

Sopley Conservation Area



The small village of cottages and farms that comprises Sopley is the focus of this large conservation area. The adjacent meadows of the flood plain of the River Avon are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. A small stream bisects the village passing beside The Woolpack before joining the Avon south of the church. The church occupies a prominent site on a small hill to the south of the village next to the 19th century mill. To the east, the site of the mansion in Sopley Park is now occupied by the Bible College. The northern end of the village contains some modern development but on the whole the centre retains much of its 19th century feel where a one way system helps the narrow lanes to cope with the heavy flow of traffic between Christchurch and Ringwood. There are a number of listed buildings as well as some important unlisted groups, such as Sopley Farm, which are very important to the character of the village. There are many mature trees singly in gardens, in groups in the Park and in the central enclosure of the village.

The manor of Sopley - Soppa's glade - is traceable from before the Norman conquest but detailed records only exist for about the last 200 years. The manor house is believed to have been rebuilt by the Vicar of Sopley about 1790. After various changes of ownership the Kemp Welch family were resident squires at Sopley Park House from 1867 owning much of the village as well. They carried out many improvements and additions to the estate. After the Second World War the house was variously a nursing home and two independent schools. It was demolished in 1988 and Sopley lost a building that played a significant part in its landscape and history. There has been a mill here since at least the time of the Domesday Survey when an annual payment of 10 shillings and 875 eels is recorded. The Avon eel known locally as the 'sniggle' is different to the common eel; a field name - snig end - in the water meadows recalls this.

These are key features in the conservation area:

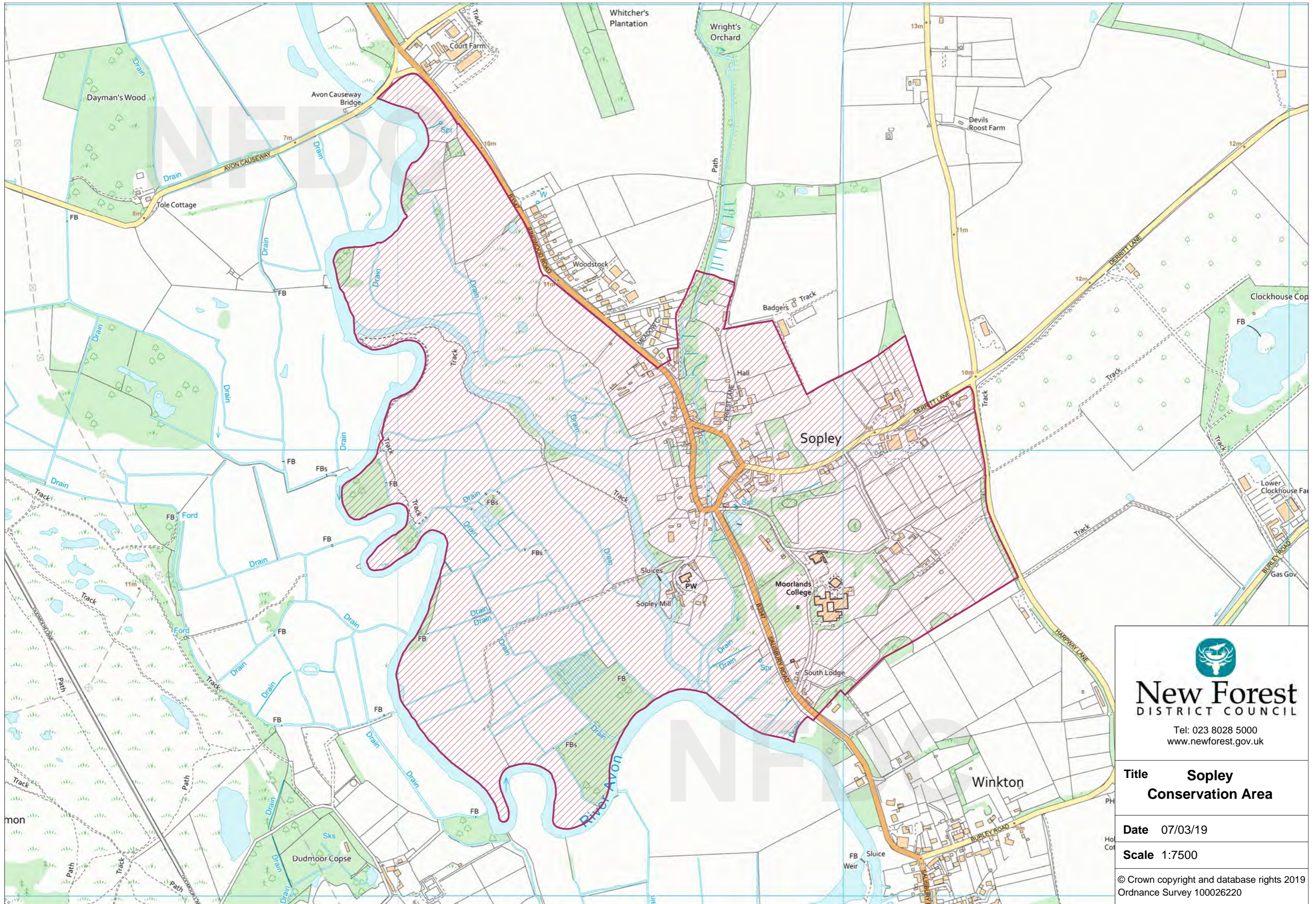
- The **Church of St Michael and All Angels** (Grade II*) is situated in a prominent position above the rest of the village as was common in the early mediaeval period. It was founded at the expense of Earl Godwin in about 1050. An area to the south of the churchyard was quarried away at some time in the past for some reason as yet unknown. Nearby was probably the original mediaeval manor farmhouse.
- **Sopley Farm buildings** are an interesting example of the problems encountered in the reuse of redundant agricultural buildings as dwellings. Consideration should be given not only to the size, shape and detailing

of the buildings but also their original purpose, the extent of any remaining fixtures and fittings such as specialised machinery and partitioning, and how all this can be accommodated within a domestic context.

- The **mill** dated 1878 is the last in a long line of mills in the village going back to at least the time of the Domesday Survey. Attached to its north side along the lane is a much older mill house. The mill was operated by an undershot waterwheel - superseded by a water turbine - and was worked until 1946. Today it is a restaurant retaining much of the original milling atmosphere.
- The **Avon Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest** stretches from Bickton to Christchurch Harbour. There is a greater range of habitats and a more diverse flora and fauna than any other chalk river valley in Britain. These habitats support internationally important groups of breeding and wintering birds, rare species of flora and a diversity of notable invertebrate fauna. The valley contains one of the largest expanses of unimproved floodplain grassland in England.
- The **Lodges at either end of the park wall** are the only remaining prominent evidence of the Manor Park estate. They are both very individual in style and detailing, typical examples of the later 19th century.

These are some of the things that make Sopley special - they need to be looked after:

- **History**
The pattern of lanes and footpaths.
The relationship between the parkland and the village.
- **Buildings**
Orangey red brick mainly in Flemish bond, replacing timber framing in some of the older cottages. Thatch was the traditional roof covering here and remains on several cottages. Tiles and slates from the 19th century are also found.
Sopley Farm group of 19th century brick buildings mainly with slate roofs.
St Michael's Church is of ironstone rubble with dressings of Binstead stone from the Isle of Wight.
The mid 19th century lodges to Sopley Park, each with elaborate architectural details.
- **Landscape/Townscape**
The irregular grouping of the buildings allowing glimpses of the farmland between.
The central green area enclosed by the roads of the one way system.
- **Setting**
The narrow winding nature of the roads give ever changing vistas.
The high ground of the churchyard provides a good vantage point giving views to the south.
There are extensive views over the Avon valley from the northern water meadows.
- **Potential for enhancement**
Any realistic opportunity to reduce the volume of through traffic by heavy-goods vehicles should be considered.



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Title Sopley
Conservation Area

Date 07/03/19

Scale 1:7500

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Ordnance Survey 100026220