

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 Brightwell Baldwin 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.

BRIGHTWELL BALDWIN

1) The History of the Area

Very little has been published on the history of Brightwell Baldwin and there are few surviving archival records to help illustrate the development of the settlement. Consequently, this study is unlikely to reflect the full history.

There is no recorded evidence for prehistoric settlement in the Brightwell Baldwin area, although Stone Age artifacts have been found in neighbouring parishes. There are also no known Roman features in the area, although a hoard of Roman coins was discovered at an unknown location nearby in the 18th century and a Romano-British cremation was found in the 17th century near Cadwell Farm to the north-west of the village.

The village name is likely to be of Anglo-Saxon origin. The “bright well” is the clear stream which was dammed to create the lake in the park. The Baldwin element was added in the 14th century when Baldwin de Bereford became Lord of the Manor.

The village today is strung out mainly along the south side of the village street, which reputedly follows the line of the Lower Icknield Way, a Romanised prehistoric track. The Church of St Bartholomew, which is essentially a 14th century structure, is at the west end of the present day village. It is likely that the medieval village originally lay on both sides of the street but the emparking, which took place at an unknown date, encroached on all but the church. There are well preserved earthworks to the east of the church, which seem to constitute parts of the medieval village, and medieval field systems can be seen to the east of the lake.

An earlier house existed on the site of the ruined house we see today. All trace of this has been lost, although the 17th century dovecote in the park may well have been associated with this earlier building. The Brightwell Baldwin estate passed through several families, including the Parke, Cottesmore and Carleton families. The estate passed to the Lowndes Stone family in 1754 when Francis Lowe bequeathed it to his daughter, Catherine, who had married William Lowndes Stone in 1744. He was succeeded by his son, William, to whom the construction of the now ruined house of c.1791 is attributed.

The house was a square, five-bay structure, built of stone. It was demolished in the mid 20th century and only low walls and the kitchen wing survive. The contemporary stable block has since been converted to a residence. The landscaped park was probably largely laid out in the 18th century and the ice house, lodges, bridge and kitchen garden are all likely to be contemporary with the construction of the main house. The Ordnance Survey map of 1885 appears to be the earliest detailed plan of the park which shows the formal avenues of trees, including the sweeping cedar avenue of the carriage drive from the south-west lodge.

Brightwell Baldwin has expanded little over the years and today is a quiet, attractive village, still dominated by the presence of the park. Farming remains important as it has done for centuries. The majority of the historic settlement and a large part of the parkland was designated as a conservation area by South Oxfordshire District Council on 17 July 1990. The area was subsequently extended to include all of the historic parkland on 19 October 1993.

2) The Established Character

Brightwell Baldwin is a very attractive, quiet village which has expanded little over the centuries. The village's character is dominated by the presence of Brightwell Park which forms the vast majority of the conservation area, the built up area of the village remaining totally subservient to the woodland and open spaces of the park.

The settlement is loosely spaced and essentially linear in form, extending along most of the southern side of the park. The majority of buildings are cottages and farms with generous gaps in between, allowing the open countryside and parkland to extend right into the heart of the village. The creation of Brightwell Park has resulted in most of the surviving historic buildings being located on the opposite, southern side of the village street. The Parish Church of St Bartholomew remains a major focal point in the village on the northern side of the street. The density of development declines dramatically at the eastern end of the village with substantial gaps between properties.

The topography of the village and park is generally undulating, although the land slopes down both from the east and west towards the former fishponds and stream which cross the park. The character of the parkland today is still influenced by the landscaping scheme, thought to have been laid out in the 18th century. The area is mostly grassland with a mixture of formal and informal tree planting and is criss-crossed by a network of informal footpaths and tracks. The formal sweeping cedar avenue from Brightwell Park to the south-west lodge is a vitally important element in the character of the park, as are the avenues from Eagle Lodge to Brightwell Park and from Brightwell Park to the walled garden. There are many trees scattered throughout the park which are important features in the attractive vistas. The location of trees on the character study map is for indicative purposes only, but detailed surveys of trees have been carried out and plans are held by the owners of Brightwell Park. The large belts of woodland to the west of the park and around St Bartholomew's Church give a more enclosed feel and a different aspect to that created by the more open grassland to the east.

For such a small settlement, there is a surprisingly large range of building materials to be found. These include local stock bricks, local limestone known as coral rag, flints, rendered timber framing, clay tiles, slate and thatch. Several more properties were probably originally thatched but this was replaced in the 18th and 19th centuries with locally made clay peg-tiles. There is a variety of roof forms but many cottages have steeply pitched roofs, often with dormers and simple, unfussy details to verges and eaves. Brightwell Park and Cedar Lodge are built of more imposing limestone ashlar and this material has also been used as a dressing for St Bartholomew's Church.

The church is a very important feature in the curve of the village street as one enters or leaves from the south-west. The brick and flint boundary walls to the churchyard and the south-western corner of Brightwell Park are also significant features. Brightwell Park, including the remains of the earlier house and the 17th century dovecote, are prominent in the parkland and form focal points in several attractive views. There are several buildings of local interest in Brightwell Baldwin which have not yet been judged to be of sufficient

architectural or historic importance to merit statutory listing but which nevertheless contribute greatly to the attractive quality of the street scene. These include Brightwell Baldwin Cottage, Cress Cottage, Heathfield and Church Cottage.

The large expanses of open parkland and the contrasting areas of dense woodland, which form the majority of the conservation area, are vital to its character and therefore there is very little scope for development which would threaten their preservation. This also includes the important gaps between properties where the parkland and open countryside extend into the heart of the village, and several areas of private garden. Where development, extension or alteration may be acceptable in principle, careful attention needs to be paid to important details such as the use of correct mortar mixes and pointing details for brick and stonework and the choice of the best quality materials.

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

Brightwell Baldwin is a very attractive village that is obviously well maintained and cared for by its residents. Consequently, there are few areas for major environmental improvement.

The most important and dramatic improvement to the street scene would be the laying underground of the existing overhead cables and wires by the statutory undertakers. The work would have to be carried out in a manner that does not destroy or damage other important amenities such as verges, kerbs and footpaths.

Attractive granite setts have been used as a kerbing material along the north side of the village street and the opportunity should be taken to preserve these in preference to the ugly concrete kerbing which has been used outside the former post office. The existing grass verges should, however, be maintained, without kerbing if possible.

There is also an ongoing programme of the management of trees in Brightwell Park and this should continue, with particular attention being paid to the cedar avenue which is in a poor condition. Overgrown, intrusive and unwanted trees should be felled and new ones planted in accordance with the historic parkland landscape where appropriate. Important vistas should be maintained, while thought could be given to creating new ones in some circumstances.

The buildings of Brightwell Park Farm are unattractive and do little to enhance the character of the park or the conservation area. The opportunity should be taken when it arises to improve the quality of these buildings through the use of traditional materials and detailing.

The owners of prominent and historic properties in the village are encouraged to remove unsympathetic modern materials, such as concrete tiles and plastic rainwater goods and to reinstate traditional materials like clay tiles and cast iron guttering. In particular, the character and appearance of the village hall and The Lord Nelson public house are compromised by their inappropriate plastic windows and could be enhanced by the reinstatement of painted softwood windows. 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 instances from the Council for the repair and renovation of historic buildings within the conservation area or the reinstatement of lost original details and materials. 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.

6) **Archaeological Constraint Plan**

No known archaeological constraints
(See Introduction)

N.B. The areas of earthworks to the east of the church and lake referred to in the text have not yet been identified on the archaeological constraint maps identified by Oxfordshire County Council. It is therefore not currently possible to indicate these in map form.