



Listening Learning Leading

Thame Conservation Area Management Plan

April 2006

Introduction

The Council has a duty to draw up proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. These proposals seek to establish guidelines for the management of change in the conservation area to allow for development and alterations to keep the conservation area vital without losing the characteristics which make it special.

Preservation of existing character

The maintenance of historic buildings in Thame Conservation Area

The use of traditional materials and detailing can have considerable positive effect in enhancing the character of Thame conservation area. The owners of historic and prominent properties are therefore encouraged to remove unsympathetic modern materials, such as concrete tiles, plastic windows and rainwater goods and to reinstate traditional materials such as red clay tiles, stone or red bricks, painted timber windows and cast iron guttering as appropriate. Repair work should also be done in a fashion sympathetic to the character of the building. The Council's leaflet *Guidance on repairs to historic buildings, 2005* gives detailed advice on this subject.

Re-pointing should be kept to a minimum and only carried out when structurally necessary. Rubble stone walls can easily damage a building's appearance if not done with care. Variations in colour and the application of excessive amounts of mortar can detract from both stone and brickwork and obscure it whilst mortar of a mix

inappropriate to the material being pointed can promote its rapid deterioration.

A modern window can be quite out of place, especially if surrounded by traditional neighbours. Several buildings in the town could be enhanced by replacing unsuitable windows. Dark staining of timber is a largely modern technique and can look out of place, especially when seen adjacent to traditionally painted windows.

The use of modern machine-made tiles should be avoided as a replacement for traditional hand-made tiles and concrete or artificial slate should be avoided at all costs.

Terraces are, in many ways, especially vulnerable to the cumulative effect of minor alteration. The very regularity of the detailing in a Victorian terrace, such as that on East St., makes a single change all the more noticeable. The terrace of cottages on Church Lane is a fine example of how attractive a terrace with a full complement of matching doors, windows and roof materials can look.

There are many walls which make a significant contribution to the character of the conservation area (some of which are marked on the attached map of the area). Most, but not all of these define the layout of medieval burgage plots which are such an important part of the town's historic character.

Boundary walls should be cherished as important parts of the town's heritage, especially those relics that illustrate the remarkable survival of the medieval planned town. There are many walls in need of repair and the removal of damaging vegetation. Every case should involve a sensitive strategy of minimum necessary intervention and

the use of matching replacement materials and traditional lime mortar.

Shopfronts

Thame is fortunate to have a large number of traditional shopfronts that make a major contribution to its attractive historic character. Most date from the 19th century and although they have often been inserted into earlier buildings they have become part of the established character of the town. This is partly due to their attractive proportions and detailing and also because the traditional shopfront employs traditional materials and good quality joinery and sign writing. The key elements of the traditional shopfront are the stall riser (the low wall at the bottom of the window) and the decorative cornice above the fascia board sign over the window. These are flanked by pilasters (flat columns applied to the building) and a window usually divided by glazing bars, as distinct from a sheer expanse of plate glass. This commonly results in an elegant composition of the building's façade with attractive detailing that does not simply leave a hole in the ground floor of the building and contributes to the street scene without being brash or intrusive. Hanging signs are traditionally low key but capable of alerting the prospective customer. They should be of traditional materials and of a scale suitable to the building. On hanging signs and fascias internal illumination is not considered acceptable in the conservation area and external lighting should always be discrete and targeted to simply illuminate the sign.

The successful traditional shopfront is a subtle balance of elements, which can all too easily be damaged by relatively small changes. There are

many buildings where shopfronts do not conform to traditional standards, whether in form or materials used, much to the detriment of the building and streetscape. A common example is the use of plastic or painted aluminium for the fascia instead of timber, or of applied plastic lettering instead of painted lettering to the fascia. Fascias of artificial materials not only lack the texture characteristic of hand painted timber but also frequently appear without the moulded edge to the boarder that frames the signage in a traditional fascia. Plastic and 'Dutch' style canopies, as opposed to the traditional folding canvas awning, are overly prominent and obscure much of a shopfront.

Buildings of local note

In addition to historic buildings that are listed Thame contains numerous buildings that have been included on the plan of the conservation area as buildings of local note because they make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area, although they have not yet been considered to be of sufficient importance to meet the current criteria for statutory listing. In Thame the buildings of local note are mainly, but not exclusively, constructed in the 19th century and range from terraced houses to churches. Many of the earlier buildings in the town are listed, although there are examples of early buildings which have been greatly altered (such as 39 North St.) which are still of local interest. There are several 19th century buildings which are included because they form part of the large groups of buildings that make up such important parts of the town centre but are not listed (for example nos. 95 and 96 High St.). Other buildings are landmarks, which make a

unique contribution, such as the two churches on Upper High St. and the Falcon pub. The bulk of the buildings of local note are 19th century terraced houses. These form one of the key elements in the areas of the town largely developed during that century (like Park St., East St. and Nelson St.) but also appear closer to the medieval town (such as in North Road). Many walls play a crucial part in the town's character; defining burgage plots, enclosing courtyards and placing solid or nominal boundaries around gardens. Important walls have therefore been identified on the map of the conservation area.

The maintenance of trees and green spaces

Trees make a significant contribution to the town and property owners should continue to manage existing trees sensitively. Within the conservation area, consent is required to fell lop or top trees.

Consideration of important views into and out of the conservation area should also be borne in mind when planting or deciding to lop trees, as should the setting of historic buildings. With the exception of the market place there are few street trees in the centre of the medieval town and, generally, it is not appropriate to plant them. The presence of inappropriate trees in front gardens, such as fast-growing conifers, may detract from the regularity of facades and the play of building components elsewhere visible. Conifer trees, being both alien to the area and capable of creating an intense visual impact, are usually ill-advised in conservation areas. Trees play a more valuable role on the fringes of the historic town and behind the boundary walls of burgage plots. In

the latter position the tops of mature trees can often be seen from public areas in the town, softening the views subtly, rather than intruding into a well-ordered streetscape. The loss of trees from within the burgage plots themselves can be an unfortunate result of subdividing and building on such plots and another reason to resist it. On the fringes of the historic town trees play a crucial part. North St., Aylesbury Road and (to some extent) Wellington St., although all heavily built-up have significant areas of garden which contribute greenery to soften the views and suggest the survival of what was once the rural fringe of the old town. Where trees are found in these areas their careful management is essential and opportunities should always be sought to enhance areas of planting. On North St. the Waitrose car park and Cattle Market sites present a prime opportunity of this sort.

Larger open spaces are equally valuable resources. The cricket pitch plays a major role in the setting of both the church and its adjacent buildings and the northern approaches to the town. The proper maintenance of this site would reinforce this role. The churchyard and allotments are likewise a valuable part of this area and the recreation ground on Park St. is also important. Where private gardens abut these open areas, owners can make a valuable contribution to the appearance of the town by nurturing deciduous trees that will soften, but not obscure views. Southern Road, in its role as a boundary to the historic town centre, plays an important part in the character of the town as a whole and the maintenance of green spaces and vegetation here is vital. Keeping the playing fields as open green spaces is

obviously essential but smaller, private areas, especially on the southern 'outer' side of the road also contribute significantly. Deciduous trees planted in the front gardens of houses on this side of the road would certainly help to soften the edge of the old town. In Nelson St. the forecourt of the fire station is especially noticeable as a hard-surfaced area; trees and shrubs planted on the adjacent roadside could help to soften this. Large open spaces that frame the historic town are also to be found on Oxford Road, where it crosses the Cuttle Brook, and between the River Thames and the Prebendal. These areas should not only be kept as open green spaces but the appearance of rough pastureland they presently possess should be maintained, although trees and hedges should not of course be neglected in these areas. Overgrown hedges in the Cuttle Brook valley could certainly be better managed so that they do not block views into this area from the road during the summer. The view out into the fields from the eastern end of Priest End could also be improved by the replacement of the concrete and steel fence, plastic litterbin and redundant signpost. Thame Bridge itself is marred by an electricity junction box.

Design Guidance for New Development

In the conservation area, where the quality of the general environment is already acknowledged by designation, new development should be of quality which responds positively to its historic setting.

The following guidance will apply to most schemes, including the creation of parking areas, extensions to existing properties and new houses or

commercial buildings. It is based on central government advice, contained in PPG 1 and PPG 15, the South Oxfordshire Local Plan and the South Oxfordshire Design Guide.

The need for contextual design.

All development, but particularly in the Thame Conservation Area, must respond to its immediate environment, its "context", in terms of scale, density, form, materials and detailing. Applicants for planning permission must provide a "Design Statement", to justify the design decisions that have been made as the scheme was developed and to show how the building relates to its context.

Most development opportunities within the Thame Conservation Areas will be on small, enclosed sites where the "context" - the surrounding buildings and the form of historic plot development - may be obvious but still needs to be acknowledged. The following are general principles which should be adopted for all development in all parts of the conservation area.

Urban grain.

The "urban grain", or form, of historic development, is particularly important in Thame and is based on the medieval layout of the town, which has remained largely unaltered. This provides a townscape of great individuality, characterised by a mixture of narrow and wide streets, with long terraces of varied brick or timber-frame properties on either side. The roofscape is also particularly important, with handmade clay tiles, laid on steeply pitched roofs, being an important local feature. Paved courtyards, glimpsed through narrow openings in the street frontages are a characteristic feature of the town. This "urban grain" is an important part of the

character of the conservation area and should be protected. Proposals for new development must include a detailed analysis of the locality and demonstrate that there is a full appreciation of the local townscape and how it has developed, including prevailing building forms, materials and plot ratios. This is particularly important on "backland" sites where new development potential is very limited and must always be secondary in character to the more important primary buildings facing the main street. The amalgamation of burgage plots into larger plots to enable redevelopment and the consequential loss of the historic "urban grain", should be resisted.

Scale and density.

Scale is the combination of a building's height and bulk when related to its surroundings. The scale of any development should respect surrounding development. However, some modest changes in scale may actually be advantageous, as this reflects the variety of form in the town centre of Thame where the buildings have developed individually for a variety of functions over a long period of time. For such schemes, the applicant must provide accurate elevations of the surrounding buildings, showing how the new development will relate to them.

Density is the amount of development (measured in terms of floorspace or number of housing units) related to the site area it occupies. In practice, it is the combination of density with layout, landscaping and other factors which determine the quality and "feel" of new developments. As set out in government guidance in PPG 6, high density development, if carefully

chosen and sensitively sited, can make good use of land and in principle the Council supports such schemes, where appropriate, in existing settlements. However, where the proposal lies within a conservation area such as Thame, a careful balance must be sought between the sensitivity of the environment and the requirements of the developer. In taking account of existing densities within the conservation area, care must be taken to ensure sites are not overdeveloped. Developments which have a detrimental effect on the character of the conservation area will be resisted. It is especially important to consider how the area has developed over time and to recognise the differences in building form which can be attributed to different periods.

Height and massing.

Within the conservation area, a number of buildings are already prominent because of their height - St. Mary's Church and the Town Hall for instance. Domestic and commercial buildings are historically of lesser importance within the townscape and new development should reflect this hierarchy. Generally, the height of new development should match the adjoining buildings, although allowing for the inevitable variations in height and bulk which are natural to historic towns. For Thame, this generally means two or three storeys, with lower heights in backland sites.

Massing is the combination of the scale of the development, its layout and its site coverage. For larger schemes, poor massing and over-intensive development leads to the creation of over-shadowed areas, with poor quality spaces between the buildings. These create a threatening environment for pedestrians and reduce the

opportunities for good quality landscaping. However, the majority of redevelopment sites in the Thame Conservation Area will be modest in size, perhaps only large enough to accommodate one or two buildings at the most and the issue of massing is less relevant than scale, density and height.

Appearance, materials and detailing

The emphasis in any new development or alterations must always be on the need to provide a high quality of design. This can be innovative modern design, providing a dramatic contemporary statement, or in some locations, a more traditional design. Positive change in historic towns can provide vitality and interest to the streetscape and designation as a conservation area and the presence of listed buildings should not stifle well thought out, modern design. However, all new development in the Thame Conservation Area should carefully consider the prevailing form of existing development, taking into account scale, density, height and massing. These elements may be used to set out the basic form of new building, including roof shape, roof pitch, height, depth of plan and, most importantly, the relationship of the new buildings to existing surrounding buildings and to the street. Natural materials and high quality detailing should be used.

Where a more traditional approach is appropriate, the Council will expect new buildings which are designed in a traditional form within the conservation area to be detailed in a manner appropriate to the historic setting. Roofs should be pitched and covered in handmade clay tiles, or natural slate. Dormers and rooflights should be avoided, unless modestly sized and away from the public viewpoint.

Traditionally walls were brick, tile-hung or weather-boarded with traditional feather-edged boarding (not modern ship-lap). This can be painted or stained an appropriate colour. Painted brick or render are more modern alternatives which are rarely appropriate. The inclusion of small decorative details, such as string courses, shaped cills or lintels, recessed panels and other features can add interest and a sense of place but must be based on local precedent and used correctly.

Windows should be timber, painted not stained. Their design should reflect local styles, usually simple side-hung casements or vertically sliding sashes. If windows are to be double glazed, then these must be carefully designed. Avoidance of glazing bars can assist in achieving a satisfactory solution. 'Stick-on' glazing bars should be avoided at all costs. Consideration should be given to alternative ways of complying with Building Regulations if traditional windows are to be used. In all cases joinery details must be submitted with planning applications. Modern top-hung lights and modern materials, such as uPVC or aluminium, are generally unacceptable in the Thame Conservation Area, particularly where the new building abuts a listed building or faces a principal street. Front doors should also be painted timber, again reflecting local historic styles.

Boundary treatments

Traditionally, most boundaries in the conservation area are defined by brick or stone walls, with trees, soft hedging and timber fencing being more prevalent in the residential areas outside the town centre. For new development in Thame, it is important that local materials and detailing are

used and new boundaries following the historic precedent of brick or stone will help development to fit in to its context. Modern alternatives, such as concrete blocks, ranch-style timber fencing, or post-and-rail type fencing are not acceptable. Simple, close-boarded fencing, with timber posts, may be an alternative to brick in certain locations away from the public viewpoint but such fencing should be simply detailed, without any decoration such as a curved top.

Extensions to existing buildings

Extensions to existing buildings require a similar approach to more major schemes in that they must take into account the prevailing forms of development, complement the form and character of the original house and use high quality materials and detailing. For listed buildings this is particularly important. Design should be of high quality, whether modern or traditional. Roof lines, roof shape, eaves details, verge details and the creation of new chimneys are important considerations. Extensions should not overlook neighbouring properties, lead to an unacceptable loss of garden space, or result in the loss of historic plot boundaries. Nor should they dominate the original building.

Public realm works

Whilst suggestions are made below for the enhancement of several sites, it must be stressed that there are currently no proposals for these sites nor funding allocated.

Street furniture

As a busy town Thame inevitably has a large number of road signs and other street furniture. Whilst these items may not be harmful individually, too many

can clutter the street scene and detract from the attractive qualities of buildings and spaces. Although many such items may be necessary, duplication often occurs and neither the best positions nor the best design are always selected. There is already room to rationalise road signs and other items. For instance, Stribblehills at the western end of High St. is a major landmark but on closer inspection the unattractive pedestrian barrier in front of the house detracts from this attractive building and obscures its iron railings. At the same place there are very prominent lamp standards, which do nothing to enhance the street scene. Indeed, in general it might be better to provide fewer lamps strategically placed on buildings as elsewhere in High St.

Traffic management systems appear at several points in the town and there will inevitably be more. Where renewal of existing schemes takes place or new systems are installed in the conservation area the advice in The English Heritage publication Streets for All, 2005 should be followed.

Other elements of Thame's street furniture are attractive and contribute to the interest of the area and must be maintained. The kissing gate at the cricket pitch edge of the churchyard is an old wrought iron one but is in need of proper repair; sadly some wrought iron components have already been replaced in tubular steel. Also in need of repair are the railings between Aylesbury Road and the drive to Lashlake House where the original gateposts remain. A gate to match could be placed in the north-east corner of the cricket pitch where the estate fencing is routinely damaged by people using this point for access to and from Aylesbury Road. It is perhaps

better to acknowledge this as a convenient gateway rather than to block it off or allow the fence (which needs repair elsewhere) to be damaged further.

Surfacing

In addition to the surfacing of the market place itself, the pavements on Upper High St. are black tarmac although in places stone setts that underlie the tarmac are visible. It would certainly be welcome if this surface, and the others that doubtless exist elsewhere in Thame, were restored. Buttermarket is a very attractive street that would also benefit from re-surfacing in traditional materials. The use of stone setts, kerbs and paving could make a great difference to the street, as it could to the parking area in front of the Town Hall. The eastern side of Church Road is presently a mixture of materials but the replacement of the tarmac element with stone or brick and the rebuilding of the western path to match would greatly enhance this street. Another area that would benefit greatly from the use of stone setts is the path towards the Prebendal on Priest End, where some old setts can in fact be seen built into the churchyard wall.

Raised pavements are a significant part of the character of the southern part of North St. However, they could be greatly improved by stone paving replacing the concrete slabs and an alternative being found for the tarmac that slopes down to the road. The pavements are edged in Victorian blue brick and there are some stone setts at the road edge but the overall appearance is quite shabby. This is not improved by the way parked cars are scattered along the embankments. These embankments could be replaced

by vertical stone retaining walls at the pavement edge. Not only would this be more attractive than the present tarmac but also it would allow safer and more orderly parking, which would utilise the space better. The need for safety railings and their design would have to be carefully considered.

Specific sites with enhancement potential

The purpose of this section is to identify potential schemes and, if there is public support for some of the works, then these could be progressed should funding become available.

Market Place, Upper High St.

The market place has granite setts in some areas but black tarmac where vehicles park. The area around the Market House is especially prominent and has benefited from a paving scheme using a combination of granite setts and York Stone paving. The market place as a whole, however, is still in need of improvement. Natural materials would benefit the whole space with parking bays delineated in contrasting but traditional, materials, rather than by painted lines. The setting of the Market House could be improved by designing street furniture and if possible replacing the utilitarian modern telephone boxes with the classic red telephone box. The market place is also blighted by a clutter of road signs which are made all the more prominent by the open aspect of the area.

The Shambles

The Shambles is at present a rather forlorn area largely given over to car parking. Only 1A Cornmarket has an active shop front that looks onto the courtyard and brings light and activity

to the scene. This area should be seen as an asset to the town centre and enhanced accordingly. The removal of parked cars and re-surfacing of the whole area would be an important first step. A different use for the rear portion of 3 Pump Lane, encouraging pedestrians to linger and bringing activity to the courtyard would also make a great impact. The presence of several unsightly rubbish bins, whilst they may be a necessity of the area, could certainly be rationalised and perhaps screened to reduce their unfortunate impact.

Park St.

Park St. is a narrow street with a high density of residential dwellings, several shops, a school and entrance to the playing fields. The frontage of the John Hampden School is an extremely important element within the street. If funding was available, the original railings, which have been removed, should be reinstated in a suitable cast iron design, whilst the tubular steel railings to the car park and playground entrances could also be improved by using a matching style. Front garden boundary walls are important parts of Park St.'s character, helping to define public and private spaces. These should be maintained and enhanced and their removal or the creation of hard standings for car parking will be discouraged. Well-tended front gardens can soften the buildings and add colour and warmth to the street scene whilst trees and shrubs can absorb traffic noise. The cluster of commercial premises opposite the garage could be improved by better signage in traditional materials. Also at that end of the street The Falcon, an interesting and attractive building, is often partly obscured by cars parked in front of it. The building would be greatly improved

by a more sympathetic use of the frontage.

Town Centre Alleyways.

The narrow alleyways between houses in the centre of Thame are an important part of its historic character. Interesting elements of many historic buildings and the plots behind them are often to be glimpsed through the entrances to these alleyways and where these are open to public view, if not public access, they should remain so. Where gates already exist they should be kept in good order and replaced, if necessary, in traditional style and material. Inappropriate forms of gate are discouraged, such as the unpleasant steel roller shutter on 98 High St. and traditional designs should be used wherever possible. There may well be opportunities to improve the surfacing in such cases as well. Where stone setts survive it would enhance the conservation area to expose these and repair them as necessary.

The cattle market (not in the conservation area but it clearly has an impact on it)

The cattle market on North St. is at present a relatively benign presence on the edge of the conservation area. Although an area of concrete and tarmac with wholly functional modern buildings it does not have a totally overbearing impact on North St. and importantly lends a lively, bustling air to this part of the town on market days. If the livestock market should cease to operate the future re-use of the site should seek to retain this character, perhaps with an increased green border between the road and any new development. In this way it would reinforce the idea of the rural fringe of the historic town centre persisting. The

archaeological potential of the site should be fully investigated when the opportunity arises.

Conclusion

The success of a conservation area depends on the joint commitment of the local authorities and those living and working in the conservation area working to preserve and enhance its character. All have a part to play in this. This document seeks to set out some ways in which this can be achieved. The Conservation and Design Team will be happy to give advice on any aspects of the conservation area and to receive further ideas for the preservation and enhancement of its special character.

Appendix

South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 Adopted Plan January 2006

Demolition of Listed Buildings

Policy CON1

Proposals for the demolition of any listed building will not be permitted.

Alterations and extensions to listed buildings

Policy CON2

Any extension to a listed building must be appropriate to its character, must be sympathetic to the original structure in design, scale and materials and must not dominate or overwhelm it.

Policy CON3

Any alteration to a listed building must respect its established character and not diminish the special historical or architectural qualities which make it worthy of inclusion on the statutory list.

Use and changes of use of listed buildings

Policy CON4

A change of use of part or the whole of a listed building will be permitted only if its character and features of special architectural or historic interest would be protected. Proposals for a change of use should incorporate details of all intended alterations to the building and its curtilage, to demonstrate their impact on its appearance, character and setting.

The setting of listed buildings

Policy CON5

Proposals for development which would adversely affect the setting of a listed building will be refused.

Proposals affecting a conservation area

Policy CON6

Consent to demolish a building in a conservation area will be granted only if the loss of the building would not adversely affect the character of the area and, where appropriate, if there are detailed and acceptable plans for the redevelopment of the site.

Policy CON7

Planning permission will not be granted for development which would harm the character or appearance of a conservation area.

The following will be required when considering proposals for development in conservation areas:

- (i) the design and scale of new work to be in sympathy with the established character of the area; and
- (ii) the use of traditional materials, whenever this is appropriate to the character of the area.

The contribution made to a conservation area by existing walls, buildings, trees, hedges, open spaces and important views will be taken into account. Proposals for development outside a conservation area which would have a harmful effect on the conservation area will not be permitted.

Advertisements in conservation areas and on listed buildings

Policy CON8

Consent will not be granted for 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, it should generally be non-illuminated, made of natural materials and to a design and scale reflecting the best traditional practice.

Blinds and canopies in conservation areas

Policy CON9

Permission will not be granted for the installation of blinds or canopies of non-traditional form or materials on buildings within conservation areas.

Burgage plots

Policy CON10

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 by its nature would detract from their historic interest, amenity and nature conservation value.

Archaeology and historic building analysis and recording

Policy CON11

There will be a presumption in favour of physically preserving nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings.

Policy CON12

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 CON13

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, conditions will be imposed

on planning permissions, or planning obligations sought, which will require the developer to provide an appropriate programme of archaeological investigation, recording and publication by a professionally-qualified body.

Policy CON14

Before the determination of an application which affects a building of archaeological or historic interest, applicants will be required, where necessary, to submit a detailed record survey and analysis of the building. In some circumstances, further survey and analysis will be made a condition of consent.

Historic battlefields, parks, gardens and landscapes

Policy CON15

Proposals which would damage the character, setting or amenities of a battlefield, park or garden of special historic interest, contained in the English Heritage Registers, will not be permitted.

Common land

Policy CON16

Proposals for development on or affecting common land, village greens and other important spaces within settlements will not be permitted.