

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 Greys Green 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. 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.

GREYS GREEN

1) The History of the Area

There is no evidence of ancient occupation in the immediate locality of Greys Green, but, like many settlements in the area, it may have developed in the medieval period around a clearing in the extensive woodland that once covered the area. There has never been a church around which a community could develop, and the history of Greys Green is closely associated with that of the neighbouring hamlet by St. Nicholas's Church and the Maltster's Arms public house.

The Manor of "Redrefeld", which included Greys Green, was given to the de Grey family after the Norman Conquest. In 1347 Sir John de Grey received a licence to crenellate the Manor House, parts of which still exist today and which incorporates very early brickwork. The present house was built by the Knollys family, who acquired the Manor in 1518. In 1724 the estates of Greys Court came by marriage to the Stapleton family who made further alterations to the house. In 1968 the Lordship of the Manor with Greys Court was given to the National Trust by Sir Felix Brunner, but because it is some distance from the settlement at Greys Green the site is outside the conservation area.

Greys Green remained a small settlement of farms around the Green over the centuries, with very little development between the farmhouses and barns. The late 18th and early 19th centuries saw much rebuilding, and many of the properties around the Green today date from this period.

A school was built on the south side of the Green in the early 19th century, but it was closed in 1966 and subsequently demolished to make way for a new house. However, the nearby terrace of School Cottages, built in 1836, commemorates its presence. The cottage rents supported the Sunday School, which continued as the village school. The cottages are owned by the Henley and District Housing Trust, which restored and modernised them. Forge Cottage on the opposite side of the Green was, as its name suggests, the location of the village smithy until it closed in 1981 and was incorporated into the dwelling.

There has been a strong tradition of cricket on the Green since the late 19th century, despite the small local population. The village hall was built in 1924 and originally had a thatched roof, now replaced with tiles. The impressive avenue of wild cherry trees along the road through the village was replanted to commemorate the Festival of Britain in 1951, and the small area of grass and paved garden around the war memorial was laid out as part of the Coronation celebrations in 1953.

The open spaces within the conservation area, including the green and the grass verges either side of the road were declared as commonland in 1949 under the Commons Act of 1899. The National Trust acquired the land, which also extends further west to Shepherd's Green and east towards Greys Court, in 1978. The land was subsequently declared 'inalienable' in 1981, i.e. the land cannot be sold or taken from the Trust except by Compulsory Purchase Order.

Today Greys Green is still a quiet hamlet, although the volume of vehicular traffic on the unclassified road is always increasing. Agriculture remains important in the attractive countryside around, which has been

classified as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The settlement was designated as a conservation area on 11 December 1984.

2) The Established Character

Greys Green is a very small settlement, barely more than a hamlet. It is completely rural in character, despite the busy main road that runs through the centre. The open countryside is never far away, but the grouping of the buildings and the many tall trees around the village give a strong sense of enclosure.

The centre of the settlement is approached from the east by an attractive and imposing formal avenue of trees on either side of the road. The views along this avenue to the axis point formed by the war memorial are important.

The rural nature of Greys Green is enhanced by the gravel tracks and paths that lead off the main road and this informality should be protected.

The focal point of the settlement is the large open space formed by the cricket pitch. This is a very attractive area with good views to the surrounding properties and mature trees. Most of the buildings are in small groups with large gaps between them, and this arrangement should be protected. There is very little modern development at all in the area, and that which has been built respects the form of the village. There is little backland development or other building that disrupts the loosely scattered form.

Greys Green is unusual in being a conservation area without any statutorily listed buildings. However, there are a large number of attractive, vernacular properties which contribute a great deal to the character. Some buildings of local interest include the School Cottages, which were built by the Rev. J Roberts and left in trust to Trinity College, Oxford in 1836. They were restored in 1949 and 1985 and are now owned by the Henley and District Housing Trust. The early 20th century village hall, stone war memorial and the weatherboarded and thatched barns also contribute to the scene.

Many buildings in Greys Green are detached cottages with spacious curtilages, sometimes associated with barns. Most of the properties are fairly large, apart from the small terrace of School Cottages. The predominant building materials are flint and red brick with red clay tile roofs. There is some weatherboarding and a little thatch.

3) Possible Areas for Enhancement

As Greys Green is such a small settlement there are few obvious areas for large-scale enhancement and emphasis should be placed on preserving the existing attractive rural character by protecting the many fine trees, the gravel tracks and the loose, well spaced arrangement of buildings.

The timber framed and weatherboarded barn behind the cricket pavilion is in a very serious state of disrepair and is a matter for concern. The building is an important element within the conservation area and it is to be hoped that it can be retained and repaired and, if necessary, converted to a new use which respects its simple character.

Generally the settlement appears to be well maintained with the grass verges and Green being regularly cut. An additional wooden seat could be placed overlooking the Green and perhaps one could also be located by the war memorial.

The use of traditional materials and detailing can have considerable effect in enhancing a conservation area's character. The owners of historic and prominent properties are encouraged to remove unsympathetic modern materials, such as concrete tiles, UPVC windows and plastic rain water goods, and to reinstate traditional materials such as clay tiles, painted softwood windows and cast iron guttering. The owners of the few 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 and 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.