

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 Waterstock 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 Culture, Media and Sport 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. 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 identified on the Sites and Monuments Record maintained by Oxfordshire County Council. 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.

WATERSTOCK

1) The History of the Area

Waterstock lies in a bend of the River Thames which bounds it to the north and west. The settlement is low lying and stands 200ft above sea level making it liable to flooding in the north-western part of the village. The soil is gravel and loam on Kimmeridge clay and alluvial soil is found in the meadows bordering the River Thames.

The main approaches to the village have probably always been from the south by the road leading from the Thames to Oxford road, or from the east by the Tiddington - Ickford road. It was only in 1790 that Diana Ashhurst built a stone bridge (Bow Bridge) and carriage road over the River Thames in order to connect with Curson's carriage road from Waterperry House.

Nothing is known of any pre-Norman Conquest settlement in Waterstock except that the name derives from the Anglo-Saxon word meaning "Waterplace". There is, however, much evidence to show that it was a medieval village. Many of the pasture fields still show traces of ridge and furrow strip cultivation and it is known that an estate, assessed at five hides, at Waterstock was held freely by Alwi in the time of Edward the Confessor.

The original nucleus of the village lies around the parish church of St Leonard's, an early medieval church which was rebuilt at the end of the 15th century by Thomas Danvers, lord of the manor.

Waterstock House has undergone a number of rebuildings and nothing of the medieval house now survives, but it was successively lived in by several important families of Oxfordshire gentry, the Bruleys in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Danvers in the 15th, the Caves and then the Crokes in the 17th century.

Thomas Danvers brought distinction to the village: he was a member of three parliaments and also actively assisted in the foundation of Magdalen College, Oxford. Also of note is Sir George Croke, that 'learned and curious botanist', who was one of the earliest members of the Royal Society.

The present Waterstock House is the former service wing of a large, square house of stone built in 1787 by Sir Henry Ashhurst and demolished in 1956. The 18th century stables remain along with a Gothic garden house of 1898. Ashhurst also improved and enlarged the garden of his house by taking part of the churchyard in exchange for certain undertakings to the rector. It also appears that the pasture field on the other side of the village street from the house was once formally landscaped as it is named 'The Avenue' on the 1848 tithe map and there are still extensive earthworks (of the sort usually associated with formal gardens) visible today.

By the entrance to Waterstock House is the Pump House, dated 1898, a little building slightly reminiscent of an Anglo-Saxon church tower. From it many of the villagers collected their water until the mains supply came in 1951. Indeed, the whole village was a squirearchy owned by the Ashhurst family until the 1950s with most of inhabitants employed by them.

Waterstock is a well preserved village, mainly composed of 17th and 18th century farmhouses and cottages, built of stone and local brick. The earliest building in the village is Orchard End, a substantial peasant farmer's house which has been dated to the late 13th or early 14th century. Its smoke-blackened cruck frame trusses and rafters show that it was once open to the roof.

Park Farm and Home Farm are two ancient farmhouses, located in the village street, the latter L-shaped and dating mainly from the 17th and 18th century, of timber framed construction with brick infill on a rubble plinth. The farm also has a 17th century granary, weatherboarded and timber framed on staddle stones. Park Farm is of the early 18th century built of coursed squared limestone rubble with brick chimney stacks. Members of the Bull family have been tenants of both farms for several generations.

Church Cottages, once Church Farm, lie opposite the church. They date from the early 18th century and are the result of the extension of a two-storey three-bay house faced with limestone rubble.

The stone-built Rectory was repaired in 1787 by Mrs Ashhurst, the mother of Sir Henry, for the new rector, R B B Robinson and has a well laid out garden with some fine trees, including a female Ginkgo.

A mill at Waterstock is mentioned in the Domesday Survey (1086), while in 1528 there is reference to both a water and horse-driven mill. The present water-mill (almost certainly that referred to in Domesday) occupies a small island in the River Thames, the water passing over weirs on both sides, the larger weir on the west or Waterperry side providing the water for the mill race. This weir was apparently rebuilt in 1846 by John Collins of Wolvercote at a cost of £150. By 1957 both the mill and mill-house had been converted into a dwelling.

The village has never been large, but except for period in the 19th century, it seems to have been more populous in the Middle Ages than ever since. Domesday records a small population but by 1279 there were approximately 200 inhabitants. After the Black Death (1348/9) the population decreased to 51 people over the age of fourteen, who are listed in the poll tax return of 1377. 18 householders are recorded for the hearth tax of 1662 and in the 18th century about 15 to 17 houses are mentioned.

During the first 30 years of the 19th century the population rose steadily from 114 in 1801 to a peak of 142 in 1831. Thereafter there was steady decline with 108 people being recorded in the 1901 census. In the 20th century the trend continued, and by 1951 there were only 96 people in the parish.

No information about schooling in the village has been found before the 19th century, although by 1805 there was a day school and in 1808 ten children were being taught to read there. A Sunday school with 13 children, supported by Mrs Ashhurst, was set up in 1808. By 1818 another day school had opened and then 18 children were attending the two day schools.

The Church school set up in 1871 was a mixed school run on National Society lines; it had an average attendance of 25 by the end of the century. The school was apparently reorganised in 1903-4 as Waterstock Church of England School is said to have opened in 1904. Lack of numbers led to its closure in 1916, after

which the children went to Tiddington school. The village is now largely a commuter village, although agriculture remains important to the local economy. Waterstock was first designated as a Conservation Area on 11 December 1984 and the extension approved by the council on 21 October 1999.

2) The Established Character

Waterstock lies in a loop off the A418 road between Wheatley and Thame and is surrounded by farming land in a bend of the River Thame. It is an attractive village where limestone predominates as the traditional vernacular building material, although there is some red brick with red clay tiles and slates as roofing materials.

Waterstock House is the main focal point of the village set in its own private parkland fronting the River Thame. St Leonard's Church, The Old Rectory and Church Cottages are located at the western end isolated from the centre of the village, while the eastern end of the single street is flanked by small cottages set close together, built of stone and local brick. The Old School now converted to a house is tucked behind other cottages, with its old school bell still remaining.

Most of the buildings are slightly set back from the road and the gaps between are often fronted with either stone or brick walls, giving a sense of enclosure.

There are two prominent timber framed thatch cottages with plaster infill, Camilla Cottage and Orchard End, the cruck built house of medieval origin referred to earlier. Home Farmhouse is timber framed with brick infill under a plain tile roof. On the bridleway to Waterperry, Waterstock Mill stands on a small island in the River Thame and is a delightful building of timber framed construction with brick nogging under a plain tiled roof.

There has been little modern infill development in the village, although there is a small group of detached houses at the back of Waterstock House on the northern edge of the existing conservation area. These are discreetly situated within the old brick kitchen walls of Waterstock House, which has helped to reduce the impact on the character of the village as a whole.

There are many other important walls in Waterstock, particularly the stone walls around St Leonard's Church, The Rectory, The Old Rectory, Waterstock House, around Home Farm and also the brick wall opposite Park Cottage.

There are a number of significant local views which include that looking down the River Thame from Waterstock Mill Bridge and the view south across open farmland from the main street towards the golf course.

There are notable groups of trees around Waterstock House and parkland along the eastern boundary of the Old Rectory and fronting Home Farm. The gardens of the Old Rectory are particularly attractive. The grass verges in the village enhance the character of the street scene as does the rustic timber fencing on the south-eastern side of the road just before the entrance to Home Farm.

In terms of the proposed extension to the conservation area, the area of open pasture between Park Farm and the rear of The Old Rectory is worthy of inclusion as it helps to create an easy transition between village and open countryside. Important views into and out of the village at this point should be protected as they

contribute to Waterstock's setting in the landscape, while the former garden earthworks of Waterstock House are well preserved here.

Extension of the Conservation Area would also include parcels of land north of Waterstock Mill. The attractive water meadows either side of the track leading to Waterperry are fringed by a number of fine woodland trees and provide an attractive foreground to the mill. To the east a thick band of mature woodland trees stretches along the northern bank of the river and is bounded on the north by a broad narrow ditch: this extends upstream and provides a dense natural backcloth to the village.

On the north-east side of the Victorian boat house a further water meadow provides fine open views upstream along the river towards Waterperry: there is also an attractive view looking back downstream at Waterstock House and near the church.

Mature copses of woodland bound the existing north-eastern boundary of the conservation area giving a well defined screen, while the field beyond has further traces of ridge and furrow. The field is bounded on its northern edge by a belt of mature woodland which includes some fine Scot Pines and Beech trees.

The boundary to the proposed extension of the conservation area is well defined by Stockwell Lane, a slightly sunken track with drainage ditches on either side which runs along a slight ridge, offering fine long distant views out of Waterstock as well as into the village itself. Near the recently landscaped former refuse tip, the lane turns at right-angles to the north-west at which point its southern boundary is composed of a thick mixed hedge line which provides screening from the village. The derelict L-shaped stone farm buildings in the field are of local interest, while more ridge and furrow earthworks can be found in the field south-east of Stockwell Lane and north of the Old Post Office. These are clearly defined and extend to the south-east towards the old allotments.

3) Possible Areas for Enhancement

Waterstock is an extremely attractive village, which is well maintained and cared for by its residents. However, a few minor improvements could be made, including the laying underground of existing overhead wires and cables, while the concrete kerb stones adjoining Park Cottages and around the memorial cross could be replaced with granite setts.

The Cypress trees recently planted along the western edge of the parkland to Waterstock House are somewhat out of keeping with the existing deciduous trees in the area and if their growth is unchecked the view up to the house will in time be spoilt.

Tree planting of an appropriate species would be desirable on the other side of the road in order to screen the alien intrusion of the golf course into the wider landscape. The grassed area around the war memorial could perhaps benefit from more regular maintenance and the provision of a wooden seat. The area surrounding the former refuse tip in the proposed extension to the Conservation Area has recently been improved, although there is scope for further landscaping and planting to screen it from Stockwell Lane and the surrounding countryside.

There have been several proposals for residential development at Park Farm, the large modern farmbuildings of which are now largely redundant for agricultural purposes. Although not attractive in themselves, these buildings do relatively little to detract from the rural appearance of the village as a whole and have been described by a Planning Inspector as making a "neutral contribution" to its character. Recently, a number of appropriate rural uses such as storage of equestrian equipment and feed and a furniture restoration workshop have been installed in some of the buildings. The stone walled and slate roofed farmbuilding on the village street is of traditional construction and provides a strong sense of enclosure at this point.

The use of traditional materials and detailing can have considerable positive effect in enhancing the character of a conservation area. The owners of historic and prominent properties are therefore encouraged to remove unsympathetic modern materials, such as concrete tiles, U.P.V.C windows and plastic rainwater goods, the latter two of which are all too prominent in Waterstock, and to reinstate traditional materials such as red clay tiles, red bricks, sometimes with flared headers, softwood windows and cast iron guttering. The owners of the two thatched buildings in the village, Orchard End and Camilla Cottage, are also encouraged to reinstate plain flush ridges, which are part of the traditional thatching style of South Oxfordshire, when re-thatching becomes necessary.

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 appropriate 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.