

## Newport – June 2007

### Introduction

Newport is one of the larger villages in the District and is identified as a key rural settlement. There are four distinct areas in the village: The long main street lined with many fine historic buildings, as far as Bridge End including St Mary's Church and the surrounding tightly packed historic core; Newport Free Grammar School and Bury Lane cottages; the 19th century developments along Wicken and Station Roads; and the substantial modern residential developments to the west of the High Street. Most genuine infill plots within the built up area have been developed.

Because of Newport's function as a large village with road and rail links to London and Cambridge and where a range of services and employment opportunities are provided, it is important to study the sensitivity and capacity of Newport to ascertain whether or not the village can accommodate additional residential development without damage to its environmental qualities.

### General character

Newport is located 5 km south west of Saffron Walden, between Cambridge, 27 km to the north, and Stansted Airport 10 km to the south. The economic success of both Stansted and Cambridge exert economic and transportation influences throughout the whole of Uttlesford. Newport, in such close proximity, will continue to be affected by these factors in the future, and this emphasises the need to provide maximum protection to its historic environment.

The main B1383 (previously the old A11) runs directly through the village providing access to the M11 motorway. The nearest accessible junction is more than 10km to the south giving access towards London and Cambridge. Here there is also access via the A120 to Bishop's Stortford and Braintree. A railway line runs along the length of the village providing services southwards to Bishop's Stortford, London and northwards to Cambridge and beyond.

Newport lies in the valley of the River Cam in a rolling landscape of chalk, overlaid with glacial gravels and clay. As part of the Uttlesford District Council's landscape assessment<sup>1</sup> the Cam Valley it is described as: *"rolling open landscape of chalky boulder clay with wide views from higher ground. Well vegetated riverbanks with shrubs, trees and water meadows along winding narrow river corridors"*.

From the landscape of the Debden Farmland Plateau, to the east of the village, there are impressive views from the higher ground down to the settlement. On this side the arable fields descend fairly steeply in parts to the river. Chalk pits can be seen on lower slopes south east of the village. To the

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west of the village there is a more gentle rolling landscape of the Langley and Arkesden Chalk uplands

The late arrival of field enclosure is evident in the field pattern. Some were enclosed in the early post-medieval period, other being enclosed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries recognized as large rectilinear fields more typical of the Midlands and Cambridgeshire. Field boundaries are denoted by low hedges and few trees. Groups of trees are found mainly in small copses which frame distant views.

The majority of the surrounding farmland is classified as being of Grade 2 agricultural value but bands of Grade 3 land are found along the valley of the River Cam, Debden Water and Wicken Water where there are extensive areas designated as zones 2 and 3 for flood risk.

Up until the 19th century, Newport developed in a more or less linear form, following the line of the River Cam and the present B1383, along the length of the High Street to Belmont Hill and Bridge End. The arrival of the railway prompted lateral growth along Station Road and Wicken Road. Any significant expansion to the east of the village has been restricted by the River Cam and in parts by the railway line. Consequently, to the west, where constraints are fewer and the land slopes more gradually, greater development has taken place. These residential developments known as Gaces Acre, Meadowford and Gilbey Green to the north of Wicken Road, and the extensive Cherry Garden residential development to the south, are generally neutral in character and set back from the historic core.

The M11 runs on a roughly north south line to the west to the B1383. The two roads gradually converge and cross about 2 km south of the village centre. To the south of the village a pattern of ribbon development has emerged along the B1383 for some distance past the Station Road junction.

Within the village development limits, are two areas of designated protected open space: the recreation ground at Gaces Acre which includes a large open space, a tennis court and playground; and the churchyard protected as an open space of environmental value. In addition, at the southern edge of the village east of the B1383 is a large common for village use and funfairs (liable to flooding and therefore inappropriate for development), and south of the Primary School a recreation ground used primarily for football but also cricket, croquet and an annual firework display. To the north the playing fields of Newport Free Grammar School can be found to the west of the Cambridge Road and railway and to the north-east, Shortgrove Park is an extensive estate designated as historic parkland. Here mature trees and historic walls of the Estate form significant and dominant features in the landscape.

The only scheduled ancient monument in Newport is a moated site 400 m south-east of Shortgrove Hall. It is thought the mound of earth in grounds of Newport Free Grammar School indicated the prior existence of a castle but investigations by English Heritage has revealed no evidence of this. Interesting archaeological sites have been identified in the past but no extensive areas of land are believed to exist where development would be inappropriate for archaeological reasons alone. The historical and

archaeological background is set out in the *Newport, Historic Town Project, Assessment Report* published February 1999 by Essex County Council.

There are two county wildlife sites identified in Newport. The Churchyard of St Mary's Church and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) along Debden Water, between the Debden Road and Shortgrove Park.

### **The historic core and its relationship with the built up area of the village as a whole**

The existing conservation area has recently been appraised and its extent as now defined is an accurate definition of the historic core. The English Heritage Register records some 83 listed buildings in the parish of Newport, 77 of which are within the designated Conservation Area. Seven buildings are Grade II\* and one Grade I and the rest Grade II.

The historical part of the village is evident in the many fine medieval and post medieval buildings. The majority of the listed buildings can be found along the long main street running in a north-south line as far as Bridge End. To the west of this, on higher ground is the Church of St Mary the Virgin, a Grade I building dating back to the 13th century, and a considerable number of listed buildings from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries around Elephant Green and Church Street. To the north of Wicken Water are the 19th century, Newport Free Grammar School and the 18th century Bury Water Lane cottages. The conservation area extends along Wicken Road and Station Road and includes some notable 19th century houses.

Within the village there are many outstanding historic buildings such as The Monk's Barn -a 15th Century Wealden house, The Old Vicarage a Medieval timber-framed house and The Crown House with elaborate 16th century pargetted decoration. Based on English Heritage records, 5 buildings in the conservation area are 15th century and 8 are 16th century (about 10%). Approximately a quarter of the buildings are 17th century, slightly more, 30% are 18th century and 20% are 19th century. Like Newport House, Pallets Farmhouse and others, are representative of the large farmhouses found along the High Street and Belmont Hill, still retaining many of their farm buildings behind. These farmhouses are particularly important and characteristic of Newport and their historic relationship with the surrounding countryside should be preserved.

The vast majority are timber-framed, plastered buildings. Many brick facades along the High Street conceal earlier timber frames behind. The use of brick construction for some frontages is evidence of the wealth in the village in the 18th century when the road through the village widened and upgraded to turnpike status, bringing renewed prosperity to the village. The presence of a variety of local materials, (timber, chalk for plaster, gravel, flints and from the 17th century brick clay for bricks), is apparent in the wide variety of building stock in the village. Arrival of the railway brought supplies of yellow and grey bricks which were used in the construction and detailing of more recent buildings primarily along Wicken Road and Station Road.

One very important feature of the village is the boundary walling. In some places the use of a rich red brick predominates, but in others flint panels are

supported with red brick piers and curved brick capping. There is also an attractive range of architectural detail in many buildings.

Along with the buildings, the open spaces and trees are extremely important elements which make up the attractive nature of the village centre. Throughout the conservation area trees are in abundance, often located in large private grounds, many of which have already been made subject to Tree Preservation Orders. These make a significant contribution to the quality of the built form.

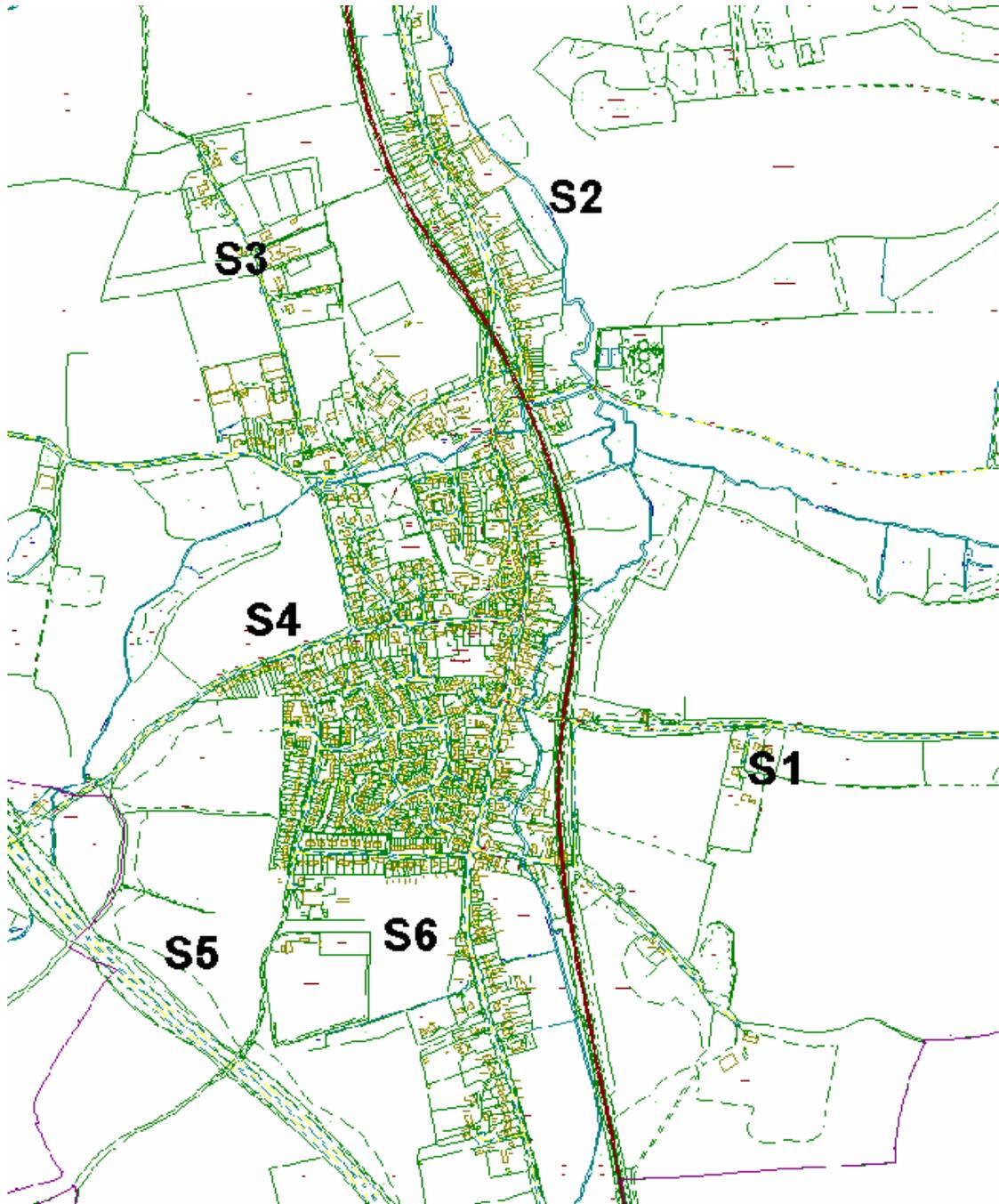
There are a number of quality areas of open space principally in private ownership that might be susceptible to development pressures, many which perform valuable landscape functions.

Beyond the village centre and outside the conservation area is the Shortgrove Estate. Shortgrove Hall was built by the Earl of Thomond early in the C18 was burnt down and now stands in ruins. However, a considerable number of listed buildings remain within the site including, North House, Clock House and South House, the original stable block, the Dovecote, the Bridge over the River Cam and Gates and Gate piers to the western entrance. Within the curtilage are a significant number trees and large groups of trees many of which are protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

Expressed in percentage terms the historic core of the village, defined by the present conservation area, and including the large open spaces that fall within it (but not including Shortgrove), represents about 45 % of the built up part of the village. If the large areas of Gaces Acre, Meadowford and Gilbey Green are excluded from the conservation area following the Conservation Area Appraisal Consultation, the historic core will represent about 36%.

In summary the historic core is of high environmental quality with a diverse range of listed buildings of varying ages and styles and important areas of open space. To the west of the historic core are large areas of modern residential development. These are generally neutral in character and neither seriously erode or add to the quality of its historic environment. To the east of the village development has been limited to a large extent by the river and to a lesser degree by the railway line. There is a sharp distinct edge between the historic village and open countryside, and although now physically separated from it by the railway, a close relationship between these buildings, and the open countryside is still important to retain.

The quality and general function of landscapes in and adjacent to the town by sector and a broad statement as to the effect of development in each sector



Map of Newport showing the sectors.

## **Sector 1 Land rising up from the corner of Chalk Farm Road and Debden Road junction**

*Quality of Landscape:* The landscape is one of an arable farmland consisting of large fields sloping fairly steeply in parts to the river and meeting the built up edge of the village on the valley floor. The overall characteristic is of an open arable landscape rising above the village providing a backdrop to the historic core. This is crossed by Debden Water to the north of this sector within a high quality and attractive, gently sloping valley where tall trees follow the Cam and Debden Water courses. Along the valley is a considerable area of Grade 3 land liable to flooding.

*General function of Landscape:* An important agricultural landscape that is accessible to the public in parts. Here the river and the railway line define the extent of the built form. The landscape retains its close proximity and historic association with former farmhouses, such as Palletts Farmhouse and Belmont Farmhouse (although in parts now physically cut off by the railway). The eastern approach, towards the village along the Debden Road is pleasant and rural, affording good views down towards the settlement which is nestled along the valley floor. Views out from the historic core, between buildings and particularly along Station Road are to open rising farmland slopes.

To the northeast of this section the wildlife site (SSSI) stretches eastwards along the south bank of the Debden Water. Here public rights of way and an extensive flood plain follow the length of the River Cam and the Debden Water. The large common to the south of the village is in regular use by the public. It and the flat valley floor to the south are part of a wide flood plain unsuitable for development. Other constraints in this area include, special verges which have been identified for protection along the Debden Road.

To the southeast of this sector historic sand and gravel pits are visible from the historic core.

*Broad statement of effect of development:* The principal effect of development on Sector 1 land would be to extend urban development onto some sections of highly visible and open rising farmland which would greatly impact on a substantial section of the historic core. To the north of this sector, development would be severely damaging to the Debden Valley SSSI. The principal effect of large scale development would be to extend the village beyond clearly defined landscape features thus detrimentally affecting its setting and destroying the close historic relationship of the village with the countryside. Development on rising landscape would further impact on views out of the conservation area and views in from the Debden approach and furthermore result in loss of good agricultural land. It is considered that development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 1 land to the east.**



**Verges bordering the Debden Road on eastern approach to village**

## **Sector 2: North east of village**

*Quality of Landscape:* The landscape is of high quality historic parkland, with large arable fields to the south enclosed by a band of important woodland on the southern edge. The River Cam passes through the treed Estate and to the east of this the landscape gently rises. Along the Cambridge Road,

London Road and Sparrowsend Road the estate is enclosed by an impressive, lengthy flint and brick wall.

*General Function of Landscape:* The Estate is privately owned and therefore not generally accessible to the public. However, the substantial mature tree coverage although retained in a private property, emerges as a dominant feature and makes a highly important contribution to the quality of this approach to the village. The extensive walling is an important quality feature and a very important local characteristic of the village.

*Broad statement of effect of development:* Any development within the grounds would be highly detrimental to this historic parkland, affect the setting of listed buildings in the parkland and almost certainly the loss of historic walling and important trees. This would therefore be considered entirely inappropriate.



**Sector 2: Distant View of landscape of Shortgrove Estate, gently rising with mature trees**



**Walls and trees of Shortgrove are dominant feature on approach to Newport**

### **Sector 3: North West of village**

*Quality of Landscape:* Gently undulating land, gently rising from Wicken Water to the south and defined by the Cambridge Road to the east. Tall trees follow the line of Wicken Water and border the playing fields and are all highly visible from public view points.

*General function of Landscape:* A mixed area consisting of: meadowland liable to flooding, treed along the watercourse; north of this, gently rising farmland where mixed development has occurred along a narrow wooded lanes; and to the east of this sector the grounds of the school which provide a vital role in providing playing fields for Newport Free Grammar School and bordered by many semi-mature trees make a particularly valuable and visible contribution to the adjacent conservation area.

*Broad statement of effect of development:* Development to the east of this sector would result in the loss of important open spaces and trees and detrimentally impacting on the adjacent historic core. Development to the west would not impact on the historic core to any significant degree because of the buffer of trees and present buildings along Bury Water Lane and Whiteditch Lane. However, **the scale of any development would need to take into account the** resulting increase in traffic along Bury Water Lane and School Lane,. Alternative access to this area, for example from the Wicken Road to the western side of this sector would result in a development isolated from the village and impacting on open fields in Sector 5. Another affect of large scale development here would be to extend the village beyond definable limits, diminishing the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the

settlement and resulting in the loss of agricultural land. In summary, **the scale of development appropriate in this sector will** need to take into account **the capacity of the road network.**



**Sector 3: View from the western end of Bury Water Lane looking north**



**Trees surrounding school playing fields (in centre), dominant and visible from conservation area**

**Sector 4: Wedge of land to the North of Wicken Road**

*Quality of Landscape:* This is a wedge of land rising gently from the River Wicken to the Wicken Road, the main western approach to the village. This is an open quality landscape with a band of trees on the north side along the water course.

*General function of Landscape:* This is agricultural land with a public right of way follows the line of the river. The urban edge of the town is crisply defined in this sector, by the Wicken Road and School Road and the land provides an important close relationship with the historic conservation area and the open countryside. The periphery of the conservation area is denoted by some important unlisted buildings overlooking the south east corner and the listed cottages in Bury Water Lane on the north east corner of this sector.

*Broad statement of effect of development:* Development in this sector would significantly affect the impact of the views to the landmark tower of St Mary's church from the western approach. Furthermore development would have a detrimental impact on the adjacent conservation area and its close relationship with the farmland, affecting important views out, and the setting of some important buildings. It is considered that development in this sector would seriously diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.





**Approach along Wicken Road, important C19th buildings on right and church on left**

### **Sector 5 South west of Village**

*Quality of Landscape:* Agricultural land wedge west of the village and between an untidy edge of the residential development of Cherry Gardens and the motorway. To the north of this section the land rises up and then falls away to the motorway and a section of the river known as Bonhunt Water.

*General function of Landscape:* The main section is an important agricultural landscape crossed by some rights of way rising from the M11 and highly visible in parts. In the northern extremity is an area of allotments and the southern section provides a vital role in providing playing fields for the village and a croquet pitch which provide a buffer at the southwest edge between the village and the motorway.

*Broad Statement of effect of development:* Whilst development in Sector 5 land would not greatly impact the historic core and would ultimately be restricted by constraints of the M11, to the south of this sector any development which resulted in the loss of open space of any recreational areas would be inappropriate. To the north of this the high visibility of these slopes and the effect of marring views of the important church tower would be highly detrimental. However, some very small scale development nestled below the brow and along a narrow band to the western edge of the present building line, may be acceptable and if well design could make some visual improvement to the western perimeter of the settlement.



**Sector 5: Looking south.**



**Western Edge of Cherry Green Development.**



***Looking north from near the Recreation ground towards south west corner of Cherry Gardens development.***

### **Sector 6 South of village Centre**

*Quality of Landscape:* Gently sloping agricultural land surrounded with hedgerows and trees, between southern edge of conservation area and the village boundary set within clearly defined limits in area to the east of the Primary School Grounds and adjoining the main B1383.

*General function of landscape:* Good agricultural land presently surrounded by hedges and trees and concealed behind a band of untidy trees and hedging bordering the London Road. This presently acts as a buffer between the Cherry Garden residential development and a group of buildings consisting of Braeside, a late C19 building to the south and some later buildings. On the east side are a number of properties along the London Road, none of which are listed and none would meet the criteria laid out in the UDC conservation area appraisals as “Important Buildings”.

*Broad statement of effect of development:* The principal effects of large scale development in Sector 6 land would be to extend the village by elongating the High Street but not beyond village boundaries, and impact on a small section of the historic core at its southern extremity to the west of London Road. Additionally it would result in the loss of agricultural land. Development here however, would be limited by clearly defined boundaries and if development was set back behind a substantial landscape frontage the approach to the village could be much improved and the impact on the listed buildings lessened.

Subject to high quality design and respecting the adjoining conservation area to the north, residential development could be created that at worst would be

neutral and at best would improve the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



*Sector 6: View of Narrow section to the west looking eastwards.*



*Western boundary of Sector 6, looking south*

## **Overall Summary**

The one major area which has been identified for growth in Newport is Sector 6, the land between the primary school and the B1383. Here clearly defined

limits of development exist and impact on the historic core can be minimised by planning control. Subject to retention of important trees, a sensitive development here could positively improve the sense of place and approach to the historic core.

Small scale developments may be appropriate in two other sectors. In the west side of Sector 3, it is considered that development will only impact on the historic core in terms of access. For this reason, only minor development could be considered. In Sector 5 some small linear pockets of development could positively contribute to the presently untidy outer edge of the village but any large development here could detrimentally impact on views into the settlement and particularly of the landmark church tower.

It is accepted that whilst the quality of new development can be designed to reduce detrimental effect, new development in Sectors 1, 2, and 4 dependent on scale and location would most likely result in a detrimental impact on the historic core, seriously eroding parts of the Conservation Area and its setting and identity.

In relation to sectors 1, 2, and 4 and the majority of the land in sectors 3 and 5, the conclusion reached is that development would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement for the reasons explained above.