



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.



