

Section 2: Overview of Cold Ash Parish

Location & Geography

2.1. Cold Ash Parish lies in West Berkshire, centred around 51.42 degrees North and 1.27 degrees West (c SU 502 703). The parish boundary is loosely triangular in shape and lies on the northern boundary of Thatcham and parts of Newbury (Figure 2.1). It is also bounded by the parishes of Bucklebury to the east, Hermitage to the north, and Shaw-cum-Donnington and Chieveley to the west. It has an area of about 3 square miles (7.9 square kilometres) and a population of 4,063 (2011 Census). About 65% of the population resides in the villages of Cold Ash and Ashmore Green. The parish is primarily rural in nature, much of the land being open fields or woodland, though there are also some urban areas, principally in Manor Park, a term understood by residents for the area which is contiguous in its southern boundary with the area between Shaw and Benham Hill.

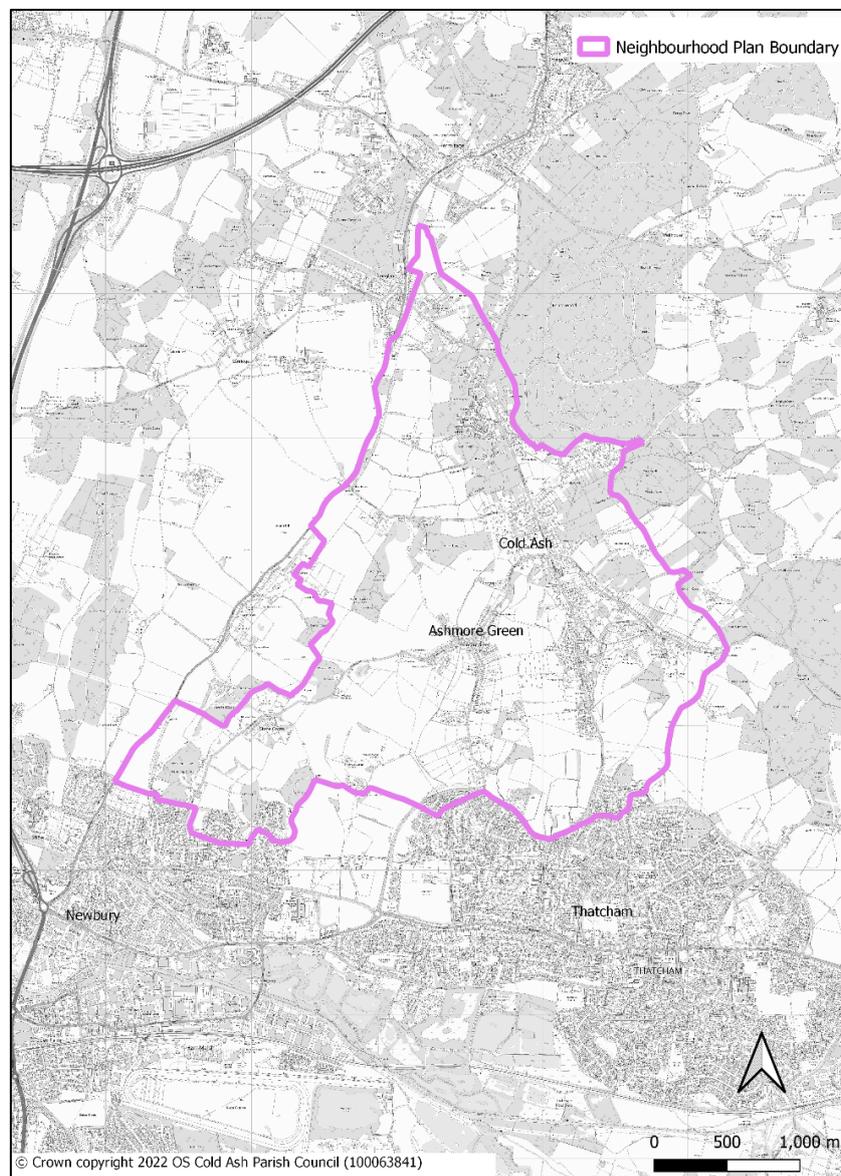


Figure 2.1: Map showing Cold Ash and surrounding areas

- 2.2. The centre of the Parish, population and facility-wise is Cold Ash village. Most of the community facilities are concentrated here, namely the village shop and Post Office, two public houses, three schools, church, village hall and the recreation ground. There is also a nationally recognised centre for Guides at Thirtover, between Cold Ash and Ashmore Green.
- 2.3. Some scattered coniferous woods remain, predominantly to the north and west. There is a network of 27 well-used footpaths through the fields and woods. All roads coming into Cold Ash pass through either open farmland or woodland, thus all the approaches to the parish are rural.

History of Cold Ash & Ashmore Green

- 2.4. The area was sparsely populated before about 1800 within a landscape of commons and a lot of early enclosed farmland with historic farmsteads.
- 2.5. During the Civil War, troops camped on Cold Ash Common before taking part in the Battle of Newbury.
- 2.6. In 1864 work commenced on the construction of St Mark's Church, which at that time came under the jurisdiction of the vicar and churchwardens of Thatcham. At 500ft above sea level this became the highest church site in Berkshire.
- 2.7. St Mark's School was built in 1873 next to the church and remained there for some 100 years until it was rebuilt on the other side of the road on land originally owned by the St Helier family of Poplar Farmhouse, on Cold Ash Hill.
- 2.8. In 1894 Cold Ash broke away to form its own civil parish, a move that was vigorously opposed at the time by Thatcham. Most of newly formed Cold Ash parish was previously in Thatcham parish but the eastern part included part of what was previously in Bucklebury parish. The first vicar of Cold Ash, The Rev Walter Smith Grindle, served in the parish for nearly 55 years and helped bring about considerable change in the life of the village.
- 2.9. In the early 1900's Sir Reginald Acland had a family home built at Thirtover, and in 1925 his family donated land upon which the Acland Memorial Hall was built, and this remains in use today as the village hall. By the end of the 20th century Cold Ash & Ashmore Green had expanded considerably, and the whole parish now has about 1330 dwellings.

Housing

- 2.10. A comprehensive assessment of housing in the parish was performed by Simon Vanstone in 2017, and he updated this in 2019. It can be found on the CAPNDP website. There is a wide range of housing across the parish as shown by:
 - Housing density in the parish varies from around 1 house per acre to over 12 houses per acre.
 - Half of the dwellings are smaller houses (3 beds or less) and half are 4 bedrooms or more.
 - About one third of dwellings are semi-detached or terraced houses.
 - Around 15% of dwellings are bungalows.
- 2.11. Cold Ash village is defined as a local service village. Service villages are places where a small amount of development (particularly economic, or which extends the range of services

available) may be appropriate.

- 2.12. Of the local service villages, Cold Ash took the second highest increase in housing between 2001 and 2011. Only Hermitage took more, which underlines the pressure that has been put in and around our parish.

Demographics

- 2.13. According to the Census 2011, Cold Ash parish had a population of 4,063, living in 1,365 dwellings. In the previous Census (2001) the population of Cold Ash was 3,623, living in 1,154 dwellings. This reveals a 12% increase in population over the 10 years and an 18% increase in dwellings.

- 2.14. The mean age of the population is 37.5 and the make-up of age groups is as follows:

- 5% of 0 – 4 age group
- 11% of 5 – 9 age group
- 36% of 10 – 19 age group
- 9% of 20 – 34 age group
- 40% of 35 – 64 age group
- 15% of 65+ age group
- 2% of 85+ age group

- 2.15. The Summer Survey conducted in 2019 reveals residents' strong desire to accommodate elderly housing (61%) and assisted housing (25%). 44% of the respondents also highlighted affordable housing for young families and for downsizing as important.

Commerce

- 2.16. There is a small light industrial area at the northern "point" of the Parish in the Red Shute estate. There are also small businesses scattered in various farm units across the parish.

Our parish and what's important to us

- 2.17. Cold Ash Parish contains one of the highest points in West Berkshire, within the village of Cold Ash, which is about 150 metres (500 feet) above sea level. The villages within the parish are 'Ribbon Villages' with the village settlements of Cold Ash and Ashmore Green being on the key north/south and east/west routes of Cold Ash Hill/Hermitage Road and The Ridge/Ashmore Green Road. The Ridge, as its name suggests, runs along the top of a ridge that divides the Pang and Kennet valleys. From the parish's vantage points it is possible to view four other counties.

- 2.18. The heights provide iconic views, the protection of which have been a major influence on the siting of development within the centre of the parish. This has seen sensitive development to protect the views. This continues to be particularly important to the parish as, being able to see most of the parish from the key viewpoints, any development that breaks up the aesthetic qualities of the landscape, its flowing patterns, and colours, would have a major detrimental impact.

- 2.19. The height of the centre of the parish means that it is an ideal spot for stargazing. It is for this reason that it is important that the Dark Sky in the highest point of the parish is protected from light pollution. This means that both street lighting and private lighting, in particular security

lighting, needs to be closely managed in this area.

- 2.20. The way the parish has developed historically has produced two unique villages, Cold Ash and Ashmore Green, each with distinctive characters. It is essential to parishioners that we maintain these.
- 2.21. There are also important environmental areas within the parish that attract a higher level of protection. These are:
 - a small proportion of the parish is in the Wessex Downs AONB, as it flows down from the Ridge into the Pang Valley
 - Cold Ash Quarry, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
 - eleven designated Local Wildlife Areas fully within the parish and two partially within the parish
 - seven ancient woodlands
- 2.22. Whilst most of the parish is predominantly rural or comprising the village settlements, there are areas of “urban fringe” mainly on the southern border and some industrial /commercial in the north.
- 2.23. In the south of the parish lies the hamlet of Henwick. There are also the smaller settlements of Little Copse (Southend) and Floral Way, and in the south-west, the parish ward of Manor Park, which are more in keeping with the neighbouring urban developments of Thatcham and Newbury. In fact, some of these areas align themselves more closely with their neighbouring districts (the element of the parish that is in Manor Park does not cover the whole of the Manor Park development). In the west of the parish there is a small development along Long Lane, which forms the western border of the parish. These dwellings and the residents also tend to align themselves to the other properties on Long Lane.
- 2.24. At the north end of the parish the Red Shute Industrial Estate is the main non-agricultural commercial area of employment.
- 2.25. The history and landscape of the parish has therefore resulted in two distinct characters, one rural and the other more urban. It is therefore important that the Neighbourhood Development Plan recognises and makes specific allowance for each of these.
- 2.26. The village and hamlet settlements in the centre of the parish are close to capacity. This, together with the need to protect the iconic views and the pattern and colours of the land, as it falls away from the heights, means that the majority of land that is suitable for development is predominantly on the fringes of the parish, particularly in the south and west. The one exception to development on the fringe of the parish is the area to the north of The Ridge, which is either in the Wessex Downs AONB or is part of the natural buffer area flowing into it.
- 2.27. The parish has several important green spaces covering land that is either owned or managed by the Parish Council. For instance, the Wildlife Allotment Garden and Hermitage Road Recreation Ground are owned by charitable trusts and managed by the Parish Council. Additional open spaces are owned by West Berkshire Council, and there is further land which is privately owned. There are also further green spaces in the parish that will be identified through this NDP, with the aim of securing Local Green Space designation for them.
- 2.28. The parish is rich in biodiverse wildlife, which is evidenced by the presence of eleven Local Wildlife Sites and nine Ancient Woodlands. Richness of biodiversity is something that it is

critically important to support, both for the benefit of the parish and the surrounding countryside. This fact further supports the need to protect the land in and around the village settlements, as a large proportion of it is critical to providing healthy biodiverse wildlife environments and provide corridors for wildlife to move around and colonise wider areas of the parish. These areas, together with the trees and hedgerows of the parish, have been identified as requiring active protection. Further sites have already been identified as having potential for securing an appropriate designation. The plan is to develop an Environmental Baseline for the parish, which will be used to drive further improvements.

- 2.29. The parish is well serviced by a network of Public Rights of Way (footpaths and bridleways), although these are predominantly footpaths. There are in fact 27 Public Rights of Way that link the various and disparate elements of the parish. The rights of way pass through and around landowner's woods and fields, and other important Green Space. In some ways these rights of way are more important than the roads in connecting the various communities. In fact, they link both the rural and urban areas of the parish, providing parishioners living in both settings easy access into the countryside. The aesthetic quality of the walks brings together the sense of place and nature for the people using them. The landscape is therefore essential to the community in maintaining the perception of place (the collective memories, feelings, and sense of awe). This plan aims to support the various landscape elements that make up the perception of place, so that when viewing it from the key vantage points or walking through it on the various footpaths, it retains the ability for people to connect with nature and provide a sense of awe.
- 2.30. The key landscape characteristics have been formed by the geology and history of the parish. These influences have resulted in a diverse pattern of land use that, along with the emotionally engaging natural landscape, provide the rural sense of place for the communities in rural areas of the parish. These include, but are not limited to:
- generously scaled rolling landscape with some pronounced wooded ridges
 - a complex pattern of landscape, dominated by woodland; coniferous, or mixed with beech and birch
 - pastures
 - heathland and woodland habitats – deciduous and mixed woodland to pasture and arable
 - linear settlements within wooded areas; clustered farmsteads and private residences
 - road pattern with complex winding sunken lanes (see 'Sunken lanes') with banks and hedgerows
 - a comprehensive network of Public Rights of way (see Public Rights of Way), including a network of bridleways
- 2.31. A small area of the parish, to the north and east of The Ridge and Hermitage Road, is within the North Wessex Down Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 2.32. The area abounds with natural drains, issues and sinks, all of which help to ensure natural drainage and control the run-off of excessive rainfall. These are particularly evident in the local gaps between Cold Ash and the neighbouring parishes and are clearly marked on larger scale Ordnance Survey maps (see Flood Risk Management).
- 2.33. Woodland is a dominant natural feature in this area. The gravel plateau, for instance, is very acidic, and has created a typical landscape of Pine and Birch. The area along and round Hermitage Road, in particular, is densely treed and provides a contrast to the more open Oak dominated landscape of the clay soils which surround The Ridge.

2.34. Main tree species can be found including:

- Ash, throughout the parish
- Beech in Ashmore Green Road
- Oak in Ashmore Green Road, Bucklebury Alley, Collaroy Road, Stoney Lane and The Ridge
- Hornbeam in Stoney Lane
- Scots Pine at Downe House and on Hermitage Road and Slanting Hill
- occasional Sweet Chestnut and Cherry.

2.35. It is noticeable that the older parts of the villages are more wooded and have larger and more mature species than the newer parts. This arises largely from the earlier dates of planting and the larger gardens usually associated with the older properties. This creates a different character from the newer areas where the houses are more visible and where cypresses tend to dominate the vegetation. The smaller gardens and open space areas mean that most of the native trees such as Oak, Ash and Beech cannot be established, especially on the clay areas where set distances have to be maintained to avoid root damage to properties. The lack of large trees could have an adverse effect on the parish if sufficient open space is not provided in new developments to allow for planting larger trees. For these reasons, it is essential that a significant proportion of the mature trees in the parish be protected. There has been limited use of Tree Preservation Orders to date; this is something that will be rectified as part of the planning process.