

**PARISH PLAN**

**FOR THE VILLAGES OF**

**NORTHINGTON, SWARRATON AND TOTFORD**

**JULY 2013**

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TOTFORD

1. Introduction

Northington, Swarraton and Totford are situated at the southern end of the Candover Valley. According to the 2011 census, there is a population of 221 (of which 20 are children) living in 101 dwellings. Most of the residents of Northington are clustered in an area between the church and the village hall. The main population of Swarraton lies on either side of the B3046. There are groups of houses in other locations and several farms. The area of the Parish is extensive – about 3.5 miles by 2 miles. It is a very settled community of mainly professional families who commute to surrounding urban areas and London, with a few working wholly or mainly from home. The housing stock has not increased for about 40 years though some houses have been rebuilt on existing plots and a number have been extended.

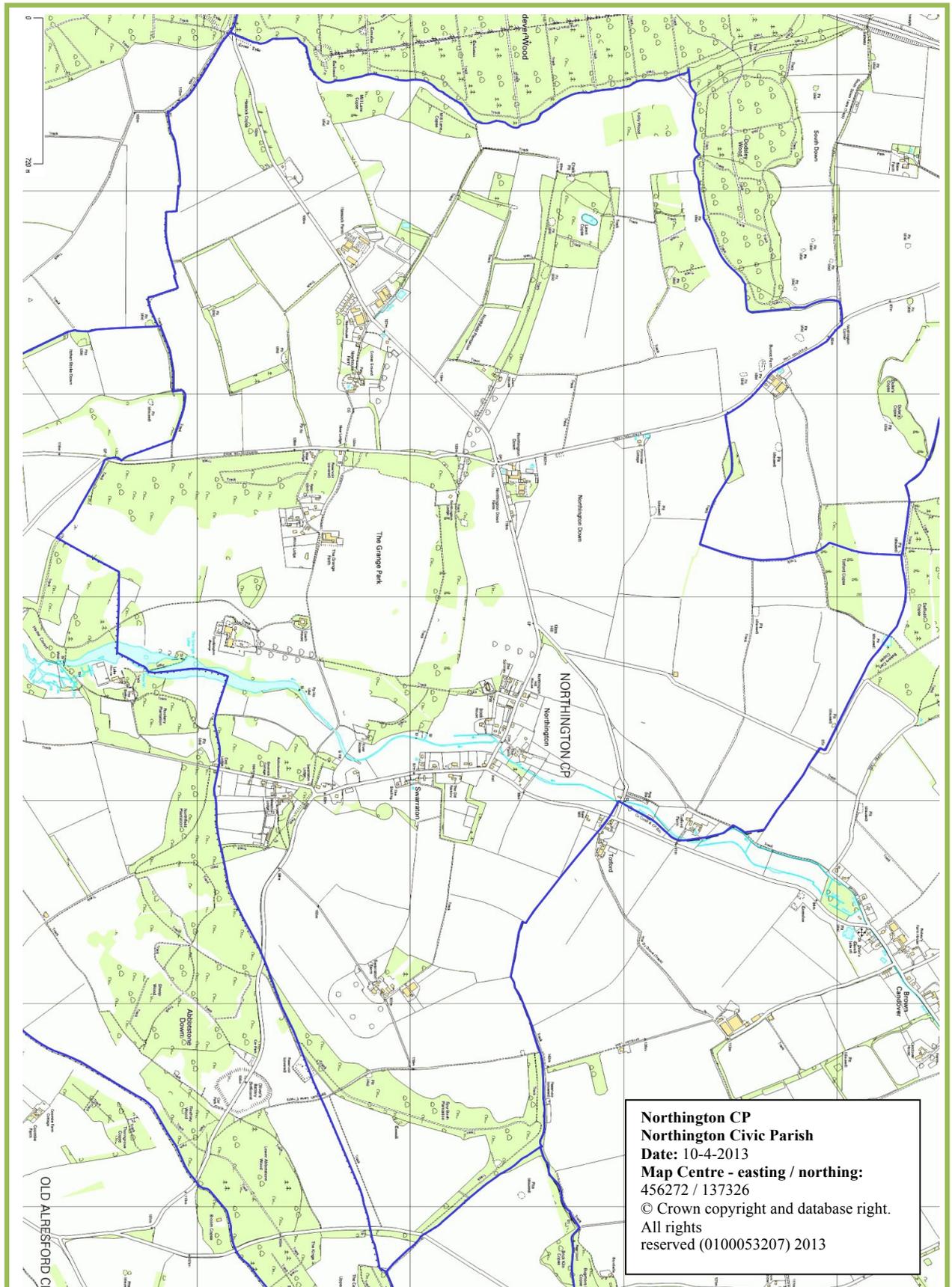
Northington has a Grade II \* listed church and a village hall, which is a popular venue for village activities. There is a public house at Totford and local enterprises include Grange Park Opera with charitable status, two riding schools and several farms. The Grange is a popular place for family walks.

Although the old village lifestyle has now gone there remains a strong community spirit as is evidenced by the good attendances at village hall events.

Demographically the population has changed with a recent influx of families with young children keen to enjoy the benefits of a rural environment.

Generally, it is clear that the great majority of residents enjoy their life in the village as it is and see no reason for any major changes in the future.

## 2. Map of the civic parish of Northington, Swarraton and Totford



### 3. The Parish Plan Process

At its AGM in May 2012, the Parish Council decided to develop a Parish Plan. The Parish Council subsequently formed a steering group comprising three parish councillors, a Sixth Form College student, a local farmer and a retired resident. In November 2012 using a written list of topics (copy attached), the group asked the residents of the parish for their views on possible development in the villages and encouraged them to suggest any changes they would like to see. Through written answers, personal visits, e-mail and telephone conversations, the group received 215 responses to the specific topics listed. This Plan represents an amalgam of these views and sets out the main issues of interest to residents in the following paragraphs.

### 4. Broadband

Almost all residents use the internet and they said that they are most unhappy with local broadband speeds which are as low as 821 kbps for downloads and 453 kbps for uploads. Our residents are now increasingly working from home – the 2011 Census identified 18 residents who do so regularly (11% of the working age population) - and they often find that there is no alternative to buying a satellite internet connection to obtain speeds sufficient for business purposes. Young people, especially, consider fast broadband to be an essential component of their studies, for course work and for downloading books, videos and so on. Fast broadband is now a required working tool for our farmers. The Parish Council's vision is for fast and reliable broadband right across the Parish and it will continue to press the City and County Councils for a quicker and more meaningful response to these needs.

## 5. Development of Derelict and Unused buildings

Residents are largely in favour of such buildings being converted to use as private residential accommodation, with a few showing interest in the creation of small business units. The most voiced opinion, however, is that the Parish is a place where people live rather than work.

## 6. New Housing

Of those responding to this topic, the majority favoured the provision of affordable housing but there was a significant minority who said that our Parish is not an appropriate location because of the lack of local businesses and inadequate public transport. Applications for private dwelling houses on new plots are likely to be unwelcome because of the danger of compromise of the rural nature of the environment. In this regard, the Parish Council takes seriously its new responsibilities under the Localism Act 2011.

## 7. Roads and Footpaths

Many residents, particularly those whose homes front the B3046 and Northington Hill, expressed great concern for safety of pedestrians in the Parish. The Parish Council has made repeated representations to the County Council for a 30 mph speed limit to include the dangerous bend at the entrance to the Grange. There have been a number of accidents near the junction with the Grange in recent years and horses and their riders have been involved in potentially serious incidents. An increasing number of heavy goods vehicles uses the B3046. Although the County Council is aware of the problem, it has not dealt with it satisfactorily. All that has happened, so far, is the provision of advisory 30 mph signs on this bend.

Kite's Hill and Stratton Lane are also bedevilled by speeding vehicles. The Parish Council will press for remedial measures.

Parents with young children need safe access to Grange Park. The creation of a footpath alongside the B3046, the other side of the line of trees, and a similar footpath from the village hall will allow visitors to reach the Woolpack Inn safely, providing a local amenity for the whole community. Improvements on these lines will require discussions with local landowners.

## 8. Open Spaces and Play Areas

The Parish benefits from having very attractive open spaces, especially the Watermeadow. The Parish Council is determined to protect these areas and footpaths such as the Millennium Walk. Several families expressed an interest in the development of a play area for young children. While the City Council's Open Space Strategy for 2012/13 recognises the lack of any play provision and identifies the potential for a play area at the Village Hall Field, the Parish Council is cognisant of the cost and safety implications. Generally our village houses have gardens for play - one of the reasons why residents choose to live in Northington, Swarraton and Totford.

## 9. Protection of Important Buildings

The Friends of St John's Charity helps to provide for the maintenance of the church which was built in 1890 and is Grade 2\* listed. The village hall is well maintained by its committee and major improvements were made in 2011. It enjoys an important place in the life of the Parish. The Grange is under the protection of English Heritage. The house is managed and maintained by both English Heritage and Grange Park Opera Company and the latter also maintains the theatre. The Parish Council, the Village Hall Committee and the Parochial Church Council have a keen interest in ensuring the long-term future of these buildings

## 10. Transport

Because local bus services are extremely limited, residents of our Parish without access to a car or non-drivers and young persons are at a considerable disadvantage. Rural areas suffer severely from this problem and, although local authority spending is currently subject to severe restraints, a more user-friendly feeder bus to Alresford, starting earlier and ending later, would ease the problem. The Parish Council will seek to keep this issue on the agenda.

## 11. Renewable Energy Projects

Our younger residents are strongly in favour of the concept of renewable energy projects. However, several other residents have serious reservations on the grounds that wind turbines can seriously spoil the environment. Solar panels can be an eyesore in a rural context but there was recognition of the fact that certain types of panels can be unobtrusive and in sympathy with the area.

## 12. Summary of Actions

The Parish Council will:

1. Press the City and County Councils to provide a fast and reliable broadband service across the Parish.
2. Work for the introduction of a 30 mph speed limit to include the dangerous bend at the entrance to the Grange.
3. Work for measures to curb speeding traffic on Kite's Hill and Stratton Lane.
4. Appoint a working group to consider in consultation with local landowners and adjacent property owners the feasibility of creating footpaths linking Northington, Swarraton and Totford with The Grange, the Village Hall and the Woolpack Inn.
5. In line with residents' opinion, encourage the re-use of redundant and under used buildings for residential and/or commercial use.
6. Discourage development threatening the particular character of the villages of Northington, Swarraton and Totford in the outstanding environment of the Candover Valley.