

Built Environment Group

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Notes for Parish Plan

History of the development of Woodcote

The village of Woodcote

At first glance, Woodcote looks to be a completely modern settlement but in fact there is archaeological evidence which shows there has been settlement in the area for the last 10,000 years. Handaxes and worked flints have been found in many places. A beautifully polished 5000 year old axe has been found in The Close, a larger than life grotesquely carved head dated to 500BC was dug up in a Wayside Green garden and a hoard of Roman coins was found on the west side of the village.

Woodcote was first mentioned in documented history in 1109. At that time, it was part of the manor of South Stoke which was already recorded in the Domesday Book. Soon after the Norman Conquest, the manor of South Stoke passed into the ownership of Eynsham Abbey where it remained until the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII. In 1546, Henry gave the lands to the new Cathedral of Christ Church, Oxford. This became part of Christ Church College which still owns land in this area today.

Until 1952 when it became a parish in its own right, Woodcote was part of South Stoke parish. Christ Church College was the main landowner and until the 1860s ran its estates in South Stoke and Woodcote on medieval manorial lines. Woodcote, however, being on the top of the hill of this typical Chilterns 'strip parish' was always a more 'open' than closed village.

The 1853 South Stoke Enclosure Award, an Act of Parliament, resulted in land in Woodcote and South Stoke being enclosed and leased to tenants. Some land was 'allotted' as common land – the Recreation Ground and Allotments are all that remains of this today. The Recreation Ground and Allotments are charitable land, the trustees of which is the Parish Council who are responsible for its protection and management. A few years after the Enclosure award, a change in legislation allowed Oxford colleges to sell their land, leading to a growth in private ownership of land in Woodcote.

Development of housing in Woodcote

The housing in Woodcote dates back to the 16th and 17th centuries with Masseys Pightle, Church Farm, Pickets Cottage, Toggs Cottage and Weevil Cottage still in use. There are numerous houses dating to the 19th century including Woodcote House, Greenmorehill Farm, Payables Farm, Woodcote Farm, Dean Farm, New Barn and Broad Street Farm as well as some cottages along Beech Lane and scattered elsewhere in the village. By 1861 Woodcote had a population of just under 500. In the 1920s and 30s a number

of villa style properties were built in Goring Road and Beech Lane, taking the population to just over 600 by 1931. Bungalows were subsequently built in Bridle Path during the 1950s, and Goring Road.

In 1952 when Woodcote became a separate parish, and subsequent to this, more major expansion began, taking the population to 1100 by 1961 and 1400 by 1965. During the 1960s and throughout the 1970s Woodcote was under enormous pressure from developers to build on greenfield sites. In 1965, Oxfordshire County Council published plans for expansion of the village. The extra housing would 'round off and consolidate existing development'. The Council said 'moderate growth would be advantageous in assisting the provision of facilities and services and the consolidation of the village'. Unfortunately, the vision of more facilities and services was not wholly fulfilled.

Expansion continued with a further 38 acres of residential development including West Chiltern (1969), Wayside Green and the eastern part of Grimmer Way (1970), the western part of Grimmer Way (1975), Oakdene (1977) and Folly Green and Wood Green (1978) taking the population of Woodcote to 2550.

Since then most housing development has been infill to existing housing. There have also been some small developments: Deanwood Close, Walker Close, Abbott Close, Potkiln Lane, Nightingales and Summit House Close on Greenmore. At the 2001 census, the population of Woodcote was 2700, and the number of houses was 953.

In 1965, at the same time as the green light was given for the expansion of Woodcote, the Chiltern Hills, in which Woodcote lies, was formally designated an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) by the government. One of the main aims of the AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. The effect of this is that the countryside surrounding Woodcote has special protection from unwanted development which would be harmful to the AONB. The AONB has national importance with the Chilterns countryside being recognised amongst the finest in the country, on a par with National Parks.

The current built environment of Woodcote

Types of housing

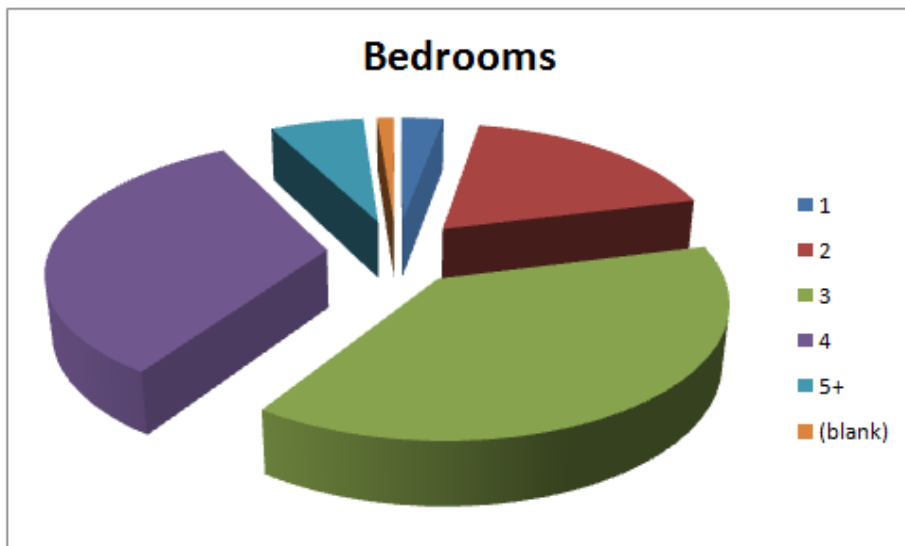
Most of the housing in Woodcote is mixed in age and in building style, for instance housing in South Stoke Road, with older and newer properties side by side. This is with the exception of some of the large estates e.g. West Chiltern and Wayside Green which have a homogeneous housing style within the estate. The average population density in Woodcote is 3.82 people per hectare, but this conceals wide variation across different areas of Woodcote.

Most houses in Woodcote consist of two storeys, some as houses built in this style, some as cottages with dormer windows, and some as bungalows or single storey cottages converted through dormer windows and rooflights. There are a number of unconverted bungalows, situated in Goring Road, Beech Lane and Bridle Path. The only three storey building is currently Wayside House, which has been converted to flats and sold.

The majority of housing in Woodcote is detached (53%), with 30% semi detached, 8% terraced and 9% flats, maisonettes and apartments (census data 2001). 62% of the population live in detached houses or bungalows, 26% in semi detached, 5% in terraced, 6% in flats, maisonettes and apartments and 1% in sheltered accommodation (village appraisal 2007). There has been a trend to decreased household size from 2.85/household in 1991 to 2.71 per household in 2000, with an older population and fewer children living in Woodcote.

Size of houses

Responses from the village appraisal 2007, showed that the majority of houses in Woodcote are larger family homes with the largest proportion (total 72.2%) having 3 or 4 bedrooms. 18.4% have two bedrooms and only 2.9% are one bedroom properties. More responses may have been returned by owner occupiers, and this may have had the effect of comparative inflation of the proportion of larger houses.



Ownership of housing

The 2001 census showed that the majority of residents in Woodcote (78.9%) are owner-occupiers, occupying houses and bungalows. This percentage is greater than the national average. 13.4% of the total housing stock in Woodcote is rented socially, with 3.2% rented privately, and 4.5% in the category of "other" e.g. tied to job.

Cost of housing

Land registry information gave the following average house prices in 2006.

Average House Prices in Local Area (£) for period Apr-Jun 2006			
House Type	Price (Woodcote)	Number of Sales	Price (Average for England and Wales)
Detached	£497,047	18	£299,693
Semi-detached	£261,635	14	£178,785
Terraced	£248,666	3	£157,381
Flat	£199,525	8	£189,015

It can be clearly seen from the above that houses in Woodcote are expensive compared with the national average, although the flats sold are comparable in price. Again, small numbers of sales mean that these figures may not be representative of the total housing stock.

Built Environment Plan

The Built Environment Plan aims to describe how the village community would like to see the evolution and future development of our surroundings and built environment. It also aims to develop a vision of how our village should evolve into the next 20 years, which will address the balance between different types of housing, the balance of our housing needs and the employment within our parish and also between social housing and privately owned housing.

Level of housing development in Woodcote

Under current government proposals there is pressure for development throughout South East England, and South Oxfordshire District Council have requested identification of possible land for development within the village. At the village consultation day on 6.10.07, written responses were sought to the

proposed sites which had been put forward. None of the responses viewed large scale development as acceptable for the following reasons:

- The countryside being under threat and damage to AONB
- Loss of identity as a village
- Pressure on amenities and infrastructure, especially due to traffic
- Overcrowding and loss of privacy
- Concerns over pressure from developers
- The high level of development which has already taken place in Woodcote

Of the responses which viewed limited further development as acceptable, most suggested that this should be for affordable housing only with young and/or local people having priority.

From the appraisal data too, one area that was very clear is that there is a majority objection to further housing development (67%) that would expand or change the environment of the village, and most residents wish to defend our environment against unnecessary building. Living in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) implies an obligation to protect the rural environment, and ensure that any development should conserve and enhance its natural beauty. However of the 18% who saw a need for additional housing, 56% preferred infill housing and 55% low cost housing.

Balance of housing in Woodcote

Balance in the built environment also needs to be considered in terms of 3 primary areas:

1. People to housing –the housing needs of the community from housing types (rented, leased or privately owned) to housing needs (size, rooms etc) to price
2. Housing to employment – the need for housing to meet the employment needs of the area, or possibly employment to meet the needs of people living locally
3. Housing to services – the services needed within the village such as healthcare, shops, schooling, transportation etc

As can be seen from the data on the current built environment of Woodcote, we have a high proportion of large houses – 40% with 4+ bedrooms. This has developed over time and was not always the case. This is clearly affecting the average house price in the village, and in addition there is a low stock of 1 & 2 bedroom housing. This in effect means that there is a limited stock of entry housing or low cost housing. There are also comparatively few employers within the village with most local people commuting outside the village to

work. Finally, some services such as shops have declined in number over the years despite the increases in population. This can perhaps be attributed to the large commuter population in the village who shop near their workplace rather than when they return to the village.

There is no set definition of what a balanced village should consist of but from our research we believe that there is a need for entry priced housing to ensure a village tuned to our communal needs.

Of the 18% of respondents to the appraisal who saw a need for additional housing, 74% requested housing for young people to enter the housing market. It is unclear from the data if this is housing for purchase or rental as the term 'low cost housing' could have many meanings.

Recommendations

1. Many facts have been recorded about the village but we feel that there is little record of the environment or indeed the character of the village. In response to this we recommend that an audit of the village be conducted recording the village as we see it today. This will enable us to be able to demonstrate the nature of our environment within the village.
2. In addition to the audit we also recommend that we document the design and density of the built environment within the village. It is often noted that the street scene within Woodcote is full of open spaces and that housing is primarily set back from the road with green areas surrounding property. This document would help us build our commitment to the AONB and make suggestions to assist the planning officers.
3. We have noted that there appears to be a small housing need within the village, possibly beyond its current built environment. However this need is minimal, with 85% of questionnaire respondents not viewing obtaining housing for local needs as a problem. Thus we should be able to guide the development agencies with our own Woodcote Housing Development Report.
4. Finally, many villagers have little knowledge of key areas within the village beyond the main roads. It is thus proposed that we invest time to know the village we love, and understand its character and individuality, including a campaign to encourage residents to explore the village further, and to discover the true beauty of our natural and built environment.