

Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan



- Conservation area designated on 14th September 1992
- Appraisal and management plan adopted 4th April 2006

This appraisal, management plan and the accompanying map has been prepared in collaboration with Blunsdon Parish Council. Swindon Borough Council's Planning Committee approved the document on 4th April 2006.

At the same time, the Committee authorised the Director of Planning and Transport to use the document for planning and development control purposes.



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Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area Appraisal

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Introduction

Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area was designated by Thamesdown Borough Council on 14th September 1992.

This document defines and records the special architectural or historic interest that warrants designation of Lower 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

Lower Blunsdon, or Blunsdon 'lower village', is a hamlet of residential and farming buildings and associated land, set in rural surroundings just north of the larger village of Broad Blunsdon in the Parish of Blunsdon St. Andrew, in north-east Wiltshire.

The hamlet is one kilometre north of Broad Blunsdon and seven kilometres north of Swindon town-centre. It lies east of the A 419 Swindon to Cirencester road which is a principal traffic route linking the M4 and M5 motorways. By road, it can be reached via a narrow level lane off the A419 at the foot of Blunsdon Hill or along one of two steep lanes, Churchway and Hunts Hill, that descend from Broad Blunsdon to become, at the foot of the hill, Back Lane and Front Lane respectively.

Blunsdon St. Andrew, sometimes called Little Blunsdon, is situated on the west side of the A419. Broad Blunsdon and Blunsdon St. Andrew also contain conservation areas.

Origins and history of the settlement

Lower Blunsdon, on the edge of the Upper Thames valley plain, developed as an outlier of Broad Blunsdon, a hill-top settlement where medieval church and manor house were established. The name Blunsdon apparently means Blunt's hill (old English 'dun') and refers to an early Lord of the Manor¹.

There is an Iron Age hill fort, Castle Hill, situated on the ridge to the south east and, west of the hamlet, 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 is a reference to one Henry Fowler in 1281, the origins of Fowler's farm, but no further information relating to any settlement.

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

Over the past 400 years, building in Lower Blunsdon has been small-scale, unpretentious and almost exclusively associated with farming. The community's social buildings (public houses, chapels, school, village hall, post office) have been located in Broad Blunsdon. (Lower and Upper Wanborough in the Borough of Swindon stand in a similar relationship, but the connection at Blunsdon is clearer to read).

Present day

Today, Lower Blunsdon is a generally sleepy tranquil place with little traffic or other bustling activity but there are high traffic levels during morning 'rush hour' due to drivers using the village to bypass queues on Blunsdon Hill.

St Leonard's Farm is no longer active, farm buildings remain but some have been converted to residential use. There is no pub, shop, church or school. The hamlet has no bus service (the nearest is at Broad Blunsdon). Lower Blunsdon has the ambience of an island, cut off from the busy modern world which is, however, not far away. This feeling of isolation is part of its character.

Landscape setting

Lower Blunsdon lies on clay at the edge of the Upper Thames valley plain 50 metres below Broad Blunsdon which sits on an east-west Coral Ragstone ridge.

The hamlet is surrounded by open countryside and is separated from Broad Blunsdon by green open space that forms a distinct gap between the two settlements.

The open countryside around the hamlet is an intrinsic part of its character and the space between Lower Blunsdon and Broad Blunsdon is an important long-standing local feature described in greater detail below.

Boundaries

The boundary of Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area has been drawn to enclose two inter-related areas: the built up historic settlement area of Lower Blunsdon and green open space that separates the hamlet from Broad Blunsdon.

To the north east, and to the north, the conservation area is bounded by Back Lane. Beyond Back Lane, flat farmland extends to the distance.

Front Lane (sometimes called The Street) forms the spine of the area and runs through the centre of the conservation area, north-west to south-east. The western boundary of the conservation area runs roughly parallel to Front Lane enclosing all the buildings on its west side and the westward extent of their gardens beyond which is open countryside. A pond to the rear of The Ferns is also included.

Proceeding southwards, the boundary has been drawn to enclose open space facing Front Lane, north-west and south-east of Callais House and an open rectangular paddock formed by Ivy Lane, Front Lane, Back Lane and the wooded area south of Grove House. Ivy Lane forms the southern boundary of the conservation area.

The paddock, wooded area and open space beside Callais House is a significant tract of undeveloped land which separates and maintains the contrasting character of the two distinct parts of Broad Blunsdon.

Summary of general character

The conservation area is characterised by a mixture of historic buildings and old roadside walls, limited 20th century infill, areas of green open space and some fine groups of mature trees and hedges.

The special interest that justifies designation of Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors relating to these parts, including -

- the rural setting of the conservation area in open countryside and the green open space that separates and distinguishes Lower Blunsdon from Broad Blunsdon;
- the architectural and historic interest of the area's buildings, four of which are listed, and the prevalent use of local building materials, in particular the use of local stone;
- the hamlet's historic linear settlement pattern;
- the tranquillity of the area;
- the area's trees, hedges and other vegetation;
- natural stone walls - particularly in roadside locations;
- local features and details that give the area its distinctive identity.

Settlement pattern

Lower Blunsdon developed in a linear form along Front Lane, the spine of the settlement. Houses and cottages faced Front Lane, which aligns with a watercourse, and their curtilages ran back, on the east side to Back Lane, and on the west to the edge of fields.

There has been variety in buildings' relationship to Front Lane, some, like St. Leonard's Cottages and Fowler's Farm Cottages, directly front the road whilst others, like The Ferns² and Bagnall Cottage stand back. Longways (now extended) stands at right angles to the road. There is no 'backland' development.

² A recent appeal was dismissed to build an additional property adjacent to The Ferns on a strip of narrow open land .APP/U3935/A/04/1167384

Homeleigh and Yew Tree Cottage, beside a public footpath, is the only example of development in depth.

New development within the hamlet has followed the traditional linear pattern. Half of the new houses have been placed in the northern end of the hamlet and, as one proceeds southwards, building density decreases until one reaches the open paddock south of Grove House. Lower Blunsdon is a small conservation area, sensitive to change, and further development could adversely affect its characteristic un-crowded settlement pattern.

Proposals for new development that do not consider the above are unlikely to receive approval. Buildings that do not relate to the existing traditional built form of this hamlet may well have a negative impact on the local environment.

Highways and streetscape

Front Lane and Back Lane meander, roughly parallel, down a very slight gradient to meet at a junction just beyond the entrance to St. Leonard's Farm. From here the road leads to Grains Farm and the A419. The lanes are narrow, grass-verged, unkerbed and of varying width punctuated by occasional 30mph speed restriction signs. In general, the absence of standardised road markings, street lights and other sub-urban items enhances the area's rural atmosphere.

Front Lane

With the exception of Page Hay Cottages, all the hamlet's historic buildings front Front Lane, giving the area a historic character and appearance which conservation area status seeks to preserve. Dwellings recently built on Front Lane (Acorns, Yenton Acre, Fariview, Beggars Roost, Springfields and Down Elm House) have followed a linear pattern but Yenton Acre and, to a lesser extent, Beggars Roost obtrude upon the streetscene because they lack a roadside boundary hedge or wall to their frontage.

Towards the north-west end of Front Lane dwellings are quite closely grouped but as one moves toward Blunsdon, buildings on either side of the road are set in more spacious plots of land. Four buildings (The Elms, Longways, Streetside and Grove House) at the southern end of the settlement area are an exception.

Back Lane

Historically, Back Lane, as its name implies, was a means of access to fields and the rear of Front Lane properties. It leads from St Leonard's Farm to the Church of St. Leonard in Broad Blunsdon, leaving the conservation area at its junction with Ivy Lane. A hundred years ago, Page Hay was the only cottage facing Back Lane³. Today, the old settlement pattern has been altered by the introduction of six new dwellings at the north-west end of Back Lane. This has given the length of road between Robin Hood and Swallows Retreat an uncharacteristically modern character arising from the obvious 20th century appearance of the dwellings, wide vehicular accesses and the planting of non-native shrubs and trees close to the roadside. However, proceeding in the direction of Broad Blunsdon, natural stone walls and old hedgerows of mixed native species re-assert Lower Blunsdon's more typical 'rural village' character. South of Page Hay Cottages, there are still no dwellings fronting Back Lane.

A Planning Inspector, in dismissing an appeal against refusal of planning permission for the erection of a house and garage at the rear of The Elms commented that, "While several dwellings have been built in fairly recent years at the north end of Lower Blunsdon, the stretch of Back Lane in the vicinity of the appeal site [rear of The Elms] has no housing and consequently has a materially different character".⁴ This character is later described as "essentially rural".

Increasingly open areas of land between Front and Back Lane are being identified for development of housing. Some infill development has occurred recently with the construction of a new detached dwelling adjacent to Bagnall Cottage.

Outbuildings to all three farms in the village have been or are in the process of being redeveloped for housing. With the exception of St Leonard's Farm, the housing settlement boundary lies within the conservation area boundary.

Any proposed future development will have to consider the sensitivity of this rural hamlet and the implications of developing within a conservation area. It is likely that previous appeals decisions will be referred to when considering any proposal.

³1884 O.S. map

⁴Reference: T/APP/U3935/A/1012028/P7 19th January 1999

Ivy Lane

Ivy Lane is an old lane which links Back Lane to Front Lane. A photograph from 1930⁵ shows that it was once a leafy elm-lined pathway but today its south side is fronted by modern dwellings which mark the northern limit of the 20th century expansion of Broad Blunsdon (outside the conservation area). However, its north side, beyond which lies an open paddock, is still lined with native trees and hedgerow and retains a rural character.

⁵Blunsdon: Looking Back', Richard Radway p.39

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, especially looking south to the ridge, contribute significantly to the character of Lower Blunsdon. Elsewhere, wide gaps between buildings and views through, and out of, the area are important for the character of the village.

The most characterful views, and those which illustrate the area's distinctive location at the foot of a hill, are looking from Front and Back Lane southwards to the trees and houses on the hill.

Open spaces and relationship to Broad Blunsdon

Lower Blunsdon is visually distinct from Broad Blunsdon and has a noticeably different character. The former is a tiny hamlet surrounded by open countryside, the latter is a large village whose historic core is enclosed by late 20th century housing. Standing at the edge of Broad Blunsdon in the vicinity of Ivy Lane one might be unaware of the existence of the 'lower village'.

Open space between the built form of Lower Blunsdon and Broad Blunsdon separates the two settlements and maintains the individual identity of each. It is composed of two open green areas, one east, one west of the southern end of Front Lane.

To the east is a rectangular paddock bounded on three sides by a mixed hedgerow and, on its fourth side, by a small area of woodland which screens Grove House from Ivy Lane. In dismissing an appeal against refusal of planning permission for the erection of a dwelling on land to the rear of Grove House, a Planning Inspector wrote, "I agree that the field [referring to the above paddock]...play[s] a vital role in maintaining the separate identities of the two parts of Blunsdon."⁶

To the west of Front Lane is a wide area of open land comprising garden, orchard and hay field, north-east and south-west of Callais House and a similar adjoining open space at the foot of Hunt's Hill (included in Broad Blunsdon Conservation

⁶Ref: T/APP/X3920/A/88/103837/P4 29th March 1989

Area for its contribution to the landscape setting of that area). The combined wide area has a rural character unaffected by dwellings on the other side of the road and there are views to the escarpment to the west of Broad Blunsdon. In dismissing an appeal against refusal of planning permission for two residential dwellings with garages in the area north of Callais House, a Planning Inspector stated, “the land...appears as part of the countryside and development would in my view be harmful to the settlement...”⁷

Architectural and historic character

Originally a mere grouping of farmhouses, farm cottages and other agricultural buildings, Lower Blunsdon has, since the 1970s, absorbed a number of modern ‘infill’ dwellings, some replacing old farm buildings, others built on former orchard and field. The majority of these were granted planning permission before the area was designated as a conservation area in 1992. Over the same period the character and appearance of some of the area’s old buildings have been obscured by later alterations and extensions - for example at Daleiden, Littlecote, and The Elms.

However, old stone cottages, farmhouses and outbuildings, roadside walls, mature trees, mixed hedgerows and the hamlet’s haphazard layout beside two narrow meandering lanes affirm the 400 year old origins of the hamlet and its architectural character remains predominantly historic. Conservation area designation aims to help Lower Blunsdon retain its special historic identity in the face of pressure for change.

The area contains four listed buildings (Fowler’s Farmhouse, Fowler’s Farm Cottages, Large’s House and St. Leonard’s Farmhouse) and several unlisted historic buildings (see below) which epitomise the traditional building characteristics of Lower Blunsdon. The area’s old buildings are vernacular - built with local building materials in a traditional manner to provide for simple farming activities and ordinary people. Most are two-storey houses or cottages, with some single storey old farm buildings of small scale. Not surprisingly, the area’s

⁷ Ref: T/APP/X3920/A/89/112367/P5 7th July 1989

farmhouses (Large's House, Fowler's Farmhouse and St Leonard's Farmhouse) are the largest buildings but even these are built to a modest scale.

Stone tile roofs and rubble stone walls are evident in the area's 17th and 18th century buildings, though in some cases the latter have been pebbledashed or smooth rendered. Brick is uncommon except in later outbuildings or extensions. The granary at Fowler's Farm is a good example of 19th century brickwork, Homeleigh is a typical red brick Edwardian small house (now much altered). White painted timber windows and red-brick chimneys are typical. Occasionally, quite small dormers illuminate attic rooms. In other cases, attics are gable-lit.

Key buildings of interest⁸

English Heritage advice⁹ 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 the area'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.

Carbis House is perhaps 200 years old and has an attractive facade of painted stonework with small timber windows and dormers. The Ferns dates from the same period and is of similar construction but smaller. On the other side of the road, Bagnall Cottage is one of only four buildings in the area to have a stone tiled roof. (No.1 Fowler's Farm Cottage, Fowler's Farm granary and parts of St. Leonard's Farmhouse are the others).

Homeleigh and Callais House, though both much altered, are examples of late 19th/early 20th century houses constructed with imported red brick. St Leonards Cottage and Grove House display natural stone walling. Outbuildings which relate by age or material to their 'host' buildings contribute subtly to the area's interest. For example, converted outbuildings at Fowler's Farm and the old stone building on Back Lane that now serves as a garage for Bennath.

⁸ See Swindon Borough Local Plan SPG: 'Buildings, Structures and Facades of Local Importance'.

⁹ Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage, March 1997

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.

As one walks down Front Lane, a gurgling stream accompanies the pedestrian and the pleasant mixture of stream, roadside trees, hedges and historic buildings evoke a serene pastoral quality to the conservation area. At The Ferns a slab of stone acts as a pedestrian bridge. These details are characteristic of rural, agricultural communities and form an important contribution to the character of this village.

Local stone is a characteristic feature of the area and is very apparent in the many stone boundary walls in the area. One of the most prominent is on the corner of Back Lane where it meets Front Lane. The wall is a remnant of a high stone wall that once enclosed the garden of Large's House. It is related¹⁰ that this wall had stones removed at intervals to provide holes for the Home Guard to fire through in the event of a German invasion in 1940 - one such hole remains. In another wall, beside Bagnall Cottage, is a red George V letter box.

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. 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.

¹⁰ About Blunsdon, E.M. Levinge & R.S. Radway

Negative factors

The historic character of the village has been adversely affected by new housing. However, the visual impact of these new dwellings has been limited by their setting behind a stone wall or hedge. Yenton Acre is an exception - though fronted by an attractive lawn and garden, the absence of a boundary wall or hedge spoils the sense of enclosure and character of the lane.

Scope for improvement

The banks of the roadside stream is eroded in places and in need of repair.

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.

LOWER BLUNSDON CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

MANAGEMENT ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	ACTIONS REQUIRED
Planning & Design		
Existing Modern Development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Most modern properties set back from roadside.</i> • <i>Some properties are not sympathetic to the existing traditional vernacular style.</i> • <i>Former farm buildings within village have been converted to residential accommodation. Future applications also likely.</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
Future Development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ad-hoc planning applications, for alterations, conversions and refurbishment of properties.</i> • <i>Proposed new dwelling adjacent to Bagnall Cottage.</i> • <i>Applications to develop small parcels of land have been received for residential accommodation.</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		
Signage & street furniture		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Street signage limited to mandatory speed signs.</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 any 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		
Shops & Retail		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No shops are present within the village – Nearest shop located within Blunsdon Village</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is unlikely that a shop would be viable in this location due to the limited number of properties in this area. 	
Parking		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No immediate concerns with parking within village</i> <i>Most properties have off road parking.</i> <i>Grass verges and gullies/ditches present to either side of roadway. Pavements not present in village.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing parking arrangements appears to work satisfactorily Any future proposals for implementation of pavements would not be supported in this sensitive historic area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaison and co-operation with SBC traffic management & highways safety.
Traffic		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Most traffic by-passes Lower Blunsdon via B4019 (Cricklade Road).</i> <i>Traffic in this area is generally local to the Broad or Lower Blunsdon.</i> <i>Narrow width of Front and Back Lane slows traffic down.</i> <i>Access is possible to A419 via Front Lane.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing traffic scheme works well to deflect traffic away from sensitive historic areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued liaison and co-operation with SBC traffic management & highways safety.
Scope for Enhancement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ditches either side of road in places are in need of repair.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess extent of damage and potential causes. ie passing traffic or unstable soil etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaison and co-operation with SBC traffic management & highways safety.