

Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area Appraisal



Historic rural village

designated 16 July 1990

This appraisal and the accompanying map has been prepared in collaboration with Blunsdon Parish Council and was adopted by Swindon Borough Council as “a proper assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area” on 11th December 2000. and re-designated on 4th April 2006



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Introduction

Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area was designated by Thamesdown Borough Council on 16th July 1990.

This document defines and records the special architectural or historic interest that warrants designation of Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area and identifies elements that contribute to its special character and appearance.

Development proposals which affect the conservation area will be judged for their effect on the area's character and appearance as identified in this conservation area appraisal.

A conservation area is "an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" (Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

When considering applications for development which affect a conservation area "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area." (Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

This appraisal, in defining the special interest, character and appearance of the conservation area, provides a sound basis for development control decisions. It will help planning officers, developers, designers and the public at large assess whether a proposed development affecting a conservation area would, or would not, preserve or enhance the character and appearance of that area.

This appraisal should be read in conjunction with policies contained in the current Swindon Borough Local Plan and with national planning policy guidance, especially Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment.

The information contained in this appraisal was collected during the year 2000. To be concise and readable, it does not record all features. The omission of any feature from the text or accompanying maps does not, therefore, mean that it must not be of interest or value.

Location

Broad Blunsdon is located six kilometres north of Swindon town-centre close to the A 419 Swindon to Cirencester road, a principal route linking the M4 and M5 motorways. The Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area covers a small part of the village of the same name and lies wholly to the east of the A419 and north of the B4019, a minor road from the A419 to Highworth. The village is located in the Parish of Blunsdon St. Andrew in north east Wiltshire.

Lower Blunsdon, or Blunsdon 'lower village', lies one kilometre north of Broad Blunsdon. Blunsdon St. Andrew, sometimes called Little Blunsdon, is situated on the west side of the A419. Lower Blunsdon and Blunsdon St. Andrew also contain conservation areas.

Origins and history of the settlement

The name Blunsdon apparently means Blunt's hill (old English 'dun') and refers to an early Lord of the Manor¹. Broad is derived from an old English word meaning 'great' and denotes the larger of the settlements of Blunsdon.

There is an Iron Age hill fort, Castle Hill, just east of the present-day village and, west of the village, the A419 follows the course of the Roman road known as 'Ermin Street'. There have been several Roman finds in the locality including the remains of a major Roman religious complex.

Blunsdon is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as 'Blontesdone' and the area's early origins are still evident today in the 13th century work to be found in St. Leonard's Church in Broad Blunsdon and St. Andrew's Church in Blunsdon St. Andrew. There have been discoveries of signs of medieval occupation in the western portion of the conservation area around Orchard House. Since that time Broad Blunsdon has grown and developed as a small North Wiltshire agricultural community housed beside narrow country lanes and by-passed by busy roads.

In recent years the village has expanded and this has resulted in the loss of many old buildings and the gradual sub-urbanisation of much of the village.

¹Wiltshire Place Names. R.Tomkins (Redbrick Publishing 1983)

Conservation area designation aims to help Broad Blunsdon retain its special historic identity. Following the readoption of this character appraisal in April 2006 a number of small boundary changes occurred:-

- Public gardens on Holdcroft Close
- A minor boundary change to the rear garden area of No 4 The Ridge

Landscape setting

Broad Blunsdon is situated in rural surroundings on a rise of land overlooking the Upper Thames. The village lies on Coral Rag above the clays of the Upper Thames valley.

To the north, at the foot of the scarp, is the associated settlement of Lower Blunsdon, a close but distinct settlement which is also a conservation area. Beyond this open countryside stretches north towards the Cotswolds. To the south of the conservation area lies open land whose rural character is diminishing as Swindon expands northwards.

Boundaries of the conservation area

The Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area is made up of two parts separated by modern housing. Historically, the two parts form part of the same historic settlement but this has been divided by an intrusive wedge of 20th century housing. This modern housing, some of which has been built on the site of old cottages and other historic buildings, has been omitted from the conservation area leaving two separate, but historically linked, parts that form the conservation area.

The smaller of the two areas, at the east end of High Street around St. Leonard's Church, is wholly on the top of the scarp. A second area, at the west end of High Street, encloses historic properties on either side of the High Street and an area of steeply sloping land containing Hunts Hill and Chapel Hill.

The eastern area has at its core St Leonard's Church and Manor House Farm, two grade II* listed buildings. To the west the boundary extends to enclose four other historic buildings, Pear Tree Cottage, one of the village's oldest cottages,

and The Old School, a good example of a 19th century National School. Old Crown Cottages and 14 High Street are included because of their historic appearance and their contribution to the historic character of the area.

East of the church the boundary includes the listed Old Rectory, secluded behind tall trees. Church Cottage and modern houses at the start of Burytown Lane are included because insensitive development in this area could spoil the special interest of the conservation area and the setting of the church. The stone outbuildings beside church Cottage apparently occupy the site of the Village Pound².

Trees are a particular feature of this area and, in addition to the well tree'd environs of church and manor, the conservation area boundary encloses a small copse on the corner of Sams Lane and three mature beeches and a Scots pine beside a modern bungalow, Greystone.

The western part of the conservation area, at the west end of the High Street, encompasses the village's historic street pattern (High Street, Chapel Hill and Hunts Hill) around which are scattered the rest of the area's old buildings. Modern cul-de-sac housing developments have been omitted.

Two open spaces on the edge of the settlement have been included in recognition of their contribution to the distinctive character of the area. An orchard north of Deacon's Court at the foot of Hunts Hill is part of the open countryside that divides Broad Blunsdon from Lower Blunsdon adding to the rural ambience of both Broad Blunsdon and Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area³ and enabling each to retain a separate and distinct identity. A field and orchard south of High Street, behind The Retreat and The Limes, is a similar open space on the southern edge of the village. The western part of the conservation area is, with the exception of these two open spaces, encircled by modern development. These spaces form a vital connection between the historic settlement and the open countryside beyond.

²About Blunsdon - A North Wiltshire Village. E.M. Levinge & R. Radway (1976) p.106

³See 'Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area Appraisal', Swindon Borough Council, 2000

Present day

Over the past 30 years, Broad Blunsdon has grown rapidly from a small rural village to become a residential dormitory for Swindon. Although its agricultural character has declined, a rural ambience may still be found - especially on Chapel Hill, Hunts Hill and Burytown Lane.

Broad Blunsdon's historic core is now almost encircled by late 20th century housing arranged in a contorted pattern of mainly cul-de-sac developments of bungalows, detached and semi-detached houses.

The conservation area has a generally quiet atmosphere although noise from traffic along the A419 can be heard in the background. The B4019 is a former turnpike from 'Ermin Street' (the present-day A419) to Highworth. This forms an effective east-west by-pass for the village allowing its quiet character to be maintained.

Within the village are a hotel and conference centre, a small industrial site, a village hall and a junior school with playing fields. The Parish Church and Methodist Chapel are active but the chapel on Chapel Hill has now been converted to residential use . The original shop within the village has since closed but a new shop within the boundary of the village hall has recently opened.. There is also a public house within the village

Summary of general character

The special interest that justifies designation of Broad Blunsdon Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors including -

- the historic layout and street pattern of the village;
- the setting of the village in a pastoral landscape with significant views over the Upper Thames valley;
- the architectural and historic interest of the village's buildings and other structures - in particular the grade II* listed St Leonard's Church and Manor House;
- the prevalent use of local building materials, notably stone and red brick;
- the area's trees, hedges and other vegetation especially where these bound a road or footpath;
- local features and details that give the area its distinctive identity;
- the area's tranquil village atmosphere.

Street pattern, layout and streetscape

Within the conservation area, Blunsdon has retained its old street pattern - High Street, Chapel Lane, Hunts Hill. The High Street follows an old route on the edge of the scarp from which Chapel Lane and Hunts Hill descend steeply to Front Lane which, in turn, leads to Lower Blunsdon (sometimes known as 'lower village') on the edge of the Thames Valley plain. Building on High Street's south side generally stands close to, and parallel with, the road. Either side of the junction with Holdcroft Close is the recently developed Millennium Garden.⁴ On the north side, where the land falls abruptly, the relationship of buildings to the road is more varied.

⁴ The garden area to the West of Holdcroft Close is to be included within the boundary of the Conservation Area following a review of the area in 2005

The width of High Street varies, narrowing close to the junction with Hunts Hill but returning to its full width beyond the Methodist Chapel. Unlike Hunts Hill and Chapel Hill it can accommodate two way traffic and a footway for pedestrians. A 30 mph speed limit is in force but speeding can be a problem. A weight restriction applies.

Sams Lane leaves the High Street opposite Manor Farm House and proceeds south to join the B4019. East of the Sams Lane junction (reputedly the site of the village stocks) the High Street swings north becoming Churchway, the modern name for the top of Back Lane which, like Hunts Hill and Chapel Hill, descends to Lower Blunsdon. Here, the stone-tiled lych gate overlooks a spacious road junction. Burytown Lane, a narrow lane with grass verges leads to the burial ground associated with St Leonard's Church, further on is leads to Castle Hill, a pre-Roman earthwork, and Upper Burytown Farm, a large 17th century house.

Chapel Hill is a steep and narrow lane with a tarmac road surface. It is not a suitable through road for vehicles but there is vehicular access to properties at the top and bottom of the hill, from High Street and Hunts Hill respectively.

At the top, remnants of two stone piers stand at the entrance to The Lodge, 64 High Street marking the former rear entrance to Blunsdon House. Proceeding downhill, the lane narrows beside Hillside Cottage but soon opens out between a row of mature beech trees and a stream. Just before Teapot Cottage a wooded footpath leads off to the left and there is a fine long view over the plain.

Momentarily, the area has the atmosphere of a woodland footpath.

After passing a picturesque thatched cottage and old brick-fronted chapel the character of the lane changes abruptly where it has been widened to make a standard size vehicular access from Hunts Hill to The Copse (a modern development outside the conservation area) and two other new houses, Random Patch and Brookwood. This small area shows the adverse effect that even apparently minor road works can have on the historic rural character of an area. An open space north of The Copse provides a spacious setting for Deacons Court, a row of early 18th century cottages.

Hunts Hill forks from the High Street, descends gently at first but, after a bend in the road where a narrow public footpath emerges, falls steeply with a slight curve until Deacons Court is reached. The road is barely passable by two vehicles and there are no street lights, kerbs or road markings - the absence of these suburban items helps preserve the area's rural character which is further enhanced by the wild flowers, cultivated plants and other greenery which grows right up to the road verge.

Five historic buildings (Hunts Hill House, Fern Cottage, Hunts Hill Cottage, Number 8 and The Cottage) on the west side create the special historic interest of this area but the character of the street is marred by Orchard House which, because of its size and design, does not harmonise with its surroundings. Modern dwellings which replace old thatched cottages that once stood on the east side of Hunts Hill are not included within the conservation area but are generally well concealed behind tall hedges.

Deacons Court and West Hill House mark the end of the historic settlement area of Broad Blunsdon. Deacons Court is gable end onto the road, its setting enhanced by a rough track running in front. Hunts Hill, known as Front Lane after the junction with Ivy Lane, proceeds through an area of open countryside towards Lower Blunsdon. New dwellings on the east side are excluded from the conservation area but the stream, old hedge, meadow and ancient fruit trees in Deacons Court orchard on the west side makes a valuable contribution to the character of Hunts Hill.

Views into and out of the conservation area

Landscape setting is an important part of the special interest of this conservation area. Views of surrounding land contribute significantly to its character and reinforce the area's distinct identity as a rural spring line settlement high above the Thames plain.

Views southwards from within the conservation area are restricted by new housing but from the copse beside Church Cottage and, more significantly, through the wide entrance to The Limes there are open views of field and orchard which are

reminders of the village's agricultural origins and help to define the village's predominantly rural location.

In contrast, there are long views northwards over the Thames plain to the Cotswold Hills. It is said locally that seven churches can be seen from the vantage point of the nearby ancient hill-fort on Castle Hill (outside the conservation area). The best panoramic views in the conservation area are from the High Street in the vicinity of The Retreat, from outside the Village Hall and from part-way down Hunts Hill and Chapel Hill. To a lesser extent, there are similar views from St. Leonard's Church.

Architectural and historic character; prevalent building materials

Buildings within the conservation area are predominantly two storey and residential. In general, the conservation area is characterised by vernacular stone cottages dating from the 18th century. Dispersed amongst the cottages are a number of later dwellings such as The Retreat and The Limes which have been consciously designed in a recognisable style or, like The Old Rectory, by a known architect (Ewan Christian). Three religious buildings, a former school and an early 20th century public house are also present. In general, the area's prestigious buildings are to be found on the High Street.

St Leonard's Church is the oldest building in the area. It dates from the 13th century but was extensively restored by Butterfield in 1870. Manor House, west of the church, is a late 16th century house built of local rubble stone with a stone tile roof.

The 18th century is well represented by small cottages built with locally available materials. Rubble stone is the usual walling material and in many instances this has been painted. Early 18th century cottages have timber lintels above windows and doors but, later, red brick has been used in quoins and dressings. Pear Tree Cottage, High Street exemplifies the former, West Hill House, Hunts Hill the latter.

Although thatch would once have been more common, only 47 High Street and The Cottage in Chapel Lane retain a thatched roof. Stone tiles have been used to roof St Leonards Church, Manor House, West Hill House, Old Rectory and Teapot

Cottage but many original thatched and stone tiled roofs have been replaced with slate or, more recently, thick concrete tiles. Brick chimney stacks with clay pots are the norm and timber casement windows with small panes of glass are common.

From the 19th century there are two chapels; a Primitive Methodist chapel (1864) on Chapel Hill (converted to residential use) and a Wesleyan chapel (1881) on the High Street - both are plain rectangular buildings typical of their type and period. The Methodist chapel on High Street, still in use, occupies a prominent corner site. The Village Hall, High Street, is typical of Victorian school building with bellcote and thin lancet windows.

The Retreat, High Street, is an early 19th century building with coach house. It has a symmetrical facade with classical portico and sliding sash windows. The Old Rectory (1868) exemplifies the move away from late Georgian symmetry and classical proportion to an irregular form with off-centre chimney stack, stone bay window and projecting tall gable 'wing'.

As transport throughout the country improved during the 19th century imported brick and Welsh slate came into the village. Hunts Hill House (c.1870), Number 8 Hunts Hill (1869) and the Primitive Methodist Chapel (1864) are amongst the first brick buildings in the area with roof slates imported from Wales. The Limes, High Street, is a red brick villa with stone bay windows typical of the end of the 19th century - also with Welsh slate roof.

The Heart in Hand was built in 1924 by the Lamb Brewery of Frome. The timber-framed lych gate at St Leonard's church was built to commemorate villagers killed in the 1914-1918 War. Although the boundary of the conservation area has been drawn to exclude modern housing, there are a number of late 20th century 'infill' dwellings which do not make a positive contribution to the conservation area.

The conservation area is characterised by small 18th century stone cottages and single examples of particular building types that record the gradual development of the village: medieval church (restored), Jacobean manor house, late Georgian dwelling and coach house, nonconformist chapels, Victorian school, rectory in Victorian 'eclectic' style, late 19th century red brick villa, 1920s public house,

memorial lych gate. All of these buildings are relatively unaltered and contribute significantly to the architectural and historic interest of the conservation area.

Key buildings of interest⁵

English Heritage advice⁶ is that, "most of the buildings in a conservation area will help to shape its character in one way or another" and in addition to Broad Blunsdon's listed buildings there are a number of other buildings which make a strong contribution to the architectural and historic interest of the area - these are identified on the accompanying map. Some have been mentioned above.

As the conservation area is typified by stone cottages, those that remain with original features or little changed external appearance are a vital part of the area's character. For example, Church Cottage, Old Crown Cottage and 14 High Street at the eastern end of the High Street and, to the west, The Forge (54), South Cottage, Holly Cottage and 56-60 High Street. Teapot Cottage, Chapel Hill and the five cottages on the west side of Hunts Hill are also notable. Teapot Cottage is of particular note because it retains a stone tiled roof.

Rose Villa and Number 36 High Street are prominent in the street scene because of their location on a bend in the High Street. The former is constructed with local stone, the latter has an attractive brick front.

Outbuildings which relate by age or material to their 'host' buildings contribute subtly to the area's interest. For example, outbuildings at Manor Farm House and those next to Church Cottage.

Trees

Trees add significantly to the interest of the area and there are several specimen trees which act as a backdrop or as a setting to the area's buildings. The eastern part of the conservation area is very well tree'd - church, manor house and rectory are, in summer, well concealed behind mature lime, chestnut and yew.

Elsewhere, garden trees are common and there is a fine row of beeches beside

⁵See Swindon Borough Local Plan SPG: 'Buildings, Structures and Facades of Local Importance'.

⁶Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage, March 1997

Chapel Hill, once part of the estate of Blunsdon House, a large 19th century house now absorbed within the Blunsdon House Hotel.

The copse beside the junction of Sams Lane and High Street contains two benches and newly planted trees which will mature to replace trees that will soon come to the end of their lives. A tall yew in West Hill House garden makes a significant contribution to the area.

Those trees, and groups of trees, which are particularly prominent and make a positive contribution to the conservation area are identified on the attached map. In such a well tree'd area, it has not been possible to identify every notable tree and lack of a specific reference should not imply that it must not be of value.

All trees within conservation areas are protected by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In most cases, anyone proposing to do work on a tree in a conservation area (which is not already protected by a Tree Preservation Order) must give the Council six weeks notice, unless it can be shown that immediate danger threatens.

Local details and features

There are a number of local features which add to the area's distinct identity and form part of the special interest of the area. It is highly desirable that these features are retained.

Stream and springs: A stream accompanies the pedestrian along Chapel Hill and, further down the hill, after Deacons Court. The sound of the stream and the associated plant life contribute to the area's charm.

Boundary walls: Stone walls are a feature of the area, complementing the common use of stone as a house building material. Notable walls are to be found around the churchyard, the Village Hall and bounding properties at the top of Chapel Hill. An unusual wall, brick on one side and stone on the other, separates the gardens of Hunts Hill House and Orchard House. At West Hill House there is wall of large upright stone slates.

Roadside kerbs of sarsen stone, a local stone noted for its durability, are present in the High Street, particularly between Hunts Hill and Chapel Hill.

Railings: The conservation area is notable for iron railings and gates on the boundaries of many properties - for example at Woodbine Cottage, Fern Cottage, Teapot Cottage, Deacons Court and the primitive Methodist Chapel.

Gardens: A major element in the character and appearance of the area is the well tended gardens, often stocked with traditional English 'cottage garden' plants.

Negative factors

The standardised vehicular access to The Copse has spoiled the character of the lower end of Chapel Hill. In older buildings, the gradual loss of traditional roofing materials and original timber windows has begun to erode the area's historic character.

Scope for improvement

Long term tree management needs careful consideration, particularly around St. Leonard's Church and the Old Rectory.

Speeding traffic along the High Street is a problem and additional traffic control measures, sensitive to the special interest of the area, would benefit the character of this quiet conservation area.

Removal of overhead cables would improve the appearance of the area. There is a need for a pavement to link Hatchers Crescent to the path opposite the Methodist Chapel.

Useful publications

About Blunsdon - A North Wiltshire Village. E.M.Levinge & R..Radway (1976)

Blunsdon - Looking Back. R.S.Radway

The Buildings of England (Wiltshire).N. Pevsner (Penguin 1975)

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Swindon Borough Local Plan (1999).

Supplementary Planning Guidance: 'Good Design: House Extensions' (Thamesdown Borough 1990).

Supplementary Planning Guidance: 'Buildings, Structures and Facades of Local Importance'. (Swindon Borough 1999).

Conservation Areas (Swindon Borough Council 1997).

Planning Policy Guidance 15 - Planning and the Historic Environment.

Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage, June 1997.

Conservation Area Practice, English Heritage, October 1995

BROAD BLUNSDON CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN











MANAGEMENT ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	ACTIONS REQUIRED
Planning & Design		
<i>Existing Modern Development</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>There is little modern development with the conservation area. Some modern properties adjacent to current boundaries contrast sharply with the more traditional architecture of the village. (Hunts Hill & The Copse)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure future development proposals are strictly controlled in terms of design and materials 	Consultation with:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning & conservation department
<i>Future Development</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ad-hoc planning applications, for alterations, conversions and refurbishment of properties.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure future development proposals are strictly controlled in terms of design and materials 	Consultation with:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning & conservation department
Public Realm & Amenity		
<i>Signage & street furniture</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Street signage limited to directional signs and mandatory speed signs.</i> <i>Minimal advertising signage due to low number of shops/facilities.</i> <i>Overhead cables and wires impinge of views in & out of area.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that all existing signage is maintained in good order. Remove unnecessary or redundant signage. Assess if overhead cables could be removed or re-routed at ground level. 	Consultation with:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning & conservation department & Liaison and co-operation with SBC traffic management & highways & Utility companies.

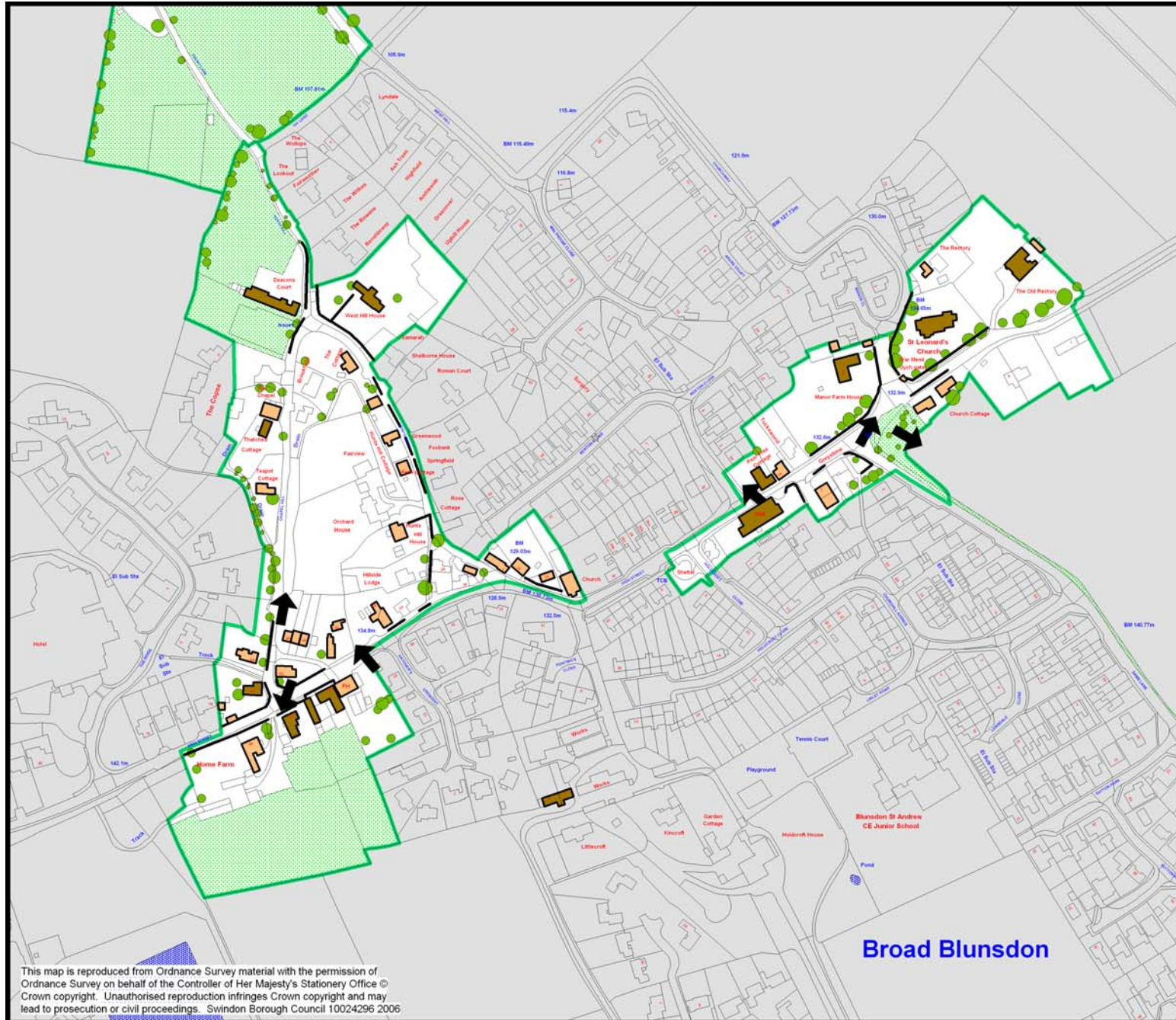
MANAGEMENT ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	ACTIONS REQUIRED
Public Realm & Amenity		
<i>Shops & Retail</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing community shop is successfully run within a temporary building adjacent to the Village Hall. • Former shop reverted back to domestic use. • A community hall and Pub' are present within the village. No other facilities are present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideally a permanent home for the village shop would be more acceptable in terms of visual amenity and accessibility for users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued dialogue with building owners to encourage maintenance. • Consider possible enforcement action where necessary through SBC
<i>Parking</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No immediate concerns with parking within village • Most properties have off road parking. Some street parking along the High Street • Chapel Hill remains 'access only' due to narrow width of road. Some inappropriate reduction of verges has occurred due to private access alterations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing parking arrangements appears to work satisfactorily • Ensure roads and pavements are maintained to adequate standard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison and co-operation with SBC traffic management & highways safety.
<i>Traffic</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most traffic by-passes Broad Blunsdon via B4019 (Cricklade Road). • Traffic in this area is generally local to the village or Lower Blunsdon, however rush hour traffic can use this area as a local diversion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing traffic scheme does not totally deflect traffic away from sensitive historic areas. • Look into schemes to reducing/limit non-local traffic within Village 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued liaison and co-operation with SBC traffic management & highways safety.

Broad Blunston Conservation Area

Key to map

Given the complexity of the area, the omission of any feature from this map should not be interpreted as evidence that it is not of interest or value.

-  Boundary of conservation area
-  Listed building
-  Key building of interest
-  Significant tree or trees
-  Area of water
-  Important green space
-  Wooded area
-  Significant wall or boundary
-  Area with distinct identity
-  Important view



Broad Blunston

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