

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 Britwell Salome 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.

BRITWELL SALOME

1. The History of the Area

There is no recorded evidence of prehistoric settlement in the Britwell Salome area. Roman settlement is possible as the village lies only a mile from the Upper Icknield Way and is partly situated on the Lower Icknield Way (now the B4009). Several urns from the Roman period were found nearby in 1849.

The location of the village was determined by the presence of springs and wells for drinking water which rise where Chiltern chalk meets the greensand. The first part of the village name may derive from a personal name, the well of Brutte, with the second part being a corruption of the De Sulham family name. The manor of Britwell in the honour of Wallingford was awarded to Amalric de Sulham by William the Conqueror. The former neighbouring parish of Britwell Prior was subdivided from the manor of Britwell when Emma, wife of King Cnut made a gift of the land to Christ Church Priory, Canterbury in 1032. The two parishes were reunited only in 1865. The linear shape of the original parish, along with several others in the area, is a possible reflection of the intention to apportion equally the full range of soil types and consequent agricultural potential, from the dry chalky slopes of the Chilterns to the wetter arable land of the lower greensand.

The de Sulham family continued as lords of the manor of Britwell for two centuries after the Conquest. The manor then passed successively to the de la Hydes, the de Malyns, the Cottesmores and the Oglethorpes. Owen Oglethorpe, rector of Newington and President of Magdalen College, Oxford, crowned Elizabeth I.

A small royal castle appears to have been built at Britwell Salome in the early 12th century and its strategic position on the road between Watlington and the large royal castle at Wallingford meant that it played a prominent role in the conflict between Stephen and Matilda. Matilda escaped from Oxford to Wallingford and Stephen then laid siege to Wallingford castle. Henry Plantagenet (afterwards Henry II), son of Matilda, sought to relieve Wallingford but was opposed by the defenders of the castle at Britwell in 1153. The castle was presumably abandoned or destroyed soon after Henry became king and no trace of it exists above ground today.

Some historians believe that materials from the destroyed castle were used to build Priory Chapel which served the parish of Britwell Prior. This building was only a short distance from the Church of St Nicholas, the present parish church of Britwell Salome, which was itself first built in the 12th century. In 1865 the Priory Chapel was dismantled when the parishes were reunited and the church of St Nicholas was almost totally rebuilt except for the chancel, thus avoiding the need for re-consecration. The rebuilt church was opened in 1867.

The manor house of Britwell probably stood on the site of Britwell House. In 1600 John Simeon, a Catholic, acquired the manor of Britwell by marrying into the prominent Stonor family of nearby Stonor Park, who were also Catholics. The present early Georgian house was built by Sir Edward Simeon in 1728 and in 1764 he erected the column in the park in memory of his parents. Between 1787 and 1813 the Simeons gave refuge to the Poor Clares of Ave in Artois who had fled the French Revolution.

The fields around the village were enclosed in 1845 and the village has remained essentially a small agricultural community. There has been some modern infill and estate development to the north of the main road but the area of the village to the south, including Britwell House and park, remains full of character and history. This was recognised by the designation of a conservation area on 19 October 1993. The village has recently been associated with the well-known designer, the late David Hicks, who lived in the village and modified many properties, including the Priest's House.

2. The Established Character

Britwell Salome is a very attractive settlement with an historic core running south and west from The Red Lion public house (now renamed The Goose), towards the landscaped parkland of Britwell House. The smaller hamlet of Britwell Priory lies to the north-east. The topography is generally flat within the village and gently undulating in the park. There is reasonably heavy traffic on the B4009 but the intrusion of noise rapidly decreases to the south along the main village street. There is therefore a considerable difference in character between the focal point of the busy crossroads outside The Red Lion and that of the quiet crossroads outside Bartletts. The majority of modern development lies outside the conservation area.

The two principal streets of the historic core area, the road south from The Red Lion to Bartletts and the road west from Bartletts to the entrance lodge to Britwell House also have distinct characters. The road south is made up of randomly grouped cottages and farms with generous spaces between. Many buildings are set back from the street frontage. The buildings on the road west have a more compact quality, particularly at the east end where most cottages front directly onto the street with few spaces between. Walls and fences reinforce this sense of enclosure.

In terms of extent, the village is dominated by Britwell House and its park, but little sense of the scale of the landscaped parkland can be gained from within the village itself. The house and landscape features cannot be seen other than from certain vantage points along the track to the south of the park and from the entrance gates at the south-west end of the village. The park has its own character of vistas, wooded copses, rolling grassland and rough pasture. The house is mostly hidden in views from the north but is more visible from the south where the land slopes away towards the Chilterns.

There are many historic buildings in the village, particularly within the conservation area to the south of the B4009. Several date from the 18th century although there are also examples of 17th century timber framing. Most are modest cottages which present a simple and dignified front to the street, with a symmetrical arrangement of windows and doors under a steeply pitched clay tile roof. Larger properties are also generally devoid of ornamentation, relying on proportion and symmetry to mark their presence in the streetscene. There are some farmhouses with associated timber framed and boarded outbuildings. Windows are predominantly simple side hung painted wooden casements, some with leaded lights and often under brick arches. There are also wooden sashes, divided into four or twelve panes.

Historic buildings of particular note within the conservation area include Home Farmhouse, no longer a working farm, which with its cruck frame dates from the 16th century if not earlier. It was remodelled in the 18th century with roughcast render above flint rubble with brick quoins, dressings and bands. In its present form the building is a good example of a 'lobby entry plan' with a main entrance leading to a large central chimney breast with rooms off to either side. It has a good group of associated farmbuildings. The Old Queen, once an alehouse, is a small 17th century cottage of square timber framing with brick infill, some laid in 'herringbone' pattern, under a clay tile roof and has a sympathetic modern addition. Kerry Vor is an 18th century farmhouse, now a house. It has rendered brick walls under a clay tile and Welsh slate roof. All of these buildings and several others in the village have been listed for their special architectural or historic interest at Grade II.

Britwell House is a fine example of an early Georgian country house in Palladian style. The quality of the building has been recognised by its listing at Grade II*. It is built of red Flemish bond brickwork under a Welsh slate roof with a dignified and fully symmetrical façade facing the rolling landscaped parkland. The central block is flanked by two wing pavilions and is of two storeys with tall eighteen-paned sash windows either side of stone steps leading to the door with a simple stone architrave. The attic storey has a lunette window in the tympanum of the pediment. The house also has fine interiors, including Baroque plasterwork and good quality wooden panelling and staircases. The two stone obelisks in the park have also been listed at Grade II*.

There is a wide range of vernacular building materials employed in the village. The local soft clunch or chalk stone is used, often in association with brick dressings as quoins and string courses. Flint also appears in combination with brick, both for houses and garden walls and there are several buildings with a timber frame. The local red brick is widely used, the best example being Britwell House. Flared headers too are characteristic, either set randomly or to form a decorative pattern in the brickwork. Roofs are usually of handmade clay tiles although there is some slate, particularly on Britwell House.

The majority of the roads in the village are edged with grass verges and this helps to reinforce the rural feel. There is no hard edged kerbing within the conservation area, although there is a small stretch of cobbles outside Orchard Close.

Vegetation in various forms is an important element in the character of the village. Hedges, bushes, trees and grass verges help to soften the views and reinforce the tranquil, rural feel. There are important trees around Kerry Vor and The Old Queen but the most significant individual trees and groups can be found around Britwell Park.

Although the historic core of the village is fairly intensely developed, the greater part of the conservation area is formed by the important open space of the landscaped grounds of Britwell House (Britwell Park) and the village cricket ground. The landscaped park is, of course, an essential element in the setting of the listed house and could be further protected by inclusion on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens.

There are many locations where picturesque views into, out of and around the conservation area can be gained, particularly around Britwell Park which affords fine vistas of the house and garden features, tree planting and out to the Chilterns beyond. Attractive views can also be had along the village street created by a picturesque mix of vernacular materials and historic buildings, while there are wide prospects across rolling countryside looking east from the crossroads outside Bartletts.

There are a number of lengths of brick or brick and flint wall which contribute to the local character, including walls in Britwell Park, around the Priest's House, Bartletts and Kerry Vor.

There are several buildings of local interest within the conservation area which have not been judged to be of sufficient architectural or historic quality to merit statutory listing, but which nevertheless contribute a great

deal to the attractive quality of the village. These include various outbuildings and The Lodge in Britwell Park and Orchard Close along the village street.

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

Britwell Salome is an 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 grass verges or footpaths, which in some cases are also being damaged by carelessly-driven vehicles overriding the verges. The Highway Authority can also be encouraged to provide more sympathetic signage in the area where it is necessary.

The use of traditional materials and detailing can have a considerable positive 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, plastic windows and rainwater goods, and to reinstate traditional materials such as red clay tiles, red bricks, sometimes with flared headers, softwood windows and cast iron guttering.

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.

6) Archaeological Constraint Plan

No known archaeological constraints
(See Introduction)