

North Leigh Neighbourhood Development Plan

Baseline Evidence – Appendix 2

Contents

Baseline Evidencing	2
Introduction	2
Baseline Assessment	2
Setting, History and Development	2
Setting	2
History	3
History of building development	6
Cultural Heritage	8
Development history	26
Population and demographics	27
Population	27
Demographics	28
Health	29
Community Assets	30
Commercial Assets	30
Traffic and Transport	31
Employment	32
Place of work and travel to workplace	33
Employment sectors and Qualifications	34
Qualifications	34
Crime	34
Education	35
Communications	36
Broadband Coverage	36
Mobile Coverage	36
Landscape and Soil	36
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	38
Water and Sewage	39

Baseline Evidencing

Introduction

Members of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee undertook research in relation to a number of contextual and sustainability indicators:

Contextual and sustainability themes
Setting, history and development
Population, demographics and health
Community Assets
Traffic and transport
Employment
Crime
Education
Communications
Landscape and soil
Biodiversity, flora and fauna
Water and sewerage
Air quality

In addition, the Committee also undertook a SWOT analysis, exploring multiple themes. This material is summarised and set out below. The data and material gathered has been used to guide policy development and evidencing in the Neighbourhood Plan.

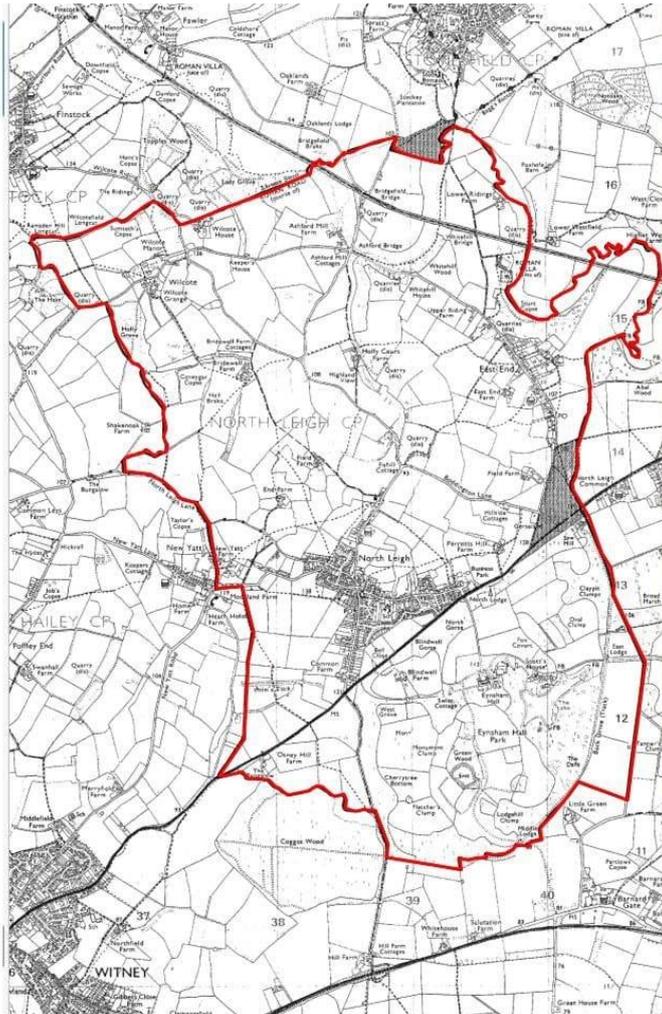
Baseline Assessment

Setting, History and Development

Setting

Information and map taken from NLPC website and information in the public domain.

North Leigh is a village and civil parish. It is a rural environment set amongst fields and rolling countryside. It is approximately 3,000 acres in size. It includes the outlying village of East End, and since 1932 the hamlet of Wilcote. The parish is located in the county of West Oxfordshire and since 1974 has fallen within the purview of West Oxfordshire District Council. Located between the market town of Witney some 5km to the West and the village of Long Hanborough in the East, it sits on a ridge 139 metres above sea level, lying predominantly to the north A4095, a main road running broadly Northeast - Southwest from Bicester to Farrington (see map below).



Leigh was the original name of the parish, but it was later renamed North Leigh to differentiate it from South Leigh. The name comes from Leah meaning a wood pasture, a mixture of woodland and pasture used for grazing animals. Due to grazing and browsing, the area was gradually cleared, and settlement began. The parish boundary between the village and Witney is still that of a Charter laid down in the 10th century.

History

Information and images taken from NLPC website and British History online.

Ancient History

The parish of North Leigh has been inhabited for thousands of years. For example, archaeologists have found evidence of a Neolithic burial at the end of Green Lane and there are two Iron Age sites built around 100 AD, one in Eynsham Park and another under the Roman Villa at East End.

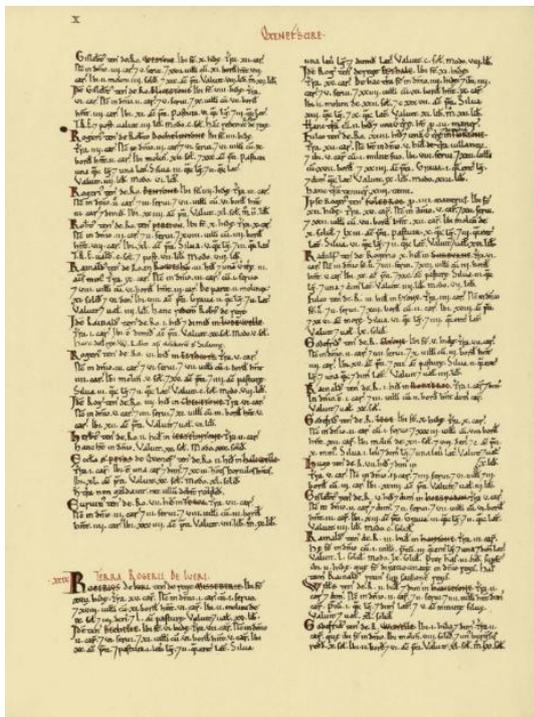
The Roman villa at East End was rebuilt and enlarged more than once until, by the 4th century, it had become a substantial courtyard house, the centre of an important estate, with fine tessellated pavements, plastered and painted rooms, and baths and hypocausts. It has been conjectured that the villa belonged to a noble family of the Dobunni and was perhaps abandoned in the late 4th century or early 5th, the likely date of a fire there.

Grimm's Ditch (to the West of Common Road) is a boundary said to be made in the Iron Age but now thought to be of Romano-British construction. There is another Roman villa (Shakenoak villa) to one side of Green Lane which has been excavated several times but remains covered over.

There are also signs of a lost Anglo Saxon village where Field Farm is now located, and St. Mary's Church tower is of Saxon origin. In 1928 Anglo Saxon graves were discovered by the side of the road to Wilcote. All the finds from these graves are in the Ashmolean Museum.

Village History

The village is mentioned in the Domesday book, as is also Wilcote. The village and church were given as part of the Honor of St. Valery in France. In the 13th century, Lieu Dieu Abbey sold the tenancy to Netley Abbey in Hampshire. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536, the tenancy passed to the Crown who gave it to Sir Thomas Pope where it remained until the 17th century when it was sold to the Perrott family (then of Perrot's Hill Farm). In the 18th century, the manor of North Leigh was sold to the Duke of Marlborough who still owns the mineral rights under the freehold houses in the village.



Entry in the Domesday book – 1086 AD.

The parish seems to have shared with other Wychwood places a reputation for wildness that encouraged deforestation in the 19th century. Instruments of control included a pillory, mentioned in 1499, stocks, mentioned in 1559 and, possibly, a cucking stool: the village pond at the northwest end of Common Road was referred to in 1759 as Cucking-stool Pond. Known later as Cuckamus pond, it was filled in c1968.

On 4 June 1644, following his night march from Oxford, Charles I rested at Perrottshill Farm before pressing on to Burford. Following the parliamentary victory Holly Court was occupied for a time by Sir George Fleetwood, the regicide. Perrott's grandson, also Edward, is said to have been a non-juror and a generous supporter of James II.

In Mediaeval times, there was an open field system of farming around the village, strips of land being given to villagers according to their status. On Dissolution, the Crown passed the manor of North Leigh partly to Bridewell Hospital in London and Bridewell Farmhouse was built in the 18th century. When Simon Leigh-Perrott inherited the manor, he began to pressure for enclosure of the open fields and was supported by Bridewell Hospital. Eventually enclosure began in 1759. This provoked riots by the villagers and fences and gates were broken. A militia of 140 soldiers was sent to North Leigh and barracked in the village. The Riot Act was read by the Justices.

Churches and Abbeys

St. Mary's church, of Saxon-Norman construction and dating from 1040, was heavily restored in the 19th century by G. E Street. The church has many hidden treasures, such as the restored 'Doom' painting, and is visited by people from all over the world. It is noted for its beautiful Wilcote chapel which has a fan-vaulted roof. The chapel was built in the 15th century with money given by Lady Elizabeth Blacket to provide a chantry chapel in memory of her husbands and her sons, who were killed in the battles in France. Her first husband was Sir William Willicotes from Chastleton. He represented the County in Parliament and also became High Sheriff.

The Perrott aisle was built in the 18th century and the coffins of the Perrott family are to be found under the floor. Through the years, tithes from the Church lands have passed through the hands of Netley Abbey, Osney Abbey and Hailes Abbey in Gloucestershire.

School & Hall

A school for 140 children was erected in 1838 on land given by the Duke of Marlborough. A new school was built in Park Road in the late 1960's.

A number of men died serving in WW1 and James Mason of Eynsham Park gave land for the building of chalet type bungalows in Park Road to help with the housing of returning soldiers. He loved the Swiss chalets that he had seen on holidays and provided Swiss moss for the roof insulations. One of these bungalows became the old Memorial Hall; the money for building this was raised by public subscription in memory of the fallen men. The Hall was refurbished in 1977, demolished in 2004 and rebuilt to include a youth centre. The Youth Centre was built using £50,000 of European money. The new Memorial Hall was opened by David Cameron, the local M.P. at the time and former Prime Minister.

Iconic Windmill

A notable landmark in the centre of the village is a windmill. This was built in 1833, refurbished in the 1930's but became derelict after the roof was removed by the Home Guard to use as an observation post in WW2.



The windmill in the 19th century



The windmill as it stands today

History of building development

Data taken from British History online and local knowledge.

In 1086 forty-one tenants and a *servant/ slave* were living in the parish. There seems to have been a large increase in population by 1279, when 116 free and customary tenants were recorded on the manor. That level of population was probably not approached again until the 18th century. In the earlier 14th century the parish was probably poor, and it may have struggled to recover from the disasters of that period, for in 1377 only 111 taxpayers were recorded.

A post office was recorded intermittently from 1854, and a permanent office from the 1880s at a house east of the Woodman Inn; it was removed in 1953 to Common Road. It has since moved into the Memorial Hall. A mains water supply was provided to North Leigh village in 1935 and to East End in 1937. Mains electricity was introduced in 1938. A mains drainage scheme was completed in the late 1950s.

In the earlier 20th century a few new houses were built, again as infill. From 1945 new houses were first built along Common Road and Park Road, but demand became such that whole estates were begun in the 1960s. North Leigh in the 1960s had one of the fastest growing populations in Oxfordshire. The total stood at 1,765 in 1971, but the rate of increase slowed in the 1970s, and by 1981 the population had risen only to 1,859.

In the 1950's and 1960's, in common with most villages, North Leigh had a number of shops most of which no longer exist. These included:

- The Windmill Stores on Park Road, included a grocery shop, butchers shop and petrol pumps. This has since been redeveloped for housing.
- The Post Office and general stores was located in what is now a private house at 10, Common Road.
- Also on Common Road was the Buckland Stores, another grocery shop, which again has reverted to private housing.
- At the end of Park Road, we had the North Leigh Garden Centre, which also sold greetings cards, gifts and hardware. This was redeveloped as Bluebell Close.
- There was until the mid-1970's a Fish and Chip shop on a site now occupied by numbers 13 & 15 Common Road.
- There were a number of pubs in the village, although only one is currently open – The Masons Arms on Park Road. The others were: The Harcourt Arms - Church Road, The Leather Bottel – East End, The Woodman – New Yatt Road, The Saddlers – New Yatt.

North Leigh's straggling housing, an early form of ribbon development, from East End through New Well End and North Leigh village to New Yatt, with a few isolated farms and cottages away from the road, has changed in density since the Middle Ages, some areas, notably New Well End, losing houses, others becoming more populous. New housing was mostly infilling, often in the form of cottages built on the manorial waste. Some organized building was undertaken by the Eynsham Park estate along Park Road in the late 19th century and early 20th, but only in the later 20th century were many houses built. Infilling has continued throughout. The manor house, west of the church, fell into ruin and was pulled down in the 19th century; probably it was never on the scale of Wilcote House, the principal surviving house in the parish. The common building materials before the 20th century were local limestone rubble and Stonesfield slate or thatch. One or two thatched roofs remain, notably those of Gable Cottage, west of the Mason Arms, and Church Farm Cottage in Church Road. Brick and Welsh slate appeared in the 19th century, and in the 20th the use of modern building materials has given the parish a suburban air.

The oldest surviving secular building is the south-eastern range of Holly Court Farm. Church Farm Cottage, east of Church Road, is a cruck house, possibly of the later Middle Ages. East End Farm, part of the manorial estate until 1981, has a former cross wing on the north apparently of 16th-century origin, remodelled when the main range was rebuilt. Perrottshill Farm, although retaining no structural features earlier than the 17th century, seems, like East End Farm, to have an earlier plan.

The Wesleyan chapel, rebuilt in 1873, was a major addition to the village and became an important focal point. The other main institutional building of the 19th century was the school, built in 1838 north of the parish church; it became a private house in 1974. A dramatic impact on the village's appearance is that of the windmill built at the top of Common Road by 1833.

The Woodman, east of the junction of Green Lane and the New Yatt road, and the New Inn, at East End, were established by 1861. The Woodman remains a public house, but it does not have a licensee at the time of writing and is closed. The New Inn seems to have ceased trading in the later 19th century and in 1958 it became a private house. The Mason Arms had, by 1871, become the fifth public house in the parish; it remains open today.

North Leigh's nearest station is at Hanborough. A station on the Witney branch line was opened at Eynsham in 1861 and closed in 1962. In 2024 the only public transport serving North Leigh is the S7 Stagecoach service, partly funded by Estelle Manor that runs between Oxford, Woodstock and Witney (although some services omit the Woodstock stops).

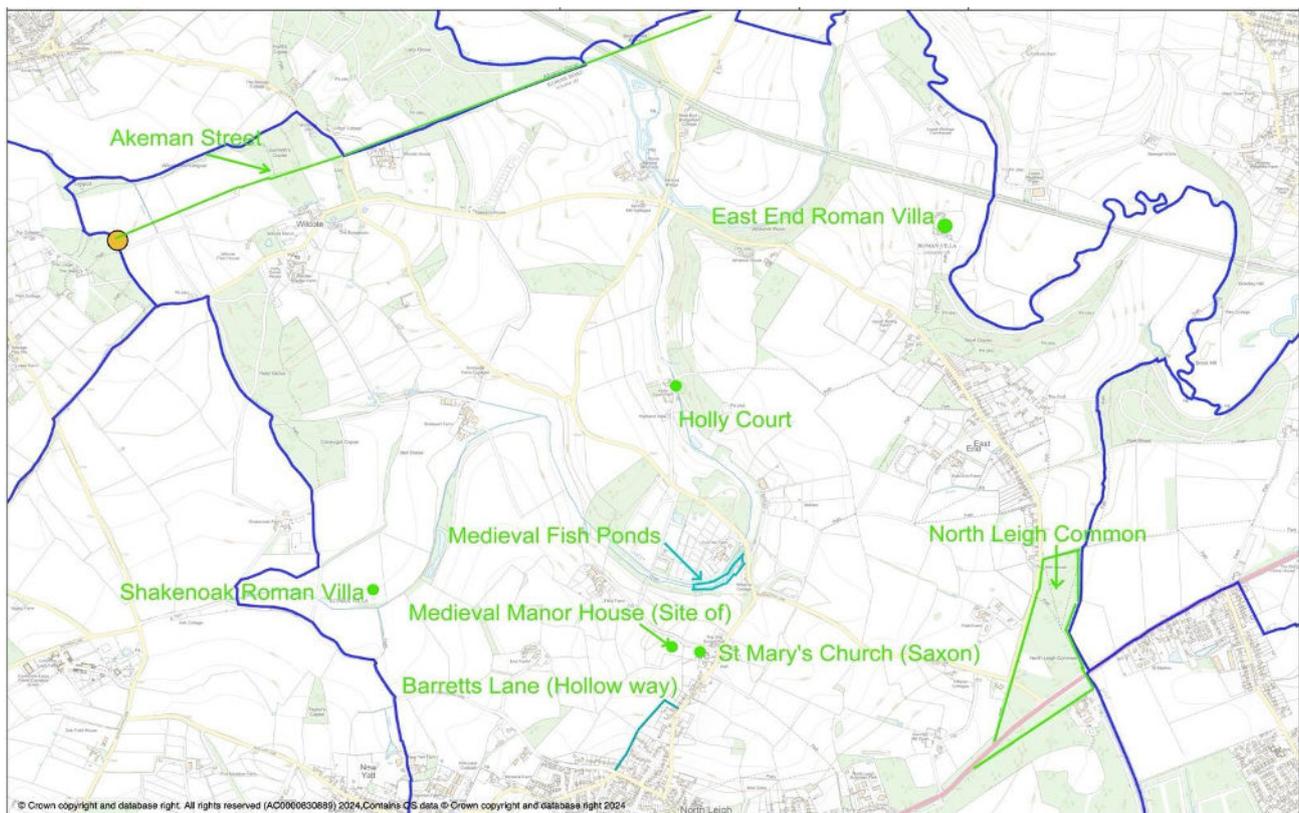
Cultural Heritage

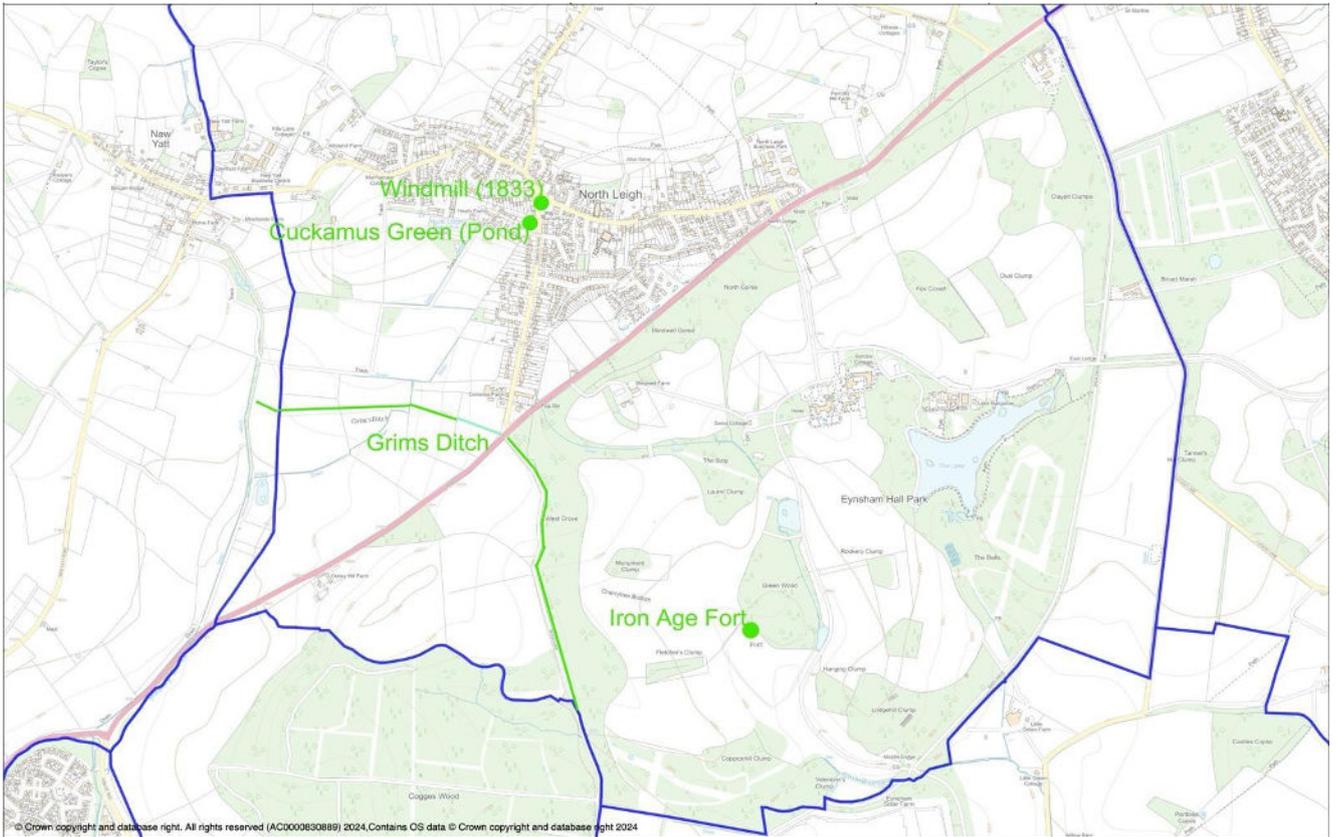
North Leigh parish is richly endowed with archaeological and historical assets, including a Saxon era church, two Roman Villas, a Roman Road and an Iron Age boundary ditch.

A list of some of the more prominent of these follows, together with their positions within the parish map.

1. Akeman Street – Roman road
2. Cuckamus Green – formerly the village pond
3. Eynsham Park Hillfort – Iron Age earthworks
4. Grims Ditch – part of the extensive Iron Age boundary ditches of Oxfordshire
5. Barrett's Lane – a medieval hollow way
6. Holly Court and the Saxon Cemetery
7. The Medieval fishponds at Fish Hill
8. North Leigh Common
9. North Leigh Roman Villa
10. North Leigh Windmill
11. Shakenoak Roman Villa
12. Site of the former Manor House
13. St Mary's Church

Many of these features are described in the Victoria History of North Leigh and in the unpublished paper "North Leigh History", by John Hunt.





1. Akeman Street – Roman road

Ref: Romano-British remains - Roads British History Online:

“Two metalled highways traversed Oxfordshire during the Roman period. The first is the well-known road which crossed the northern part of the county in its course from London and St. Albans to Cirencester and Bath; the second is an unnamed way which, from its general direction, will here be called the North-South road, and which almost certainly connected the Watling Street at or near Towcester with Silchester, though the extremities of its course have not yet been traced with certitude.

Of these roads, the Akeman Street, connecting two pre-Roman capitals, Verulamium and Corinium, may well have been an older track, metalled by the Romans. The road takes a swing northward to avoid the marshes of the main Thames valley, and this lack of directness in its course supports its pre-Roman origin, which has been further confirmed by recent excavation in Blenheim Park. The present straightness of its course across the hills and valleys suggests that, if it existed previously, it was entirely reorganized by Roman engineers.”

See also: Oxoniensia - Article on Akeman Street by Blair.

2. Cuckamus Green – formerly the village pond



Ref: The Oxfordshire Village Book:

“A spring supplied the town well, which was situated near the Gospel chapel, and the pond which in the Enclosure Award was called Cucking Stool Pond. The name later changed to Cuckamus pond and is now Cuckamus Green. A certain Billy Wickson was blamed for the low level of water in the well and evidently the villagers were glad to see the back of him!

*‘Now grumbling Billy has gone away,
There’s plenty of water night and day’.*

Ref: Definition of Cucking Stool (Wikipedia):

“Ducking stools or cucking stools were chairs formerly used for punishment of disorderly women, scolds, and dishonest tradesmen in medieval Europe[1] and elsewhere at later times.[2] The ducking-stool was a form of wymen pine, or “women’s punishment”, as referred to in Langland’s Piers Plowman (1378). They were instruments of public humiliation and censure both primarily for the offense of scolding or backbiting and less often for sexual offences like bearing an illegitimate child or prostitution.”

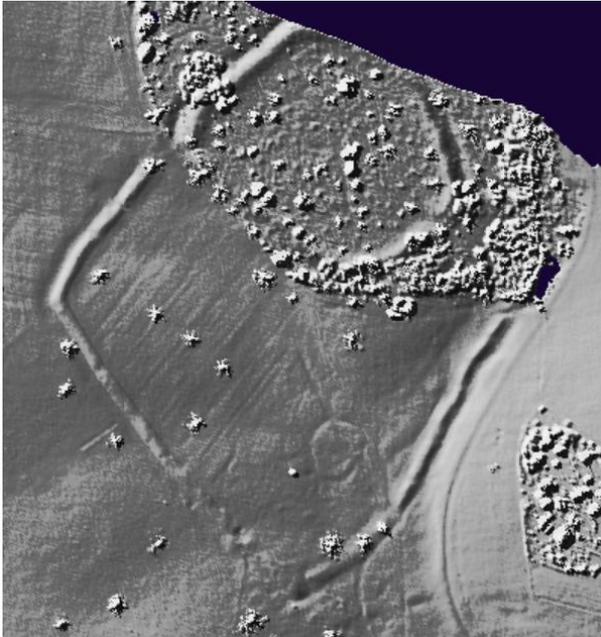
The pond is mentioned in the village perambulation of 1298 – from the Victoria County History North Leigh ...in a perambulation of 1298 confirmed that only the western half of the parish was afforested. (fn. 11) The perambulation seems to have begun near the south-west corner of the parish, following a stream northeastwards to Madley well, probably the later village pond. (fn. 12) It passed along Church Road to ‘Grundesweleye, and so along a hedge to Snellesleye (or Sulllesleye), and so to Forsakenhoke’.

3. Eynsham Park Hillfort – Iron Age earthworks

Ref: Oxoniensia - 1966 - Sutton.pdf

The above paper briefly describes all of the Iron Age hill forts of Oxfordshire, and includes a description of Eynsham Park Camp.

The following lidar image illustrates the extent of the ditches and banks surrounding the fort.



The fort lies within 100 metres of the extension of Grims Ditch that runs along Wood Lane and may be associated with the feature.

4. Grims Ditch – part of the extensive Iron Age boundary ditches of Oxfordshire

Ref: Oxoniensia - Article on Grims Ditch by Blair

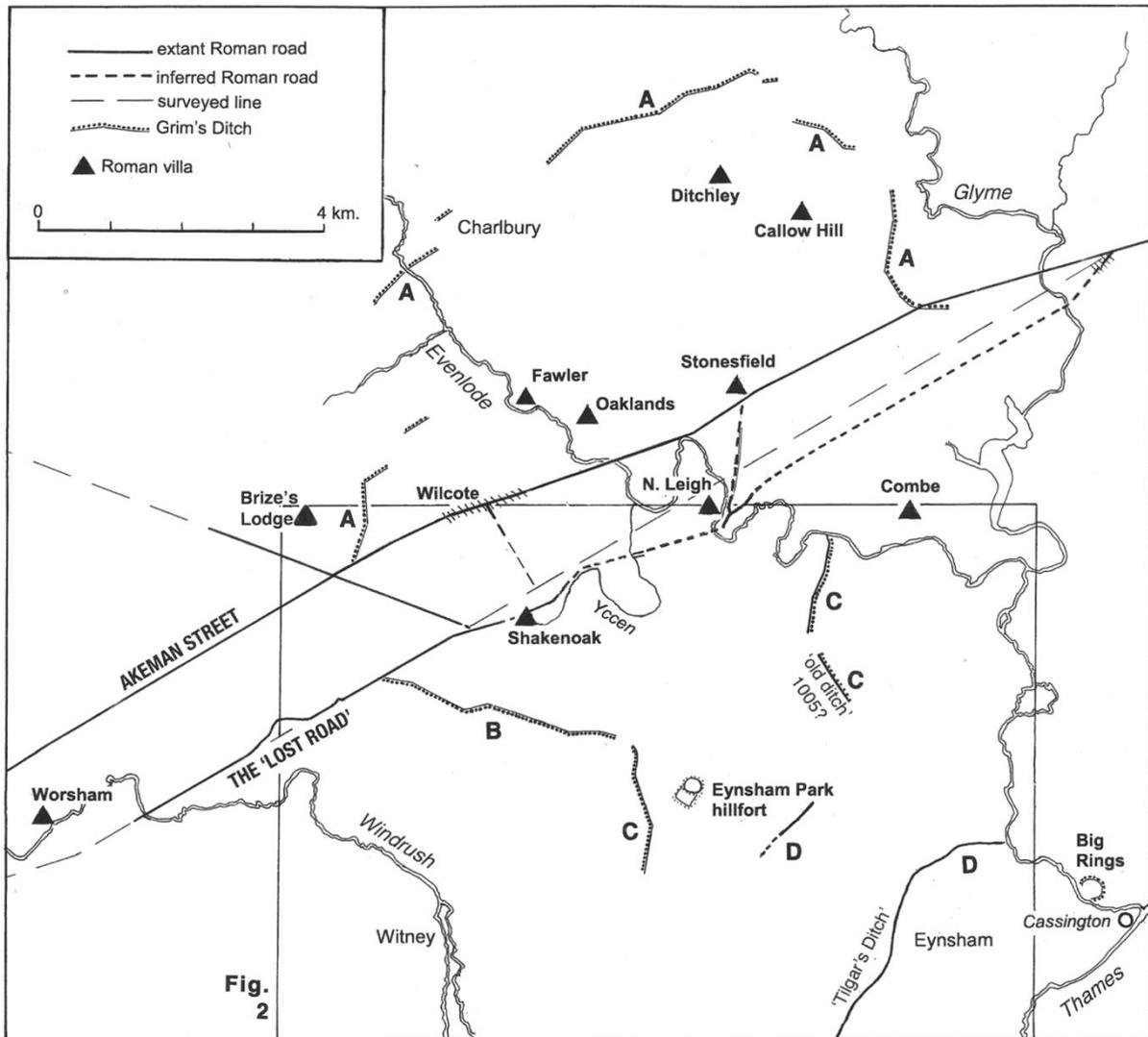


Fig. 1. The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch, in relation to rivers, Roman roads and Roman villas. A = established sections of the circuit, not reinterpreted here. B = an established section of the circuit, reinterpreted here. C = other linear earthworks, newly ascribed here to the Grim's Ditch circuit. D = other linear earthworks, potentially having some association with the Grim's Ditch complex.

In this diagram from Blair's paper, the visible portions of Grim's Ditch running to the southeast of North Leigh is labelled "B", and the portion of the ditch visible on the ground as a ditch and bank alongside Wood Lane is labelled "C". It appears that the course of Grim's Ditch possibly continues between B and C in an area that shows today only as a faint crop mark, indicated by the dashed line in the following aerial photograph.



5. Barrett's Lane – a medieval hollow way

An ancient hollow way runs along the eastern edge of the southeastern corner of the field to the north of Green Lane and to the west of Bridewell Close, North Leigh. See the maps below.

The hollow way marks the course of an ancient route from the present-day junction of New Yatt Road with Green Lane, running north and parallel to Church Road, and turning to meet Church Road close to the former Harcourt Arms.

The road is referred to in 18th and 19th century documents as Barrett's Lane.

The maps below show the pre-1880 6" Ordnance Survey map superimposed on modern satellite mapping, and the corresponding 6" OS map of 1913.

The junction of the hollow way with New Yatt Road corresponds today with the right side of the plot now containing the property known as Elmside. From this point the roadway ran

northwards, with its right-hand verge corresponding to the present-day western boundary of Bridewell Close. The roadway was about 7 metres wide, and lined on each side by hedges and trees, as shown on the 19th century 6" map.

Today the hollow way is protected by areas of brambles but is clearly visible as a distinct sunken channel of about 80 cm in depth and 7 metres in width.

The sunken channel can be traced along the western boundary of the properties at the end of Bridewell Close, and then disappears into the rear of a property on Church Road to the north of Bridewell Close.

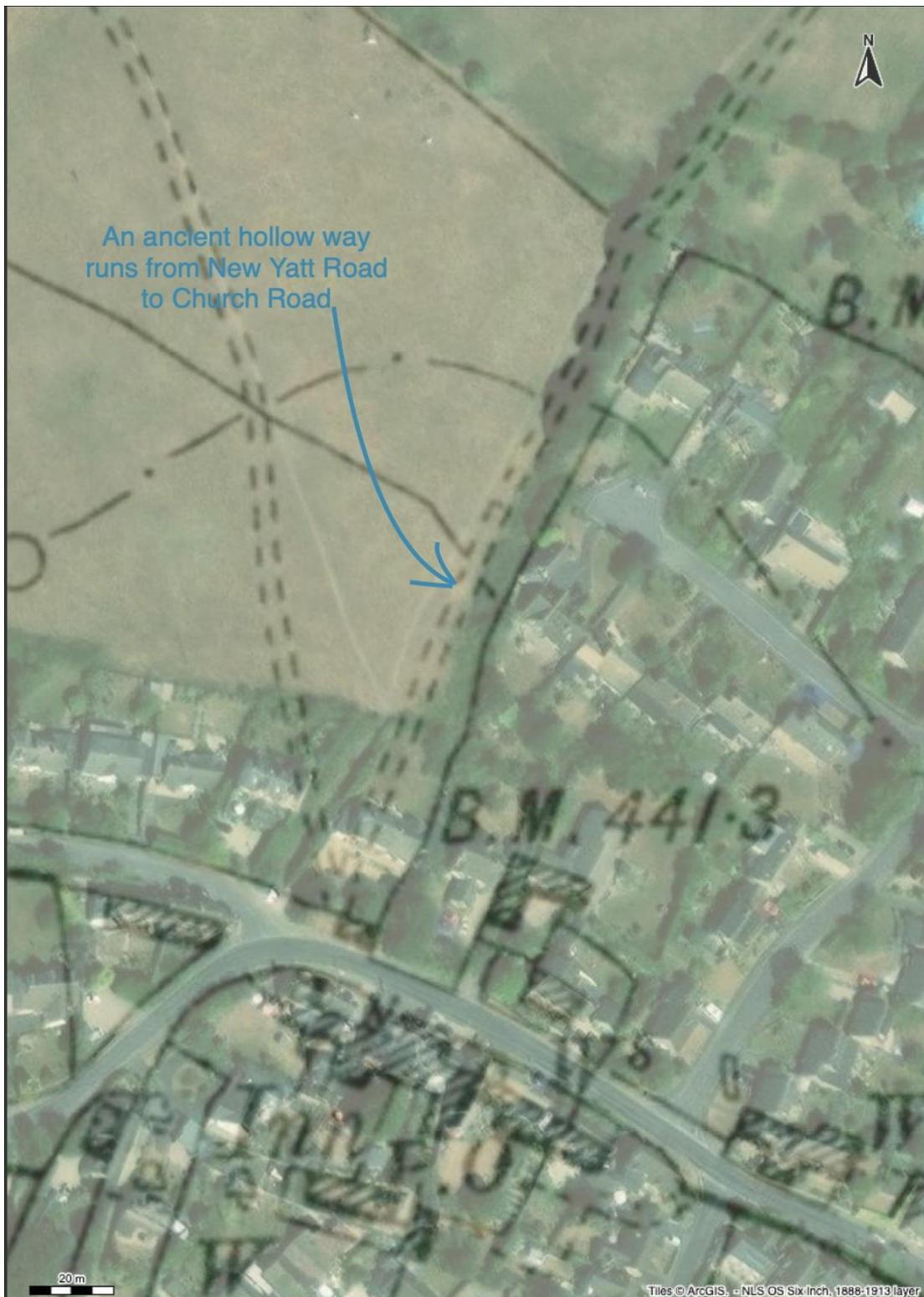
On the 19th century map, the lane formerly ran on behind properties on Church Road, before turning sharply to the east to connect with Church Road just to the north of the former Harcourt Arms.

The 1880 Ordnance Survey 6" map of North Leigh (below) shows the lane running north from the junction of Green Lane and New Yatt Road with trees on either side of the roadway. Judging by the present day hollowed out path of the road, this was clearly used by wheeled vehicles in former times and was not simply a footpath. The present-day footpath runs from a point 40 metres west of the hollow way and converges with it at the stile on the northern boundary of the modern field, which incorporates two former fields.



In the 1913 OS 6" map (below), the satellite mapping is merged to indicate the present-day buildings and paths. The ancient roadway met New Yatt Road at a point which is now the front garden gate to the property known as Elmside.

The original route of the 19th century paths was revised when Elmside and other properties were built in the 1950's. The current route of the paths can be seen emerging into the field some way away from their original point of departure from New Yatt Road.



6. Holly Court and the Saxon Cemetery

Ref: Historic England - Holly Court Farmhouse and Attached Outbuildings (IOE01_03515_27)

NORTH LEIGH WILCOTE ROAD SP31SE (East side) Holly Court Farmhouse and attached outbuildings GV II Farmhouse, now house. Late C16/early C17, incorporating C13 fragments. Coursed limestone rubble, with old rendering to front; gabled stone slate roof; stone ridge and end stacks finished in C19 brick. 3-unit plan with cross passage. 2 storeys; 3-window range. C19 four-panelled door with gabled timber porch



Ref: Oxoniensia - 1940 – Leeds

This paper describes the excavation of five Saxon era burials with grave goods on land close to the entrance of the lane to Holly Court on the Wilcote Road.

7. The Medieval fishponds at Holly Court and Fish Hill

From an article by Emma Tidswell:

“Medieval fishponds were not only sources of sustenance but also integral parts of the medieval landscape, reflecting the importance of fish in the diet and culture of the time.

In the medieval period fishponds were common features, particularly in the estates and gardens of the affluent upper classes.

Fishponds were seen as such an important part of life in the medieval era that mention of fishery infrastructure even made its way into the Magna Carta.

Fishponds could be large areas of water that served a variety of purposes, from promoting status to providing sustenance for the lords of the manor.

So vital were fishponds that in many cases if prominent establishments such as monasteries and castles didn't have a natural fishpond, the arduous task would be undertaken to construct one.

The consumption of fish, and by extension the construction of fishponds, had a close association with the church and religious dietary restrictions on certain days of the year. Fish became an important part of medieval diet”.

On the following OS 25” Map of 1885 – note the fishpond close to Holly Court and the flat floored stream valley north of Field Farm and the church.



The following Lidar map emphasises the topology of the stream valley, and clearly shows the embankment by which the Wilcote road crosses the stream valley, suggesting that this also served as a water retention dam. The fishpond at Holly Court is also evident.



8. North Leigh Common

A good description of the Common appeared in an article in The Oxford Times on 25th February 2010, much of which holds true today:

North Leigh Common contains in its 50 acres a wide variety of important habitats for wildlife, indications of the earlier history of this part of West Oxfordshire, interesting geological features and highly enjoyable walks.



The common is bounded by the villages of East End, Long Hanborough and North Leigh. In the past it was much more extensive, taking in the Manor of Eynsham and extending into Witney and Cogges.

One of the walkers who takes much pleasure in exploring its seasonal changes is Christine Hutchinson, who lives in North Leigh.

“There is so much variety, there is so much there to see,” she said. “It is as beautiful in winter as it is in summer. I can take different routes when walking my dogs, to be able to enjoy it.

“It is beautiful all the year round. In the winter there are the shapes of the trees, which show up against the evergreen background, to be admired. In early spring there are banks and banks of snowdrops, masses of them, which have been allowed to grow wild and other flowers.

“Then there is the wild honeysuckle which you can smell whenever you go past it in the warmer weather. In the autumn there are suddenly the wonderful changes of the colours of the leaves.”

There are road-names today which reflect its past history: there is Common Road in North Leigh, Moorland and Heath Holm Farms in New Yatt and Blindwell Gorse and North Gorse in Eynsham Park — gorse being a typical plant of heathland.

Today the common is administered by West Oxfordshire District Council and managed for the council by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. Much of the practical work is carried out by volunteers.

Ian Anderson, who is volunteer co-ordinator of the Friends of North Leigh Common, said: “About ten years ago the district council commissioned a habitat enhancement plan from a conservation consultancy, which has been overseen by BBOWT.

“The volunteers who have been sharing in the work include members of the Cotswolds Volunteer Warden Service, of the Wychwood Project’s Friends of Wychwood and its young V-Involved volunteers and other local people.”

This is very much community-based conservation. Following a recent working party to thin out some self-sown silver birch trees, the resulting wood was donated to the nearby Bridewell Organic Garden, where it is to be made into besom brooms.

One of the aims of restoration on the common has been to make it more open. This has included the coppicing of tall scrub to improve its age-range.

“There are some self-sown oaks, thanks to the jays and other birds and we are trying to support these and to protect them from invasive growth,” said Mr Anderson.

The area already has a range of different habitats, and these are being enhanced to increase their potential for wildlife.

The common has areas of mixed woodland, with some grassy open spaces. In earlier times it would have been much more open and further back still and would have consisted largely of heathland. The woodland, therefore, is for the most part — in relation to the age of some long-lived tree species — relatively young.

There are areas where, in the past, sand and clay were dug out and used in the brickmaking that took place in Long Hanborough and other villages. These areas now exist as pits, often filled with water.

While the heather had disappeared until recent work aimed at re-introducing it, there are still occasional patches of gorse — reminders of the original heath-like nature of the area.

Scrub clearance to aid this re-introduction has been one of the tasks carried out by Cotswolds Volunteer Wardens.

David Scott, volunteer co-ordinator for the eastern area of the Cotswolds, found this an interesting aspect of the work. “There has been success in getting the heather to grow but it is a long process,” he said.

This volunteer group visits the common three or four times a year. “We helped with the first landscaping and of the clearing of scrub of hawthorn and bramble,” he added.

“The area is now much more open, but some scrub has been left to grow as it provides different habitats.

“We have also been helping to dig out some scrapes to encourage frogs, toads and invertebrate species.

“There are also ponds and areas of the bracken that have been left to provide habitat to attract butterflies, so such a variety of different areas makes the common a very interesting place in which to work.”

A habitat of particular importance is the wetland area, which had developed as a result of the former clay and sand workings and is a habitat rare in this part of Oxfordshire. In one of the pits, there is a small area of sphagnum moss, which is very uncommon in the county.

The common is also valuable for its birdlife. Oxfordshire Ornithological Society, which carries out regular surveys there for inclusion in its Patchwork Project observations on various county sites, has recorded frequent sightings of species that are regarded as being of high conservation concern.

Here again it is the variety of resources that is so important — from the scrub for the wrens and dunnocks, to the teasel-heads on which the goldfinches feed and the homes found by species such as nuthatches in nest-holes in trees and also in the bird-boxes that are provided.

Winter visitors include the fieldfares and redwings — the ‘winter thrushes’ — which can find sustenance on the various berry-bearing shrubs and the apple trees.

Ian Anderson describes the work that has been taking place to maintain this variety of habitats as being like “creating a series of rooms”.

“We want to recreate much of what has been lost,” he said.

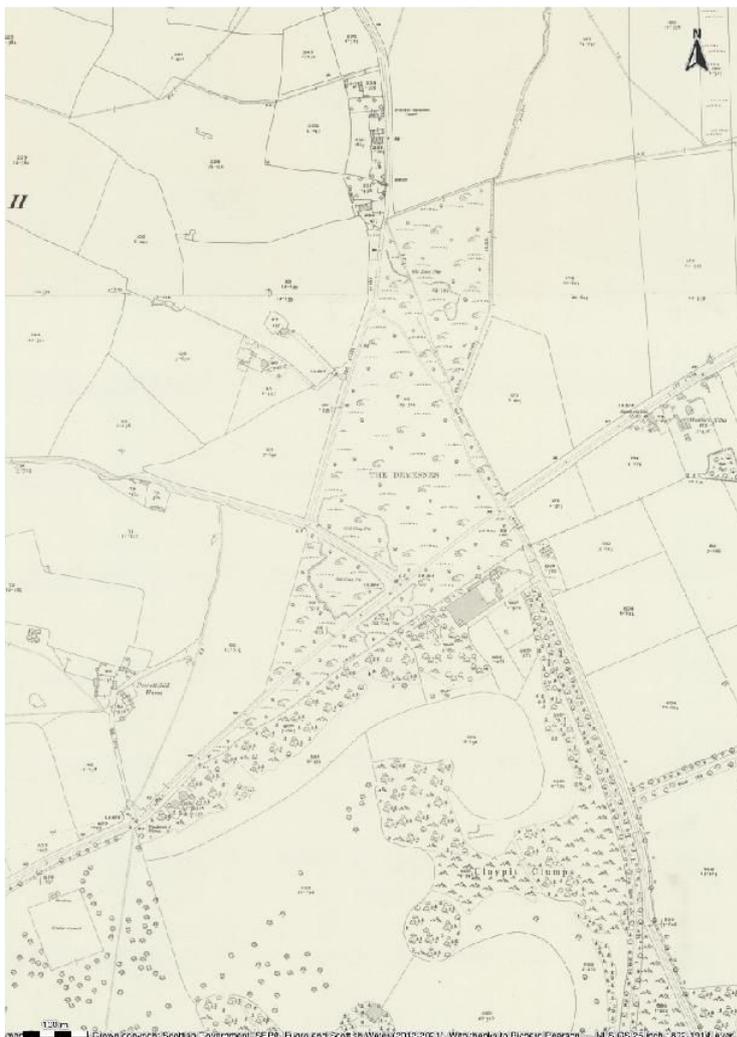
Another objective is to make the common more inviting to walkers. “We have been reducing the taller brushwood around the pathways,” said Mr Anderson. “Over time this had encroached, and we have been cutting back some of the bracken, hawthorn, blackthorn and elder so that people will not feel intimidated in the places where it had reached head-height. This will make visitors feel more welcome.

“The pathways have also been widened, so that people now feel that this is an area which they can enjoy.”

The common is well used by dog-walkers, like Mrs Hutchinson. Its car park is another recent improvement. Drainage work has been undertaken to make it more accessible. Elsewhere, where a sloping bank was becoming slippery, steps have been built to make progress easier for walkers. Benches have been installed.

West Oxfordshire District Council describes North Leigh Common as ‘A quiet place to enjoy’. Mrs Hutchinson added: “It is a wonderful place for walkers and country-lovers — there is always something more to see.”

The following map shows North Leigh Common in 1914.



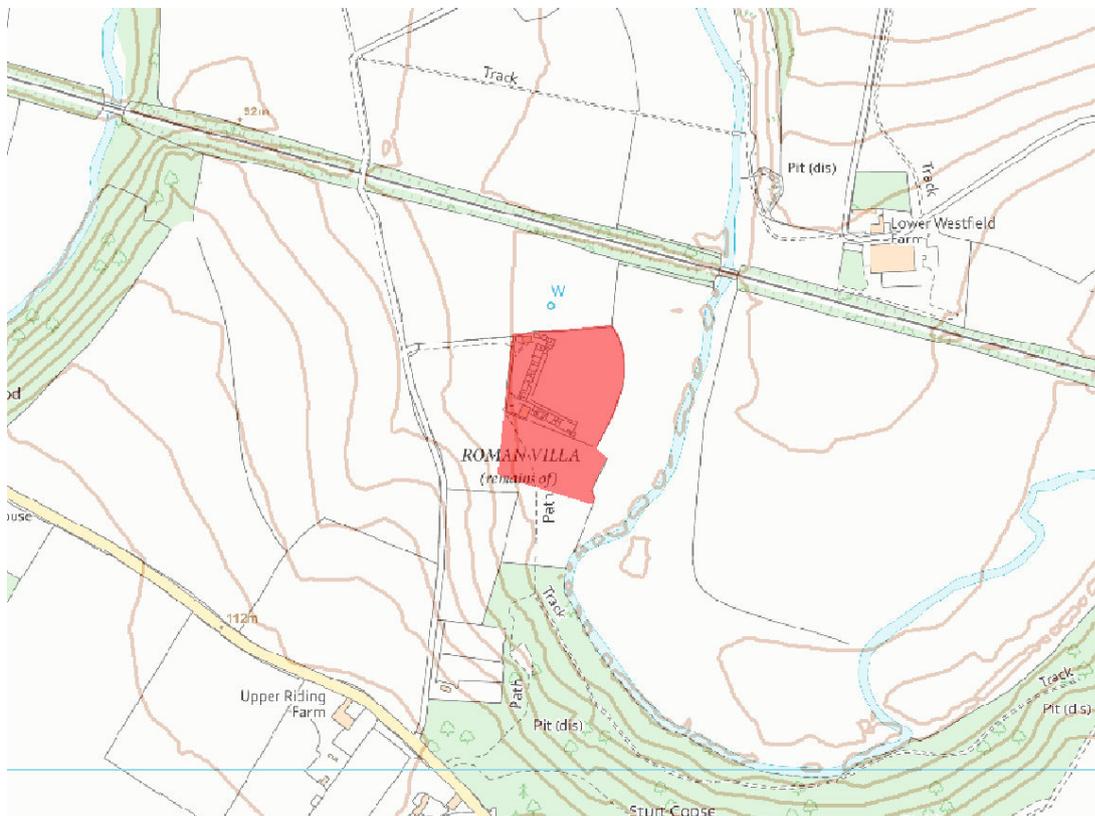
9. North Leigh Roman Villa

From Wikipedia:

North Leigh Roman Villa was a Roman courtyard villa in the Evenlode Valley about 0.5 miles (800 m) north of the hamlet of East End in North Leigh civil parish in Oxfordshire. It is a scheduled monument in the care of English Heritage and is open to the public. It was enlarged over time from the late 1st century AD to the early 5th century and eventually became a very large, luxurious villa rustica with 19 mosaic floors, and included a large agricultural estate with housing for farm workers and possibly slaves. Life there was very comfortable with access to the best local agricultural products and imported luxuries from sophisticated nearby towns such as Cirencester.

It remains the only visible and visitable Roman building in Oxfordshire

The following map is extracted from the above reference.



10. North Leigh Windmill and the Windmill Field

North Leigh Windmill is a Grade II listed building dating from the early 19th century. It is situated at the centre of the village and is for many the defining feature of the village. Local street names – Windmill Close, Windmill Road and Windmill Heights commemorate it, the adjacent Grade II listed former miller’s house dating from 1735 is named Windmill House”, the Primary School logo features it, as does the Parish Council and Cub Group and the local football team are known as the “Millers”.



Although it is known that the mill was built in 1833 by the local miller Joseph Sheppard, it is likely that there was an earlier mill on this site given that the adjacent Windmill House dates from 1735. Its active life as a mill ended many years ago, and today it has lost its four sails and is capped by a utilitarian felt roof.

The following photo was taken just prior to the re-felting of the cap in 2020 but does demonstrate its central position relative to the surrounding housing.



The present owner submitted plans to develop the windmill and the surrounding field in 2015, but the application was refused. In 2019, plans were submitted for the consolidation of the structure with a view to future development:

Ref: 15_02460_FUL-PROPOSED_SITE_LAYOUT-346238

19_03225_LBC-COVERING_LETTER-788861

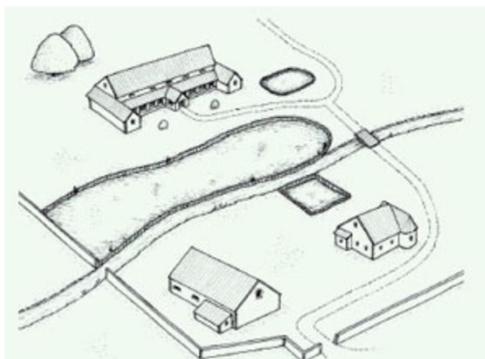
The field in which the windmill is located is important to the village landscape in that it provides the one remaining central open space in an area which is now fully developed. The allotment field to the south of the windmill was re-developed in the 1990's as Windmill Heights, and the former Windmill Stores to its east was replaced by the three-story terrace Healey Court.



11. Shakenoak Roman Villa

Ref: British Archaeology at the Ashmoleum Museum – Shakenoak Farm

“The Roman farm built at Shakenoak, near Witney, in the later years of the first century AD is the only example known in Britain of an inland fish-farm. It was extensively excavated in the 1960s and 1970s, revealing interesting information for the rural history of Roman Britain.”



Ref: Oxoniensis - excavations in 2012 - including Shakenoak Roman Villa

“Shakenoak was one of seven Roman villas located within the north Oxfordshire Grim’s Ditch, an Iron-Age earthwork bisected by Akeman Street.1 The site is in wooded countryside on the edge of the medieval forest of Wychwood, on the boundary between the manors of Wilcote and North Leigh.”

This quotation again underlines the scale of development of North Leigh in the pre-Roman era, and the importance of its Iron Age remains, including Grim's Ditch and Akeman Street.

12. Site of the former Manor House

Ref: The Victoria County History of North Leigh – Manor and Other Estates.

“The manor house stood west of the church. Traces of foundations are visible, but no structure remains above ground. Although the house was allegedly pulled down by James Leigh-Perrott, an 'ancient built house' with dovecot and coach houses, the gardens including a bowling green, was shown on maps of 1767 and 1792. In 1768 it was used for a girls' school. In 1806 nothing remained but the dovehouse, a few of the offices, and mouldering walls. The house's position makes it the likely site of the original manor house, but Netley abbey or its predecessor seems to have preferred, in Cistercian tradition, a house away from the village. In 1279 the original manor house probably formed part of the freehold of John of the hall, the abbey using the house known as Folycourt in the 15th century and as Holy Court or Holly Court from the later 16th.”

The following aerial photo shows the site of the manor house to the west of the churchyard.



13. St Mary's Church – a Grade I listed building

Ref: The Victoria County History of North Leigh – Church

The VCH text is lengthy and detailed, but a short quote follows:

“The church of ST. MARY has an AngloSaxon tower and a 15th-century chapel of outstanding quality. The church, of coursed limestone rubble and ashlar, comprises the integral west tower, a chancel with south vestry and organ chamber, a nave with, on the north, the 15th-century chapel and a 17th-century chapel, and a south aisle and south porch. The existence of a substantial pre-Conquest church is evident from the tower, which is of the earlier 11th century. It is of oblong plan and formerly had a large arch, presumably into a nave, in its western face: in the mid-19th century traces of foundations were uncovered west of the tower, reputedly

consistent with a nave of two bays. The external faces of the tower on the east and west retain the gable-marks of the early high-pitched roofs, and the 11th-century church is usually thought to have been axial. The nave was presumably abandoned in or before the later 12th century, when an aisled nave of two bays was built east of the tower with a chancel beyond it. Early in the 13th century the tower arch was enlarged, and a new chancel of two bays was built, leaving the former chancel to serve as a third, un-aisled, bay of the nave. There is a contemporary tomb recess on the north side of the chancel. In the earlier 14th century both aisles were rebuilt or remodelled and extended westwards, and arches were made in the north and south sides of the tower. The tower was given a new west window, the chancel a new east window. A doorway, now blocked, was put at the west end of the north wall of the north aisle, and in the south aisle a mid-12th-century doorway was reset, its opening and tympanum being recut. A doorway on the south side of the chancel was built or remodelled in 14th-century style.

In the mid-14th century, a crocketed ogee arch, perhaps over a tomb, was made in the north wall of the easternmost bay of the nave, and there was presumably a chapel continuing the north aisle. That chapel was replaced c. 1440 by the Wilcote chantry chapel, a small, lavishly decorated building whose workmanship, notably that of the fan vaulting, is of a quality rarely found in parish churches; the chapel has been attributed to the master mason Richard Winchcombe. Winchcombe, who had worked for New College, Oxford, may have been known to the Wilcotes family through the Wykehams. Beneath the arch is a stone tomb bearing the alabaster effigies of Sir William Wilcotes (d. 1410) and his wife Elizabeth (d. 1445)."

Although the church is located on the northern edge of the village, it occupies a central role in the lives of the residents of the parish and is today the place of worship for a small but active community.

North Leigh School has close links with the church, and the entire school visits the church for various seasonal services. The war memorial in the churchyard commemorates the men who died in the wars of the 20th century, and the residents and youth organisations congregate there on Remembrance Sunday each year.

Development history

North Leigh can trace its roots back to Roman times with a Roman villa being located within the village boundary. The village in Saxon times would appear to have been centred around the parish church.

Records show that a mains water supply was provided to the village in 1935 and to East End in 1937. Mains electricity was introduced in 1938 and a mains drainage scheme was completed in the late 1950's. Unfortunately, current issues with capacity require the pumping station to be upgraded by the water authority.

The availability of these main services inevitably led to an increase in the number of houses being built. Although records show that North Leigh's population began to increase in the 1920's. In 1951, the population was 805, by 1961 – 1,197 and in the 1960's North Leigh had one of the fastest growing populations in Oxfordshire. It stood at 1,765 in 1971 but the rate of increase slowed in the 1970's, and by 1981 the population had risen only to 1,859. In recent years, however, there have been more major developments which have significantly increased the population.

The principal development in the 1980's would seem to have centred along Common Road and Park Road and the generous size of a lot of the plots on both these roads has led to a lot of additional dwellings being constructed as evidenced by the number of A's, B's and even C's that can be seen. The style is an inconsistent style. The type of housing is detached, semi-

detached, some terraced and a considerable number of bungalows. There are very few flats. A lot of the bungalows have had roof extensions carried out and most of the new development has been concentrated in North Leigh village itself and the triangle between Common Road, Park Road and the Witney Road has been built over including a new school built in 1967.

In more recent years, there have been larger scale developments, Marlborough Gardens, Breakspear Way and Masons Grove. This has significantly increased the population and the demands on the local infrastructure. It is also noticeable that the new developments, both the larger ones and some smaller developments including those off Common Road and Park Road which have been built over the last 10-15 years, are a more consistent style of housing with quite a number being built in what is regarded as traditional Cotswold style.

The 2021 Census states that there were 478 detached (53.6%), 265 semi -detached 29.7%), 108 terraced (12.1%) and 30 flats (3.4%).

74.4% are owner occupied (64% nationally), 11.15% social rented, 1.46% Local Authority rented, 10.59% private rented (19% nationally) and 2.25% Shared Ownership. This comes to 99.85%, and as mentioned is made of a couple of caravans, this probably accounts for the missing 0.15%

The census was before the recent larger developments so I suspect this might have increased Social rented and Shared ownership. By way of example Marlborough Gardens has 50 Houses of which 40% are affordable and if the same pattern is reflected in the other large developments, it would mean an increase in social rented and shared ownership and a decrease in owner occupied although the change is unlikely to be significant.

Population and demographics

Population

Historic population data taken from British History online. Recent population data and housing development numbers taken from the Census and information in the public domain.

Prior to 1961, population growth in the parish was slow and intermittent, punctuated by poverty, smallpox and the two world wars. Early population figures are estimates only and exclude children but based on the available evidence the number of adults / people of all ages can be tracked as follows:

Year	Number of adults / people
1086	41 tenants + 1 slave
1279	116 tenants
1377	111 taxpayers
1676	c400
1801	517
1861	738
1921	578
1951	805
1961	1,197
1971	1,765
1981	1,859
2021	2,127
2024	2,978 estimated

Between 1961 and 1971 the population increased by 568 (+47%), coinciding with the 1960s housing developments in the village of North Leigh (noted later). The population total then settled at around the 1,800 mark for the next 40 years until 2021.

Between 2021 and the present day, population numbers have again grown rapidly, outstripping local infrastructure; this growth is mainly due to four new housing developments:

- Bluebell Gardens (14 new houses)
- Masons Grove (44 new houses) Breakspear Way (50 new houses)
- Marlborough Gardens (35 new homes)

In addition to this there is another approved, but as yet unbuilt, development off the A4095 adjacent to Marlborough Gardens to be known as Rectory Rise (55 new houses) as well as a small development of 10 houses on Common Road.

And lastly there are also proposed developments (September 2024) as follows:

- 43 houses at the Manor Oak site on New Yatt Road. Planning for the latter was turned down by WODC but the developers are appealing to the Secretary of State and a decision is expected towards the end of 2024.
- A pre-planning proposal for 70 – 150 new houses to the land West of Common Road at the Southern end.
- At the recent 'call for sites' by WODC, other significant swathes of land have been put forward as potential residential building sites all around the Parish.

It is estimated that since 2021, population and household numbers in the parish have swelled by over 40% or more, excluding the Rectory Rise, Manor Oak and Common Road developments.

In summary, the population stayed well below 1,000 people for many hundreds of years and in the 63 years from 1961 to 2024 it has almost trebled in size.

Since the first half of the 20th Century there has been very little investment in local infrastructure with sewage and drainage dating from that period and essential repairs taking place on an ad-hoc, piecemeal basis resulting in the same problems reoccurring with frequent sewage leaks and broken water pipes. As the population has grown infrastructure problems have increased, notably water pollution, sewerage issues, parking and more as identified by the 2024 Neighbourhood Plan Community survey.

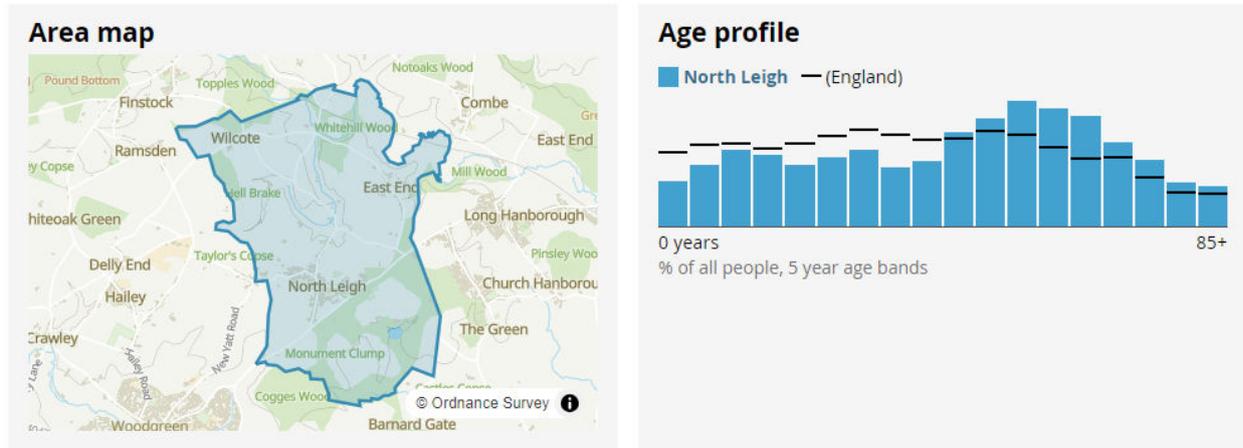
Demographics

Data taken from OSCI 2021 Local Insight Profile. Most data drawn from the 2011 Census.

In 2019 there were 1,880 people living in North Leigh (*mid-year estimate, ONS 2019*). The population is skewed towards older age groups with 27.4% being aged 65+ compared with 21.8% for West Oxfordshire and 18.4% for England. Conversely young people aged 0-15 years are under-represented in the population:

Profile preview

North Leigh



Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

! The data and boundaries displayed in this profile are aggregated from small areas on a best-fit basis, and therefore may differ slightly from other sources.

Anecdotally it is noticeable that the age bias has started to shift, post the 2021 Census, with more young families moving to North Leigh and hence more young people.

Health

Data taken from OSCI 2021 Local Insight Profile. Based on original data drawn from the 2011 Census, the ONS (various years 2009-2017), Indices of Deprivation 2015, Health Survey for England 2006-2008, Sport England Active Lives Survey 2020 and others.

Life expectancy for men in North Leigh is slightly higher than the England average and for women it is significantly higher at 88 years vs 83 years; however, when healthy life expectancy is compared, the differences for both men and women versus the England average are significantly higher.

Curiously there is a higher incidence of the main cancer types in the North Leigh population vs England as a whole but mortality from cancer is significantly lower which suggests that the population are getting good medical care and treatment. Indeed, the only major cause of mortality that exceeds the England average is death from strokes.

This general pattern of reasonably good health is repeated across most health metrics and lifestyle factors and, in general terms, the population of North Leigh falls into the 10% - 20% 'least health deprived' decile. The only exception to this general picture is that the percentage of people aged 15 years who 'smoke occasionally' is above the England average and there is a large body of evidence suggesting that smoking behaviour in early adulthood affects health behaviours in later life.

All this is in spite of the fact that, being a rural community, the people in the parish of North Leigh have to travel much further than the average person in England to get to an A&E hospital, a GP, dentist or pharmacy.

In spite of some difficulties with accessing the excellent network of footpaths and bridleways throughout the Parish, the residents of North Leigh maintain healthy lifestyles: the Local Insight Profile for North Leigh in 2020, created by OCISA (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion) shows 72% of residents as being active for at least 150 minutes per week and 87% doing physical activity at least twice a month (p.43).

As well as enjoying walking in the area, many residents participate in local exercise classes. No doubt the desire to undertake exercise is enhanced by the good air quality locally: the level of air pollutants recorded in the same Profile (p.63) is consistently at or below the national average.

Community Assets

Asset	Location	Notes
Memorial Hall	Park Road	
Youth Centre	Rear of Memorial Hall, Park Road	
Library	Memorial Hall, Park Road	
Post Office and shop	Memorial Hall, Park Road	
Children's Play Area	Park Road	
Children's Play Area	Breakspear Way	
Children's Play Area	Akeman Road	
Adventure Playground	Windmill Road	
The Turner Hall	Church Road	Private parties, venue for clubs and society meetings, Seniors Lunch monthly. Community Coffee Mornings.
St Mary's Church	Church Road	Anglican church. Weekly services.
War Memorials	Churchyard	
Cemetery	Church Road	
St Peter's Church	Wilcote	Anglican church. Weekly service. Part of the Forest Edge Benefice
Allotments	Off Park Road	
North Leigh Football Club	Off A4095	
Gospel Hall	Common Road	Coffee mornings weekly
Cuckamus Green	Common Road	
Quicken Copse	Green Lane	Community woodland
North Leigh Common	East End	

Commercial Assets

Asset	Location	Notes
Masons Arms PH	Park Road	
Woodman PH	New Yatt Road	
Estelle Manor	Eynsham Park	Major local employer – hospitality. Subsidises Stagecoach bus services
North Leigh Business Park	Off A4095	

	New Yatt Business Park	New Yatt	Includes some retail units, e.g. Brewery, Pizza shop
	Osney Hill Farm	Off A4095	Business Units
	Eynsham Park Sawmill	Cuckoo Lane	Business units
	Wilcote Walled Garden	Wilcote Road	Therapeutic horticultural centre
	Field Farm	Off Church Road	Livery yard, Stables
	New Yatt RDA	Off Wilcote Road	Volunteer run stables and horse-riding centre for disabled people.
	North Leigh Reservoir	Heath Farm Lane	Thames Water - covered reservoir.

Traffic and Transport

The main method of transportation in the Parish is by motor car.

There is currently a double decker bus service (Stagecoach No 7) in operation between Witney and Oxford. It runs through North Leigh twice an hour between 5.30am and 1.30am the following day.

The service started approximately 18 months ago and is funded by Estelle Manor and offered as an employment benefit for staff with journeys provided for free.

Generally, the North Leigh to Witney route operates in a timely fashion. However, journeys to Oxford are sometimes problematic with regard to meeting the timetable, particularly during rush hour where the impact of traffic congestion associated with journeys into central Oxford come into play.

The route to Oxford is also convoluted, going through Woodstock (where it doubles back on itself via a turning circle outside the Town) and then proceeds through Kidlington Airport, Kidlington, Banbury Road, terminating at Oxford railway station. A journey time of between an hour and quarter to an hour and a half can be expected if travelling from North Leigh to Oxford.

The route has a stop at Hanborough Station allowing access to the GWR train services to Oxford, Didcot, Reading, and London, and in the opposite direction towards Worcester.

There are no bus services in operation for East End residents.

The Witney to Woodstock cycle lane adjacent to the A4095 has still not been connected between the Common Road and Park Road junctions. Consequently, cyclists have to use the village network of roads if they want to avoid this busy stretch of the A4095.

Some stretches of the cycle lane along the A4095 are not well maintained with vegetation creep and road chippings presenting hazards to users. This has the detrimental effect of forcing experienced cyclists on to the road and deters those who might want to try using a bike instead of a car for short journeys into Witney for example, from doing so.

Traffic through the Parish road networks has increased dramatically over the last 10 years. This can be attributed to a number of factors, the key ones being:

- New housing - North Leigh has increased in size by 40% and as a result there are more cars on its roads (UK average is 1.30 cars per household)
- Increased traffic congestion on the A40 to Oxford – Witney to Oxford commuters are using New Yatt Road, Common Road, Church Road, and Park Road as short cuts to

join the A4095 and 'get ahead' of queues, using Cuckoo Lane and Lower Road junctions to join the A40

- The boom in online shopping – now a standard method of shopping for many resulting in a large increase in delivery vans on the roads
- Stagecoach No 7 bus service – the current timetable results in c70 journeys per day through North Leigh village

All roads in North Leigh are particularly busy during rush hour and primary school drop off and pick up times. With the latter, cars parked in and around the school area on Park Road create traffic flow and driver/pedestrian visibility issues as a result of the road layout.

The Post Office and Memorial Hall is situated opposite the Primary School and has 6 off road parking spaces. Such limited parking is insufficient to handle events that are held in the Hall e.g. society meetings, fitness classes, club activities. Consequently, the same traffic issues arise with on road parking as per the school drop off/pick up situation.

There are single lane restrictions near the Masons Arms opposite the Common Road junction to Church Road due to the narrowness and winding nature of the road. A similar situation exists near The Woodman on New Yatt Road. Both are through traffic pinch points and present difficulties for large lorries going to and from New Yatt Industrial Estate.

The majority of large lorries going to and from the Industrial Estate use Common Road as its straight and fairly wide. The alternative approach from Witney on the New Yatt Road is an unviable option for most given its very poor state of repair.

More recently Estelle Manor has introduced a shuttle minibus pick up service for its staff using the No7 bus. Basically, the minibus follows the No7 bus through Common Road and Park Road picking up staff as they disembark, taking them on to work. The shuttle bus operates 12 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Employment

The 2021 Census showed that there are 58.4% of adults aged 16+ who are economically active compared to the UK average of 57.4%

The breakdown of those economically active is as follows:

Category	North Leigh	England	Unit
Economically active: In employment	58.4	57.4	%
Economically active: Unemployed	2.8	3.5	%
Economically inactive	38.9	39.1	%

The breakdown of hours worked is as follows:

Category	North Leigh	England	Unit
Part-time: 15 hours or less worked	13.3	10.3	%
Part-time: 16 to 30 hours worked	18.3	19.5	%

Full-time: 31 to 48 hours worked	55.1	59.1	%
Full-time: 49 or more hours worked	13.3	11.1	%

The breakdowns show that compared to England North Leigh has a higher employment rate overall but the percentage of those in full time work is slightly lower than that for England.

Place of work and travel to workplace

Category	North Leigh	England	Unit
Driving a car or van	50.4	44.5	%
Work mainly at or from home	37.9	31.5	%
Passenger in a car or van	4.1	3.9	%
On foot	2.9	7.6	%
Bicycle	1.5	2.1	%
Bus, minibus or coach	1.1	4.3	%
Train	0.7	2	%
Motorcycle, scooter or moped	0.6	0.5	%
Other method of travel to work	0.6	1	%
Underground, metro, light rail, tram	0.2	1.9	%
Taxi	NA	0.7	%

As can be seen from the above table, the greatest number of people travel to work by car or van.

Fewer people use public transport compared to the whole of England – 2% vs 8.2%

North Leigh has a larger percentage of people working at or mainly from home than England as a whole.

DISTANCES TRAVELLED TO WORK			
Category	North Leigh	England	Unit
Less than 10km	21.9	35.4	%
10km to less than 30km	20.2	14.4	%
30km and over	3.5	4.3	%
Works mainly from home	38	31.5	%
Other	16.5	14.5	%

The above table would imply that most people not working from home, work within the wider local area. Given the lack of employment opportunities in the specific area of the parish this would appear to be correct. The recent opening of Estelle Manor may have provided closer employment opportunities within the parish boundaries.

Employment sectors and Qualifications

Employment sectors:

Category	North Leigh	England	Unit
2. Professional occupations	24.6	20.3	%
1. Managers, directors and senior officials	15.2	12.9	%
3. Associate professional and technical occupations	14.4	13.3	%
5. Skilled trades occupations	12	10.2	%
4. Administrative and secretarial occupations	8.7	9.3	%
6. Caring, leisure and other service occupations	7	9.3	%
9. Elementary occupations	6.5	10.5	%
8. Process, plant and machine operatives	6.1	6.9	%
7. Sales and customer service occupations	5.5	7.5	%

When comparing employment sectors, the areas which are the most statistically different compared to the England figures those listed as 1,2,3. These total 54.2% for NL vs 46.5% for England.

Qualifications

Qualification categories:

Category	North Leigh	England	Unit
Level 4 qualifications and above	40.8	33.9	%
Level 1, 2 or 3 qualifications	36.9	39.9	%
No qualifications	13.3	18.1	%
Apprenticeship	6.8	5.3	%
Other qualifications	2.2	2.8	%

North Leigh is above the England percentage for Levels 1 and higher: NL 77.7% vs England 73.8%

North Leigh also has lower percentage of the population with no qualifications than the national figure.

Crime

On the basis of data available for the period July 2023 – June 2024 from Thames Valley Police, the area of Eynsham of which North Leigh is a part, shows the following recorded levels of criminal activity:

Type of crime	
Violence & sexual offences	244
Other theft	74
Anti-social behaviour	47
Criminal damage & arson	34
Vehicle crime	33

Public order	31
Burglary	28
Drugs	28

Education

The Parish is served by North Leigh CE Primary School which is located in the centre of the village and was rated as “good” following an OfSTED inspection in 2023. Operating from a purpose-built Early Years building on the same site is North Leigh Pre-School which provides sessional childcare places for children aged 2-4 years old.



The school is supported by a Governing Body and became a Primary Academy within the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST) in June 2015. ODST is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) with schools across Oxfordshire and Berkshire. It is one of the largest MATs in the region, with five geographical hubs to support school-to-school collaboration. Schools that are within the Trust have the freedom to serve their individual communities in the way they know best, with support from ODST to ensure they have what they need to deliver the best for their pupils.

The school serves children from the ages of 4-11 with 181 pupils on the school roll (as of February 2023) and currently has a capacity of circa 200. There is also a strong link with the parish church of St Mary's. There is a growing problem of traffic congestion at school pick-up and drop-off times in particular, due to parked cars.

There are no establishments providing secondary education within the Parish, which falls into the catchment area of Witney.

Communications

The information below has been sourced from Ofcom.

Broadband Coverage

Broadband type	Highest available download speed	Highest available upload speed	Availability
Standard	7Mbps	0.8Mbps	Good
Superfast	200Mbps	28Mbps	Good
Ultrafast	1000Mbps	100Mbps	Good

Networks in the area: Openreach, Virgin Media. Availability of broadband throughout the parish has improved over the last 2-5 years and the Ofcom search results may not reflect the suppliers available as of today.

Mobile Coverage

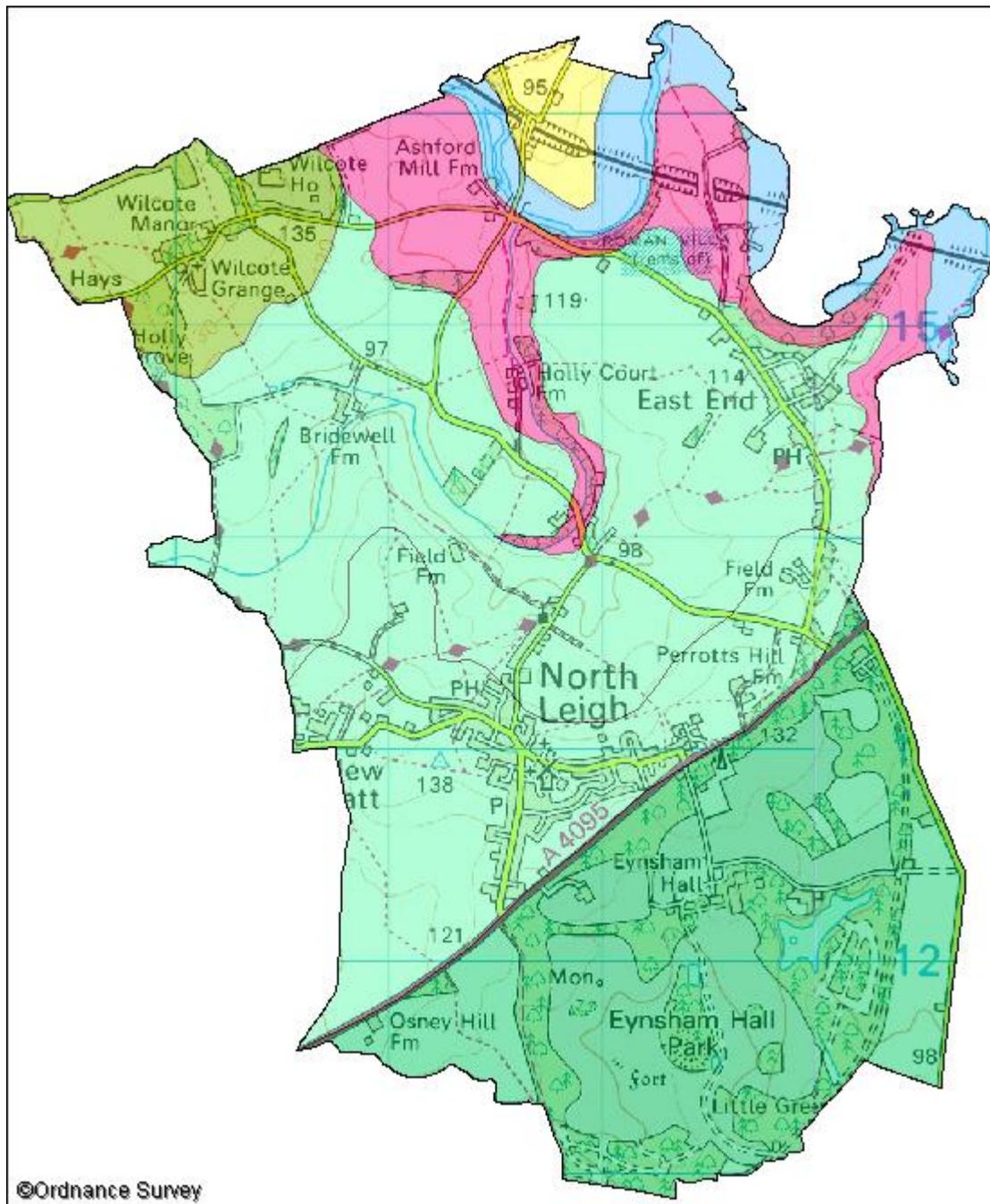
Provider	Voice	Data
EE	Likely	Likely
Three	Likely	Likely
O2	Likely	Likely
Vodafone	Likely	Likely

The above is based on the location being the Memorial Hall and is the "Outdoor" mobile availability

Landscape and Soil

The largest area of North Leigh Parish (light green area of the map below, taken from the Oxfordshire Wildlife Landscape Study) is classed as "settled ancient pastures". However, while most of this area is indeed grazing land on limestone soil, fields around Bridewell Farm have recently been planted with barley, which is flourishing.

The land rises from the south to a large hill, topped by the old windmill, next to the Mason's Arms public house. There are wide views across the grazing land to the north of the main New Yatt and Park Roads; and then there is an upwards slope towards the northern Parish boundary and the hamlet of Wilcote. From Wilcote itself there are panoramic views back towards the church. The area around Wilcote includes patches of ancient woodland: Coneygar Copse and Holly Grove, and less dense woodland around the group of houses.



The land to the south of the A4095, is the estate owned by Eynsham Hall, which is largely ancient woodland i.e. continuously wooded since 1600AD. While “parts have been replanted with conifers, poplars or a mix of trees, there are still areas of broadleaved woodland composed of native trees”. This area is regarded as a “national nature conservation priority.”

North Leigh Parish is fortunate to include 3 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): Hollycourt Bank, Whitehill Wood and Sturt Copse (coloured pink on the map above), as well as North Leigh Common, which is managed by West Oxfordshire District Council with assistance from local volunteers.

Hollycourt Bank, as limestone grassland, is regarded as a national nature conservation priority. Sturt Copse, to the south-east of the Roman Villa may be described as “hanging woodlands”: trees include ash, wych elm and oak. The wych elm especially makes it a priority for conservation.

Land close to the Evenlode river forms a floodplain, naturally draining towards the river. There is also a small area of grassland mixed with woodland to the north of the river - the only part of the Parish on its north side (marked in yellow on the map)

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

It is clear from the extent of the records about the Parish of North Leigh held by the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVRC) that local residents value biodiversity in the neighbourhood.¹ The most prolific records of biodiversity in North Leigh Parish have been collected on sites where there is an expectation that there will be interesting findings: particularly, North Leigh Common and the SSIs at Holly Court Bank, Whitehill Wood, and Sturt Copse. In addition, there has been several years of continuous monitoring at specific farms or estates. In some cases, such as Eynsham Hall and Bridewell Farm, continuous recordings have ceased, and it is not possible to guess whether the items recorded were no longer present, or the current owners were not interested. Note that for some of the records of sightings by individuals, the exact location is marked as confidential, presumably in order not to risk an item being destroyed.

Residents are often delighted by the sight of groups of non-endangered animals, butterflies, flowers etc: e.g. foxes, groups of roe deer, a wood full of bluebells, and they may choose to go in search of common birds in our woodlands; however, this report concentrates on the rarer species.²

The presence of the great crested newt is often celebrated, not only on North Common where there is a monitoring group. Theoretically, this newt is not endangered but it has disappeared from other places because of loss of habitat and invasive agriculture.

Records of many birds have decreased, for instance barn owls, bull finches and kestrels. Red kites, on the other hand, have increased, presumably after the drive to re-introduce them. Swifts are still arriving in groups in early summer as expected. The RSPB (www.rspb.org.uk) have reported that the number of birds recorded during the annual count has generally decreased throughout the UK. Fish found in the Evenlode are of the species expected, though there are few records.

Residents will be pleased to note that the English bluebell is holding its own in the countryside (against the Spanish one) – many walkers choose to visit our woodlands when they are flowering. The scarce, blue-flowered meadow clary can be found in Holly Court Bank, along with other limestone grassland wildflowers. Whitehill Wood is a conservation priority as a mixed broadleaved woodland with various woodland flowers, and there is the occasional sighting of Roman snails (found in greater numbers elsewhere in the district). The small area to the north of the river consists of unmanaged scrubland, and thus has a wide variety of wildflowers, including the uncommon grey sedge.

¹ While some of the records for North Leigh available from the TVERC (www.tverc.org) date as back as far as 1989, comments here are based on records in the 10 years from 2014 to 2023 – to ensure current relevance.

² Since the records supplied by TVERC do not show the extent to which species are endangered, information about this was obtained from other sites such as the Woodland Trust, Butterfly Conservation Trust, RSPB and BBOWT and the Oxfordshire Wildlife Landscape Study (<https://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk>) from which passages are quoted in this document.

Water and Sewage

North Leigh Parish has the River Evenlode as its north-east border. The river may flood when there is heavy rain, but residents and owners of adjoining land are prepared for this. There are no other watercourses that have a name.

There is an unnamed stream that borders a track leading south from near Ashford Mill, passing Holy Court Farm and Fish Hill Farm (at various points, this stream is labelled “drain” on the County Council Definitive Map.) There is another stream that rises near the Ladywell north-west of Bridewell Farm, and then goes both south towards Fish Hill Farm and forks west to go near the site of the roman villa near Shakenoak Farm.

It is not surprising that this network of “ditches” (as well as springs that are not marked on maps) can lead to flooding of fields and footpaths. Of recent years, there has been severe flooding of tracks and footpaths, especially the “track” called North Leigh Lane: part of the problem is (clear) water draining from the land around the recent development at Masons Grove. There are also problems in various places around the parish with mud and water collecting near kissing gates on paths going down slopes, and other paths have become dangerous for walkers in the winter months over considerable distances.

Drinking water and management of sewage is provided by the Thames Water treatment plant near Heath Farm. There are ongoing problems with the services provided by Thames Water, leading to repeated closures of the main roads in the village when repairs need to be carried out. In addition, residents who live close to the treatment plant report that they need to filter their drinking water to get rid of the chemical odour.