

Offenham Neighbourhood Plan: Policy Development Document

[Abridged Public Consultation document](#)

Section 1: Housing and Land Use (HL)

Evidence Base: *High demand for bungalows (65+ group) and local-needs housing (35–49 group). Strong opposition to Grade 1 agricultural land loss.*

- [Policy HL1: Residential Mix and Tenure](#)
 - **Objective:** To rebalance the housing stock.
 - **Requirement:** New developments must provide a minimum percentage of **two-bedroom bungalows** and **three-bedroom family homes**. "Executive" 4+ bedroom homes will be restricted to prevent over-densification.
- [Policy HL2: Local Connection Criteria](#)
 - **Objective:** To support village families.
 - **Requirement:** A "Local Connection" clause for all affordable/social housing to ensure Offenham residents are prioritised.
- [Policy HL3: Protection of Arable Land](#)
 - **Objective:** To safeguard the market-gardening economy.
 - **Requirement:** A presumption against building on **Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land** unless it is demonstrated that no other brownfield or lower-grade sites are available.

Section 2: Infrastructure and Environment (IE)

Evidence Base: *Severe anxiety regarding Three Cocks Lane drainage, Boat Lane flooding, and pedestrian safety near the school.*

- [Policy IE1: Sustainable Drainage \(SuDS\) and Sewage](#)
 - **Objective:** To achieve "Flood Neutrality."
 - **Requirement:** Every application must include a site-specific hydrological audit. The use of **non-permeable materials** for driveways is prohibited. Developers must prove that the existing sewage network has capacity *before* commencement.
- [Policy IE2: Pedestrian and Cycle Connectivity](#)
 - **Objective:** To reduce car dependence and improve safety.
 - **Requirement:** Developments must provide internal footpaths that link safely to the existing village network. Specific focus on "Pram-safe" widths and level access.
- [Policy IE3: The "Strategic Gap"](#)
 - **Objective:** To prevent urban sprawl toward Evesham.
 - **Requirement:** Designation of a permanent "Green Buffer" between the village boundary and the Evesham bypass where no residential development will be permitted.
- [Policy IE4: Biodiversity and bio-recovery](#)
 - **Objective:**
 - **Requirement:** All new developments to provide at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity (e.g., through hedgehog highways, bat boxes, or native wildflower planting).

Map References (The "Where" factor)

Policies like **IE3 (The Strategic Gap)** and **DH2 (Protected Vistas)** are difficult to enforce without visual boundaries.

- **The Policy Map:** Add a "Policy Map" section. This should explicitly colour-code the **Strategic Gap** boundaries and use "view cones" (arrows) to show exactly where the protected vistas in **DH2** start and end.
- **Local Green Space Designation:** Under a new policy (e.g., **IE4**), we could formally designate the Recreation Ground or specific "Ridge and Furrow" field as **Local Green Space**, which gives them protection equivalent to Green Belt.

Section 3: Design and Heritage (DH)

Evidence Base: 94% of residents demand traditional materials. Deep value placed on Ridge and Furrow field and historic views.

- **Policy DH1: The Offenham Design Code**
 - **Objective:** To ensure new builds look like they belong in Offenham.
 - **Requirement:** Mandatory use of **local stone, brick types, and roof tiles** as defined in the village character assessment.
- **Policy DH2: Protected Vistas and Landscapes**
 - **Objective:** To safeguard the visual "soul" of the village.
 - **Requirement:** No development shall significantly obstruct the identified views of **Windmill Hill, Bennett's Hill, the Maypole, or the River Avon.**
- **Policy DH3: Heritage Non-Designated Asset Preservation**
 - **Objective:** To protect medieval agricultural history.
 - **Requirement:** Identification of specific fields where **medieval earthworks** must be preserved in situ.
 - **NOTE: Refining Policy DH3 (Heritage)**
In our current draft of **DH3**, we mention the "identification of specific fields where medieval earthworks must be preserved." To make this legally enforceable, we should add a **"Schedule of Local Heritage Assets"** as an Appendix. This list would name specific walls, barns, and fields so a developer can't claim they "didn't know" it was significant.

Section 4: Economy and Community (EC)

Evidence Base: Support for farm shops/cafes and protection of the "Agent of Change" for existing businesses.

- **Policy EC1: Rural Business Diversification**
 - **Objective:** To support the "Working Village."
 - **Requirement:** Positive support for converting redundant agricultural buildings into **studios, farm shops, or community cafes**, provided traffic impact is minimal.
 - **Policy EC2: Protection of Community Assets**
 - **Objective:** To maintain social vibrancy.
 - **Requirement:** A "Right to Bid" and a presumption against the loss of the **Village Shop, Post Office, Pubs, and the Royal British Legion.**
 - **Policy EC3: Digital Infrastructure**
 - **Objective:** To facilitate modern working.
 - **Requirement:** All new builds must be equipped with **Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP).**
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Section 5: Community Action Plan (Non-Planning)

These are aspirations that the Parish Council will pursue through lobbying, not through planning law:

- **Speed Management:** Campaigning for a 20mph zone at the Primary School.
- **The Valley Bridge:** Seeking funding for a pedestrian/cycle crossing over the Avon.
- **Gully Maintenance:** Negotiating a frequent drain-clearing schedule with the County Council.

Draft Policy HL1: Residential Mix and Tenure

Policy Intent

To ensure that housing growth in Offenham directly meets the needs identified by our community rather than the speculative preferences of developers. The survey data highlights a "missing middle"—a shortage of homes suitable for young families and a lack of accessible options for older residents looking to downsize.

1. Housing Mix and Size

New residential developments must provide a mix of housing types and sizes that reflects the local demographic profile.

- **Bungalow Priority:** On sites of 5 or more dwellings, at least **20%** of the units should be single-story **bungalows** or "lifetime homes" specifically designed for older people or those with limited mobility.
- **Small to Medium Homes:** To support young families, the Plan mandates a focus on **2 and 3-bedroom properties** for freehold purchase.
- **Restriction on Large Dwellings:** Proposals consisting primarily of 5+ bedroom "executive" homes will be resisted unless an exceptional local need can be demonstrated through an up-to-date housing market assessment.

2. Tenure and Affordability

To help those with a local connection remain in the village:

- **Affordable Housing:** In line with District Council requirements, affordable units must be pepper-potted (integrated) throughout the development so they are indistinguishable from market housing.
- **Local Connection Clause:** All affordable housing (including social rent and shared ownership) must be subject to a **Section 106 agreement** prioritising individuals who currently live in, work in, or have strong family ties to the Parish of Offenham.

3. Design for Longevity

All new homes should be built to the "**Lifetime Homes**" standard (or equivalent Building Regulations Part M4(2)), ensuring they can be easily adapted as residents' needs change with age. This includes:

- Level access to the front door.
- Wide internal doorways and hallways.
- Sufficient space for a downstairs bathroom or wet room.

4. Self-Build and Custom Build

The Parish Council encourages the provision of serviced plots for **self-build or custom-build** projects, particularly where the design adheres strictly to the Offenham Design Code (**Policy DH1**). This supports individual residents in creating homes tailored to their specific needs.

Evidence Base Reference

This policy is the direct answer to our survey findings:

1. **35–49 Age Group:** Highlighted the need for "attainable" family homes to keep the village school viable.
2. **65+ Age Group:** Expressed a strong desire to downsize into bungalows while remaining within their social network in the village.
3. **Tenure Data:** Revealed a lack of social and affordable options for the younger workforce currently living in HMOs or with parents.

Draft Policy HL2: Local Connection Criteria

Policy Intent

To ensure that "affordable" housing in Offenham actually serves the people who live and work here. High market prices often force local families and young workers to move away. This policy creates a legal "ring-fence," ensuring that eligible residents with a genuine link to the parish are given first priority for any new social rent, shared ownership, or "First Homes" schemes.

1. Priority Allocation

All affordable housing units provided within the Parish must be subject to a legally binding **Section 106 Agreement**. This agreement will mandate that initial and subsequent vacancies are offered to eligible households in the following order of priority:

1. **Residents:** Persons who have been resident in Offenham Parish for at least three of the last five years.
2. **Employment:** Persons who are currently employed within the Parish (minimum 16 hours per week) or have a firm offer of employment.
3. **Family Ties:** Former residents who moved away due to a lack of affordable housing but have immediate family (parents, siblings, or adult children) currently living in the Parish.
4. **Neighbouring Parishes:** Only if no eligible applicant is found within Offenham after a defined period (typically 4–8 weeks) will the offer be extended to the surrounding parishes (e.g., South Littleton, Badsey, or Evesham).

2. Evidence of Need

Applicants for "Local Connection" housing must provide verifiable evidence to the housing provider or District Council. This may include:

- Entries on the electoral roll.
- Employment contracts or pay slips.
- Proof of address for family members within the parish.

3. Perpetuity of the Connection

This policy applies not only to the first occupants of a new development but to all future re-lets and re-sales of affordable units. This ensures that the stock of "local homes" is protected for future generations of Offenham residents.

4. Small-Scale Rural Exception Sites

The Parish Council will support small-scale housing schemes on "Exception Sites" (land not normally designated for building) provided that:

- **100%** of the homes are affordable and reserved for people with a local connection.
- The scale and design are in keeping with the surrounding landscape (as per **Policy DH1**).
- The development is led by a Community Land Trust (CLT) or a registered Housing Association.

Evidence Base Reference

The survey showed that **94% of respondents are homeowners**, but the small minority in **Housing Association properties** or **HMOs** reported feeling "squeezed out" of the local market. By creating a Local Connection policy, we protect the social diversity of the village and ensure that the children of current residents can afford to stay in the community where they grew up.

Draft Policy HL3: Protection of Arable Land and Soil Quality

Policy Intent

Offenham's identity is built on its "Market Gardening" heritage. This is not just a matter of aesthetics; it is a matter of food security and economic history. The parish contains some of the highest-quality agricultural land in the United Kingdom (**Best and Most Versatile – BMV land**). This policy ensures that our finite soil resources are protected from irreversible development.

1. Presumption Against Development on BMV Land

Development on **Grade 1 and Grade 2 agricultural land** will be strictly resisted.

- Proposals for residential development on these soils will only be considered if the applicant can prove that there are no suitable alternative sites on lower-grade land (Grade 3b, 4, or 5) or brownfield sites within the parish.
- The economic value of the soil for food production must be weighed against the perceived benefit of the development.

2. Soil Management Plans

For any approved development on or adjacent to agricultural land, a **Soil Management Plan (SMP)** must be submitted. This plan must detail:

- How topsoil will be stripped, stored, and reused on-site (e.g., in gardens or community allotments) rather than being removed or buried.
- Measures to prevent soil compaction and contamination during the construction phase.

3. Support for the Horticultural Economy

The Plan supports developments that actively enhance or sustain the agricultural use of the land, such as:

- The creation of new allotments or community orchards.
- Small-scale, modern horticultural infrastructure that supports "farm-to-fork" local sales, provided it does not permanently damage the soil structure or the landscape (as per **Policy EH1**).

4. Restoration of Land

Where temporary agricultural structures (such as large-scale polytunnels) are permitted, the policy requires that the land be fully restored to its original agricultural condition once the use ceases. The installation of permanent concrete footings on Grade 1 land for temporary structures is prohibited.

Evidence Base Reference

Offenham's survey feedback was clear: "**Once the land is built on, it is gone forever.**" With 94% of respondents identifying the rural, agricultural character as the village's best feature, protecting the literal ground beneath our feet is a key priority. This policy aligns with the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, which requires planners to account for the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

DRAFT POLICY IE1: Sustainable Drainage and Sewage Capacity

Policy Intent

To ensure that all new development in Offenham Parish is "flood neutral" and does not exacerbate existing surface water or sewerage issues on identified "hotspots" such as Three Cocks Lane, Boat Lane, and Ferry Lane.

1. Surface Water Management (SuDS)

All development proposals must demonstrate that they will not increase the rate of surface water runoff onto adjoining land or the public highway.

- **The "Greenfield Rate" Standard:** Post-development runoff rates must not exceed the original "greenfield" runoff rates for the site.
- **Permeability Mandatory:** There is a presumption against the use of non-permeable materials for hardstanding, driveways, and parking areas.
- **Natural Solutions:** Priority must be given to "soft" SuDS (e.g., swales, rain gardens, and attenuation ponds) over "hard" engineered solutions (e.g., underground tanks), to enhance biodiversity and filtration.

2. Independent Hydrological Assessment

For developments of five or more dwellings, or any development on land identified as having a high water table (consistent with Offenham's geology), the applicant must provide an **Independent Hydrological Audit**. This audit must:

- Account for a 1-in-100-year storm event plus a **40% allowance for climate change**.
- Assess the cumulative impact of the development alongside other recently approved sites in the immediate vicinity.

3. Foul Water and Sewerage Capacity

Development that would result in the overloading of the existing sewerage network or contribute to known discharge issues at the Boat Lane pumping station will not be supported.

- **Capacity Evidence:** Applicants must provide written confirmation from the relevant water authority (e.g., Severn Trent) that the network has sufficient capacity to accommodate the peak flow from the development.
- **Phasing:** Where upgrades are required, a "Grampian Condition" will be applied, ensuring that no dwellings are occupied until the necessary sewerage infrastructure improvements are fully operational.

4. Long-term Maintenance

Planning applications must be accompanied by a **Management and Maintenance Plan** for the lifetime of the SuDS features. This must identify the party responsible for maintenance (e.g., a management company) and provide a ring-fenced funding mechanism to ensure the system remains effective.

Evidence Base Reference

This policy directly addresses the **65 resident comments** regarding "lakes" on Three Cocks Lane and the recurring sewage overflows on Boat Lane. It shifts the burden of proof from the community to the developer.

Draft Policy IE2: Pedestrian and Cycle Connectivity

Policy Intent

To transform Offenham into a "walkable village" by improving safety for the most vulnerable road users. Currently, the conflict between heavy agricultural traffic, HGVs, and pedestrians creates a significant barrier to movement. This policy ensures that new developments prioritise non-car travel and contribute to a safer, better-connected network for prams, wheelchairs, and cyclists.

1. Integration with the Existing Network

All new developments must demonstrate how they connect safely to the existing village footway and Public Rights of Way (PROW) network.

- **Directness:** Pedestrian routes must be designed to be the "most direct" path to key village hubs (the school, the shop, and the bus stops), prioritising people over car-turning circles.
- **Safety:** New footpaths must be well-lit (using "dark sky" compliant low-level lighting) and overlooked by homes to ensure a sense of security.

2. Accessibility Standards (The "Pram-Safe" Mandate)

Reflecting the specific needs of young families and older residents identified in the survey:

- **Width:** New pavements must meet a minimum width of **2.0 metres** where feasible to allow a pram and a wheelchair to pass comfortably.
- **Surfacing:** All new paths must be finished in smooth, all-weather materials. The use of loose gravel or high-maintenance "soft" surfaces on primary transit routes will be resisted.
- **Dropped Kerbs:** Tactile paving and dropped kerbs must be provided at all crossing points to ensure level access for those with mobility aids.

3. Support for the "Avon Link" (The Valley Bridge)

The Parish Council aspires to connect Offenham to the "The Valley" (Twyford) shopping and leisure complex via a non-vehicular bridge.

- **Strategic Protection:** Proposals that would obstruct the potential landing sites or access paths for a future pedestrian/cycle bridge over the River Avon will be resisted.
- **Developer Contributions:** Large-scale developments may be required to provide financial contributions (via S106 or CIL) toward the feasibility and delivery of this cross-river link.

4. Cycle Storage

To encourage cycling as a viable alternative to short car trips:

- All new dwellings must provide **secure, covered, and convenient cycle storage**. For houses, this should be integrated into the building or provided via a permanent shed; for apartments, communal secure "cycle hubs" are required.

Evidence Base Reference

This policy addresses the "infrastructure deficit" highlighted in the consultation.

1. **Safety:** Responds to resident fears regarding the narrowness of **Boat Lane** and **Ferry Lane**.
2. **Health:** Supports the **22% of households with children** who require safe routes to the primary school.
3. **Environment:** Aims to reduce the number of internal village car trips, which currently contribute to congestion at the **Maypole** junction.

Draft Policy IE3: The Strategic Green Gap

Policy Intent

To maintain the separate identity and rural setting of Offenham by preventing "coalescence" (merging) with the town of Evesham. This policy ensures that Offenham remains a distinct, self-contained village and protects the "Green Lungs" of the parish.

1. Designation of the Gap

A **Strategic Green Gap** is hereby designated on the land between the western and southern boundaries of the Offenham built-up area and the Evesham bypass (A46).

- Within this designated area, there is a **presumption against residential development**.
- Any proposal that reduces the physical or visual distance between Offenham and Evesham will be resisted.

2. Permitted Uses

To ensure the land remains functional and well-managed, the following uses are permitted within the Gap, provided they do not involve significant new permanent buildings:

- **Agriculture and Market Gardening:** Maintaining the land for food production is the primary priority.
- **Outdoor Recreation:** Uses such as allotments, sports pitches, or community orchards.
- **Nature Recovery:** Projects focused on reforestation, wetland creation, or wildflower meadows.

3. Visual Integrity and Vistas

The "Gap" is not just about physical distance; it is about the **feeling of being in the countryside**.

- **Skyline Protection:** No structures (including tall agricultural polytunnels or glasshouses) should be placed in a manner that creates a "solid wall" effect, blocking the view of the open horizon from the village.
- **Gateway Preservation:** The "entry points" to the village (specifically from the Evesham side) must be kept free of development to preserve the psychological transition from town to country.

4. Enhancing the Buffer

The Parish Council will support initiatives within the Green Gap that enhance its "buffer" qualities, such as:

- Planting of **native woodland** or thick hedgerows along the bypass edge to reduce noise and light pollution.
- Improving the **public right-of-way network** (footpaths and bridleways) to allow residents to enjoy the Gap for health and wellbeing.

Evidence Base Reference

This policy is a direct response to the recurring sentiment in the 160+ survey responses: *"We want to keep our village identity and not become an extension of Evesham."* It provides a clear planning boundary that the Local Planning Authority must respect when reviewing development proposals.

Draft Policy IE4: Biodiversity and Nature Recovery

Policy Intent

To ensure that development in Offenham does not just "neutralise" its impact on the environment but actively leaves the village greener and more biodiverse than before. This policy aligns with the national mandate for **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)** while tailoring it to the specific rural landscape of the Vale of Evesham.

1. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

All residential and commercial developments must demonstrate a minimum **10% Biodiversity Net Gain**.

- **The Mitigation Hierarchy:** Developers must first avoid damage to existing habitats, then mitigate any unavoidable impact. Only as a last resort should they compensate for losses elsewhere.
- **On-Site Priority:** Net gain should be delivered on-site through the creation of new habitats (e.g., wildflower meadows, ponds, or native orchards) rather than purchasing "credits" for projects outside of the parish.

2. Wildlife Corridors and "Hedgehog Highways"

Development must be designed to allow for the free movement of wildlife through the built environment.

- **Connectivity:** Existing hedgerows must be retained. Where breaks are necessary for access, they must be replanted with native species elsewhere on the site.
- **Garden Access:** New boundary fences must include "Hedgehog Highways"—small holes at the base of gravel boards—to link gardens and allow small mammals to forage.

3. Integrating Nature into Architecture

To support declining bird and bat populations, new builds are encouraged to incorporate permanent nesting and roosting features:

- **Swift Bricks and Bat Boxes:** These should be integrated into the brickwork of new dwellings at appropriate heights and orientations, particularly on buildings adjacent to the "Green Gap" or the River Avon.
- **Pollinator-Friendly Planting:** Landscaping schemes must prioritise native, nectar-rich species that support bees and butterflies, avoiding the use of invasive or non-native ornamental plants.

4. Protection of the River Avon Corridor

The River Avon is a primary ecological artery for the parish.

- **Buffer Zones:** A minimum 10-metre "naturalised buffer zone" must be maintained between any new development and the river bank to protect water quality and riparian habitats.
 - **Lighting:** Artificial lighting near the river must be strictly controlled to avoid disrupting the flight paths of bats and the natural cycles of aquatic life.
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Evidence Base Reference

This policy responds to the **94% of residents** who stated that "Nature and the Rural Environment" are what they value most about Offenham. It also addresses concerns from the local "Working Village" demographic about climate change and the loss of the traditional orchards that once defined the area. By mandating BNG, we ensure that new housing contributes to the "Green Lungs" of the village.

DRAFT POLICY DH1: The Offenham Design Code

Policy Intent

To protect and enhance the unique rural character, historic fabric, and "market gardening" aesthetic of Offenham Parish. All new developments must demonstrate a high standard of design that is sympathetic to the village's identity.

1. Materials and Palette

Applicants must utilise a material palette that reflects the local vernacular. The following are required:

- **Wall Materials:** Primary use of traditional **Blue Lias stone** (including sympathetic reconstituted materials with the same overall appearance) or **mellow red brick** (consistent with local 18th/19th-century examples). The use of modern, brightly colored "engineered" bricks or extensive white render is discouraged unless it reflects a specific neighbouring property.
- **Roofing:** Slates or plain clay tiles in dark/muted tones. Concrete "interlocking" tiles are generally considered unsympathetic to the historic core.
- **Windows and Doors:** Use of timber or high-quality timber-effect frames. Window proportions should favor the vertical (portrait) rather than horizontal (landscape) to maintain the "cottage" feel.

2. Scale, Massing, and Density

To maintain the "village feel" and prevent the "suburbanisation" of Offenham:

- **Height Limits:** New residential dwellings should generally not exceed **two storeys** in height. Tall, three-storey "townhouse" styles are considered out of character with the village skyline (referencing resident concerns over Crab Tree Leys).
- **Density:** Developments must reflect the "loose" grain of the village. High-density layouts that sacrifice garden space for additional units will be resisted.
- **Building Lines:** Houses should follow the established, often irregular, building lines of the street rather than being arranged in rigid, uniform rows.

3. The "Market Gardening" Plot

Reflecting Offenham's heritage:

- **Garden Provision:** Every new dwelling must provide private, functional rear garden space that is proportionate to the size of the house.
- **Boundary Treatments:** Preference is for **native species hedging** or **low stone walls** rather than high close-boarded timber fencing, particularly where plots border the open countryside.
- **Green Infrastructure:** Existing mature trees and hedgerows must be integrated into the site design, not removed.

4. Modern Adaptations

While favoring traditional aesthetics, the Plan supports modern sustainability:

- **Integration of Tech:** Solar panels and air-source heat pumps are encouraged but should be sited on non-prominent roof slopes or screened where they impact the Conservation Area or a listed building's setting.

Evidence Base Reference

This policy addresses resident feedback regarding the "hideous constructions" and "out of proportion" tall buildings noted in the survey. It provides the Parish Council with a "checklist" to use when reviewing planning applications.

Draft Policy DH2: Protected Vistas and Landscapes

Policy Intent

The "visual character" of Offenham is defined by its wide-open skies and the relationship between the village settlement and the surrounding natural landmarks. This policy ensures that the scenic beauty of the parish—often cited as the primary reason residents choose to live here—is not eroded by poorly placed or overly tall structures.

1. Identification of Key Vistas

Development proposals must demonstrate that they do not significantly obstruct or detract from the following **Protected Vistas**, as identified by the community:

- **The Bennett's Hill Horizon:** Views looking South-West from the village core toward the rising ground of Bennett's Hill.
- **The River Avon Corridor:** Uninterrupted views of the river valley from Ferry Lane and Boat Lane.
- **The Maypole Landmark:** Visual prominence of the Maypole from the primary entrances to the village.
- **Cotswold Escarpment Views:** Long-distance views toward the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) from the eastern edges of the parish.

2. Visual Impact Assessment (VIA)

For any development involving buildings over two storeys, or developments located on the edge of the built-up area, a **Visual Impact Assessment** is required.

- **Photomontages:** Applicants should provide "Before and After" visual renders from specific public vantage points (footpaths and highways) to show the impact on the skyline.
- **Siting and Height:** Development must be sited to follow the natural contours of the land. Placing large buildings on "ridge lines" where they create a harsh silhouette against the sky will be resisted.

3. Preservation of "Rural Dark Skies"

To protect the character of the landscape at night:

- **Light Pollution:** Street lighting within new developments must be "downward pointing" and shielded to prevent light spill into the open countryside.
- **Glazing:** Excessive use of floor-to-ceiling glazing on "edge-of-settlement" properties, which creates significant night-time light glow in a rural setting, will be discouraged.

4. Ridge and Furrow Integrity

The visual rhythm of the medieval **Ridge and Furrow** field is a defining landscape feature of Offenham.

- Development that requires the leveling or destruction of these historic undulations will be resisted, particularly where they are visible from public rights of way.
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Evidence Base Reference

This policy is a direct response to the **94% of residents** who identified "rural character" as Offenham's greatest asset. During the consultation, many residents expressed "heartbreak" at the potential loss of views toward Bennett's Hill. By naming these vistas in a legal policy, we move from a subjective "I like the view" to an objective planning requirement that must be assessed for every application.

Draft Policy DH3: Non-Designated Heritage Assets

Policy Intent

While Offenham has several Grade II listed buildings, much of its unique "feel" comes from older buildings and structures that aren't nationally listed but are locally significant. This policy protects these "Non-Designated Heritage Assets"—the brick walls, old stables, and market-gardening outbuildings—from being demolished or altered in a way that erases the village's history.

1. The Local List

The Parish Council will maintain a list of **Buildings and Structures of Local Significance**. Development proposals affecting these assets will be expected to preserve or enhance their character. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Historic Boundary Walls:** Traditional Red Lias stone and mellow brick walls that line our historic lanes.
- **Agricultural Outbuildings:** Former stables, cider houses, and barns that reflect the village's market-gardening and farming past.
- **The "Maypole" Infrastructure:** Not just the pole itself, but the surrounding historic square and its immediate setting.

2. Presumption Against Loss

Proposals that involve the total or partial loss of a Non-Designated Heritage Asset will be resisted. If a loss is proposed, the applicant must demonstrate:

- The asset is structurally unsound and beyond feasible repair.
- The public benefits of the new development significantly outweigh the loss of the heritage feature.

3. Sympathetic Renovation and Extension

Where extensions or alterations to a locally significant building are proposed:

- **Materials:** They must match the original building in terms of texture, color, and masonry bond (e.g., matching the specific Red Lias stone pattern).
- **Scale:** Extensions should be "subordinate"—meaning they should not overpower the original building in height or width.
- **Features:** Original features such as timber beams, stone lintels, and historic window openings should be retained and restored.

4. Archaeological Significance

Given Offenham's history (including its links to Evesham Abbey), any development on previously undeveloped land must carry out a desk-based archaeological assessment. If significant remains are suspected (such as medieval farm structures), a field evaluation (trenching) will be required before any planning permission is granted.

Evidence Base Reference

This policy responds to the **60% of residents** who expressed concern about the "gradual erosion" of the village's character. During the survey, many residents pointed out that when an old stone wall is replaced by a modern fence, a piece of Offenham's identity is lost. This policy gives the Parish Council the power to say "No" to the removal of these small but vital historic details.

Draft Policy EC1: Rural Business Diversification

Policy Intent

To support the long-term viability of the local economy by allowing for the sensitive diversification of agricultural holdings and the reuse of redundant rural buildings. This policy encourages the creation of local jobs and services, reducing the need for residents to commute out of the village.

1. Reuse of Redundant Buildings

The conversion of existing, permanent agricultural or rural buildings for business use (e.g., Class E(g) offices, workshops, or artisan studios) will be supported, provided:

- **Structural Integrity:** The building is of permanent and substantial construction and is capable of conversion without major reconstruction or significant extension.
- **Character Preservation:** The conversion retains the original character and features of the rural building, avoiding "suburban" domestic styling (e.g., keeping large barn door openings rather than inserting standard domestic windows).

2. Farm Shops and Community Hubs

Proposals for farm shops, small-scale cafes, or "destination" rural businesses that promote local produce will be viewed favorably where they:

- **Scale:** Remain proportionate to the rural setting and do not constitute a "supermarket" scale development.
- **Local Benefit:** Demonstrate a clear link to the local agricultural economy (e.g., selling goods grown or processed within the Vale of Evesham).

3. Operational Requirements

To protect the residential amenity of the village, any diversification project must satisfy the following criteria:

- **Traffic Impact:** The proposal must not generate a volume of traffic (particularly HGV movements) that would be detrimental to the safety of narrow village lanes or the amenity of nearby residents.
- **Noise and Light:** Measures must be taken to minimise noise and light pollution. Business hours may be restricted via condition to protect the "tranquil" nature of the parish.
- **Parking:** Adequate on-site parking must be provided using **permeable materials** (consistent with Policy IE1) to avoid overspill onto village verges.

Evidence Base Reference

This policy responds to the **60% support** for agricultural diversification in the survey. It provides a pathway for those wanting a "village cafe" or "farm shop" while specifically addressing the **36 business owners' concerns** regarding planning hurdles and the need for "affordable safe space."

Draft Policy EC2: Protection of Community Assets

Policy Intent

The village's social fabric depends on its physical community hubs. This policy ensures that Offenham remains a sustainable, "living" village by resisting the loss of essential services. Once a village shop, pub, or hall is converted to housing, it is usually lost forever; this policy sets a high bar to prevent such closures.

1. Identification of Key Assets

The following are designated as **Primary Community Assets** for the purpose of this policy:

- **The Offenham Post Office & Village Stores**
- **The Fish & Anchor and The Bridge Inn**
- **The Royal British Legion Club**
- **The Village Hall**
- **The Primary School and Church**

2. Protection Against Change of Use

Proposals that result in the loss of a Community Asset (through demolition or change of use to residential) will be resisted unless the applicant can provide **compelling evidence** of the following:

- **Market Exhaustion:** The facility has been marketed at a realistic price for its current use for a minimum period of **12 consecutive months**, and no viable offer has been received.
- **Non-Viability:** Independent evidence demonstrates that the business or service is no longer financially viable and there is no reasonable prospect of it being made viable.
- **Alternative Provision:** A replacement facility of equivalent or better quality and accessibility is being provided as part of the proposal or is already available within easy walking distance for residents.

3. Support for Enhancement

Development proposals that seek to **improve, extend, or diversify** these assets to ensure their long-term survival will be positively supported. Examples include:

- Adding a small cafe or community hub to the Village Store.
- Improving accessibility (ramps/toilets) at the Village Hall.
- Extending the school or church to provide multi-use community space.

4. Community Right to Bid

The Parish Council will maintain a list of **Assets of Community Value (ACV)** registered with the District Council. In the event of a proposed sale, this gives the community a six-month "moratorium" to raise funds and bid for the asset to keep it in community ownership.

Evidence Base Reference

This policy addresses the community's concern that Offenham could become a "dormitory" village where people sleep but have nowhere to socialise or shop. It directly reflects the feedback that our existing pubs and shops are "the soul of the village" and must be protected from being turned into profitable housing plots.

Draft Policy EC3: Digital Infrastructure

Policy Intent

Reliable, high-speed digital connectivity is no longer a luxury but an essential utility. This policy ensures that Offenham is "future-proofed" to support remote working, digital learning, and small-scale home businesses. By mandating top-tier infrastructure, we reduce the need for commuting and support the local economy.

1. Mandatory Fiber Connectivity

All new residential and commercial developments within the Parish must be served by a **Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP)** connection.

- Developers are required to work with infrastructure providers (such as Openreach or Gigaclear) to ensure that the necessary fiber-optic cabling is installed and "live" prior to the occupation of the first unit.
- Wireless or satellite-based solutions will only be considered as a primary connection if it can be independently proven that a physical fiber connection is technically impossible.

2. Infrastructure Integration

To protect the village's visual character (as outlined in **Policy DH1**), all digital infrastructure must be integrated discreetly:

- **Underground Cabling:** All new cabling must be routed underground. The installation of new telegraph poles or overhead lines will be resisted.
- **Sensitive Siting:** Any required street-level infrastructure (e.g., green cabinets or nodes) must be sited to minimise visual impact and must not obstruct pedestrian or "pram-safe" pavement widths.

3. Support for Home Working

In recognition of the 12% of respondents who are self-employed and the growing trend of hybrid working:

- Proposals for small-scale residential extensions (e.g., garden offices) will be supported, provided they remain ancillary to the main dwelling and do not negatively impact neighbor privacy or drainage.
- New-build dwellings are encouraged to include a designated "home office" space with integrated data points.

4. Existing Network Upgrades

The Parish Council will work with external providers and the District Council to facilitate the upgrade of existing copper-based networks to fiber across the older parts of the village. Planning applications that include "oversized" ducting to allow for future community-wide fiber expansion will be viewed favorably.

Evidence Base Reference

This policy directly addresses the "terrible broadband" cited by business owners. Better digital connectivity allows more villagers to work from home, reducing the 7:00 AM – 9:00 AM traffic congestion on Ferry Lane and the Evesham crossing.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Affordable Housing: Housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including social rented, affordable rented, and intermediate housing).

Agent of Change: A planning principle which places the responsibility for mitigating impacts from existing noise-generating activities (like a farm or pub) on the new development, rather than the existing business.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG): An approach to development that leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. In Offenham, we mandate a minimum 10% gain.

Blue Lias Stone: A traditional local building stone, typically blue-grey or cream in color, that defines the historic character of many Offenham buildings and boundary walls.

CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy): A charge which local authorities can place on new development to help fund infrastructure. With a "Made" Neighbourhood Plan, Offenham receives 25% of these funds.

Coalescence: The merging or coming together of separate settlements (e.g., Offenham and Evesham) into a single urban mass, resulting in the loss of individual village identity.

Dark Sky Compliant: Lighting designed to minimize light pollution by ensuring light is directed downwards and only where needed, protecting the rural "darkness" of the village at night.

FTTP (Fibre-to-the-Premises): The highest standard of broadband connectivity where fiber-optic cables run directly into the building, rather than stopping at a green cabinet in the street.

Grampian Condition: A planning condition which prevents a developer from starting or finishing a project until a specific event has occurred (e.g., "no houses can be occupied until the Boat Lane pumping station is upgraded").

Hedgehog Highway: Small $13\text{cm} \times 13\text{cm}$ holes in the base of garden fences or walls that allow hedgehogs to travel between gardens to find food and mates.

Local Connection: A legal criteria used to prioritize people for housing who already live in, work in, or have strong family ties to Offenham Parish.

Non-Designated Heritage Asset: A building, monument, or site that has a degree of local heritage significance but does not meet the criteria for national "Listing."

Permeable Surfaces: Ground materials (like gravel or porous blocks) that allow rainwater to soak through into the ground, reducing the risk of flash flooding and runoff.

Ridge and Furrow: A pattern of ridges and troughs in the land created by a system of plowing used in the Middle Ages. These are significant historical landscape features in Offenham.

S106 Agreement: A legal deed between a developer and the council to provide specific community benefits, such as affordable housing or a new playground, as a condition of planning permission.

SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems): A range of techniques used to manage surface water and flood risk by mimicking natural drainage (e.g., ponds and swales).

The "Valley Bridge": A community aspiration for a dedicated pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Avon, connecting Offenham to The Valley (Twyford) shopping complex.

Vernacular: Architecture that makes use of local materials and traditional building styles common in a specific area (e.g., "The Cotswold vernacular").

Offenham Neighbourhood Plan: Consultation Draft (2026)

Your Village, Your Voice, Our Future

This document sets out the proposed planning policies for Offenham Parish. Once "Made," these policies will hold legal weight in determining planning applications. They have been crafted using the feedback provided by residents, local business owners, and community groups.

Section 1: Housing and Land Use (HL)

The Goal: To provide homes that residents actually need while protecting the Grade 1 soil that sustains our heritage.

Policy HL1: Residential Mix and Tenure

- **The Issue:** A "missing middle" of housing. Young families can't stay, and seniors can't downsize.
- **The Policy:** New developments must prioritise **2-bedroom bungalows** and **2-3 bedroom family homes**. Large "executive" homes (5+ bedrooms) will be restricted to ensure our village remains a balanced community, not a commuter estate.

Policy HL2: Local Connection Criteria

- **The Issue:** Affordable housing often goes to people with no link to Offenham.
- **The Policy:** We are introducing a legal "ring-fence." Affordable and social housing must be offered first to those who live in, work in, or have strong family ties to the Parish.

Policy HL3: Protection of Arable Land and Soil Quality

- **The Issue:** Offenham sits on some of the UK's finest soil. Once built on, it is gone forever.
 - **The Policy:** There is a strict presumption against building on **Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land**. Developers must prove that no brownfield or lower-grade sites are available before encroaching on our market-gardening heritage.
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Section 2: Infrastructure and Environment (IE)

The Goal: To solve existing flooding issues and ensure safe, green movement around the village.

Policy IE1: Sustainable Drainage (SuDS) and Sewage

- **The Issue:** Frequent flooding on Three Cocks Lane and sewage issues on Boat Lane.
- **The Policy:** We require "Flood Neutrality." Developers must prove the sewage network can cope *before* building starts. Non-permeable driveways are prohibited; we demand natural solutions like swales and rain gardens.

Policy IE2: Pedestrian and Cycle Connectivity

- **The Issue:** Narrow lanes and heavy traffic make walking to school or the shop feel unsafe.
- **The Policy:** New paths must be "Pram-Safe" (minimum 2.0m wide) and link directly to the village core. We also legally protect the landing sites for the proposed "Avon Link" bridge to Twyford.

Policy IE3: The Strategic Green Gap

- **The Issue:** The fear of Offenham being swallowed by Evesham.
- **The Policy:** We designate a permanent **Green Buffer** between the village boundary and the A46 bypass. This is a "no-build zone" for residential development to preserve our identity as a distinct village.

Policy IE4: Biodiversity and Nature Recovery

- **The Issue:** Declining wildlife and loss of natural habitats.
 - **The Policy:** All new builds must provide a **10% Net Gain** in biodiversity. This includes mandatory "Hedgehog Highways" in fences and integrated bat/bird boxes in new walls.
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Section 3: Design and Heritage (DH)

The Goal: To ensure Offenham *looks* like Offenham.

Policy DH1: The Offenham Design Code

- **The Issue:** 94% of residents want traditional materials, not "anywhere" architecture.
- **The Policy:** Mandatory use of **Blue Lias stone** or mellow red brick. Buildings should not exceed two storeys to protect the village skyline.

Policy DH2: Protected Vistas and Landscapes

- **The Issue:** Protecting the "Soul" of the village—the views we see every day.
- **The Policy:** Development must not obstruct key views of **Bennett's Hill**, the **Cotswold Escarpment**, the **Maypole**, or the **River Avon**.

Policy DH3: Preservation of Local Heritage Assets

- **The Issue:** Protecting the small things—old stone walls and market-gardening barns.
 - **The Policy:** We have identified a "Schedule of Local Heritage Assets" (see Appendix). These structures and medieval "Ridge and Furrow" field must be preserved.
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Section 4: Economy and Community (EC)

The Goal: To keep Offenham a "Working Village," not just a dormitory.

Policy EC1: Rural Business Diversification

- **The Policy:** We support the conversion of redundant barns into farm shops, cafes, or studios, provided they don't clog our lanes with heavy traffic.

Policy EC2: Protection of Community Assets

- **The Policy:** A presumption against the loss of the **Village Shop, Post Office, Pubs, and the British Legion**. If a business closes, the community must be given a "Right to Bid" to save it.

Policy EC3: Digital Infrastructure

- **The Policy:** To support home working and reduce commuting, all new homes must have **Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP)** installed from day one.
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Section 5: Community Action Plan (Non-Planning)

While these cannot be enforced by planning law, the Parish Council commits to lobbying for:

1. **20mph Zone** outside the Primary School.
2. **Gully Maintenance:** A strict schedule for clearing village drains.
3. **The Valley Bridge:** Connecting us safely to Twyford shopping.