



FREELAND

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

FEBRUARY 2025



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SUMMARY

The following design principles have been developed as a result of extensive consultation with village residents, in combination with climate change mitigation and nature recovery considerations.

General matters affecting village life

- Traffic calming and reduction in traffic volume (NB: a 20mph speed zone was introduced in December 2024)
- Improved surfaces to existing footpaths/roadside pavement
- More footpaths, allowing circular walks around the village
- Better cycle routes

Green infrastructure

- Hedges not fences, and green roofs replete with lichen and moss
- Recognition and protection of green open spaces, enhancement of existing wildlife corridors and more diversity of habitat
- Landscape mitigation prior to development
- Preservation of the diminishing and vulnerable countryside, separating our villages.

Settlement principles

- The two 'green gaps' to be maintained
- Distinctive core of the village to be sustained through a new Conservation Area
- Loose-knit character of development and open spaces to be protected

New and redeveloped housing

- No support at all for large-scale house building
- General support for small scale, affordable new housing and redevelopment in appropriate locations
- An aim of environmental sustainability, energy efficiency and a move towards carbon net zero
- New development to be of proportionate scale and form a logical and historic complement to the village
- Aesthetic design should also be mutually inclusive with the construction of energy efficient housing, in line with principles such as LETI standards

Light pollution

- Preservation of Freeland's dark skies – no streetlights
- Reduction in existing light pollution

Hydrology

- Increase area of porous surfaces (drives, gardens, new road-ways) to reduce surface water runoff and cumulative flooding downstream
- Create more attenuation ponds (constructed for wildlife)
- Separation of roof water/ storm water from sewage network from existing dwellings and road drains
- Rainwater harvesting to all new properties with gardens

The Three Villages

Protect the diminished and vulnerable countryside separating the three villages of Freeland, Long Hanborough and Church Hanborough, whilst preserving the unique distinctiveness of each and preventing coalescence.



Church Hanborough with its exquisite Norman Church, is the smallest of the three villages.

Freeland is a spacious village, maintaining its rurality by the intersection of farmland in two 'green gap' locations. With its own primary school, church, pub, village hall, sports field, play park, vets practice, garden centre and small businesses, Freeland is within walking/ cycling distance of further facilities in Long Hanborough. The Green at Freeland is a hamlet, separated from the main village by open fields and countryside.

Long Hanborough is a large village and is a service-hub to the surrounding villages with its larger range of facilities – train station, doctor's surgery, dentist, well stocked Co-op and Post Office, and other food outlets and small businesses.

Residents of Freeland can access these facilities with the First and Last Mile bus service, reducing car use and shop using online delivery services. Better foot and cycle paths are a realistic aspiration to improve access.

INTRODUCTION

A Village Design Statement (VDS) is a supplementary planning document prepared by the Parish Council and residents. The aim is to produce design guidelines that can describe and preserve the unique character of Freeland. It helps to ensure that any development in the future is sympathetic to the features in Freeland most treasured by the residents, in an effort to ensure that the essential character of the village can be preserved.

When adopted by West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) as a supplementary planning document, it will become a material consideration when WODC determines any planning applications within the village.

The VDS will also serve as a reference point for any householder considering making alterations to their house who may wish to have guidance on the best way to do this in keeping with local characteristics.



A sensitive new extension to an old property

The Freeland VDS has been produced by the village VDS working party in conjunction with Freeland Parish Council.



Consultation has taken place on a village-wide basis. Some of it has been through discussion with groups of residents about it – for example at the Annual Parish Meeting, but the main consultation took place through an online and paper survey distributed to all households in June/ July 2024. A total of 170 surveys were completed and returned.

The responses have been collated and will be referenced at various points in this document.



Freeland Cricket Ground

FREELAND'S PLACE IN THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

Situated on the southeastern edge of the Cotswold National Landscape, Freeland sits within the bounds of the former Royal hunting grounds of the historic Wychwood Forest. The landscape forms a picturesque transition from the oolitic limestone of the Cotswolds to the cornbrash limestone and clay of the Thames Valley.

This distinct area is made up of mostly heavy clay soils and is characterised by large oaks, big hedges and small fields. Intermittent farmland cuts east to west through the village creating green corridors which join Eynsham Park and Freeland House Estates to Blenheim Estate and surrounding countryside. As a result, Freeland enjoys a high level of biodiversity aided by the surrounding woodland and non-intensive farmland.



The separation of the built environment (old and new) along with predominantly large undeveloped front gardens, grass verges and mature trees along Wroslyn Road, gives Freeland its uncluttered character of relative peace and rural tranquillity.

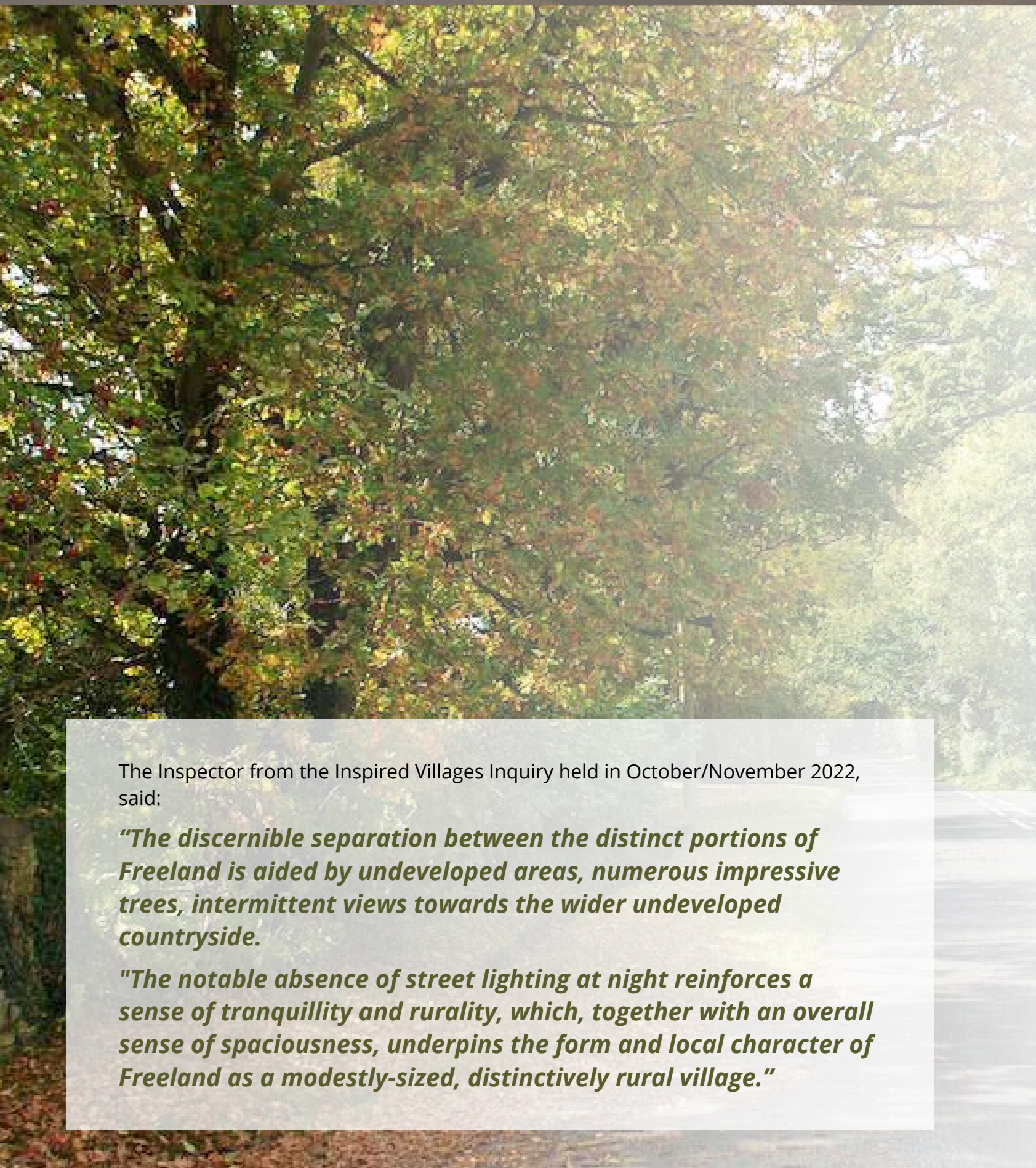
To the southeast of the village, beyond The Green, a bridle track leads to Vincents Wood (a picture of pristine bluebells in spring). The vistas on either side reveal views to rival any in Oxfordshire. To the southeast the view is dominated by the hill of Wytham Woods.



Its 1,000 acres of woodland changes colour with the seasons and sets off the Spires of Oxford nestling in the rolling countryside with the Chiltern hills beyond. To the west, equally unspoilt views extend to the White Horse Hill and the Berkshire Downs on the horizon. At sunset when Freeland is in the shadow of the woodland, the distant hills remain sunlit and clear.



The centre and northern end of Freeland, whilst not open to such panoramic views, is sheltered from the worst of the south-westerly winds by the woodlands of the Eynsham Park Estate. The woodlands create a microclimate, diffusing traffic noise and creating a visual barrier to the ever-expanding villages beyond.



The Inspector from the Inspired Villages Inquiry held in October/November 2022, said:

"The discernible separation between the distinct portions of Freeland is aided by undeveloped areas, numerous impressive trees, intermittent views towards the wider undeveloped countryside."

"The notable absence of street lighting at night reinforces a sense of tranquillity and rurality, which, together with an overall sense of spaciousness, underpins the form and local character of Freeland as a modestly-sized, distinctively rural village."

Freeland is set within a truly rural landscape, part of the Estate Farmlands Landscape Type in the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study completed in 2024. This is described as ***"...a rolling agricultural landscape characterised by parklands and a well-ordered pattern of fields and estate plantations."***

Approached from the south the first part of the village is The Green, an outlying hamlet where the open countryside meets a loose-knit collection of detached properties in generous plots grouped around the triangular green. Moving northwards along Wroslyn Road there is once again open countryside, together with the parkland of Freeland House. This forms one of Freeland's two strategic 'green gaps' which break up the otherwise continuously developed frontage along Wroslyn Road.

North of Pigeon House Lane there is a transition to the more densely inhabited area of the village centre, including the distinctive Victorian core. Beyond this is a second strategic 'green gap' located beyond the village school, where the agricultural setting traverses Wroslyn Road. From here, a ribbon development pattern continues to the A4095, linking to a further collection of dwellings along the A4095.

This rural tranquillity and overall sense of spaciousness is much appreciated by residents in the recent survey:

"A lovely quiet friendly village surrounded by beautiful countryside"

"A quiet, peaceful friendly village with lovely woodlands and wildlife"

"A quiet, small rural village surrounded by beautiful countryside"

"The most important feature is that people appear to live in and surrounded by nature, rather than seeking to overwrite and erase it"

"It is a friendly village with a lovely pub which helps to bring the community together"

"A separate small village with its own character. Surrounded by nature and farm land"

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

A commitment to green infrastructure and biodiversity is central to Freeland's design. According to residents' survey responses, this is of great importance to the community. Green spaces such as fields, hedgerows, trees and watercourses play a vital role in creating a sustainable, healthy and vibrant environment. Moss and lichen on roofs are an undisturbed aerial habitat for insects and birds.

Hedgerows form essential wildlife corridors, allowing small mammals, birds, and insects to thrive. These living fences also act as natural windbreaks, reduce soil erosion and contribute to the seasonal visual charm of our rural landscape. For all these reasons, the aim is to protect and manage the existing hedgerows and encourage the planting of new ones.

Trees are another cornerstone of the green infrastructure, adding beauty to the surroundings and giving Freeland its cherished rural character. Beyond their beauty and the shade they provide, trees improve air quality, sequester carbon and offer habitats for various species.



The spring symphony of the dawn chorus!

The village is surrounded by an attractive mix of open fields and woodland areas, which the residents value highly. These woodlands are vital for maintaining biodiversity, attracting a variety of bird species and helping in flood prevention. The fields provide open views across the landscape and give the village its characteristic green punctuation points throughout its length. Both aspects allow for many opportunities for lovely walks and rambles in the immediate area of the village, which are very well used by the residents. In the recent village survey the most loved views were across Chapel Meadow towards Oxford, in Vincents Wood, and the woods behind Broadmarsh Lane.

By fostering a network of interconnected green spaces, the aim is to create safe walking and cycling routes as well as a resilient and ecologically rich environment. This approach not only supports local wildlife but also enhances the quality of life for all residents. The village design reflects a dedication to sustainability, biodiversity, and the health and well-being of the community.



Moss and lichen on roofs

NATURE CONNECTIVITY & BIODIVERSITY

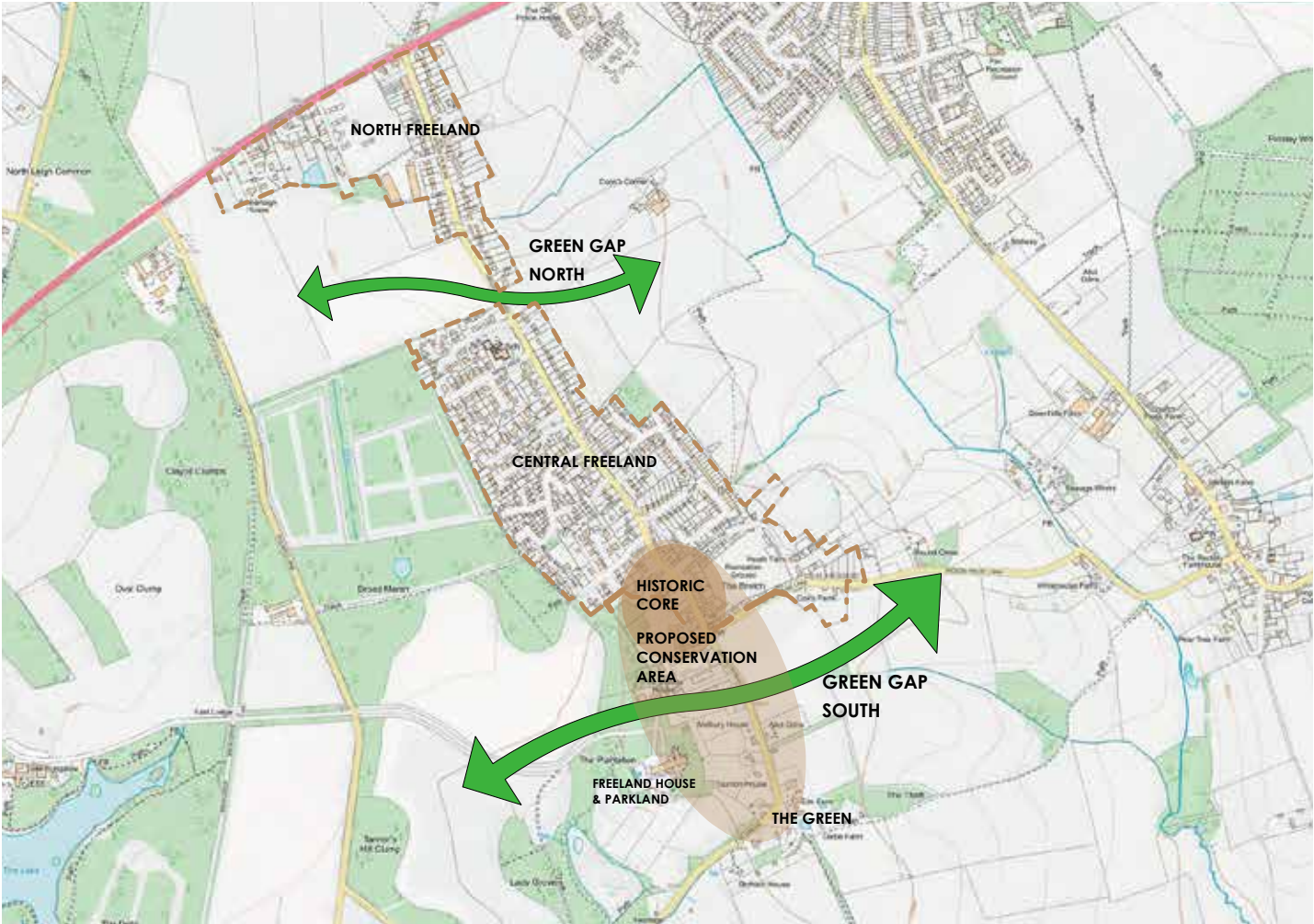
Freeland lies mid-way across an impressive east/west green corridor.

Stretching from Pinsley Wood (Blenheim) in the east, through the Eynsham Park Estate and beyond to Witney, this uninterrupted wildlife corridor exemplifies 'nature recovery'.

Freeland's linear development of the 1960s-1980s does partially block the corridor, but the retained areas of open farmland within the village serve as green punctuations, allowing unimpeded movement of wildlife through the built environment.

If development of any scale is to take place in Freeland, it should seek to:

- enhance 'nature connectivity' and increase biodiversity, including the protection and management of existing hedgerows, and encouraging the planting of new ones
- take a holistic view of the effects upon nature and not limit its scope to a specific site

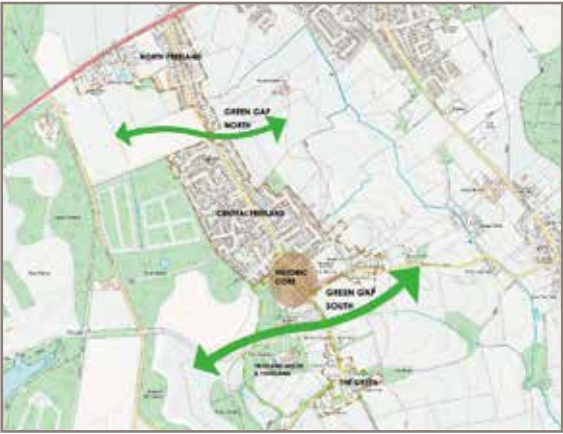


The two "Strategic Green Gaps" are critical to preserving the village character and are to remain undeveloped.

FREELAND'S 'GREEN GAPS' & NATURE RECOVERY



The two 'green gaps' within Freeland provide an uninterrupted and essential East-West link in the environment. These are critical wildlife corridors and support an abundance of nature.



SETTLEMENT PATTERN & CHARACTER

Freeland is a modestly sized, traditional rural village, identified in the West Oxfordshire Design Guide as having a 'Linear' and 'Dispersed' settlement pattern. It is distinctive due to the penetration of mature forest trees and farmland into the village centre, breaking the linear form and creating the subsidiary dispersed pattern.

Freeland developed from a medieval freehold near the wood called the Frith (later Thrift coppice); this was within the medieval Royal hunting forest of Wychwood, lying near its eastern boundary.

By the 16th century the ancient freehold was called Frithlands or Freeland, and Freeland was named as an address by the late 17th century. In 1762 there were fewer than a dozen cottages at Freeland. One group lay close to the Green, another in and near Blenheim Lane.

Following the Enclosure Acts of the 1800s most of the land west of the heath road was awarded to W E Taunton. It became the park of Freeland lodge (later Freeland House), which was built in 1807.

Employment provided by the Taunton and Eynsham Hall estates and by several small brickworks stimulated the growth of the hamlet, and by 1869, when Freeland became an ecclesiastical district, there were 52 houses with a population of 241.



Freeland School circa 1960s



Freeland Old School

The Wesleyan chapel was also completed in 1807 and was central to the hamlet's life in the early 19th century. It is now called Freeland Methodist Church. The building is Grade II listed and is the oldest Methodist church in the Witney and Faringdon circuit. The chapel sadly remains closed and unused since 2016 despite the best efforts of the villagers to secure its continued community use.

Freeland had several unidentified public houses by the later part of the 18th century. The New Inn, built in 1842, was Freeland's only licensed public house for most of the 19th century. Since 1974 it has been called the Oxfordshire Yeoman and today is a thriving community asset.

A period of expansion in the Victorian era from c1868 by the Taunton family of Freeland Lodge (now Freeland House) saw the building of the Church of England parish church (St Mary the Virgin) and

associated buildings, and the unification of the scattered hamlet of stone cottages.

Freeland's population fell from 232 to 160 during the 1880s, but by 1951 the newly formed civil parish of Freeland contained 140 houses and a population of 530. The 1955 OS maps show linear development along Wroslyn Road, plus a few dwellings around the Shepherds Hall Inn on the A4095.

Later, Church View, Walkers Close and the Blowings were built to the east of Wroslyn Road and Parklands to the west. These were followed by Broadmarsh Lane to the west in the late 1970's. These developments led to the population rising to 654 by 1961, 961 by 1971 and 1,374 by 1981. The population in 2024 was approximately 1,700.

The school moved to new premises in Parklands in 1964 and is now Freeland Church of England Primary School.



Freeland Methodist Church

THE CHARACTER OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

As the settlement evolution has demonstrated, the houses in Freeland date from various periods. The oldest are built from local Cotswold stone, under Cotswold stone tile or slate roofs, with brick chimneys and relatively small windows. Garden boundaries are usually traditional dry stone walls or mature hedges. A good example of this type is the much-loved village pub, The Oxfordshire Yeoman, voted by residents as one of the most popular aspects of village life.

Other 'favourite' buildings are St Mary's Church and the Wesleyan Chapel (now the Methodist Church) built in 1807 with local stone under a stone tile roof. Both these buildings are architecturally significant.

St Mary's Church is an exceptional Victorian Gothic Revival church. Together with the adjoining Arts and Crafts style parsonage, school and schoolhouse, it creates a design set piece which helps form the distinctive heart to the village. The Architect for all these buildings and the matching church Lychgate was JL Pearson, designer of Truro Cathedral and New College, Oxford. Pearson was commissioned by the Taunton family, the original owners of Freeland Lodge, and the buildings were completed between 1869 and 1871.

St Mary's Church, its lychgate, the war memorial, parsonage, and schoolhouse are all listed buildings, whilst Freeland House and St Mary's House are Non-designated Heritage Assets – the latter being built for the Taunton family in 1875-1876 and now an enclosed convent for the Community of St Clare.

Pearson's new buildings provided a unified centre in an otherwise scattered hamlet linking together several older stone-built cottages with the listed Methodist Church. These, together with the adjoining Freeland House Park, form a cohesive historic centre to the village, which remains largely intact today.

Freeland House Park was originally established around Freeland Lodge, the predecessor to Freeland House. It was designed in the 'English Landscape' style in the early 19th century, with perimeter woodlands, lime avenues and an ornamental lake.

Freeland House itself is set back from Wroslyn Road and is currently in use as a nursing home. It is another impressive heritage asset along with its associated historic estate cottages, stables (still in use as livery stables) and coach house (now a veterinary surgery). The walled kitchen garden has been used since the mid-20th century as a popular nursery and garden centre. The park wraps around the south and west of the village centre and continues in use for agriculture and forestry.

This parkland is highly valued by villagers, making responsible use of the permissive footpaths and woodlands for quiet recreation. The forest-scale trees of Freeland House Park, the historic village core and those bordering Chapel Meadow, together form a distinctive feature in the village centre, lending scale, enclosure and a sense of permanence to the village streetscape.

Many houses along Wroslyn Road were built between the wars, around 1930. These are either bungalows or two-storey

houses, generally set in large mature plots. These houses are also generally set back from the road with substantial green verges between the pavement and front boundary of the property. These verges are planted with trees, some of which are mature, others planted more recently to commemorate village residents who died in the first or second world wars. All these features combine to give a wide and open aspect to Wroslyn Road, rich with greenery, flowers and trees.

In the second half of the twentieth century relatively large estates have been added either side of Wroslyn Road. In Church View and Parklands the houses were built in the 1960s and are very much of their time, once again having large front gardens, with tree and shrub planting and well tended front gardens. Broadmarsh Lane was developed in the 1970s with a mix of house styles and sizes and set against the backdrop of Broadmarsh Woods. Once again, a rural feel is maintained with generous planting and woodland areas.



Freeland Village Hall, designed by local architect Ray Tollady

Mid-way between the two and opposite the pub, is Freeland Village Hall, built in 2011. Set in its own gardens and adjoining playing field, the hall was opened by then-Prime Minister, David Cameron.

Funded by a WODC grant, In-village fund raising and a Government Works Board loan, the hall has proved a great success and remains highly regarded by villagers and out-of-village hirers alike.

A dynamic management committee ensure that the facilities are kept as pristine as new, and the hall continues to be financially independent.



Freeland Village Hall

FREELAND'S HISTORIC CORE



St Mary's Church and Lynchgate



Freeland's historic centre



Freeland War memorial



The Oxfordshire Yeoman

MATERIALS, FEATURES & THE VILLAGE LANDSCAPE

Houses in Freeland are predominantly built of stone or reconstituted stone. There are also a number of red brick houses, notably the elegant red brick villas in Pigeon House Lane (originally built by the Oxford Eye Hospital) and a short terrace at the northern part of the village, known as Red City. Some houses are rendered and painted, and a number have been extended with the use of roof lights or dormer windows.

The boundaries are mainly dry stone walls or mature hedges, although some have boarded fences. The driveways are predominantly gravel or are water permeable material which adds to the softly landscaped feel of many properties, as well as assisting with reducing flooding during heavy rain by attenuating run-off. In the recent village survey, concern was

raised over the amount of nature friendly space being lost to hard landscaping, and an increased concern over landscaping details for new properties was also expressed by residents of the newest existing development.

The architectural and landscape features that are distinctive, going beyond the vernacular building styles are Freeland House and its surrounding parkland, and the design set piece in the village centre. These add to the distinctive character of Freeland.

In recognition of the landscape value of its Victorian village centre, the village Community Led Plan (2014) included a recommendation to ***“Apply for Conservation Area status for historic core of village”***.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

West Oxfordshire’s Local Plan 2031 states in its preamble that:

“There will be a network of safe, inclusive, vibrant, well-connected and prosperous market towns and villages within a healthy, attractive, historically and biodiversity-rich environment where new development achieves a high standard of design and respects and complements the distinctive character of the area whilst managing the impacts of climate change.”, and under policy CO14 that it will: “Conserve and enhance the character and significance of West Oxfordshire’s high quality natural, historic and cultural environment”.

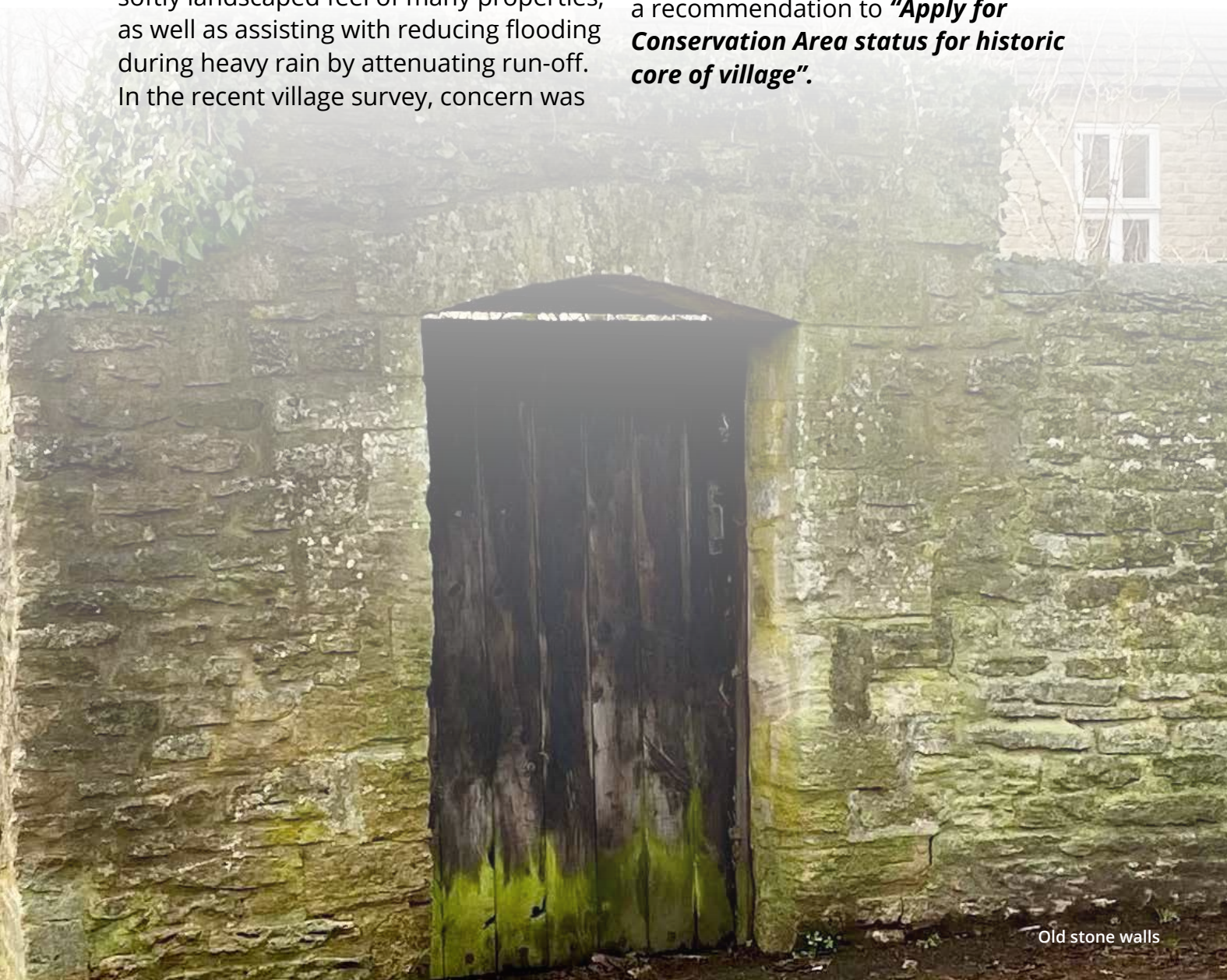
More specifically for Freeland, which the Local Plan identifies as a “village”, planning policy OS2 says:

“The villages are suitable for limited development which respects the village character and local distinctiveness and would help to maintain the vitality of these communities.”

In relation to landscape character the Local Plan says in policy EH2:

“The quality, character and distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire’s natural environment, including its landscape, cultural and historic value, tranquillity, geology, countryside, soil and biodiversity, will be conserved and enhanced. New development should conserve and, where possible, enhance the intrinsic character, quality and distinctive natural and man-made features of the local landscape, including individual or groups of features and their settings, such as stone walls, trees, hedges, woodlands, rivers, streams and ponds. Conditions may be imposed on development proposals to ensure every opportunity is made to retain such features and ensure their long-term survival through appropriate management and restoration.”

Guided by these policies, the village design guidelines also reflect the views gathered from residents, identifying the features and characteristics they particularly value in the village, which must be preserved to maintain the essential quality that makes Freeland “Freeland”.



Old stone walls



A masterpiece in design and craftsmanship. Stone extensions to rear and far end



Contemporary extension and new stone wall

VILLAGE HOUSING



OVERALL PRINCIPLES FOR FREELAND

The two 'Strategic Green Gaps' are critical to preserving the village character and are to remain undeveloped, in order to:

- prevent coalescence into a single suburban sprawl
- preserve open views to the countryside from Wroslyn Road
- facilitate bio-connectivity by linking the ecologically diverse areas to the east and west via green corridors
- preserve the distinctiveness of the village settlement pattern comprising:
 - the ribbon development to the north of the village school
 - the village centre, including the historic centre
 - the outlying hamlet, at The Green

The distinctive Victorian village core is to be protected through seeking designation as a Conservation Area.

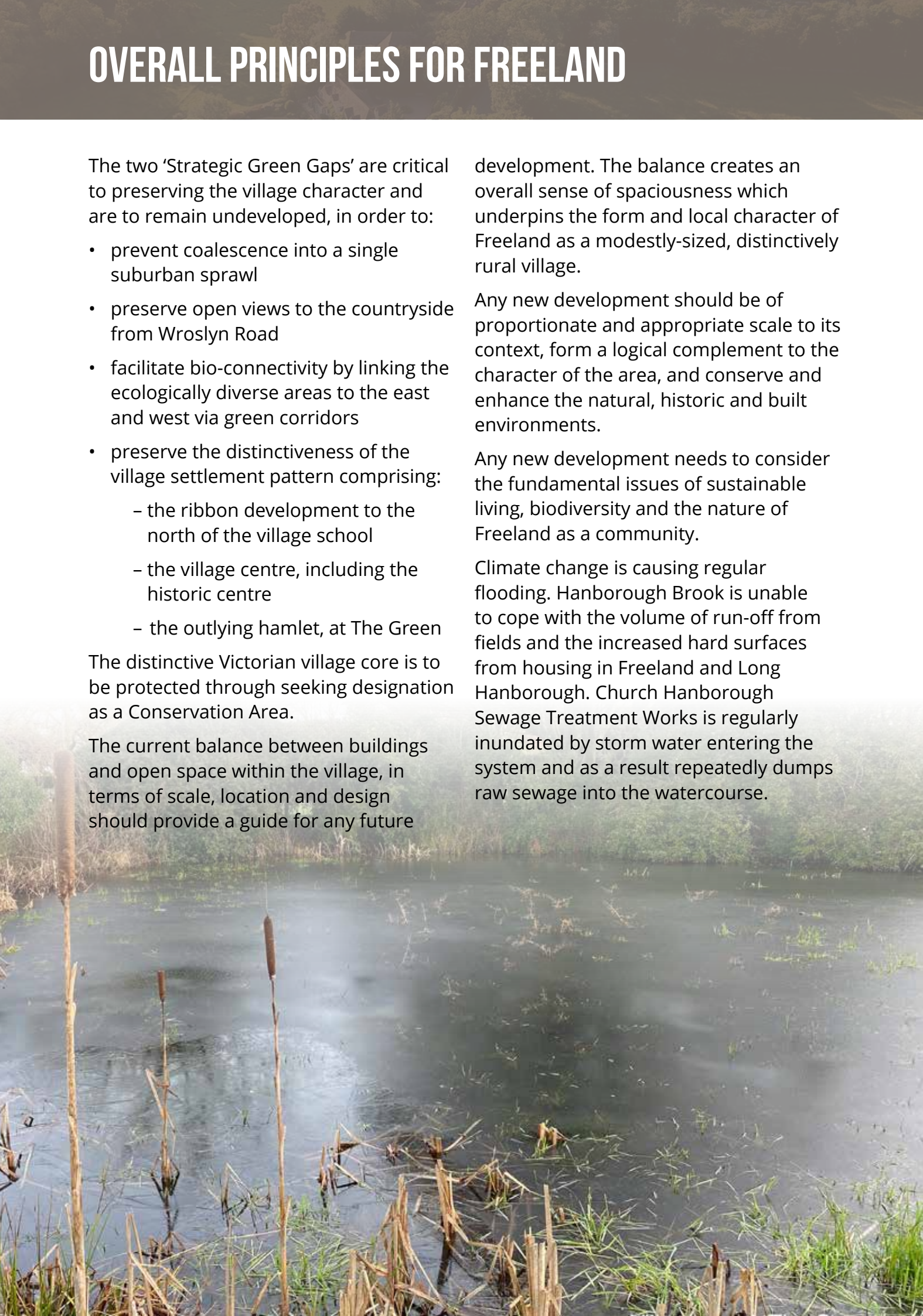
The current balance between buildings and open space within the village, in terms of scale, location and design should provide a guide for any future

development. The balance creates an overall sense of spaciousness which underpins the form and local character of Freeland as a modestly-sized, distinctively rural village.

Any new development should be of proportionate and appropriate scale to its context, form a logical complement to the character of the area, and conserve and enhance the natural, historic and built environments.

Any new development needs to consider the fundamental issues of sustainable living, biodiversity and the nature of Freeland as a community.

Climate change is causing regular flooding. Hanborough Brook is unable to cope with the volume of run-off from fields and the increased hard surfaces from housing in Freeland and Long Hanborough. Church Hanborough Sewage Treatment Works is regularly inundated by storm water entering the system and as a result repeatedly dumps raw sewage into the watercourse.



Freeland Garden of Remembrance



Hoar frost, view South towards The Green

Credits:

All photos were taken in Freeland – thanks go to our resident photographers Peter Newell, Bruce Hammersley, Moth Clarke, Graham Lay.

VDS working group:

Lindsey Harrison, Peter Foster, Robert Crocker, Russ Canning. Freeland Nature Recovery Group, Freeland Sustainability Group and WODC Planning/ Nature Recovery.

This document has been produced through the auspices of Freeland Parish Council.