

1. How does the planning system work?

Our local planning authority is Cherwell District Council. Developers or individuals wishing to make changes to their homes submit applications to the council. These are then considered to make sure that they conform to:

1. The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>) which sets general guidelines for planning authorities.
2. Policies in the Cherwell Local Development plan which sets out guidelines for developments and specific rules for the local area. Existing policies and proposed changes can be found at <https://cherwell.citizenspace.com/planning-policy/cherwell-local-plan-review-2042/>.
3. Any policies in a local Neighbourhood Plan.

The Council also asks for comments from local residents, the Parish Council and other interested parties like Oxfordshire Highways Department.

The planning officers at Cherwell District Council will then decide on the application. In some cases they may ask the Councillors to decide on their recommendations. A local Parish Council can only make a recommendation, it does not make a decision.

2. What is the difference between a Local Plan and a Neighbourhood Plan?

The Local Plan is the property of the District Council. It refers to Cherwell district only. It has to conform to the NPPF. It can add to the NPPF but not propose anything that conflicts with it. One aspect of the Local Plan is that it can put forward a proposal for the number of new properties that should be built in a community. The most recent Cherwell Plan has allocated 50 new dwellings to Bletchington. For more on this see the FAQ's 3 and 4 below.

A Neighbourhood Plan is a mini version of the Local Plan and is restricted to a parish or group of parishes. It must conform to the NPPF and the Local Plan. It can add to these but not conflict with either of them. Once adopted it becomes part of the Local Plan and its policies should be adhered to locally.

Bletchington Parish Council is in the process of forming its Neighbourhood Plan.

3. Both plans can contain proposals for the allocation of new housing. How does that happen?

The District Council or a Parish Council can do a "call for sites". This is an invitation to local landowners to submit proposals for development on their land. These are not planning applications but should show outline details of the site plan and the number of houses or other buildings that are proposed.

Whichever council does this then has to assess each of the sites against:

1. The local or neighbourhood plan to ensure that it does not conflict with any of the existing policies.
2. A set of fairly extensive criteria to ensure that a fair decision is made. A recent allocation exercise in Kirtlington used 31 criteria. A few of these are shown below. A number of red assessments would generally lead to a rejection of the site.

Issue	Green	Amber	Red	RATING	COMMENTS ON RATING
9. Likelihood of setting precedent of further adjacent development	Little likelihood of this scenario arising	Uncertain, but could be some likelihood of this scenario arising	High likelihood		
10. Important Woodlands, Trees & Hedgerows	None affected	Mitigation measures required	Site would harm or require removal of ancient tree or hedge (or TPO)		
11. Local Wildlife Designations (LWS or LNR)	No impact on wildlife designations	Small to medium impact but with potential to mitigate	Statutorily protected site affected		
12. Proximity to habitats with potential for protected species (e.g. Ponds with GCN)	No impact on habitats	Small to medium impact but with potential to mitigate	Statutorily protected species/habitats likely to be impacted		

(<https://kirtlingtonvillage.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/KIRTLINGTON-SITE-ASSESSMENT-KT1.pdf>)

4. Why did Cherwell allocate 50 dwellings to Bletchingdon?

Cherwell has to make allocations in its plan that provide for a figure dictated by the Government and to show that it can meet this target. The current target is to provide 20,029 dwellings over the next 22 years. Most of this new development will occur in Bicester, Banbury Heyford Park and Kidlington/Woodstock. However, 565 will be in rural areas. These allocations will be in 11 category A villages of which Bletchingdon is one. Category A villages are designated as such because they have facilities like a shop, school, village hall and good public transport. This does not preclude development in other villages, Kirtlington being an example. Bletchingdon's allocation is 50 dwellings.

5. What sites were proposed for Bletchingdon?

Two sites were proposed for Bletchingdon after the 2023 call for sites.



This is the site to the north of Duchy Field. Originally 22 dwellings were put forward. Cherwell now suggest 44 on the site.

The site is currently agricultural and not in the Green Belt or Conservation area.



This is the most recent version seen by the Parish Council of the proposed site to the south of Station Road. Besides the care home/retirement village it also included 102 dwellings. We understand that this plan has now been modified in a number of ways and includes a car park for the Co-Op.

The site is currently agricultural land, is not in the Conservation area but is in the Green Belt.

This site was first shown to the Parish Council in a different form for information in June 2022.

6. Why did Bletchingdon Parish council not put forward any sites or agree to any that had been proposed?

We cannot as a Parish Council decide a site allocation just by discussion or consultation. Although there has been some discussion about the two sites we have not formally discussed their relative merits. To make a site allocation in a sensible and rational way we would need to do the following:

1. Engage consultants; cost in the region of £7,000 to £8,000
2. The consultants would need to contact local landowners and ask if they wanted to put a site forward and to outline the number of houses and a site plan.
3. The consultants would then assess the sites against a set of criteria like those in a FAQ
 3. Given our circumstances one of the criteria would be whether or not the site was in the Oxford Green Belt.
4. The consultants would then draw conclusions which the Parish Council could accept or ignore. Given the criteria from 3 above it is likely that they would have recommended the Duchy Field site only out of the two above.

It is important to note that one of the sites put forward in 2023 is wholly within the Green Belt. This site is also partly owned by a member of the Parish Council, although it is important to say that this person has NOT tried to influence the council on this matter. The other site is owned by a former resident of the village.

It is also important to note that anything that goes into the Bletchingdon Neighbourhood Plan has to conform to the policies in the Cherwell District Local Plan. As it stands Cherwell policy COM 12 specifically states that “*The Oxford Green Belt boundaries within Cherwell District will be maintained*”. Therefore, if the Neighbourhood Plan contained a suggested allocation within the Green Belt this would be rejected and possibly the whole plan would be rejected.

Building development is always a contentious matter. If the PC were to endorse one site or indeed both it would open itself up to considerable criticism, opposition, accusations of cronyism, and possibly, legal action. This is why the council has remained neutral and there will be no site allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan. We were not part of the CDC site appraisal process and were only aware of the outcome when their Local Plan was published. This is now their consultation phase.

Individual councillors do of course have their own views on the sites.

7. Why did the Parish Council not consult the village about the sites.

It has to be accepted that any public meeting called to consult on these sites would be likely to have been contentious and would also have been attended by only a small proportion of the population. You cannot assume that non-attendees would have been disinterested. Any meeting could hardly have been regarded as representative. The Parish Council having decided to adopt a neutral position would therefore not have gained anything by having this meeting.

The Neighbourhood Planning group held a meeting in December 2023 and the potential sites were discussed and comments invited. There were no views expressed.

It was not until a few days before Christmas 2024 that Cherwell published its Local Plan and until then there had been no formal confirmation of what the allocation situation would be.

8. What happens now?

The Cherwell Local Plan is open to comments until 11.59pm on the 25th February. It is up to interested individuals to make comments to them. This can be done by going to <https://cherwell.citizenspace.com/planning-policy/cherwell-local-plan-review-2042/>.

At some point a formal planning application will be lodged with Cherwell for the allocated site and possibly the second one. When this happens the Parish Council is able to consult and along with individuals to make comments and suggestions.

9. Could anything change?

Yes, a number of things could change. Cherwell could still remove the allocation from the plan. The Cherwell Plan could be rejected by the Government.

The policy on the Green Belt (a band of land around a town that is protected against development) could change. Changes are proposed in the NPPF that could mean that protected land could be released although this could be challenged in Parliament and in the Courts. The current thinking can be found in latest NPPF document in chapter 13:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67a610df6006e4154dc498a0/NPPF_December_2024.pdf

10. How will I keep up to date?

The Parish Council will publish any new information on this issue when it receives it. It should be noted that the leaflets that you have received through your letterbox are NOT from the Parish Council. These leaflets do not say who they are from and might be construed as misleading.

You can also keep up to date with the Cherwell Local Plan on

<https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/83/local-plans>