

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 North Moreton 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.

NORTH MORETON

1) The History of the Area

The village of North Moreton is reputed to lie on the line of a Roman road from the north but the first documentary reference to a settlement in this location does not occur until the Domesday survey of 1086, when Ralf, lord of the manor, held the patronage of the existing church. The manor house has long since disappeared but the site lay to the east of All Saints' Church where the remains of a moat can still be seen.

The manor passed from the Bassett family to the Stapletons in the 13th century. Miles de Stapleton, who became lord of the manor in 1290, added a fine chantry chapel to the recently rebuilt church. Miles was an important figure who served in the royal household and in parliament. He died at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314. The chapel contains some very fine late 13th century stained glass in the east window.

North Moreton has always been a community based on agriculture. It has remained small as a result of the relative isolation created by the barriers of the Thames and Wittenham Clumps to the north and marsh-land and the Blewburton Hills to the south. Consequently, growth of the village has been slow. The isolation only ended with the coming of the railways in the 19th century and the growth of the nearby railway town of Didcot.

Apart from the parish church, the oldest buildings in the village are North Moreton House and parts of The Pannels, both of which date from the 16th century. The 17th century saw allegations of witchcraft between two families in the village and in 1603 there was an outbreak of the "great sickness". 39 people died in August when the average death rate was 5 per year.

There are many fine surviving buildings from the 17th century including Orchard House, Stapleton's Chantry, Cobbs Cottage and St. Andrew's Lodge. This is despite a serious fire in 1807 which is said to have destroyed one side of the High Street.

There was sporadic development in the 19th century, including the Queen Victoria public house. The church was restored and the porch added in 1858 by G E Street, the architect of the Law Courts in the Strand, London.

The early 20th century saw the erection of a First World War memorial at the entrance to the chantry chapel by the well known artist, Eric Gill. The latter part of the 20th century has seen much infill development between the older properties but the village has managed to retain its compact and close-knit identity. Today agriculture still plays an important part in the life of the village but many residents work in the neighbouring towns or commute to London. The centre of the village was first designated as a conservation area by Berkshire County Council on 16 December 1970 and the area extended by South Oxfordshire District Council on 18 December 1997.

2) The Established Character

North Moreton is a compact village at the junction of the roads to the sister village of South Moreton, Long Wittenham and Wallingford. Immediately to the south of the village is the main line railway between Didcot and Reading.

The topography of the village is fairly flat with gentle slopes leading out of the village to the north and south, giving way to hills beyond.

The village is surrounded by open fields to the north, west and east. The farms historically associated with these field systems, such as Cobb's Farm, Alder's Farm and Church Farm still exist on the edge of the settlement together with their agricultural outbuildings, although several of the farmhouses and barns are no longer in agricultural use.

Many of the older properties in the village are large and detached, set in spacious mature grounds. There is almost no backland development and nearly every property fronts onto the road. Most modern "estate" development has been confined to the north and south, outside the conservation area.

There are many significant and attractive trees, particularly around the churchyard and to the west of North Moreton House, and also within the extensions to the conservation area, particularly along Elm Road and to the rear of the recreation ground. There are also several important lengths of brick wall along Wallingford Road, Long Wittenham Road and at Alder's Farm.

An area of open space is to be found around the church and Church Farm where it is a vital element in the setting of these listed buildings. The extensions to the conservation areas include further large areas of open land, particularly the paddocks to the west of the village and the recreation ground and rough grassland to the east.

There are relatively few notable views into or out of the village within the existing conservation area, due to the flat topography but the open land behind Alder's Farm provides a good view to the church tower from this side of the village and out to Wittenham Clumps to the north. Attractive views can also be gained of the church from the proposed extensions to the conservation area, particularly to the south east and south west.

There are no obviously predominant vernacular building materials in the village. The building stock is made up of a mixture of timber framing, often rendered but sometimes exposed, red brick, some glazed headers, some painted brick and painted limestone rubble, red clay tiled roofs and thatch. Outbuildings are often weatherboarded with clay tile roofs and the church is sandstone and flint.

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

North Moreton does not lend itself to any large scale projects of environmental improvement due to the compact nature of the village and the lack of formal public open spaces within the conservation area. However, the character of the village could be enhanced through small scale works and the encouragement of good conservation practice by owners of historic buildings and other important unlisted buildings.

A substantial improvement to the general streetscape would be the laying underground of the existing overhead wires and cables. These are ugly and visually intrusive, particularly in the centre of the conservation area. However, the work would have to be carried out in a sensitive manner that does not destroy or damage other important amenities such as verges, kerbs and footpaths.

The concrete-faced foot path in Wallingford Road has recently been repaired by the County Council. It would be beneficial to the character of the conservation area, however, if this and the adjoining stretches of concrete kerbing were to be replaced with a natural material.

The iron railings along Long Wittenham Road should be regularly repainted and maintained as these contribute a great deal to the character of the street at this point. The many grass verges in the village should also be regularly maintained. A large scale map of traditional street furniture and attractive road surfaces and paving materials has been produced (*see Section 2 'The Established Character'*). The use of traditional materials and detailing can have a considerable positive effect in enhancing the character of the conservation area.

The owners of prominent and historic properties in North Moreton are encouraged to remove unsympathetic modern materials, such as concrete tiles, uPVC windows and plastic rainwater goods and to reinstate traditional materials such as clay tiles, painted softwood windows and cast iron guttering.

The owners of thatched buildings are also encouraged to retain or reinstate plain, flush ridges as at Old Manor Cottage in Church Street, 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.