



- Brightwell-cum-Sotwell
- Listed building
- Building of local note
- Former Grade III Listed building
- Important views in, out and around
- Important wall
- Important trees
- Important open space

With the exception of views, only those features in the key that are located within the boundaries of the conservation area are defined on the plan.

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Sotwell



Listening Learning Leading

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Conservation Area Character Appraisal

April 2006

Introduction

This conservation area character appraisal has been undertaken to assist in defining the special character of the Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Conservation Area. An appreciation of this special character is essential in order to manage change within the conservation area. This appraisal is part of the duty placed on the local authority by the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 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. These are the subject of a separate management plan.

As part of this exercise a plan of the conservation area had been produced 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.

1. Brightwell-cum-Sotwell - the History of the Area

The villages of Brightwell and Sotwell and the hamlet of Slade End have developed around a line of farms along the old Saxon road from Wallingford to Abingdon at the foot of the south facing slope of Sinodun Hills. At Brightwell Barrow the hills rise 70m above the Thames valley, the river itself forming the northern parish boundary. The bedrock is a chalky marl of the Upper Greensand with a thin capping of chalk.

Settlement is along a narrow east-west gravel terrace around the site of two permanent springs - hence the village names. To the south, the villages overlook a network of streams on an ancient meander system of the Thames. The hamlet of Mackney lies 800m to the south on a former "island" rising above the valley bottom, which, before extensive drainage, must have formed a fen-like landscape.

Iron Age - and possibly late Bronze Age - activity associated with nearby Castle Hill is spread along the Sinodun ridge. Occasional Roman artefacts are still found around the villages, particularly along the line of a presumed road connecting the Roman towns of Silchester and Dorchester. This lineation comes from the Goring Gap at Cholsey, through Mackney and roughly along the line of Mackney Lane before climbing over Sinodun on its way to Dorchester. Land to the west formed the Saxon estates of Beorhtanwylle and Maccanie, and to the east Suttanwylle or Stottanwylle.

While the Saxon lands at Brightwell are commonly thought to originate in an estate of Hyde Abbey, the New Minster at Winchester, they may in fact have been held by the Bishop of Winchester.

Half this area, Sotwell, was transferred to the Abbey between 948 and 1066.

The Bishopric held Brightwell and Mackney in 1086 which had, at that date, a combined population of 48 families; Sotwell had 23 families.

Brightwell

The boundaries of Brightwell were established in early medieval times when a second road between Wallingford and Abingdon bypassed the old street some 400m to the north. This road eventually became the turnpike and ultimately the modern A4130.

Settlement developed between these two roads along a distance of 1.5 km between arable farming on the hill slope above and pasture on marshland below. The entrances to the village from the east and west are still close to the original limits of the medieval settlements.

It is possible that the Saxon settlement at Brightwell was situated on higher ground above the old Saxon road through the village; the Brightwell spring (near the site of Upper Farm, 300m north of the church on Little Lane) is reputedly the site of the Domesday mill. The earliest part of Brightwell village, held and farmed by the Bishop of Winchester until Tudor times, is still evident around the Manor House (see Fig. 1).

Although the oldest part of the Manor House itself is thought to date from the 17th century, traditionally the site has been regarded as the site of Brightwell Castle, one of a ring of defences containing

¹ With grateful thanks to the members of the Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Village History Group

Fig. 1: Brightwell Manor ¹



Wallingford during the civil war of 1139 to 1153. An earthwork in the grounds of the Manor may well be part of the castle.

The church is also contained within the moat, the dedication to St Agatha pointing to a founding date after 1153: the earliest surviving part of the building is late 12th century (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. St. Agatha's Church

The former rectory, sited between the church and the Street, was extensively rebuilt in 1782 around a much older core, and the area of the village adjacent was extensively redeveloped following enclosure in 1813.

With the church and manor house at one end, the medieval and post-medieval village developed eastwards along the main street. The scatter of timber-framed buildings seen today mostly date from the 17th and 18th centuries, the small fields between and behind some of them demonstrating the traditional land pattern of the settlement.

There were several farms on the north side of the road - and some of the buildings remain: Upper Farm, now The Old Priory, on Little Lane, and

Middle Farm on Church Lane; another farm stood at the junction of Brightwell Street and Mackney Lane. Middle Farmhouse stood on the site of Allnutts, with farm buildings behind the Red Lion and Little Thatch and near Vine House (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The Old Priory

The Manor Farm complex at the western end of the village was removed when Highlands Farm was built north of the Wallingford to Abingdon road in 1840. The Manor Farm buildings, and perhaps a tithe barn situated to the west of the rectory, were taken down in 1850; tenements on ecclesiastical land north of West End were also removed and modern housing now stands on their site (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. West End

The 19th century saw considerable residential development replacing older buildings or infilling between those that survived. On Brightwell Street, these buildings are typically still just one property deep and flank the street, some preserving the boundaries of historic enclosures.

The first village school was built at West End in 1841 but a new school was built in 1870 on the site of the Village Hall; the schoolhouse, which still exists, was added later on the adjacent site.

Sotwell

Sotwell has a more complex structure than Brightwell, resulting from fragmentation of the Hyde Abbey estate which was split approximately along the line of Sotwell Street, probably at the end of the civil war between Stephen and Matilda in about 1156.

Lands to the south and east, (the marshes and fields adjacent to Wallingford) were recovered by the Bishop of Winchester and annexed to his Brightwell manor. They appear to have been farmed separately and were first identified as Slade End in 1354. Lands to the north of the Street, and a narrow strip of land parallel to Mackney Lane, remained in Sotwell. The Abbot of Hyde is last recorded as holding property in 1416 but by this time Sotwell had separated into two manors and at least two independent farms.

In 1156 the Bishop of Salisbury granted tithes and lordship to the monks of Holy Trinity at Wallingford to form what became the capital messuage of the Priory Farm estate. Most probably, this concerned land adjacent to Penny Green Lane and the site of what was Priory Farm, now the Priory. These lands passed into private ownership following an exchange of property by Henry VIII for lands at Windsor in 1547 (see Fig. 5).

A Chapel of Sotwell is identified in 1158 but as a dependency of St Lucian's in Wallingford, annexed to St Leonard's in the 14th, century and united with



Fig. 5. The Priory

Brightwell as recently as 1868. The present church of St James was entirely rebuilt in 1884 on old foundations but incorporating stonework from the 12th to 15th centuries. Church Cottage stands in the churchyard and it was formerly used as a residence for the verger (see Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Church Cottage in St James Churchyard

At the west end of the village, at Sotwell spring, is the moated farmhouse now called Sotwell House, identified with the manor of Sotwell St John. Reputedly the site of the Domesday mill, this estate can be traced to the 13th century but much of the present house dates from 18th century (see Fig. 7).

Little is understood of the medieval and early post-medieval history of the



Fig. 7. The Moat at Sotwell House

central area of Sotwell immediately north of St. James's Church, although it appears to have been the focus for farms in the village.

On Baker's Lane was Baker's Farm, centred on what are now Beech and Porch cottages, Home Farm (around the barn complex at Sotwell Manor), and Manor Farm to the east where Craston now stands (see Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Baker's Lane

The present road system connecting Sotwell and Brightwell Streets to the south of the moat and the south portion

of Bell Lane originated only in 1875. Prior to this, through-traffic went via Baker's Lane to Wellsprings, approaching the Red Lion from the north along the western arm of the moat.

The cottages at Wellsprings probably stand on the site of a very early settlement but the relationship of this area to the ancient core of Sotwell is far from clear.

The second manor, sited at the east entrance to the village immediately north and west of Slade End farmhouse, was, in about 1320, part of the lands of the Stonor family. Known as Sotwell Stonor the manor house is thought to have stood in the Stonor Hayes/Moat Fall area and is reputed to have been abandoned in 1684.

Peacock Cottage is a building of some age close to this site but it is unclear whether it was connected to the manor.

The estate probably included a parcel of farmland and the crofts south of Sotwell Street from the Slade End farm track to Dobson's. Some 17th century references to Bishop's Sotwell, or Sotwell Bishop, appear to relate to these lands. Slade End House was constructed in the 18th century and is the dominant residence in the historic core of the hamlet (see Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Slade End House

The population of Sotwell parish at the start of the 19th century was just 68 compared with 491 in Brightwell. The

Sotwell enclosure award, issued in 1842, initiated a period of new building and redevelopment, the main area of which was to the south of Sotwell Street from Slade End Farm to the Red Lion, exploiting the southerly aspect and views to the Berkshire Downs. Croft Villa and adjacent cottages were begun in 1840 and by about 1890, with the completion of Red House, many 'gap' sites had been built upon or redeveloped (see Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. 19th century houses on Croft Path

The 19th century also saw development beyond the traditional boundaries of what was to become Brightwell-cum-Sotwell with three large houses being built between 1875 and 1898 to the north of the High Road and by the road itself.

Since 1945 there has been considerable 'infill' development, including the 86 dwellings of the Greenmere Estate, built in 1949 when mains water was brought into the village. Three smaller estates have subsequently in-filled farmland within the main settlement: Monks Mead in 1965 and 1990, Datchet Green in 1972, and King's Orchard in the late 1970s (see Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. 20th century houses at Slade End

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2 The Established Character

Introduction

One of the principal characteristics of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell is its close relationship with the landscape: grass verges, trees, remnants of old orchards, green spaces between buildings, and views out across open countryside are as much a part of the character of the village as traditional materials and historic buildings.

Modern development has most affected the historic borders of the settlement on the north side but remains separated from the core of the village by green open spaces. On the south side, the edge of the village retains an immediate relationship with open fields and the countryside beyond (See Fig. 12). A buffer of open space remains at the east and west ends of the village but the historic boundaries have become blurred by inappropriate modern development.



Fig. 12. The southern edge of the village

Brightwell

Brightwell Manor, St. Agatha's Church, West End

The war memorial is a focal point at the open space in the centre of Brightwell - an area that may once have been the meeting place for the village but is now characterised by busy through-traffic and informal car parking (see Fig.13).



Fig. 13. The War Memorial

South of the war memorial, the two most important historic buildings of Brightwell, Brightwell Manor and St. Agatha's Church, occupy a large area set mostly in open countryside. Scarcely visible from Brightwell Street, they retain much of their historic separation from the village.

The open green spaces of the allotments and the field beyond maintain the rural setting of the village to the west of St Agatha's. The stream that runs between the allotments and the field still defines the extent of the Manor house grounds on most of two sides and marks the south-west edge of the village.

The line of yew trees, the belt of trees at the foot of St Cecilia's garden and the cob wall define the northern extent of the area around Church and Manor - another ancient boundary and possibly part of the route of the moat. The importance of the surviving sections of cob wall on part of the northern boundary of the churchyard cannot be overstated, not only for its role as a boundary marker but also for the evidence it provides of a once-common method of construction in rural South Oxfordshire (see Fig. 14).



Fig. 14. The cob wall

St. Agatha's churchyard is a large, light and open space with an informal arrangement of monuments and a scattering of deciduous trees, although yew and holly trees give a sense of enclosure to the northern and eastern edges throughout the year.

Important walls, largely free from vegetation, surround the churchyard, with a distinctive brick, flint and stone gateway in the northern boundary. A run of beech hedge forms part of the boundary, screening the gardens of Fairlight House and adding to the character of the area (see Fig. 15).



Fig. 15. Gateway to the former Rectory

The formal route to the Church from the war memorial is flanked by flint walls and celebrated by wrought-iron gates; a row of lime trees reinforces both the formality and the rural setting. The asphalt surface of the path is at odds with this rural character (see Fig. 16).



Fig. 16. Path to St Agatha's Church

St Agatha's Church itself is a building of historic and architectural importance, with features surviving from the late 12th century; the distinctive brick tower is late 18th century.

The open grounds of Brightwell Manor on the south side of the churchyard are important to the setting of both Church and Manor. The Manor itself contributes to the character of the churchyard, the composed 18th century façade surveying the view of the Church over the boundary wall; timber framing in one wing indicates the earlier origins of the building.

A belt of trees marks the line of the moat on the west and south of Brightwell Manor, forming a boundary with the flat, open fields beyond. Views out from the conservation area here are unspoilt and uninterrupted, highlighting the isolation of the Manor from the rest of the village.

Although the drive of Brightwell Manor gives the impression of a track to be leading out of the village into woods, late twentieth century houses (Orchard Grange, Dairy Well House and Old

Dairy House) share the access: they were built, as their names suggest, on the site originally occupied by farm buildings of Manor Farm and latterly by Brightwell Dairy Farm. In summer, they are largely screened by trees in views east into the conservation area but in winter they become visible from both the field to the east and from the churchyard, tending to diminish the historic character of the area.

Haycroft and Meadowland, are built behind the other three and beyond the historic edge of the village. With the exception of Mackney Lane and the former Slade End nursery site, this is the only point at which the established historic boundary on the south side of the village has been breached by new building.

In this part of the village, the buildings tend to have a less formal relationship with the road than further east, along Brightwell Street. Many were built in the 19th century and they bring a distinctive character to the area. Perhaps more urban than rural, they nevertheless do not look out of place. This may be due to their style of architecture which looked back from an industrial age to an idealised rural past.

The southern side of West End is dominated by the Victorian Gothic front of Fairlight House and St Cecilia, set in large front gardens which themselves contribute to the semi-rural character of the village (see Fig.17).



Fig. 17. Fairlight House and St. Cecilia

In contrast, the brick and flint boundary wall of these houses gives a distinctive hard edge to the road, the height and decorative brick coping of the wall of Fairlight House suggesting the historical status of the building as a former rectory.

Hedges and gardens of the Fairthorne Memorial and Chestnut Cottage on the north side of Brightwell Street and West End form a backdrop to a small grassed area and a bench. The ornate chimneys and Tudoresque gable of Chestnut Cottage, complete with herringbone brickwork, contribute to views from the south.

On the north side of West End stand the matched pair of Fairthorne Memorial houses, set back in their gardens behind iron railings, the Stewart Village Hall with its distinctive clock tower, and the School House, further to the west, standing on raised ground behind a low brick wall and hedge (see Fig. 18).



Fig. 18. The School House

The busy detailing and variety of traditional materials that characterise this style of Victorian architecture contrast with the simple local vernacular style of Stranger's Place,

Woodley's and Orchard Cottage. Both the latter are thatched and timber framed - the cruck frame visible in one gable of Woodley's suggesting an earlier phase of construction - and together they form a major feature in views up and down the lane (see. Fig. 19).



Fig. 19. Stewart Village Hall and Stranger's Place

The range of brick outbuildings at Purbrook, their brick and flint gable giving a hard edge to the road as it starts to turn the corner, marks the curve in the lane at West End.

Modern houses have strayed beyond the historic village envelope but trees and planting in their front gardens soften their impact on the rural edge of the village. The churchyard extension and allotments are both important open spaces here - together they form a corridor of publicly-accessible open land to the churchyard and maintain visual continuity with the open country beyond the village.

The informal surface of Old Nursery Lane also contributes to the semi-rural character of the area. The former West End Nursery itself is now derelict land but forms part of an important string of green spaces both within and beyond

the conservation area that maintain the historic northern boundary of the settlement (see Fig. 20).



Fig. 20. Old Nursery Lane

Brightwell Street

East of the war memorial, where the mediaeval and post-mediaeval village developed along Brightwell Street, the historic grain of the village is still evident. The houses face the street and are set towards the front of their long, narrow plots - a characteristic undermined by late twentieth-century houses built on their backlands. Open spaces and gaps between buildings make as much contribution to the character of the conservation area as the buildings themselves.

The orchard between Vine House and the Barn is an open space of particular importance in this streetscape. A relic of the orchards which once formed the predominant land use within the core of the historic village and surrounding area, it separates two groups of historic buildings and provides a setting for Vine House and the Barn. It also forms part of a series of green spaces linking the village with open country to the south of Brightwell Street and the school playing fields to the north (see Fig. 21).



Fig. 21. Orchard at The Barn

The orchard is complemented by the front garden of the pair of 17th century cottages now known appropriately as Orchards, and the long front garden of Nunsacre, where a large willow tree makes a further positive contribution to the street scene.

These open spaces halfway along Brightwell Street divide the houses at either end of the street into two groups, maintaining the relatively low density of building and preserving a village character in this part of the conservation area.

Similar in scale and detailing, the front elevations of Orchards, and Chestnut and Marjoram Cottages combine as a group to give some continuity along the street. So, too, does the brick wall marking the boundary of Nunsacre, its materials blending well with the more established walls, and the low brick walls in front of Marjoram and Chestnut Cottages.

The cottages themselves, both of which originate in the 17th century, combine with Vine House opposite to form an important group in this part of Brightwell Street.

Vine House is the most notable building of the three: the composed mid-18th century façade fronts an earlier building, a timber framed portion of which (probably 17th century) projects from the side (see Fig. 22).



Fig. 22. Vine House

Trees in the gardens of Orchard Grange and the properties near St Agatha's Church close the views westward along Brightwell Street from the Red Lion.

The eastern end of the village is marked on the north side by Moat Cottage and on the south by the Red Lion and the adjoining cottage, Thatch End. These buildings are major landmarks in the village and both originated in the mid-17th century but were largely rebuilt in 2001 following a disastrous fire (see Fig. 23).



Fig. 23. The Red Lion and Thatch End

Returning to Brightwell Street, the earlier building of Stores Cottage, clearly indicated by the exposed timber frame in the gable end, is now almost overwhelmed by large modern extensions.

The Barn and The Street Cottage are the focus of a group of buildings on the south side of the road. The Barn (possibly 17th century) has a low, sweeping thatched roof and, like The Street Cottage, is built straight onto the roadside. The 18th century timber framing of the Street Cottage is obscured by a later brick frontage.

Opposite is Stewart's Cottage, also thatched and providing a visual link with the group of buildings set on either side of the street. More recent development is set in and around this group.

The gaunt but well-detailed red brick Haldane Stewart Memorial (1880) is set back from the street, giving the building a certain reticence within the context of the group.

The Almshouses, set back from the street at the top of a grass bank, are well composed with a veranda linking the two halves of the symmetrical building. The brickwork is of a similar quality to the Stewart Memorial, with an added flourish of terracotta decoration to the round windows at each end of the building (see Fig. 24).



Fig. 24. The Almshouses

The three houses on the south side of the street (Sunnybank, Celandine Cottage and Longwall) occupy a very large area and are so unmistakably twentieth-century in style and materials, with little to relate them to the locality, that they tend to dominate this part of the street. However, the wall that gives Longwall its name is an important feature, giving a hard edge to the street and allowing fine views to open country across the gardens.

The Old Rectory opposite is a well-preserved early 19th century building with a composed and symmetrical front elevation in red brick with grey brick panels, set on top of a grass bank; the simple iron railings and garden wall provide a hard edge to the street and reinforce the linear character of Brightwell Street (see Fig. 25).



Fig. 25. The Old Rectory

The open veranda of High Cottage links the original modest 19th century house to the weather-boarded and thatched extension - a building of an entirely different style - and provides a distinctive feature in the street scene.

Nos. 1 & 2 Meadow View are a pair of red brick Victorian semi-detached houses with yellow brick facings not

dissimilar to the Haldane Stewart Memorial and make a different but equally distinctive contribution.

The former village shop and Post Office (now boarded up) stands at the centre of a group of buildings at the western end of Brightwell Street. This is a much-altered Victorian house with concrete steps leading up to the modern front door. Its present state of dereliction contrasts with the colour and activity of Brightwell Garage (see Fig. 26).



Fig. 26. Former village shop and post office

The Woodman, a brick building dated 1735, has been combined with the adjoining Old Bakery and the two sit together behind small front gardens bounded by a low white picket fence which marks a curve in the street (see Fig. 27).



Fig. 27. The Woodman and The Old Bakery

The open space formed by the area of hard-standing in the field opposite the garage plays an important role in the streetscape by creating a break after the group of modern houses and

allowing views out across fields to the south. The tarmac surface itself, however, is inappropriate in this semi-rural context.

Church Lane and Little Lane

Church Lane curves north east from the war memorial between the garage of Abbot's House and Middle Farmhouse, two 17th century timber-framed houses with thatched roofs. Woods Cottage, a small white-painted building with an old tiled roof, marks the corner of Church Lane; next door stands the Old Forge which has been considerably altered and dominates the view south down the Lane (see Fig. 28).



Fig. 28. Church Lane

In front of Middle Farmhouse and Swan Cottage is The Square, a small, informal grassed area of common land and an important open space on the curve of Church Lane. The barn of Middle Farm is a rubble stone, timber framed and thatched building built on a rubble stone wall probably in the 18th century. This building makes a significant contribution to the character of the area both in its own right and as part of the group of buildings at Middle Farm.

A sizeable stump beside the bench on the green gives an idea of how shaded the Square may once have been - and will be again when the young chestnut tree, recently planted, matures. The front garden of Swan Cottage, laid to lawn and separated from the green by a low picket fence, visually extends the present open character of the area (see Fig. 29).



Fig. 29. The Square

In summer, trees in the garden of Orchard Cottage soften the appearance of this large modern house, set back from the Square adjacent to Swan Cottage.

The modern houses within the conservation area on Church Lane make no particular reference to the local style but they are set back from the road and have generally low-key driveways; trees and hedges in their front gardens contribute to the semi-rural character of the Lane, particularly in summer.

This semi-rural character continues along Little Lane, the northern section of the footpath from Church Lane to the Square. Old Priory Cottage, the Old Priory and its barn, and Little Lane Cottage form a group of historic buildings which creates an intimate

enclosure around the path where it turns and narrows.

Old Priory Cottage presents a plain modern extension towards Church Lane but the late 17th century timber framing of the original building is visible on the side facing the path. The informal surface of the path contrast with the hard edge provided by the old flint wall bordering the cottage garden and the brick and the flint wall along the front boundary of The Old Priory. This combination makes an important contribution to the character of this area. The Old Priory is a commanding building - although not large - with tall cross-wing gables at each end and a fine cluster of brick chimney stacks rising through the centre of the roof (see Fig. 30).



Fig. 30. The Priory and Old Priory Cottage on Little Lane

The non-native conifer trees at the back of Nut Trees, Walnut Cottage and Swan Cottage impose a sense of enclosure on the path beside the Old Priory but the wrought iron fence at the front of Little Lane Cottage opens out the space by allowing views of the garden and trees beyond.

Nut Trees, Walnut Cottage and Rosebank are modern houses on Church Lane with few stylistic associations with the area. However, because of the size and layout of their gardens and the informal style of their rear boundaries, they do not impinge

significantly on the character of the path or the setting of the historic buildings. A belt of trees running along the rear boundaries of Little Lane Cottage and The Old Priory forms a backdrop to the boundary of the conservation area.

The footpath becomes narrow and enclosed between the rear of Swan Cottage and Walnut Cottage, largely due to conifer trees and an inappropriate concrete block wall.

The footpath leading east from Church Lane towards Wellsprings, defines (as it turns north) the boundary of the conservation area in Brightwell and separates the school playing fields from the gardens behind houses on Brightwell Street. Trees in these gardens and the general absence of walls and fences as the path moves away from Church Lane, create a sense of distance between the conservation area and the modern development beyond, allowing the historic centre of Brightwell to retain its established character.

Sotwell

As in Brightwell and Slade End, open spaces make a vital contribution to the semi-rural character of the village. The grounds of Sotwell House are particularly important: they mark the western end of Sotwell and, with the field beside Greenmere path and the school grounds, form an open space separating the two villages.

A red telephone box stands like a sentinel on the boundary between the two villages, close to a marker stone commemorating the former parish boundary (see Fig. 31).

The semi-rural character of this corner is diminished by extensive areas of hard surfaces - such as the concrete

and tarmac pavement and large parking area beside the telephone box.



Fig. 31. Moat Cottage on the boundary between Brightwell and Sotwell

Beyond the all-too-visible car park and bins behind the Red Lion, the view south from the conservation area gives a sense of leaving the village into the open country. This illusion is created by the front gardens of the relatively small houses along Mackney Lane which are set well back from the road behind hedges and trees.

Opposite the Red Lion, on the corner of Mackney Lane, is a pair of distinctive Victorian houses: The Croft and Holmewood. These buildings, built in 1874, display an array of details typical of the period: moulded bargeboards, multi-coloured brickwork, turrets, decorated roof finials and ornate ridge tiles (see Fig. 32).



Fig. 32. The Croft and Holmewood

The boundary wall, equally ornate, with dentils and an unusual eight-pointed star motif, forms a hard edge to the street and turns the corner into Mackney Lane. The grass verge in front of the wall gives a rural character to this otherwise rather urban group. A small outbuilding in the garden of The Croft is an important part of the composition and also forms a hard edge at the corner of Mackney Lane (see Fig. 33).



Fig. 33. Mackney Lane

These two Victorian houses and Moat Cottage frame the entrance to Sotwell Village seen from the west. Perhaps paradoxically, the view beyond is essentially green and open, with no buildings visible.

Moat Cottage is a thatched building which, although much altered externally, contains evidence of an earlier cruck-framed construction. As well as marking the entrance to Sotwell, the cottage stands on the corner of the wooded path leading north which links Brightwell Street, Sotwell Street and Wellsprings.

The moat of Sotwell House runs along the east side of this path; the path itself shares the route of a stream and

the gravelled surface is an important aspect of its character. The only buildings visible from the path are partial glimpses of Sotwell House and two uncompromisingly modern late 20th century houses on the western side (Wild Strawberries and The Rookery). These two houses, with Holly Tree House, intrude into the important series of green spaces along the northern edge of the village (see Fig. 34).



Fig. 34. The path to Wellsprings

Towards the northern end of the path the views into the paddocks on either side are partly obscured by high banks, trees and undergrowth. This gives the impression, particularly in summer, that the green spaces are larger than they are in reality and increases the perception of Brightwell and Sotwell being separate settlements. The illusion is broken where the backs of the houses in Monks' Mead are visible through the trees in winter.

Wellsprings

The path emerges by Satwell Pond in Wellsprings - a deeply rural spot. Satwell Pond is overhung by trees and framed on either side by paddocks; it is separated by a small area of grass

from the informal road serving the row of houses on Wellsprings (see Fig. 35).



Fig. 35. Satwell Pond

This little settlement still retains a sense of being a place set apart from the larger village to which it is linked. The fact that large modern housing developments press against it on two sides makes this character particularly special and particularly fragile.

Three historic houses make a significant contribution: the Wellsprings, Snail Cottage and Spring Cottage. The Wellsprings faces south down the path: built of alternating stone and flint bands, it appears as a neat two-storey house when seen from the front, although it has been substantially extended to the rear. Snail Cottage is timber framed and Spring Cottage red brick but both buildings are a similar scale (see Figs. 36 & 37).



Fig. 36. The Wellsprings



Fig. 37. Snail Cottage and Satwell Pond

Between the Wellsprings and these other two historic houses is Wellsprings Orchard which overlooks Satwell Pond. The design and materials of this 20th century house have little to do with local tradition but it is set back in a deep front garden which contains mature and visually important trees.

The self-contained character of the road continues beyond Spring Cottage with two pairs of early 20th century houses, foursquare in design and set behind grass banks, hedges and trees.

Despite the quantity of late 20th century building to the east and north of Wellsprings, views out of the conservation area here are of an apparently secluded lane leading out of the village: the thatched roof of The Knowle forms an appropriate focal point at the curve of Bell Lane (see Fig. 38).



Fig. 38. The Knowle from Wellsprings

The informal road surface, the gardens, hedges and grass banks, the slight curve in the road at Spring Cottage, the trees on the north side of the paddock and those forming a backdrop to Satwell Pond, the absence of buildings to the south - all contribute to the sense of rural isolation.

Bell Lane

Bell Lane runs from the end of Wellsprings along the eastern side of the grounds of Sotwell House. The house itself is screened by hedges and trees, although its mid-18th century façade (probably concealing an earlier core) can be glimpsed in winter. The view north out of the conservation area from Bell Lane has a well-preserved Edwardian house as a fortuitous 'eye-catcher': dated 1911, Orchard View is a handsome double-fronted villa neatly contained by a suitably formal laurel hedge.

Despite the modern development of houses in Monks' Mead, the gardens, boundary beech hedges and grass verges bordering the road give Bell Lane a semi-rural character, reinforced by the trees along the boundary of the paddock opposite, on the western side of the road.

Croft Path

The southern edge of the village is clearly defined by Croft Path, the long-established historic edge of settlement where views out are still across open fields towards Mackney and the Berkshire Downs beyond (see Fig. 39).



Fig. 39. View from Croft Path

The western section of the Croft Path is characterised by the high hedge and gardens of White Cottage, a green space which blends visually with the trees in the gardens of Sotwell House on the far side of the moat.

White Cottage is one of a group of five Victorian houses set on a slight curve in Croft Path; together they form a distinctive feature along the path and in views into the conservation area from the south.

The orchard to the east of Benjamin House, separated from the grass track running north to Sotwell Street by a simple iron fence, is a particularly important incident along Croft Path, an echo of a rural past. In marked contrast to this informality, the fine brick wall marking the boundary of Dobson's progresses up the opposite side of the grass track (see Fig. 40).



Fig. 40. Dobson's wall and the orchard

The special character of this area owes much to the hedges and walls along the northern side of Croft Path, the glimpses of gardens and roofs, the low-key post and rail fence along the edge of the field on the southern side, and the rough grass verges on either side.

At Slade End, Croft Path changes character to become narrow and secluded, winding between hedges, which partly obscure views of the fields outside the village. The buttressed walls and heavy thatched roof of

Honeysuckle Cottage bulge out into the path as it turns north towards the road (see Fig. 41).



Fig. 41. Honeysuckle Cottage on Croft Path

A large beech tree frames a view of the thatched roof of Cappaslade Cottage. These two cottages briefly appear to be set in a woodland clearing - an illusion created by the surrounding gardens and the overgrown Slade End Nursery site beyond the path.

Pennygreen Lane, St James' Church, Bakers Lane

Inappropriate modern development has diminished the historic character of the conservation area at the western end of Sotwell Street where it is dominated by Monks' Mead, a cul-de-sac of houses with little or no connection with local tradition. The hedges and trees cannot disguise the wide expanse of tarmac at the junction with Sotwell Street on the northern edge of the conservation area.

Pennygreen Lane, on the north side of Sotwell Street, is a sunken track running between high banks, enclosed by hedges and trees, bordered by the gardens and not overlooked by buildings. Even during winter, the lane has an air of seclusion (see Fig. 42).



Fig. 42. Pennygreen Lane

The path to Pennygreen Cottage is equally successful in giving the impression of semi-rural isolation as it curves away into greenery behind a wrought-iron gate.

The white gable end of Pennygreen Cottage is an important feature in the view eastwards back along Sotwell Street, marking the north-western corner of the conservation area (see Fig. 43).



Fig 43. Pennygreen Cottage and Sotwell Street

The Old Parsonage, built in 1887, stands in a large garden at the junction of Pennygreen Lane and Baker's Lane. On the opposite corner are Beech Cottage and Porch Cottage, a 17th century house with an 18th century front.

As the lane turns beside Monks' Mead, it becomes slightly sunken which, combined with the trees and shrubs on its western side, has the effect of screening the modern development from views in the lane, maintaining a semi-rural character.

The flint walls of North and South Barns lead the eye to the grassy path beside Mount Vernon and out of the conservation area.

Mount Vernon, built in 1892, is just outside the existing conservation area but, as the Bach Centre, is a significant feature in the village. The hedges, cottage garden and fields beyond provide the house with an appropriately rural frame. The bridleway running alongside the house, straight between Baker's Lane and the fields beyond, links both house and setting to the historic core of Sotwell. Mount Vernon is a major feature in views into the conservation area and makes a positive contribution to its rural character.



Fig. 44. St. James's Church

St James' Church is largely hidden from view from Sotwell Street and Baker's Lane by trees and hedges, only its distinctive tower, covered with oak shingles and topped by a

weathervane, is visible. Largely rebuilt in 1884 to replace a medieval church, it is a more modest building than St Agatha's in Brightwell; the 14th century roof timbers were re-used and a 12th century window and 13th century doorway were re-built within the walls (see Fig. 44).

The southern side of the churchyard, enclosed by large yew trees, has a secluded character; grass paths and an area of rough grass to the south where the churchyard is set high above Sotwell Street, are appropriately rural and informal.

Predominantly 20th century memorials, set out more formally, contribute to the larger and more open character of the northern side of the churchyard. This is enhanced by the grounds of Blackstone House extending behind the boundary wall to the west, and by trees in the gardens of houses on the north side of Baker's Lane.

The north-west corner of the churchyard is more wooded: a row of holly trees and laurels screens the side of Blackstone House and creates a green tunnel for the path along the weathered brick boundary wall. The rear extensions of Rose Cottage, close to the churchyard wall, are very visible within the churchyard itself (see Fig. 45).



Fig. 45. Churchyard path

More subtle in its relationship is Church Cottage which is set slightly below the raised ground of the churchyard behind shrubs and trees. Its black and white timber frame, and that of the Small House on the far side of Sotwell Street, is visible through trees from the churchyard.

Baker's Lane narrows towards its west end where the timbered gable of Beech Cottage acts as a focal point. The boundary wall of St James's churchyard and the shrubs in the garden of Little Barn give a sense of enclosure to the Lane which is overhung in summer by the beech trees in the churchyard. The mature copper beech in front of Sotwell Manor is a significant feature in views out of the village from Baker's Lane.

Little Barn itself is an attractive stone building, largely hidden by its own garage, it forms part of an interesting group of what were originally farm buildings beside Sotwell Manor. A semi-rural track with grass verges links the buildings to Baker's Lane.

New Barn Court and Granary Barns are still important features in Baker's Lane, despite being considerably altered by domestication. The weathered tiled roof of Granary Barn contributes to views from the churchyard. Looking south, there are also views here across the churchyard over its low brick boundary wall.

The central section of Baker's Lane is dominated by Sotwell Manor and Blackstone House. Sotwell Manor - originally one house but now two - is set close to the lane behind small unfenced gardens. The mature copper beech tree marks the corner of the property - a section of the old iron boundary fences is embedded in its trunk.

The eastern side of the building has 18th century sash windows set in a brick façade; the western end is less formal, with casement windows in walls of brick, chalk and soft lime mortar. Both sections of the house have panelled front doors beneath porch canopies set on timber brackets. The degree of formality to the façade is a reminder that Baker's Lane was once the main road through Sotwell.

The original relationship of Blackstone House to the street has been altered by the addition of an extension, which turns a largely blank side wall to the road and overshadows the main frontage. The front elevation is dominated by a porch with a parapet and is set back from the road behind iron railings. This austere building is a major feature in the street (see Fig. 46).



Fig. 46. Blackstone House

The section of brick wall concealing part of the gardens of Iden House, the wall which curves into the entrance of Plus Four opposite and the grassy track leading to Barberry also contribute to the character of this part of the conservation area (see Fig. 47).



Fig. 47. The wall of Sotwell manor flanking the drive to Barberry

Sotwell Street

From the east end of Baker's Lane, four very different buildings on the south side of Sotwell Street form a distinct group (see Fig. 48).



Fig. 48. Group of distinctive buildings on Sotwell Street

Dominating the group is Church House, an imposing Victorian building that presents a large mock half-timbered gable to the street. This style contrasts with the Free Church hall next door, a plain and simple building, which has lost some of its original character through alteration.

Red House Lodge with a date stone of 1714, is a timber-framed building with a thatched roof ; it turns a brick and flint elevation to the street and is older and more modest in style than the neighbouring Church House.

The fourth building in this important group is St James's House. An Edwardian wing, with distinctive curved soffit boards, faces the street - but a much earlier house of rubble and brick construction, is set at a right angle to the street. This forms one side of a courtyard, which is separated from the street by a brick and flint wall topped with tiles and buttressed on the outside where it returns to form the eastern boundary of the gardens.

The courtyard forms an important space between St James' House and the Free Church, giving the house its own distinct setting and allowing trees within the property to be seen as a backdrop to the street.

A length of hedge to the east of the Edwardian wing of St. James's House and the grass verges along this section of Sotwell Street contribute to the semi-rural character of the conservation area.

Rose Cottage commands a prominent position at the junction of Bakers Lane with Sotwell Street. It is a modest mid-19th century brick house (now much extended) set in a neat garden surrounded by the original cast iron fence and a grass bank, and provides a landmark looking westwards into Sotwell (see Fig. 49). The character of the street at this point has two contrasting aspects. To the north are the open spaces of large gardens in front of modern houses; to the south is the old red brick wall of the Red House which forms a hard edge to the street and curves inwards to meet the entrance gate piers.



Fig. 49. Rose Cottage

Long Wall Cottage, built on a modest scale in the 1950s in part of the grounds of the Red House, allows the character of the open area behind the wall to make a positive contribution to the streetscape. The distinctive roofs and chimneys of the Red House are visible above the wall from Sotwell Street, with its entrance building, itself quite ornate, set firmly across the view between the gate piers.

The wall, which gives Long Wall Cottage its name, provides an important feature opposite the end of Baker's Lane, curving to follow Sotwell Street as it turns south.

The low density of building and the large gardens give this area a more spacious feel - although the conifers opposite Rose Cottage overshadow the end of Baker's Lane. The open design of the gardens of the modern houses at the junction of Baker's Lane and Sotwell Street, simple timber fencing and the grass verges beside the road combine to give them an appropriately rural character, a faint echo of the paddocks that may once have been associated with the farm buildings adjacent to Sotwell Manor.

A footpath beside Glenwood, opposite Red House Lodge, leads up from Sotwell Street to the northern edge of the conservation area. The outbuilding in the grounds of Craston is built alongside this footpath and is an important remnant of a rural past (see Fig. 50).



Fig. 50. Footpath between Glenwood and Cranston

The gardens of the Granary, Little Barn and Sotwell Manor mark the northern boundary of the conservation area and contribute to the low density of building characteristic of the historic village.

The Small House, despite its name, is an important landmark in this part of Sotwell. Its black and white timber-framed elevations (mid-17th century) stand hard against the road and mark the sharp curve in Sotwell Street where it narrows beyond Long Wall Cottage (see Fig. 51).



Fig. 51. The Small House

Hedges and undergrowth border the other side of the lane. A narrow stepped footpath from St James's churchyard emerges beside Church Cottage; the remains of a substantial oak gatepost suggest that this was once a more formal route to the Church. Church Cottage is raised

above the sunken lane towards the higher ground of the churchyard, accentuating the narrowing road turning sharply west.

On the opposite side of this curve and built hard up against the road is Gable Lodge, a late 17th century rubble stone house with brick bands and margins and a weathered tile roof. A modern brick extension to one side is prominent in views eastwards on the curve of this section of Sotwell Street.

Closing the view on the curve in the opposite direction is The Gables, its 18th century frontage concealing the original 17th century building. This house is slightly set back from the road behind two small planting beds (see Fig. 52)



Fig. 52. Gable Lodge and The Gables

The low-key wooded driveway to the Spinney runs between The Gables and Gable Lodge, with a belt of beech trees behind forming a backdrop to the lane. It combines visually with the trees in the garden of Church Cottage and the churchyard, and with the vegetation below the churchyard walls to create a semi-rural and intimate character in this part of Sotwell Street, despite the traffic squeezing round the narrow corners of the lane.

Trees in the raised gardens of Blackstone House and the border of thick vegetation growing below them along the roadside continue this semi-rural character as the road straightens out. On the opposite side, the verges of the grassy track beyond Dobson's spill out into the road suggesting the proximity of the countryside to the south (see Fig. 53).



Fig. 53. Sotwell Street

Buildings are widely spaced in this area but built close to the road with their large gardens running back towards open country beyond. The exception is the outbuilding which stands between The Gables and Dobson's in a courtyard surrounded by brick walls - although a group of mature trees visible beyond opens out the space. The sweep of the barn's tiled roof and its weatherboard gable turned hard against the edge of the road are distinctive features in the view east along Sotwell Street (see Fig. 54.)



Fig. 54. Outbuilding

Dobson's, with its generous boundary walls, is one of the most notable historic buildings in this part of the

conservation area. The essentially mid-17th century frontage is built in brick and clunch on the ground floor, and timber framing with brick infill panels above. A label moulding above one ground-floor casement gives an indication of the high status of the original building. A generous timber front door and Victorian timber porch, complete with armorial shields, continue this modest grandeur.

The distinctive flint and brick wall of Dobson's that makes such an impression from Croft Path makes a similarly valuable contribution to Sotwell Street: with its height and ornate brick coping, it is an important feature in the street. Two carved stones referring to William Dobson set into the wall to the west of the house add a layer of historical interest.

Dobson's wall continues round the corner into Croft Path, giving a hard edge to the eastern side of the path and acting as a pointer to the open countryside beyond. It is in fine contrast to the informal grass path and orchard (see Fig. 55).



Fig. 55. Grass path flanked by Dobson's wall

This orchard, between Dobson's and Benjamin House, is an important open space in the conservation area,

contributing to the semi-rural character and to the low-density of building in the street. It is also an important reminder of the types of traditional land use of these small fields within the core of historic villages in the wider region (see Fig. 56).



Fig. 56. Orchard

Benjamin House is a conversion of an outbuilding originally associated with the Priory. Traces of old brick and stone survive in the wall facing the road and in the gable ends.

The Priory is an L-shaped building with a late 18th century chequerboard brick frontage (red brick with blue vitrified headers) turned to the street; an early 17th century brick-panelled timber framed range is built at a right angle to the street. A wrought-iron gate in the high garden wall gives a glimpse across a brick courtyard garden to a similar gate beyond, framing views out to the open country.

From Sotwell Street looking west, The Priory forms a group with the two neighbouring buildings also built close to the road: a modern annexe to Croft House, which turns a weather boarded gable end to the road, and Pleasant Cottage, now much altered but with origins as a stone-built house.

The hedges in the gardens beyond Pleasant Cottage close the view westwards as the road narrows and, with the high hedges and mature tree on the corner of Pennygreen Lane

opposite, give a semi-rural character to the area and no hint of the large modern housing development in Monks' Mead immediately to the north.

Slade End

Although the group of historic buildings forming this part of the village is small and affected by modern development, the area is still identifiable as a hamlet distinct from Sotwell. Its distinctiveness relies largely on the open fields to the east and south - at the very edge of the village as a whole - and the open spaces formed by gardens between houses.

The fields to the east, between Slade End and the Wallingford by-pass, are open and free of hedges and trees, allowing important views into the village from the by-pass and from the footpath crossing the field between road and settlement. A group of Wellingtonia trees is a significant feature in the landscape viewed from outside the conservation area (see Fig. 57).



Fig. 57. Slade End from the south

The design and layout of the late 20th century development of Larkrise, Stubbings and Cedars, built on the village boundary beside Slade End House, owe little to local tradition. However, the houses are screened to some extent by hedges and trees and the deciduous and native species help the village edge to blend with the countryside.

Slade End Cottage, a rendered and painted building, closes the view along Sotwell Street from the Wantage Road entry to Slade End. A carved stone in the gable end shows a date of 1733, but the building has been significantly altered and extended since then (see Fig. 58).



Fig. 58. Slade End Cottage

Peacock Cottage, built in the 17th century, marks the sharp curve in the road and is one of the major historic buildings in Slade End. Its large gardens, containing several mature trees, create an important open space at the corner of Slade End road (see Fig. 59).



Fig. 59. Peacock Cottage

Equally important to the spacious character of this part of the conservation area, although outside its boundary, are the large gardens of the bungalows to the north east of Peacock Cottage: these post-war houses extend the village beyond the historic limits but their sizeable plots reduce the density of building and help to maintain a semi-rural character.

Greenacres, opposite Peacock Cottage, is also outside both the historic village limits and the conservation area - but it is still prominent in views across the fields and from the Wantage Road and therefore affects the character of the village; its large garden and vegetable plots have a contribution to make in blending this edge of the village with the open countryside beyond.

The centre of Slade End is dominated by the handsome 18th century front of Slade End House, its associated buildings and its brick and flint boundary wall. Lodge Cottage is contained within the grounds of the main house by this boundary wall, although its relationship with Slade End House has been altered by the development of an ancillary access into the drive to the late twentieth-century development of three houses to the east (see Fig. 60).



Fig. 60. Slade End House and Lodge Cottage

The iron railings and wide gateway in front of Slade End House are distinctive features in the street and display the front elevation of the house to good effect. The wide triangle of grass on the curve of the road by Slade End Cottage opens out the space further.

The picket fencing, grass verge and open green spaces of Slade End Farm, immediately to the west of Slade End House, also contribute to this open

area by providing a setting for the house and allowing views to a backdrop of deciduous trees and various historic buildings, including a stone and timber barn, one of two 18th century barns within the farm.

Triangle Cottage stands at the western end of the group of buildings that form the core of Slade End. This is a thatched and timber framed house, with origins in the 17th century, and it is bordered by a flint wall with half-round brick coping. The wall makes an important contribution to the scene by giving a hard edge to the street and turning the corner to the track to Slade End Nursery (see Fig. 61)



Fig. 61. Triangle Cottage and the track to Slade End Nursery

Generally, the buildings of Slade End are screened by trees and hedges and blend into the landscape, even during winter. In contrast, Malthouse Orchard and Lawrence House, built at the end of the track to Slade End Nursery, are particularly noticeable in the flat open landscape beyond the village. Although they are at some distance outside the conservation area, their prominence demonstrates how sensitive the character of this landscape is to development: by puncturing the village

envelope so noticeably, this development emphasises the otherwise well-defined boundaries of the settlement (see Fig. 62).



Fig. 62. Entrance to Croft Path; Malthouse Orchard and Lawrence House in the distance

The former nursery site, now overgrown, contributes an important green space between the historic edge of the village and the outlying Lawrence House and Malthouse Orchard.

To the west of the early Victorian Coombe House (now much altered and extended) the weatherboarding of an old shed built hard on to the edge of the road in front of Applecroft contributes a touch of rural character to a section of the conservation area which is dominated on the north side by a series of modern houses.

The style and materials of these houses has nothing to link them to the local vernacular but their large front gardens contribute to the semi-rural character of the area.

In contrast to this run of houses, only three relate to the road on the southern side: Hillfoot, Elmleigh and Tree Haven. The street scene here is characterised by trees and grassy banks, which give the sense of a green

and enclosed country lane running between the two historic settlements. The gardens and trees of Elmleigh bordering the road maintain a green area between Slade End and Sotwell and help to define the division between the two historic settlements (see Fig. 63).



Fig. 63. Parish marker stone

Proposed Extensions to the conservation area

The present study of the conservation area has suggested that the present boundaries could be extended to include several areas of importance to its character, which are presently excluded.

The graveyard and allotments to the north west of St. Agatha's church.

These are areas of local and historic interest and their inclusion would maintain the rural character at the edge of the village. The allotments were previously part of the Rectory grounds (see Figs. 64 & 65).



Fig. 64. Graveyard at West End



Fig. 65. Allotments at West End

The former West End Nursery.

This is an area of archaeological significance and an important open green space on the edge of the conservation area, defining the historic envelope on the north-west side of Brightwell. The southern end of the nursery site provides a rural setting for

several historically interesting buildings on Old Nursery Lane and Little Lane (see Fig. 66).



Fig 66. Part of the former West End Nursery

The northern part of the Old Priory gardens.

This contains the locally important Brightwell Spring (see Fig. 67).



Fig. 67. The northern part of the gardens of The Old Priory

The Swan Allotments.

These are of local importance and their inclusion within the conservation area could help to maintain the rural edge of the village (see Fig. 68).



Fig. 68. The Swan allotments

The garden of Holmewood.

Only part of this garden is presently included in the conservation area. Moving the line to coincide with the curtilage of Holmewood would address this anomaly (see Fig. 69).



Fig. 69. The Swan Allotments and curtilage of Holmewood

The northern section of Baker's Lane.

This should be included in the conservation area because of its historic importance as part of the original main street through Sotwell.

The Knowle is a building of local note and an important landmark at the historic edge of the village (see Fig. 70).



Fig. 70. Baker's Lane and The Knowle

Mount Vernon is of historical interest as the home of Bach flower remedies (Dr. Edward Bach moved to the house in 1934). It is also an important feature in views out from the existing conservation area and is linked to the historic core of Sotwell by the public

footpath leading north out of the village. Both the house and its garden make a positive contribution to the rural character of this part of the conservation area (see Fig. 71).



Fig. 71. Mount Vernon

Extending the boundary to include Mount Vernon would also rectify an anomaly in the existing conservation area where the line presently runs through part of North Barn.

The trees, gardens and grass verges on the south side of Sotwell Street between Slade End and St James's House and the grass verges on the north side contribute to the rural and informal character of the conservation area and provide an area of transition between Slade End and Sotwell (see Fig. 72).



Fig. 72. Sotwell Street at Elmleigh

Management proposals

Proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area are included in a separate document Brightwell cum Sotwell Conservation Area; Management Plan. This includes proposals for the maintenance of historic buildings, trees and open spaces, design guidance for new development and public realm works and relevant conservation policies. This document is available from South Oxfordshire District Council, Conservation and Design Team; tel 01491 823771 or email: conservation@southoxon.gov.uk



Sotwell



Listening Learning Leading

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Conservation Area Management Plan

April 2006

Introduction

The Council has a duty to draw up proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. These proposals seek to establish guidelines for the management of change in the conservation area to allow for development and alterations to keep the conservation area vital without losing the characteristics which make it special.

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell is an attractive village comprising a group of three distinct settlements all generally cared for and well maintained by its inhabitants. Much of the historic character is preserved within the conservation area. Any new development in the village - from a new window to a new extension - needs to be carefully considered with the intention of preserving or enhancing this character.

Planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent may be needed for new development, alterations, additions and demolitions within the conservation area. Additionally, lopping, topping or felling any tree over a certain size requires the permission of the Council.

If you are not sure whether permission would be required for your proposals, please contact the Planning Department before commencing work: details are provided at the end of this document. Failure to obtain the necessary approvals can result in enforcement action or even, where a listed building is involved, in a criminal prosecution.

Article 4 Direction

Certain minor works and alterations to unlisted buildings in use as family

dwellings can be carried out without planning permission from the Council. Development of this kind is called "Permitted Development" and falls into various classes, which are listed in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995.

Cumulatively these minor alterations can have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of a conservation area. Powers exist for the Council to withdraw some of these permitted development rights in the interests of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area.

There are a considerable number of unlisted buildings in Brightwell-cum-Sotwell which are nevertheless of historic interest or local note and make a significant contribution to the character of the conservation area. At present, they are not protected from inappropriate alteration.

It is proposed, therefore, that the Council withdraws permitted development rights from unlisted family dwelling houses in the conservation area. This would assist in the preservation of historic features and traditional materials by requiring an application for planning permission before any works were carried out.

The type of works that would be controlled by an Article 4 Direction would include:

- Installation of new windows and doors.
- Alterations to the roof, including changing the roofing materials and installing rooflights.
- Building a porch.
- The erection of sheds and other outbuildings.

- Creating an access on to the road.
- Building a hard standing
- The erection or alteration of gates, fences or walls.
- Painting the exterior of a building.

The Council proposes that these restrictions would only relate to those buildings identified as buildings of local note or former Grade III listed buildings on the accompanying plan. And it would only affect development visible from a public highway, including a footpath.

New Development

The historical development of the settlements has defined the extent of the village of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell in a way that is still strongly evident in its character today. With the exception of 20th century houses built outside the historic boundary of Slade End and near Brightwell Manor, almost the whole southern half of the conservation area is bounded by open fields. The southern edge, formed by Croft Path and the rear boundaries of properties on Brightwell Street, follows the long-established historic envelope of the village, maintaining its relationship with the open countryside of the Thames valley. This boundary should therefore be protected from any future development that would adversely affect the character of this important area.

On the western and eastern sides of the village, open land around Slade End Farm, Brightwell Manor and St Agatha's Church are important for the same reasons and equally deserving of preservation.

On the northern edge, the situation is more complex because most of the

modern development is on this side of the village. However, a series of important open spaces between Sotwell House and Old Nursery Lane still survives and combines to separate much of the new development from the traditional edge of the village behind Brightwell Street and West End. The existing open land between the edge of the conservation area and the A4130, from north of Monks' Mead to Slade End, is equally important in maintaining a defined edge to the village

Within the historic core of the village, the character of the conservation area has now reached a point where the historic character is in delicate balance with the quantity of new building that has already taken place.

Unsympathetic building over the past fifty years has undoubtedly altered the village but so far the historic character has not been overwhelmed.

One of the principal characteristics of the conservation area - both inside and adjacent to the area - is the low visual impact of small buildings set in large grounds. An example of this is the group of bungalows at Slade End, beyond the eastern end of the conservation area. Although their style may not be appropriate to the character of the area, the small scale of the buildings, their large gardens and the open ground next to them are important both in the setting of Peacock Cottage and in forming part of the low-density semi-rural fringe of the village in which many of Slade End's historic buildings are set. Areas like these should be protected from over development, both in terms of density and scale.

The sizeable plots separating houses are an important element of the historic character of the village. Not only would infill development in these areas be

intrusive but also the loss of open spaces would dramatically affect the character of the existing buildings and their setting.

Equally important are open spaces not directly associated with houses - the orchard beside Benjamin House in Sotwell is a prime example - or private grounds large enough to create the sense of significant open space in the village, such as the gardens of Blackstone House. Subdivision of gardens would damage this special character of the conservation area. Even small areas need to be protected.

The large open spaces separating Brightwell and Sotwell are an essential part of the character of the conservation area and should be preserved. The grounds of Sotwell House, the allotments opposite the moat, the land beside Greenmere Path and the school playing fields are all important elements. So too are smaller spaces, such as the gardens of houses on Mackney Lane, Allnuts, Holsten and Holly Tree House. The present density of development, combined with trees, gardens and more informal vegetation, is responsible for the character of this important area having been preserved.

The sequence of gardens and green spaces from Sotwell House to Old Nursery Lane that mark the northern side of the historic envelope of Brightwell, plays an equally important role in maintaining the open character of this part of the conservation area.

The value of the open fields on all sides of the conservation area to the setting of the village cannot be overestimated. Development on these fields would have a highly damaging affect on the character of the conservation area and on views into and out of the village. The historic

relationship of the edges of the three settlements to the open countryside has, to date, been largely preserved.

Use of Traditional Materials

The appropriate use of traditional materials, whether for repairs or for new buildings, can have a considerable and positive effect in enhancing the character of a conservation area. (Please see the Council's leaflet *Guidance on repairs to historic buildings*, 2005 which gives detailed advice on this subject). Unsympathetic modern materials such as concrete tiles, plastic doors and windows, and uPVC rainwater goods will have the reverse effect and can rapidly erode the character of the conservation area. They tend to be harsh and rarely weather well, deteriorating rather than aging gracefully or acquiring an attractive patina.

One of the defining characteristics of the conservation area is the variety of traditional building materials: dressed stone, rubble stone, brick, flint, timber, cob, render, tile, thatch. Originally, the use of materials would have depended on availability as well as the type, size and status of the structure.

The owners of historic properties are encouraged to replace inappropriate modern materials with appropriate traditional materials wherever possible by reinstating hand-made clay tiles, for example, or traditional timber doors and windows, and cast iron rainwater goods. Traditional materials should also inform the scale and design of new buildings, including extensions and outbuildings.

To be successful, a thorough understanding of the materials and careful observation of their traditional use is needed. The wrong mortar, wide joints, the over-formal setting of flints or

stone - seemingly small details - can all undermine visual quality.

The performance of traditional construction, which allowed moisture to pass in and out of the building, can also be undermined by misuse of materials. Moisture trapped within the construction of a building can cause serious damage, particularly to historic fabric.

Cement render applied over such traditional materials as timber, brick or stone is notable for causing damage: it is too rigid for the underlying material and therefore tends to crack, allowing moisture to enter the construction through hairline cracks but trapping it inside, causing materials which cannot survive being permanently damp to decay.

Traditional lime render allows a building to breathe: moisture can pass both into and out of the construction, keeping it healthy. A surface finish of limewash, which may be coloured with natural pigments, adds extra protection. A surface finish of modern synthetic masonry paint may, however, prevent the lime render from working properly, trapping moisture within the construction and causing the render to break up.

The majority of rendered buildings in Brightwell-cum-Sotwell are cement rendered, many displaying the telltale signs of cracking and dark patches of trapped moisture. Owners are encouraged to replace cement render with a suitable lime render when the occasion arises.

Cement patching or pointing can be equally damaging, accelerating the decay of brickwork and stonework. When repointing, it is important to remove existing cement mortar carefully by hand, to select an appropriate lime mortar and to finish

the joint in a traditional manner, preferably copying a good local example.

The remnants of the cob wall in St. Agatha's churchyard are fast-vanishing examples of a once common local tradition. They are disappearing because they have lost their two essential elements of survival, "a hat and a good pair of shoes": a coping (probably originally thatch) and their plinth of flint or stone. They should be protected at the earliest opportunity to slow the rate of decay; if the opportunity arises to repair them, the advice of experts in cob walling should be sought.

Materials and building techniques for new walls should match those traditionally used in the village. Cast concrete blocks - even those that imitate the appearance of stone - are alien to the historic character of the village and their use should be avoided.

Walls of all types are vulnerable to the effects of uncontrolled ivy growth and disturbance by tree roots: management of vegetation is therefore essential. Ivy should be cut back at the roots, the roots killed, and the rest of the growth allowed to die back for as long as possible before being lifted away in order to diminish the risk of damage to historic fabric, particularly soft stonework, brickwork and lime mortar.

The earliest roofs in Brightwell-cum-Sotwell were of thatch. In the post mediaeval period tile came to be used for the grander houses and the churches but thatch was still the main roofing material for cottages and farm buildings. Although many of the buildings that would have been thatched originally have now been re-roofed in tile, thatch remains an important part of the village's character.

Thatchers in South Oxfordshire traditionally used long straw, finishing the roof with a plain, flush ridge. Block-cut ridges have been imported into the region and can therefore look intrusive and inappropriate. Owners of thatched buildings in the village are encouraged to maintain their roofs in the traditional material, removing block-cut ridges and reinstating plain flush ridges when repairs become necessary.

The traditional tile of the area is a plain orange-red hand-made clay tile that weathers over time to a darker ruddy colour. This material is widespread in the village and can be seen on buildings of all types and all dates up to the early years of the 20th century.

Individual replacement tiles should match an unweathered example of the traditional local material to preserve the appearance of the village. New tiled roofs should also seek to preserve the character of the conservation area.

Modern concrete tiles are generally of a colour, texture and size inappropriate to local buildings and should be avoided. Modern machine-made clay tiles can have a similarly discordant effect.

Slate came into use mostly after the railways reached the region in the mid-19th century. Although not widely used in the conservation area, there are nevertheless several examples where slate roofs make a positive contribution - on the outbuilding to Purbrook, for example, opposite the end of Old Nursery Lane.

Windows and Doors

Modern styles of windows and doors can all too easily undermine the character of a conservation area. They generally have inappropriate proportions and can be too elaborate in comparison with more simple and

straightforward traditional styles: generally side-hung casements or vertical sliding sash. Good quality timber windows and doors, carefully detailed to match local traditional styles can make a positive contribution to the area while the reverse tends to be the case with uPVC, aluminium and other modern materials.

Double glazing should be avoided wherever possible in historic buildings - the thicker glazing bars required to support the additional weight of glass and the visible gasket separating the two layers of glass are visually intrusive and inappropriate. Additional insulation values can generally be achieved by other means - even thermally interlined curtains will help.

Historic window glass is a valuable asset both to the particular building and to the wider area and should be carefully protected. Crown glass in particular - but also the more common cylinder glass - has higher reflective qualities than modern float glass. The flaws which are the result of the manufacturing processes produce lively reflections that are missing from quality-controlled factory-produced glass. The art of producing crown glass has now been lost; 'hand-blown' cylinder glass is still produced, but it is expensive.

Paint is the traditional finish for windows in South Oxfordshire - stained timber is a modern introduction and the result is almost invariably intrusive, even giving an entire façade a different character. Some modern paint colours can be uncharacteristically harsh but those selected from historic colour ranges can be more sympathetic and make a positive contribution to the character of the area.

Garage doors can also be visually intrusive: vertical timber boarded side hung doors are more likely to fit relatively unobtrusively into the scene than up-and-over garage doors, particularly those made of metal or fibreglass.

Lighting

Private lighting can have an adverse effect on the character of the area by illuminating individual structures or areas of paving and throwing light 'pollution' into the surroundings. When installing external security or amenity lighting, residents should be considerate both to other residents and to the appearance of the area. Cables should be sensitively routed to be as unobtrusive as possible and to avoid damaging historic fabric (including by channelling rainwater into a building). The design and material of lamp fittings should be carefully chosen to suit the location and purpose; plastic is rarely an appropriate material to use in a conservation area.

Boundary Treatment

Walls, fences and gates can affect the character of a conservation area for good or ill. Generally, simple forms in traditional materials, based on historical local examples, will make a positive contribution.

The style and material of new walls, fences and gates should be chosen carefully to be in keeping with the character of both the property and the wider area, not forgetting the effect they may have on views in and views out. Close-boarded timber fencing, providing a visually impenetrable barrier, is generally inappropriate to the character of a semi-rural area.

The many fine old walls in Brightwell-cum-Sotwell provide examples and

standards for new walls, the success of which will depend to a large degree on a high quality of materials and workmanship.

The cast-iron railings around Rose Cottage are an example of boundary treatment appropriate to the age and style of a modest Victorian house; the timber picket fence at the entrance to Slade End Farm is appropriate to the more rural aspects of the village. Each allows views of the garden or of the paddock and trees beyond, and each makes a positive contribution to the character of the area; the simple post and wire fence separating the Croft Path from the field beyond forms an appropriate and understated boundary between village and countryside.

Existing iron railings should be protected, maintained and sympathetically repaired using matching materials.

Trees and Hedges

Trees and hedges make a significant contribution to Brightwell-cum-Sotwell conservation area and landowners are encouraged to maintain them regularly and sensitively. Trees within the conservation area over a certain size are protected by law and it is therefore advisable to consult the Forestry Officer at SODC when proposing any lopping or felling.

Important views into and out of the conservation area should be borne in mind when considering planting trees - for example, views into the village from across fields to the south should not be obscured. The settings of listed buildings should also be considered. Owners of properties in the village generally should be aware of the importance of them in significant views.

Trees and hedges of local indigenous species are generally more appropriate in prominent parts of the conservation area than more exotic imports. Fast-growing species such as leylandii are uncharacteristic and can alter and block important views.

Open spaces within the conservation area, such as the orchards and the churchyards, should be sensitively managed to maintain a balance between an open space softened by trees and dense vegetation.

Areas that contribute to the rural character of the conservation area, such as Satwell Pond at Wellsprings, for example, should be carefully managed as natural habitats for wildlife. To avoid these areas taking on the appearance of a domestic garden, over cultivation or planting with non-native species should be avoided. The Countryside Officer at SODC can provide advice on natural habitats.

Some parts of the village might benefit from tree and hedge planting - at Bell Lane, for example, to help to soften the impact of the rear of houses on Monks' Mead.

Public Realm Works

(Aspects of this section may also apply to private properties)

The English Heritage publication 'Streets for All - South East' provides guidance on how to avoid street clutter.

Roads and Pavements

There are several places in the conservation area where an improvement in the surfacing of pavements or roads would enhance the overall appearance - for example, replacing the asphalt pavement and concrete slabs around the bench

opposite the War Memorial with flagstones to match those around the memorial itself.

Where surfacing of private spaces is highly visible from public areas in the conservation area, it is important that it should make a positive contribution. Brightwell-cum-Sotwell is generally semi-rural in character but this is all too often undermined by unbroken expanses of concrete or tarmac on roads, pavements and private driveways.

Where the use of tarmac or concrete is unavoidable (such as on public roads), its monotony can be visually broken up by introducing bands of granite setts at intervals (there are examples of this device in Malthouse Lane in Dorchester-on-Thames).

Informal roads or driveways that still need to take vehicular traffic (Wellsprings and Old Nursery Lane are two examples) could look more in keeping with their semi-rural surroundings if a brown rather than grey aggregate were to be used, or if they were to be surfaced in hoggin.

The informality of the various footpaths is an essential part of their character and attempts to over-keenen them, or to provide asphalt or concrete surfaces, pedestrian guardrails or No Cycling signs should be resisted.

Grass verges at the sides of roads and informal areas of grass growing along tracks, footpaths and driveways are particularly important to the character of the conservation area and they should be carefully preserved.

However, it is important that they should not be over maintained and take on the appearance of garden lawns - their informality and roughness are valuable qualities.

Street Furniture

Public street furniture, such as benches or litterbins, can have a significant impact on a streetscape and their design and materials should be appropriate to their context.

Croft Path, popular for recreational walks, could benefit from the addition of some carefully-sited benches - which should be timber and of a simple, low-key design.

Lighting

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell is largely without street lighting. The absence of lamp standards helps to maintain the semi-rural character of the village and reduces clutter on the main streets.

Wires and Cables

Overhead wires and cables and their supporting poles are very intrusive throughout the village, diminishing the character of the conservation area: they should be re-routed underground by the statutory undertakers if the occasion arises.

Television aerials can sometimes be relocated successfully within roof spaces where these are available; owners of satellite dishes are encouraged to site the dishes unobtrusively (Planning Permission and/or Listed Building Consent may be required to erect satellite dishes).

Conclusion

The success of a conservation area depends on the joint commitment of the local authorities and those living and working in the conservation area working to preserve and enhance its character. All have a part to play in this. This document seeks to set out some ways in which this can be achieved. The Conservation and Design Team will be happy to give advice on any aspects of the conservation area and to receive further ideas for the preservation and enhancement of its special character.

Appendix

South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 Adopted Plan January 2006

Demolition of Listed Buildings

Policy CON1

Proposals for the demolition of any listed building will not be permitted.

Alterations and extensions to listed buildings

Policy CON2

Any extension to a listed building must be appropriate to its character, must be sympathetic to the original structure in design, scale and materials and must not dominate or overwhelm it.

Policy CON3

Any alteration to a listed building must respect its established character and not diminish the special historical or architectural qualities which make it worthy of inclusion on the statutory list.

Use and changes of use of listed buildings

Policy CON4

A change of use of part or the whole of a listed building will be permitted only if its character and features of special architectural or historic interest would be protected. Proposals for a change of use should incorporate details of all intended alterations to the building and its curtilage, to demonstrate their impact on its appearance, character and setting.

The setting of listed buildings

Policy CON5

Proposals for development which would adversely affect the setting of a listed building will be refused.

Proposals affecting a conservation area

Policy CON6

Consent to demolish a building in a conservation area will be granted only if the loss of the building would not adversely affect the character of the area and, where appropriate, if there are detailed and acceptable plans for the redevelopment of the site.

Policy CON7

Planning permission will not be granted for development which would harm the character or appearance of a conservation area.

The following will be required when considering proposals for development in conservation areas:

- (i) the design and scale of new work to be in sympathy with the established character of the area; and
- (ii) the use of traditional materials, whenever this is appropriate to the character of the area.

The contribution made to a conservation area by existing walls, buildings, trees, hedges, open spaces and important views will be taken into account. Proposals for development outside a conservation area which would have a harmful effect on the conservation area will not be permitted.

Advertisements in conservation areas and on listed buildings

Policy CON8

Consent will not be granted for 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, it should generally be non-illuminated, made of natural materials and to a design and scale reflecting the best traditional practice.

Blinds and canopies in conservation areas

Policy CON9

Permission will not be granted for the installation of blinds or canopies of non-traditional form or materials on buildings within conservation areas.

Burgage plots

Policy CON10

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 by its nature would detract from their historic interest, amenity and nature conservation value.

Archaeology and historic building analysis and recording

Policy CON11

There will be a presumption in favour of physically preserving nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings.

Policy CON12

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 CON13

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, conditions will be imposed

on planning permissions, or planning obligations sought, which will require the developer to provide an appropriate programme of archaeological investigation, recording and publication by a professionally-qualified body.

Policy CON14

Before the determination of an application which affects a building of archaeological or historic interest, applicants will be required, where necessary, to submit a detailed record survey and analysis of the building. In some circumstances, further survey and analysis will be made a condition of consent.

Historic battlefields, parks, gardens and landscapes

Policy CON15

Proposals which would damage the character, setting or amenities of a battlefield, park or garden of special historic interest, contained in the English Heritage Registers, will not be permitted.

Common land

Policy CON16

Proposals for development on or affecting common land, village greens and other important spaces within settlements will not be permitted.

