

Executive Summary

Cold Ash parish is diverse in nature, sitting partially within an area of AONB and comprising two village settlements, elements of two urban settlements, a small industrial area and large areas of countryside that includes wooded areas and agricultural land. It also has a rich history, centred around the villages of Cold Ash and Ashmore Green, and the hamlet of Henwick. It has therefore been essential that this plan takes account of this variety, aiming to protect those rural and historical elements that give the parish its identity, and recognising that the urban and industrial areas have differing needs. To address this, our policies recognise the assets within the parish, many of which are the result of the parish being the highest point in Berkshire. These include policies on iconic views, open green space, biodiversity and the blue and green infrastructure, and dark skies. Our policies on heritage cover protection of assets, which include key buildings and our sunken lanes. We intend to use these policies to assess development within the parish as well as the potential impact on the parish from neighbouring, adjacent, or nearby developments.

To handle the varying design considerations of the different areas of the parish, we have identified three distinct zones:

1. Villages Zone – comprising the villages of Cold Ash and Ashmore Green, each with their own distinctive characteristics.
2. Urban Fringe Zone – comprising the more urbanised areas found on the outskirts of the Parish, which adjoin Thatcham (Southend and Florence Gardens) and Newbury (Manor Park). These areas are essentially part of those larger conurbations.
3. Rural Zone – comprising land within the Parish but located outside the other zones, where little to no development is expected to take place. If exceptional approval is given, then the design principles for the Villages Zone would apply.

The design considerations for each zone support the areas in question, with additional clarity being provided on the Villages Zone; the design considerations for the Urban Fringe Zone are to be in-line with those of the settlements of which they are part.

Movement around the parish is a recognised issue, as many of the roads are little more than upgraded country tracks, several without footpaths and some are single-track sunken lanes. The only substantial road is north-to-south through the centre of the parish. Resolving these issues would be a challenge, as any potential improvements would adversely impact on the character of the parish. It is for this reason that this plan has been developed based on the premise that no significant changes will be made to the road network (non-policy actions have been included to address the management of motorised traffic). The parish is well served with a network of Public Rights of Way (PROW), which are heavily used by pedestrians. Whilst the parish doesn't lend itself to bicycle traffic, being so hilly, there is a desire to develop further cycle networks, away from the main highways. Further non-policy actions are identified to further explore opportunities in this area.

Parking is a significant issue within the parish, particularly around the two schools at drop-off and pick-up times. These have been known issues for many years and all actions to address them to date have not had the desired effect. Further options will be explored during the lifetime of this plan.

It is hoped that this plan meets our vision of maintaining the parish as: ***A beautiful, desirable place to live, preserving the distinctive rural villages of Cold Ash and Ashmore Green, with their own identities, whilst also providing a variety of settings and dwellings across the whole parish that take advantage of modern infrastructure and transport links to local towns and beyond.***

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