

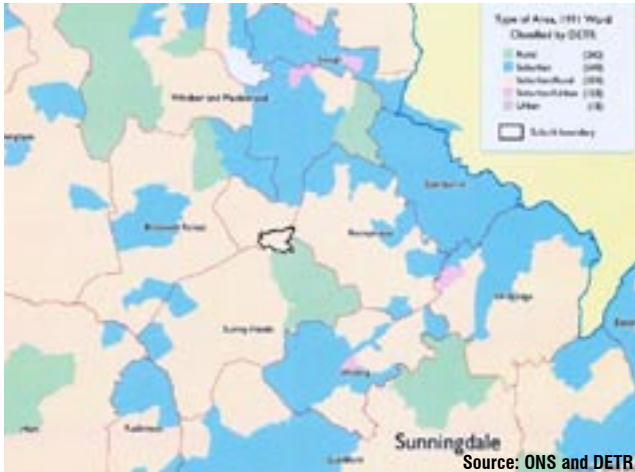
SUNNINGDALE, WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD

This case study provides a profile of the suburb, and assesses its current state of health. It considers the need for improvement and potential for renewal, before raising some policy issues. It is based on a visit, a workshop with representatives of local interests, and data from a range of sources including the 2001 Census, Local Knowledge, CACI, and FPD Savills.

Sunningdale presents the issue of what the Local Authority should be doing to deal with the intensification of housing on a major scale through the demolition of large houses and their redevelopment into smaller units.

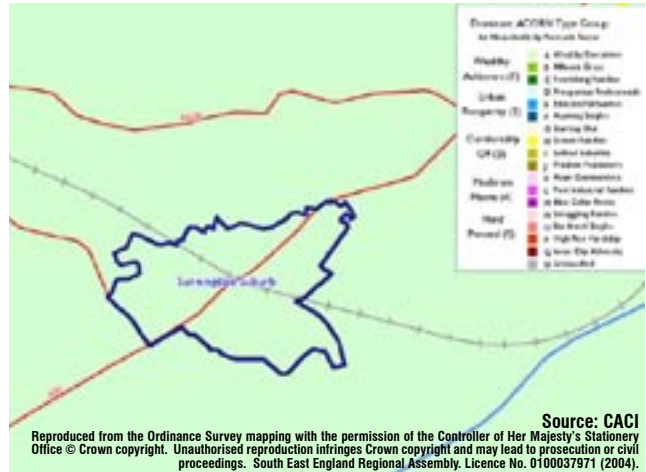


What type of suburb is Sunningdale?



Source: ONS and DETR

Defined by ONS as on the edge of suburban rural

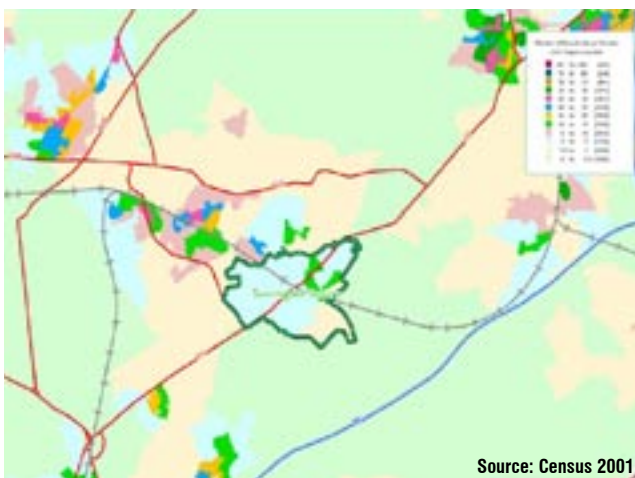


Source: CACI

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Dominant Acorn Type Group (with transport links shown)

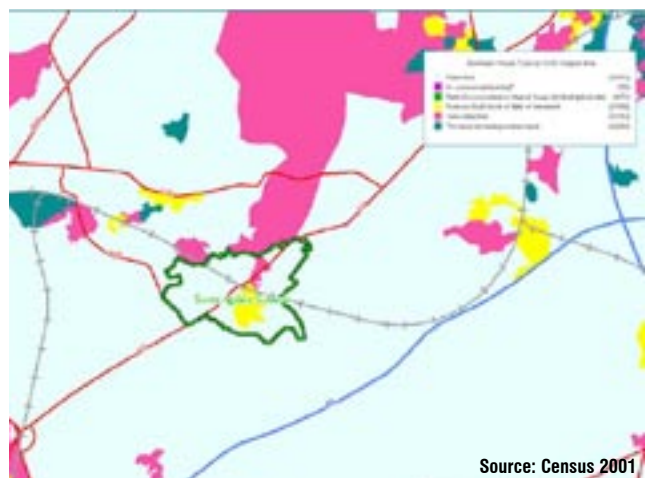
- Wealthy Executives



Source: Census 2001

Density: number of households per hectare (ONS)

- Predominantly at 3 - 5
- A small part in the South East 0.5 - 3



Source: Census 2001

Dominant House Type (ONS)

- Detached
- Purpose Built Block of Flats and Tenements
- Semi Detached

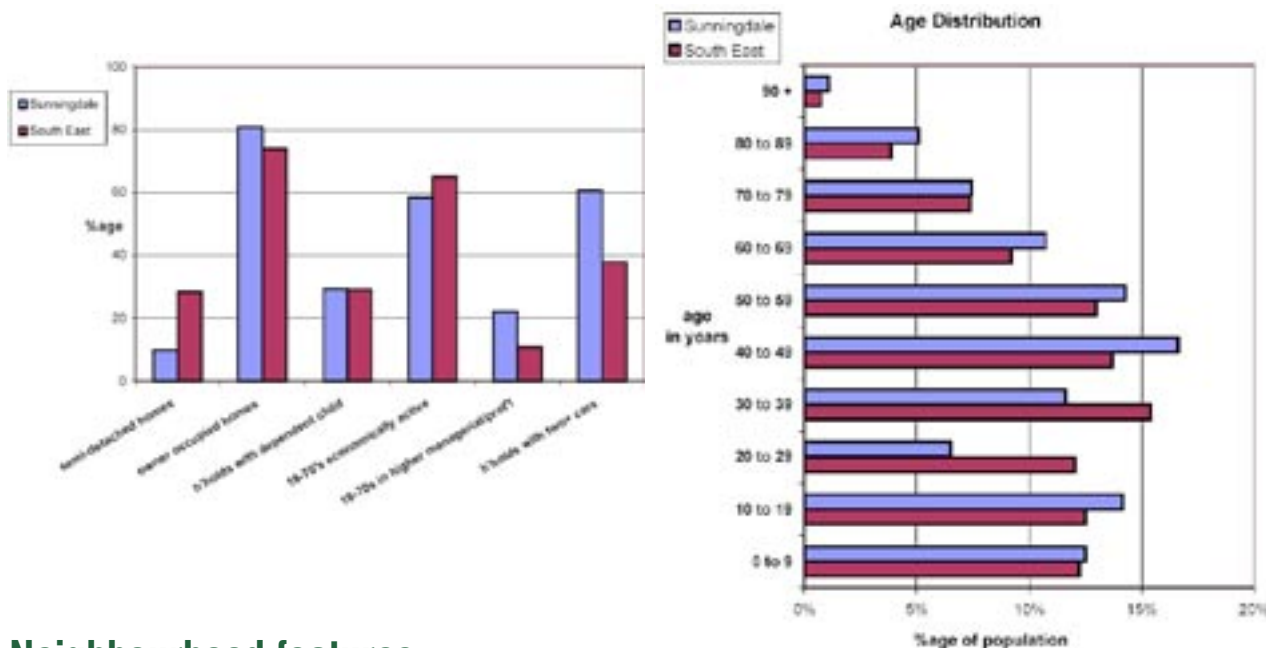
Physical features

- a. Location** Sunningdale is close to both the M3 and M25, Heathrow Airport, the fine centres of Windsor and Maidenhead, and has its own district centre. The station is only 35 minutes from Waterloo with a frequent service. It is highly accessible to well paying jobs, and local attractions include world famous golf courses.
- b. Age** First developed in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, and then gradually infilled with other large houses, the area is now undergoing change. Houses with large plots are being redeveloped as several houses, or groups of flats, particularly in the neighbourhood around the station.
- c. Layout** The Sunningdale area can be broken down into a number of different

- neighbourhoods:
 - The area is split by the London Road, and the main redevelopment has been taking place on the larger plots to the North
 - As well as the grand older houses along the London Road, there are also terraced houses in the neighbourhood of two small centres. The profile of houses in Sunningdale is not unlike the district as a whole. However it differs considerably in terms of the proportion of detached homes, the unmade roads, with no paths and limited lighting. These create a distinct character, and also help traffic calming.
 - The green belt surrounds and runs through the area. Large gardens, and the

remains of an ancient forest and heathlands surround the detached houses in the predominantly quiet and sylvan roads. The density is relatively low with most of the space given over to gardens, followed by green space; domestic buildings only account for 9% of the land use.

- Redevelopment of large houses is resulting in higher densities, doubling the number of bedrooms on a plot. Since 2001 when there were 2073 houses there has been a net increase of 76 homes. A local website suggests there have been 219 new homes on 18 sites, approval is pending on 105 units, and has been turned down on five schemes for 62 units.



Neighbourhood features

a. Role Sunningdale provides a good environment for executive housing, with executives making up 29% of the population. There are also a significant number of ‘empty nesters’.

It has a diverse economic base, and benefits from Windsor and Maidenhead’s buoyant economy, and the M4/Thames Corridor. Also nearby is Heathrow airport, the Civil Service College and famous public schools. Independent shops are surviving, with a growing number of bars and restaurants, as well as estate agents and hairdressers.

b. Image and identity Long viewed as one of the most desirable places to live in the South East, and favoured by celebrities, Sunningdale, near to historic Windsor, is perceived as rural and this is reinforced by its physical layout.

c. Demographics It is mainly a middle aged area with 43% aged between 30-59 years, but with smaller numbers of dependent children. 60% of the population is economically active, just under the South East average, but with a higher than South East average employed in higher

positions – 22% cf 10%. There are a significant number of American and Japanese residents on placement with global companies who are renting company owned housing.

The proportion of detached housing in Sunningdale is double that of the South East region (48% cf 30%), and house prices significantly higher: detached houses £589k cf £337k and semis £589k cf £194k.

d. Housing demand As the older households pass on or ‘downsize’, so their houses have often been redeveloped, and then sold, often to companies for executive lets as described above. Relatively high house prices, and a high proportion being used as company lets, have created a fairly transient, mobile community. The average length of stay is five years for owner occupiers, compared with a regional average of seven years, but tenants move much more frequently, judging from the number of removal vans, and about 7% of the houses were vacant at the time of the Census.

e. Social infrastructure There are

considerable strains on the area’s social capital:

- **Heavy commuting** Employment levels are about average, and the average distance travelled to work by all modes of 14km is similar to the regional average, and rail use has been increasing. There is some home-working, and spare bedrooms are often used as home offices, but not much in the way of facilities for small businesses. Though there are plenty of jobs nearby, with such a high proportion of well-qualified people, many choose to commute out of the borough. A high proportion of children are driven to school, adding to congestion on the main road at peak times.
- **Expanding population** The population is beginning to expand. Many older households have been downsizing, and moving into flats, and overseas homes, while realising some of their capital. Official population figures could be misleading because children at boarding school are now included in the area where they study.

Health of the suburb: priorities and opportunities for improvement

The first part of the workshop comprised a scoring/ranking exercise using a ten category scorecard (5 physical and 5 social characteristics). Participants were asked to score questions within each of the ten categories, and the results used to stimulate discussion and reach consensus on priorities. A further ranking exercise enabled the priority categories below to be identified, together with some ideas for improvement.

Character As the older houses are redeveloped, complex forms are being replaced by simple boxes on smaller plots, often trying to ‘outshout’ their neighbours with mock Georgian (‘neo geos’) or Colonial features. Trees and hedges are also being lost, and the new ‘Gin Palaces’ stick out, and are no longer lost in the landscape. Some of the rich landscape is disappearing, notably a former tree nursery which the Crown Estate has sold to Bellways, who have cleared it to build 60 houses and some blocks of flats. There is a trend toward electronic gates (car theft has been a problem in the past), and gated closes, along with other security measures (burglary rates are now quite low).

Possible improvements:

a. Hedges Stopping the loss of hedges or reinstating them and protecting mature trees would help to maintain the distinctive character.

Choice Since 9/11 the big new houses are no longer selling at prices of £2 million, leading developers to build blocks of flats that look like single houses

NEIGHBOURHOOD SCORE CARD - SUNNINGDALE

- * 1. Poor
- 2. Adequate
- 3. Good
- ** 1 to 5 where
1 = least important and
5 = very important

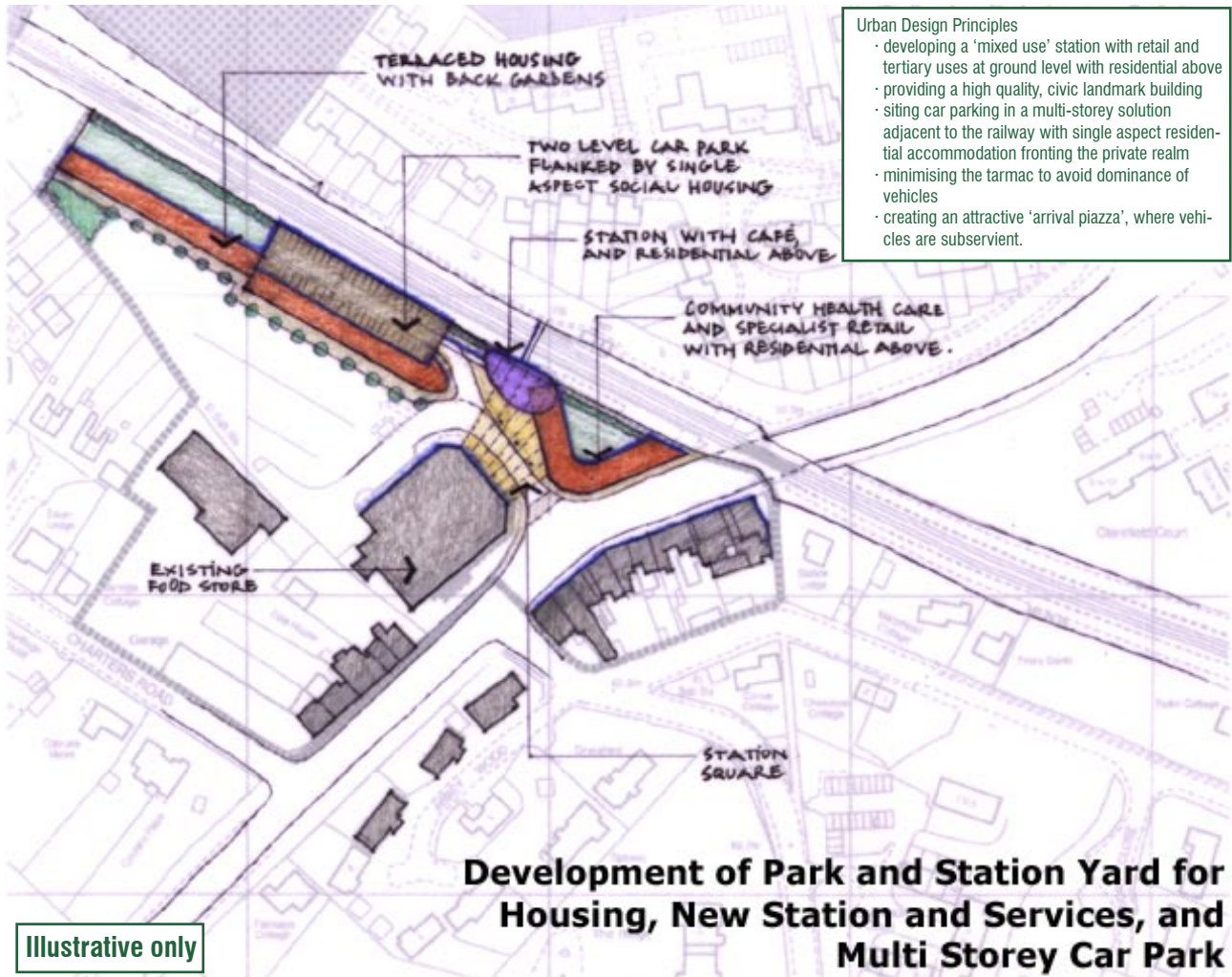
A. Physical capital	Score*	Rank**
1. Choice		
• can the area accommodate the stages in a family’s life cycle?	2	3
• does it offer a mix of house types and affordability?	1	
2. Connectivity		
• can you reach services and jobs without too much stress?	2	4
• are there basic shops and quality open space within easy walking or cycling distance?	1	
3. Conservation		
• are natural resources being saved e.g. energy, water, materials (waste)?	1	3
• is bio-diversity being encouraged e.g. trees, wildlife?	2	
4. Character		
• does the area look attractive and cared for?	3	5
• has new development enhanced the area?	2	
5. Commerce		
• are there other uses in the area, such as employment or leisure?	1	2
• are there places to set-up a business?	1	
B. Social capital		
1. Community		
• do people feel a sense of pride?	2	5
• does the area readily accept newcomers?	3	
2. Civic life		
• are there enough places to meet others e.g. pubs, clubs, open spaces?	2	3
• are the shops and services welcoming?	3	
3. Crime		
• do residents feel safe when they go out?	2	2
• do residents feel their property is safe?	2	
4. Climate for enterprise		
• is it a good place to start a business?	2	1
• is there sufficient purchasing power to support local businesses?	2	
5. Capacity (and quality) of services		
• can you get to see a doctor without a long wait?	1	4
• can you get into an acceptable secondary school without a long journey?	1	

instead, and these are selling very well. However, there are too few houses that are affordable by young families, making it harder to maintain family connections, and nothing is being built that will cater for key workers, like teachers, or for local children when they want to return from having gone to university etc. Further some of the new self contained blocks of social housing have been criticised as looking like a poor relation of the exuberant private apartments alongside. While there is some acceptance that redevelopment of large plots is inevitable,

the feeling is that it should be much more joined-up, so that facilities keep pace with the houses. However it is hard for the local authority to react, as applications come up one at a time, and usually win on appeal. There are also thought to be too many services such as hairdressers, off-licences, and estate agents, and too few good food shops.

Possible improvements:

a. Conservation There is a strong case for retaining a number of the large build-



ings, in order to maintain an important part of our English heritage, to avoid a waste of materials, and to retain as wide a choice as possible.

Connectivity The heavy traffic on the London Road makes it difficult to get out at peak times, and would discourage people from walking or cycling to the station. The bus service is very poor apparently, but the secondary school puts on its own buses.

Possible improvements:

a. Congested main roads People are very car-dependent and getting out on to the main road, particularly at peak times, can be difficult. A better bus service and safer walking and cycling conditions might lead to less car use, particularly

going to shops and station.

b. Safer routes to school The schools impose extra traffic at peak times. It is possible that safe cycling routes and support for cyclists e.g. training would be both healthy and more sustainable.

Community There has been a decline in community spirit and pride of place, and there is low voting turnout. With increasing competition to get into local schools, and new houses putting pressure on local primary health facilities and roads, there is resistance to further development.

Possible improvements:

a. Role of the Parish Council An even larger role could be played by the Parish Council in organising activities such as welcome packs for new residents and

guides to local societies.

Room for renewal and redevelopment

There is the following potential for the area to become more sustainable through renewal and development.

- **Homes for Key Workers** By developing land alongside schools, and also over new health facilities, like group medical practices, pressures on capacity could be reduced, and one of the schools is proposing to develop some of its land for teachers' homes.

- **Building for Life** Buildings are being demolished that are only 20 years old, and greater variety is going to be needed if some of the current buildings are not



to become obsolete. Possibilities could include:

- restoration of fine houses, and extension by building in the back gardens.
- promotion of schemes that take in several plots to create linked houses or apartments.
- Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes to avoid covering over front gardens and drives.
- use of Scandinavian or Canadian 'kit homes' to cut construction times and improve energy conservation.
- intensification round the station provides an untapped opportunity. A redeveloped station, which occupies a temporary building and is currently an eyesore, might have a community health centre below. A new multi storey car park (which might be shared with shops) could release land for a high-density housing scheme, as well as provide the opportunity to improve the current landscaping. There would therefore be scope to build more blocks of flats around the station and shops, catering for households without children, both young and old, and using a mix of tenures to secure a greater balance.

Recommendations for policy

• Community Infrastructure Programme

There would be less resistance to new housing if there were proper compensation for its cumulative impact. There is already a fund, drawing on Section 106 contributions, but this might be strengthened through:

- being more 'transparent'
- involving the Parish Councils in how it is used
- charging a proportion of the achieved sales value (which may need government support, perhaps through a modification of Stamp Duty)
- applying to the wider neighbourhood

• Design Guides and Statements

There is already a good 'Pattern Book', but more probably needs to be done to promote better design, possibly through:

- publishing the Pattern Book, preferably in conjunction with other authorities to provide more examples of ways of intensifying a site
- appraising local character, possibly with English Heritage, and publishing a guide

- involving a Design Panel in vetting applications
- giving awards for sensitive design
- using the new planning system to achieve a more proactive approach

• **Car Parking** Space is being wasted in providing garages that are not used, and in people owning far more cars than they use, and having parking spaces that are only used for a small part of the day. There are a variety of ways to save space, including:

- introducing more bands at the upper end of Council Tax, and relating these to the space given over to car parking
- encouraging developers of blocks of flats to enable the rent of additional spaces to be part of the Service Charge
- securing the use of underground parking on major developments (which may need research)
- ensuring the shared use of car parking space in shopping centres
- promoting car sharing and car clubs, for example by getting car hire firms to have bases at key stations
- supporting 'smarter' alternatives to bus services e.g. community transport, taxi sharing etc.

Summary findings from FPD Savills' Market* report on Sunningdale

Residential

- A predominantly affluent residential area with a high level of development activity.
- Mainly detached houses, but with some flats developed on sites of former large detached houses.
- Most housing is owner occupied (ACORN wealthy executives), but there is a strong 'corporate' private rented market partly due to two American Schools nearby.
- High levels of demand for all types of housing but particularly for affordable and mid priced detached housing.
- Flat schemes concentrated near railway station.

Retail and Leisure, Office and Industrial

- Non existent commercial market in Sunningdale – little demand due to very high land values and distance from motorway.
- Only potential location is around the railway station, but even this is unlikely as residential development would give a better return.
- Small upmarket retail provision close to the station and established High Street. Little market activity.
- Potential increase in retail demand because of a higher population as a result of high density development, but little scope for expansion based on current supply and local market perceptions.
- Ascot provides major competition and is easy to get to with parking.
- There are no leisure facilities except for a number of golf courses.

Future action

- Given Sunningdale's socio-demographic profile, its high land values, and its non existent manufacturing/ industrial base it is likely that residential uses will continue to dominate the market. However a mixed use scheme with a high proportion of residential property might be possible if near to the railway and to existing retail.

* The full market report can be found at www.southeast-ra.gov.uk