

Copas Farms – Vision Document for Cookham Neighbourhood Plan

1. Background

- 1.1. The first records for the Copas Family living in Cookham date back to the mid-1600s. Originally we were bargemen working on the Thames before becoming licensees of The Chequers Public House in Cookham Dean in 1827. The family started farming in 1890 using Commoners Rights on the Cookham Commons and purchased the first land in Cookham in 1901.
- 1.2. There are two sides of the family still living and farming in Cookham. These are the family of Tom Copas, who operate the Copas Partnership and run the turkey business at Kings Coppice Farm, and the family of Geoffrey Copas who operate Copas Farms and run an arable and Pick Your Own business based at Lower Mount Farm. Both sides of the family have substantial landholdings in the village and a genuine interest in seeing the Cookhams evolve in a sustainable way for future generations to continue to live and work in the Parish.
- 1.3. This vision document has been prepared by Copas Farms and it is understood that the Copas Partnership will be making separate representation to the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.4. Cookham Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Cookham and is requesting that residents and businesses based in Cookham engage in helping to develop the plan. Cookham Parish Council states in its consultation documentation that the plan is an opportunity to “identify and meet future needs and to shape development”
- 1.5. The consultation documentation also states that by having a completed Neighbourhood Plan in place this helps to deliver 25% of money raised from developer contribution, paid through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), to be spent on projects in Cookham. This figure would only be 15% without a plan in place.
- 1.6. The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Local Plan 2013 – 2033, which is currently at Examination and if found to be sound will be adopted in early 2021. Three sites inside the Cookham Parish have been proposed for residential development. These are:
 - HA38 – Cookham Gas Holder – Whyteladyes Lane, Cookham – Allocation 40 residential units.
 - HA39 – Land east of Strande Park, Cookham – Allocation 20 residential units
 - HA40 – Land north of Lower Mount Farm, Long Lane, Cookham – Allocation 200 residential units

Therefore in the next 12 years approximately 260 houses are likely to be built in Cookham. Forty percent of these houses will be Affordable Homes and will not be subject to CIL payments. This leaves 156 houses subject to CIL and if you assume an average houses size of 133m² this results in a total of 20,748m² subject to CIL payments. Currently the CIL rate set by RBWM is £295/m² resulting in a total CIL payment of £6,120,660. When the Neighbourhood Plan is in place this will mean that Cookham Parish Council will receive £1,530,165 to help deliver and fund community improvements and/or projects from the three proposed allocated sites.

- 1.7. CIL payments are index linked to BCIS All-in Tender Price Index and the £1,530,165 identified above are in addition to the CIL money due for any housing built in Cookham

since 2016 and any windfall housing (not on allocated sites) that receives planning permission in the future. Due to this it is estimated that approximately £2 million could be available for Cookham Parish Council to deliver and fund community improvements up to 2033 which equates to £166,666 per annum.

- 1.8. Due to this Copas Farms see the proposed Cookham Neighbourhood Plan as a 'once in a generation' opportunity to both protect and enhance the village which our family have lived and worked in for over 350 years and deliver positive planned change in the villages of Cookham for future generations of residents and businesses.
- 1.9. It is our view that this Neighbourhood Plan should be extensively researched and consulted on, so that every resident and business owner has an opportunity to express their views on the plan and input with schemes for community improvements. All forms of communication should be used (social media, leaflet drops etc.). It should not be a plan made up behind closed doors by the few. This should be a parishioners plan with a wide scope of views considered to ensure that it is as democratic as possible. This vision document expresses Copas Farms views of how we feel the village could be improved. It is fully accepted that not everybody will hold the same views but we hope it will create discussion to assist in the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan of all the residents and businesses in Cookham to deliver benefits for the village as a whole.

2. Farming and the Environment

2.1. Future of Farming

Copas Farms is the last active fruit or arable farming business to be based in Cookham. As a family we are passionate about farming and the environment and we are keen to continue our farming activities in the Cookham villages for future generations. However farming is a business activity and not a hobby and our farming operations need to remain viable.

For our arable business the main change will come from Britain leaving the European Union. It has already been agreed that the subsidy regime for UK farmers is going to dramatically change. Subsidy payments from the EU will stop and the current payments based on land area are to be phased out over the next 7 years with the last payment being made for harvest 2027.



Photo of Oilseed Rape growing at Lower Mount Farm 2014

The new regime to be introduced is called Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMs) based on the principle of Public Money for Public Good. It is currently unclear what

the exact form these support payments will take, however, the effect on the Landscape is likely to be significant.

In the future this is likely to lead to a fine balance between food production and environmental enhancement. The more productive land is likely to be farmed more intensively with crops for specific end users requiring full traceability and modern storage and processing facilities.

On the less productive land, where farmers will not be able to compete with cheaper food imported from lower cost production areas like Brazil, there is likely to be a return to mixed farming using more traditional techniques and working closer with nature. This will lead to an increase in livestock (cattle and sheep) numbers in the village requiring specialised winter facilities. Alternatively, more land will be taken out of production and used for carbon capture schemes which could involve the planting of more trees and increased use of cover crops and fallow.

Our fruit business is less reliant on Government support but the current trends of responding to increasing unpredictable weather patterns are likely to continue with increased use of new irrigation and crop protection schemes.

The Pick Your Own at Lower Mount Farm is becoming increasingly popular, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic as the general public looked to reconnect with the countryside. Customers continue to enjoy the fresh air and educating their children about how food is grown and harvested and also the nutritional benefits of fruit and vegetables.

If these trends continue the Pick Your Own will become more of a leisure activity with more picnicking and events onsite as this becomes a countryside destination for customers.



Photo of Laura and George Copas picking raspberries at Lower Mount Farm

2.2. Arboriculture and Estate Maintenance

At Copas Farms we take our role as custodians of the countryside seriously. Each year we review hedges and trees on our Estate and assess any maintenance requirements and opportunities for further planting. As part of this process we are continually looking to create wildlife corridors with new planting and thickening of existing hedges to link wildlife areas.

In the past year we have planted over 1 km of hedges and 1,750 trees on the whole Estate. We also maintain the older trees on the estate which when left unattended for a number of

years can become dangerous. When undertaking this work generally the larger branches are removed chipped and used in our biomass boiler and the smaller branches are generally disposed of on site. Copas Farms is committed to continuing this process in the coming years.

The Cookham Neighbourhood Plan could consider how the Parish Council could likewise look to increase the tree cover and environmental benefits from the areas it is responsible for. For example, some of the CIL money could be used to fund woodland projects on the Alfred Major Field, perhaps along the railway line, to make this area more accessible to nature.

2.3. Chalk Downland at Cockmarsh and Winterhill Common

The agricultural land around Cookham that is not managed by man or grazed by animals naturally resorts to scrubland with hawthorn and bramble establishing. Next larger species of trees establish cutting out the light to the ground below and resulting in woodland. This process has taken place on Winterhill Common (below the National Trust Car Park) resulting in the loss of the view and the natural chalk downland and the process is now happening on Cockmarsh Common. The escarpment on Cockmarsh Common is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to calcareous grassland which is species rich with plant varieties like rock-rose, squinancywort, milkwort and rare wetland plants like galingale. If the expansion of the scrub is left unchecked these calcareous grassland plants which also help to support many endangered butterflies will be lost from Cookham.



Picture taken from the National Trust Car Park looking towards Marlow taken between the two World Wars



Copy of Postcard of Winter Hill from approximately 1905



Picture showing Cockmarsh between the two World Wars.



Copy of Postcard of Winter Hill from approximately 1950's

These areas of land are owned by the National Trust and grazed by the Cookham Commoners. Copas Farms as local residents and commoners believe that the Neighbourhood plan and Cookham Parish Council should actively promote and work with the Landowners and Commoners to restore the chalk downland in Cookham before it is lost. It is hoped that this will result in the return of the endangered Chalkhill Blue, Small Blue, Skippers, Small Copper and Marble White butterflies.

Please note that the Copas Family controls roughly 45% of the Commoners Rights (right to graze animals) and are happy to assist with this process.

2.4. Cookham Moor

Copas Farms feel that over the last 20 years Cookham Moor has become unkempt and has degenerated detracting from the beauty of Cookham's historic centre. The Common is slowly becoming overgrown with weeds and small poplar trees and the pond is being left unmanaged and will eventually fully silt up, stopping the flow of water under the Causeway Bridge.

It seems that environmental concerns for the protection of every bug and weed has led to paralysis of action resulting in nature taking over in a negative way and changing the landscapes we all benefit from. Areas away from the public should be left for nature and areas of public access should be maintained for the public. Cookham Moor should be maintained for the backdrop of the historic setting of the village. Cookham Parish Council, through the Neighbourhood Plan, should encourage the National Trust to reinvest the money raised from the Pay & Display car park on Cookham Moor into maintaining the immediate area.

3. Community Facilities

3.1. Marsh Meadow

Since 1994 Copas Farms has made Marsh Meadow available as public open space under the management of the Marsh Meadow Management Committee. We are keen to give back to the village and it is the family's intention to continue and enhance these arrangements at Marsh Meadow while these are positively supported by the Parish Council and the wider community. In addition to the general public open space the current and proposed uses include:

3.1.1. Cookham Regatta

Cookham Regatta restarted in 2000 and is organised by Cookham Bridge Rotary Club and Marlow Thames Rotary Club. This raises funds for charity and achieved roughly £15,000 in 2018 and £16,000 in 2019. Copas Farms support this event and does not charge a land rent. We wish for this event to continue and expand in the future as it is a great community event providing an opportunity for villages to get together.

3.1.2. Cookham Let's Rocks the Moor

Cookham Let's Rocks the Moor was started by Cookham Residents Mike Clark and Nick Billingham in 2009 as a charity fund raising event. In the 10 years to 2019 it has donated £242,209 to local charities. Copas Farms has not taken any site rent from this event to maximise the amount of the charity donation. It is hoped these arrangements will continue into the future and perhaps increase to a two day event which would significantly increase the fund raising potential.



Photo – Let's Rock the Moor

3.1.3. Conservation Pond

In 2010 Copas Farms organised for the Conservation Pond on Marsh Meadow to be created as part of the Environment Agency's work to improve the flood defences of Cookham Village. This is currently under Wild Cookham management to promote this nature resource to local schools. Copas Farms would like to see Wild Cookham take this opportunity forward and enhance this environmental and educational resource.

If a material environmental enhancement can be achieved at the Conservation Pond, Copas Farms would be happy to consider dedicating additional land for environmental reasons. For example land at the end of Marsh Meadows which is either side of the railway line by the tunnel.



Photo of Nesting Swans at the Conservation Pond – Marsh Meadows where James Copas prepared the raft with reeds

3.1.4. Future Consideration

The popularity of Marsh Meadow and the wider area with the general public has been increasing since 1994 and it is now a well-used and much loved local amenity space. Particularly at Bank Holiday weekends and during the Covid Pandemic lock down period, the National Trust Pay & Display car park on Cookham Moor could not cope with the demand and this lead to delays and blockages on the main road as cars waited for a parking space to come available. The Neighbourhood Plan should consider how the parking provision in this area can be improved to meet demands. This could be in the form of a permeable stabilised grass parking area either on Cookham Moor or in the equine field on Marsh Meadows where it would be screened by the hedge and treeline.

3.2. Battlemead Common

In December 2018 the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead purchased 110 acres at White Place Farm for £1 million with a view to opening up the land for public use. Over 50% of this land falls within the Cookham Neighbourhood Plan Designation Area. The Neighbourhood Plan should consider how a balance on this land should be achieved between public access and environmental protection and enhancement. Additionally it should consider how public access at Battlemead Common can be secured in perpetuity through the Neighbourhood Plan and whether this area needs special protection/designation in the Neighbourhood Plan.

On a point of information it should be recognised that the land is not part of the Cookham Commons and has never been a Common.

3.3. Alternative Pedestrian Route around the Pound

It is generally accepted that the pedestrian access through the Pound is substandard and not wide enough for two pedestrians to pass and unsuitable for double prams and wheelchairs etc. The Neighbourhood Plan should explore ways to improve this ongoing situation.

One option could be to create an alternative pedestrian route through the Poundfield, across Terry's Lane and to the National Trust car park on Cookham Moor by connecting the two north-south footpaths with a new east-west link path. See illustrated plan below. This would need to be delivered through consultation between the wider Copas Family, the National Trust and the Cookham Parish Council. We would suggest that the path is sensitively hard surfaced to make this route as appealing as possible for users during the winter months. Copas Farms are supportive of the principal of this proposal. This could be delivered as part of the Cookham Cycle Track proposals outlined below.



Proposal plan of Alternative Pedestrian Route around the Pound

3.4. Cookham Cycle Track

Cycling is increasing in popularity and is a great sport for all ages to engage in physical activity on a regular basis with all the health benefits that flow from an active lifestyle.

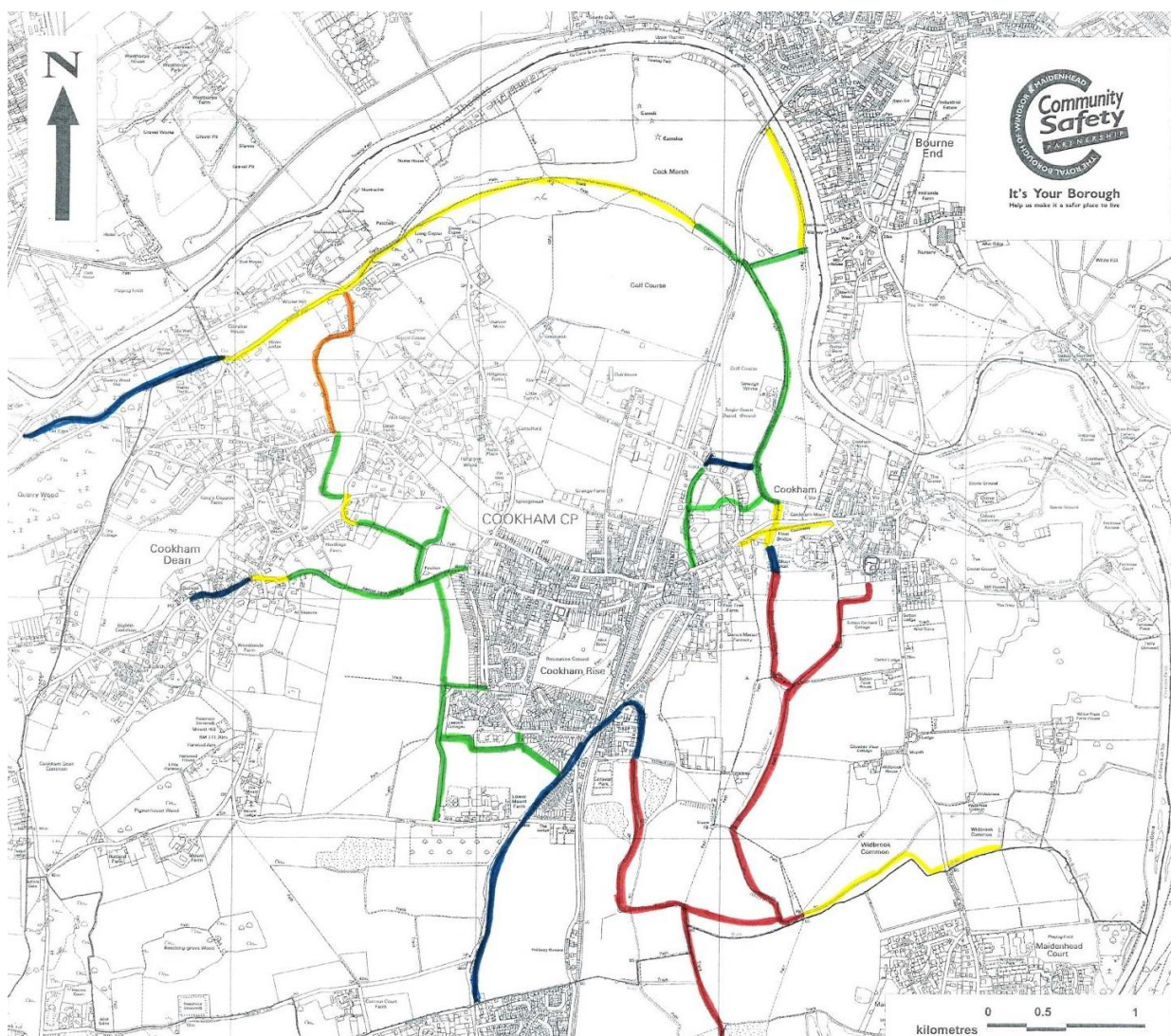
Richard Copas has been promoting a circular cycle track around Cookham with the local landowners and through the Local Access Forum at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The main proposals for the route are shown below. Copas Farms hope that the Parish Council will actively include these proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The exact route would need to be agreed between the Parish Council and the individual landowners but the intention is to:

- Create a safe place for the residents of Cookham to cycle away from the main vehicle routes through the village
- Create a cycle link to the three schools in Cookham and also the secondary schools at Furze Platt and the proposed new secondary school at Spencers Field to the north of Maidenhead.
- Create a circular route around Cookham for residents to exercise on and enjoy the scenic beauty. The proposed circular route in the plan below is 8.9km

- Create cycle assess to the village sport facilities with links to the Cricket Club at Whyteladyes Lane and the football pitches on Long Lane
- Improve the cycle path linkage between Cookham Dean, Cookham Rise and Cookham and improve the connections to Bourne End (via the Railway Bridge), to Marlow (via Quarry Wood) and Maidenhead (via the existing Cycle path adjoining the Switchback Road)
- The cycle track could be used for an annual cycle rally to raise money for charity

The map below shows what could be achieved. The red lines represent land owned by Summerleaze, the yellow is on land owned by the National Trust, the green is on land owned by the Copas Family, the orange is on land owned by the Philips Family and the blue land is either highway land or other landowners.

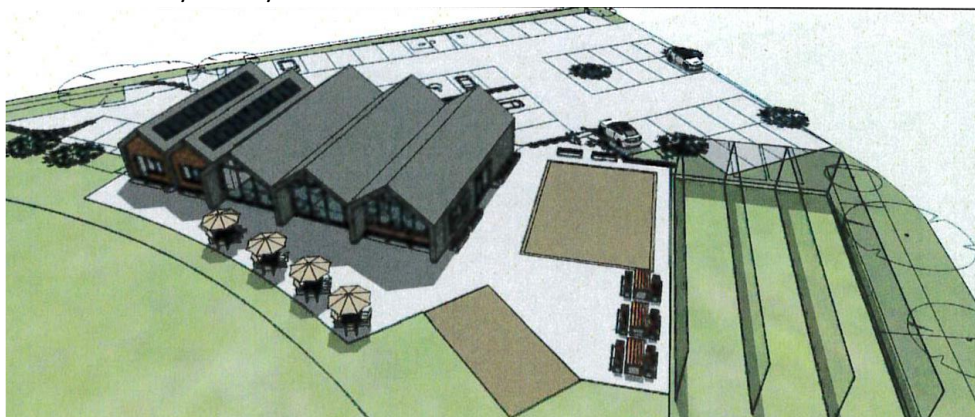


Suggested Plan for a Cookham Cycle Track

Richard Copas has made contact with the National Trust and Summerleaze who are supportive of the principles. The routes would need a hard surface to make them suitable for cycling. Copas Farms hope that the Parish Council will actively include these proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan and consider them suitable for CIL funding.

3.5. Cookham Dean Cricket Club – Replacement Pavilion

The Copas Family is a long term supporter of Cookham Dean Cricket Club and in 1996 we donated 0.75 acres of land for the expansion of the grounds at Whyteladyes Lane. Due to this at Copas Farms we were pleased that Cookham Dean Cricket Club has recently received planning permission for a replacement pavilion at its Whyteladyes Lane facility under Planning Application Number 19/00491/FULL.



3D Visualisation of Cookham Dean Cricket Club Replacement Pavilion

We understand that the build costs are approximately £600,000 and the Club has already raised £100,000. Therefore, another £200,000 is required to get to the magic £300,000 mark required to trigger grant applications. I would suggest that Cookham Parish Council should consider this a great candidate for funding through the CIL money raised, as this will be an amazing community facility for generations to come.

An alternative delivery option could be to move the community events from Pinder Hall, which suffers from a lack of dedicated parking, to the Cookham Dean Cricket Club's new facility buildings. This would release Pinder Hall for redevelopment, raising capital for Cookham Parish Council to redirect to the construction of the new facilities building.

3.6. Cookham Dean Football Club

Cookham Dean Football Club have applied for planning permission for a new club house on the new sports pitches on Long Lane. This proposal is fully supported by Copas Farms as likewise it will offer a great community facility. Similar to the Cricket Pavilion, Cookham Parish Council should consider using a proportion of the CIL money to support these proposals.



Site plan for Cookham Dean Football Club proposed pavilion on Long Lane

3.7. Equestrian Facilities

In Cookham a number of the long term equestrian facilities have been lost in the villages to alternative uses. There are many enthusiastic horse people in the village and locals still have a desire for their children to grow up with the opportunity of an equestrian experience. Due to this the demand for equestrian facilities in Cookham remains very high. The Neighbourhood Plan should positively support appropriate equestrian facilities in the villages to prevent the proliferation of adhoc mobile stabling scattered throughout the greenbelt.

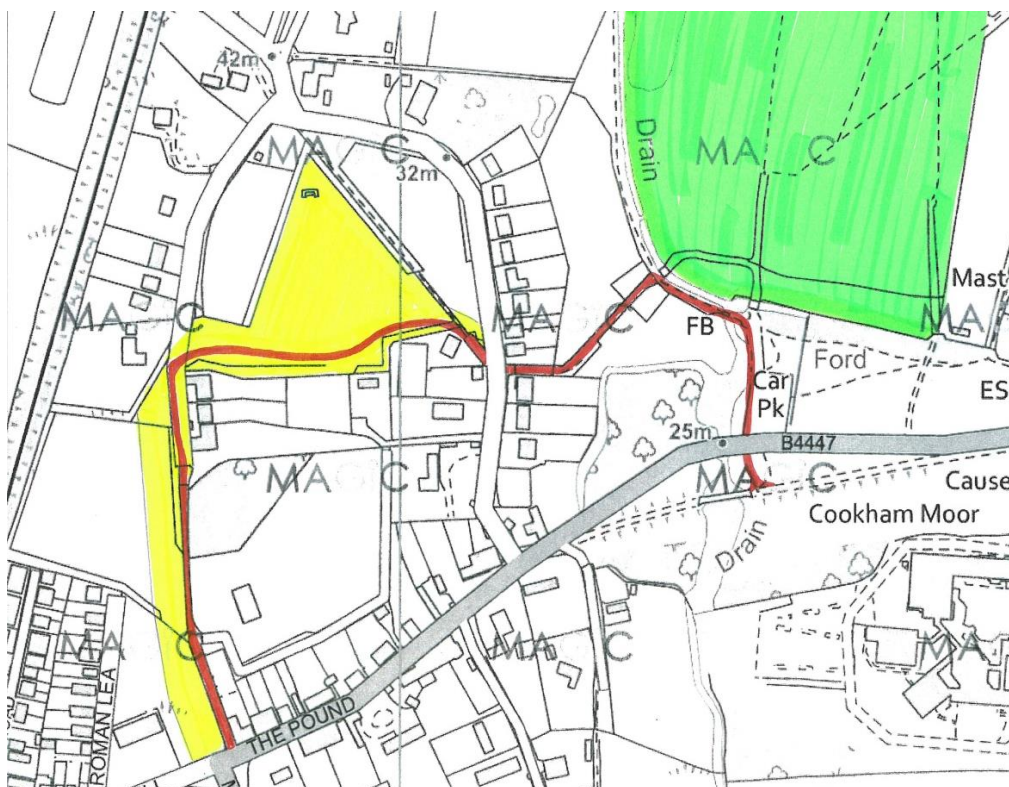
Consideration should also be given to the expansion of the local bridlepath network, similar to the proposed Cookham Cycle Track to give a circular route for horse riders through Cookham which is away from the main vehicle carriageways.

3.8. Public Open Space

As discussed earlier, since 1994 Copas Farms has made Marsh Meadow available as public open space for the benefit of Cookham Village. We consider that this facility should be expanded with additional recreational space made available. We consider that a link should be created between Marsh Meadow and the heart of Cookham Rise with a green corridor created along the route of the alternative pedestrian route around the Pound. See plan below.

This space could additionally be used by the Sir Stanley Spencer Gallery to create a walking trail around Cookham so budding artists / visitors to the gallery could gain access to locations where Sir Stanley Spencer painted his pictures.

On the plan below the green area is the southern part of the existing Marsh Meadow public open space. The red line is the proposed alternative pedestrian route around the Pound and the yellow area is the suggested addition public open space. In the northern part of the new proposed additional public open space, is a suggested bench could be located at the point where Sir Stanley Spencer painted the Pound as shown in the picture.



Proposal Plan for Additional Public Open Space at the Pound



Painting by Sir Stanley Spencer – The Pound

3.9. Local Business Facilities

Cookham is fortunate to have a high proportion of business owner managers and budding entrepreneurs amongst its residents. The Cookham Neighbourhood Plan should look at ways of helping to support local businesses and residents looking to establish businesses in premises close to where they live to reduce the need to travel. In addition employment uses that create local jobs or provide services to local residents should be actively encouraged.

With the increase in internet shopping and home deliveries waste, particularly cardboard and plastic waste, is dramatically increasing. The Neighbourhood Plan could look at ways of promoting local recycling schemes on a neighbourhood level for local businesses and residents.

At Copas Farms we are fortunate to be able to offer facilities for local businesses at Lower Mount Farm. We are aware of a demand for childcare facilities for working parents and onsite recreational facilities like a café or gym for employees.

With the move towards a zero carbon economy local business facilities will be required to meet higher energy performance standards from their built environment. For some this will be in the form of improved insulation or carbon neutral heating. However, for some buildings this will require wholesale building redevelopment. The Neighbourhood Plan should be supportive of the transition to a zero carbon economy and schemes to enhance the energy performance of the built environment.

4. Summary

In Summary Copas Farms believe the Cookham Neighbourhood plan is a 'once in a generation' opportunity to enhance the Cookham's in a positive and proactive way for the future. The proposals in this vision document are our suggestions of some improvement to the villages and how the Neighbourhood Plan and the CIL money raised could be used within the villages.

It is hoped that other interested residents and businesses in Cookham will also make suggestions for consideration. It is accepted by Copas Farms that not everybody in the village wants change and some will be actively against these proposals. However we believe Cookham should evolve

positively for future generation and the Neighbourhood Plan is a great vehicle to consider these differing views.

We would encourage all residents and businesses in Cookham to engage in the Neighbourhood Plan process to help proactively deliver a positive vision of Cookham for the next 20 years. We would also welcome the opportunity to discuss these proposals with the Neighbourhood Plan Committee and their appointed planning consultants Troy Planning.