Blewbury Neighbourhood Development Plan

Appendix D: Village Character Assessment

This appendix presents of the full text of the Village Character Assessment carried out for the Parish Council.

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Blewbury Village Character Assessment

Dorian ATA Crone BA, BArch, DipTP, RIBA, MRTPI, IHBC and
Dr Kathryn Davies BA (Hons), MA, DPhil (Oxon), Dip TP, MRTPI, IHBC

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NOTE

This Village Character Assessment sits alongside the Landscape Assessment and the two should be read together. The latter considers landscape aspects of the village only and this assessment gives a heritage perspective. It looks at the archaeology and history embodied in different elements of the village, its aesthetic characteristics and how people value these. It may, therefore, lead to different conclusions from the Landscape Assessment, hence the need to consider the two together.

CONTENTS

1. Summary of village character

The old core of the village has a unique character derived from its ancient layout, its network of informal, winding lanes and footpaths, and lack of vehicular traffic. Few villages are as quiet and dark as the centre of this settlement. The lack of highway engineering and street lighting are major contributing factors. The ancient church and churchyard are found at its centre, see Fig. 1, with traditional buildings surrounding it, including the old school and almshouses. Buildings of all types and sizes ranging over a 500 year period are found on ancient plots of various sizes, some very large, and still containing the remnants of the old orchards which covered the entire village during the 19th century. As a result of the village's location on the spring line, several watercourses flow across the village before joining together to form the Mill Brook to the north, and there is a large body of water, the Cleve, in the heart of the village. The juxtaposition of tightly grouped historic buildings with open plots of orchards, gardens or unmanaged land and enclosed spaces create an extraordinarily attractive environment. In some places the paths appear to be in deep countryside and in others the views are of picturesque village scenes.

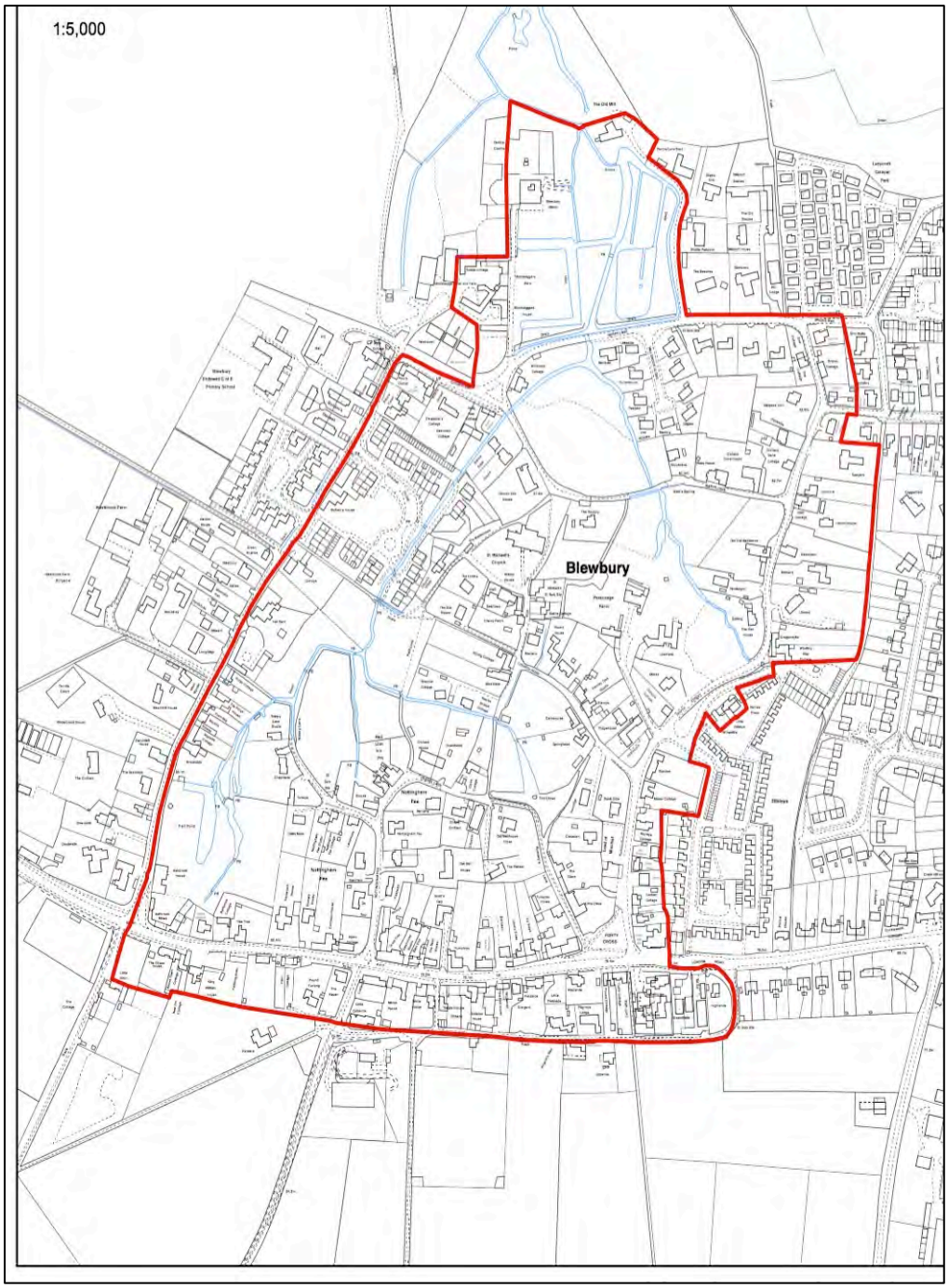
Fig. 1: St. Michael's Churchyard

The ring of roads surrounding the core, Westbrook Street, Church End/Berry Lane, South St and London Road, all take vehicular traffic, though only London Road has through traffic. Apart from the latter, these roads are quiet village lanes, used only by local traffic. A mix of historic and modern buildings front onto the streets of a similar range of dates, types, size and materials to those found in the core of the village. Many are set back within their plots and screened from the road by mature hedges and trees, enhancing the prevailing rural character. Narrow footpaths and lanes off these roads offer glimpsed views of open countryside, the former open fields of the village. London Road is inevitably different in character because it carries through traffic, though this is by no means heavily congested. Many traditional buildings front onto the road, mostly near the highway's

edge. This reflects the former commercial former functions of these buildings, and they retain a strong village character. Again, narrow paths lead off the road, either into the core of the village or up onto Pilgrim's Way – which runs parallel to the south – and then on to the Downs.

Markedly different is the character of the area to the east between the old village and Bessel's Way, the B4016 leading to Didcot. This is almost entirely 20th century residential houses, along with some very recent additions. The houses themselves are not especially locally distinctive, though the range in styles, scale and date gives interesting variety. The layout, particularly of some recent development, is reminiscent of the rest of the village in its informality and its open spaces. This area also shares with the rest of the village the lack of intrusive highway engineering and street lighting.

Map 1: Blewbury Conservation Area boundary



2. Introduction

This character assessment has been produced as part of the evidence base for the Blewbury Neighbourhood Plan. Underpinning this is the understanding that the village must change to stay vital and sustainable. In managing this change it is crucial to ensure that the story of the village is not lost. This story is contained within the built form of the village and its surrounding land; its layout and open spaces; its natural features and archaeology; its fields, lanes and road network connecting it to its wider context. Planning policies for the village should, therefore, seek to enhance the understanding of this story i.e. the significance of the historic environment. This relates not just to the visual qualities of the village but also how people value it, including historical and archaeological dimensions of the buildings and spaces in the village which help in understanding its development.

The assessment is focused on the conservation area but also takes in the surrounding land of the parish, both developed and undeveloped, as this is inextricably linked to the conservation area. The Blewbury Conservation Area covers the old core of the village. It was declared in 1970 and amended in 1990; see Map 1. It contains 64 listed buildings, with a further 5 just outside the boundary. These are all grade II apart from the Church of St. Michael which is grade I. There is no existing published character assessment or management plan of the conservation area. Within the parish but outside the conservation area are several scheduled ancient monuments, including the Iron Age camp and fort at Blewburton Hill and Bronze Age barrows on the Downs.

Because of the complexity of the natural and man-made features this exercise provides an overview of the character. The lack of uniformity means that generalisations are inappropriate. Any sites proposed for development should have a further, more detailed, assessment of significance to ensure that no harm to the historic environment would result from development.

3. Methodology

A visual assessment was carried out over six visits in November 2015. Documentary work was undertaken in the Berkshire Record Office where published and primary sources were researched. Material published by the Blewbury Local History Group has been used and information has been obtained from discussions with local people. A detailed photographic record was made to supplement the survey.

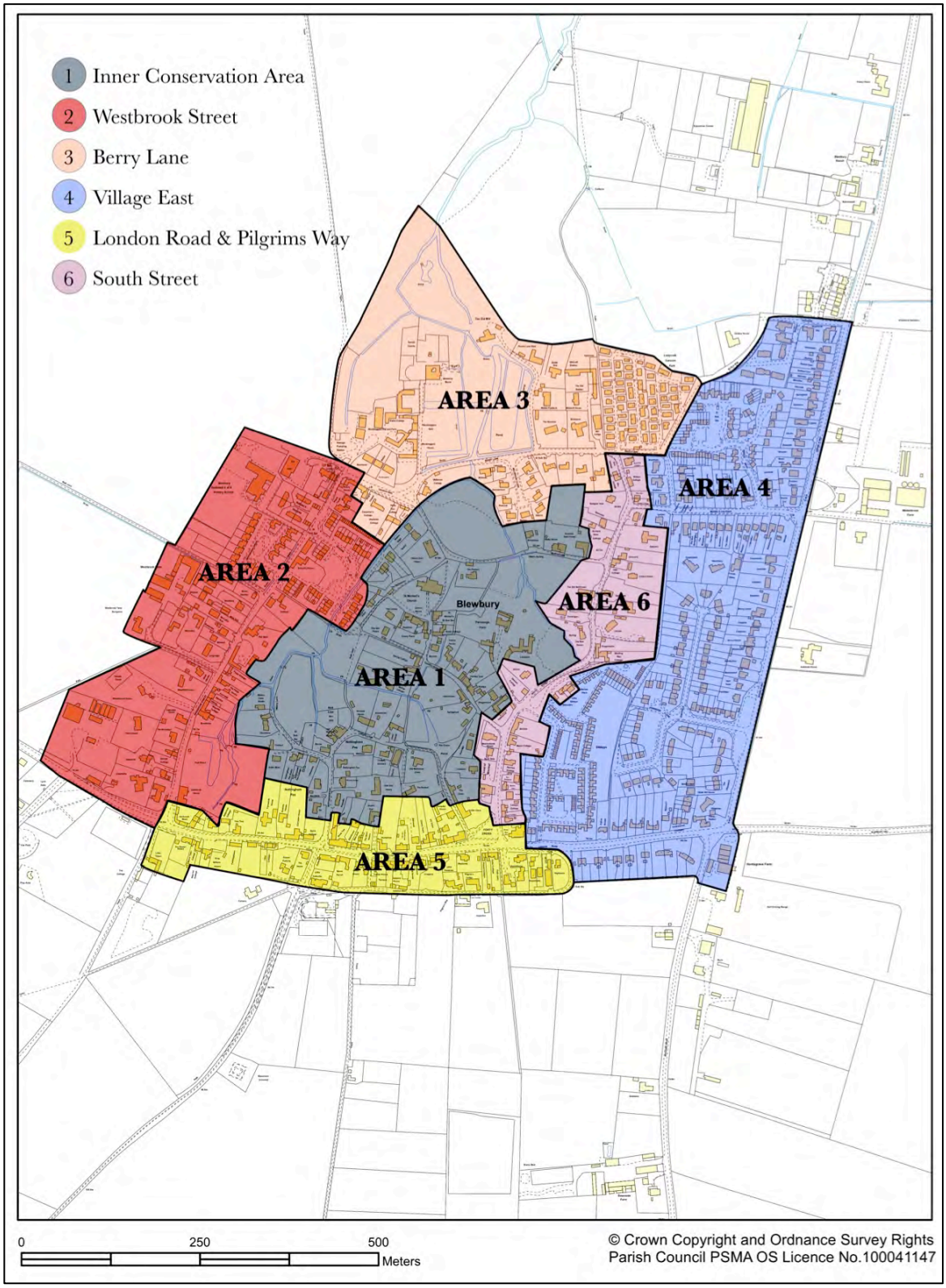
The built-up area of the village has been divided into six areas for the purposes of this analysis; see Map 2. There is some overlapping of characteristics between the areas and some variation within areas. There is generally no clear boundary between them. This analysis covers all of the conservation area and developed land to the west, north and east up to the village boundary. Land beyond the village boundary is also considered as this provides the context for the development of the village and is an integral part of it, both historically and currently.

All of the areas were surveyed using the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit. This looks at all the elements making a contribution to the village character, positive and negative, and assesses the value of each. This includes spaces, buildings, views, greenery and landscape features, and intangible qualities such as light and dark, noise and smell.

The significance of each area is articulated in accordance with English Heritage's *Conservation Principles*.[1] The values which make up the significance are summarised at the end of each section. The conclusion gives an overall summary and includes recommendations for protecting and enhancing this significance.

[1] English Heritage, *Conservation Principles,* 2008

Map 2: Village Character Areas



4. Context

4.1. Location

The village of Blewbury lies just south of Didcot at the foot of the Berkshire Downs. It is one of a number of villages which developed on the spring line and water is a major feature in the village. To the north are the flat lands of the clay vale and to the south are the chalk Downs. The A417 London Road connecting Reading and Wantage runs along the southern end of the village. The eastern edge of the village is bounded by the B4016 Bessel's Way, which leads north to Didcot via the village of East Hagbourne. To the south this becomes a track leading up onto the Downs.

Blewburton Hill just to the east of the village stands out in the clay vale as an island of chalk upland and is the site of an Iron Age hill fort. There are panoramic views over the Downs, the Chilterns and the Thames Valley. The entire parish lies with the North Wessex Downs AONB.

4.2. Historical development

This section deals with the historical development of the village insofar as it is expressed in the built form of the village today. The purpose is to understand the significance of the different elements that make up the historic context of the village, i.e. its archaeological and historical value. This account is based principally on documents in the Berkshire Record Office including the Enclosure Award 1805, the Tithe Award 1848, and the Ordnance Survey map series; published material on the village, an unpublished report by the Architectural History Practice Ltd. (AHP) on a timber-framed house in the village called Chapmans; census material online and discussions with local residents[2].

There is little published on the early development of the village itself, with archaeological investigations focusing on Blewburton Hill and the Downs. Here there is plenty of evidence of early settlement, including Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows and the Iron Age hill fort on Blewburton Hill. There is limited evidence on the settlement by the Anglo-Saxons, though a settlement on the site of the present village is thought to have been in existence by 500–600 AD. Anglo-Saxon burials have been found on Blewburton Hill. Other evidence of Anglo-Saxon development is thought to be in the lines of the thatched cob walls which criss-cross the village, though there is nothing to substantiate this; see Fig. 2. That said, the network of watercourses which run through the village determined its initial layout. The springs would have been the original reason for settling here and the expanse of water of the Cleve has considerable historical significance. However, much of the land around the water courses would be damp and boggy, especially in winter, so the paths connecting the most important elements of the village would probably always have been confined to the dry land. These ancient tracks, some of them bounded by cob walls with thatched or tiled 'tops' still dominate the layout of the village.

[2] Peter Saunders and Audrey Long, members of the Blewbury Local History Group.

Fig. 2: Cob walls defining ancient pathway

A recent archaeological investigation within the conservation area has revealed the foundations of an Anglo-Saxon house on the Ashbook House site. Odd finds elsewhere in the area suggest that the heart of the village may have been inhabited from the Neolithic period and that therefore there is considerable archaeological potential within the village.

The 7th century missionary St. Birinus is thought to have passed through this area on his way to Dorchester, preaching on Churn Knob just to the south of the village. The earliest documentary evidence is a 10th century charter which refers to lands in the parish which were subsequently given to Abingdon Abbey, and it is likely that a church was in existence in the village by this time or shortly after.

The Domesday Book records a sizeable settlement here, with 89 households, a church and four mills; the population has been estimated at around 400. This would have been an extraordinarily large settlement for the time, a fact which reinforces the claim for a substantial Anglo-Saxon settlement here. The extent of the early medieval village could well have been broadly similar to that of the 19th century. The land was divided into three holdings, or manors, the exact areas of which are detailed in the 1805 Enclosure Award. Manorial records over the centuries tell the story of the village, and evidence for these manors is still expressed on the ground in the village today.

The earliest building in the village is the church, dating from the 11th century, which, together with the land and all the tithes in the parish formed the Predendal Manor. The small tithes, i.e. wool, lambs, sheep, were set aside for the chaplain in the late 13th century together with land for a house and curtilage next to the cemetery, thus establishing the vicarage. Although the present (former) vicarage dates from the late 19th century, the site may well be the original one. The estate of the Prebendal Manor was leased out to provide an income and the manor house was based on Parsonage Farm,

although there is no evidence of the old house now. The manor was held briefly by Thomas Cromwell until his execution in 1540, and soon after the prebend was extinguished and the land acquired by the Bishop of Salisbury.

The Great Manor, known as The Manor of Blewbury, covered the main part of the parish and is most likely to have always been based on the current Manor House. It belonged originally to the king but was granted to the abbots of Reading, who held it until the Dissolution after which it reverted to the king. Usually held by an absentee landlord of high status, the lease of the manor was a highly lucrative asset. Land within the manor was held by a number of copyholders and freeholders and many of the house plots are still identifiable. The property belonging to the manor was sold in the early 20th century. The moat of the original Manor still survives, as do other interesting water features around the site.

The third manor holding, Nottingham Fee, is located either side of Watery Lane, with Hall Barn (on Westbrook Street) as the manor house. This is sited on a large plot backing onto the watercourse and is an interesting, multiphase building. Also situated in Westbrook Street is Ashbrook House, which must also have been an early high-status house based on the evidence of its plot size and the presence of fishponds, which could be the remnant of a moated medieval site. It is here that the foundations of an Anglo-Saxon house have been discovered.

An early 19th century description of the settlement records:

> *The village is very ill built, the roads bad, and the enclosures constructed of mud, thatched on the top, give the whole a very mean appearance; indeed, the want of trees and hedgerows, so common in the neighbouring parishes, with the great extent of open downs, afford no inducement to strangers to settle here*[3] *(Northeast, 2007).*

Early photographs confirm the openness of the village in contrast to the mature trees and hedges which are such a feature of the village today. In the early 19th century the condition of roads between Blewbury and its neighbouring villages and towns were generally poor. The road from Streatley to Harwell was improved when a turnpike trust for repairing and maintaining the road was established in 1803. This linked with existing turnpikes between Reading and Wantage in 1804, and allowed a regular coach service to pass through the village along the London Road. In 1826 the coach from London to Wantage travelled through Blewbury three times a week. Various local services to Abingdon, Wallingford and Didcot were provided by wagons. The number of village merchants, innkeepers and hostlers in the village increased in response to the new trade.

The 1801 census records Blewbury's population as 553, not much greater than the 11th century population of an estimated 400. Census returns show that in 1841, when around 650 people lived in the village, Blewbury was home to 11 farmers, seven blacksmiths, five wheelwrights, four carpenters, three publicans, three shoemakers, two grocers and various other professions including bricklayers, tailors, millers, drapers and glaziers[4]. Evidence for some of these is contained in the buildings they occupied.

[3] Northeast, 2007, p.30

[4] ibid, p.32

The area's coaching trade was curtailed by the arrival of the Great Western Railway from London to Bristol, completed in 1841. It reached Didcot in June 1840. Although there was no station at Blewbury, the proximity of the new connection helped to alter the socio-economic makeup of the village.

In 1871 the village population was 659; the census that year records that Blewbury had 16 farmers, 121 agricultural labourers, 12 shepherds, two millers, four blacksmiths, seven carpenters, three wheelwrights, two cordwainers, a harness maker, four boot and shoemakers, three boot binders, five publicans, two grooms, two basket makers, a chair maker, a maltster, two needleworkers, a watercress grower, a glazier, two teachers and various grocers, drapers and other shopkeepers. By the latter part of the 19th century, nearly all the buildings fronting London Road were in some form of commercial use and this can still be read in many of the buildings today.

The population was 746 in 1881, swelled by workers constructing the northern section of the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Junction Railway. Finished in 1882, it ran through Blewbury parish with a halt at Upton, just west of Blewbury. It closed in 1962.

By the end of the 19th century Blewbury had attracted a small colony of artists, partly because the area provided peace for artistic endeavour but also was close enough to London to court commissions. Among those who settled in Blewbury were the painters Blandford Fletcher (1866–1936), T.F.M. Sheard (1866–1921), Rowland Holyoake (1880–1924), Sir Luke Fildes (1843–1918) and Sir William Nicholson (1872–1949). The village was also home to several notable writers during the first half of the twentieth century, including Nicholson's partner Marguerite Steen (1894–1975), Kenneth Grahame (1859–1932), Barbara Euphan Todd (1890–1976) and Dick Francis (1920–2010).[5]

With a population of 545 in 1901, the occupation of Blewbury's early 20th century inhabitants remained almost entirely agricultural. Farms were mainly arable, and cherry orchards and watercress beds skirted the village.

Blewbury's population increased from the mid-20th century, partly due to post-war employment opportunities at the nearby Harwell Atomic Energy Research Establishment and in Didcot, whose large power station was completed in 1968. The area also attracted London commuters. In 1971 the population was 1,455. The village was part of Berkshire until 1974. By 2001 there were 1,650 people living in Blewbury, some of whom were accommodated in new houses built around the edges of the old settlement. Evidence for economic activity is no longer primarily expressed in buildings, as several businesses today are run from home offices.[6]

4.3. History on the ground

One of the defining characteristics of the village is the number of plots of open land, or closes, within the heart of the village; see Fig. 3. Understanding the development and use of these helps in assessing their significance.

[5] Architectural History Practice, report on Chapmans

[6] ibid.

In common with most villages in the area, the economy was based on mixed farming with cereal crops in the open fields and the Downs used for common pasture. The smaller irregular-shaped enclosures within the village would have provided produce for the householder. These are referred to in the 1805 Enclosure Award as 'Old Enclosures' suggesting these may date back to at least the 16th century. The large regular-shaped fields that surround the village are typical of the later Parliamentary enclosures.

The barns and granaries within the village, some dating back to 17th century, give an indication of the extent of corn grown. Documentary sources provide evidence of the type of cereal crops, typically wheat, oats and barley, and these would have been grown on the two open fields, West Field and East Field. The open land of Church Moor provided 'grass' for the church and the charterholders[7] in the village. The remaining open plots were invariably part of the house and tenement, and would have been used to provide produce for the household and some surplus for market.

What is striking about the 19th century maps of the village is the extent of orchards; see maps 4 and 5. Nearly all the small plots of land within the village, and a few on the edge of the village, appear to have been orchards. Documentation on the type of trees grown is limited. Certainly there were apple trees, and cherries are recorded here as well as in the neighbouring village of Harwell. Harwell cherries were being sold in Abingdon in the 1610s and the tithe record in 1772 includes apples, pears, cherries and walnuts.[8]

Fig. 3: Open land within the core of the village

In the tithe award of 1848 there are references to 50 orchards. These are generally on these small plots of land, usually combined with house and garden. There is reference to the orchards being also used for pasture. It appears that the orchards expanded in the

[7] Freeholders of land who enjoyed special privileges, Northeast, 2007, p.14

[8] Northeast, 2007 p.24

mid-18th century as there are disputes recorded relating to who should have the tithes dating from this period. The great tithes, i.e. corn crops and hay, went to the rector whilst the small tithes such as wool, lambs, chickens and fruit went to the vicar. In the mid 18th century there seems to have been a move from corn to fruit, thereby increasing the tithe for the vicar and decreasing that for the rector. Further evidence for the dating of orchards comes from John Wesley's account of his visit in 1746 in which he describes Blewbury's springs in use to feed watercress beds and where the water-table was also 'high enough to keep orchards green in time of drought' *(quoted by Beckinsale, 1972)*[9]. There is other documentary evidence for an orchard in Blewbury in 1762[10]. Some ancient apple trees can still be found in the village today.

Conditions for farming seem always to have been favourable, and this is reflected in the size and wealth of the houses by the 17th century, which can be worked out from the hearth-tax returns. In 1664 53 houses were liable for tax and 22 exempt because of poverty. Nearly half of these had three or more hearths, indicating that these were certainly not the houses of the poor. Three houses had six or more hearths, including Ashbrook House which had ten. These must have been large wealthy houses. It would be possible to work out which some of these are from records and building surveys.

Early Non-conformism is represented by the evidence of the Quaker Meeting House, which appears on the 1805 Enclosure Award Map (see Map 4) but it had disappeared by the time of the 1848 Tithe Map, (Map 5). This was located in the north-west corner of the village and a stone now records the approximate site of this and the associated Quaker burial ground, though there is no other evidence of this. In the 19th century there was a Baptist Chapel and a Primitive Methodist Chapel, as well as the Wesleyan Chapel (the former Methodist Church of more recent times).

4.4. Layout

The story of the village is also legible in the lanes and tracks from the village centre to the surrounding land. Enclosing the centre of the village is a ring of larger tracks; these are now the vehicular roads of the village but none cross the centre of the village. Instead a network of smaller paths criss-crosses the centre of the village with tracks leading out to Blewburton Hill, to the open fields where there was daily work to be done and up to the downs, where sheep and cattle were grazed. This layout remains clearly visible today

4.5. Views

The Downs and Blewburton Hill offer magnificent long-distance views over the vale; see Fig. 4. Didcot Power Station rising above the flat plain dominates views to the north and west. The village is barely read in these views. It appears mostly as a patch of woodland, because of the amount of mature tree growth and also, significantly, because of the modest scale of buildings within the village. Even the modern developments are minimally visible, the most intrusive being White's Orchard and Cossicle Mead when seen from Blewburton Hill.

[9] Quoted in Architectural History Practice report on Chapmans

[10] Berkshire Record Office, D/ESTE/8

Fig. 4: View from Blewburton Hill towards the Wittenham Clumps

Within the village are many picturesque views, mostly short-distance views, which are closed by buildings, winding paths and vegetation. There are a few glimpsed views of the church rising above houses when viewed from Westbrook Street and Church Road. Unfolding views along narrow paths and lanes are characteristic of the core of the area and the outer roads. The latter also provide glimpsed views of open countryside.

Map 3: Rocque's Map of 1761

Source Cockerell and Kay, 2006

Map. 4: 1805 Enclosure award map

Berkshire Record Office

Map 5: 1848 Tithe map

NB - North is at the bottom

Berkshire Record Office

5. Character Areas

5.1. Area 1 – Inner Conservation Area

Within the ring of vehicular roads around the village lies its historic core, all of it lying within the conservation area. This has a magical quality, completely free from through traffic, criss-crossed instead by a network of enticing paths which run alongside and across the numerous watercourses and the Cleve. In places these are bounded by ancient thatched or tiled cob walls, giving a strong sense of enclosure. These lead on to views of wider open spaces within the heart of the village. The extremely attractive natural environment, at times appearing as deep countryside, directly adjoins the equally attractive built environment. The contrast presented by this juxtaposition enhances the characteristics of each, the more so because it is unexpected. There are tight clusters of traditional buildings, many listed, giving one view of the village, and detached houses, apparently randomly sited, in large plots giving a completely different view of the built environment. Mature trees and hedges, small grassy fields, unmanaged plots and cottage gardens make a very positive contribution to the rural setting.

A notable feature which has a major contribution to the special character of the area is the lack of highway engineering. Although most houses can be accessed by car, access lanes are informal, without any edging and not complying with modern standards. This, and the lack of street lighting, create the sense of a bygone age.

There are no long-distance views from within the core of the village. The enclosure of the village limits views to the near or middle distance. In terms of important historic views, the whole area is comprised of these. There are important views down narrow winding lanes; along watercourses; over the Cleve (see Fig. 5); across open spaces of former orchards and closes; of the Church from the churchyard and from further afield peeping above the houses; of idyllic cottages and houses set off by traditional cottage gardens. Important views are legion. They are not just aesthetically pleasing, they also express the history of the village and are highly valued by local residents.

There is a sense of timelessness and antiquity. The only way across the centre of the village is by foot and there is no street lighting, giving a feeling of what it would have been like in previous centuries. That said, there are many modern houses, but these have mostly respected the layout of the village, and mature vegetation on boundaries helps to integrate them. Vehicular access is possible along the lanes that lead into but not through the centre. The lanes and tracks are informally surfaced and there is very little tarmac. Gravel and grass predominate with attractive blue-brick paving by the church.

The layout of this part of the village is essentially the same as that appearing on Rocque's map of 1761 (see Map 3), where dense clusters of houses are interspersed with large open plots. These are likely to have been the garden plots of the houses and the small pastures and orchards referred to above. The ubiquitous water courses must have rendered some parcels of land too wet to develop but good for vegetation. The lack of uniformity is a strong and attractive characteristic; some houses are grouped together fronting a lane, such as those at the end of Church Road, but the majority are set back from the path or centred on a plot. For the most part, house plots are large and some are very large such as Orchard Dene, Carramores and Parsonage Farm. Plot boundaries are defined in a variety of ways, including ancient cob walls, brick walls, mature hedging and

railings. In some places the boundary is not defined, such as the Schoolhouse. Openness to public view is a key characteristic (see Fig. 6).

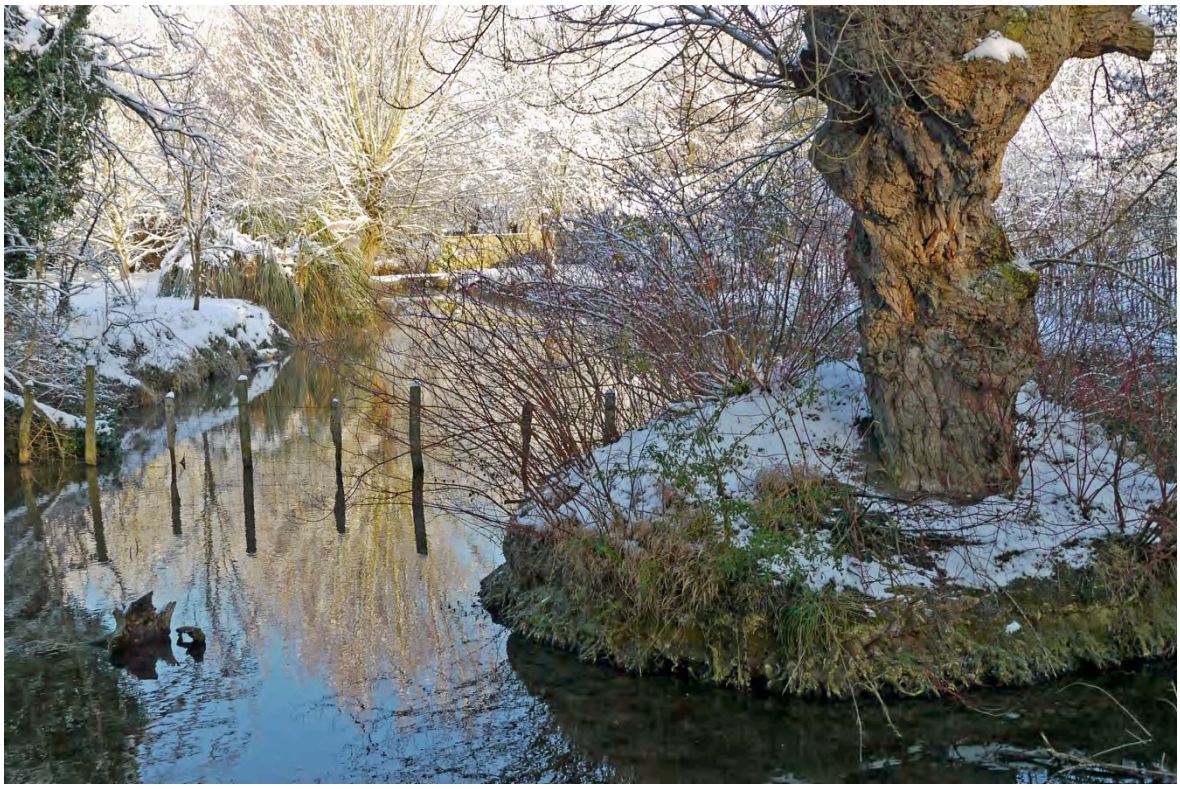


Fig. 5: View across the Cleve

Buildings are mostly residential or ancillary buildings, with old farm buildings also being quite well represented and providing evidence of the farming past, e.g. Chapmans Barn and the granary on Rumsey's Lane. Some old apple trees survive as a reminder of the historic orchards. There are many historic buildings within the heart of the village of varying sizes, type and date. The oldest building is the Church, dating from the 11th century with medieval additions and some late Victorian work.

Fig. 6: No. 1 Almshouse with frontage open to the footpath

The next oldest buildings are the timber–framed houses, of which there are many examples including Laurences , Stocks, Carpenter's and Blue Haze (see Fig. 7), which all probably date from the 16th century, and Chapmans, Orchard Dene and Nottingham Fee dating from the 17th century. Earlier timber-framed houses tend to have larger panels with later ones having small square panels. Stocks, which has a cruck frame, is likely to be one of the earliest houses in the village. Originally these would have had wattle and daub infill, which would have been limewashed for additional protection. Many have now been replaced with brick infill panels and some are rendered. Timber-framed barns dating from this period are usually weatherboarded, a treatment which continued into the 18th century. Roofs would all originally have been thatched, but some are now covered in plain clay tiles. The steep pitch and the deep overhang, both features needed to shed water away from the wattle and daub walls, make the thatched roofs a very visually dominant element (see Fig 21).

These early timber-framed houses are all substantial, of two or more units and generally two storeys high. They are characterised by a fairly low eaves level and usually massive chimney stacks, sometimes of decorative brickwork. They would have been the homes of better-off husbandmen or yeoman and possibly aspiring gentry. They were not the homes of the poor.

The 18th century saw the widespread use of brick, a much more fashionable material at the time (see Fig. 8). Its use continued throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and it is still the most widely used building material today. It was used for buildings of every status, as evidenced by the modest almshouse built in 1738. Timber framing was still used into the 18th century but usually for inferior buildings or internal walls, e.g. in the Schoolhouse, dating from 1709. Many earlier houses were re-faced in brick to bring them up-to-date, their proportions being the clue to their earlier origins, e.g. the Red Lion public house. Plain clay tiles replaced thatch as the favoured roofing material until the coming of the railways made slate a cheap alternative. The most prominent 19th century building in the inner area is the Methodist Church.

Fig. 7: Blue Haze, dating from the 16th century

Fig. 8: The Schoolhouse, demonstrating an early use of brick

Twentieth century buildings have generally respected traditional forms and material. The huge variation in building types, dates and materials means that further variety adds to the visual interest of the area. What unifies the development in the area and helps it to integrate well into its context is the respect for open spaces, plot sizes, informal layout and siting of houses, retention of mature boundary hedges and informal access roads. The lack of highway engineering is a crucial factor in the retention of the village's character.

Whilst much original detailing survives, most houses have had some details altered. In particular, windows and doors date from all periods. Replacements are mostly sensitive and appropriate. Buildings and also the public paths and tracks are generally well maintained.

The area is extraordinarily peaceful. There is no traffic noise, just the sound of water, never far away, and birdsong.

There are very few negative or detrimental features in this part of the village. Some elements of new building stand out and therefore could have been designed to fit their context better. Solar panels are always visually intrusive when placed on prominent roof slopes, presenting a dilemma for people endeavouring to be more sustainable. A minor point relates to signs on the Church and pre-school building. These are probably required for health and safety reasons but are unfortunately intrusive.

There is little scope for car parking and what there is inevitably detracts from the strong character of a pre-motor vehicle era.

5.1.1. Summary of significance

Evidential value – based on the extensive documentation of the village and evidence of archaeological investigations; watercourses; the layout of the roads and paths; the surviving archaic closes and plot boundaries, and the large number of unrecorded historic buildings – **high evidential value.**

Historical value – this lies in the many multiphase buildings whose alterations and extensions reflect the changing needs and circumstances of the owners. The range of types, sizes and building materials indicate how building technology and fashions have changed over time. The size and type of farm buildings tells the story of farming over the centuries and workshops indicate the range of trades within the area. The watercourses and enclosed lanes illustrate the way of life in the village over the centuries. The origin of the open plots or closes is not fully understood. Although they appear in records dating back to the 18th century, they are likely to be much earlier. They have played an important part in the day-to-day life of the village, as a major source of additional income.

The association of several prominent national figures and extensive documentary sources covering the area add additional value. These are collected and summarised by Northeast[11]and so are not repeated here. This also includes local people who figure in the village's history.

The illustrative and associational values combine to give – **high historical value**

Aesthetic value – derives from the layout of the lanes and lies in the considerable number of traditional buildings of varying dates, types and styles including modern building. The watercourses through the village and the Cleve and its associated vegetation are of paramount importance. Contrasts between built form and open countryside; between enclosed spaces and open plots; between dark-shaded tree-covered paths and light open tracks contribute to this aesthetic value and there are some key views which encapsulate this. Mature trees and hedges in both public and private realm have high value as do private gardens, many of which are highly visible and attractively planted as old cottage gardens – **high aesthetic value**

Communal value – derived from that fact that the tracks through the village are in constant use and much loved by local people. The Playclose is a site of public recreation and many private but highly visible gardens also have communal value because of the contribution they make to the appearance of the area. Orchard Dene is the site of an open-air theatre which has annual productions – **high communal value**

5.2. Area 2 – Westbrook Street

This area covers developed land both sides of Westbrook Street and includes the 20th century developments of Grahame Close, Westbrook Green and Boham's Cottages. The eastern side of the street contains most of the historic buildings and lies within the conservation area, though the plots fronting the street on the west are certainly historic, even if not all the buildings are.

[11] Northeast, 2007 pp 47-80

It has the air of an informal village street, lined on both sides with houses. Some of these, mostly the historic ones, are on the highway edge; others are set back from the road. The narrow street carries local traffic and has limited footways; in places there are only grass verges. Building plots are of varying sizes and there is a mix of historic and modern buildings along the street. The treatment of plot boundaries varies, with fences, brick walls and hedges being most common; some plots are open to the highway. Mature trees and hedges are dominant elements in the streetscape and give a definite rural character.

By far the largest plot is that of Ashbrook House, an old farmhouse dating from the mid-18th century but on a much earlier developed plot. The surviving fishponds suggest this was the site of a medieval house and it is here that the foundations of an Anglo-Saxon house have been found[12]. The archaeological potential of this site is very high.

Another large plot with an interesting history is Hall Barn, the Manor House for the manor of Nottingham Fee; see Fig. 9. Again, there is likely to be significant archaeology in the grounds; this will date back to the medieval period, if not earlier. The house itself dates from the mid-17th century and has an extraordinary late 17th century re-fronting in brick with giant Doric pilasters. This would have been a highly fashionable display of taste for the period.

Fig. 9: Hall Barn, the manor house of Nottingham Fee, showing giant Doric pilasters to the main range

Other traditional buildings are a mix of dates, size and materials similar to those of the inner conservation area, including Green Bushes, a 16th century timber-framed house; Forge House, a 17th century timber-framed house marked on the early OS maps as a smithy; Boham's House Barn, an 18th century weather-boarded barn; Curtoys, which is a

[12] As described in an interview with Audrey Long

pleasingly symmetrical early 19th century house (see Fig. 10); and Fron Deg, a modest house from the same period.

Fig. 10: Curtoys – early 19th century symmetrical design

Leading off the street are a number of 20th century housing developments, the largest being Grahame Close (see Fig. 11), named after Kenneth Grahame, the author of *Wind in the Willows*, who lived in Boham's House from 1910–24. Although this is a much denser development than is commonly found in the historic centre of the village, and the houses are not of outstanding design, it integrates well into the village scene. The interesting layout, informal open spaces and mature trees are similar in character to the closes in the centre of the village, which lies immediately to the east and south. The small estate of Boham's Cottages also fits well into the village scene, with houses of traditional form and design; it also shares the characteristic of not having direct vehicular access. Westbrook Green is quite different in character, with some striking monopitch roofs and stark white painted brickwork.

Long views gradually unfolding along the street reveal a rich variety of buildings, partly screened by mature hedges and trees. At the northern end the view is closed by the large mature horse chestnut at the junction with Church End. There are glimpsed views to the west between building plots of open flat countryside beyond which was once the West Field before enclosure. Ancient lanes lead out westwards from the village, giving wide open views of the surrounding flat countryside. The village boundary has been extended here to accommodate some backland development which generally gives a soft edge to the village.

To the east are the narrow enclosed lanes leading into the core of the village. In places there are glimpsed views of the church tower.

Fig. 11: Grahame Close, showing the informal layout and open space

As with the centre of the village, public and private green spaces make a positive contribution to the character of the area. Mature trees and boundary hedges line the street and traditional cottage gardens, open to public view, provide an additional, very attractive, element to the streetscape.

Although the street carries traffic, much of the time it is quiet and peaceful, especially along the side lanes. The sounds of birds and smell of plants and flowers enrich the environment.

At the north end of the street, a lane turns off to the west, leading into a car park serving the village hall, post office, school and playground.

There are few negative features in this area. The unrelieved expanse of tarmac forming the car parking area around the village hall, post office and school is unattractive, though this is not a prominent feature within the village. The flat-roofed extension to the village hall including the post office is architecturally poor. That said, the facilities provided are a valuable asset to the village.

5.2.1. Summary of significance

Evidential value – derives from the layout of the roads and paths; plot boundaries, open spaces and buildings. The sites of Ashbrook House and Hall Barn are likely to hold evidence of early medieval settlement – **high evidential value**

Historical value – illustrative value is similar to the inner area above. Value lies in the many multiphase buildings; the range of types, sizes and building materials and the size

and type of farm buildings. The association of Kenneth Grahame with Boham's House is also of historical value – **high historical value**

Aesthetic value – derives from the variety of building types and styles including some very attractive historic buildings with picturesque settings; hedges, trees and attractive cottage gardens all contribute further – **high aesthetic value**

Communal Value – most of the area forms part of the everyday environment of local people and is much valued. The extent to which this contributes to heritage significance is, however, limited. The village hall/school complex and associated car park have poor aesthetic value but one of the highest communal values – **medium communal value**

5.3. Area 3 – Berry Lane

This area lacks unity and is comprised of three sub-areas, one ancient and two modern. The common feature is their access off Church End/Berry Lane. The boundary of the conservation area includes the sites of the Manor House and Old Mill, and land to the south of Berry Lane.

Occupying the north-west corner of the village is the group of buildings comprising Mockbeggars Hall, the Manor House and the Old Mill. These are part of the medieval village though there may have been earlier settlement here. The watercourses running through the village join together here to form the Mill Brook, which flows off to the north. The mill is sited here and there is a complex network of water features relating to this. The mill is likely to be on the site of one of the mills mentioned in the Domesday Book though the current building, much altered, appears to date from the 18th century. Another water feature is the remnants of a moat, forming three sides of a rectangle, which is likely to have been the site of the medieval manor. The present Manor House, dating from the 17th century, lies to the north of this. To the west, encircling Mockbeggars Hall is another watercourse. The Enclosure Map of 1805 shows a group of buildings here (see Map 4), some of which must be the farm buildings relating to the Manor House. However, the name Mockbeggars Hall (meaning a house where no hospitality was given) is archaic, suggesting that there may have been an earlier house on the site. This is currently a working farm with a large, two-storey office/accommodation block in the centre, fairly well-screened from public view. Fronting on to Church End, now occupied by an interesting group of traditional buildings, was the site of the Primitive Methodist Chapel.

The rest of this area was not developed for housing until the 20th century. There are detached houses in large plots on both sides of Berry Lane, including the bungalows on Millbrook Close and a self-contained area of mobile homes on Ladycroft Park.

The juxtaposition of contrasting elements which characterise much of the village is evident along the road here. The narrow road along Westbrook Street opens out at Church End to form a small green with mature trees, with attractive historic buildings addressing the space. This is a strong element in the streetscape (see Fig. 12). The openness continues along Berry Lane with mature hedges and trees lining the road. Berry Lane has no footway, only informal grass verges. The stream running alongside the road and expanse of water extending towards the mill, populated by ducks reinforces its rural character.

Fig. 12: Berry Lane, showing the open space by Millbrook Cottage

Buildings are generally not prominent in views, being well-screened from the highway by trees and hedges. The group of buildings on the medieval site around the Manor House is hidden away from public view.

Traditional buildings have the similar characteristics to those already described, including 16th and 17th century timber-framed buildings such as Carpenter's, 18th and 19th century brick houses such as Millbrook Cottage, and a range of modern building styles and materials. Many modern buildings are bungalows or of one-and-a-half storeys. Millbrook Close has a typical close layout which has nothing locally distinctive about it, but it is visually low-key and therefore readily assimilated into the streetscape. Ladycroft Park is even more discreet in terms of visual impact. It is well-screened from the road and forms a self-contained area of well-kept homes, totally alien in terms of local character but single storey and unobtrusive (see Fig. 13).

Although hidden away, the farm buildings of the Manor House, dating predominantly from the 18th century are important evidence of farming practices in the past. Most are listed and they include cow houses, stabling, attached workers accommodation and shelter sheds.

The 20th century developments tell the story of the growth of the village after the war, providing a range of house types and sizes and therefore attracting a cross-section of population to support the vitality of the village.

Views are closed by the winding road and mature vegetation. There are glimpsed views through the hedges and trees of the Manor House site of open garden areas and water, and closed but enticing views along the track to the Old Mill. The parking area by the village hall and the footpath leading out of the village to the north have open views over

the former West Field. This path leads past the site of the former Quaker Meeting House, shown on the 1805 Enclosure map but gone by 1848. There is a stone marking the way to where the Quaker burial ground is thought to lie (see Fig 14).

Fig. 13: Ladycroft Park showing visually low-key housing

Fig. 14: Stone marking the site of the Quaker Meeting House and burial ground

There are few negative features in this area. Some modern house designs have a neutral impact on character but, in general, sensitive scale, siting, screening and landscaping mitigate any negative elements. The farmstead of Mockbeggars Hall has a number of utilitarian buildings, which is to be expected on a farm. The litter bin on the green in front of Millbrook Cottage could be more sensitively sited and/or designed.

5.3.1. Summary of significance

Evidential value – the water complex around the Manor House, Mockbeggars Hall and the mill suggests this area has high archaeological potential. This is backed up by documentary evidence for this as the centre of the Great Manor. Some history of Non-conformism is contained in the sites of the Primitive Methodist Chapel and the Quaker Meeting House – **high evidential value**

Historical value – the Manor complex illustrates the nature and scale of farming and changes in practice over time. The range of traditional buildings individually and collectively illustrate changing building technology and the wealth and status of the population over time. They illustrate changing economic activity supporting the village and its population, and the detailed records in Northeast (2007) expand on this – **high historical value**

Aesthetic value – lies in the retention of the rural character along the street with its mature trees and hedges, stream and pond alongside the road. The intimate green space in front of Millbrook Cottage fronted by picturesque traditional buildings is particularly attractive – **high aesthetic value**

Communal value – with the significant exception of the Manor and Old Mill complex, most of the area is accessible to the public and used on a daily basis by local people. The extent to which this contributes to heritage significance is limited – **medium communal value**

5.4. Area 4 – Development to the east of the village

The land between Bridus Way/South Street and Bessel's Way was completely undeveloped until the 1930s, at which point some houses were built on Bessel's Way and East Fields. The built area was expanded and infilled, so that now all the land here is developed for housing, at much higher densities than is generally found in the rest of the village. However, these are not without character.

Only the west side of Bessel's Way is developed. Apart from Winterbrook Farm, which is late 19th century, a large house to its south and a couple of houses to its north, the east side is open countryside with a patch of allotments (see Fig. 15). There are views out towards Blewburton Hill, a scheduled ancient monument, and an ancient track leads from the village, via Bessel's Lea Road, across Bessel's Way, past the farm and up the hill. This is a popular walk for locals and visitors. Views to the south from Bessel's Way are open and include attractive views of the Downs. Within the estate developments, however, views are limited.

Plot sizes vary, with some quite large and some, especially at Dibleys, very small. The layout of some development is irregular, incorporating public open space in line with the character of the core of the village (see Fig. 16). However, most are regularly set out, and more typical of standard estate layouts. Houses are set back from the highway with front gardens and longer rear gardens. Scale varies from very modest single-storey bungalows to large two-and-a-half storey dwellings. The latter are wider than traditional homes and stand out in views of the village from Blewburton Hill.

Fig. 15: Allotments to the east of Bessel's Way

Fig. 16: Dibleys, showing low-rise development around informal open space

What is strikingly different here is the amount of traffic, with Bessel's Way having through traffic, even though it is only a B road. The noise and activity associated with this gives it a markedly different character to most of the rest of the village, the exception here being London Road. Related to this, and also in contrast to much of the rest of the village, are the tarmac roads and proper footways but, crucially, no street lighting. Apart from a section of Dibleys, there is direct vehicular access to all houses in accordance with modern standards and car parking to go with it. Dibleys was developed in the 1960s to provide housing for people over 55 years old and it was later extended.

There is much less public open space in this character area. The grassed areas in Eastfields seem left-over rather than designed spaces and, other than providing a grassed setting to the houses, they have very little function. The open space of Bridus Mead, by contrast, is surrounded by houses and contributes to the character of the development, reflecting the predominant character of the heart of the village. Dibleys, mentioned above, is an extraordinary development in many ways and is built around a number of small open spaces. It also has a rather unattractive parking court. The original development comprises small-scale, single-storey housing tightly packed around garden spaces. The layout creates interesting, intimate spaces and is very attractive. Although it has its own strong character, it echoes the character prevailing in the historic part of the village.

All development in this area is residential, apart from the former filling station occupying a key location at the junction with London Road. This prominent corner marks the entrance to the village on the approach from the east. Although it now serves as a local shop, providing a much-needed facility, its appearance has a negative impact on the street scene.

The cement-rendered pair of semi-detached houses on the east side of Bessel's Way intrude into otherwise open views of countryside. Whilst their scale and form is appropriate, their siting is at odds with the rest of the area, and materials and detailing are utilitarian. Otherwise there are no significant negative elements. The scale, in terms of height and width, of the houses on White's Orchard appear noticeably bigger than those traditionally found in the village and this has a slightly a negative impact on views from Blewburton Hill (see Fig. 17). Solar thermal panels on prominent roof slopes of Cossicle Mead are visually intrusive.

5.4.1. Summary of significance

Evidential value – there is some evidential value in this as part of the East Field and in the track running through part of the village to Blewburton Hill – **low evidential value**

Historical value – in some places plot boundaries dating back to the 1805 Enclosure Award have been respected, indicating how individual plots, sold separately for development, have determined the form of development. This is respectful of the setting of the conservation area though of limited historical value – **low historical value**

Aesthetic value – this lies in the appropriate nature of the development for its location, and there are some interesting examples of 20th century development, e.g. Greenlea and Dibleys – **low aesthetic value**

Communal value – this again is limited. Much of the space is private, as are the buildings. The tracks leading into and out of the village are well-used, and the garden areas of Dibleys have communal value for residents – **low communal value**

Fig. 17: Cossicle Mead, showing visually intrusive solar thermal panels

5.5. Area 5 – London Road and Pilgrim's Way

London Road, the A417, which follows the line of the ancient track of Icknield Way, is the main road between Reading and Wantage and has always been the principal route through the village. It was turnpiked in 1804, which greatly increased commercial traffic. Whilst current traffic is not continuous, traffic noise and, in the dark, car headlights are dominating characteristics.

Fig. 18: Pilgrim's Way

In complete contrast is Pilgrim's Way, a quiet back lane running parallel to London Road behind properties on the south side of the road (see Fig 18). This is an unmade country lane, bounded on the north side with hedges and mature trees and with some backland development, which fronts onto the lane. On the south side, agricultural fencing separates the lane from open countryside in most parts, allowing open views up to the Downs. The farmland is used for grazing, mostly for horses, and there are a number of stables and ancillary buildings servicing the land. Three narrow tracks, almost hidden, link this back lane with the main road. They also line up with other lanes across London Road connecting the village to the grazing lands of the Downs. Pilgrim's Way is the southern boundary of the conservation area.

At the junction of London Road and South Street the road widens out into a small attractive green space, the Pound (see Fig. 19). This acts as a focal point for this part of the village and it is a major pedestrian crossroads, both currently and historically. It is an attractive sitting area with a number of specimen trees, including a mature beech tree in the centre.

In common with other areas of the village, London Road is characterised by a variety of building types, of a wide date range and an interesting mix of materials, styles and plot sizes. The eastern end has 20th century development which has more in common with Area 4. However, unlike the rest of the conservation area, most of the buildings on London Road front directly onto the highway, often right up to the pavement edge. This was prime commercial frontage, especially after the road was turnpiked, which accounts for the almost continuous built-up frontage. There are far fewer gaps between buildings. Whilst most buildings are now in residential use, at the end of the 19th century nearly all the building along London Road were in some form of commercial use, either as shops, public houses, workshops or lodging houses (see Fig. 20). Evidence of former use remains in some of the buildings, such as Treble House Terrace and Cottrills. Some farm buildings survive, indicating the predominant economic activity of the past such as the brick and weather-boarded granary at Granary House and Great Tree Farm Barn (see Fig. 21).

Fig. 19: Public open space of the former pound

Fig. 20: Former commercial property at Treble House Terrace, London Road

Fig. 21: Great Tree Farm Barn, London Road

Buildings are generally one to two storeys high, with many having one-and-a-half storeys expressed in dormers. The range of materials typical for the village is timber-framing with brick or rendered infill panels; flint and/or brick, sometimes painted or rendered; and thatched, tiled or slate roofs. The timber-framed buildings include those with large panels and small, square panels. Also, there is some close-studding at Corrydon House, dating from the late 16th century (see Fig. 22). This is confined to the front elevation of the main range and jettied cross-wing; it was intended for display and indicates high status. The side elevation, less visible, is of small square panelling. Several houses of 17th century origin, or earlier, have been updated with alterations or additions in the 18th century, such as Yew Tree House. Some of the terraced houses date from the 18th century and Humfreys, a very fine, symmetrical brick house dates from around 1800.

Much original detailing survives from all periods including railings, as at Treble House Terrace, windows of all dates, and doors and porches such as that at Turnpike House.

On Pilgrim's Way there are a number of modern houses built in various styles behind the London Road properties. These are fairly discreet, screened by mature hedging which helps to retain the feel of a country lane. The unmade road and lack of highway engineering contributes considerably to its character.

Fig. 22: Corrydon House, London Road showing the higher-status close studding on the front elevation with small square panelling to the side elevation

At either end of London Road are views of open countryside, but in the middle section views are closed by development either side and by the winding road. The tracks leading off either side have short views, inviting further exploration.

Traffic noise has a negative impact on the otherwise peaceful village, but this is inevitable. A reduction in vehicle speeds would reduce this impact. On Pilgrim's Way, electric fencing associated with horse grazing can be untidy, but again this is part of the rural scene.

5.5.1. Summary of significance

Evidential Value – derives from the ancient tracks of Icknield Way, and Pilgrim's Way and routes linking the village centre to the Downs as part of the medieval farming system. An archaeological investigation on London Road found evidence of Neolithic occupation – **high evidential value**

Historical value – the buildings fronting London Road reflect the changing status of this main route and the commercial growth of the village, and have similar value to the traditional buildings already described. Displays of status and fashion are evident in a

number of buildings. The original function, size, materials and detailing of individual buildings all contribute to this story – **high historical value**

Aesthetic value – derives from the range of building types, dates, styles materials and detailing, and the attractive public open space of the Pound. Pilgrim's Way has a different but equally attractive aesthetic – **high aesthetic value**

Communal value – nearly all the area is open to public view and it is a well-used part of the village. The former Pound provides a public sitting area. Paths crossing the area are very well used for recreation leading to walks on the Downs – **high communal value**

5.6. Area 6 – South Street

This area covers the buildings fronting onto the trafficked route around the east of the village, interestingly called South Street. The whole area falls within the conservation area, with the boundary running along the rear of the properties on the east side of the street. It was pretty well-settled by the time of Rocque's map of 1761 and, as with the rest of the historic village, it has probably been settled in a similar form for over a thousand years. The winding tarmac road retains the character of a village street. It has no footway, just informal verges. There are lanes leading off either side connecting the centre of the village to the developments to the east and Bessel's Way.

Many houses have fences and hedges as a boundary to the street and there is a section of ancient cob wall. As with other areas, some frontages are open to the highway. Plot sizes vary. The historic buildings nearer to London Road have smaller plots, with houses sited close to the highway edge. Those to the north end are generally larger. Plot boundaries follow almost exactly the plot boundaries shown on the 1805 Enclosure Award. Although the street is quite narrow, it widens out in a number of places as at the junctions with Church Road and with Dibleys, where there is a small green. Just opposite this is an open garden area, the former orchard of Parsonage Farm, the site of the manor house for the Prebendal Manor, which still has an ancient apple tree in the garden; see Fig. 23.

There is a mix of historic and modern houses, the latter fitting in well, in part because they respect the historic plot boundaries and many have mature landscaping which contributes to the rural character. The historic houses have the same mix of dates, types, styles, materials and detailing as found elsewhere in the conservation area. The one exception is Manor Cottage which is partly constructed in clunch (see Fig. 24). Most are of one-and-a-half or two storeys.

Fig. 23: Old apple tree in the grounds of Parsonage Farm

Fig. 24: Manor Cottage, constructed of chalk block or clunch

Evidence of commercial activity includes the former tea shop at Lantern Cottage (Fig. 25) and a former public house, the Load of Mischief. Borlase used to be a gallery, associated with the community of artists who settled here during the 20th century, and on the land opposite is a workshop.

This area shares many characteristics with Westbrook Street and Berry Lane, i.e. its informal village street character, with attractive unfolding views down the winding lanes, always closed by the next bend and mature vegetation. It carries only local village traffic

and is therefore mostly free from traffic noise, which can only really be heard near London Road.

There are no marked negative features.

Fig. 25: Lantern Cottage, on left, showing evidence of former tea shop.

5.6.1. Summary of significance

Evidential value – this is derived from the road and path layout, plot boundaries and multiphase buildings – **high evidential value**

Historical value – in common with other parts of the old village, its history can be read in the layout, including spaces, and the original function, size, materials and detailing of individual buildings. Associational value lies in its connection with the artists who settled here in the 20th century – **high historical value**

Aesthetic value – derives from the attractive rural character of the village street, determined by its layout, buildings and views – **high aesthetic value**

Communal value – it is highly accessible and views experienced within the village street are much-valued locally, though contribution to heritage significance is limited – **medium communal value**

6. Conclusions

The character of a village can be very difficult to pin down, as it is much more than its physical attributes. It is the intangible qualities that make it what it is, giving it life and spirit. These develop over centuries as a result of the interaction of human activity and the land. This character assessment has therefore focused on the heritage significance of the village and sought to take into account all the factors that have given rise to the village as it is today. That said, the complexity of the village and richness of its history mean that this is only an overview.

There was already a sizeable village here in the 10th century when it was referred to as 'this venerable village' and this is substantiated by the Domesday record. Given the constraints of topography, watercourses and boggy land, it is likely that the Anglo-Saxon village occupied the core of the current village and there is some archaeological evidence to support this. The whole of this area has, therefore, considerable potential to yield more information about the early development of the village.

The layout of the village, its church and manors, and considerable number of historic buildings, supplemented by extensive documentation, take up the story from there. The agricultural development of the village can be read in conjunction with the surrounding landscape, the former open fields and grazing on the Downs. Farm buildings can give an indication of the nature and amount of crops grown and the type and number of animals kept. Watercourses and the mills supplement this story. Early maps and documents indicate the contribution of orchards to the economy, illustrated on the ground today by some ancient apple trees in the open spaces within the core of the village. The survival of these open spaces or closes is one of the defining characteristics of the village.

The buildings, as a whole and individually, further illustrate the development of the village. Changing technology is demonstrated in building materials, as timber framing gives way to brick, and thatch is increasingly replaced by plain clay tiles and later with slate. Larger window openings became popular as a result of improved technology for producing glass, which became much cheaper and more readily available. Other detailing reflects changing fashions, which is where the human dimension is most clearly expressed. Buildings have for centuries been a vehicle for the display of status. This can be seen in Corrydon House on London Road, where the more expensive, and therefore high status, close-studding is confined to the most visible elevation (see Fig. 22). It can be seen in the charmingly clumsy addition of giant Doric pilasters to Hall Barn (Fig. 9), giving that all-important nod in the direction of classical architecture that was essential for reinforcing status. And it can be seen in the re-fronting of timber-framed buildings with brick, the much more fashionable material of the 18th century, indicating to neighbours and visitors that the house is up-to-date. There are many more examples. Research on individual buildings will contribute considerably to this story.

Buildings also clearly express their function and where this has changed. Evidence of former shops can be seen in Treble House Terrace and Cottrills (Fig. 26) along London Road and in Lantern Cottage on South Street. Several workshops survive and more detailed recording of these may contribute to an understanding of the trades carried out there.

Fig. 26: Cottrills, showing evidence of former commercial use

Whilst there are attractive panoramic views from the Downs and Blewburton Hill, the principal aesthetic of the village itself lies in the cumulative value of the myriad picturesque snapshots from throughout the village. These are of individual buildings; clusters of buildings; open spaces; enclosed spaces; public spaces and private spaces; natural vegetation and cottage gardens; watercourses; glimpsed views down footpaths and lanes; open views to the fields surrounding the village. The scene changes at every turn. The quality and variety in the built and natural environment combine to create an extraordinarily attractive village.

Whilst the historic core has the highest aesthetic value, many characteristics of the modern developments are locally distinctive and attractive. Some negative features have been identified within the village but these are far outweighed by the positive ones and there is opportunity to enhance some of these to mitigate their negative impact.

Communal values are often difficult to articulate and the village is no exception here. What is clear is that the character of the historic village is much cherished by local residents. Much of the village is open to public access and public view. The paths, lanes and public open spaces across the village are in daily use; the buildings, including the church are part of that experience and the sense of history embodied in the village is experienced on a daily basis.

7. Recommendations

7.1. Open Spaces and views

These have not been accorded any rating in terms of status or quality as their value is multifaceted and complex. This account has sought to identify some of the factors which must be considered in attempting to assess their significance. It is not easy, therefore, to rank them, nor necessarily desirable. They embody values not always readily articulated or understood but which are nevertheless important and which should be enhanced.

Any proposed development that might have an impact on these open spaces or the views, throughout the village, should not be considered until a full assessment of the impact of the proposal on all aspects of its significance has been satisfactorily completed.

7.2. Historic buildings

Although there are 71 listed buildings in the village, there are many more buildings of interest which contribute to the character of the village and which should be considered as non-designated heritage assets for the purposes of the NPPF. These should be identified by the community in conjunction with the local authority and included on a local list. Policies to protect and enhance the significance of these should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan

The statutory list for the village is limited and more buildings are possibly worthy of statutory designation. List descriptions are cursory. Few interiors have been surveyed and it is here that there is the potential to discover much more about the history of the village and the inhabitants of the past. Heritage statements submitted with listed buildings applications have demonstrated that it would be a valuable exercise to survey the interiors of the historic buildings. As the early infrastructure of the village survives along with so many interesting buildings and extensive documentary records, Historic England might be approached about undertaking a fuller survey with a view to updating the designations.

7.3. Key features to consider for any new development.

- Retain and enhance open areas and views in the old core of the village
- Respect historic plot boundaries
- Accept informal road layouts and no streetlights rather than adopting standard highway solutions
- Green spaces respecting traditional layout
- Respect traditional building plots, scale, form and materials including techniques and detailing
- Recommend to local authority to undertake a conservation area appraisal, based on this report, a management plan and, potentially, an Article 4 direction
- Retain views within the village as well as out of and into the village.
- Identify opportunities to enhance the significance of the village
- Consider extending the conservation area boundary to include Mockbeggar's Hall and Farm
- Identify opportunities to improve the appearance of current negative features

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Appendix: Note on the authors

Dorian A T A Crone, BA, BArch, DipTP, RIBA, MRTPI, IHBC has been a Chartered Architect and Chartered Town Planner for over 30 years. He has also been a member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation for 25 years. Dorian is a committee member of The Institute of Historic Building Conservation, The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), ICOMOS UK . He has also been a court member of the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects and a Trustee of The Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust.

Dorian has worked for over 30 years as Historic Buildings and Areas Inspector with English Heritage, now Heritage England, responsible for providing advice to all the London Boroughs and both the City Councils. Dorian has also worked as a consultant and expert witness for over 20 years advising a wide variety of clients on heritage and design matters involving development work, alterations, extensions and new build projects associated with listed buildings and conservation areas in design and heritage sensitive locations.

He is a panel member of both the London Borough of Islington Design Review Panel and the John Betjeman Design Award . Dorian has also been a panel member of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition Architectural Awards and the Philip Webb Award along with a number other public sector and commercial design award. He has recently been appointed by CABE as a Built Environment Expert to sit on design review panels.

Dr Kathryn Elizabeth Davies, BA, MA, DPhil (Oxon), Dip TP, MRTPI, IHBC – Heritage Consultant has been a Chartered Town Planner and qualified in conservation for over 25 years. She is a founder member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and is currently Vice-Chair.

Kathryn sits on the Planning Panel for The Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society and The Oxford Preservation Trust. She is a member of The Oxfordshire Building Record and sits on the committee of The Oxfordshire Local History Association.

She has over 35 years' experience working in planning and conservation in local authorities in Burnley, North Shropshire and South Oxfordshire, for Historic England (formally English Heritage) as a Historic Buildings Inspector, Team Leader and as the Principal Historic Places Adviser - South East Region. She has recently been appointed by CABE as a Built Environment Expert to sit on design review panels.

Her work has inevitably covered the whole range of historic environment issues, but her specialism is in vernacular buildings. Of particular relevance is work on rural Buildings At Risk and engaging the public in understanding significance and characterisation. She has also lectured widely on conservation and her specific area of research, secular wall paintings, on which she has published a book and a number of papers.

APPENDIX 1
OXFORD CHARACTER ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

www.oxford.gov.uk
OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

DETAILED CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST

ENGLISH HERITAGE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This character assessment toolkit is designed to help you examine the character of areas, buildings and places in areas of Oxford to identify the features that contribute to their distinctiveness, interest and amenity. It also provides opportunities to identify features or issues that detract from the character of areas, spaces and buildings.

How the toolkit will be used

The historic environment makes an important contribution to the character of the city as a distinctive, interesting and special place. The buildings, spaces, associations and history that combine to create places mean different things to different people. The toolkit should help people to analyse the character of areas, spaces and buildings in a structured way. This should help to identify, define and understand the significance and value of different features of the environment that contribute to its character and distinctiveness.

While there is an accepted need for change to occur within many places in the city, proposals for change should be measured against their existing significance to ensure that their present values are not eroded. This should help to ensure that change enhances and sustains the value of the historic environment to the city for ourselves and future generations. The evidence and understanding provided by the process will enable management of change in an effective and positive manner.

What makes up character?

Elements of character include both the uses of an area and its physical features, such as styles of building, construction materials, architectural details or green landscape features. Others elements of character may be more emotional or personal perceptions of a place, such as historical or cultural associations with a place or building. Others may be relatively ephemeral or transitory, such as the smells and sounds associated with particular activities, which may occur only at certain times of the day or year. The features, listed in the Survey Sheets below, are common components of character, but the list is not exhaustive.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

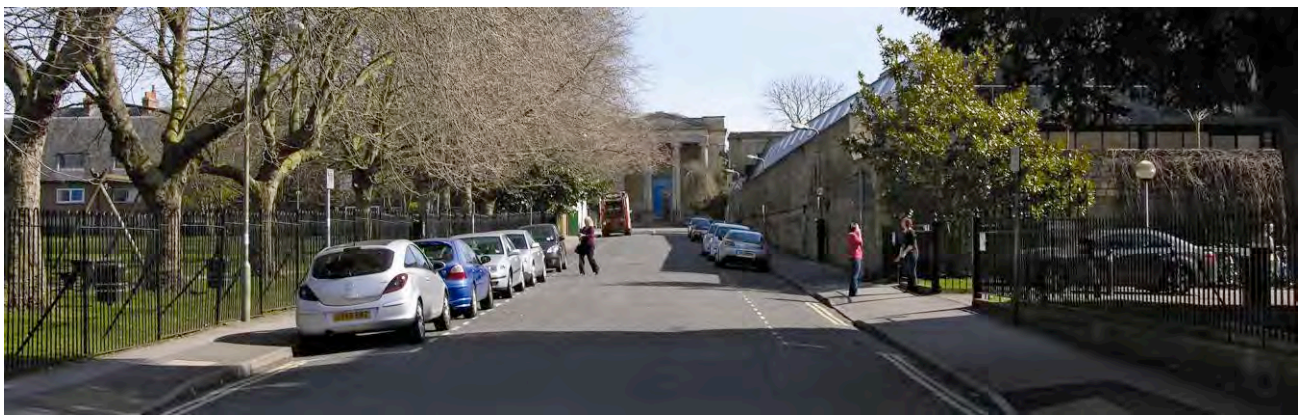
Undertaking your character assessment

In undertaking your assessment it is important to visit the area/building/space to complete a visual survey. In pilot studies, people have found they prefer to take photos and make brief notes whilst in the area, giving them time to examining the surroundings. They then make more detailed notes on the questionnaire, once they have completed the survey. Although there is no prescribed method for carrying out an assessment, the following structure may be helpful:

- It works best on a street by street basis. If you wish to assess a larger area it will be worth surveying each street individually and putting together an overall picture after all the surveys are finished.
- Take an initial walk around your survey area. Use this opportunity to note your initial thoughts/perceptions of the area and assign a score (see below) to the broad character features.
- Taking photographs is strongly recommended as they can illustrate and visually explain any comments you make on the questionnaire. They are also useful to look back over after you have completed the survey.
- Annotating a street plan/map is also a useful way to explain certain features e.g. direction of views, location of key buildings, spaces, etc.
- Make comments using the explanation of terms to prompt your thoughts.
- Give a score to each feature based on your opinion of its negative or positive contribution to the space.
- It is also worth noting how the building/space/area being assessed relates to its wider context e.g. how a building sits within a street or a street within an area. The setting and interrelationships between the single element, such as a building, and the wider context, such as the street, are just as important as the quality of the buildings themselves.

The tool kit is divided into a series of themed questionnaires that will prompt you to consider the contribution of different features that might contribute to the character of the area/building/space. The features listed are the main components of character but the list is not exhaustive. Depending upon the asset being assessed e.g. a building, street, space etc, not every feature in the list may be relevant and a comment should be entered only where applicable.

Each feature requires a brief comment of how you feel it contributes to the character and value of the area. The option is provided to assign a numerical score to reflect your perception of the significance of each feature to the character of the asset. The ‘scores’ given may vary from one individual to another. However, trends will be seen when comparing different surveys of the same asset.



Initial Reaction to an Area

The initial reaction is a summary of what you see and feel when you first enter the area being assessed.

Survey

In the main body of the toolkit, the character features outlined in the 'Initial Reaction' section are broken down into individual questionnaires. These prompt a finer level of analysis of each of the broader character themes. Again, not every feature in the list may be relevant and a comment and a numerical value should be entered only where applicable.

Final Reaction

This prompts a reassessment of your initial reactions. It allows you to see if your perception of the asset's character has changed as a result of the in-depth study. Try placing the nine character groups in an order of preference, with '1' being the feature you feel the most important contribution to its character and '9' the least.

Spirit of Place

This is an open question allowing you to articulate what you feel about the place and how it influences all your senses

Need more help?

A guidance document is available to view on the Character Assessment Toolkit Website. This includes explanations of some of the terms used in the questionnaires and some prompts to help you think about the contribution of different types of features to the character of the area. If you feel there is an additional feature, feel free to make a note of that separately in the comments box at the end of the questionnaire. Not every feature in the list may be relevant and you need only enter a comment where you feel it is applicable.

Further Research

A visual study may only take you so far in understanding what is special about an area. By researching its history you may develop a better understanding of how the buildings and spaces reflect its evolution and its unique character. You may wish to focus this research on how the physical characteristics reflect the process of its development, such as the formal design of a landscape, the functional and artistic elements of a building that reflect its use, or the social and economic processes that have influenced the evolution of a settlement. The Character Assessment Toolkit website includes a Research Area with tips and links to help you get started with your research. Some of the information may be readily accessible as online resources, whilst others may require visiting the local studies library, record office or other archives.

Assigning numerical values to features

Assigning a numerical value or score provides a mechanism for analysing and interpreting results over a wider area. Without scoring consistent interpretation and evaluation of text and written comments can be difficult

- +1 to +5: Positive features that add to the character or special nature of an area. This ranges from +1, slightly adds to the character, to +5, that significantly adds to the character.
- 0: Neutral features that are neutral. They neither detract nor add from/to the character of the area.
- -5 to -1: Negative features that detract/take away from the area. This ranges from -5, significantly detract, to -1, slightly detract.

SURVEY DETAILS	
STREET/BUILDING/ AREA NAME	
DATE	
TIME	
WEATHER	

1: INITIAL REACTION: What do you first see as making the most important contribution to the character of the area? Is the area's character defined by the public or private spaces, groups of buildings or particular views, the presence of particular materials or its trees and greenery? Do these reflect particular aspects of the area's history? Are less tangible features, such as the activity, noises and smells of the area significant? Please provide a few brief reasons for your choices.

FEATURE	***COMMENTS***	***VALUE -5 TO +5***
SPACES		
BUILDINGS		
VIEWS		
LIGHT/DARK		
SURFACES		
GREENERY & LANDSCAPE		
USES AND ACTIVITY		
NOISES AND SMELLS		
GENERAL COMMENTS		

2: SPACES: A 'space' is normally the gap between buildings and other features. They may be formally designed or develop informally over time. They may be enclosed by surrounding buildings, trees and foliage, have structure created by the alignment and spacing of surrounding buildings or property boundaries, and be narrow or wide and open. The character of areas can depend on their uses and vibrancy, as well as the choice of paving, kerbs, seating, telephone or post boxes or the presence of formal planting or other greenery.		
FEATURE	***COMMENTS***	***VALUE -5 TO +5***
FORMAL / INFORMAL SPACES		
GAPS BETWEEN BUILDINGS		
MEANS OF ENCLOSURE		
BUILDING PLOTS		
WIDE/OPEN SPACES		
NARROW / ENCLOSED SPACES		
WINDING / STRAIGHT SPACES		
RELATIONSHIP OF THE SPACE TO BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES		
USES AND ACTIVITY		
PAVING MATERIALS		
STREET FURNITURE		
IMPACT OF VEHICLES AND TRAFFIC		
USABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF THE SPACE		

3.0 BUILDINGS: Do buildings make an important contribution to the character of the area and if so what features are significant to their contribution? Do buildings reflect an important period in the area's history and is this reflected in their past or current use? Do buildings share a uniform scale and size, or is there a high degree of variation that is visually attractive? Are the buildings very old or do they form a single development with shared or similar architectural detailing? Do styles of windows, doors or other features add to the visual interest of the buildings, reflect their origins and use, or form part of a designed scheme? What condition are the buildings in? Have changes increased or reduced their interest, or have they lost important features?

FEATURE	***COMMENTS***	***VALUE -5 TO +5***
CONTRIBUTION OF BUILDINGS TO THE SPACE		
SIZE/SCALE		
AGE		
MATERIALS		
WINDOWS		
DOORS		
ROOFS / CHIMNEYS / GABLES		
USES (PAST AND PRESENT)		
CAN YOU TELL IF A BUILDING HAS BEEN ALTERED?		
CONDITION		

4.0 VIEWS: Are there views of interest and distinction? Is a view well known because of a historical event, painting, prose or poetry, or is it popular with local residents as a part of a public place? Are views glimpsed through gaps between buildings, channelled by lines of trees or buildings, or open and expansive? Does the shape of a street create a series of views, or is a single viewing point particularly important? What features of the view contribute to its interest? Does a landmark, such as a building or group of trees, form a focal point? Does the view include an attractive frontage or roofscape? Is the view urban or rural in character? Do background features like the city's rural setting contribute to the view's attractiveness?

FEATURE	***COMMENTS***	***VALUE -5 TO +5***
HISTORIC / POPULAR VIEWS		
FORM OF VIEW: SHORT OR LONG, UNFOLDING, GLIMPSED, CHANNELLED OR WIDE AND OPEN		
FOCAL POINTS		
STREETSCAPE		
ROOFSCAPE		
URBAN/RURAL VIEWS		
VIEWS OUT OF THE SPACE		

5.0 LANDSCAPE: What landscape features contribute to the area's character and how do they affect it? Do hedgerows or grass verges create a rural feel or do street trees provide a leafy suburban character. What hard surfaces are present, are they attractively designed or do they use materials that are out of keeping with the area? Does their maintenance affect their contribution? Is a river of canal a significant feature in the area? Does it have scenic or wildlife value?

FEATURE	***COMMENTS***	***VALUE -5 TO +5***
LEAFY AND/OR GREEN IMAGE		
HARD URBAN LANDSCAPE		
PUBLIC/PRIVATE GREENERY		
DOES WATER FORM A KEY FEATURE OF THE AREA		
TOPOGRAPHY		

6.0 AMBIENCE: Many less tangible features, such as activity, changes in light during the day, shadows and reflections affect reaction to an area. How does the area change between day and night? Do dark corners or alleyways feel unsafe at night time? What smells and noises are you aware of and is the area busy or tranquil? What affect, if any, does vehicle traffic have on character?

FEATURE	***COMMENTS***	***VALUE -5 TO +5***
ACTIVITIES		
LEVEL OF ACTIVITY		
TRAFFIC		
DARK, SHADY, LIGHT, AIRY		
DAY AND NIGHT		
SMELLS		
NOISES		

7.0: FINAL REACTION: Take a moment to consider the notes and scores that you made, in your initial reactions survey sheet and the subsequent pages. Are there any features that you would now rate as having a greater positive or negative value, or are there particular aspects of these features that you would highlight as having a high significance to the character of the area? Try ranking the features in order of their relative importance in forming the area's character and appearance.

RANK IN ORDER OF CONTRIBUTION BETWEEN 1 (HIGH) AND 9 (LOW)

FEATURE	***EXAMPLE***	*YOUR* ***HIERARCHY***
BUILDINGS	1	
SPACES	5	
LONG/SHORT VIEWS	2	
LIGHT/DARK	4	
SURFACES	3	
GREENERY & LANDSCAPE FEATURES	6	
NOISE, SMELL AND TRAFFIC	7	

8.0 SPIRIT OF PLACE: Having undertaken the survey and scoring now try to sum up the character of the area in a few brief sentences, picking out the most significant positive and negative features of its character and appearance.