



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Stanton Harcourt & Sutton

What are Conservation Areas?

Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. Groups of buildings, walls, trees and hedges, open spaces, views, and the historic settlement patterns all combine to create an individual sense of place. It is this character, rather than individual buildings, that Conservation Area status seeks to protect. The first Conservation Areas in the District were identified in the late 1960s. Since then, there has been a rolling programme of designations. Recent Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Stanton Harcourt Conservation Area was designated in 1989, following a process of public consultation.

The purpose of this document

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes the main aspects of character or appearance which contribute to the special interest and quality of the area. This document is intended to complement the approved policies for Conservation Areas contained in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan. In Conservation Areas there are controls over the demolition and minor alterations of unlisted buildings, and on works to trees. Full details can be obtained from the Planning Service. The Preservation and Enhancement document for Stanton Harcourt & Sutton accompanies this Character Appraisal and describes strategies for their future maintenance and improvement, as well as providing development advice, and guidance on conversions, extensions and the design of new buildings within the Conservation Area.



Location and setting

The villages of Stanton Harcourt and Sutton lie in the extreme south-east of the District, six miles west of Oxford and four miles south-east of Witney. The parish occupies the flat, low-lying and expansive floodplain landscape of the rivers Thames and Windrush.

Stanton Harcourt is the larger of the two settlements and is an attractive village of loose-knit form. It features an abundance of Listed buildings, including a memorable and highly significant cluster of structures at its core. Winding around this core are lanes lined with short terraces and distinctive thatched cottages. These lanes, together with small parcels of open land, serve to create a series of attractive internal vistas, and both components represent enriching and distinctive features of the character area.

Located just to the north of Stanton Harcourt is the smaller settlement of Sutton. In character this village provides a contrast to Stanton Harcourt. It displays a consistently linear settlement pattern, a more pronounced sense of intimacy and, particularly at its eastern end, a markedly rural character.

The parish overlies an area of mixed geology, comprising Oxford clay and the alluvium deposits and river gravels of the Thames floodplain terraces.



Historical development

Evidence has revealed extensive early activity in the parish, particularly during the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British era. A Bronze Age barrow formerly half a mile south-west of Stanton Harcourt contained a rich Wessex culture burial.

To the south-west of Stanton Harcourt, a henge monument known as 'The Devil's Quoits' was used throughout the late Neolithic and Beaker periods. This embanked circle of 30 or more stones 85 metres across was mostly destroyed in the Middle Ages to make way for cultivation. The site was then completely covered by a military airfield in 1940. The Devil's Quoits takes its name from the legend, current by the late-17th century, that the Devil hurled the stones from Wytham hill during a game of quoits. The name 'Stanton' – a derivation of 'stone tun' – refers to this legend. The suffix 'Harcourt', meanwhile, is taken from the name of the family who held the manor.

Settlement seems to have been concentrated on the modern villages of Stanton Harcourt and Sutton by about the 9th century. The church and manor house in Stanton Harcourt formed the early nucleus of the parish, and represented the focal points of religious and manorial power respectively.

From an early date Stanton Harcourt seems to have been an ecclesiastical centre of some importance, and correspondingly formed a settlement characterised by its size and local pre-eminence. Parsonage House, connected with the manor house and church by the distinctive arc of the main street, stands on the site of a medieval rectory, and settlement activity was doubtless concentrated on the armature formed by these elements.

Over time, as well as the construction of new dwellings, the consolidation or reconstruction of existing houses and cottages took place; particularly during the 17th and 18th centuries when stone and slate were extensively used to replace the existing timber-framing and some of the thatch.

From an early date, Sutton was both subordinate to Stanton Harcourt (in terms of size and importance) and more scattered in terms of settlement pattern (in the 16th century, Lower and Over Sutton comprised separate tithings). By the 12th or 13th century a house stood on the site of Lower Farm at the southern end of the village, and a number of the surviving cottages here originated as timber-framed hall houses. A manor certainly existed at Sutton from early in the 13th century, and was held by the Hospitallers from c.1224 until the Dissolution in the 16th century.

Stanton Harcourt was the principal seat of the Harcourt family from the early-12th century until the early-18th century - a tenure of 600 years broken only once, in the early 17th century. In 1710, Sir Simon Harcourt bought Nuneham Courtenay, which later became the family's main seat. Having lost this status, the medieval manor house at Stanton Harcourt was mostly demolished in the mid-18th century, leaving only the former north-east tower and chapel, the kitchen and range to the south, and the gatehouse standing. These were renovated and extended during the 19th and 20th centuries, and re-inhabited as the manor house from 1948.

Agriculture played a major part in the establishment and development of both Stanton Harcourt and Sutton. With much of the parish overlying the river gravels and extensive alluvium deposits of the Summertown-Radley and Thames floodplain terraces, the land is well suited to meadow or pasture use (this gravel often formed a hard conglomerate, making the ground here resistant to tillage until into the 19th century). Certain 18th-century field names, such as 'In the Gravel' and 'Gravel Allotment', allude to the nature of the soil here. Enclosure took place in 1774, resulting in the consolidation of land holdings.

In 1940, a military airfield was built to the south-west of the village. This covered an area of several hundred acres, and was used by Whitley bombers during WWII. This factor caused a temporary increase in the population, which in 1951 stood at 960*.

*Further information on the history of Stanton Harcourt and Sutton can be found at: www.british-history.ac.uk



Settlement pattern

Stanton Harcourt's earliest settlers may have been users of a prehistoric trackway whose presence is suggested by crop marks to the west of the village. This ancient route crossed the river Windrush close to Beard Mill Farm, and connected the iron fields of north Oxfordshire with the Berkshire chalklands. Among a number of other early routes adjacent to Stanton Harcourt is a 4th-century Roman trackway running parallel to, and west of, the road south of the village.

The attractions of the site for early settlers were manifold: besides being well-served by arterial and lesser routes the site has forgiving contours, a ready supply of water, and land suited to cultivation and livestock farming. From the Bronze Age onwards, a wealth of evidence points to consistent settlement in the area, along with a pattern of stable mixed farming.

With settlement concentrated on the modern villages of Stanton Harcourt and Sutton by the 9th century the community grew steadily. By 1086 there were 83 tenants living in Stanton Harcourt. This had risen noticeably by 1279 when there were close to 80 households in the parish. In this year at least 17 cottagers and villeins were recorded as living in Sutton indicating that by this date, while Stanton Harcourt was a well established community, Sutton was a settlement in its infancy.

Although adjacent to one another, Stanton Harcourt and Sutton retain entirely distinct forms and characters, reflecting the markedly different patterns of settlement witnessed by each. Stanton Harcourt is loose-knit and polyfocal in form, with development activity historically centred on the church and Harcourt House. A subordinate but noteworthy focal point exists north-west of this cluster in the form of Parsonage House. Between the two lies a distinctive C-shaped road. Moving out from this core the density of the settlement drops off, eventually giving way to scattered farmsteads and labourers' cottages.

More recently, housing development in Stanton Harcourt has seen infilling between Parsonage House and the church, and to the west of the village along Black Ditch in a continuation of this pattern of loose-knit growth.

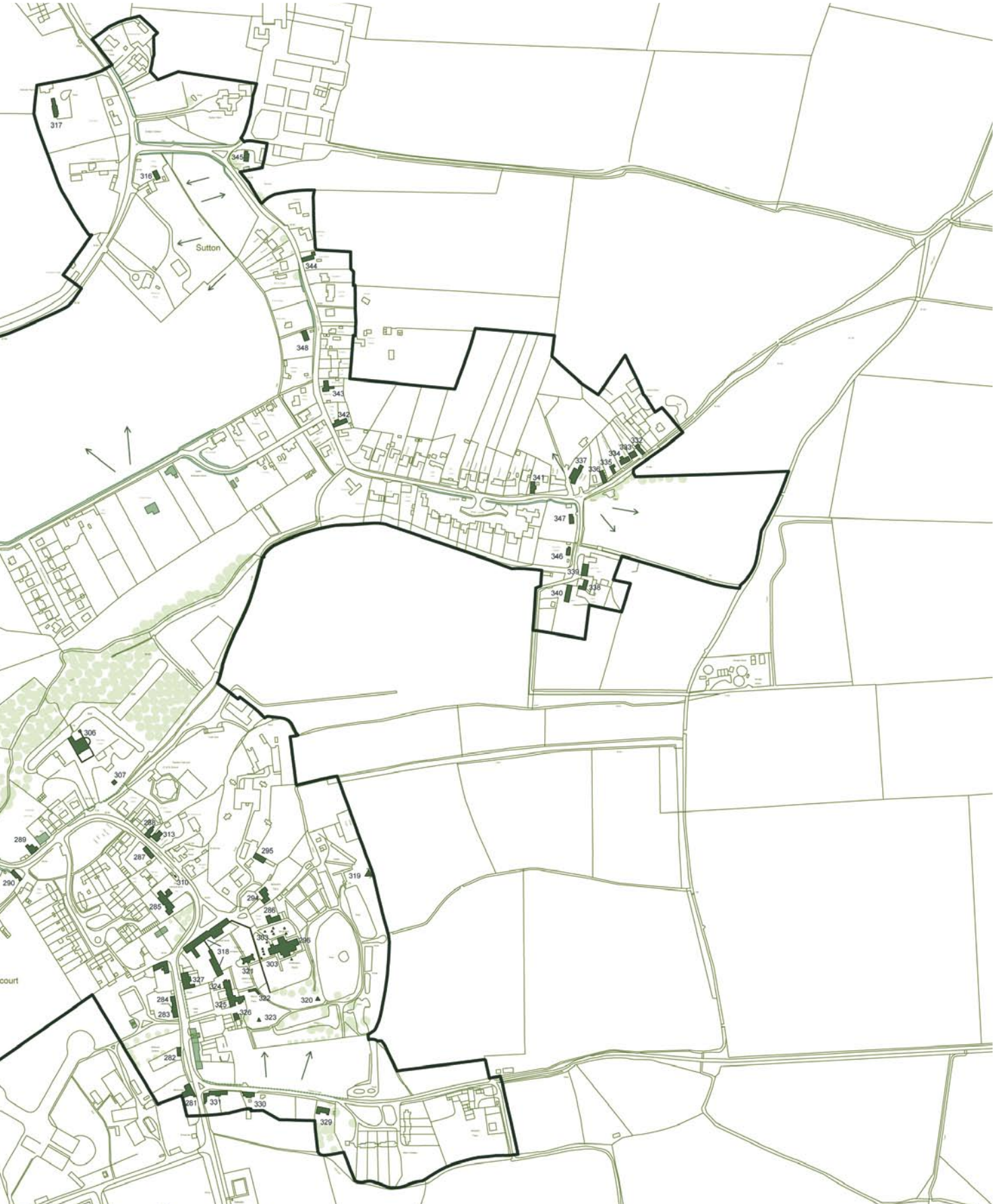
The village of Sutton does not have, and never has had, a core of comparable density (indeed, for a long time it was almost too disparate to be called a village at all). During the 17th century in particular, however, its eastern edge became recognisably linear in form, with the development of a string of adjacent houses and cottages along Sutton Lane.

Following this precedent, the village has continued to evolve a linear form not more than one property deep, following the course of Sutton Lane west and north-west to a dispersed group of early farmsteads in the extreme north-west of Sutton.



Stanton Harcourt & Sutton Conservation Area





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Listed Buildings

There are 60 Listed structures of architectural or historic interest in the Conservation Area. Listed Buildings are classified in grades of relative importance.

Grade I – Buildings of national importance and exceptional interest (2% of Listed Buildings)

- 21/296 Church of St. Michael
- 21/321 HARCOURT HOUSE, Pope's Tower approx. 35m. SE of Harcourt House (Formerly listed as Pope's Tower)
- 21/324 HARCOURT HOUSE, The Great Kitchen approx. 40m. S of Harcourt House (Formerly listed as The Great Kitchen, Harcourt House)
- 21/325 HARCOURT HOUSE, Manor Farmhouse approx. 70m. S of Harcourt House (Formerly listed as Manor Farmhouse)

Grade II* – Particularly special and important buildings (4% of Listed Buildings)

- 21/306 Parsonage House and attached forecourt walls, gates and gatepiers and rear wall with outbuilding (Formerly listed as Parsonage House with dovecot)
- 21/318 HARCOURT HOUSE, Harcourt House and attached walls and outbuildings (Formerly listed as Harcourt House and outbuildings)

Grade II – Buildings of special interest

- 21/281 Nos. 8/10
- 21/282 No. 11
- 21/283 No. 12
- 21/284 No. 13
- 21/285 Nos. 14/15 and attached outbuilding
- 21/286 No. 17 and estate office
- 21/287 No. 22 (White Cottage)
- 21/288 No. 25 (Thatchings)
- 21/289 No. 27
- 21/290 Nos. 28/29 (Leena Cottage)
- 21/291 No. 30 (Smithy Cottage)
- 21/294 Bedwell's Farmhouse
- 21/295 Bedwell's Farm, barn approx. 40m. NEE of farmhouse
- 21/297 Church of St. Michael, group of 2 chest tombs approx. 18m. N of chancel and 8m. NE of north transept
- 21/298 Church of St. Michael, group of 3 chest tombs approx. 20m. N of N porch
- 21/299 Church of St. Michael, base of churchyard cross approx. 20m. NNW of porch
- 21/300 Church of St. Michael, headstone approx. 2.5m. NW of N porch
- 21/301 Church of St. Michael, group of 3 chest tombs approx. 5m. W of nave
- 21/302 Church of St. Michael, chest tomb approx. 7m. W of nave

- 21/303 Church of St. Michael, chest tomb with railed enclosure approx. 5.5m. S of south transept
- 21/305 Flexney's House
- 21/307 Parsonage House, dovecote approx. 30m. SSE (Formerly listed as Parsonage House with dovecote)
- 21/310 Stocks approx. 30m. NE of the Harcourt Arms Public House
- 21/312 The Harcourt Arms Public House
- 21/313 The Old Post Office
- 21/315 Blackditch Farmhouse
- 21/319 HARCOURT HOUSE, Memorial approx. 190m. NE of Harcourt House
- 21/320 HARCOURT HOUSE, Memorial urn approx. 150m. SE of Harcourt House
- 21/322 HARCOURT HOUSE, Doorway approx. 85m. SSE of Harcourt House
- 21/323 HARCOURT HOUSE, Memorial urn approx. 115m. SSE of Harcourt House
- 21/326 HARCOURT HOUSE, Dovecote approx. 105m. SSE of Harcourt House
- 21/327 HARCOURT HOUSE, Barn approx. 25m. SSW of Harcourt House (Formerly listed as barn at Manor Farm)
- 21/329 STEADY'S LANE (South side) Nos. 1/2
- 21/330 STEADY'S LANE (South side) Nos. 3/4
- 21/331 STEADY'S LANE (South side) Nos. 5/6 and 7

SUTTON

- 20/316 EYNSHAM ROAD (East side) Sutton, Tudor Cottage
- 20/317 EYNSHAM ROAD (West side) Sutton, Nicholl's Farmhouse
- 8/332 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Goldenbridge Cottage
- 8/333 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Pinkhill Cottage
- 8/334 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, No. 42 (Mistletoe Cottage) (Formerly listed as Mistletoe Cottage)
- 8/335 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, No. 43 (Yew Tree Cottage) (Formerly listed as Rose Cottage)
- 8/336 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, The Willows
- 8/337 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Brigstowe Cottage
- 8/338 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Lower Farmhouse (Formerly listed as Lower Farm Farmhouse)
- 8/339 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Barn approx. 10m. NNW of lower Farmhouse
- 8/340 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Nos. 39 & 38 (Formerly listed as No. 39)
- 20/341 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, No. 44 (Batt's Cottage) (Formerly listed as No. 44)
- 20/342 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Post Box Cottage
- 20/343 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Inglenooks and Violet Cottage
- 20/344 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Odd Cottage
- 20/345 SUTTON LANE (North side) Sutton, Pond Cottage (Formerly listed as Cadles Cottage)
- 8/346 SUTTON LANE (South side) Sutton, No. 40 (Duck End Cottage)
- 8/347 SUTTON LANE (South side) Sutton, No. 41
- 20/348 SUTTON LANE (South side) Sutton, No. 47

Note: The numbers indicate the unique identification number by which Listed Buildings are referenced

Architectural character and quality of buildings

The vernacular cottages and houses of the parish (the former often linked to form short terraces) tend to be of simple plan form, constructed from limestone rubble and topped with thatch or stone slate. The numerous thatched cottages are especially distinctive, and are often of a 'risen-loaf' form, with unusually deep thatch. Later developments, whilst being of variable architectural merit, have tended to follow precedents set by the early vernacular structures; most notably in the use of buff colours and the liberal use of gabled dormer windows.

Stanton Harcourt is rich in Listed structures. The church of St. Michael dates from the 12th century and contains an important rood screen of c.1260, and the Shrine of St. Edburg, dating from 1294-1317 and removed from Bicester Priory by Sir James Harcourt.

Next door, Pope's Tower dates from c.1470-1. It was built as a chapel for Sir Robert Harcourt (probably by William Orchard) and named after Alexander Pope, who translated some of Homer's Iliad in an upper room during 1717-18. Manor Farmhouse was built as a service range for the Harcourts in the 15th century and has an attractive arch-braced roof. Attached to this is the Great Kitchen of c.1485 (arguably the finest surviving medieval kitchen in Britain).

Two other buildings are worth highlighting: Harcourt House itself and Parsonage House. The former fell into ruin following the death of Sir Philip Harcourt in 1688 and was mostly pulled down in 1750. However, the original gatehouse and stables, (dating from the 15th century), were remodelled in c.1868 to form the greater part of the present house. Adjoining this is an 80 metre stretch of 15th-century walling.

Parsonage House was built by Robert Huntingdon in c.1675. It stands beside a chain of medieval fish ponds east of the church, and is notable for the unaltered state of both its exterior and interior. It has a symmetrical 7-window range and a hipped roof of a type deriving from Holland.

Boundary treatments

The boundary treatments of the parish display considerable variety (though drystone walling, unusually for the District, is generally conspicuous by its absence). The period buildings of the village tend to front directly on to the road, while later developments are generally located behind verges of varying depth, or along parallel roadways or cul-de-sacs. Hedges can be seen throughout the village, as can extensive stretches of tarmac pathway.

Landscape, trees and views

The landscape in which the parish is set is flat and low-lying (mostly below the 70 metre contour), and is characterised by an attractive and largely unspoilt rural character. The surrounding area includes a mosaic of gravel pits (in various stages of active quarrying, restoration or recolonisation), open water and floodplain farmland. The flatness, quality and openness of this landscape make it extremely sensitive to development.

The extensive areas of woodland that once characterised the parish have now largely disappeared (their clearance began before 1086) but vestiges are still discernible in the profusion of native trees and vegetation found throughout the parish. Pockets of open land and unadulterated streetscapes lead to a variety of highly attractive views both within Stanton Harcourt itself and out into the farmland beyond. Intervisibility is lower in Sutton, which has an intimate and extremely picturesque character, particularly at the Cox's Farm end of Sutton Lane.



“By the blackness of the walls, the circular fires, vast cauldrons, yawning mouths of ovens and furnaces, you would think it either the forge of Vulcan, the cave of Polypheme, or the temple of Molach. The horror of this place has made such an impression on the country people, that they believe the Witches keep their Sabbath here, and that once a year the Devil treats them with infernal venison, a roasted Tiger stuffed with ten-penny nails”.

The Great Kitchen, by Alexander Pope in a letter to the Duke of Buckingham.

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Elmfield, New Yatt Road, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 1PB

General planning enquiries and application forms

01993 861683

List entries and grant enquiries

01993 861666

Trees and landscape enquiries

01993 861662

Architectural and technical enquiries

01993 861659

