

# Steeple Ashton Neighbourhood Development Plan

## Appendix C: Character Assessment

June 2025



**STEEPLE ASHTON**

**NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the character assessment is to provide evidence regarding the character of the Parish and how it is viewed by its residents. The character assessment is a factual and objective analysis that communicates the key physical features and characteristics of Steeple Ashton that combine to give a particular settlement or an area its local distinctiveness and unique identity<sup>1</sup>. It identifies recognisable patterns of elements or characteristics that make one place different from another. Character assessments are widely recognised as useful tools, helping to aid the planning, design, and management of future development in a particular locality.

The key role neighbourhood planning has in achieving high quality places, and the importance of understanding local character and context to inform such plans, is acknowledged in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Paragraph 127), which states:

*“Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development, both through their own plans and by engaging in the production of design policy, guidance and codes by local planning authorities and developers.”*

Preparing a character assessment therefore gives the community the opportunity to document the existing character of the Parish. By understanding what you have already, you can begin to talk about what type of

development you might want in the future. Development can help preserve the character you already have, enhance it, or even add some contrast and variety to it.

Poorly designed development proposals are often the result of a lack of understanding of, or in some cases a disregard for, the character, feel and appearance of the local area. Such proposals can fail to conserve or enhance the unique qualities of the local area for which they are proposed and may harm and erode the existing character.

Conversely, good design, that is both visually attractive and functional, stems from having an understanding of a development’s setting and the character of the local area. This understanding can help to ensure that new development proposals are of an appropriate design; one that respects and compliments the existing local character.

The character assessment will support the design and character policies progressed within the Steeple Ashton Neighbourhood Plan. It is intended that the report will be used to guide high quality design and give context to future development schemes within the Parish, to ensure they reflect the identity of the local surroundings, character and history.

## What is Character?

The character of an area is essentially the combination of the public and private realms. Elements of character therefore include both the uses of an area and its physical features, such as styles of building, construction materials, architectural details or green landscape features. Every property, public place or piece of infrastructure can make a contribution, whether great or small.

Elements of character may also be from emotional or personal perceptions of a place, such as historical or cultural associations with a place or building. Others may be relatively ephemeral or transitory, such as the smells and

<sup>1</sup> Planning Aid guidance 'How to Prepare a Character Assessment to support design policy within a neighbourhood plan' pg3.

sounds associated with particular activities, which may occur only at certain times of the day or year.

All areas have a character. In some areas the character may be more obvious, more consistent, more unusual, or more attractive, but no area should be described as having no character.

The National Design Guide (NDG) sets out that well-designed places have individual characteristics which work together to create its physical character. These characteristics help to nurture and sustain a sense of community and contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the NPPF. The characteristics are set out in the figure below.



The ten characteristics of well-designed places

The NDG sets out that well-designed places are based on a sound understanding of the features of the site and surrounding context, using baseline studies as a starting point for design (Para 40).

Local identity is made up of typical characteristics such as the pattern of housing, and special features that are distinct from their surroundings. These special features can be distinguished by their uses and activity, their social and cultural importance, and/or their physical form and design (para 52). Recognising that the character of any settlement is formed by more than just the appearance of the buildings which occupy it, NDG identifies a broad range of factors which should be considered, including:

- Scale, design, and contribution of built form
- Structure, spacing and layout
- Historical evolution of the area
- Landscape setting
- Vegetation, planting, and landscape features
- Landmarks and Historic Buildings
- Views
- Function of the area

# 2. METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this assessment is to identify the qualities and characteristics of the village of Steeple Ashton, however, where appropriate, existing development which fails to contribute positively to the character of the Parish can also be highlighted. This identification ensures that a holistic and thorough assessment of the character is presented and that all key aspects of local character are considered.

The following methodology is prepared in accordance with the Locality Guidance on achieving well designed places<sup>2</sup>, as well as the National Design Guidance definitions of the ten characteristics of a well-designed place<sup>3</sup>.

## Step 1 – Identification of Broad Location

The first step is to identify broad character areas that exist in the Parish and set them out on a map. These broad character areas should be identified as areas that share similar appearance and feel throughout.

This exercise is based on local knowledge and existing understanding of the Parish and settlement. The way the Parish is divided up may be based on factors such as:

- Land uses
- Building type
- Building age/period of construction

- Architectural styles
- Existing landscape character assessments
- Existing boundaries, such as roads and rivers

A combination of these criteria may be used to identify the character areas.

## Step 2 – Character Assessment

Having divided the built-up area of Steeple Ashton into different character areas, the next step is to identify and record the distinct character of each of these areas.

A site visit will be undertaken around each of the identified broad locations and the findings categorised into the following proforma.

The criteria on this proforma have been developed from features of importance identified in the National Design Guide sections on ‘Context’ and ‘Identity’, which look at the local and wider context of an area to identify a sense of place.

The proforma includes assessment aiding recommendations to help guide a consistent approach and explain terminology. This will include the following recommendations for each area:

- **Built Development**
  - *Think about the layout, form, scale, type, appearance, details, materials, age, and pattern of the built form.*
- **Local Heritage**
  - *Think about the designated or non-designated heritage assets in the area that relate to the existing character. Are there any important cultural associations?*

<sup>2</sup> <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/good-design-neighbourhood-planning/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/962113/National\\_design\\_guide.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962113/National_design_guide.pdf)

- **Land Use and Function**
  - *What is the main land use in the area? What is the pattern of uses and activities including community facilities and local services. How does the area function?*
  
- **Physical Setting and Landscape Character**
  - *Think about the landform, topography, geography, and ground conditions. Are there water courses, ridgelines or particular physical features that contribute to the character of the area? Does the area have high ecological value?*
  - *Think about the key landscape and visual features, including views into and out of the area, connection to green infrastructure and wider countryside. What are the key areas of public or open space? What is the scale and proportion of hard vs soft landscaping?*
  
- **Movement and Connectivity**
  - *Think about how the area is accessed and connected to wider routes and the main method of movement in the area? Are there rights of ways/ footways/ cycle paths etc? Think about the legibility of the area – how easy is it for people to find their way around?*
  
- **Key Positive Characteristics to be Maintained**
  - *What are the overall characteristics of the area that should be maintained and enhanced?*
  
- **Sensitivity to Change**
  - *Summarise any elements that are particularly sensitive to change? This may include features that do not have a positive contribution to the character of the area and further development of this kind should be avoided.*

2.1. Photographs should be taken to support the identification of each character area.

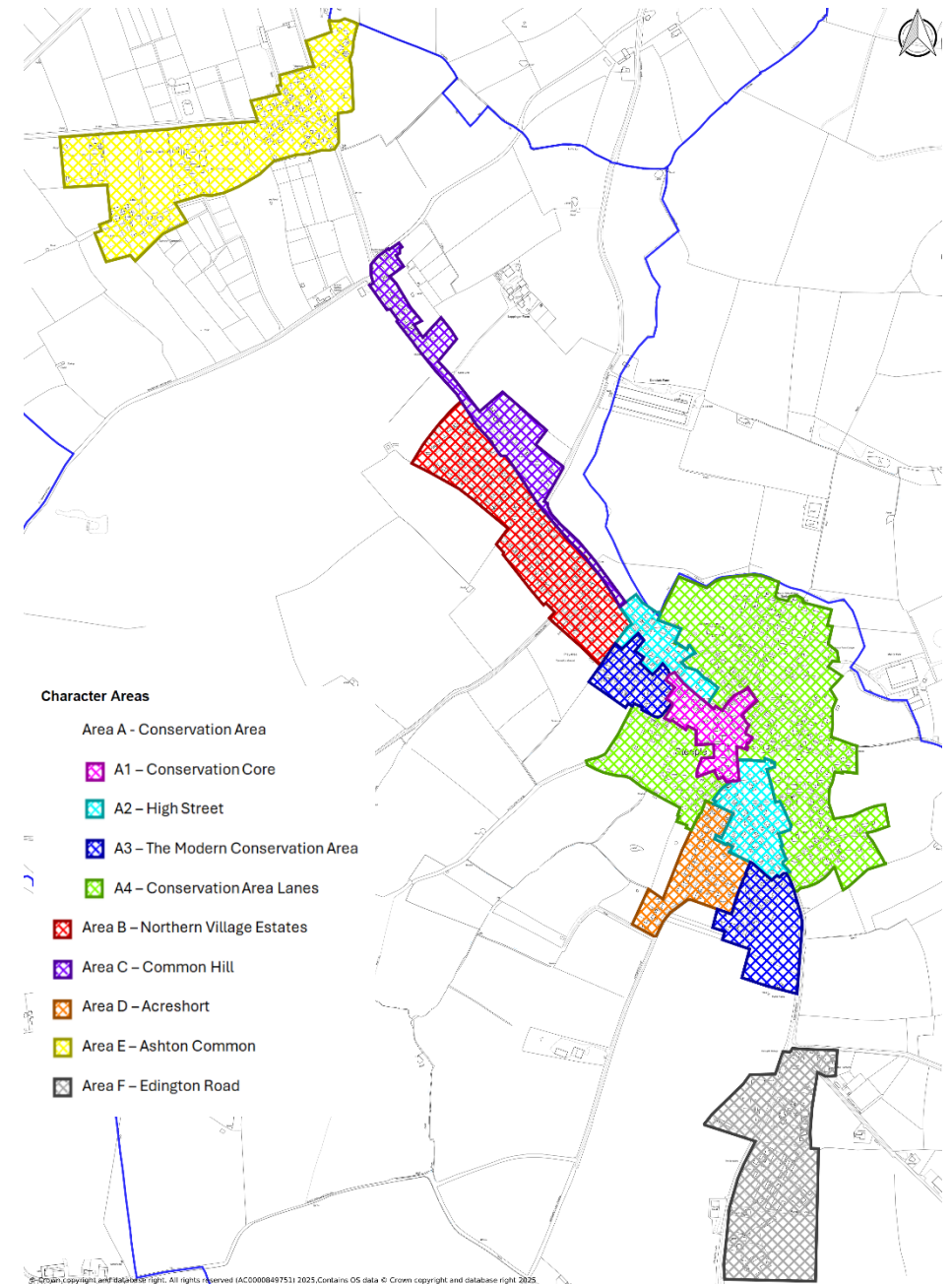
# 3. CHARACTER AREAS

The Character Areas within this section include

- Area A – Conservation Area
  - A1 – The central conservation area
  - A2 – The High Street
  - A3 – The Modern Conservation Area
  - A4 – The Conservation area Lanes
- Area B – Northern Village Estates
- Area C – Common Hill
- Area D – Acreshort
- Area E – Ashton Common
- Area F – Edington Road

The character areas in this study have focused on the main settlement and key built-up areas in the Parish. These are the locations where future development is most likely to occur and should therefore be influenced by this Character Assessment. It is acknowledged that there are further areas of sporadic development across the Parish, within the countryside, that are not covered by this study.

The following pages set out the analysis of each of the character areas, with a summary of their key qualities and characteristics.



# Area A – The Conservation Area

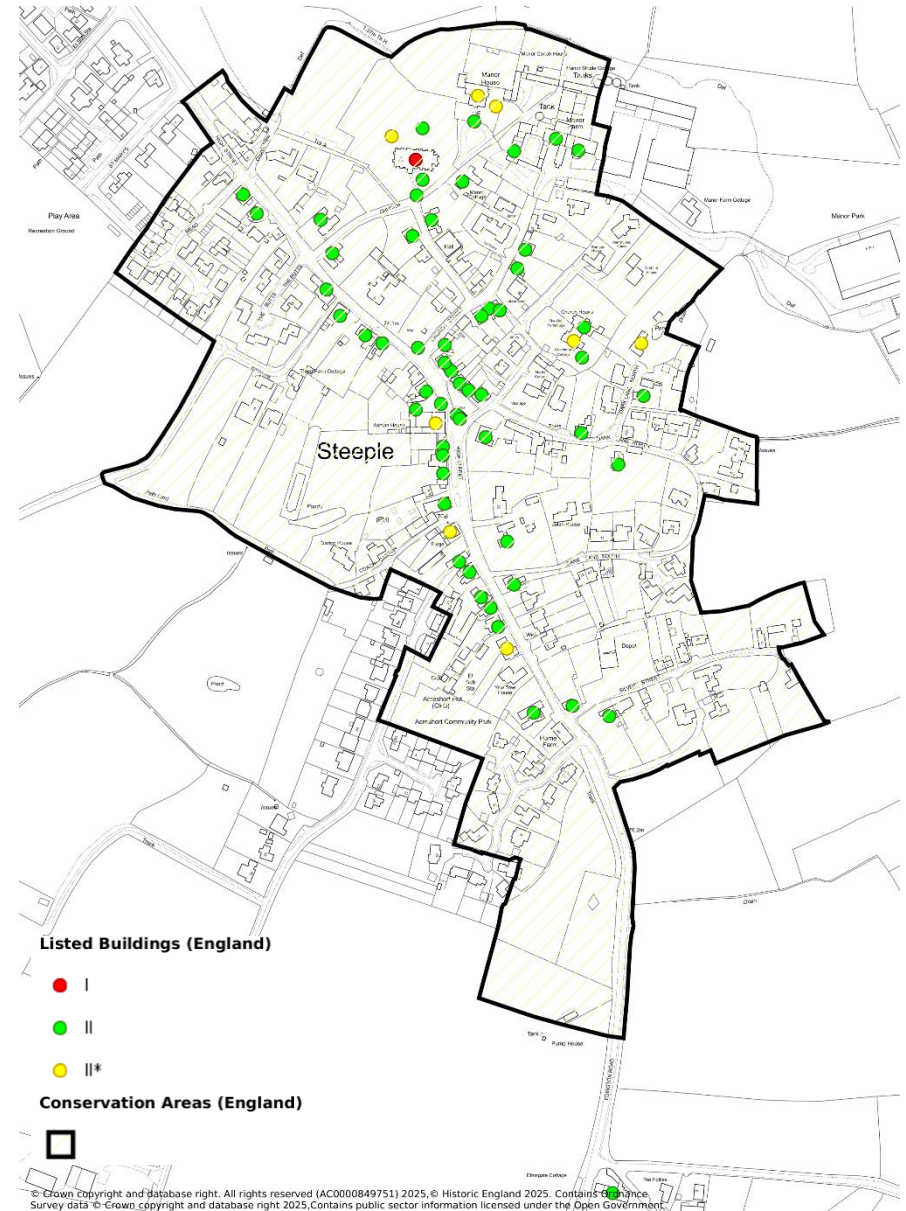
## Overview

The Steeple Ashton Conservation Area (shown to the right) covers a large portion of the village and is where most of the historic fabric of the village can be found. There are approximately 64 listed buildings and monuments within the Conservation Area, including the Grade I Listed 15<sup>th</sup> Century Church of St Mary the Virgin, and eight Grade II\* Listed buildings/ monuments such as Ashton House, Black Barn Cottage, The Sanctuary and The Manor House. Other notable listed buildings include the Grade II Listed Market Cross and Blind House, Steeple Ashton War Memorial, Church of England School and the Longs Arms, among others. These date from between the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Conservation Area is made up of a variety of different distinct character areas and has been separated as follows:

- A1 – The central conservation area
- A2 – The High Street
- A3 – The modern conservation area
- A4 – The back lanes of the conservation area

These areas are discussed in detail below.



# A1 – The Central Conservation Area



## Built Development

The central conservation area is focused around the Village Green, the geographical centre of the village which houses the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Market Cross and Blind House and is surrounded by some of the oldest houses in Steeple Ashton. The majority of properties in this character area are of earlier construction, with some buildings dated from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

The houses in this area are clustered closely together and almost all front onto the highway, separated by only the footways which contain elements of the traditional pitched and cobbled paths of the village. The buildings on the

western side of the High Street, including the imposing Ashton House and The Merchants House form a continuous unbroken frontage onto the road. The more modest houses behind The Green are also clustered tightly together, creating a dense urban feeling in the heart of a once thriving, mediaeval market centre.

The buildings are mostly two-storey with the exception of the Longs Arms and Ashton House being three-storey. Properties are made up of a mix of build materials and styles including brick, timber frame, dressed stone and random stone, with clay tiles, stone and slate roofs. There is no uniformity within the buildings style or form which creates a varied and organic character of development.

There is little to no modern infill development within this character area, and alterations or extensions to properties have been undertaken sympathetically and generally to the rear of the buildings.

## Local Heritage

The majority of buildings within this character area are Grade II Listed. Ashton House, which sits opposite the Village Green is Grade II\* Listed. The Lock up and Market Cross on the green forms a scheduled monument and landmark of the village. The War Memorial, also Grade II Listed, is sited on the corner of Church Street and High Street (south) and is often used for wreath laying on Armistice Day and a place for quiet reflection. The area also contains The Longs Arms public house, a former major coaching inn dating from when the village was located on the Salisbury/Bath route.



## Land Use and Function

This is mainly a residential area, although does include the Longs Arms Public House. The Village Green is used for community events throughout the year.

## Physical Setting and Landscape Character

The village green forms the backdrop of this character area, which extends to the south and forms pleasant green verges either side of the highway. The dwellings have very little, or no front garden meaning vegetation is limited.

The southern approach into this character area provides one of the most recognisable and finest views in the village, with the Church Tower rising behind the Green framed by the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century buildings.



The Village Green and High Street within this character area form the lowest part of the main village and tend to flood when experiencing torrential rain. Significant areas are at risk of surface water flooding.

## Movement and Connectivity

The main north-south route through the character area is the High Street, the primary route through the village and parish. The area also extends north-east out to the southern end of Church Street.

Pavements are predominantly paving stones edged with cobbles. There is little to no street lighting within this area.

Few properties have off-road parking spaces, and therefore parked cars have become a dominating feature of the street, eroding some of the character.

## Key Characteristics

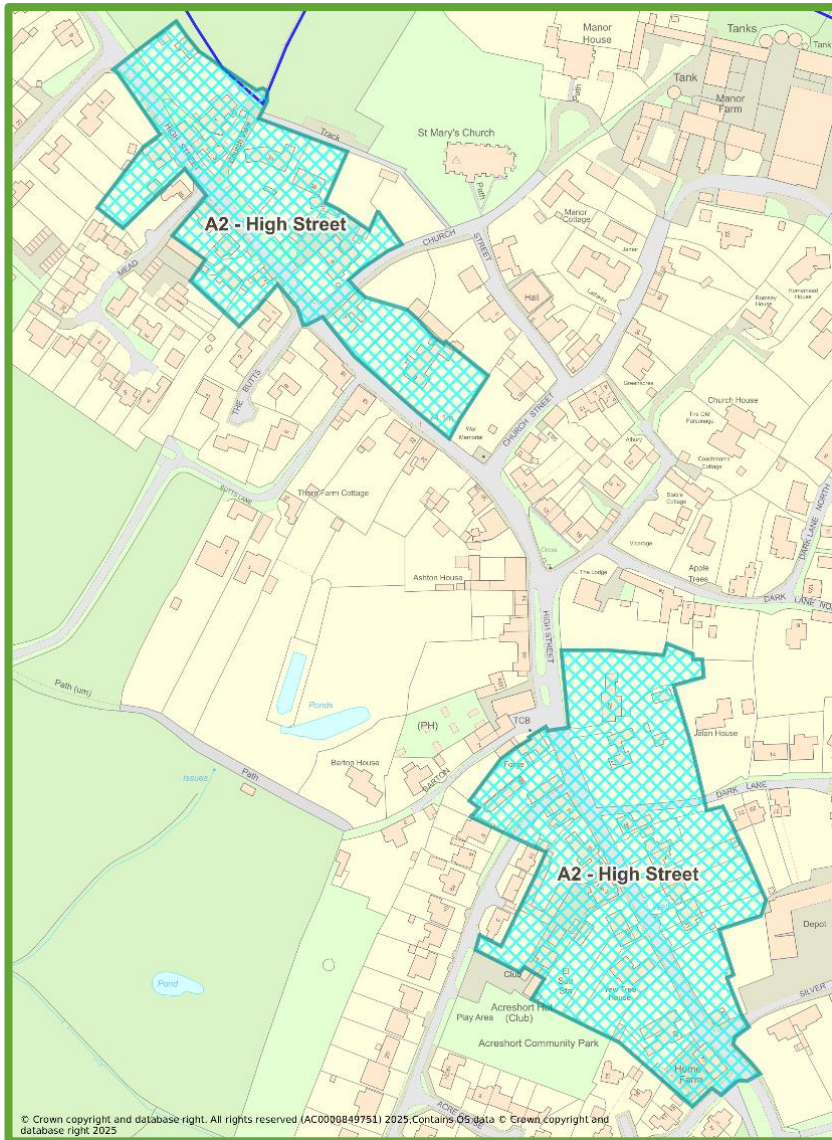
- Dense existing development of varied character, building materials and design.
- Strong building line of properties fronting the High Street.
- Village Green extending down the High Street to Longs Arms
- Building heights generally two-storey with some taller focal dwellings.

## Sensitivity to change

- Lack of parking and through traffic is already posing a problem, so special consideration should be given to this in selecting suitable development sites.
- Potential for the loss of historic detailing and materials on some historic properties through things like window replacements, timber boarding and boundary treatment changes.
- Important green spaces must be maintained.



## A2 – The High Street



### Built Development

This character area covers the main High Street to the north and south which has remained largely unchanged over the past 100 years.

The winding alignment and varying width of the High Street results in a constantly changing street scene and gives Steeple Ashton its character. The area is made up of a variety of residential dwellings, both ancient and modern, only one dwelling in depth that all front onto the High Street. The area is characterised by lower density housing than in the core of the conservation area.

To the western side of the road, the houses are situated much closer to the highway, either facing directly onto the pitched stone and pennant paving or hiding behind short gardens bounded by brick or stone walls. A number of these are substantial former farmhouses that feature prominently in the street scene when approaching from the north. On the eastern side of the road, most of the dwellings are set back from the highway, either behind hedges or walls or have grass verges and front gardens with varying widths. An exception to this is the Methodist Church and the two adjoining dwellings that stand close to the edge of the main road.

The dwellings are predominantly two-storey in height, and there is no set style although the use of red brick is popular.

### Local Heritage

This character area contains 15 Grade II Listed buildings, including 43 High Street, one of only two thatch properties in the village, situated at the junction to Silver Street, which was once a public house – The Three Tuns. A number of the older buildings were the substantial houses of wealthy cloth merchants.

The former village school which is now home to the village community shop is also situated within the southern section of the High Street. Written into the former school lease was a clause that the building



should always remain a place of education, now part of this property is home to the Frome Spinners and Weavers.

A row of unlisted semi-detached former farm cottages, now all in private ownership, sit within the area, showing dated bricks of 1879, as does the Parish Well which is identified as a Non-Designated Heritage Asset and provided the water supply for the village prior to the pipes being laid in 1913.



### Land Use and Function

This is mainly a residential area, however, includes some community amenities including the Village Shop and Methodist Chapel.

### Physical Setting and Landscape Character

Most of the area is characterised by its residential setting, however there are a number of open spaces which form important breaks in the built-up development and contribute to the image of a small un-spoilt village. To the north, the large front gardens of 3A and 3B High Street – both built in the 1990s - and wide grass verge provide space for a number of large trees which contribute the green infrastructure network running through the conservation

area. To the south, the open character on the eastern side of the High Street is formed of residential gardens and vegetation to the front of dwellings.

To the north, there are glimpsed views of the Church of St Mary the Virgin, which have been identified as key views, including through the boundary of 9 High Street, and at the junction of High Street and Church Street.

### Movement and Connectivity

The main north-south route through the character area is the High Street, the primary route through the village and parish. A footpath runs down the length of the western side of the High Street, which feature elements of paving stones edged with cobbles.

### Key Characteristics

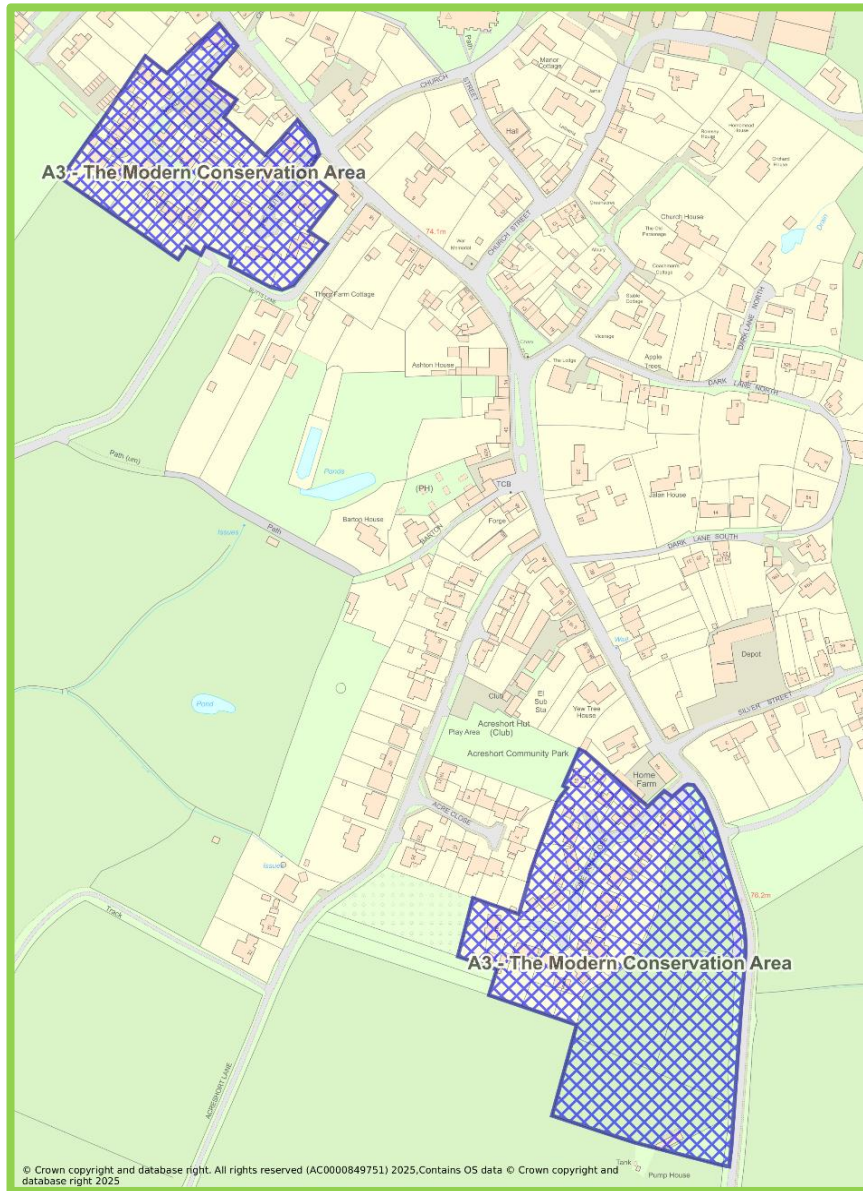
- Predominantly a mix of larger detached properties, although some smaller terraced/semi-detached to the south and adjacent the Methodist Chapel.
- Varied building design and materials including one of only two thatched properties in the village.
- Key views throughout the area towards the Church.

### Sensitivity to change

- Unsympathetic alterations to vernacular properties, including the insertion of uPVC windows and doors, garage entrances, timber boarding and boundary treatment changes.
- Retain gaps between buildings.



## A3 - Modern Conservation Area



### Built Development

This character area comprises of the 20<sup>th</sup> C infill style developments that form part of the conservation area. There are three cul-de-sacs: The Butts and Bartletts Mead to the north, and Home Farm Close to the south.

The Butts is an estate of 6 houses built in an old farm yard in the style of many of the farmhouses in the village with stone mullioned windows, stone porch lintels, string courses and building materials. The spacing of the houses is generous with good-sized gardens, open at the front, and most villagers regard The Butts as an ideal small village development. The open spaces between and in front of the houses, the style and proportions of the fenestration and doors and the absence of modern plastic materials are important components of the visual attraction of the close.



Situated on the western side of the High Street, Bartletts Mead is a development of about 30 houses of differing sizes all built in the 1980's. The construction is of brick and stone with tiled roofs. Most villagers regard this development as a successful addition to the village landscape. Its features combine well into the rural environment, with terraced buildings, balanced proportions, stone quoins and general building materials that emulate older elements elsewhere in the village.



Home Farm Close was developed in 1999, located to the south of the village and located off the High Street. It is a small development of 18 two storey houses which are mainly detached, in large plots, although two pairs of semi-detached houses are located at the entrance to the Close. These houses are all red-brick with a variety of detailing including tile hangings, gable and cat-slide roof elements and limited white render. Wide grass verges wrap around the cul-de-sac. All properties have small front gardens and off-road parking.



### Local Heritage

There is limited local heritage within these areas, being of more modern construction, although they remain within the conservation area. There is local knowledge that the green verge along Edington Road, to the south-east of Home Farm Close, was once the site of a former Toll House, however no record of this is found on the Historic Environment Record.

### Land Use and Function

This is mainly a residential area, although the southern section also contains a large area of paddock/grazing land.

### Physical Setting and Landscape Character

Grass verges, and garden lawns are important features in this character area, providing visual interest and softening the built form, integrating the modern developments into the conservation area and rural village setting. Occasional hedgerow planted at front boundaries for enhanced separation and screening.

Both areas border open fields associated with the wider countryside and rural setting of the village. The southern area contains long distance views to the east across surrounding countryside.

### Movement and Connectivity

Continuous pavements present alongside High Street and Edington Road for improved connectivity into the village and further afield, where the High Street has 3 bus-stops allowing easy access to neighbouring schools or larger towns. Given the cul-de-sac layout of these developments, there is no through traffic.

Connections to wider Public Rights of Way networks, notably SASH19, 23, and 26 which connects the northern area with Sandpits Lane which offers routes into Trowbridge, and SASH15 and 35 which connects the southern area to routes into Edington and further afield.

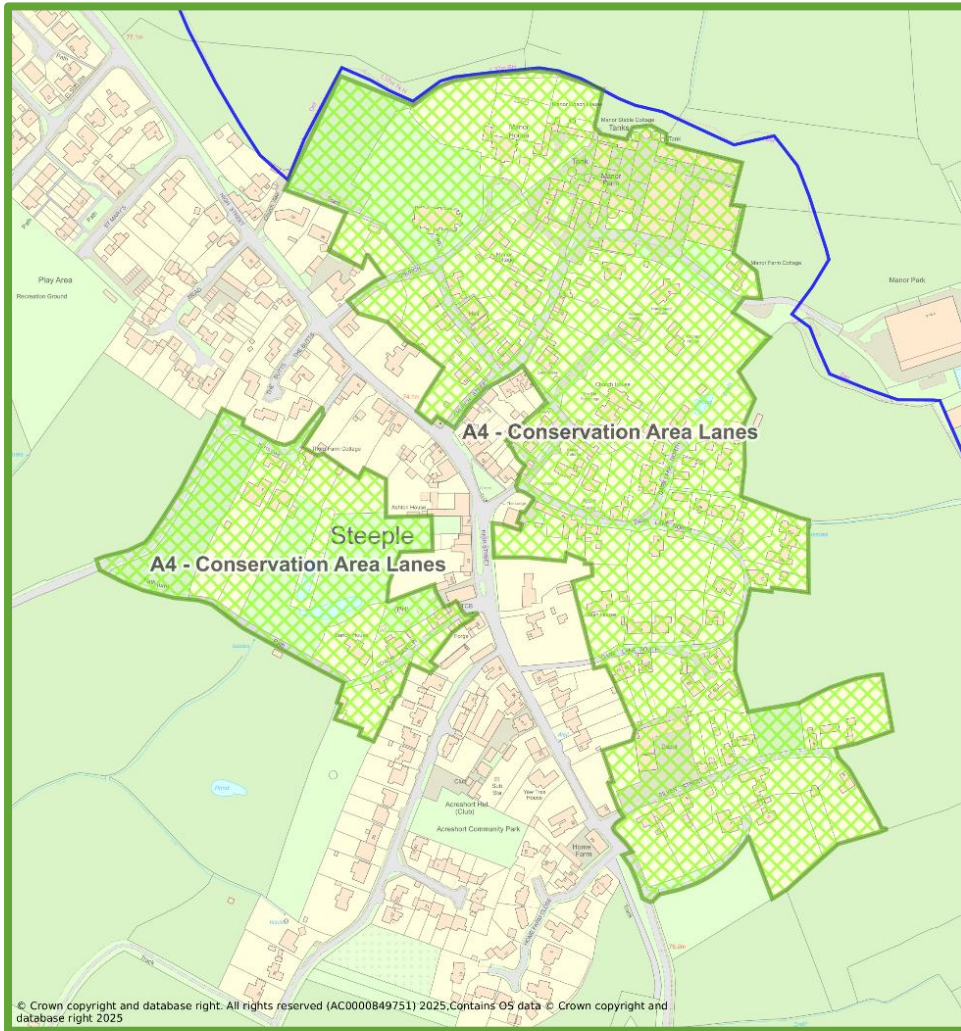
### Key Characteristics

- Cul-de-sac development with inward looking residential character.
- Consistent building scales, a defined materials palette and a series of common architectural details and features create a generally cohesive character to each development.
- Off-street parking to all dwellings.
- Well landscaped developments with verges and front gardens that add softness to the built form.

### Sensitivity to change

- Lack of pavements in the cul-de-sacs so safety consideration needed for improved connectivity via foot throughout the village.
- Potential for loss of historic detailing and materials through window replacements, timber boarding and boundary treatment changes.

## A4 – The Conservation Area Lanes



### Built Development

This character area is the largest of the conservation area and comprises the historic lanes which lead off of the High Street to the east and western edges of the conservation area. Church Lane, Vicarage Lane and Dark Lane all form

a series of loops of the north-eastern and eastern side of High Street, while to the west are the narrow streets of Butts Lane and Coach Barton.

These rural lanes are narrow and curving which give a sense of containment and contribute to the rural character of the village. A degree of sympathetic 20thC infill has taken place, such as those along Vicarage Lane. Newer builds tend to be set back from the road frontage whereas the historic builds immediately front the highway.

### Butts Lane

A delightful village lane that leads off from the village street and which quickly takes the walker, after some 200 metres, into a network of rural footpaths across paddocks and fields that link neighbouring villages and hamlets with Steeple Ashton. In places, remnants of medieval pitched stone footpaths can be seen, matching those within the village. Access into Butts Lane from the High Street is narrow but this is a public road only to the first bend and serves the three homes, two modern and one converted barn. From the first bend it becomes a public footpath which has become an important amenity to the villagers who wish to stroll in safety and quiet, in an unspoilt rural environment. There is a well-used public seat having good views of both the village church and surrounding fields. Almost all residents would regard the conservation of this lane and its environment a very high priority.



### Coach Barton

Coach Barton is a narrow, unadopted, gravel surfaced cul-de-sac running west from the High Street between the Longs Arms and the village smithy, still in occasional use. It is part of a public footpath which may be followed to Rood Ashton and East Town. There are three fine brick houses and a cottage situated in the lane, which retains much of its original rural character.



### Church Street and The Strand

Church Street leads east of the High Street opposite The Butts and runs in a horseshoe shape, returning the High Street just before the village Green.

The Church and Manor dominate this street, with the attractive views from both the west and south. From the High Street, stone walls line the Street until reaching the Church, with the ancient pitched paths in front. Behind the walls are the large residential gardens of Church Farm, Tylers Cottage, and Moorfield Farm, which give this locality a sense of openness, with little built form surrounding the Church.

Along the north-southern part of Church Street, houses appear denser, as they front on the road, separated only by the pitched paving or narrow front gardens. Houses vary in character but are predominantly two-storeys in height of red brick or painted render construction. The village hall is also found here, standing out as a single-storey stone building with a corrugated metal roofing. The village hall has no parking which often leads to parking congestion in the street.



The Strand leads north from Church Street up to Manor Farm and is characterised by more terraced housing of eclectic style immediately fronting the road. Manor Farm remains an active farmyard, drawing larger agricultural vehicles along the narrow lanes. A couple more modern bungalows can be seen at the northern end of the Strand which detract from the traditional character.



### Vicarage Lane and Dark Lane North and South

Vicarage Lane is accessed from the High St. on the corner of the Village Green via Dark Lane North. All buildings in the lane centre around the late medieval Old Parsonage, which was extended in the 1800's to nearly double the size, a listed Grade II\* property. The original Old Parsonage was split into 2 dwellings in the 1960's. The stables and coach house were converted to dwellings in the 1960's. Also a cottage at the corner of Vicarage Lane and Dark Lane North was demolished to make space for a new Vicarage in the 1960's when the Old Parsonage was sold by the Church. Development of the lane during the late 20th century. allowed a further 5 detached properties to be built.

Dark Lane North and South form another horseshoe off of the High Street, although the connection is only via footpath. Vehicle access therefore creates two individual cul-de-sacs with very narrow lanes, only 3 metres wide in some places. Several farmers' and workers' cottages are situated here. A number of modern properties, mainly bungalows have infilled gaps within the lanes, however these tend to be well set back from the road, with private parking.



### Silver Street

Silver street lies towards the southern end of the village, extending east from the High Street. Silver Street is initially characterised by the large commercial site of Brown's Transport Yard, from which a number of HGVs operate. The site has been situated here in the village for over 130 years. Aside from two small cottages to the immediate east of the yard, the remainder of Silver Street comprises larger detached properties, a few of which are traditional and a few of which are more modern in character. The most recent dwelling at 8 Silver Street, being constructed in the past few years (replacement dwelling).

Two properties, while visible from Silver Street and form part of the street scene here, are accessed via a long drive off Edington Road.



### **Local Heritage**

There are a significant number of listed buildings within this area. Importantly in this character area is St Mary's Church which is the sole Grade 1 listed building in Steeple Ashton and forms the focal point of the village, visible from Lord Long of Wraxall estate however now privately owned.

Other listed buildings include but are not limited to:

- Manor Farm Barns
- The Manor Cottage
- 13 Church Street
- Church Street House
- Old Chesils
- Cruck Cottage
- 2 Silver Street



This character area contains the second of the only two remaining thatched properties in the village. This is located in Dark Lane North, the Old Chesils, at

one stage a Mormon Meeting House before they set sail for America and still gets occasional visitors from America today who come to see their roots.

The Village Hall is included in this area. A major part of village community and recognised as a Non-Designated Heritage Asset. The original village hall was opened in December 1899 having been funded by Eustace Bosanquet of Ashton House, on land given to the village by Sir Walter Hume Long. Since then, the hall has continued to serve the community, including holding an important role in supporting efforts during WWII when it became the base for the Steeple Ashton Home Guard. Refurbishments over the years has allowed the hall to provide excellent facilities for the local residents and wider community.

### **Land Use and Function**

The lanes are predominately residential however as discussed above, some other uses do occur, including community uses, commercial and agricultural.

### **Physical Setting and Landscape Character**

The built development across this character area is fairly dense with little opportunity for landscape features. However, there are two areas of priority habitat for woodland in garden land within this character area – one to the rear of Ashton House, and the other to the rear of The Sanctuary. The area also contains the Local Green Spaces of the Churchyard and community orchard.

To the east of the character area, expansive views across Keevil Airfield are visible due to the flat topography.

### **Movement and Connectivity**

Most of the lanes have been spared the urbanising effects of modern highways works such as road widening, surface markings, traffic signage and raised kerbs, and has managed to retain a pleasingly simple and unfussy traditional rural appearance. There are dispersed areas of pavement, with some pitch stone path still evident from Corner Cottage towards The Sanctuary.

There are streetlights and pavements on one or both sides of the road at Church Street, The Strand and Silver Street.

There are several Public Rights of Way throughout the Conservation Area Lanes, leading out towards Keevil to the east and West Ashton to the West.



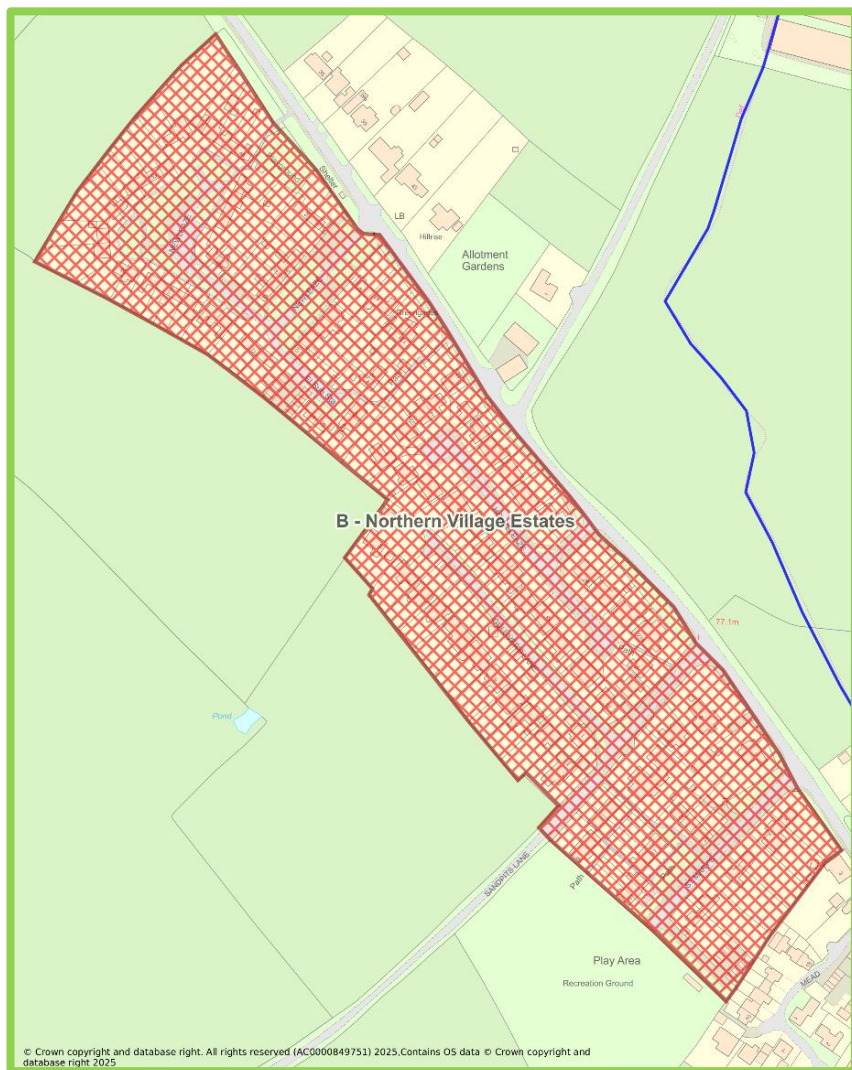
### **Key Characteristics**

- Secluded rural lanes with a very traditional, informal character.
- Generally dense development of varied design creates the interesting character of Steeple Ashton.
- Landmark buildings including the Grade I Listed Church and a significant historical character.
- Views of the Church throughout the area.

### **Sensitivity to change**

- Loss of traditional character through modern infill development.
- Potential for the loss of historic detailing and materials on some historic properties through things like window replacements, timber boarding and boundary treatment changes.
- In some areas there is a lack of parking and through traffic is already posing a problem, so special consideration should be given to this in selecting suitable development sites.

## AREA B – Northern Village Estates



### Built Development

The northern village estates character area is formed of the development at St Marys, Sandpits Lane, Gullivers Lane, Holmeleaze and Newleaze. It is Steeple

Ashton's most uniform and regimented area of the village form, comprising dwellings set along a common building line and within similarly sized plots. The area comprises a mix of housing built from the mid-1900s onwards, with some newer builds and renovations. Properties are a mix of detached, semi-detached, terraced, houses and bungalows, combining a wide use of materials (red brick, Bath stone, render) under predominantly tiled roofs.

The original St Mary's estate was built in the 1930's and was originally intended to provide council housing. Smaller houses, bungalows, specifically for the elderly, added later. Many properties are now in private ownership.

Newleaze comprises 48 properties that were built in the 1940's, comprising a mixture of terraced type houses and semi-detached. They were built as council owned houses to be rented by those who could not or did not want to own their own house. Some of these houses have been sold and are now owned by their occupiers, but a number are available to be rented from a housing association. Properties are set back from the road frontage, with wide grass verges. The majority of parking is via laybys on the roadside.

Holmeleaze comprises 26 properties in the form of a close, built in 1970's. The residences are detached and link-detached houses and bungalows of varying design, although the exterior finish is consistent with painted rendering finish.



Sandpits Lane runs west from the High Street and comprises of a handful of bungalows set back from the lane with wide gardens. Gullivers Lane is a cul-de-sac accessed from Sandpits Lane and runs North with 10 bungalows on the west side of the lane and a single, detached house at the end. Parking is generally off-street to the front. Generally, due to the age of the properties, most are reasonably well set back from the road with generous front gardens with stone, fence or hedge boundaries, and some area with wide grass verges.

### **Local Heritage**

The character area contains no Listed Buildings or Non-Designated Heritage Assets but is situated opposite the Old Garage with the colourful rusting petrol pumps which is a key local landmark and is often used as a backdrop for vehicle photography. The character area also borders the Steeple Ashton Conservation Area along its southeastern boundary and lies adjacent to the community allotments.

### **Land Use and Function**

The character area constitutes residential development. Public recreational facilities are available immediately adjacent to the character area for young children including at the Newleaze Park and St Mary's recreation field, also here is a football pitch used by small local football teams. This area now known as "St Mary's Rec" is undergoing a major makeover to bring a more diversified and updated range of sports and play facilities.



### **Physical Setting and Landscape Character**

Garden lawns and occasional hedgerow planted front boundaries combine with wide, open grass verges to provide separation between dwellings and the road to add to the visual quality and attractiveness of the streetscape. Dwellings at Newleaze have notably generous green areas to the front.

The area is bordered by open fields associated with the wider countryside and rural landscape at its eastern, south, southwestern, and northwestern boundaries, with properties on the western side of the character area having far-reaching views across the fields towards East Town/West Ashton.

### **Movement and Connectivity**

Due to the predominant cul-de-sac layout of the character area, there are few through roads. Most of the residential developments have continuous footpaths throughout for access into the village via Common Hill and/or the High Street. All also have direct or close access to the network of footpaths leading from the village to the next villages or further beyond. All areas are either on or benefit from close proximity to the Common Hill and the High Street which have bus-stops allowing easy access to neighbouring schools or larger towns.

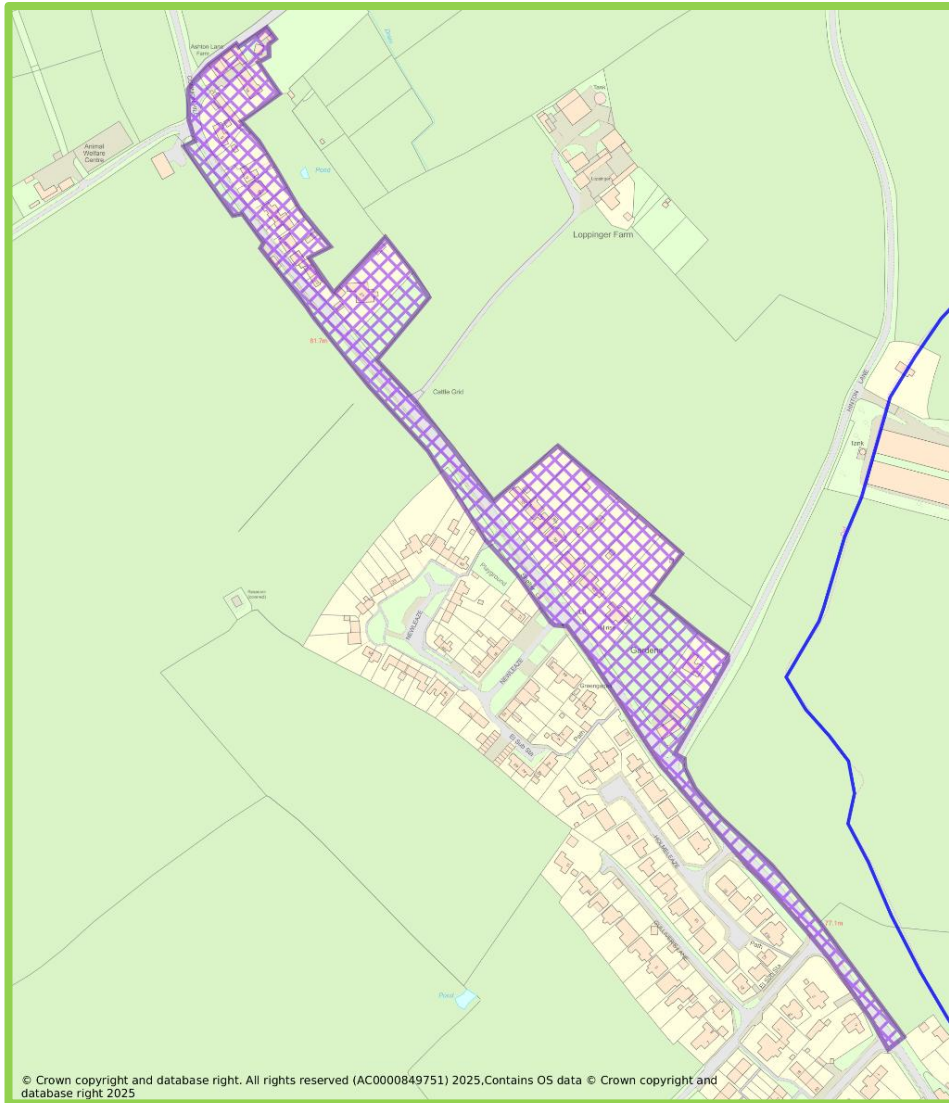
### **Key Characteristics**

- Uniformed, repetitive design and cul-de-sac layout within each residential area with a strong building line and consistent frontage.
- Variation in building heights and sizes between each residential area with lower profile dwellings within Holmleaze.
- Urban development with less traditional features and materials which are associated with the village centre, notably the High Street.

### **Sensitivity to change**

- Potential loss of wider connection to the countryside through intensification of development to the northwest.
- Important green spaces must be retained.

## AREA C – Common Hill



### Built Development

Common Hill is the main access road that makes up the northern end of the village. It forms part of the junction off the A350 that runs from Melksham to North Bradley, and from this junction, Common Hill runs in the southern direction towards the centre of Steeple Ashton

Properties are located on the East side of the road and are linear in nature. They are in two strips separated by several hundred metres, either side to the entrance to Loppinger Farm. The houses located nearest to the village are set back from the road and all have off-road parking, the houses on top of the hill face directly onto the road and have no off-road parking. These houses are of mixed design and vary in age of development.

Common Hill makes up a large part of the village character as it hosts the Old Garage and Designated Petrol Pumps adjacent to the village allotments which are a key part of the village heritage. There is also a variety of linear development, running along the northeastern side of the road, comprising of traditional dwellings that hold historical importance. To the southwestern end of Common Hill comprises later residential development which sits behind dense, tall hedgerow.

The northern end of Common Hill is largely open and contributes to the openness and tranquillity of the village. This acts as a buffer between the village and Ashton Common. The southern end of Common Hill leads to the High Street where more important features and characteristics make up the conservation core of the village.



## Local Heritage

There are no listed buildings within this character area. However the area contains the Old Garage with the colourful rusting petrol pumps which is a key local landmark and is often used as a backdrop for vehicle photography. These are notable along Common Hill when entering the village from the north.



## Land Use and Function

Common Hill contains predominantly wide fronted detached and semi-detached residential development along the road which are dispersed in areas by open fields and agricultural land associated with the wider countryside and rural landscape. The area also contains the Steeple Ashton allotments to the southeast and buildings associated with Ashton Lane Farm to the northwest.

## Physical Setting and Landscape Character

Front Gardens and grass verges allow for separation between dwellings and the road front. Occasional hedgerow planted to the front boundaries for enhanced separation and screening.

The area contains the Local Green Space along Common Hill, which is planted with wildflowers



and makes for an attractive view when entering the village from the north.

The north of Common Hill is associated with the wider landscape, with open agricultural fields and countryside to the rear of and alongside the linear development, contributing towards the rural setting of the village. Views are respected through low level, low density development.

## Movement and Connectivity

Continuous pavements alongside Common Hill allow for connectivity into the village, leading onto the High Street. The route passes bus stops which allow easy access to neighbouring schools or larger towns.

The character area is in close access to the network of footpaths leading throughout the village and towards the next villages or further beyond. Notably, Public Rights of Way SASH31 is situated alongside Ashton Lane Farm which leads on to Keevil and various paths to the southeastern end of the character area which connect to the rest of the village.

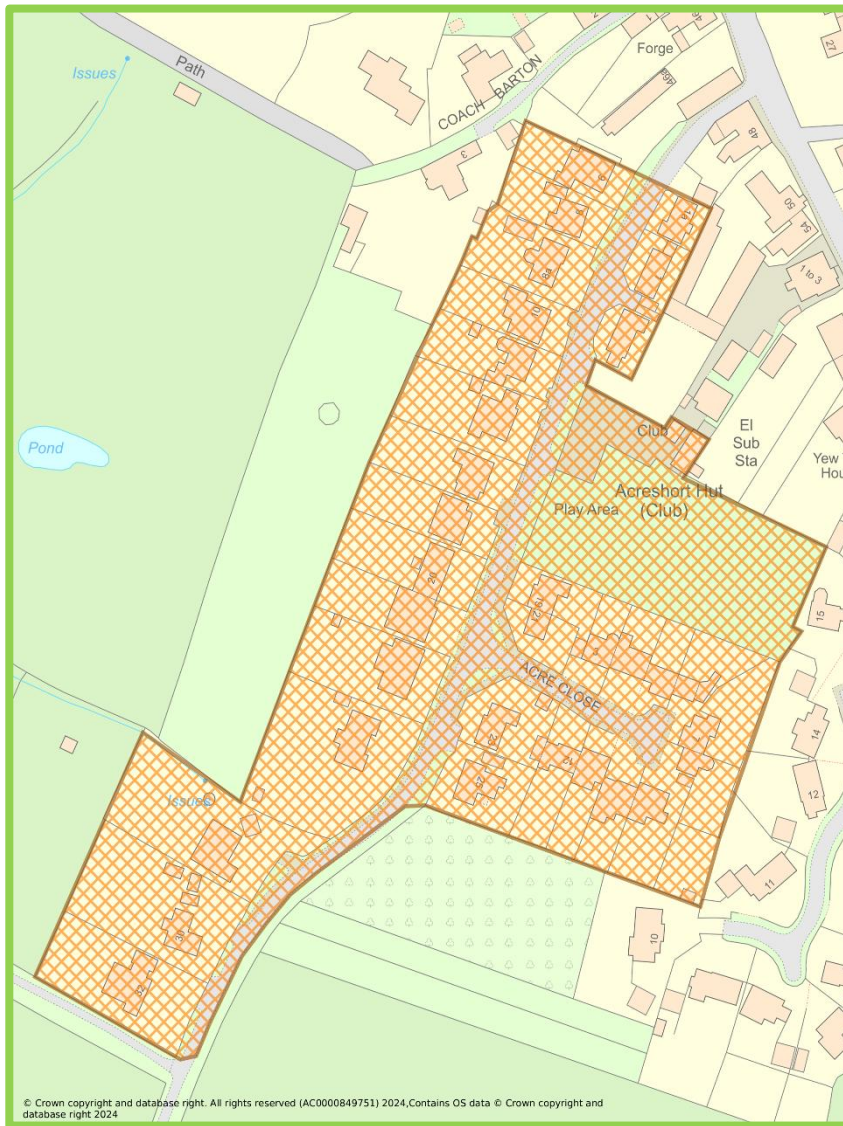
## Key Characteristics

- Area forms the key approach into the village from the north.
- Lined by a linear development pattern, separated by large open agricultural stretches.
- Variation of dwelling types and façades with wide frontages.

## Sensitivity to change

- Intensification of development within the area has potential for adverse landscape impacts due to the exposure of the area within the wider countryside.
- Loss of local heritage connections to Old Garage and Petrol Pumps through potential change to the street scene.

## Area D – Acreshort



### Built Development

The narrow entrance to the lane is flanked on both sides by listed buildings, The Old Shop, once the village bakery on the southern corner, and the ancient 16th century Black Barn on the other, both directly along the roadside. This is a major constriction and adds to the impression of entering a country lane.

The lane was developed during the 1950's and 60's, with equally spaced bungalows and chalet-bungalows on the north side in a variety of styles. On the south side are the remains of the boundary wall of the old Shop's garden, in parts fronting bungalows 1 to 3. Beyond these bungalows is Acreshort Community Park - a valuable open recreational space in the village, fronted by a grass verge and native hedgerow that gives an open look to the lane.

The dwellings on the north-west side of the lane are fronted, unlike much of the older parts of the village with suburban style gardens bounded mainly by brick walls.

In the 1960's, Acre Close was built as a cul-de-sac of 12 semi-detached houses all of similar design, many of which have been extended at the rear over the years.

The lane continues as a public footpath and bridleway to open countryside leading to East Town and West Ashton. There are important outward views to the west and southeast of the northern escarpment of Salisbury Plain and Bratton Castle. The reverse inward views are of a village dominated by its church. This is again part of a circular walk round the village frequently used by walkers with or without dogs.



## Local Heritage

Acreshort contains no listed buildings or Non-Designated Heritage Assets. The area does however lie to the rear of Black Barn Cottage, Barn at Number 46, 48, 50, 54 High Street, and Church of England School which are situated along the High Street to the northeast.

Acreshort Community Park, situated to the north of Acre Close, is situated within the designated Steeple Ashton Conservation Area. The remaining development at Acreshort lies adjacent to the rest of the Conservation Area along its northeastern boundaries.

## Land Use and Function

Acreshort is predominantly a residential area, comprising bungalows along Acreshort Lane and larger 2-storey dwellings at Acre Close. The area also contains Acreshort Community Park and its associated building.

## Physical Setting and Landscape Character

Acreshort Lane is associated with the wider landscape, with open fields and countryside to the rear of the linear development, contributing towards the rural setting of the village. Views are respected through low level development.

## Movement and Connectivity

Acreshort Lane has been spared the urbanising effects of modern highways works such as road widening, surface markings, traffic signage and raised kerbs, and has managed to retain a pleasingly simple and unfussy traditional rural appearance.

There is a continuous footpath alongside the linear development of Acreshort Lane and within the Acre Close cul-de-sac. The roads and pavements comprise of Tarmac throughout, with irregular grass verges and parcels of open space, including the recreation ground, to separate the road from the road from public and private spaces and wider built development at Acre Close.

There is minimal lighting along the footpaths which seeks to maintain the rural characteristics and dark skies of the village.

Close access to the network of footpaths leading throughout the village and towards the next villages or further beyond. Acreshort Lane is a single track road which leads onto PRoW SASH28 where there is no through traffic past the existing built development.

## Key Characteristics

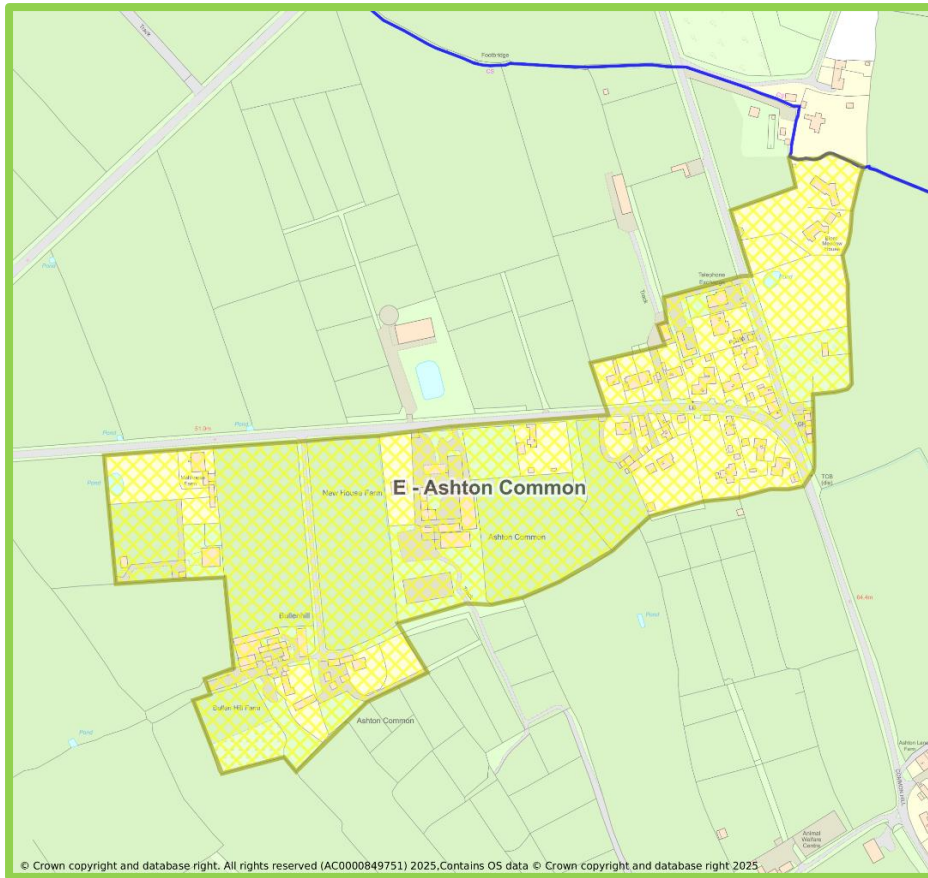
- Linear development along Acreshort Lane, consisting of low profile bungalows, varying in style and materials for variation and architectural interest.
- Traditional layout along Acreshort Lane in which are fronted by generous front garden/driveways and varied boundary treatments, allowing the built for to be set back and screened from the road.
- A more uniform cul-de-sac layout at Acre Close comprising repetitive design and consistent frontage which lack variation and detailing.
- The area is largely of traditional rural appearance with occasional houses that have sympathetically modernised the façade.

## Sensitivity to change

- Potential loss of wider connection to the countryside through intensification of development southwards along Acreshort Lane.
- Important green spaces must be maintained.



## Area E – Ashton Common



### Built development

The Houses in this hamlet are of mixed design and character. There is a row of terraced houses located at the road junction, these face directly onto a narrow pavement with no front garden. The remainder of the houses are set back from the road and are made up of detached houses and some terraced/ semi-detached cottages. There are a small number of bungalows present. To the western edge of the character area, dwellings are set within larger agricultural plots.

The houses vary in age, with some dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century while the most recent having been built in the early 2000's. Materials and architectural style also vary, with render, painted brick, red-brick and stone being evident.

### Local Heritage

There is one Grade II listed building in this area – No. 11 Ashton Common, an early 19<sup>th</sup> century dressed limestone 3-storey dwelling.

There are three farmsteads identified on the Historic Environment Record, including the 19<sup>th</sup> century farmsteads of Bullenhill and to the South of Bleet Farm, as well as 17 Ashton Common which is undated.

### Land Use and Function

The area is predominantly residential however does include a number of farmsteads and associated agricultural/ grazing land. These include Malthouse Farm, providing sustainably grown fruits and vegetables located to the western edge of the character area, as well as Bullen Hill Farm and New Hill Farm.

Located in Ashton Common is also a detached telephone exchange and a Wessex water pumping station, due to their design and location they are barely obvious and blend in with the other buildings in this small hamlet.

### Physical Setting and Landscape Character

Ashton Common is a hamlet to the east of Trowbridge lying on Common Hill, a little south of the A350 road. Separated from Steeple Ashton by a swathe of mainly open countryside. Ashton Common is about one mile from the centre of the main village of Steeple Ashton and pedestrian access is difficult because of the lack of any pavement along Common Hill which is a busy narrow road which features a blind bend at its top.

Ashton Common is one of the lowest points of the Parish and during heavy rain the ditches and water courses fill bringing rainwater from the higher ground to Ashton Common where the ground does become waterlogged and in places

flooded. Large areas, particularly to the north of the character area are identified at high risk of surface water flooding.

### **Movement and Connectivity**

The main form of transport is by a private car. The area is clustered around Common Hill, the main route into the village, as well as Ashton Common Road which leads west of Common Hill to the A350 at the Stony Gutter crossroads. Ashton Common Road is subject to a 30mph speed limit for approximately 200m, before changing to the national speed limit. Speed along Ashton Common and Common Hill is an important concern within the community.

There is 1 bus stop in this area, with a limited service into Trowbridge.

The only footway within the area runs around a small section of road (approximately 60m) at the T-junction between Ashton Common and Common Hill. There are a number of public footpaths that cross and lead away from the built development, including out to the east towards Great Hinton, west towards Green Lane Woods and beyond, and south down into the main village.

### **Key Characteristics**

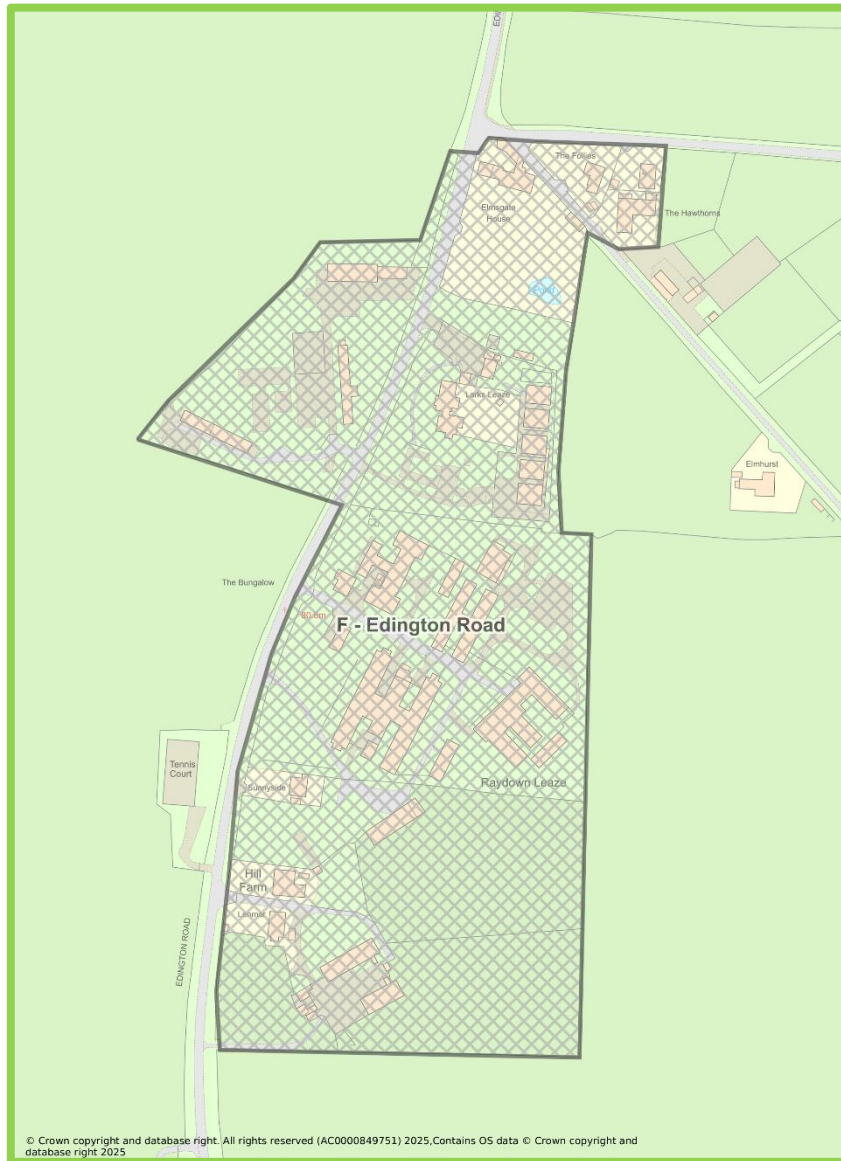
- Eclectic mix of properties
- Strong social links within this small hamlet

### **Sensitivity to change**

- Increased development would bring increased pressures on traffic and parking, which already poses a problem along Ashton Common and Common Hill roads. The visual access at the T junction from
- Trowbridge to Common Hill is often obscured by parked vehicles requiring caution, although residents do note that this does slow vehicles along a stretch of road which is subject to speed enforcement.
- Drainage and flooding is a key concern to increased development.



## Area F – Edington Road



### Built development

The area is mostly rural, with built development largely limited to farm buildings and minor industry. Elmsgate House, a large detached 2-3 storey red brick dwelling sits at the northern extent of the character area, it is surrounded by a red brick wall and forms a focal point if leaving Steeple Ashton towards Edington.

Most of the built development lies to the east side of Edington Road, with only relatively low-profile commercial development at Elmsgate to the west. Much of the commercial land here utilises the hard-standing and infrastructure footprint of Keevil Airfield, such as at Elmsgate and Raydown Leaze. Aerial photography of the airfield during World War II illustrates the tactical dispersal (to counter enemy aerial surveillance and bombing) of buildings and facilities well beyond the fenced confines of the current MOD site.

Development to the south of the area is also generally low profile, being 1 or 1.5 storeys in height and rural in character.



## Local Heritage

Elmsgate House to the north is a Grade II listed building situated at the junction with Spiers Piece, an early 19<sup>th</sup> century dwelling.

There are a significant number of records held on the Historic Environment Record within this area, many of which are Second World War blast shelters. Two hangers can also be found on the southern edge of the area, which can be dated back to the war.

## Land Use and Function

Edington Road character area comprises a mix of land uses. There is a heavy commercial/ industrial character, mixed with residential properties.

## Physical Setting and Landscape Character

The area is surrounded by largely flat and rural land with pastures supporting livestock farming and equestrian activity on the clay soils, as well as some arable crop farming. Historical strip farms and common fields have given way to larger more open fields. Sheep farming (once for wool that made the area so prosperous) is little in evidence. Dairy farming is now much reduced, with no dairy farm now operating inside the parish boundary. The area affords views to both the Marlborough Downs to the east, and to the escarpment of Salisbury Plain to the south.

The southern approach to the character area is planted with wildflowers, providing an attractive landscape setting in the summer months.

The area is also in close proximity to the Steeple Ashton SSSI to the east, which is designated due to its rich Jurassic coral limestone with considerable stratigraphic, paleogeographic and palaeoecological interest.

## Movement and Connectivity

As well as local, delivery and farm traffic, the unclassified Edington Road is subject to increasing traffic due to sat-nav navigation avoiding A350 congestion etc.

There is no footways within the character area itself although a footway does run along the eastern side of Edington Road, north of the character area and into the centre of the village.

## Key Characteristics

- Low profile development that is rural in character.
- Commercial uses are prominent.
- Open views across the wider landscape towards the Bratton Downs from much of the area.

## Sensitivity to change

- Intensification of development within the area has potential for adverse landscape impacts due to the exposure of the area within the wider countryside.
- Loss of local heritage connections to WWII through change to the remaining hangers and shelters.



# 4. Conclusions

The above character assessment has been produced to set out the key characteristics, features and design elements that make up the special qualities of Steeple Ashton and its various character areas. The assessment should be used to assist good design in any future development across the Parish.

It is expected that new development will be designed to respect and respond positively to the local context, of which this assessment seeks to help developers, planners, landowners and others understand. Consideration should be given to the defining built and natural characteristics of each character area within which development is proposed, in order to conserve and enhance the rural setting of Steeple Ashton and its unique and locally distinct character.

