

# THE VILLAGE CONTEXT



**The signpost at the junction of Winchester Street and the High Street places Overton neatly in its geographical context**

## Location and Population

The village of Overton is built along the valley of the River Test, a few miles from its source, and is surrounded by rising land so that a traveller, from any direction, comes upon the village with little forewarning. Most of the village is spread to the south of the river with the church on a slight rise to the north. It has a population recently risen to 3,800 and is still growing.

The county town of Winchester lies 13 miles to the south, and the intersection of Winchester Street and the B3400 Basingstoke to Andover road forms the historic focus of the village.

The civil parish includes the smaller settlements of Northington, Southington, Quidhampton, Polhampton, Ashe and South Litchfield together with a number of isolated cottages and farms.

**Overton High Street about 100 years ago**



**The same view of the distinctive cream or whitewashed houses in 2001, with Overton Hill visible in the background**



**Overton Sheep Fair in 1905. Many older villagers clearly recall the annual July sheep fair**

*Reproduced by permission of the Rural History Centre, University of Reading*



**Winchester Street during The Millennium 'Sheep Fair' in 2000**



*"Its own strong character.. the families who have lived here for generations have helped to form its character."*

## Historic Development

The first mention of Overton is in 909 when King Edward the Elder granted the estate of 'Uferanton', to Frithestan Bishop of Winchester. The manor was held by the Bishop at the time of the Domesday survey and remained in the Church's possession until the 19th century. In Saxon times the village was probably concentrated to the north of the river, where the church and Court Farm still stand. Once the Bishop's palace, where his Steward held manorial courts, the house was rebuilt around 1500 for the yeoman farmer who took on the tenancy.

In the 13th century Bishop de Lucy founded two 'new towns', Alresford and Overton, at about the same time. Both were sited on a river, and both were laid out on a grid system with a wide market street and back lanes which remain to this day. The broad expanse of Winchester St. still echoes its original function as a sheep market, first set up by charter in 1246. A letter written after the Black Death (1348-9) tells us that the outlying settlements from Ashe to Northington "were depopulated... and reduced to penury". The survivors probably moved to the newer areas of Overton on the south side of the river.

## Village and Community Aspects

Overton is fortunate in possessing a range of community facilities which are the envy of many other villages.

There is a thriving primary school and playgroup, doctors' surgery, nursing

home, pharmacy, library, post office and veterinary practice as well as a good selection of shops.

The village has two churches, a wide range of clubs and societies, including the Overton Memorial Institute, and four pubs.

Overton Recreation Centre, set up in 1966 as a community based initiative, aims to

provide for the widest possible range of organised sport and recreation in the village and maintains Town Meadow, Bridge Street sports ground, Berrydown sports ground and Overton Primary School playing field.

There is a well used community centre and two public halls with plans to develop a new village hall on Overton Hill.



**Overton Community Centre, formerly the Village School and now used by the library, playgroup, lunch club and the Parish Council amongst others**



**Overton Dramatic Society's Millennium celebration**



**Overton Primary School children who completed the junior Village Design Statement questionnaire**

*(Important to maintain)... "local shopping facilities and local organisations, particularly ORC."*

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## Overton Paper Mill

For over 200 years Portals Paper Mill, now owned by De La Rue plc, has had a major impact on many aspects of village life which have given the village its distinctive character as an industrial community.

Overton Mill has for many years produced banknote paper used by the Bank of England and other banknote printers around the world.

The Mill relies on water drawn from aquifers deep below the catchment of the River Test and returns the water, after use, treatment and cleansing, into the river at Quidhampton.

Overton Mill has provided employment for generations of local people and this has encouraged many families to remain within the area providing a remarkable degree of social cohesion and community spirit.

Although security paper making is now a highly mechanised industry, the Mill remains the major employer of local people in the area.

In addition to providing employment, the Mill contributed to the housing stock of the village and also played its part in community matters, for example by making land available for the sports ground opposite the church and by supporting local clubs and societies as well as Overton Primary School.



## Affordable Housing

Overton's location within the affluent south east of England, with its diverse employment prospects, good road and rail links and rural surroundings, has led to a rapid increase in the price of houses.

Many houses which have been built, particularly on smaller developments, have been large 4 or 5 bedroom properties with fewer 1 or 2 bedroom 'starter homes' than many residents would prefer.

The lack of dwellings to purchase or rent at affordable prices has led to some local people moving away from the area to find housing elsewhere, even if they work in the village.

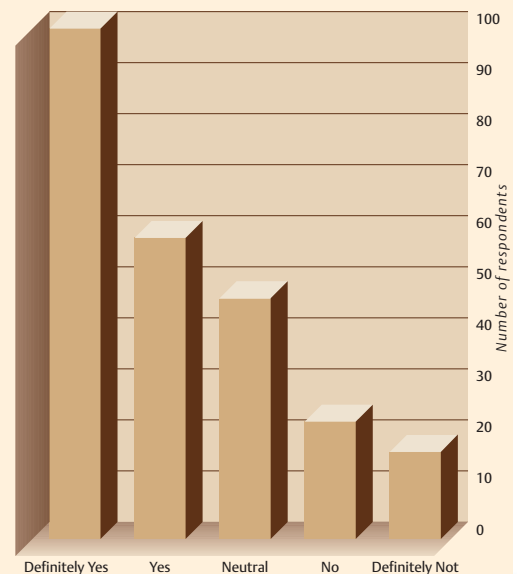
Unless affordable housing is provided, the community spirit for which the village is noted will be eroded.

**Phases 1 and 2 of the Foxdown Estate (above) developed in 1994**

**Questionnaire results (below) showing the desirability of low cost 'affordable' housing**

**Q10 Should there be a greater provision of 'affordable' housing above the current national recommendation of 20%?**

Definitely Yes	Yes	Neutral	No	Definitely Not
100	59	47	23	17



*(Cherished views)... "to the Mill and the bungalow where I lived all my young days."*