

# Snapshot Character Assessment:

## 6. Saltford's Green Belt



Kelston Round Hill and Cotswold AONB viewed from the Green Belt, north of the village. Photograph © SEG

### 6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The parish of Saltford lies within the Avon Valley and Saltford's Green Belt provides the rural countryside setting of the village. Saltford's Green Belt slopes gently, although steeply in places, from the south to the north east towards the river Avon. The river is recognised nationally for its nature conservation importance and forms the east and north boundary of the parish.

6.1.2 Saltford's Green Belt covers an area of approximately 4.4km<sup>2</sup> and encircles the housing development area of Saltford in the shape of a 'C'. To the east of the parish of Saltford, in the parishes of Kelston and North Stoke, lies the most western part of the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB). This AONB is also designated as Green Belt and can be seen from many viewpoints in the village; Saltford is thus completely surrounded by the Green Belt.

6.1.3 The Cotswold AONB ridge and the distinctive local landmark of Kelston Round Hill (also known as Kelston Tump) together with Saltford's Green Belt and the river Avon provides a rural setting for the village. Despite Saltford's proximity to the cities of Bath and Bristol and the neighbouring town of Keynsham, this landscape gives Saltford its own

distinctive character complementing and preserving both the setting of Saltford's Conservation Area with its historical buildings and the newer housing developments within the village.

6.1.4 The openness of Saltford's Green Belt also provides a sense of permanence to the countryside surrounding the village, provides separation whilst keeping in check urban sprawl from Keynsham, Bristol and Bath, and helps to safeguard the adjacent countryside including the Cotswold AONB from encroachment.

6.1.5 It is also a very important green infrastructure asset for Saltford and the wider community of Bath & North East Somerset. It provides ecosystems that support agriculture and wildlife together with an element of flood protection for the village from the river Avon and from surface water flooding arising from extreme rainfall events.



Kelston Round Hill and Cotswold AONB viewed from the Green Belt on the south side of Saltford (near Manor Road)  
Photograph © Phil Harding

6.1.6 In addition to sports facilities offered by Saltford Golf Club and the sports ground by Saltford Hall, the Bristol and Bath Railway Path together with Saltford's extensive network of public footpaths provide the community and many visitors from neighbouring urban areas with a healthy environment much of which is considered locally to be of outstanding scenic value. This also enables leisure activities such as walking and cycling that are important for healthy lifestyles and a general sense of well-being.

6.1.7 93% of households that responded to the Saltford Parish Plan questionnaire in 2009 specifically said that they wanted Saltford's Green Belt to be protected. This clearly expressed view is reflected in the 2010 Saltford Parish Plan's objective to "prevent development that will encroach upon the Green Belt around Saltford".

## 6.2 An historic landscape



Exposed limestone in Mead Lane by the river Avon  
Photograph © SEG

6.2.1 The Parish of Saltford has a fascinating geological history with Lower Jurassic rocks seen across ploughed fields and in old quarries and used in many of the older houses in the village. The rocks, mainly limestone, have abundant fossils and provide evidence that this region was once under a warm, shallow, sub-tropical sea, 180 million years ago. Some limestone exposures in Saltford are extremely important in our understanding of local and regional geology and have been protected as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) in recognition of this. The GWR, the former Midland Railway Path and the River Avon provide some of the best exposures of these rocks anywhere in the West of England. These RIGS sites include:

1. Avon Lane Railway Path Cutting
2. Mead Lane Saltford
3. Saltford Railway GWR Cutting (north west of tunnel)
4. Saltford Railway GWR Cutting (south east of tunnel)
5. Avon Farm storm water cutting\*

6.2.2 Terrace gravel deposits of a much younger age occur in the Avon Valley and accumulated here during the last ice age that ended 11-12,000 years ago (the Pleistocene Period). One gravel deposit, near Avon Farm has national protection as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)\*.

\* The citation sheet refers to this locality as Stidham Farm SSSI but it is part of Avon Farm. The adjacent Stidham Farm is now Avon Valley Adventure & Wildlife Park, located in neighbouring Keynsham.

6.2.3 At the northern tip of the parish lies an Anglo-Saxon burial ground, currently grazed by horses. Other archaeological points of interest within Saltford's Green Belt include evidence of Roman settlement including a Roman coffin found in the fields south of Keynsham Manor west of Longwood, and three medieval fish ponds linked by a stream (the top pond is known

locally as Watercress Pond). These ponds are located to the north east of Saltford Manor and St Mary's Church. Saltford Manor, built in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, is reputed to be the oldest continuously occupied private house in England; the ponds are thought to have been originally part of the Manor House estate for providing mainly coarse fish as a food source.



One of the medieval fish ponds near Saltford Manor.  
Photograph © SEG

## 6.3 Landuse

6.3.1 Salford's Green Belt is mainly farmland used for growing arable crops and grazing cattle and horses.

6.3.2 Most fields are of medium size. The field boundaries are a mix of dry stone wall constructed from locally sourced blue lias limestone, wire fencing and hedgerow. Much of the hedgerow is ancient (probably dating from around the 18<sup>th</sup> Century) and rich in wildlife. Compared with many other areas of lowland southern England, a larger proportion of the hedgerows that were present before the agricultural intensification of the 1960s-70s survive. Some of the hedgerows in the northern part of the Green Belt are beside perennial streams, further enhancing their wildlife value. Some hedgerows have retained very old large diameter, partly hollow oak and ash trees.

6.3.3 The Green Belt also includes two recreational areas, the sports ground used principally for football and cricket by Salford Hall on the north side of Salford village and Salford Golf Club on the south side; the latter providing a parkland landscape that complements the surrounding Green Belt fields. Avon County Rowing Club is located at the east side of the village where the river Avon and A4 road are in close proximity.



Fields south of Salford, west of Longwood Lane.  
Photograph © SEG



Salford Golf Course by Folly Wood. Photograph © SEG

## 6.4 Wildlife (including protected species) and woodland habitat

6.4.1 The Green Belt together with the gardens in the village collectively support a wide variety of wildlife. Some 100 species of wild birds occur regularly in the village and its surrounding landscape, together with 24 species of butterflies.

6.4.2 The Green Belt is also host to several European Protected Species: Pipistrelle bats are known to inhabit Saltford (widespread) together with Daubenton's bats along the river Avon, and Brown long-eared bats (southern end of Haselbury Grove). Otters are continuously present and regularly seen the length of the river Avon within the parish. There are many Badgers setts throughout Saltford's Green Belt.



Folly Wood, Saltford. Photograph © SEG

6.4.3 To the south east side of the Golf Club there is ancient woodland, Folly Wood. The woodland understorey and, notably, the large quantity of rotting wood at all stages of decay suggests that Folly Wood has a rich invertebrate fauna. This wood also provides an important habitat for plant species including mosses and fungi and, due to its location away from the main residential area of Saltford, is largely undisturbed and unspoilt.

6.4.4 Two other long standing woods, albeit small and linear, are Colonel's Wood, located north of Saltford Manor, and Longwood, located west of the Golf course. Both provide excellent habitat for a rich invertebrate fauna due to the relatively large proportions of large old trees and the woodland understorey. These are inhabited by Barn, Tawny and Little Owls.

6.4.5 Two parcels of Avon Community Forest exist in Saltford: the Manor Road Community Wood that extends from Keynsham into Saltford along Manor Road on the west side of the

parish and another area of the Community Forest to the north west of Salford Mead by Swineford Lock on the north side of the parish.

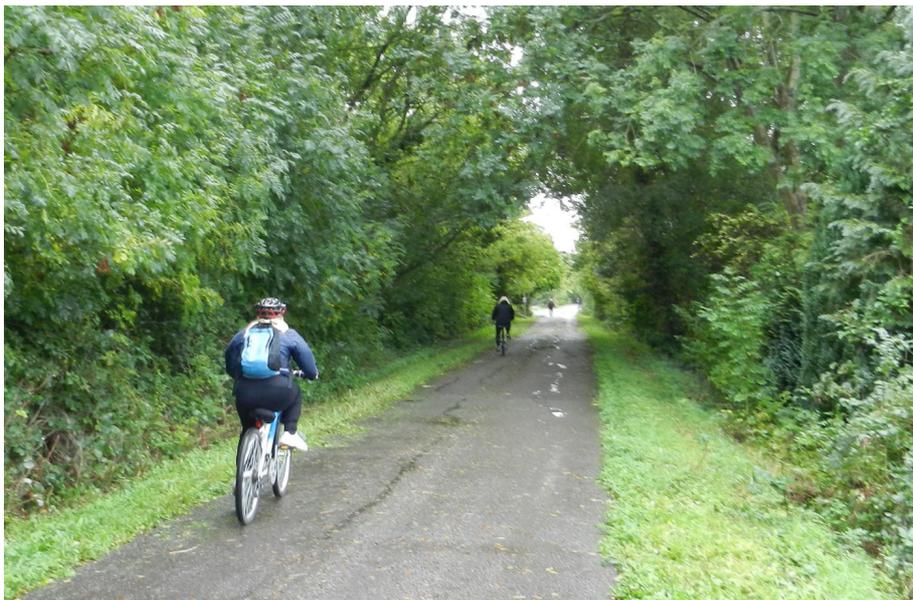
6.4.6 Across the road from the Manor Road Community Wood is Eastover Farm. This is no longer a working farm, but is a domestic dwelling and includes a garden approximately 4 acres in size incorporating a large wildflower meadow. The garden at Eastover Farm has been “adopted” by Salford Environment Group (SEG) as a showcase wildlife-friendly Somerset garden to help show residents at an annual event the wildlife and visual benefits of growing native species. It was chosen by SEG in 2013 due its size and the high proportion of native plant, shrub and tree species grown within the garden.

6.4.7 The numerous dry stone walls and hedgerows in Salford that form field boundaries provide an important wildlife habitat. One example of the importance of this habitat is the existence of two clumps of nationally rare Bath Asparagus (*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*) on the roadside verge of Longwood Lane that borders arable fields. This is thought by Salford Environment Group (SEG) to be possibly the only remaining original Bath Asparagus growing wild in Salford. Steps have been taken by SEG during 2013 to protect the plant and cultivate its seed elsewhere in the village.

6.4.8 Along the river Avon and in regularly flooded areas Greater Dodder (*Cuscuta europaea*) grows extensively and at high density. Within the river grows Loddon Pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*) which is only known in a few sites in Britain and which is categorised as Vulnerable on *The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain*. Two species of orchid, Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), survive in the less disturbed fields on the northern side of Salford.

## 6.5 Route-ways

6.5.1 The main A4 road cuts through the centre of the parish as does the main Bristol Temple Meads to London Paddington GWR railway line.

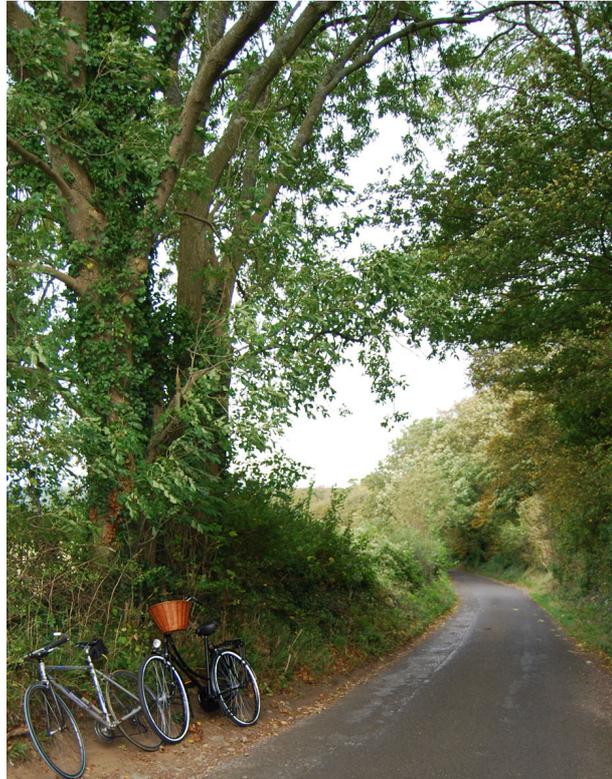


Railway Path by the Bird in Hand PH, Salford. Photograph © SEG

6.5.2 There is also the railway path that follows the route of the former Midland Railway Mangotsfield and Bath Branch Line, which was closed in 1966 as part of the Beeching cuts. It was converted by the cycling charity Sustrans between 1979 and 1986 and is now a cycleway that forms part of National Cycle Network's National Cycle Route 4; the route was the first major project undertaken by Sustrans and is open to walkers and cyclists with excellent access provided for disabled users.

6.5.3 The railway path serves several purposes; it is an integral and popular commuting route, an attractive leisure path and a wildlife corridor. It also connects with several of Saltford's extensive network of public footpaths.

6.5.4 A narrow lane, Longwood Lane, runs from Manor Road south from Saltford through farmland each side of the lane together with Saltford Golf Course on its eastern side. This connects with the main A39 Bath to Wells road and is also used regularly by cyclists as it is part of the Avon Cycle Way (Sustrans Regional Route 10) - an 85 mile circular route around the city of Bristol, following quiet country lanes and taking in the best of the countryside and villages around Bristol and Bath.



Longwood Lane, part of the Avon Cycle Way.  
Photograph © SEG

## 6.6 Valuing Saltford's Green Belt landscape

6.6.1 Saltford's Green Belt is highly valued by residents as being intrinsic to what makes Saltford the village that it is. This was demonstrated clearly in 2009 by 93% of households that responded to the Saltford Parish Plan questionnaire who specifically said that they wanted Saltford's Green Belt protected, not built upon.

6.6.2 The Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) including Kelston Round Hill to the east of Saltford makes a stunning rural backdrop to the green landscape that surrounds the village of Saltford hence many local and visiting photographers regularly photograph elements of the Green Belt including the river Avon. This beautiful landscape also helps attract tourists, particularly day-trippers, to the picnic area by the river Avon in the Shallows and to the pubs and restaurants situated by the river.

6.6.3 The network of footpaths and narrow lanes throughout the Green Belt attracts walkers and cyclists, many of whom use the National Cycle Route 4 that passes in a north-south direction through the Green Belt and the village itself.

6.6.4 The following poem written in 1998 by local schoolgirl Penny Faulkner as part of the South West's "Our South West" millennium archive youth project includes a description of the Green Belt in and around Salford:

*A street of higgledy-piggledy houses  
all squashed up  
A grey snake protected  
by green hills  
A patchwork quilt of greens  
With, just once, a splash of red and yellow  
Like spilt powder paint.  
And, in the Sunday silence of lie-ins,  
A single bell plays its simple tune.*

by Penny Faulkner, source: [www.oursouthwest.com](http://www.oursouthwest.com)

6.6.5 Such is the importance of Salford's natural environment that the village has a thriving and active environmental group, Salford Environment Group (see [www.salfordenvironmentgroup.org.uk](http://www.salfordenvironmentgroup.org.uk) for further information on SEG). Furthermore, the Keynsham and Salford Branch of the Avon Wildlife Trust holds its annual dawn chorus walk each April in Salford starting at the Shallows by the river Avon.

## **6.7 Negative Features and Characteristics**

6.7.1 The invasive plant species Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens noli-tangere*) is evident on the banks of the river Avon in Salford and has spread to other areas including the railway path. There are also several small areas of another damaging invasive, Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) along the river Avon, including alongside the Anglo Saxon Burial Ground.

6.7.2 Some of the narrow lanes and footpaths through the Green Belt attract litter and fly-tipping of waste materials from careless and unscrupulous individuals.

6.7.3 The relatively high property prices in Salford put a high commercial value on any land that becomes available for development and thus Salford's Green Belt is a target for property developers. An example of this was the Salford Green Belt Appeal Inquiry in August 2013 following the non-determination of a planning application by developers to build a housing estate of up to 99 dwellings on the fields within the Green Belt south of Manor Road. The planning application led to a vigorous campaign in the village against the proposed development. Salford Parish Council voted unanimously to object to the application and, before the Appeal Inquiry was held, B&NES Council Development Control Committee also voted unanimously against the application. Following his decision in September 2013 to make the determination himself, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government dismissed the appeal and refused planning permission on 4 March 2014. In concluding that the appeal proposals were inappropriate development in the Green Belt causing harm to the Green Belt's openness and purpose of preventing encroachment into the countryside, the Secretary of State said "*the proposed development would result in an unacceptable reduction of the Green Belt in that area.*" He was also "*mindful that the site*

*lies within a substantial sub-area of Green Belt identified as strongly serving the purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, and attributes considerable weight to this issue in the planning balance."*

Saltford Environment Group

December 2013

(Paragraph 6.7.3 updated April 2014 to reflect Saltford Green Belt Appeal Inquiry determination)