



FOREST HILL

Conservation Area

a character study



South Oxfordshire
District Council

The information contained in this character study was chiefly collected during March 1994 and is believed to be correct at the time of printing in January 1998. It should be appreciated that the legislative background may change and that the omission of any feature or features from the text and accompanying maps is not to be regarded as an indication that the feature or features are necessarily without significance or importance in conservation and planning terms. None of the statements contained in the document can be held as binding on the Council in the determination of applications for planning permission, listed building consent or conservation area consent.

DATE OF PRINTING
JANUARY 1998

The Forest Hill Conservation Area Character Study which seeks to define the established character of the settlement and to identify areas for preservation or enhancement, was first published in draft form in October 1994. Between then and November 1997, when it was formally adopted as supplementary planning guidance by the District Council, it was the subject of public consultation. The results of this consultation have, wherever possible, been included in the final document.

Further general information on this character study and others in the series can be found inside the back cover.

INTRODUCTION

The 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act places a duty on every local planning authority to determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The Act also states that the local planning authority should, from time to time, formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these conservation areas.

This document is an appraisal of the Forest Hill conservation area to give an overview of the established character to be preserved and to identify possible areas for future enhancement. It is intended to assist in defining what is of special architectural or historic importance, what should be protected and to give guidance as to the form, style and location of future change and development.

The document is divided into various sections as follows:

1) The History of the Area

This covers the period from prehistory to the present day. It includes significant architectural history, important dates and references to people and events that have helped to shape the area we see today.

2) The Established Character

This is an assessment of the existing character, including the topography of the area, the vernacular style, predominant building materials and natural or man-made features of local interest.

3) Possible Areas for Enhancement

These can range from major areas for environmental improvement, to very minor works of repair and redecoration.

4) Existing Conservation Policies

This is an extract from the South Oxfordshire Local Plan identifying policies relating to listed buildings and conservation areas.

5) Plan of the Conservation Area

This is a scale plan of the area which aims to identify the elements which contribute to the character. The plan includes the conservation area boundary, listed buildings (buildings identified by the Department of National Heritage as being of special architectural or historic interest), former Grade III listed buildings (a now obsolete category but where the buildings may still be of architectural or historic interest) and other buildings of local note.

This latter group consists of buildings that play a part in establishing the character of the street scene but have not yet been considered to be of sufficient importance to meet the current criteria for listing. Recent government guidance contained in PPG.15-**Planning and the Historic Environment** indicates, however, that there is a presumption against the demolition of such buildings. Important trees are also identified. These are usually highly visible from public places and/or they contribute to the setting of a listed building. Finally, important open spaces are identified as these are a vital element in the character of an area. Character is defined not just by buildings, walls and trees, but also by the spaces between them. These contribute to the setting of buildings. They allow views around the area and they are often an important element in the historical development of a settlement.

Important unlisted walls are identified. These are usually built of local materials and help to define spaces and frame views. Lastly, important views into, out of and around the conservation area are identified. It should be appreciated that a conservation area's character does not end with a line drawn on a map. Often the character is closely associated with attractive views out to surrounding countryside, sometimes via gaps between buildings. Views within an area such as that to a church or particularly attractive group of buildings are also important.

6) Archaeological Constraint Plan

The character and history of an area are closely linked to its archaeological remains. This plan identifies the location of ancient monuments, earthworks and known cropmarks, find spots, archaeological sites and linear works. If nothing has yet been identified within an area then this map will be blank, but this does not mean that the area is necessarily archaeologically sterile.

FOREST HILL

1) The History of the Area

The linear village of Forest Hill lies at a height of 350 feet above sea level at the crossing of the Roman road from Thame to Stanton St. John and a Saxon trackway, which followed the course of the present day Main Street, and led to the hill-top village of Brill in Buckinghamshire.

The name of the village derives from the Old English "forst-hyll" or hill ridge, rather than from the forest which once surrounded it. The historic core of the village was originally centred on the parish church of St. Nicholas, which dates from the 12th century, and the long since demolished Manor House which stood in the area now occupied by Manor Farm. There is no visible trace of the Manor House today, although the impressive stone archway in the wall to Forest Hill House is thought to date from the early 17th century and to have come from the Manor House.

The village subsequently developed along the ridge to the north-east of the church and many of the buildings date from the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

The Domesday survey of 1086 records Forest Hill as being very small and inhabited by only a few families. However, by the end of the 13th century, the population had increased to twenty families. This population was halved again by the outbreak of the Black Death in the mid 14th century.

The spread of the village in the 17th century is linked with the growth of farming in the area and other small scale local industries, such as quarrying and glove making. The population consisted mostly of small landowners and their tenants who grew crops such as oats, beans and wheat. There was also some sheep farming in the area.

The 19th century saw further infill development throughout the village. St. Nicholas' church was restored and extended in 1852, a relatively early work by George Gilbert Scott, who is perhaps best known for designing the St. Pancras Station Hotel and the Foreign Office in London. The former Vicarage, now Forest Hill House, was built in the early 19th century.

The 20th century has seen a great deal of development, particularly to the north of the village, although all of this is outside the conservation area. Farming is still important, although the majority of the residents work in nearby Oxford or commute to London. The settlement was designated as a conservation area on 12 December 1989.

2) The Established Character

The topography of Forest Hill is that of a linear hill top village with buildings stretching from around St. Nicholas's Church along Main Street to Minchin Court Farm and the White Horse public house.

It is an attractive village where stone predominates as the traditional vernacular building material. The majority of the settlement fronts onto either Main Street or Wheatley Road, and most of the modern development is outside the conservation area around the northern end of the village, although there has also been some infill development, including that immediately to the north of the former King's Arms, of varying quality. Buildings range in size from large detached buildings to small terraced houses. However, it can be said that fairly small, detached and terraced cottages predominate, particularly within the conservation area.

There is little important open space within the village, apart from the cemetery and the area around Minchin Court Farm. However, there are open fields close to the village which are vital to the setting of the conservation area, providing attractive views into and out of Forest Hill. These views are particularly important in the southern part of the village where there are larger gaps between the buildings.

There are many important stone walls, particularly around Manor Farm and St. Nicholas's Church, where they are associated with the prominent and attractive raised stone pavement.

Trees do not play a major role in the character of the conservation area. However, there are good groups around St. Nicholas's Church, the cemetery and Minchin Court Farm.

Although stone predominates as the traditional building material there is also a mixture of red brick, some painted, some rendered, with red clay tiles, slate and thatch for roofs.

Buildings of local note include the old chapel in Main Street, now converted to residential use and Manor Farm, a largely mid 19th century stone farmhouse in Jacobean style. Milton's stone on the grass verge by the cemetery is important for its historical association with the 17th century divine and poet.

A large scale map of the conservation area identifying the location of traditional street furniture worthy of retention and attractive road surfaces and paving materials has been produced and is available for inspection at the District Council Offices by appointment.

3) Possible Areas for Enhancement

The linear topography of the village means that there are no large public spaces appropriate for formal schemes of enhancement. However, there are a number of areas where minor improvements could be made.

A major improvement would be the laying underground of the existing overhead wires and cables by the statutory undertakers. Also the concrete kerbs, particularly in Main Street, could be replaced with a natural material such as granite. The recently installed traffic management measures in Main Street are purely functional and relatively little regard has been paid to their aesthetic quality and impact on the conservation area.

The grass verges and banks require constant maintenance. This is generally carried out but a few appear to be neglected, particularly around the White Horse public house. The large tarmac car park of the White Horse is also very prominent and consideration should be given to improving the quality of the surface material with areas of paving or stone setts. Landscape planting would also enhance the area.

A large scale map of traditional street furniture and attractive road surfaces and paving materials has been produced (*see Section 2 'The Established Character'*).

Raised pavements are a particular feature of the village and these should be renovated, particularly that outside numbers 1-4 Bank Cottages in Main Street, where much of the stone has been replaced with concrete. A successful repair and renovation scheme has recently been carried out to the much more prominent raised stone pavement outside St. Nicholas's Church. Similarly, stone walls are another local feature and these should be repaired, renovated or reinstated where they have been replaced with inappropriate materials, such as concrete blocks.

The "at cost" modern barns to Manor Farm are highly visible from the conservation area and are very ugly. Consideration should be given to replacing these with a more attractive style when the opportunity arises.

The open land to the north-east of the former Kings Arms public house was until recently in a neglected state. However, apart from the siting of the recently erected houses directly on to the street, the new development is in many ways a sadly wasted opportunity and has failed truly to enhance the character of the conservation area. This is regrettable as the chance could have been taken to integrate this prominent site at the heart of the village more satisfactorily with the surrounding area.

The use of traditional materials and detailing can have considerable effect in enhancing the character of a conservation area. The owners of historic and prominent properties are encouraged to remove unsympathetic modern materials, such as concrete tiles, UPVC windows and plastic rainwater goods, and to reinstate traditional materials such as clay tiles, painted softwood windows and cast iron guttering. The owners of thatched buildings are also encouraged to retain or reinstate plain, flush ridges, which are part of the traditional thatching style of South Oxfordshire.

Small amounts of financial assistance may be available in some circumstances from the Council for the repair and renovation of historic buildings within the conservation area. Grants may also be available for schemes of environmental improvement.

4) **South Oxfordshire Local Plan adopted by Council, April 1997**

LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 1

PROPOSALS FOR THE DEMOLITION OF ANY BUILDING INCLUDED ON THE LIST OF BUILDINGS OF SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC INTEREST WILL NOT BE PERMITTED EXCEPT IN MOST EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

POLICY CON 2

THE COUNCIL WILL MAKE FULL USE OF ITS POWERS TO SERVE REPAIRS NOTICES TO PREVENT THE WILFUL NEGLECT OF LISTED BUILDINGS.

ALTERATIONS TO LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 3

THE USE OF MODERN MATERIALS SUCH AS ALUMINIUM AND UPVC WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED FOR THE DOORS OR WINDOWS OF LISTED BUILDINGS. SEALED DOUBLE-GLAZED TIMBER WINDOWS WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED UNLESS THEIR MOULDINGS PRECISELY MATCH THOSE OF TRADITIONAL WINDOWS. THE USE OF SECONDARY GLAZING WILL NORMALLY BE ACCEPTABLE.

POLICY CON 4

LISTED BUILDING CONSENT WILL NOT NORMALLY BE GRANTED FOR PROPOSALS WHICH INVOLVE THE USE OF CEMENT-RICH MORTARS, ABRASIVE CLEANING METHODS AND CHEMICALLY-BASED SEALANTS, NOR FOR THE PAINTING OF UNPAINTED BRICKWORK AND STONE OR THE USE OF UNSUITABLE COLOUR SCHEMES ON LISTED BUILDINGS.

POLICY CON 5

THE ALTERATION OR REMOVAL OF HISTORIC INTERNAL FEATURES IN BUILDINGS INCLUDED ON THE STATUTORY LIST OF BUILDINGS OF SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC INTEREST WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

CHANGES OF USE AND EXTENSIONS TO LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 6

ANY CHANGE OF USE OF A LISTED BUILDING MUST BE APPROPRIATE TO ITS CHARACTER, AND ANY EXTENSION MUST BE SYMPATHETIC TO THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE IN DESIGN, SCALE AND MATERIALS AND MUST NOT DOMINATE OR OVERWHELM IT.

THE SETTING OF LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 7

PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT THE SETTING OF A LISTED BUILDING WILL NORMALLY BE REFUSED.

CONSERVATION AREAS

POLICY CON 8

THE COUNCIL WILL USE ALL ITS POWERS UNDER THE RELEVANT ACTS TO ENSURE THAT THE CHARACTER OF INDIVIDUAL CONSERVATION AREAS IS PRESERVED OR ENHANCED.

POLICY CON 9

CONSENT TO DEMOLISH A BUILDING IN A CONSERVATION AREA WILL NORMALLY ONLY BE GRANTED IF THE LOSS OF THE BUILDING WOULD NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA, AND IF THERE ARE DETAILED AND ACCEPTABLE PLANS FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE.

POLICY CON 10

WHEN CONSIDERING PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN CONSERVATION AREAS, THE COUNCIL WILL REQUIRE:-

- (i) THE DESIGN AND SCALE OF NEW WORK TO BE IN SYMPATHY WITH THE ESTABLISHED CHARACTER OF THE AREA;
- (ii) THE USE OF TRADITIONAL MATERIALS, WHENEVER THIS IS APPROPRIATE TO THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA;
- (iii) THE RETENTION OF EXISTING WALLS, HEDGES, OR ANY OTHER FEATURES WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA.

THATCHING STYLE

POLICY CON 11

IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE TRADITIONAL THATCHING STYLE OF SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE THE DISTRICT COUNCIL WILL GENERALLY PROMOTE THE USE OF LONG STRAW AND RESIST THE INTRODUCTION OF PATTERNED BLOCK-CUT RIDGES ON THATCHED BUILDINGS.

ADVERTISEMENTS IN CONSERVATION AREAS AND ON LISTED BUILDINGS

POLICY CON 12

THE COUNCIL WILL NOT NORMALLY PERMIT THE DISPLAY OF SIGNS ON A LISTED BUILDING OR IN A CONSERVATION AREA WHICH ARE IN ANY WAY HARMFUL TO THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE BUILDING OR AREA. WHERE IT IS ACCEPTED THAT A SIGN IS NEEDED, ITS DESIGN AND MATERIALS SHOULD REFLECT THE BEST TRADITIONAL PRACTICE.

POLICY CON 13

THE INSTALLATION OF BLINDS OR CANOPIES OF UNTRADITIONAL FORM OR MATERIALS ON BUILDINGS WITHIN CONSERVATION AREAS WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED.

BURGAGE PLOTS

POLICY CON 14

IN THE HISTORIC TOWNS OF HENLEY, THAME AND WALLINGFORD THE BURGAGE PLOTS TO THE REAR OF THE PRINCIPAL STREETS WILL GENERALLY BE PROTECTED FROM AMALGAMATION AND FROM DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD DIMINISH THEIR HISTORIC INTEREST AND VALUE.

PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS

POLICY CON 15

IN CONSERVATION AREAS, THE COUNCIL WILL TAKE ALL AVAILABLE STEPS TO ENSURE:

- (i) THAT THE INTRODUCTION OR INTENSIFICATION OF USES WHICH CONFLICT WITH THE SPECIAL CHARACTER OF THE AREA IS RESISTED;
- (ii) THAT EXISTING WALLS, BUILDINGS, TREES, HEDGES, OPEN SPACES AND IMPORTANT VIEWS ARE RETAINED, WHERE THEY CONTRIBUTE TO THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA;
- (iii) THAT WHENEVER THE OPPORTUNITY ARISES, UNSIGHTLY OVERHEAD WIRES AND

UNNECESSARY SIGNS ARE REMOVED. THE STATUTORY UNDERTAKERS WILL BE URGED TO SITE THEIR SERVICES UNDERGROUND;

- (iv) THAT WHERE NECESSARY, IMPROVEMENTS ARE MADE TO THE VISUAL QUALITY OF THE FLOORSPACE, STREET FURNITURE, LIGHTING AND SIGNS; AND
- (v) THAT DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE A CONSERVATION AREA WOULD NOT HAVE A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE CONSERVATION AREA.

ARCHAEOLOGY

POLICY CON 16

THE COUNCIL WILL NOT NORMALLY PERMIT DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT THE SITES OR SETTINGS OF NATIONALLY-IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS, WHETHER SCHEDULED OR NOT, OR THOSE OF MONUMENTS OF SPECIAL LOCAL IMPORTANCE.

POLICY CON 17

BEFORE THE DETERMINATION OF AN APPLICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT WHICH MAY AFFECT A SITE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST OR POTENTIALLY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE, PROSPECTIVE DEVELOPERS WILL BE REQUIRED, WHERE NECESSARY, TO MAKE PROVISION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION, IN ORDER TO ENABLE AN INFORMED AND REASONED PLANNING DECISION TO BE MADE.

POLICY CON 18

WHEREVER PRACTICABLE AND DESIRABLE, DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING SITES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST SHOULD BE DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE PHYSICAL PRESERVATION IN SITU OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS. WHERE THIS IS NOT PRACTICABLE OR DESIRABLE, THE DISTRICT PLANNING AUTHORITY WILL IMPOSE CONDITIONS ON PLANNING PERMISSIONS, OR SEEK LEGAL OBLIGATIONS, WHICH WILL REQUIRE THE DEVELOPER TO PROVIDE AN APPROPRIATE PROGRAMME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION, RECORDING AND PUBLICATION BY A PROFESSIONALLY QUALIFIED BODY ACCEPTABLE TO THE DISTRICT PLANNING AUTHORITY.

PARKS AND GARDENS OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST

POLICY CON 19

PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD DAMAGE THE CHARACTER, SETTING OR AMENITIES OF A PARK OR GARDEN OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST, ESPECIALLY THOSE CONTAINED IN THE ENGLISH HERITAGE REGISTER, WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED.

COMMON LAND

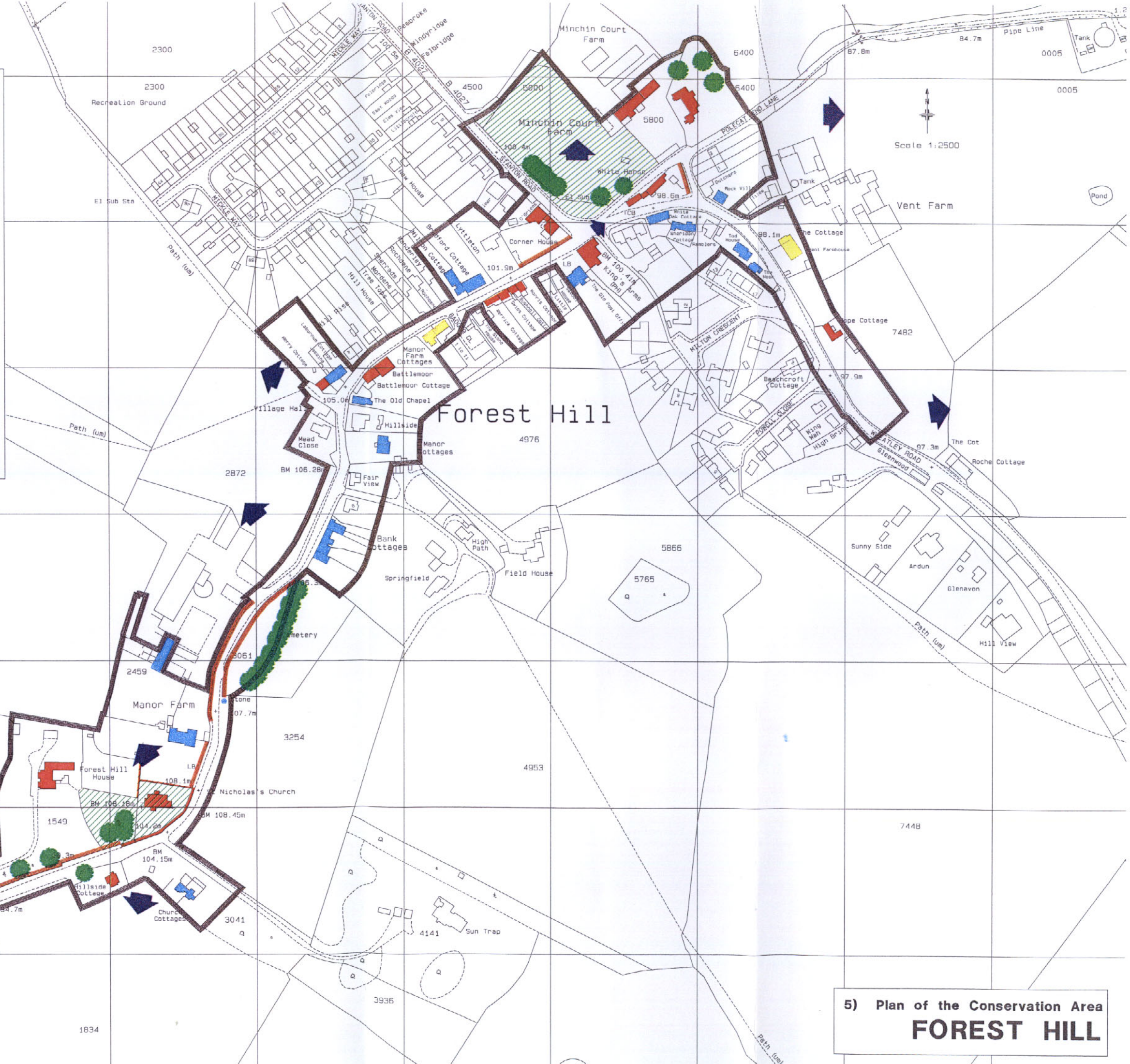
POLICY CON 20

PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT ON OR AFFECTING COMMON LAND, VILLAGE GREENS AND OTHER IMPORTANT SPACES WITHIN SETTLEMENTS WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED.

-  Conservation boundary
-  Listed building
-  Former Grade III Listed Building
-  Building of Local Note
-  Wall important to the street scene
-  Important open space
-  Important trees
-  Important views in/out/around

With the exception of views, only those features in the key that are located within the boundaries of the conservation area are defined on the plan

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Scale 1:2500

**5) Plan of the Conservation Area
FOREST HILL**

6) Archaeological Constraint Plan

No known archaeological constraints
(See Introduction)

**PUBLISHED CONSERVATION CHARACTER STUDIES
(with date of adoption by South Oxfordshire District
Council in brackets).**

1. Watlington (8 April 1997)
2. Greys Green (8 April 1997)
3. Forest Hill (25 November 1997)

Others in preparation include Beckley, Benson, Brightwell
Baldwin, Mapledurham, North Moreton, Stoke Row, Thame
and Warborough.

Designated Conservation Areas

