

# South Cerney Neighbourhood Character Assessment Report

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## 1 Summary

1.1 This Neighbourhood Character Assessment report is a record of the built and natural environment in 2017 produced as a part of the Neighbourhood Plan process. The report aims to highlight the important features of each part of the parish as well as defining some key characteristics, street scenes and viewpoints that the Neighbourhood Plan should help to conserve and enhance. It also identifies parts and features of the parish that could be improved as a part of Neighbourhood Plan process and policies.

1.2 The parish of South Cerney has a proud and long history dating back over a millennium. The old parts of the village of South Cerney date from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century and the basic layout of the village has remained unaltered since that time. The old centre of the village is characterised by its mix of properties from grand manor houses to former farm workers/artisan cottages and workshops. Properties have Cotswold stone elevations and Cotswold stone or slate roofs, dry stone walling, wide verges that give a sense of space and there are a number of important green spaces.

1.3 Over the past 60 years there have been numerous developments off the old road layout of the village allowing the centre of the village to retain its historic character. In general, as time has moved on through from the 1960s to the 2010s, the quality of the build of developments has improved with newer properties built in a more traditional Cotswold style with traditional style materials, although the sense of space has not always been retained.

1.4 The transition from village to countryside is remarkably rapid, partly due to the former railway line and canal routes and partly due to the local topography. There are many footpaths that make the countryside accessible and, in the main, tranquil. There are some stunning views, particularly to the north and west of the village. There is distinct separation from Cirencester, Siddington and Preston.

1.5 To the south of the village the landscape is dominated by former gravel pits. Some have been redeveloped as holiday and tourist facilities with a 'New England' style architecture that is very different to the traditional Cotswold vernacular.

1.6 Cerney Wick lies around 2 miles to the east, separated by the Water Park, and is an historic hamlet of former farm houses, farm workers cottages and some infill developments. Most are built in the traditional Cotswold style connected by narrow lanes with limited views.

## 2 Introduction

2.1 The Neighbourhood Character Assessment (NCA) of the parish of South Cerney has been produced in support of the Neighbourhood Plan (NP). It sets out the distinctive character of different parts of the parish.

2.2 The NCA is an important record of the character of the different areas of the parish. It sets out the key style and construction of the built environment, the important green spaces and the characteristics of the open countryside. Such analysis should assist in ensuring that any NP policies and new developments have regard to the setting into which they are planned and ensure that key views and features are preserved and enhanced.

2.3 The NCA report has been produced by a Working Group of volunteers from the NP Steering Committee and the South Cerney Trust.

2.4 There have been various landscape character assessments undertaken at the National<sup>1</sup>, County<sup>2</sup> and District<sup>3</sup> level as well as an Assessment of the Cotswold Water Parks<sup>4</sup>. These assessments have informed this Neighbourhood Character Assessment which aims to address the built environment and countryside as experienced by people who live and work in South Cerney.

## 3 Brief South Cerney History

3.1 The history of South Cerney dates back to pre-historic times due to the fertile lands in the area and the land was occupied during Roman times and before the Saxons founded the village over a thousand years. A royal charter was granted in 999AD and the modern day Parish still reflects the historic boundaries. There was a rash of building in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century when the South Cerney as exists today first took shape. Upper Up, Silver Street, Station Road, High Street, Church Lane and School Lane all date from that period.

3.2 In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century there was further expansion with both the canal and the railway bringing new growth. Census returns of the 19<sup>th</sup> century reveal a village of around a thousand people at first working on farming related activities in the parish, but later many travelled to work in Cirencester and Swindon, taking advantage of better wages in the new industries. Maps from the time show the layout of the village as at 1924.

3.3 The canal closed in the 1920s and the railway line in the 1960s. Both leave important industrial legacy. More recently gravel extraction has been a major shaping force, with restoration creating the Cotswold Water Park and the resultant leisure and holiday home sectors. Another

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<sup>1</sup> <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5865554770395136?category=587130>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/6800/glca\\_report\\_severn\\_\\_\\_other\\_vales\\_text\\_2006-51673.pdf](https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/6800/glca_report_severn___other_vales_text_2006-51673.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Assessment of landscapes outside the Cotswold AONB, White Consultants for CDC, June 2000

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/3xrnffaz/cotswold-water-park-landscape-character-assessment.pdf>

important development was the opening of the airfield in 1936. In 1967 the airfield was taken over by the Army and the Duke of Gloucester Barracks is an integral part of the parish.



The Village in 1924

3.4 The village of South Cerney has, for a number of centuries, been of a crucifix form spreading out from the intersection of what we now call High Street/Station Road with Clark's Hay/Silver Street/Ham Lane. The lanes and tracks have supported the expansion of the village over the centuries and it is perhaps not surprising that there are pinch points along their length where the layout of old buildings does not allow the full width roads and pavements that would be ideal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

3.5 Over the last 50 years or so there have been many estate and infill developments that have housed the burgeoning population. Most are development off the linear routes of the village and along a new line of development to the south along Broadway Lane.

3.6 The hamlet of Cerney Wick has a similar history to South Cerney village with many properties dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has not had the major new developments that have seen the village grow so much over the recent decades.

## 4 Character Areas

### 4.1 General Points

4.1.1 The task of setting out the character of all parts of the parish was guided by a methodology recommended by Planning Aid<sup>5</sup>England and summarised in Appendix 1 to this report.

4.1.2 A Working Group of members of the NP Steering Committee and volunteers from the South Cerney Trust proposed that the parish be split into seven areas which have an individual style and character. Walkabouts were then undertaken noting the character of the areas and amendments made to the boundaries as deemed appropriate. It should be noted that some parts of the parish have properties from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century sitting alongside infill developments from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Inevitably it has been hard to draw the line between some areas. Whilst a property may fall within one character area it may still have an impact on the setting and character of an adjacent area. Views into and out of character areas are important and, for example, changes to a property/development in Later Cerney could have an impact on nearby properties in Old Cerney.

4.1.3 The seven character areas are shown in the attached map.

4.1.4 In drawing the boundary of Old Cerney, account was taken of the boundary of the Conservation Area<sup>6</sup>. The Old Cerney boundary extends beyond the Conservation Area boundary where it was felt that other parts of the village should be included for the reasons given above. The boundary of the Commercial Area is taken as the employment area identified in the CDC Local Plan.

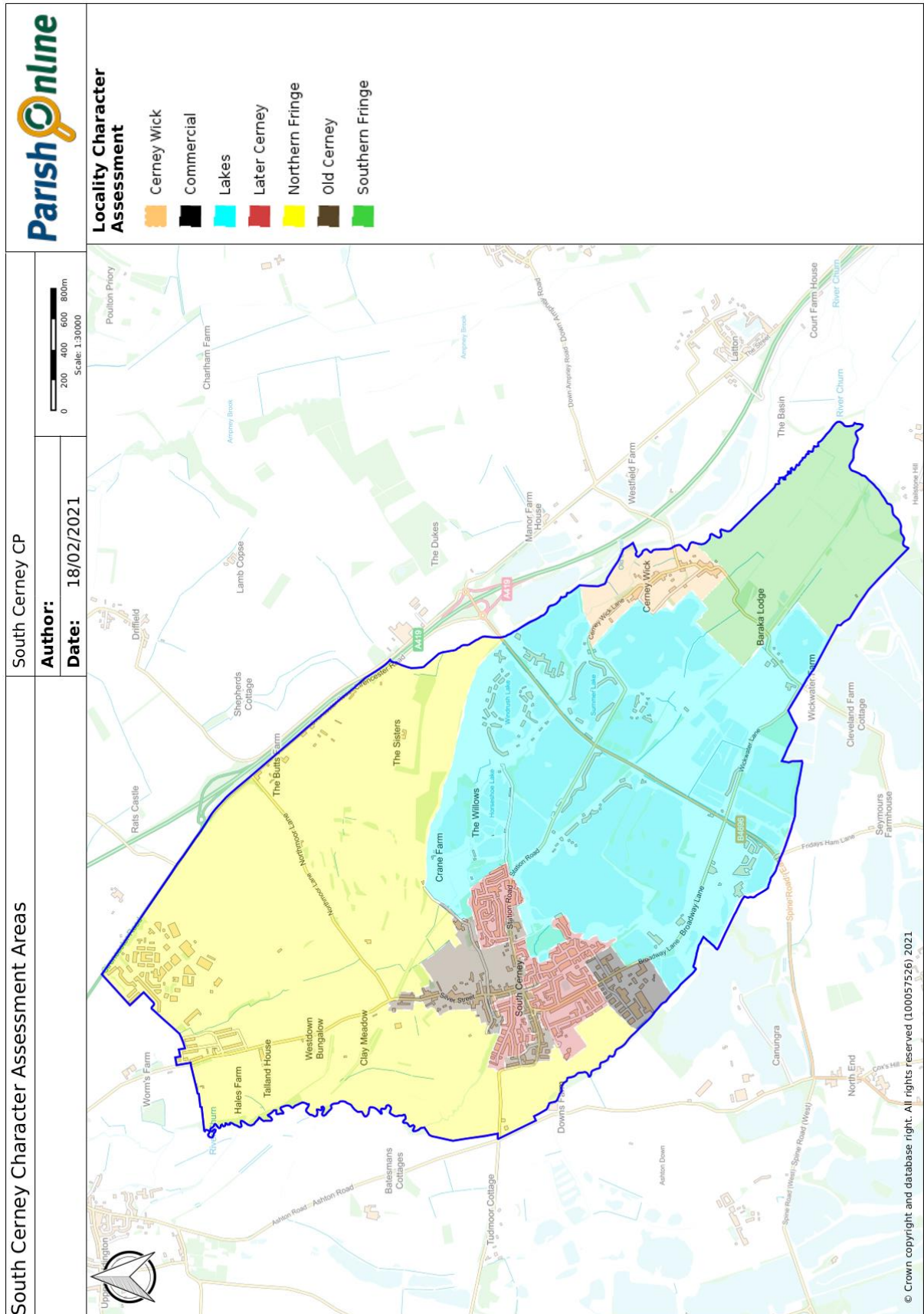
4.1.5 This report is not a detailed description of individual buildings but describes the basic scale and style of buildings and how they contribute to each area's character and attributes. A more detailed description of the individual listed buildings is contained in the Conservation Area Statement and full descriptions are available at the Historic England web site.

4.1.6 Each of these seven character areas was walked by groups of volunteers. The key characteristics of the areas are summarised as follows.

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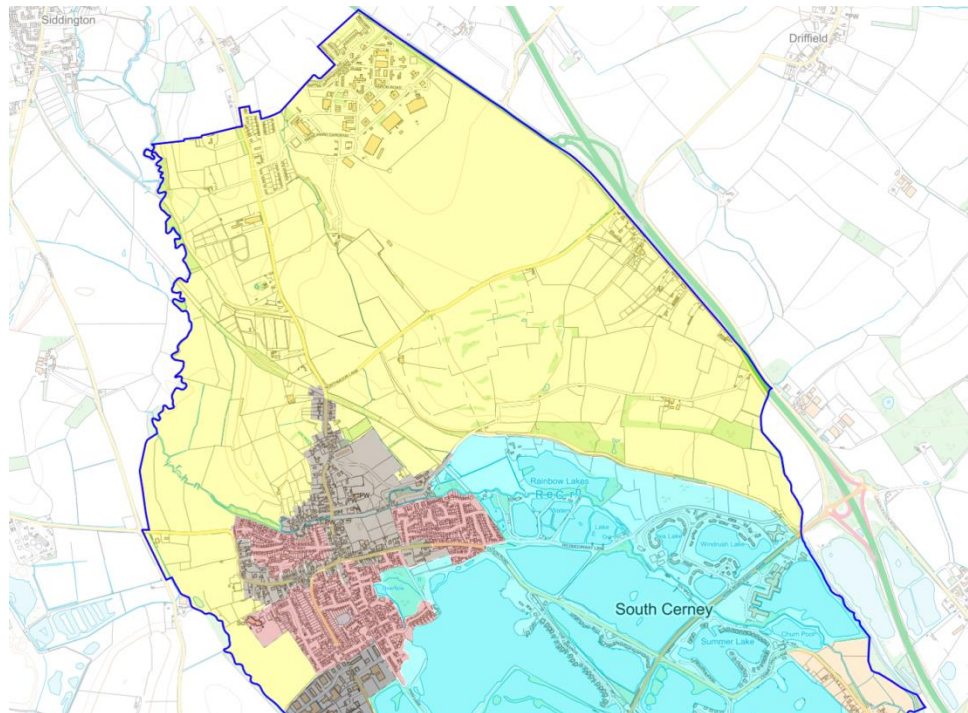
<sup>5</sup> How to prepare a character assessment to support design policy within a neighbourhood plan, Planning Aid England

<sup>6</sup> South Cerney Conservation Areas statement, CDC, December 2002



## 4.2 Northern Fringe

4.2.1 The Northern Fringe area is a mixture of historic water meadow, farmland, parkland, the airfield and the army camp and sports facilities and playing fields as set out below. The large open spaces, punctuated by only a few buildings, significantly contribute to the separation from Cirencester, Siddington and Preston. Older field boundaries are typically hedges with drainage ditches with Cotswold stone walling reserved for property boundaries.



4.2.2 An important feature of this area is the short distance with which the character changes from a village setting to a rural setting. The area is crossed by the route of the abandoned canal and dismantled railway line and there is evidence of the associated infrastructure in a number of locks, former lock keeper's cottages and railway bridges. Buildings in this area vary from traditional Cotswold Stone farm buildings, through pre and post war military facilities to more modern leisure facilities, such as the South Cerney Golf Club clubhouse and sports pavilions at the Upper Up playing fields. The east of the area is bounded by the A419 and the noise from the roads is a significant detractor to the enjoyment of this part of the Northern Fringe.

4.2.3 There are a number of important views in this area including the views from the old canal footpath looking over the parkland of the golf course, the views from Northmoor Lane towards the control tower and hangers of the airbase and the view from the old canal path to the north of Northmoor Lane looking up towards the base. But undoubtedly the most spectacular views are the 270 degree panoramas from the ridge behind Hill View Farm along to Hill House which looks north, west and south. The views from numerous vantage points along the ridge reveal few man-made structures other than the odd pylon in the far distance. It is just possible to make out the top of

Cirencester Parish Church – but there is little evidence of occupation of the landscape before you. It is hard to accept that such a rural panorama can be found so close to the village centre. The preservation and enhancement of all these views should be a high priority.

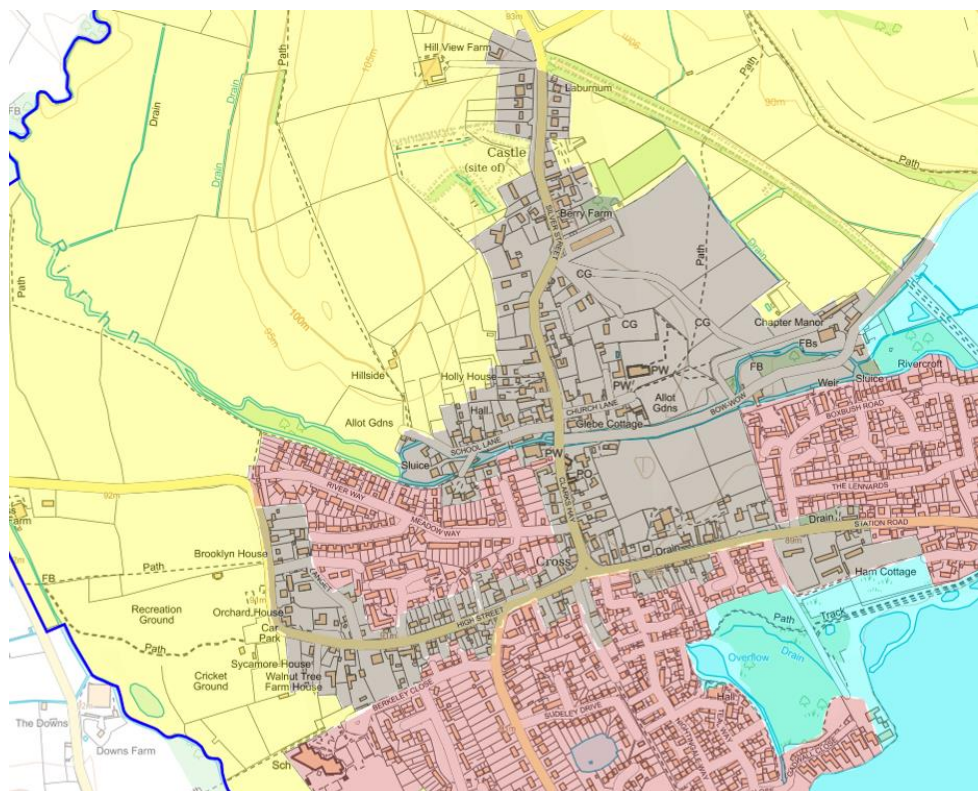
4.2.4 There are two important Local Green Spaces within the Northern Fringe as set out in the CDC Local Plan, the Upper Up playing fields and the Church Lane allotments.

4.2.5 Many parts of the Northern Fringe area are well used by ramblers and dog walkers alike. The area forms an important part of the parish and gives the parish its sense of separation from the settlements of Siddington, Cirencester and Preston.

### 4.3 Old Cerney

4.3.1 Old Cerney covers the areas that include most of the old properties in South Cerney village dating back from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as some later additions that impact on the setting of those older properties. The area naturally contains the iconic parts of the village built in the Cotswold vernacular of stone walls, stone or slate roofs, stone or brick chimneys, wooden sash and casement windows or metal casement windows, steep roof slopes with many dormers, dry stone boundaries and wide verges. The scale of properties in the area is varied from grand manor houses to former farmworker/artisan cottages and workshops. There are a number of important street scenes, village facilities and green and open spaces within the area.

4.3.2 The layout of the area follows the historic pattern of the village with Station Road/High Street running east to west and Silver Street/Clarks Hay north to south. The layout is varied but not regimented, reflecting the organic development of the village through the centuries. Church Lane and School Lane are narrow lanes in the centre of the village and Bow Wow is a unique lane with the River Churn on one side with the Mill Stream running down the other side with fields beyond that where a working farm (Boxbush Farm) remains in the heart of the village. The adaptation of this layout to 21<sup>st</sup> century living and the motor car helps explain problems with car parking, the narrow pinch points in the road layout and the intermittency of pavements and footpaths.



4.3.3 The garage on Clark's Hay stands out as an incongruous site. Formerly the village petrol station and garage, the site has become a vehicle recovery and repair operation with a forecourt filled with vehicles, some of which are damaged along with associated recovery vehicles. The garage is no longer a village facility and is simply a business that could be more suitably located in the designated Lakeside Business Park. The recently opened Co-op on the High Street is a useful additional retail business that serves the needs of local people. However, the traffic issues that it has brought with traffic bottleneck at a scenic viewpoint along the High Street, parking along the street and even parking on the iconic green verges as well as increased emissions from vehicles waiting outside the shop are all serious detractors.

4.3.4 Whilst there are many key landmarks, viewpoints and green spaces in Old Cerney, the most important ones, which deserve the greatest degree of protection through the policies in the South Cerney Neighbourhood Plan and The CDC Local Plan, are:

**Landmarks:** The Cross, The War Memorial, Bow Wow, Atkyns Manor, Edwards College, All Hallows Church, Village Hall

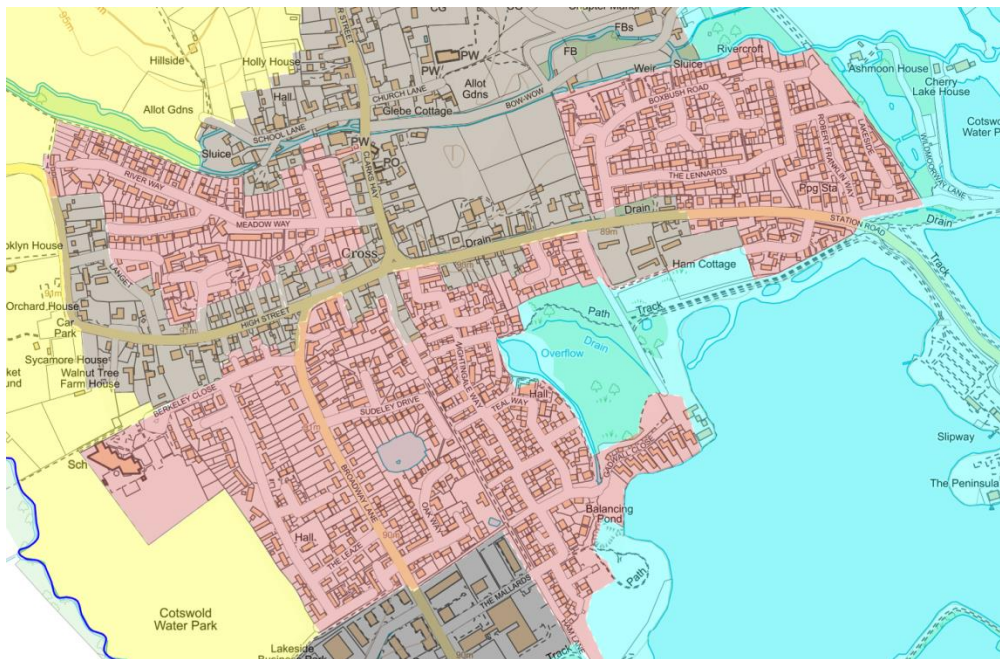
**Viewpoints:** View north up Silver Street from the bridge at Bow Wow, the view east along Bow Wow from Silver Street, the view from Bow Wow across the fields towards Bodbush Farm, view west along School Lane from before the Old School building, view towards Edwards College from the footpath on parkland at Chapter Manor, view east along Station Road from the Cross, view west along High Street from the War Memorial, view of All Hallows Church from the allotments.



**Green Spaces:** Mown verges along parts of Silver Street, Station Road and High Street, fields at Boxbush Farm backing onto Bow-Wow, parkland between Chapter Manor and Edwards College, allotments and bowling green by All Hallows and the site of Cerney Castle.

## 4.4 Later Cerney

4.4.1 Later Cerney comprises a number of larger scale developments that date from every decade from the 1950s to the present time as well as a significant number of infill and backland developments. Most developments have been designed to complement the traditional Cotswold character by utilising stone coloured walls. As time has moved on the building materials used have changed from reconstituted stone to artificial/imitation stone through to the use of natural stone meaning that the later developments fit in better with the Cotswold vernacular. Later developments have also utilised imitation stone roof tiles or slates, again consistent with the appearance of older buildings. This is to be applauded. However, the space around older developments in terms of front gardens, verges and the spacing of properties has not been maintained and many newer developments do not enjoy the sense of openness enjoyed by earlier developments. There are also a number of brick facades in developments between Broadway Lane and Berkeley Close.

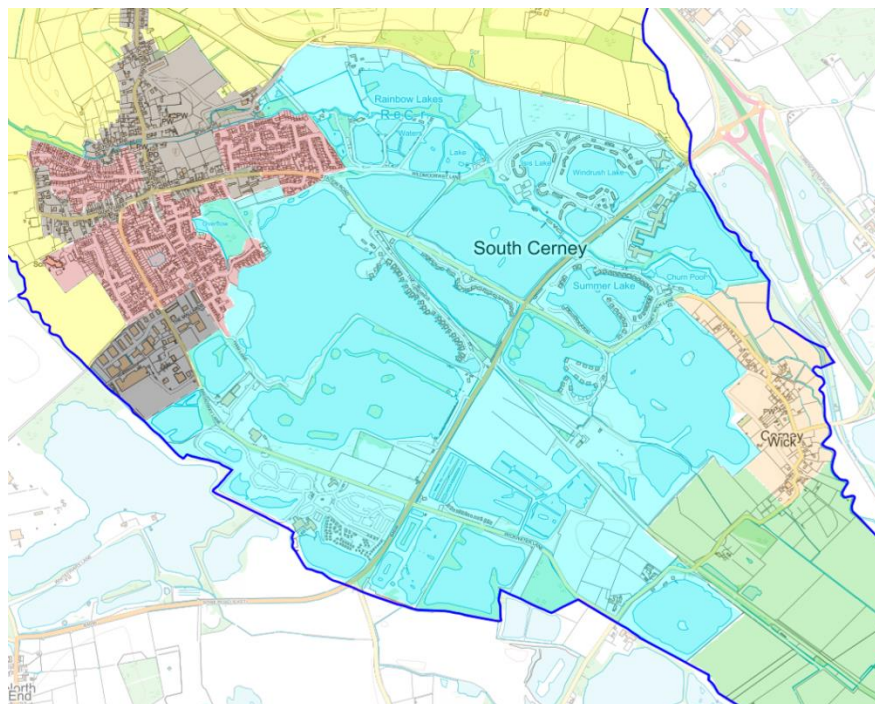


4.4.2 There are three important green spaces in the Newer Cerney area, the playground at Robert Franklin Way, the green outside properties in Berkeley Close and the amenity area at Cerney on the Water.

4.4.3 One obvious feature of the post 1990 developments at The Limes, Kingfisher Place and Cerney on the Water is the absence of the wire-scape of electric and telephone wires that spoil many other street scenes and views in the parish.

## 4.5 The Lakes

4.5.1 The lakes are mainly 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century features resulting from the gravel extraction across the area. Restoration has resulted in most lakes being privately owned and many developed for holiday/tourist homes and others for recreational pursuits including fishing and water sports.

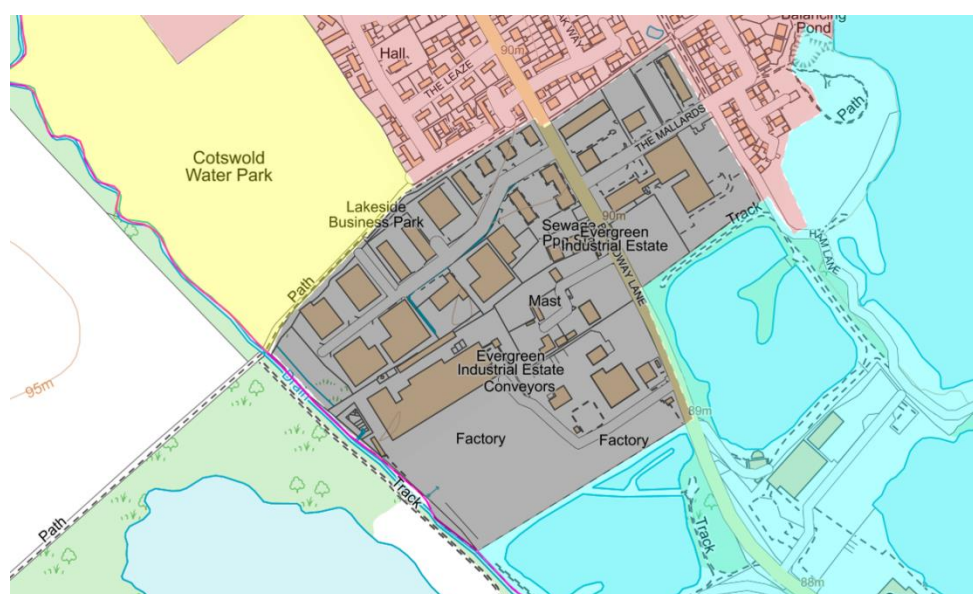


4.5.2 There have been a number of developments comprising holiday homes within the water parks area over the past 20 years. These houses are wooden New England style lodges that are painted in pastel colours located on the shore line of the lakes. There are a mixture of detached/semi-detached and terraced lodges. Some developments have clubhouses of a similar construction as well as other leisure facilities. There is no public access to these private lakes.

4.5.3 Elsewhere there have been other businesses set up along the Spine Road and Broadway Lane including Cotswold Hoburne, St Johns Care Home, De Vere Hotel, Berite and Packers Leaze. Some of these businesses, such as the De Vere Hotel sit well in their local environment and are of a Cotswold style while others such as the Care Home are in large New England style which looks incongruous with the Cotswold style and setting. Berite and Packers Leaze industrial sites are inconsistent with the tourist and recreational facilities that are adjacent to them. There are more appropriate sites within the Commercial Area for these businesses and moves to the Commercial Area should be supported in the longer term.

## 4.6 Commercial Area

4.6.1 The business park is a mixture of older and new industrial units and offices. The more recent buildings in Lakeside Business Park and the Mallards, to the north of the area, are large purpose built offices and light industrial units and warehouses and are constructed of reconstituted stone with large windows and corrugated aluminium roofs and side panels. The boundaries and approaches are sensitively landscaped with trees and shrubs which will improve as they mature. The Business Park tries to harmonise with the setting. The major issue with these developments is the lack of car parking space which causes problems due to parking on Broadway Lane.

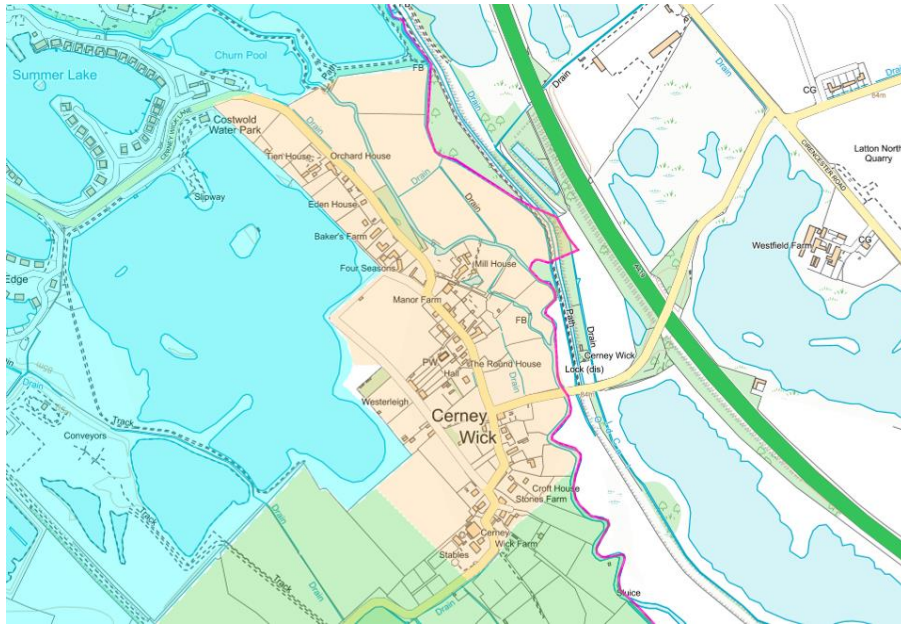


4.6.2 In the more southerly part of the Commercial Area the buildings are older and become increasingly less attractive with some unsightly porta-cabins and transport yards. Parts of this area would benefit from redevelopment.

4.6.3 The Redland Centre is at the southern edge of the area and as well as modern facilities there are some rusty, and presumably disused, facilities and a chimney. The area would benefit from the removal of these disused facilities.

## 4.7 Cerney Wick

4.7.1 Cerney Wick is a small pretty hamlet negatively impacted by noise from the concrete surface of the nearby A419. It is made up principally of older farm buildings now all converted into housing, later housing together with a pub, church and small village hall set in an area of flat low lying flood meadows to the west of the River Churn, accessed by two narrow roads from the Spine Road and the old A419.

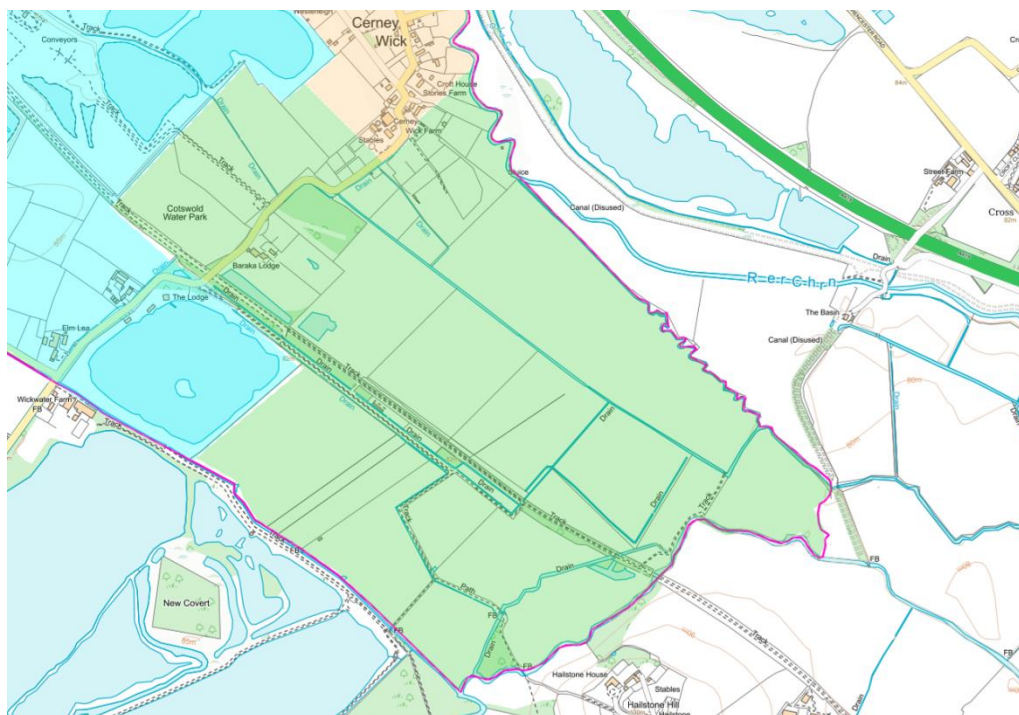


4.7.2 Older properties vary in scale from older farmhouses to farmer workers cottages and former farm buildings, many extended. They are of traditional Cotswold construction with stone elevations and stone roof, although there are some slate roofs. More modern infill properties are of either stone or reconstituted stone. Windows vary from timber to metal frames and uPVC. Many properties have spacious front gardens enclosed by traditional dry stone walls whilst others are built to the edge of the plots.

4.7.3 The footpath alongside the sailing club lake offers a picturesque view of the sailing lake towards the machinery of the gravel industry.

## 4.8 Southern Fringe

4.8.1 The Southern Fringe is an area of flat rough grazing land to the south of the parish, divided into fields by hedgerows and ditches, crossed by the River Churn, bordered by the River Thames and crossed by the old railway line/Sustrans 45 route. There are few buildings. The infrastructure for future gravel extraction is being put in place.



4.8.2 The area is far from peaceful as the noise from traffic on the nearby A419 is constant. The landscape value is not high and, whilst there are few high value views looking either into or out of the parish, the view of Hailstone Hill from the tranquil permissive path by the side of the infant River Thames is notable. Also, the view from the Thames Path towards Cricklade Church and the SSSIs of North Meadow link together Saxon settlements which are now separated by a county boundary. The area does contain some important SSSIs.

## 5 Areas for Improvement

5.1 The Working Group have identified a number of issues that could be addressed as a part of the NP process that would enhance the character and setting of the parish and it is proposed that these issues should be in the formulation of NP objectives and policies.

1. Garage in Clark's Hay – the repair garage in Clark's Hay is completely out of character with the Conservation Area and the surrounding historic buildings and street scene. The petrol pump canopy, parked recovered vehicles, recovery trucks and the style of the garage itself make this an incongruous development that detracts from the setting of the centre of the village.
2. Wirescape throughout Old Cerney – many views into and out of the Old Cerney area are spoilt by the wirescape of electricity and telephone wires. For example, it is impossible to view School Lane, Silver Street or High Street without the eye being drawn to the linear feature of wires and poles. By contrast, newer developments such as Cerney on the Water enjoy views that are not impacted by strung wires.

3. Access to lakeside areas – it was noticeable in the walkabouts that irrespective of the NCA area, access to lakeside areas was generally restricted. Having endured the years of gravel extraction and lorry movements, the general public are excluded from most lakeside areas with restored lakes privately owned and fenced off.
4. Fencing in the Business Area – some of the older fencing in the business area runs alongside footpaths and pavements and is not always appropriate and in some instances is topped off with barbed wire. More recent fencing demonstrates that security needs can be met without resorting to barbed wire.
5. Inappropriate business developments – there are a number of business developments in the Lakes NCA that are inconsistent with the setting and tranquillity of parts of the Lakes area and inconsistent with holiday homes and tourist/leisure activities.
6. Business Area older facilities – a number of sites in the Commercial NCA would be unlikely to be permitted today and redevelopment of stacked porta-cabin offices would enhance the area.
7. The Sustrans 45 cycleway south of the Spine Road is in a very poor state of repair with very large potholes that need to be filled with gravel, an ironic situation given the proximity of gravel extraction.

## Appendix 1 - Methodology

The development of the NP has been led by a Steering Committee of the Parish Council and the NCA process has been undertaken by a Working Group comprising members of the Steering Committee and volunteers from the South Cerney Trust.

The assessment has taken account of a number of documents and reports in addition to the Landscape Character Assessment reports listed in Section 2 of this report.

The Village Appraisal, South Cerney and Cerney Wick, 1999

South Cerney Conservation Area Statement, CDC, Dec 2002

How to prepare a character assessment to support design policy within a neighbourhood plan, Planning Aid England

Character assessment pro forma notes, Planning Aid England

An NCA is an integral part of the evidence base to support a NP and guidance documents from Planning Aid England formed the framework for the assessment. A Working Group started the process by splitting South Cerney into areas of distinctive character. Seven areas were identified:

Northern Fringe

Old Cerney

Later Cerney

The Lakes

Commercial Area

Cerney Wick

Southern Fringe

Groups of volunteers then walk about each of the character areas noting the important facets of the built and natural environment as set out in the Planning Aid England guidance to help define the character of the area.