainwater harvesting within the village.

ED1 - Site Analysis

- Any new development **must** conduct a detailed site survey to assess natural contours, drainage patterns, and existing vegetation;
- Development **must** identify prevailing wind directions and solar exposure to optimise passive heating and cooling;
- Development **must** assess soil quality for sustainable landscaping and rainwater absorption;
- Development **must** ensure pedestrian- and cycle-friendly routes that integrate with existing green spaces; and
- Development **should** identify topographical features that might optimise or degrade the performance of the buildings, for instance, slopes, tree belts, and the shape and orientation of the site.

ED2 - Building Orientation

- Properties **must** avoid backing onto a road and creating long stretches of blank façades, which could reduce natural surveillance;
- The orientation of buildings within the plot, along with the site topography, **should** be considered to maximise solar gain while keeping a consistent frontage to the road;
- The orientation of the building **should** be considered when determining the placement of glazing. Ideally, one of the main glazed elevations **should** be positioned within 30° due south to maximise solar heat gain. For buildings with a different orientation, the proportion of window to wall area on north-facing façades **should** be adjusted to minimise heat loss on the cooler side; and

Figure 17: Dwellings fronting onto the road and creating natural surveillance.

Figure 18: Development should take into consideration mature trees and planting.

- Additionally, north-facing single-aspect units **should** be avoided or mitigated with the use of reflective light, roof windows, or other design solutions to optimise natural light and warmth.

ED3 - Building Form

- Roofs **should** be designed to accommodate solar panels or green roofs where possible. The pitch and orientation of pitched roofs **should** be considered carefully to optimise solar energy collection and ensure the most effective positioning for solar panels;
- Multi-functional spaces and shared walls (e.g., in terraces or semi-detached houses where appropriate for the local character) **should** be encouraged to enhance thermal performance; and
- Low-carbon and energy-efficient techniques **should** be prioritised.

ED4 - External Environment

- Development **should** prioritise native and pollinator-friendly planting to support local wildlife. Wildflower meadows and woodland buffer zones **could** be introduced to strengthen ecological resilience;
- Developments **must** implement Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), such as swales, permeable paving, and rain gardens, to reduce flood risk and manage surface water;
- Developments **should** implement motion-sensitive or time-controlled lighting in public spaces to minimise energy use while maintaining safety; and
- Lighting schemes **must** be kept to a minimum to preserve Mortimer's dark village character.

Figure 19: Local example of dwelling with solar panels.

Figure 20: Green roof incorporated in a bus shelter, example from elsewhere in the UK.

3.4 Views and Landmarks

V1 - Preserve and enhance views

- Development **must** respect and preserve significant views of the surrounding countryside, woodlands, and historic landmarks;
- New buildings **should** be positioned to avoid obstructing important sightlines, particularly those towards St. Mary's Church, heritage buildings, and key landscape features;
- Tree planting and landscaping **should** enhance views rather than obscure them, maintaining a balance between screening and openness;
- Public spaces **should** be designed to maximise natural and historic views, incorporating seating areas and viewpoints where appropriate;
- Key landmarks **could** be highlighted through sensitive lighting or subtle wayfinding elements that enhance their visibility without causing light pollution;
- New developments **should** create opportunities for framed views through careful layout, road alignment, and landscaping;
- Footpaths and cycle routes **must** be planned to connect with key viewing points, encouraging appreciation of the landscape; and
- New developments **could** introduce subtle architectural features, such as view corridors or framed perspectives, that emphasize important landmarks.

Figure 21: Views along The Street.

Figure 22: The Avenue, tree-lined rural road with landscaped boundary treatments.

V2 - Development Edges in the Rural Landscape

- Housing densities **must** be reduced towards development edges and along rural edges in order to create a gradual transition towards the countryside;
- New development adjoining open fields and countryside **should** have a soft landscaped edge to create a gradual transition into the surrounding rural landscape; and
- Abrupt edges with little vegetation or landscape on the edge of the development **should** be avoided. On the contrary, rich vegetation including native trees and hedgerows **should** be used to screen buildings from incoming views.

V3 - Boundary Treatments

- Boundary treatments **must** be designed to allow wildlife to pass through and to retain the rural character of Stratfield Mortimer;
- Natural boundary treatments **should** reinforce building line and help to define the streetscape, appropriate to the character of the area. They **could** be low wooden fences, brick walls and hedges of varying heights depending on the surrounding context;
- Existing hedgerows **should** be retained whenever possible to maintain the rural character; and
- All boundary treatments **must** be designed for long-term durability and ease of maintenance, using sustainable and locally sourced materials where possible.

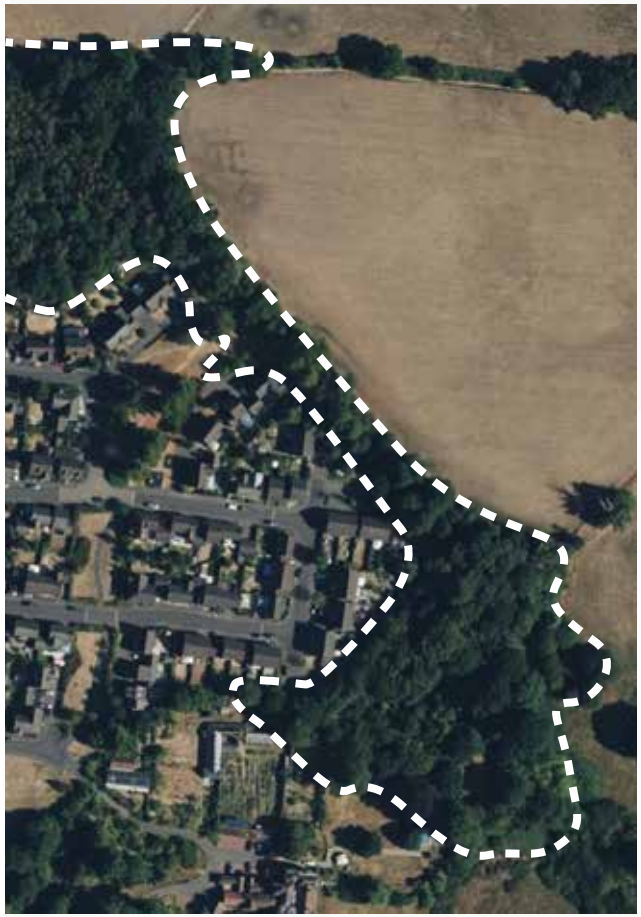

Figure 24: Positive example of landscape buffering from the open countryside, Strawberry Fields development.

3.5 Extensions, Conversions and Infill

B1 - Extensions

- Extensions **must** consider the materials, architectural features, window sizes and proportions of the existing building and respect these elements to design an extension that matches and complements the existing building;
- In the case of side extensions, the new part **must** be set back from the front of the main building and retain the proportions of the original building in order to reduce any visual impact of the join between existing and new; and
- Features such as dormer windows **could** be acceptable but they **must** be appropriate to the context, well designed, and constructed using durable, sustainable materials such as natural stone, brick, or high-performance timber. These materials **must** complement the surrounding architecture and reflect the local character.

B2 - Conversions

- Any conversions **must** consider that new openings **must** generally be avoided and kept to a minimum when necessary;
- Wall treatment **must** reflect the existing materials of the building and be sympathetic to the surroundings;
- New courtyards and driveways **must** be surfaced in a material that reflects its rural setting and the original building materials; and
- Any original boundary treatments **must** be left intact, and not removed, as much as possible, or bisected for access or to create visual splays.

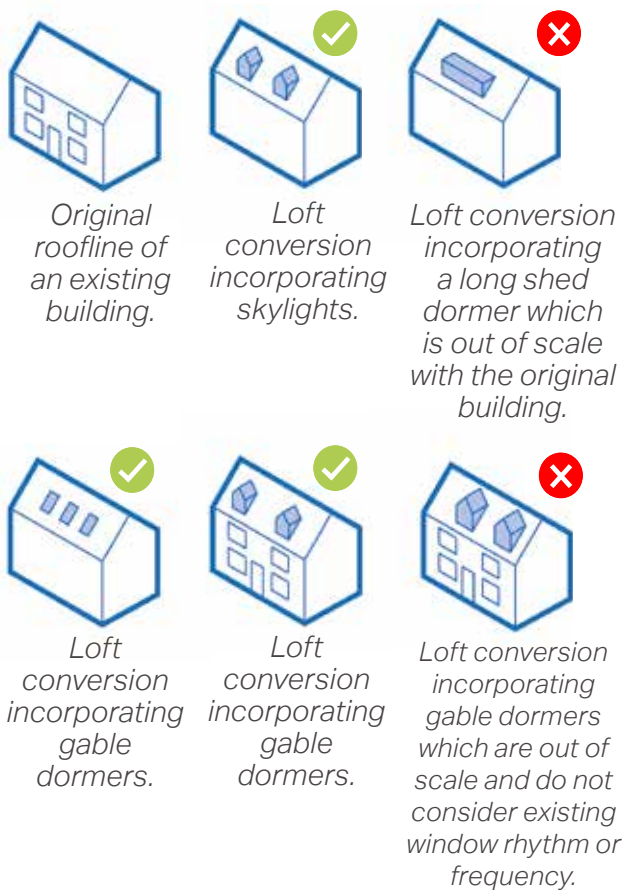

Figure 25: Examples for different types of design treatment in the case of loft conversions.

B3 - Infill

- Infill development **must** complement the street scene into which it will be inserted. Points of continuity in the streetscape **must** be created by material, colour palette, roofscape features (such as chimneys and ridge/eave heights), scale and massing;
- The number of houses per hectare of any new infill development **must** reflect its context and its location in the village (centre or edge), or in a smaller settlement nestled in a wider landscape. The optimum density **must** respond to surrounding densities whilst making efficient use of land; and
- Green unbuilt gaps along The Street **must** be retained to prevent continuous built frontage and preserve the landscape and relationship with the countryside.

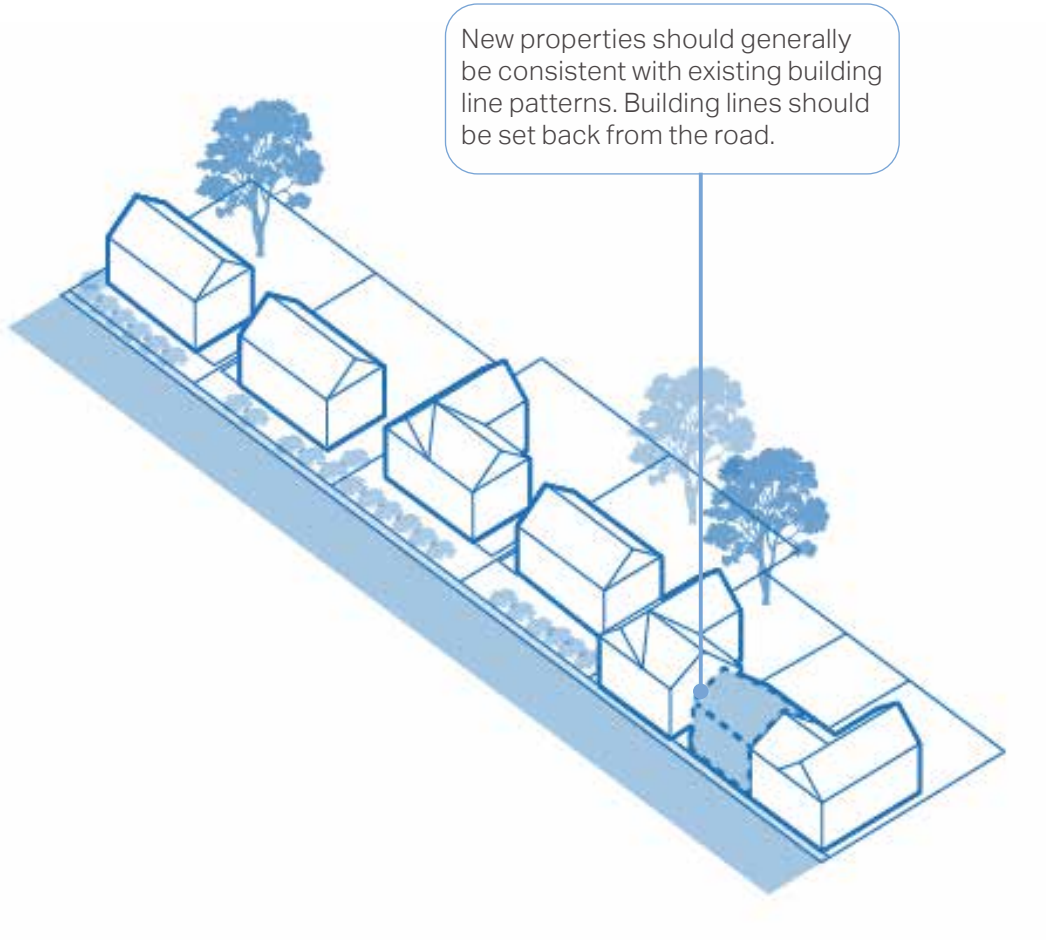

Figure 26: An indicative site after infill.

3.6 Settlement Pattern

SP1 - Plot, Layout and Building Line

- New development **must** provide a wide setback for any residential development within the plot, allowing space for front gardens, and on-plot parking with driveways, and garages; and
- Building setbacks and building lines **must** respond to the existing context. Different areas in Stratfield Mortimer have differing layouts. For example, more consistent building lines with similar setbacks are appropriate in Orchard Road where plot layout is formal and more uniform. In contrast, St John's Road has a much more informal building line with more varied setbacks that do not all enable on-plot parking.

Figure 27: The building lines along St John's Road is not uniform, with setbacks that vary significantly in size. The buildings have a consistent orientation, facing the roads. Some plots allow for on-plot parking, whereas others must rely on road space for parking.

Figure 28: The building lines along Orchard Road are continuous and relatively uniform, maintaining a consistent orientation, facing the road, although the setback slightly varies from plot to plot. The larger setbacks allow for a front garden and driveways.

SP2 - Densities and Garden Sizes

The concept of density, defined in this document as the number of dwellings per hectare (dph), is important to planning and design as it affects the viability of the place. The density varies throughout the village with the lowest density, out of the areas that were sampled, being 8dph (A5, see Figure 33), and the highest being 26dph (A2, see Figure 30). The guidelines opposite highlight how new development should be designed to ensure that existing density within the Parish is respected:

- Density **must** be appropriate to the location of any new development and its surroundings and enhance the form of the existing surrounding area;
- Housing densities **should** be reduced along the edges of the main settlement areas, to create a gradual transition towards the countryside; and
- There are higher densities closer to the village centre such as A1, A3 and A6, see Figures 29, 31 and 34) which is usual of a rural village, and **should** be maintained.

A1

Figure 29: Higher density of 12dph at the at the village edge.

A2

Figure 30: This area, along College Piece, has the highest density out of the areas that have been sampled, with a density of 26dph. This due to the area being predominantly terraced houses.

A3

Figure 31: This area has density of 15dph within the center of the village.

A4

Figure 32: This area has a density is 11dph with a mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced houses.

A5

Figure 33: Lower density of 8dph along Dury Lane, creating a more gradual transition with the countryside.

A6

Figure 34: The density is 10dph but varies throughout the area. This is due to the higher housing density towards Victoria Road, which is then counteracted by the lower housing density that is closer to the settlement edge.

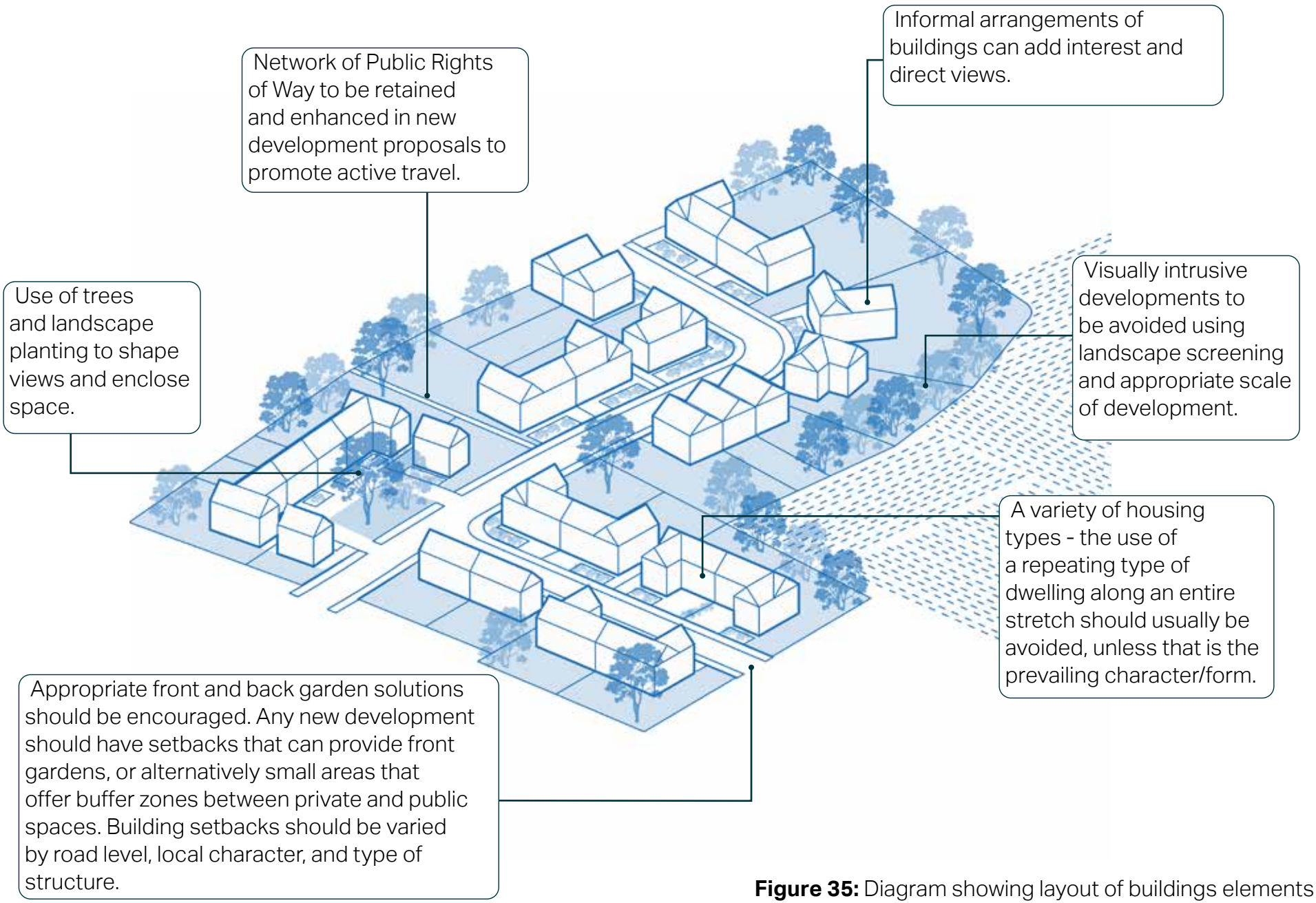

Figure 35: Diagram showing layout of buildings elements

3.7 Built Character

Although a variety of architectural styles are present in Stratfield Mortimer, the local material palette, especially through the use of local brick mixes, brings a degree of visual coherence of the parish. The architectural features of buildings are indicators of the different periods of development in the history of the expansion of the village. This resulted in architectural styles from the Victorian and Edwardian periods, post-WW2 era, and more recent 20th and 21st century examples.

Details such as patterned brick façades, ornamental chimney stacks made of local clay are commonly featured. These elements provide visual interest and reduce the scale and bulk of the buildings. More details on specific key characteristics and materials within the NA are set out in the following pages.

Front gardens are an important components of the character of the parish because they contribute to the rural character and provide space for vehicle parking. Boundary treatments most frequently employ landscaped hedges, low brick walls, or natural timber fencing for security and privacy. In contrast, the design of places in the parish with very small front gardens such as Strawberry Fields has often resulted in a more built-up character with frequent street clutter created by kerbside parking caused by insufficient parking spaces in front gardens.

The rural lanes which are surfaced by gravel constitute another key characteristic of the parish. These roads, such as The Avenue, bring a more informal and rural character to the village. These roads are typically irregularly tree-lined with mature trees and, with soft landscaped boundary treatments.

Figure 36: Residential buildings with a wider setback allow for front gardens, driveways and garages.

Figure 37: The Avenue, tree-lined rural road with landscaped boundary treatments.

BC1 - Building Heights

- New development **must** ensure that the height of buildings responds to the surrounding context, including the height of existing buildings, road width, sense of enclosure, topography, and mature vegetation; and
- Building heights **must** be restricted to 1-2 storeys, in keeping with the existing dominant height of development. Extensions may be permitted into the roof space, but additional storeys above a 2-storey dwelling will not be allowed to maintain the character and scale of the area.

BC2 - Scale and Roofscape

- New development **must** ensure it responds sympathetically to the surrounding buildings in its scale;
- Proposals **should** blend and show consideration for how the roof design and scale will integrate with the existing roofscape;
- The scale and pitch of any roof **should** be in proportion with the dimensions of the building and **should** not be overly complex in its design; and
- The proportion of a building's fenestration **must** be related to each other as well as the scale and proprotion of the surrounding buildings.

BC3 - Roof Materials

- Roof materials **must** respond to surrounding context, with a preference for slate and clay tiles; and
- Roof tiles **should** be in muted, natural tones such as red, brown, grey, or black to harmonise with the surrounding architecture and landscape.

Figure 38: Roofline along West End Road, with the three-storey Dental Practice building, one of the tallest in the village.

Figure 39: Roofline along Groves Lea showing the consistent building line and roofs built below the tree canopy

Materials and Colour Palette

BC4 - Brick Detailing

- Buildings **must** be finished with materials appropriate to the local context. Examples of materials found in Stratfield Mortimer are shown opposite;
- Brickwork **should** incorporate traditional detailing such as header courses, dentil courses, or Flemish bond, to reflect the historic character and maintain visual continuity with existing village architecture; and
- Development involving multiple houses **must** ensure a variety of detailing is utilised across the development to provide visual interest along the road and avoid homogeneous building designs. The houses at Tower House Farm portrays a good variation in architectural details and thus result in a dynamic streetscape.

Facade

Red & blue bricks in Flemish bond

Roughcast with red brick

White painted brick

Off-white render

Roofing

Slate and red brick chimney

Red clay tiles

Fenestration

Slate porch and sash windows

Clay tile porch

Timber casement window

Detailing

Brick mix and calle quoin bricks

Diaper pattern brickwork

Buff brick dressing

Boundary treatments

Low brick wall with landscaped hedges

Timber fencing with hedges

Landscaped hedge

BC5 - Fenestration

- Locally distinctive fenestration and detailing **must** be used in new development. Some local examples of detailing are achieved through using various types of brick as well as creating varied patterns using different brick colours;
- Window proportions **must** be in keeping with the traditional character of Stratfield Mortimer, typically with a vertical emphasis and set within well-defined reveals to create depth and shadow; and
- Windows **must** be constructed from timber or high-quality alternatives that replicate traditional painted wood; and
- Window styles and placements **must** be consistent across building elevations, ensuring a balanced and harmonious appearance.

Figure 40: Local example fenestration with arches employing zig-zag patterns.

Figure 42: Tower House Farm provides high-quality landscaping and mix of materials, building shapes, and orientations.

Figure 41: Example of locally distinctive fenestration and detailing with buff brick dressing.

Figure 43: Positive example of modern interpretations of the local vernacular.

For District level guidance on designing safe streets - please refer to the **West Berkshire Quality Design SPD (2006) – Achieving Design Quality** 2.9 Safety and Security (page 21-22)

BC6 - Liveable streets

- Roads **must** be designed to not only accommodate vehicles but also as 'spaces' for people who live on and along them. An active streetscape is an essential part of a successful public realm design;
- New roads **must** be designed as a 'space' to be used by all transport modes. Public realm spaces **should** be created to provide plenty of places for sit, chat or play in the road;
- Blank façades with no ground floor openings **must** be avoided because they are detrimental to the creation of safer and friendly environments; and
- Landscaping and planting layers **could** be used to add sensory richness.

Figure 44: Example of spaces designed for the local community to get together, with a central play feature and street furniture. Image credit: https://landezine.com/futureproof-village-realmalpen-by-felixx/

Figure 45: Example of well-designed landscape and planting layers. Image credit: https://landezine.com/sky-uk-headquarters-byurban/

More guidance on minimum garage standards can be found in **Section 5.3** of the *West Berkshire Residential Parking Policy for New Development*

BC7 - Garages

- Garages **must** not dominate the appearance of dwellings and must not reduce the amount of active frontage to the street. It should be noted that garages do not count as designated parking spaces. Parking requirements must be met through other means, such as driveways or designated spaces;
- Garages that provide space for bin storage and/or cycle parking **must** have minimum dimensions of 3.5x7m; and
- Any bicycle stored **should** be able to be removed easily without having to move the vehicle.

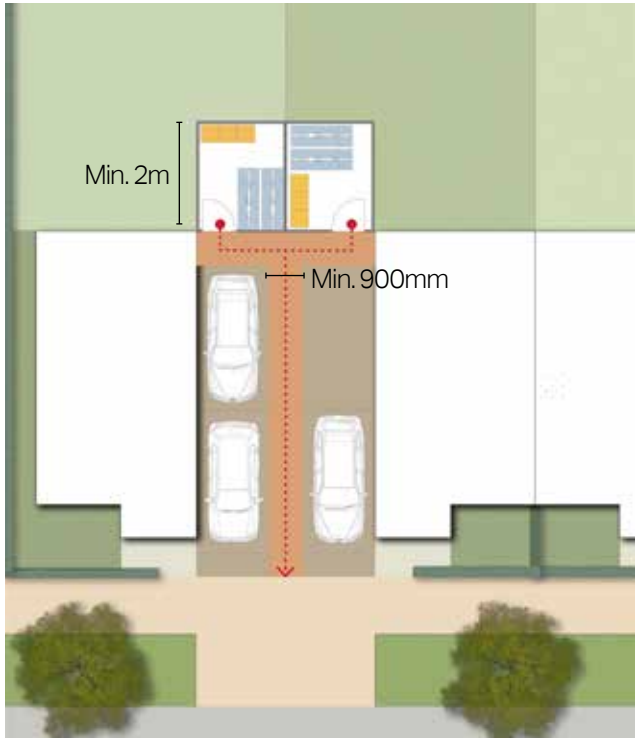

Figure 46: Indicative layout of a bicycle and bin storage area at the back of semi-detached properties.

Figure 47: Positive example of a detached garage within the NA.

Figure 48: Local example highlighting a semi-detached garage that does not dominate the appearance of the house.

Checklist

04

View of a Public Right of Way within the Neighbourhood Area.

4. Checklist

This concluding section provides a number of questions based on established good practice against which the design proposal should be evaluated.

The checklist can be used to assess all proposals by objectively answering the questions below. Not all the questions will apply to every development. The relevant ones, however, should provide an assessment as to whether the design proposal has taken into account the context and provided an adequate design solution. As a first step there are a number of ideas or principles that should be present in all proposals. These are listed under 'General design guidelines for new development'. Following these ideas and principles, a number of questions are listed for more specific topics.

1 General design guidelines for new development:

- Integrate with existing paths, streets, circulation networks and patterns of activity;
- Reinforce or enhance the established settlement character of streets, greens, and other spaces;
- Harmonise and enhance existing settlement in terms of physical form, architecture and land use;
- Relate well to local topography and landscape features, including prominent ridge lines and long distance views;
- Reflect, respect, and reinforce local architecture and historic distinctiveness;
- Retain and incorporate important existing features into the development;
- Respect surrounding buildings in terms of scale, height, form and massing;
- Adopt contextually appropriate materials and details;
- Provide adequate open space for the development in terms of both quantity and quality.

1

General design guidelines for new development:

- Incorporate necessary services and drainage infrastructure without causing unacceptable harm to retained features;
- Ensure all components e.g. buildings, landscapes, access routes, parking and open space are well related to each other;
- Make sufficient provision for sustainable waste management (including facilities for kerbside collection, waste separation, and minimisation where appropriate) without adverse impact on the street scene, the local landscape or the amenities of neighbours;
- Positively integrate energy efficient technologies;
- Positively integrate green infrastructure in accordance with national design guidance to positively contribute to liveability, biodiversity and climate change resilience;
- Ensure that places are designed with management, maintenance and the upkeep of utilities in mind; and
- Seek to implement passive environmental design principles by, firstly, considering how the site layout can optimise beneficial solar gain and reduce energy demands (e.g. insulation), before specification of energy efficient building services and finally incorporate renewable energy sources

2

Street grid and layout:

- Does it favour accessibility and connectivity? If not, why?
- Do the new points of access and street layout have regard for all users of the development; in particular pedestrians, cyclists and those with disabilities?
- What are the essential characteristics of the existing street pattern; are these reflected in the proposal?
- How will the new design or extension integrate with the existing street arrangement?
- Are the new points of access appropriate in terms of patterns of movement?
- Do the points of access conform to the statutory technical requirements?

3

Open environmental areas, views & character:

- What are the particular characteristics of this area which have been taken into account in the design; i.e. what are the landscape qualities of the area?
- Does the proposal maintain or enhance any identified views or views in general?
- How does the proposal affect the trees on or adjacent to the site?
- Can trees be used to provide natural shading from unwanted solar gain? i.e. deciduous trees can limit solar gains in summer, while maximising them in winter.
- Has the proposal been considered within its wider physical context?
- Has the impact on the landscape quality of the area been taken into account?
- In rural locations, has the impact of the development on the tranquillity of the area been fully considered?
- How does the proposal impact on existing views which are important to the area and how are these views incorporated in the design?
- How does the proposal impact on existing views which are important to the area and how are these views incorporated in the design?
- Can any new views be created?
- Is there adequate amenity space for the development?
- Does the new development respect and enhance existing amenity space?
- Have opportunities for enhancing existing amenity spaces been explored?
- Will any communal amenity space be created? If so, how this will be used by the new owners and how will it be managed?
- Is there opportunity to increase the local area biodiversity?

4

Gateway and access features:

- What is the arrival point, how is it designed?
- Does the proposal maintain or enhance the existing gaps between settlements?
- Does the proposal affect or change the setting of a listed building or listed landscape?
- Is the landscaping to be hard or soft?

5

Buildings layout and grouping:

- What is the typical built pattern of buildings?
- How have the existing groupings been reflected in the proposal?
- Are proposed groups of buildings offering variety and texture to the villagescape?

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