

OVERTON PARISH BOUNDARIES AND ORIGINS, GEOLOGY AND LANDSCAPE, COMMUNICATIONS AND POPULATION

Parish boundaries and origins



A royal charter, dated between 963 and 975, granted the Manor of Overton to the bishopric of Winchester. It included detached lands and a chapel at Tadley, as well as land at North Waltham and Bradley near Herriard. The detached lands are not included in this account.

The parish extends from its straight northern boundary, which marks the course of the Roman Portway, to the Basingstoke-Stockbridge road in the south. The boundary of the ecclesiastical parish shown on the tithe map of 1843 was probably established in Anglo-Saxon times, providing access to water in the river valley for livestock and mills, as well as arable land, heath and woodland on the downs to the north and south.¹ The boundaries on the tithe map correspond with the civil parish established in 1894 (see map, left), Tadley chapelry having been detached in 1878 when a separate ecclesiastical parish was formed.² Almost all of the parish of Ashe was added in 1932 to form the present day civil parish,³ the area thereby increasing from 6,762 a. to 8,577 a. In terms of population, Ashe was

relatively small, having only 174 inhabitants in 1931 compared with 1,885 in Overton. This account will cover Overton parish as it was until 1932 and only includes the parish of Ashe after this date.

Geology and Landscape⁴

The River Test rises at the eastern border of the parish and flows to the west. Elevations range from 75 m. where the River Test flows out of the parish to 185 m. at Robley Belt on the northern boundary.

The soil types are mainly calcareous with areas of overlying plateau drift of clay with flints. The clay was traditionally used for bricks and tiles while flints were much used for walls. In the Test Valley there are silt and gravel deposits. Rain soaks into the deeper layers of the underlying chalk and moves under the influence of gravity until it emerges as springs in the river valley. Rain takes several months to filter through the underlying chalk through to the springs, resulting in a fairly constant flow in the river which is ideal for the operation of water mills.

In the northern part of the parish, Great Litchfield Down and Willesley Warren form a distinct open, rolling area underlain predominantly with chalk which has been covered in places with clay and flint

¹ Hare, J., The Bishop and the Prior: demesne agriculture in medieval Hampshire. *Agricultural History Review* 54, 2, (2006), 191.

² HRO 39M75.

³ HRO 27M80.

⁴ This section is derived from *Overton Biodiversity Action Plan, 2015-2019*, (2015), 9-17. <http://www.overton-biodiversity.org/resources/docs/overton-bap-2015-19.pdf> Accessed 28 June 2017.

deposits. Erosion of this underlying geology has led to the formation of a rolling, strongly undulating landform, with numerous dry valleys. Elevation and lack of vegetation contribute to an exposed and remote character.

The River Test has cut through the chalk and the alluvial loam and gravel resulting in a change in vegetation from the surrounding chalkland. The land adjacent to the river forms a mixture of wet woodland, disused watercress beds and grazing land.

South Test Down to the south of the river is underlain with chalk, creating a gently undulating landform characterised by large arable fields with low hedgerows and limited woodland cover, except to the east which has a more enclosed landscape. About 10 per cent of this area is woodland.

Communications

Routes

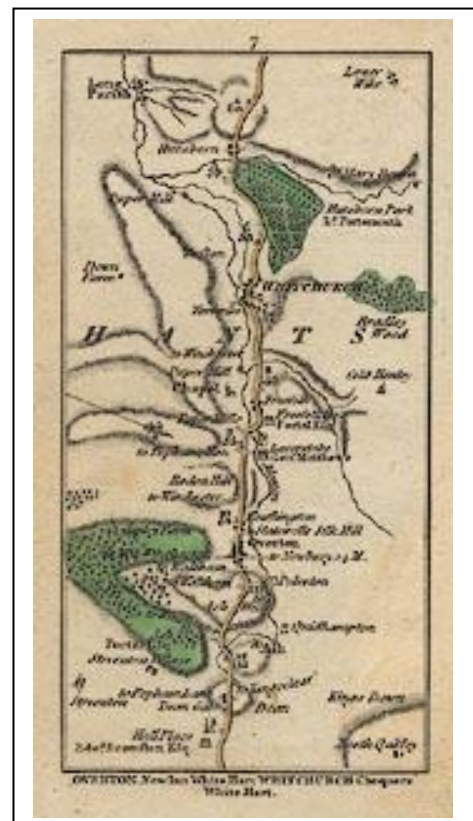
The oldest route through the parish is the Harrow Way, a Neolithic era track following the high chalk downs connecting Stonehenge with the Weald of Kent.⁵ An 1800 plan of Court Farm shows it as 'Old London Road Sheepwalk', indicating that it had previously been used as a drovers' track to London.⁶

The straight northern boundary of the parish is 'Caesar's Belt' which marks the course of a Roman Road now called the Portway, connecting Silchester with Salisbury.⁷

The east-west route

It is presumed that the new town of 1216 was laid out along the line of a pre-existing east-west route through the Test valley.⁸ The 14th century Gough Map shows that the preferred route between London and Exeter passed through Alton, Alresford and Winchester.⁹ However, Ogilby's 1675 map of the road 'from London to the Land's End' passes through Basingstoke to Whitchurch and Andover.¹⁰ A settlement he named 'Tetherton' lies where Overton should be according to the mile markers. This error was repeated by other map makers in plagiarised copies and was not corrected until Arrowsmith made a new survey in 1782. (right).¹¹

This section of the road was turnpiked by Act of Parliament in 1754, 'for repairing the road from Basingstoke through Wortin (sic), Overton, Whitchurch because of the narrowness of the road in several places



⁵ Timperley H.A. and Brill, E., *The Ancient Trackways of Wessex*, (1965), 61.

⁶ HRO 11M59/A1/2/38.

⁷ Somerville, C., *Walks in the Country Near London*, (2003), 182.

⁸ Hopkins, D., *Extensive Urban Survey, Archaeology Assessment Document: Overton*, English Heritage, 2004, 4.

⁹ The Gough Map, <http://www.goughmap.org/>. Accessed 21 January 2017.

¹⁰ Old Hampshire Mapped. <http://www.geog.port.ac.uk/webmap/hantsmap/hantsmap/ogilby/og25smaf.htm> Accessed 28 May 2017.

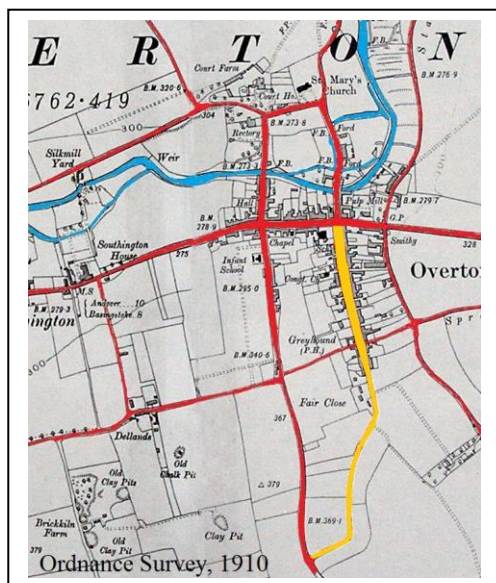
¹¹ Arrowsmith, A., 1782, published by Carey J., (1784).

<http://www.geog.port.ac.uk/webmap/hantscat/html/lgcyl007.htm>. Accessed 24 November 2017.

and also because it is very inconvenient and in many places so deep and foundeours that the same cannot be passed in winter without great Difficulty and Danger.¹²

Improvements to the road at Ashe towards Overton were made sometime after 1781.¹³ Later, the preferred route from London to the west appears to have changed and followed the line of what became the A30, from Basingstoke through Micheldever to Stockbridge.

The north-south route



It is suggested that the route from Winchester to Newbury pre-dated the new town and passed along Red Lion Lane and Bridge Street.¹⁴ Winchester Street (shown in yellow on the plan) was therefore a new diversion, with a lesser incline, designed to afford views of St Mary's church from the south. It was set out as a wide street for fairs and markets.

A canal proposal

A canal from Basingstoke to the River Wey was first conceived in 1769 and opened in 1794. A canal linking Andover with Romsey on the River Itchen and thence to Southampton Water was completed the same year. Even before they were completed, entrepreneurs had the idea of linking the two, thus providing a canal all the way from Southampton to London.¹⁵

The foremost expert of the day, John Rennie, was commissioned to survey a route through the Test valley and he reported in 1790.¹⁶ His plan was to bring the canal from Basingstoke on a high-level embankment through Overton, passing just south of the Silk Mills, with an aqueduct over the river at Quidhampton and another just west of Town Mill. The plan was finally quashed by local landowners in 1810.¹⁷

The railways

The railway from Nine Elms in London to Southampton was opened on 11 May 1840, the most notable feature in the parish being the Litchfield tunnel. Overton people joined the celebrations

¹² HRO 44M69/G1/128.

¹³ HRO 5M52/TR7.

¹⁴ Hopkins, D., *Extensive Urban Survey, Archaeology Assessment Document: Overton*, English Heritage, (2004), 4.

¹⁵ HRO 5M52/TR3.

¹⁶ HRO COPY/582/1.

¹⁷ HRO 5M52/TR3/26.

when an ox was roasted whole at Micheldever Station, ¹⁸ a mile beyond the southern boundary of the parish known then as 'Andover Road'. The London and South-Western line followed and the Basingstoke to Salisbury section opened in stages between 1854 and 1857. Overton Station was opened on 9 December 1854.¹⁹

Modes of transport

On foot



Jane Wort

In the later part of the 19th century, people walked to work at the Laverstoke Paper Mill (1.5 miles) and the Whitchurch Silk Mill (3 miles) on top of their 10-hour working day.²⁰ Jane Wort, Overton's post woman between 1867 and 1906, covered the whole parish on foot, tramping some 20 miles every day.²¹ In the 1940s, people were quite prepared to walk to Whitchurch to go to the cinema.²²

Coach

Once the London-Exeter turnpike road had been improved, travel by coach became increasingly popular. By 1795 there were 70 scheduled coaches and waggons stopping every week at the White Hart and the New Inn.²³ Fresh horses also had to be found for private coaches and post-chaises. On 5 November 1805, Lt John Lapenotiere stopped in Overton on his way from Falmouth to London, bringing news of the victory at Trafalgar and the death of Lord Nelson.²⁴

The coming of the railways killed the coaching trade through Overton almost at once. Only five months after the railway through Micheldever opened in 1840, the lessee of the White Hart complained that the stables only produced a sixth of the rent he was paying for them and that the value of the inn had dropped by half.²⁵

¹⁸ Hobb's Chronology, HRO COPY/582/1.

¹⁹ *Hampshire Chronicle* 9 December 1854.

²⁰ Griffiths, W., *One Woman's Story*, (1979), 19.

²¹ Obituary, *Hants & Berks Gazette*, 21 October 1916. Photograph of Jane Wort supplied by Peter Baker.

²² Butler, V., *On a Hill above a Valley*, (2001), 56.

²³ Universal British Directory, 1796, 55.

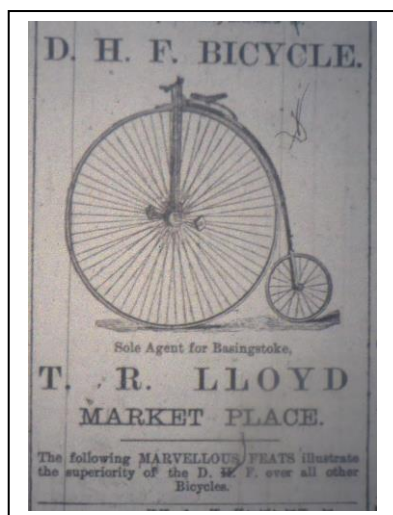
²⁴ Captains' letters, 1805, Lapenotiere, J.R. TNA ADM 1/2074/170.

²⁵ Waight, S., *The estates of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in Overton, Quidhampton and Polhampton, Hampshire: a survey of the land, burgages and tenants from the 14th to the 19th centuries*, (1996), 7. HRO 1983A02/8.

Motor cars

The first motor cars to pass through Overton were restricted to 12 miles per hour but they damaged the road surface, causing clouds of dust in the summer. This was dealt with ineffectively by watering the roads and in 1915 the protests were finally resolved by tarring the High Street.²⁶ Car ownership gradually increased but it is evident from old photographs that parking in Overton did not become a problem until the 1970s.

Bicycles



At Easter 1880, the Overton correspondent of the *Hants & Berks Gazette* thought it sufficiently newsworthy to report,

'On Easter Monday...during the whole day the High Street was in a continual hum with the passing and re-passing of vehicles. As many as 34 bicycles were said to have passed. These were not unattended by slight mishaps. Several were dismantled though the roughness of the flinty roads and two young men were slightly hurt in falling at the bottom of Ashe Hill'.²⁷

The same issue showed an advertisement for the bicycles available in Basingstoke at the time. Before the First World War, a cycle shop opened in the High Street next to the Methodist Chapel. The good people of the chapel were most concerned that the shop opened on Sundays, offering bicycles for hire.²⁸

Advertisement; *Hants & Berks Gazette*.

Buses

The first proposals for a bus service were made in 1908²⁹ but it was not until 1919 that a 'Mobility' bus service was provided by Tibbles of St Mary Bourne on a route from Basingstoke to Andover. Other early operators serving Overton were King Alfred Motor Services of Winchester and Basingstoke's Venture Bus Company.³⁰

Commuting

In the 1970s, commuting to work increased as the population grew and employment at the Portals paper mill started to decline. Between 1971 and 1982, the proportion of working residents commuting outwards increased from 49 per cent to 62 per cent.³¹ At the 2011 census, 1,951 Overton residents travelled to work and 182 worked from home. Of those who travelled, 9 per cent went on foot, 1 per cent by bicycle, 9 per cent by train, 4 per cent by bus and 76 per cent by car. Commuting by car or public transport accounted for 89 per cent.³²

²⁶ *Hants & Berks Gazette*, 3 July 1915.

²⁷ *Hants & Berks Gazette*, 3 April 1880.

²⁸ Griffiths, W., *One Woman's Story*, (1979), 26.

²⁹ Overton Parish Council Minutes, 10 June 1909, HRO 27M80/PX1.

³⁰ Birmingham, P., *Venture Limited: the story of Basingstoke's own bus company*, (1995), 36.

³¹ Overton Local Plan, 1984, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.

³² *Census*, 2011.

Transport infrastructure

Transport infrastructure has not changed significantly in the last 160 years. Overton retained its railway station despite the 'Beeching' reforms of 1963. A proposal to widen the High Street in 1935 was abandoned because it would have meant the demolition of most of the houses and shops on the north side of the street.³³ After a long campaign by the parish council, traffic lights were installed at the village centre in 1990.³⁴ Population increase and the dominance of the motor car present major problems in the 21st century.

Post, telegraph and telephone

A commercially viable postal service existed by the 1630s. Late in the 17th century, post was dispatched three times a week on the 'Great Western Road' from London to Plymouth which passed through Basingstoke, Overton and Andover.³⁵ In 1796, post was collected and dispatched by mail coaches calling at the New Inn.³⁶ When the London to Southampton railway opened in 1840, post and newspapers were collected by carrier from Micheldever Station.³⁷

With the railways came the electric telegraph, installed to control the signalling system. It also brought a commercial opportunity for private telegrams, dispatched by telegraph boys from Overton station and later by an extension of the line to Overton Post Office. There is no mention of a telegraph office in White's Hampshire Directory of 1859 but there was a telegraph operator in the 1861 census.³⁸

Overton acquired its first public telephone office in 1914, presumably within the post office.³⁹ The manual telephone exchange was in Kingsclere Road. In 1923, Overton Post Office was 'Overton 1', Overton Mill was 'Overton 9', the surgery at Yield House was 'Overton 12' and Hide's store was 'Overton 19'. Only a few of the more prosperous residents had a private line. By 1939 the exchange had been automated with a dialling code of TN.⁴⁰ In the late 1970s the numbers were transferred to the Basingstoke exchange. Fast broadband came to Overton in 2015.

³³ Document in possession of Michael Thompson, Overton.

³⁴ *Andover Advertiser*, 11 April 1980.

³⁵ Brayshay, M., The Royal Post-horse Routes of Hampshire in the reign of Elizabeth 1st. *Proc Hampshire Field Club*, 1992, 48, 121-132.

³⁶ Universal British Directory, 1796, 55.

³⁷ White's Hampshire Directory, 1859, 469.

³⁸ *Census*, 1861.

³⁹ *Hants & Berks Gazette*, 12 December 1914.

⁴⁰ Kelly's Hampshire Directory, 1939.

Population

Population to 1801

Domesday Survey, 1086

The Domesday Survey recorded 50 villagers, 27 smallholders and 7 slaves in Overton.⁴¹ Polhampton was recorded separately as having 2 villagers and 16 smallholders.

Estimate of population in 1232.

From the pipe rolls of the bishopric of Winchester, Titow estimated the population of Overton Manor at about 495 from the sown acreage and yield of crops. The manor included the detached lands at Tadley, North Waltham and Bradley.⁴²

The Black Death 1348-49 and subsequent plagues

The town suffered considerably from the plague. The account made up at Michaelmas 1349 shows that four and a half burgages had come into the bishop's hands, meaning that the holders had died and there was no-one to inherit them. The income from market stalls had also fallen off owing to the pestilence. Still more significant was the drop in the income of the Martinmas and Hockday courts which fell by 29 per cent.⁴³ In 1350, the clerk recorded that, '*the holdings which used to pay are empty and no-one is looking after them*'.

The second pestilence of 1361 does not appear to have been so destructive in Overton borough as in some other districts of Hampshire, but the effects of the repeated plagues of the 14th century were lasting. By 1485, the settlement of 35 households at Northington had shrunk to only four.⁴⁴ Around 1500, many holdings were still in the bishop's hands for lack of tenants.⁴⁵ As elsewhere, the population probably increased again in the 16th century as new houses were built in the village⁴⁶ and at the Lynch in Southington.⁴⁷

Religious censuses

In the Diocesan Population returns of 1603,⁴⁸ the number of communicants in Overton parish (not including Tadley) was given as 550 with two female recusants. Children under 16 were not included. Whiteman states that it would be reasonable to apply a factor of 1.5 to arrive at an estimate of the total population of 828.⁴⁹

⁴¹ Munby, J., (ed) 1982, fol(40b). <http://opendomesday.org/place/SU5149/overton/> Accessed 27 June 2017.

⁴² Titow, J., *Land and population on the bishop of Winchester's estates, 1209-1350*, (1962), 17. HRO THESIS/41.

⁴³ 'Parishes: Overton', in *A History of the County of Hampshire, 4*, ed. William Page (London, 1911), pp. 210-219.

⁴⁴ Hare, J.N., 'Northington, near Overton, and the deserted villages of Hampshire'. *Hampshire Field Club Archaeol. Soc.*, Newsletter, N.S. 21, (1994), 26.

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⁴⁶ Waight, S., 'The Hampshire Lands of Corpus Christi College, Oxford and their management, 1500-1650,' *Proc. Hamp. Field Club Archaeol. Soc.*, 51 (1995), 175-6.

⁴⁷ Deveson, A. M. 'A group of cottages at The Lynch, Overton', *Hamp. Field Club Archaeol. Soc.*, Newsletter, (1999), 31, 29-32

⁴⁸ Dyer, A. and Pallister, D. M., (ed), *The Diocesan Population: returns for 1563 and 1603*, (2005), 491.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Grant, M., *The Small Towns of North Hampshire, 1600-c1800. Part 2: Population growth and urban development. Proc. Hampshire Field Club Archaeol. Soc.* 64, 2009, 182-199 (Hampshire Studies, 2009).

The Compton census of 1676 was a similar survey which found 369 communicants, one papist and two nonconformists in Overton.⁵⁰ Applying a factor of 1.5 gives a population of 558.

At intervals, the Anglican church sent questionnaires (Bishops' Visitations) to each parish. In 1725, the rector of Overton reported that the parish contained about 730 souls.⁵¹

Since it is not known how the rectors of Overton made these estimates they cannot be relied on to draw conclusions about population trends in this period.

The Hampshire Hearth Tax Assessment, 1665

This showed a total of 153 households.⁵² The figures include those who were not liable to pay hearth tax and are thus a reasonably accurate estimate of the number of households. On an assumption of 4.2 people per household, the population was in the region of 643.

Population and houses, censuses, 1801-1911

	1801	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Persons	1,130	1,178	1,341	1,507	1,590	1,550	1,459	1,409	1,433	1,496	1,514	1,616
Houses	230	232	257	297	300	332	319	317	333	330	333	328

Table 1.

In 1801 there were 1,130 people living in 230 houses. These figures are considerably higher than any previous estimate, indicating a rise in population prior to this date. The subsequent census returns show a 40 per cent rise in population between 1801 and 1841. There was also a net gain of 70 houses, a rise of 30 per cent.

The rise in population could have been due to natural increase or net inward migration or both. During this period, parish records show a considerable excess of baptisms over deaths.¹¹ At this time it is reasonable to use baptisms as a proxy for births. The table below shows that natural increase was augmented by net inward migration between 1811 and 1821. However, in the decades 1821-1830 and 1831-1840, the increase in population was less than the natural increase implying a net outward migration.

	Baptisms	Deaths	Excess	Population change	
1811-1820	329	212	117	plus 163	net inwards migration
1821-1830	503	278	225	plus 166	net outward migration
1831-1840	460	306	154	plus 83	net outward migration

Table 2.

Out migration could have been linked to rural poverty and the 'Swing' riots of November 1830, when several hundred agricultural labourers protested in the village centre. They claimed that their wages

⁵⁰ Whiteman, A. and Clapinson, M., *The Compton census of 1676: a critical edition* (1986), 84.

⁵¹ HRO 21M65/B4/1/1 fol. 289.

⁵² Hughes, E. and White, P., (ed), *The Hampshire Hearth Tax Assessment* (1991), 172-4.

were so low that their families were living only on bread and potatoes. Better wages were agreed by the farmers but it did not happen.⁵³

After 1841, it would be unsafe to use baptisms as a proxy for births because there are no records of the growing numbers of nonconformists who may have had their children baptised in their own chapels and because others may not have had their children baptised at all.

The population fell from 1,590 in 1841 to 1,409 in 1871, which corresponds to a steady loss of jobs in the agricultural sector from 267 to 186, as recorded in the censuses, and may also reflect the closure of Overton Silk Mill in 1848.

The population rose again to 1901 and corresponds to a marked rise in industrial employment of Overton residents at Portals Laverstoke Paper Mill. By 1911, those employed in industry outnumbered agricultural workers for the first time.

	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Paper Mill	3	3	21	37	41	81	100	156
Silk Mill	31	35	7	2	0	0	0	0
Railway	0	1	6	6	10	11	24	17
Total industrial	34	39	34	45	51	92	124	173

Table 3. Industrial employment of Overton residents, census records, 1841-1911.

Population, 1911-2011

	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Persons	1,616	1,779	1,885	2,670	2,936	3,480	3,668	3,860	3,948	4,315
Houses	328	401	465	682	882	1,130	1,250	1,445	1,662	1,863

Table 4. Overton parish population and houses from census data, 1911-2011

The average number of people per dwelling fell steadily from 4.9 in 1911 to 2.3 in 2011. In terms of the number of dwellings, the village doubled in size between 1911 and 1951 and doubled again by 1991. There has been a further 29 per cent growth since. Whilst there has been almost threefold growth in population since 1901, the number of dwellings is nearly six times higher.

From 1911 to the mid-1960s, the increase in population coincided with steadily increasing employment opportunities at Overton Paper Mill⁵⁴ and at the Airpak factory in Winchester Street.⁵⁵ In later years, employment at the mill fell but new housing attracted people commuting outwards to work. In 1981, 77 per cent of workers were still employed in Overton, Laverstoke, Whitchurch and Basingstoke. A third of all those in full time work (about 360 people) were employed at Overton Mill.⁵⁶ Only about 30 residents were employed at Overton Mill in 2016.⁵⁷

⁵³ *The Times*, 18 November 1830.

⁵⁴ Ottway, D.S., *A contribution to the History of Portals*, (2007), unpublished, supplied by J. Seargeant, Archive Manager, Bombay Spirits Co., 35.

⁵⁵ A factory in Winchester Street making quilted material using kapok which was demolished in 1987. www.overtonpictures.com, 03_1WS020_2. Accessed 12 October 2017.

⁵⁶ Overton Local Plan, 1990, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.

⁵⁷ Overton Neighbourhood Development Plan, 2016-2029, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, 2016, 29. <https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/> Accessed 27/06/2017.