



The  
Conservation Areas  
of Sedgemoor







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APPRAISAL AND AUDIT

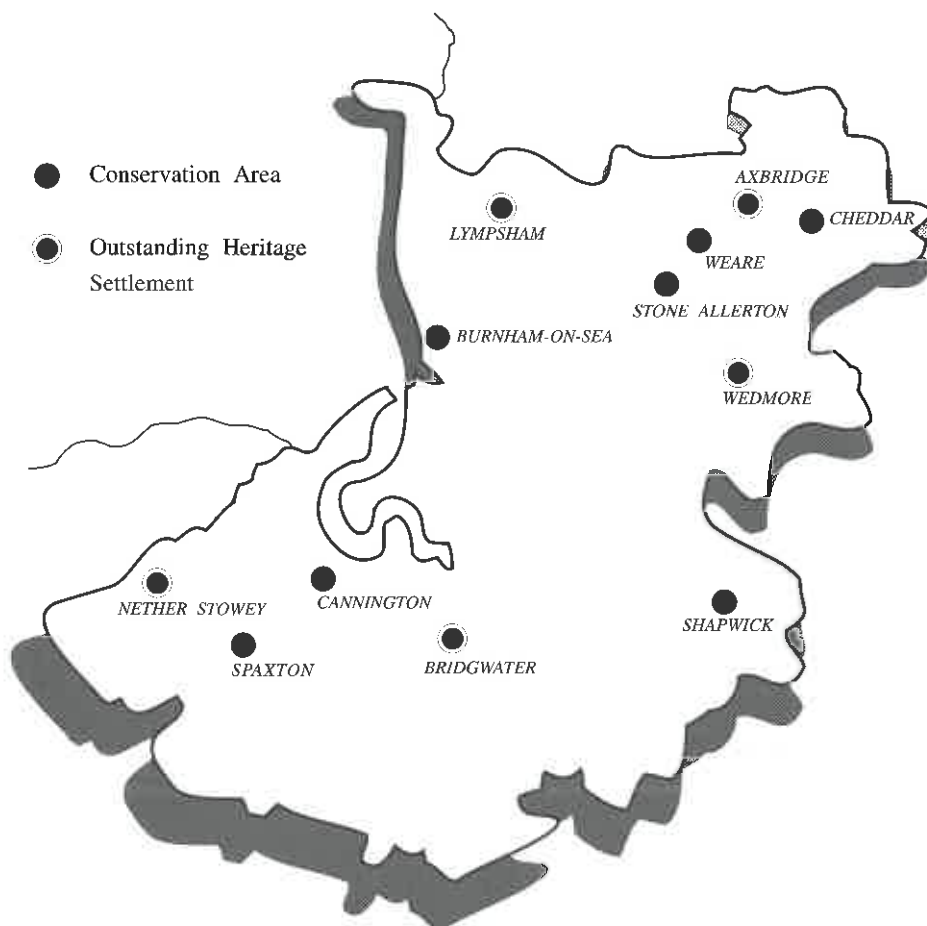
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## KEY TO THE CONSERVATION AREA MAPS

	Conservation Area boundary
	Area of High Archaeological Potential
	Listed Building
	Ancient Monument

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## INTRODUCTION

It is nearly twenty five years since the first conservation areas were designated in Sedgemoor. Generally there is public support for conservation and enhancement of historic areas which can provide an important and strong sense of place. The mixture of historic buildings, variety of street scenes and spaces, all add in some way to the quality of life. Many such areas reflect their regional and cultural heritage and can be of major importance for tourism and attracting economic development. Coupled with the need for clear planning policies to guide future development, there has probably never been a greater requirement for conservation policies based on a clear assessment of what constitutes "special character or interest" and which underpins designation. Against this background the District Council has recently carried out an extensive programme of review and designation of conservation areas as part of its ongoing preparation of statutory development plans. At a time also of critical examination of the validity, purpose and results of designation, this booklet has been prepared to provide the basis of a framework for direction and management of the District's conservation areas. As such it seeks to identify the components of conservation areas which present a collective character:

- the development of the topographic framework determined by such elements as historic road patterns, plot boundaries, formal layouts and the relationship of buildings to open spaces;
- architectural and historic quality and character of the area;
- the archaeological significance of the area;
- areas which have a spatial quality and important views;
- the traditional materials which are particularly characteristic of local vernacular styles;
- the role of green / soft elements (trees, hedges etc.);
- the relationship of the built environment to landscape setting.

This publication is not intended to be an exhaustive commentary on the planning, legal or other mechanisms for change or investment within conservation areas, but to stimulate local debate and a critical appraisal of the current state and desired condition of these areas. From this publication it is intended to identify those detractive or negative qualities which have eroded the architectural / historic integrity of these areas and to provide directions for the enhancement or reinforcement of the qualities which warranted designation. Such an audit will help in assessing what types of schemes would enhance these areas, defend them against inappropriate development and encourage appropriate design - in all, to move towards active and positive management of the conservation areas of Sedgemoor.

## THE LEGAL BACKGROUND

The conservation movement is now well-established and conservation of the built environment is a central theme of town and country planning and Government policies. The rapid pace of development in the 1950s and 1960s and a growing reaction against the widespread removal of historic buildings and features led to the introduction of the concept of conservation areas under the Civic Amenities Act 1967. Although very limited in its powers this represented the first legislation that attempted to control the historic and architectural character of areas rather than the appearance of individual buildings.

It was not until the Town and Country Amenities Act 1974 that a control over demolition and works to trees was introduced in addition to a duty placed on Local Authorities to prepare proposals to preserve and enhance their conservation areas. Defined as "areas of special architectural or historic interest" the legal provisions relating to conservation areas are currently consolidated into the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

As a general summary the more significant implications of conservation area designation contained in the 1990 Act encompass the following:

- the requirement to obtain "conservation area consent" from the local

planning authority for the demolition of unlisted buildings (works to listed buildings wherever located requires separate consent);

- a requirement to publicise development proposals which affect the character of a conservation area;
- a duty for the local planning authority to formulate and publicise proposals for preservation and enhancement;
- a requirement for six weeks' notice to be given to the local planning authority for works to trees;
- the possibility of obtaining grants or loans from various bodies towards schemes of enhancement or works to individual buildings.

Current conservation legislation embraces powers to protect and control change but also, and perhaps more importantly, to encourage, co-ordinate and initiate opportunities for the enhancement of the built environment. The character of conservation areas varies considerably within districts and regions of the country. There is no specification as to what should be included in a conservation area although of course many are centred on listed buildings and old settlement cores. In assessing areas for designation the essential importance is the contribution to overall character made by groups of buildings and the spaces between them, construction materials, trees and wooded areas, archaeological sites and monuments and the resultant historic patterns of development. As a general rule, extensive areas of new development are excluded.

## CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The Somerset Structure Plan and the relevant Local Plan constitute the development plan for a particular area and set out the planning policies and proposals for the scale of development for the foreseeable future. The development plan seeks to balance the demands for new development and change with the need to protect, conserve and enhance the historic and architectural heritage of Sedgemoor and its conservation areas in particular

as a valuable resource for tourism, recreation, education and economic development.

The Government places significant emphasis on the provisions of the development plan in the determination of planning decisions whereby positive conservation measures can be promoted and programmed for the allocation of resources. The three Local Plans for the Sedgemoor District for the Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea and Cheddar areas will be reviewed in the near future and replaced by a single District-wide Local Plan. Collectively these plans in association with the Structure Plan contain extensive guidance for the protection of conservation areas including policy frameworks for:

- promoting enhancement schemes and priorities for investment;
- standards and principles of design for new development;
- co-ordinating the work of statutory undertakers relating to installations, street furniture, repairs, etc.;
- encouraging the use of local materials;
- protecting open land from development.

## ENHANCEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES

The designation of a conservation area is really a statement of intent by the local planning authority to concentrate efforts and resources into the co-ordinated improvement and enhancement of the conservation area over a planned period. Whilst the planning controls over demolition and works to trees in conservation areas are a fundamental provision in protecting character, of equal if not greater importance is the need for positive measures to physically enhance the quality of the built environment. In this respect the legislation places a duty on the planning authority to formulate proposals for preservation and enhancement.

As a general rule resources have tended to be directed towards projects in conservation areas which would act as a catalyst to encouraging additional

private investment. The spaces between buildings therefore often offer the potentially greatest opportunities for the most cost-effective local authority expenditure. The “knock on” investment effects can be a powerful form of public policy in refurbishing streets and areas particularly in economically depressed areas.

The planning authorities in Somerset have an important role to play in promoting and co-ordinating enhancement and environmental programmes. To date, the schemes undertaken have been significantly funded by the local authorities but the responsibility for such works in conservation areas should not be their sole preserve.

Public authorities have an important role to play in the delivery of their various services to achieve satisfactory standards of reinstatement and provision within conservation areas and this is an area where increased dialogue between the planning authority and utility services is required to co-ordinate environmental works at an economic cost. There may for example be opportunities to pursue schemes for the undergrounding of overhead electricity and telephone wires in sensitive parts of conservation areas which can have a significant detrimental visual impact in the street scene. In other areas highway repair works could provide the catalyst for further related improvements.

The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (English Heritage), the national advisory body to the Government on conservation and historic buildings, adopts a high profile role in assisting local authorities in achieving conservation objectives. From the national viewpoint English Heritage firmly recognises the importance to economic development of the sustained investment in the historic fabric by stimulation of the building industry, tourism and local revenue and the confidence displayed to the private sector through what can amount to substantial infrastructure expenditure.

## FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION

To a large extent the promotion of conservation of the built environment in the wider sense has been the responsibility of local authorities and the fund-

ing which has been available is intended to act as a catalyst or “pump primer” to attract additional investment. Different funding arrangements are available for a variety of objectives although the principal public sources have been the local authorities and English Heritage. Finance and grant aid arrangements are of course always subject to availability and the relevant authorities.

As a brief guide the areas in which financial assistance may be available in conservation areas relate to:

**Listed Buildings:** the District Council usually has a modest annual fund with which to offer grant aid towards repair/restoration of listed buildings (generally up to 25% of approved costs). Grant aid may also be available from English Heritage for repairs to listed buildings of more national importance (grade I or II\*) and historic buildings in conservation areas.

**Town Schemes:** are agreements between the local authorities and English Heritage to allocate funds on an annual basis over a specified period to offer grants towards repairs to identified historic buildings in a designated conservation area. The scheme which can produce grant aid up to 40% of repair costs is directed towards encouraging the repair of whole streets and groups of buildings. There are at present no Town Schemes operative in Sedgemoor.

**Enhancement Schemes:** the most effective enhancement schemes in conservation terms are planned on a programmed and phased basis and comprise financial commitments from a variety of bodies. Most schemes to date have been initially underpinned by District, County and perhaps Parish Council funding in order to attract grant aid from other sources. Experience has demonstrated therefore that relatively small initial outlays can produce substantial schemes over a number of years with significant environmental impact.

Grant aid schemes by English Heritage are currently being reviewed with a view to replacement by “conservation area partnerships” with local authorities. This publication is intended to be part of the appraisal process in the establishment of such a partnership.

## ARCHAEOLOGY

Conservation areas are generally declarations which recognise a particular character of the built environment. Of great importance also to the wider historical context of a conservation area is the rich variety of archaeological remains and sites located throughout Sedgemoor. Many of these sites have been recognised as Scheduled Ancient Monuments and are protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Several of these scheduled sites are included within designated conservation areas and the determination of proposals for development or ground disturbance within them are a matter for the Secretary of State for the Environment in consultation with English Heritage.

Whilst the scheduling of a site implies a presumption against its destruction there may be circumstances where an appropriate form of development is acceptable but may involve a requirement to undertake a watching brief, site evaluation and recording and/or the redesign of proposals to accommodate items of archaeological concern. Many of the old cores of settlements, with or without designated conservation areas, are also likely to contain material of archaeological interest although not Scheduled Ancient Monument. Such locally designated Areas of High Archaeological potential are identified in the District Council's Local Plans. Should development proposals be approved within such areas, following assessment against wider planning and conservation considerations, there may also be a requirement for appropriate site investigation and analysis and steps may be taken to secure scheduled status.

## LISTED BUILDINGS

The statutory lists of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest compiled by the Secretary of State for the Environment have been a cornerstone of conservation policy since the compilation of the first list began in Somerset in 1947.

Changing standards, public opinion and criteria for listing led to a revised list for Bridgwater in 1974 (resurveyed again in 1992) whilst a national re-survey during the mid-1980s provided the rural parishes of Sedgemoor with

much expanded lists thus remedying the often patchy and inadequate coverage of the original statutory lists. This review necessarily afforded greater recognition of Victorian and Edwardian buildings and the often more simple forms of traditional rural architecture. The Sedgemoor District currently has about 1,000 entries on the statutory list and which often make a particular contribution to the character of conservation areas. The listing process ensures that the case for the preservation of a building is fully considered through the Listed Building Consent procedure. Consent is required to carry out any work which affects the character of a listed building either internally or externally and is always necessary for any works of alteration, extension or demolition. A listed building for the purposes of the consent procedure includes any object or structure fixed to a building or within the curtilage of the building. All applications for Listed Building Consent are submitted to the District Council although the procedures involved in considering the application may vary dependent on the works proposed and the listing grade of the building. As it is a criminal offence to demolish, alter or extend a listed building without prior consent for which there are heavy penalties, anyone considering undertaking any works to a listed building should seek early advice from the local planning authority, particularly as planning permission may also be required.

## ALTERATION AND EXTENSIONS

The built character of conservation areas is composed from a myriad of styles, features, materials etc and which can be seriously eroded by the cumulative impact of minor alterations or extensions to buildings which comprise the local scene. For unlisted buildings in conservation areas (and this often comprises the greatest percentage) there are a range of alterations which can be carried out without the need for planning permission. For buildings in residential use permitted development rights can include replacement of windows, doors, roofing materials, overpainting etc. In addition, extensions of up to 50 cu m or 10% of the volume of the

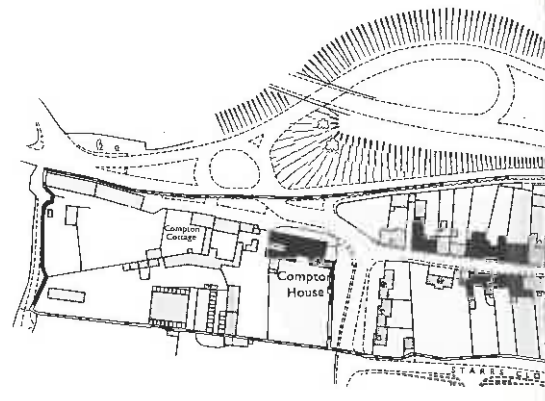
house (subject to a range of criteria) can also be carried out. Currently there is considerable concern at a national level over the very substantial impact that such changes can have on the appearance of conservation areas and debate as to whether there should be a reduction in the range of such permitted development rights.

## TREES

Many of the conservation areas in Sedgemoor contain important tree groups or settings which can be a very valued feature of the local scene or character, whilst in other areas it may be desirable to introduce or encourage additional appropriate planting. Trees of amenity value can be protected by a Tree Preservation Order which requires the consent of the local planning authority before any works involving topping, lopping, felling or uprooting may take place. The main exemptions relate to cultivated fruit trees or those which are dead, dying or dangerous, where a replacement tree should be planted. In all cases it is advisable to resolve the position with the District Council. In conservation areas all trees enjoy a similar protection whereby six weeks advance notice must be given to the District Council before undertaking any works. The six week period allows the Council to consider whether a Tree Preservation Order should be made.

# Axbridge

Designated 1970, 1991



## BRIEF HISTORY

The settlement lies on an east-west axis squeezed between the Mendip scarp and the moors, its name suggesting an early fortified settlement commanding the River Axe and defending the Saxon Royal Palace at Cheddar. In the 11th century Axbridge had a mint (for about fifty years) and a market. The early affairs of the town appear to have been managed by thirty-two burgesses (a form of local government) since before the time of William the Conqueror until the abolition of the mayor and the township's corporation in 1886. Between 1295 and 1344 Axbridge increased in local political importance, representatives were sent to Parliament and the town was no longer dependent on Cheddar and its trade, presumably in Mendip wool and cloth and as a local market centre.

Later medieval Kings with a passion for hunting gave Axbridge considerable status but of all the monarchs who came there for sport based on Mendip Forest, King John is the most popularised. Facing the main square on the west side is the building traditionally known as King John's Hunting Lodge although the timber jettied building had nothing to do with King John (and is most likely an early Tudor merchant's house). Today it is owned by the National Trust and contains the museum of local history and archaeology, whilst there is also a remarkable collection of surviving records held by the Town Trust.

The local topography established the street pattern at an early stage based upon West Street, St. Mary's Street and Moorland Street converging on the square overlooked by the 15th century parish church, and logically forming the basis of the conservation area. These narrow principal streets contain a wealth of historic buildings although many of those which have Georgian style fronts in the town



*Changing fortunes: timber framed buildings at the east end of High Street, the legacy of the town's prosperous medieval period. King John's Hunting Lodge (right) is in the guardianship of the National Trust whilst The Old Drug Store is included on the County Register of Historic Buildings at Risk. The narrow street opens dramatically onto The Square, the former market place.*



*Looking down into The Square from the church steps.*

centre undoubtedly conceal earlier structures. The railway came to Axbridge and by the 1860s there was little business but market gardening. The course of the railway line is now the bypass but the old station building still remains. More recent development has been estate housing to the south and east. Given the physical constraints to the development of the town and its outstanding heritage status only modest additional housing development is envisaged in the short term.

#### **CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA**

There is no doubt as to Axbridge's deserved status as a conservation area and outstanding heritage settlement. Its designation as such is due in no small measure to the collection of so many listed buildings in the town. This has afforded planning control over alterations to individual buildings and





*The outstanding composition of The Square (north side) set against the immediate Mendip skyline.*

has, over the longer term, safeguarded the collective contribution to area character which is particularly threatened, or has already been seriously eroded in those conservation areas comprised substantially of unlisted buildings. The continued emphasis on maintenance, repair and control over alterations to Axbridge's stock of listed buildings is therefore fundamental to the survival and further enhancement of this historic conservation area.

#### THE SQUARE

The east side of The Square comprises the solid grouping of two and three-storey terraced Georgian fronted rendered buildings. The north side is a contrasting juxtaposition of buildings of various periods the most historically significant being the Old Angel of about 1550 (although like several buildings in the vicinity the subject of later rebuilding and 19th century alterations), and the shop and house adjacent to the west which are of 16th

and 17th century origins again with later rebuilding although the core of the building is probably timber framed. At the north-west corner of The Square and forming a single architectural unit is the Lamb Inn of the early 19th century but occupying a medieval site. The listed group of buildings comprising the south side includes the Town Hall, a pedimented early 19th century building with portico and iron balcony. The ground floor was originally the market house with the Council Chamber on the first floor, later the court room and behind this the banqueting hall.

Of all Axbridge's heritage, the so-called King John's Hunting Lodge is perhaps the most famed of its buildings. Dominating the corner site of The Square and High Street the early 16th century structure has prominent timber framing with studding, substantial wind braces and continuous jetties to the upper floors. Originally a typical medieval town house serving

as a dwelling house, probably three shops and an inn, it was restored in 1975. Now in the guardianship of the National Trust and a richly stocked



*Church of St. John the Baptist.*



*The Square (looking east) featuring the surface enhancement scheme completed in the mid 1980's. Clearly a complement to the setting of the buildings but there are no easy solutions for the integration of parking demands, given the strong retail and tourist function.*

museum, it is a feast for the local historian and student of timber framing. Until the completion of the bypass in 1969 there was considerable congestion in Axbridge particularly in The Square, with conflict between parking and through traffic. The linked issue of parking and enhancement of The Square was addressed by the local authorities in the early 1980s when a floorscape scheme was introduced. Whilst this scheme complements the setting of the buildings in The Square, car parking still maintains a high profile and demonstrates the inherent problems of attempts to reconcile the competing requirements of retail and tourist needs, enhancement and conservation.

## HIGH STREET AND WEST STREET

Winding away and upwards from The Square, High Street at its lowest, eastern end represents some of the oldest of the town's surviving heritage in street form. King John's Hunting Lodge, Wood's the Butchers shop and the Old Drug Store are the obvious collection of jettied, timber framed buildings, although there are doubtless other timber framed structures in the vicinity such as No.15 High Street where recent shopfront restoration has incorporated the 16th century jetty on curved brackets.

All the buildings in High Street are of great interest providing an almost continuous group of listed properties, although Georgian-style refronting no doubt obscures earlier interiors. The narrow width of the carriageway for most of the length of the street is defined by the iron kerbs although this is of little relevance with present-day traffic levels. Even with the existence of the bypass, the conflict between wheeled traffic and the historic fabric can relegate the status of the pedestrian to a refugee.

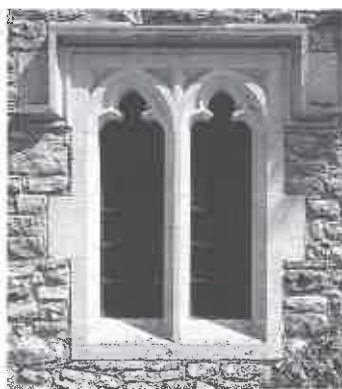
Of all Axbridge's solidly defined street scenes, West Street is probably the most domestic in scale. Approaching from the west this terraced residential street, with St. John's church tower complementing the higher town development, is framed against the Mendip skyline, a constant reminder of its rural setting.



*Open, triangular pedimented door in West Street suggesting late 18th century Georgian, probably with earlier core.*

## MOORLAND STREET

The old road to the low moors to the south, Moorland Street is of lower architectural status than the rest of the conservation area but nonetheless a worthy collection of mostly two storey stone and rendered terraced houses



*The Old Almshouses, Moorland Street. Probably early 16th century with earlier interior features. Extensively rebuilt in 1983, the standard and quality of materials and detailing is self evident.*

characterised by varied and juxtaposed roof pitches. In recent years there has been noticeable investment in the properties in this street which has generally improved their physical and visual condition. Of particular note is the Old Almshouse just off The Square, not only for its historical interest from the early 16th century but for the outstanding quality of restoration.

Although the street facades of Axbridge's buildings are the most visible aspects of the town's heritage the historic integrity and physical structure of the conservation area is strongly supported by the medieval strip plots which comprise domestic curtilages. Particularly to the rear of High Street and West Street these are most clearly demarked by the long rubble stone walls. When viewed from the elevated location of Back Lane their contribution to the town's physical development can be most appreciated.

## ST. MARY'S STREET

Similar in overall character to High Street the buildings in St. Mary's Street (mostly listed) create an enclosed effect on the street scene. The predominance of terraced housing is punctuated on the south side by probably the most imposing building in St. Mary's Street, The Court House, with its high stone forecourt walls comprising a distinct architectural unit. Reputedly dated 1796 the rendered three-storey symmetrical frontage with slate roof and parapet, defines the singularity of this building compared to most in Axbridge. Most of the older buildings in St. Mary's Street are two storey of 18th century origin with some later facade alteration but with many interesting doorways, windows and decorative fanlights creating the excellence in group character. The highest part of the street viewed from the west is framed in the far background by the Mendip Hills around Cheddar.

The recent redesignation of the conservation area now includes the varied collection of older two-storey buildings on the south side of Jubilee Road culminating in the terrace of rendered roadside cottages up to Parkside.

## THE LANES

Set off from and on the north side of the principal streets of West Street, High Street and St. Mary's Street are three short lanes. Whilst these are totally subservient to the axis of the main street they provide interesting and contrasting vista points where the facades turn away from the street and could be greatly enhanced by the introduction of a sympathetic but durable floor-scape scheme.



*Church Lane. A visually inviting pedestrian link to the church despite its tarmac surface.*

# Bridgwater

**Central Area and Docks. Designated 1972, 1977, 1991**  
**Northfield. Designated 1977, 1991**  
**Church Street / St. John's. Designated 1977**

## BRIEF HISTORY

Listed in the Domesday Book as an agricultural community called Brugie the town developed around an important river crossing of the Parrett away from the low-lying marshy moorland to the east. Tradition assigned the building of a bridge to William Briwer who about 1200 built a castle near its western end which must have dominated the town. The complex of buildings covered some 8-9 acres embracing the whole of the present day King Square and Castle Street area. Of the castle, only the watergate and some walling on West Quay survive though it once contained a hall, chapel and bell tower and part was evidently turned into a residence



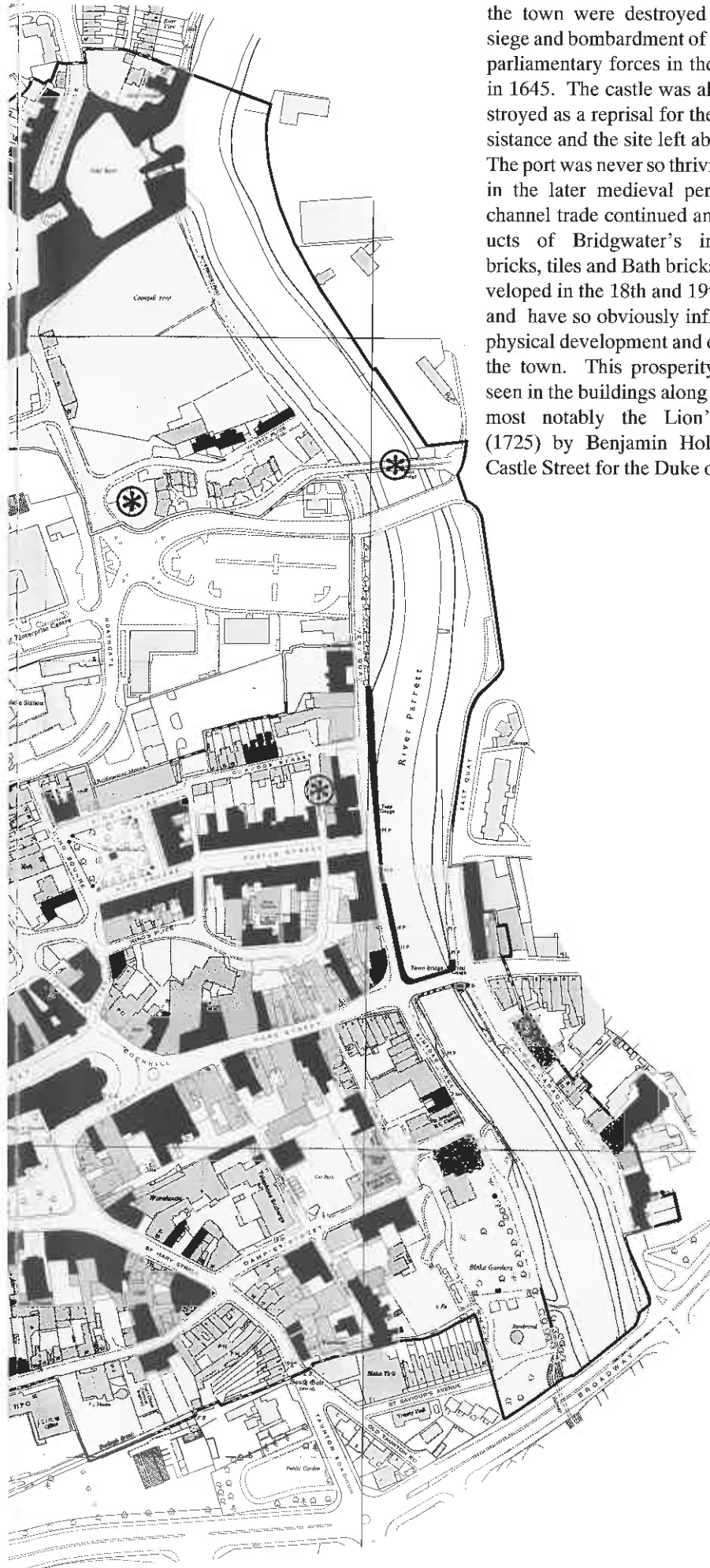
*Outstanding townscape value: St. Mary's Church, Corn Exchange, Blake Statue and Royal Clarence House, the town's former premier Regency style hotel although now altered on the ground floor for retail use.*

for the constable on the high ground at King Square.

Bridgwater later developed as the most important port (particularly as a centre for the cloth trade) between Bristol and Barnstaple and by the late 15th century was trading regularly with Ireland and Europe. By this time the town consisted of about 300 houses primarily grouped around the three main streets of High Street (with

some growth in Eastover), Friam Street (site of a once substantial Franciscan Friary founded about 1245) and Dampiet Street (previously with a dam on the town brook to drive a mill) forming a roughly semi-circular pattern around its market place, the present day Cornhill. Although most of the buildings in this area were later destroyed, this basic street pattern survives today. Buildings in the centre of





the town were destroyed during the siege and bombardment of the town by parliamentary forces in the Civil War in 1645. The castle was also later destroyed as a reprisal for the town's resistance and the site left abandoned. The port was never so thriving again as in the later medieval period but its channel trade continued and the products of Bridgwater's industries - bricks, tiles and Bath bricks - were developed in the 18th and 19th centuries and have so obviously influenced the physical development and character of the town. This prosperity is clearly seen in the buildings along West Quay most notably the Lion's building (1725) by Benjamin Holloway and Castle Street for the Duke of Chandos.

Development of the town in the 19th century was largely on an east/west axis partly as a result of the constraints of lower lying ground and clay workings to the north and south and the presence of the railway station to the east. The town's industrial base expanded considerably between the wars accompanied by substantial residential development in peripheral locations, a pattern largely continued in the post-war period.

In recognition of Bridgwater's considerable historical significance, it was recognised in 1965 by the Council for British Archaeology as one of seven towns in Somerset, "the historic quality of which particularly required careful treatment in any planning or redevelopment proposals". The Somerset Structure Plan also designates the town as an outstanding heritage settlement in recognition of the more than local significance of its architectural and historic heritage.

The original conservation area for Bridgwater was designated by Somerset County Council in 1972 and related to the area around St. Mary's Church and Cornhill, King Square, Castle Street and the river frontages of East and West Quays. The designation was greatly extended in 1977 to include the wider historic core of the town centre, particularly Friar Street and Dampier Street areas, the historic river frontages through the town and the important complex of industrial archaeology represented by the disused docks and associated structures. Two additional conservation areas were also designated for the residential areas of Northfield and Church Street (St. Johns) which represented outstanding quality of residential development of the late 19th century. Modern day Bridgwater is a bustling market town with a population of 35,000 and is the commercial, industrial and administrative centre of Sedgemoor. Substantial estate housing development has taken place to the east of the town with some large industrial developments exploiting proximity to the M5 motorway. As one of the three principal centres in the county, further significant growth is envisaged although this is becoming increasingly constrained by the need for commensurate infrastructure investment in particular to deal with increasing levels of traffic congestion in the town centre.



## CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

### CORNHILL/ ST. MARY'S STREET

The site of the former medieval market place, Cornhill dominates the centre of the town and provides the historic context to much of the retail core. The Corn Exchange (Grade I) of Bath stone dates from about 1830 and this large composition is presented to Cornhill by the semi-circular Ionic portico with dome and lantern, which today contains the covered market with shops in the side elevations. Repositioned from in front of the Corn Exchange to face down Cornhill is the dramatic over life size bronze statue of Robert Blake (Oliver Cromwell's Chief Admiral) erected in 1898. Blake is featured in seventeenth century costume with outstretched right arm pointing towards Christ Church Unitarian Chapel in Dampiet Street. This statue together with St. Mary's Church, the Corn Exchange and Royal Clarence House represent outstanding architectural and townscape quality in the centre of Bridgwater. Immediately adjoining to the west is St. Mary's Church and churchyard. Much of the north and south sides of naves and porches is 14th century otherwise it is largely perpendicular of the 15th and 19th centuries (with extensive restoration between 1848 and 1857). In conservation and amenity terms, the churchyard is a particularly valuable resource as it affords a relatively quiet space within a bustling town centre. The churchyard had physically deteriorated over recent decades until it was the subject of a relatively simple but robust enhancement scheme initiated by the local authorities in the

*St. Mary's churchyard. Well conceived simple design, robust attractive materials and quality of workmanship are the hallmarks of the enhancement scheme carried out at St. Mary's churchyard, promoted by the District Council and grant aided by Somerset County Council and English Heritage. New paving with reclaimed York stone, salvaged cast iron seats, period railings and lighting emphasises the quality of the building facades around the churchyard but particularly the spaces between them. A closed churchyard, for years a "patch and repair" burden on the local authority is now a greater historic asset and a low maintenance, valued and well used public amenity.*



*West Quay (north of Chandos Street). Bridgwater's 1725 Grade I listed Baroque fronted showpiece, The Lions (centre building) now has new neighbours through the redevelopment of the former Peace's warehouse (left) and the new office development (right). Such prominent and historic sites present major problems of urban design for scale, proportion and integration of new development and in this case, the relationship to the wider waterfront.*

mid 1980's. The tall unfussy spire begun in 1367 punctuates much of the town centre skyline, of particular note also as most Somerset churches are of the towered variety. The adjoining Little St. Mary Street provides a great complement to the open aspect of the



*Little St. Mary Street, included in the Local Plan for an enhancement scheme. Fundamental design considerations will be the desired level of vehicular access and on-street parking which will in turn determine the pedestrian role of the street.*

churchyard with an interesting diversity of domestic scale buildings on the south side. The street would benefit in visual terms (and also to promote the role of the pedestrian) through an enhancement scheme which could involve a resurfacing of the carriageway, possibly with the reduction of on street parking. High Street (particularly the south side) contains a wealth of listed buildings which have important front facades and quality rear elevations facing the churchyard which have now been afforded greater prominence by the churchyard enhancement scheme. Of note in the High Street is the Town Hall with restrained classical front of nine bays and two pillared porches. The central portion of High Street at one time contained an "island" of buildings, hence the recessed building line on the north side. Such a street width affords a good visual appreciation of an old market town but also highlights the significant impact on townscape of 20th century flat-roofed buildings where the overwhelming built context is the pitched and tiled roof.

**KING SQUARE / CASTLE STREET**  
The most concentrated examples of outstanding urban residential architecture from the early 18th and 19th centuries are presented here. Castle Street, built for the Duke of Chandos, has been acknowledged as one of the finest Georgian streets in the South West. Now listed Grade I, both sides of the terrace were probably conceived as a whole as speculative development for merchants on the derelict site of the former castle. The subtlety of design is strongly early Georgian and particularly demonstrated by the varied decorative detail of window surrounds and doorways and interesting parapets sweeping up as the street rises. The first of the present day terraced buildings in King Square were erected between 1810-14 on the east and south sides in the much lighter Regency style

entrances leading to an internal circular footpath was rebuilt in the 1920's when the area was adopted by the local authority and laid out with the present diagonal footpaths centred on the war memorial. The second generation of railings were later removed for the war effort and for the last fifty years or so the square has physically deteriorated and now represents only remnants of two historic identities. The local authorities and English Heritage have agreed a programme for the enhancement of King Square to introduce railings and repaving, reflective in style of the 1920's. The re-introduction of investment into the town centre conservation area also anticipates further phases of enhancement to the remainder of the square (possibly to include the facades of the buildings) and repaving in Castle Street.



*Castle Street, north side (1723-28) for the Duke of Chandos. The south side, with less detailing, is thought to be a late 18th century copy. Repaving of the footways in stone with new lighting would be desirable as a continuation of the enhancement scheme promoted for King Square.*

(a third terrace on the north side was started but never finished). The original square garden area was a private amenity for these houses (typical of a residential London square of the period) with access into the square via an iron gateway at Northgate. The Regency buildings on the north and east sides originally had lead canopies and decorative ironwork; some of the balconies still survive. Associated with the changing role of this part of the town centre to business/commercial uses and a greater degree of public access, the actual square has undergone two changes of physical identity. The original square with brick walls, stone copings, iron railings and four gated

**RIVER FRONTAGES**  
The built development facing the River Parrett is a distinctive legacy of Bridgwater's maritime and trading past. North of the Town Bridge, West and East Quay were the centre of shipping activity in the town where wharves used to extend downstream for about a mile. West Quay (between Fore Street and Castle Street) still largely retains the built form of this period of three and five storey 18th and 19th century waterfront development of former warehousing and shaped gabled frontages. The ground floors are now altered for retail or related uses although the group as a whole presents a solid maritime aspect

to the Town Centre Conservation Area. To complement these facades is the raised quayside (the original extension of the quays was sanctioned by Act of Parliament in 1845) with some restored fittings, all now a listed structure but an important reflection of a seaport. All the listed buildings on West Quay consequently form a group with the Town Bridge. Of equal prominence in the river frontage is the block of development between Chandos Street and Chandos Bridge, which includes a large element of recent residential and office development adjoining the Lions building (about 1725 and listed Grade I) often regarded as the best house in Bridgwater.

### THE DOCKS

The dock complex represents a major intact feature of Bridgwater's industrial heritage built in 1841 as a "floating harbour" to retain high water in the dock to enable stable loading rather than in the tidal River Parrett. Trade was substantial up to the second world war after which gradual decline rendered most of the structures a complex of industrial archaeology.

In 1974 Somerset County Council purchased the entire dock and adjacent semi-industrial land from British Railways for a ten year development programme of rejuvenation as a marina, leisure uses and waterside housing. This manually operated dock, together with the grain warehouse, three sets of lock

gates, bascule bridge and associated structures were all listed Grade II in 1973 and two years later included within the Bridgwater Town Conservation Area. The four storey Wares Warehouse was the subject of early conversion to flats whilst the remaining land on the south, west and north sides of the dock was developed for houses and flats largely in accordance with a development brief.

A further area along the river frontage is allocated for housing in conjunction with the realignment of Northgate. Overall the docks development concept has been successful in conservation terms by the revitalisation of a downgraded and derelict area incorporating innovative housing and creating a unique development in a designated conservation area in Somerset.

### CHURCH STREET (ST. JOHN'S)

#### CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

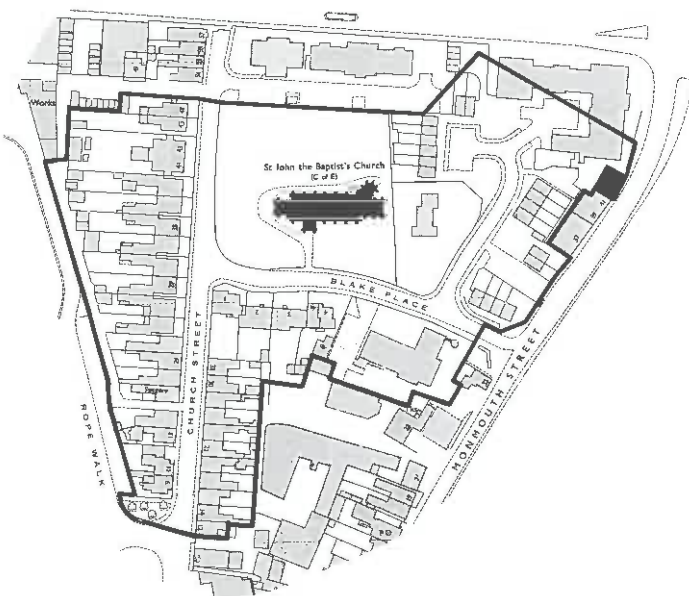
The church and tower of St. John's dominate the locality and provide a visual focus for the area. The area is largely residential in character comprising large two-storey semi-detached and terraced properties of red rubble sandstone, pantiles, brick chimneys and distinctive stone quoins. Re-

cent terraced and flatted housing development has been completed to the north-east of the church where the original vicarage stood. Although this small conservation area has changed significantly since designation, the concentration of housing of overall homogeneous materials closely related to the church core is still the basis of the designation. Probably the greatest impact upon the character of the area has been the extensive replacement of windows particularly in the terraced houses of Church Street. The removal of the original timber sash windows and replacement in a variety of styles, patterns and materials, is clearly at its most damaging in this situation where fenestration is a prominent feature in a terraced group.

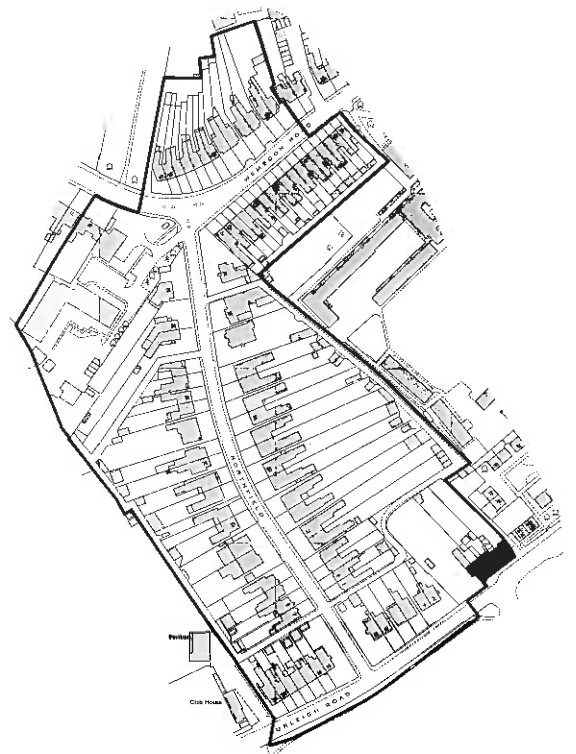
### NORTHFIELD

#### CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Northfield conservation area represents probably the most concentrated examples of quality domestic architecture of the late 19th century in Bridgwater. Much of the character of the area is derived from the extensive use of red sandstone as the principal construction material (particularly Northfield itself) and a rich display of brick and clay products. The decorative tim-



Church Street conservation area.



Northfield conservation area.

berwork for eaves and gables, is also a particular feature. Wembdon Road (south side) comprises a two-storey terrace with gardens set back from the road, enclosed by low brick walls. Front elevations are characterised by gabled fronts to first floor, large castellated bays to the ground floor and detailed pediments over doorways. As a whole, the terrace is a rich display of the town's former brick and tile industry - clay chimney pots, tiles, finials, wall plaques and moulded clay copings. The north side of Wembdon Road is of more flamboyant style. The large two-storey terraced and semi-detached houses occupy a prominent position set well back from the road, with substantial gardens and generally with brick boundary walls and large indented brick piers some with original stone caps remaining. Some of the boundary walls, which are generally prominent in the street scene, have been removed or rebuilt to different levels with alternative materials and different cappings thus collectively losing original detail and rhythmic appearance. The timber detailing outlining the gabled fronts echoes this feature of Northfield.

The Durleigh Road part of the designation largely continues the flavour of Northfield and Nos. 14 - 26 comprise a four storey terrace of stone and brick with a mix of render, paint or tile cladding on the front walls again with decorative timber gables. Most of the upper storey sash windows are intact and appear original but some ground and first floor bays have been altered. The sandstone retaining wall on the north side of St. Matthews Field was included in the redesignated conservation area in 1991.



*Whilst of a wide range of individual house designs, Northfield is distinctly unified by the coherent blend of red sandstone and timber moulding for windows and gables. Alterations of such basic components by overpainting or replacement with alternative materials can seriously damage the historic integrity and character of individual buildings and the collective contribution to area character.*

*The gabled brick and stone terrace of Nos. 14 - 26 Durleigh Road.*





# Burnham-on-Sea

Designated 1988

## BRIEF HISTORY

Although now the second largest urban area in Sedgemoor, until the early part of the 19th century Burnham-on-Sea was a small coastal community reliant on farming and fishing. A lighthouse was built in 1800 to aid safe passage into the River Parrett for shipping destined for the port of Bridgwater. Burnham itself was not suitable for development as a port but resort development started around 1830 when a spa was established centred on a bath house (now Steart House) and two wells north of the church.

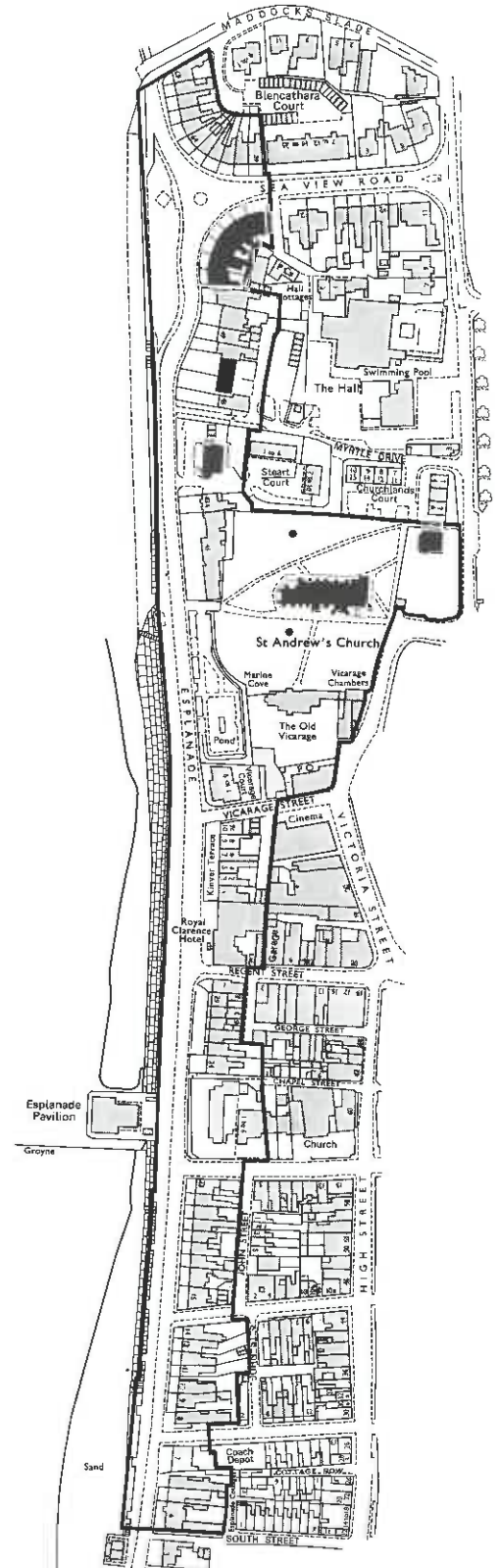
During the Victorian era Burnham capitalised on its long sandy coastline and the consequent holiday trade saw the erection of the substantial terraces along the Esplanade and the establishment of a hotel in 1836. The arrival of the railway greatly increased Burnham's attraction as a seaside resort with the Great Western reaching Highbridge in 1841 and a line ex-

tended to Burnham Pier in 1858 for steamer trips to South Wales.

The advent of the railways led to the extraordinary rapid growth of Burnham-on-Sea. In the period 1851-1901 Burnham's population swelled from 1,701 to 4,922, but this was somewhat overshadowed by the rapid development of nearby Weston-super-Mare. In later years and particularly since 1945 the built-up area of Burnham-on-Sea has expanded considerably along the coast and now coalesces with Highbridge with the construction of substantial new housing areas on the eastern side underpinned by the accessibility of the M5 motorway and the popularity of the area for retirement. As a substantial urban area the town is now the economic focus for much of the rural hinterland in the north-west of Sedgemoor, with further provision planned for housing and industrial development to exploit its good regional accessibility to the motorway network.



No.'s 11 - 14 The Esplanade.





*Burnham's Victorian Esplanade now faces a more secure future protected by the extensive sea defences and associated fixtures which are strongly reflective of the previous era. There is increasing recognition that the standard of the built heritage, particularly at coastal towns, can make a valuable contribution to the holiday experience and the character and quality of the resort. Designation as a conservation area therefore provides a focus and context for further investment in Burnham's seafront environment whilst the convex ashlar stone terrace of Nos. 52-58 Esplanade, the sole unaltered terrace on the seafront, provides the inspiration.*

## **CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA**

The conservation area is based largely on the Esplanade northwards from South Street to encompass the large groups of terraced residential / hotel / boarding house development. The seafront contains relatively few listed buildings and although the majority of the existing older buildings are not particularly rich in detail, taken as a whole the area does present frontage which is characteristic of the scale and proportions of a modest Victorian resort. The area south of South Street, whilst generally of similar age was considered to contain a level of commercial development and associated physical alterations which were of insufficient quality and therefore excluded from the designation.

The area suffered damaging floods in 1981 and the reconstructed defences replace an earlier stone sea wall. A structure of such necessarily massive proportions can never be totally integrated within the scale of existing sea-

front development but the scheme included a sympathetic and often striking range of street furniture, bollards, lighting columns, covered seating and planted amenity areas which is reflective of the Victorian era. Although totally linear, the conservation area can be considered to comprise three elements.

### **SOUTH STREET TO VICARAGE STREET**

Chiefly residential in character these five blocks of development facing the Esplanade appear to be in relatively good physical condition although alterations to the facades over many years (particularly replacement windows and doors) somewhat detracts from their appearance.

### **ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH**

The churchyard provides an important space in the substantially developed frontage of the Esplanade. Parts of St. Andrew's Church can be dated back to the early 14th century and contains many interesting features. The lias

stone church tower dates from the late 14th century and has developed a distinct northwards lean. The undulating churchyard provides a pedestrian and-visual link through to Victoria Street and marks the historic centre of the town.

### **STEART HOUSE TO SEAVIEW ROAD**

At the north end of the Esplanade Nos. 52 - 58 a convex stone terrace of seven mid -19th century houses, now predominantly flats, occupies a prominent corner site. This is the sole remaining unaltered terrace on the Esplanade and provides a yardstick for the standard of restoration that could be sought for the other terraced groups on the Esplanade.

# Cheddar

Designated 1991

## BRIEF HISTORY

Although now most associated with cheese and the gorge, Cheddar has ancient origins firmly linked with Romans, Saxons and Normans. The Romans shipped to Cheddar via the Rivers Yeo and Axe to a Severn port

houses in the old village and market gardening is locally widespread today. The dignified 15th century stepped market cross with octagonal base at Church Street/Bath Street/Union Street dominates the street scene. The early local commercial importance of the settlement, lying along the shel-

and patchwork of cultivated fields and orchards. Consolidation of development with much new housing in the 20th century has established the village as a commuting centre for Bristol and Weston-super-Mare. By 1990 Cheddar had expanded to a population of approximately 4,300 and it acts as a



*Cheddar market cross, one of Somerset's magnificent remaining monuments of its kind. Originally a preaching cross it was later surrounded (probably in the 17th century) by a hexagonal structure with open arches providing a dry market for itinerant merchants. Dominant in the street scene and the focus of the conservation area, the structure is so obviously physically vulnerable to traffic.*

north of the Axe estuary, the exploitation of Mendip mineral resources, particularly lead, probably being a key factor in the development of this area. From Saxon times there was a royal palace at Cheddar, its only remains being the Chapel of St. Columbanus and the outline of the former wooden buildings, marked out in the grounds of the Kings of Wessex School. The complex included a succession of halls in use from Alfred's time to the 14th century, a corn mill with attached grain store and bakery and at least two earlier chapels. The rich fertile soils of the area supported a strong farming tradition characterised to the present day by the survival of a few farm-

tered southern escarpment, was reinforced by the dozen or so mills supplied by power from the River Yeo for grinding corn and paper making. Perhaps the most socially significant of Cheddar's buildings is a long rectangular cottage at Lower North Street associated with the religious writer, educationalist and philanthropist Hannah More (1745 - 1833), a practical social campaigner for improving the religious and educational standards of Mendip rural folk. She also founded the first day school there in 1789. Late 19th century maps show Cheddar to have developed as a very dispersed village with farms and cottages scattered throughout the network of lanes

focus for shopping, recreation and education facilities for north-east Sedgemoor. This role is intended to continue for Cheddar and further housing and industrial development is planned possibly in conjunction with a bypass.

The Cheddar Gorge and its related tourism is of course an integral part of Cheddar life today although the massive visitor influx and trade is largely a seasonal phenomenon. Given the location of the gorge away from the main body of the village the physical impact of tourism tends to be relatively small on the historic core of the village and much of the designated conservation area.



## CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Cheddar is a settlement of significant historical importance and this underpins the conservation area designation. The use of local limestone in Cheddar's older buildings and boundary walls was widespread and contributes enormously to its built character. The historically dispersed pattern of development means that whilst many such features remain in the village most lie outside the conservation area. There are three main components to the conservation area: the village core focusing on the Market Cross and parish church; a part of Lower North Street where traditional local limestone construction is particularly evident; and the ancient Kings of Wessex palace site.



*Thriving commercial areas are often an integral part of conservation areas and the consequent profusion of advertisements and signs can be a significant determinant of character and appearance.*

## CORE AREA

Bath Street and Union Street are strongly commercial and retail in character. Bath Street is particularly characterised by an unresolved and competing pattern of building styles and a large number of signs and advertisements.

The majority of Union Street generally survives as indicative of Cheddar in physical scale, comprising a good collection of two-storey cottage style buildings on the north side although significantly altered for retail uses.

## LOWER NORTH STREET

The southern part of the street is probably most characteristic of an earlier, rural domestic Cheddar - narrow road with no pavements and stone boundary walls with some houses abutting the roadside. The quality of the street



*Fern Bank, Lower North Street. Built about 1820 for the Marquis of Bath. Characteristic limestone rubble provides the context for this flamboyant Gothic villa-style cottage (listed Grade II).*

is notable on the east side for the 19th century random rubble Manor House with former stables and the strongly Gothic villa-style cottage Fern Bank. The overall view of the street is significantly disfigured by overhead wires and a much-scarred highway surface.

#### KINGS OF WESSEX PALACE

The Kings of Wessex School is the site of a Scheduled Ancient Monument, the former royal palace, which is known to have existed from the mid 10th century. The ruins of a chapel dedicated to St. Columbanus near to the present day Manor Farm were excavated in 1960-62 prior to the construction of the school which provided much of the known historical evi-

dence. This chapel was indicated to be the third on the site, the original being a small 10th century structure and probably associated with Alfred, being replaced by a larger building the next century and possibly finally rebuilt in the later 13th or early 14th century. This last was converted into a dwelling in the 17th century, continuing in use until the early 20th century. The earliest chapel overlaid a long hall (although succeeded by east and west halls) dating from before the 10th century, orientated north-south and measuring 78ft by 20ft. Associated minor buildings of the same period also included a corn mill or perhaps a fowl house. Today the ruins of the chapel survive and the outlines of the

long, west and east halls and other minor buildings are marked out by small pillars and tiles. As a whole the site represents exceptional archaeological importance of the period.

#### CHURCH STREET

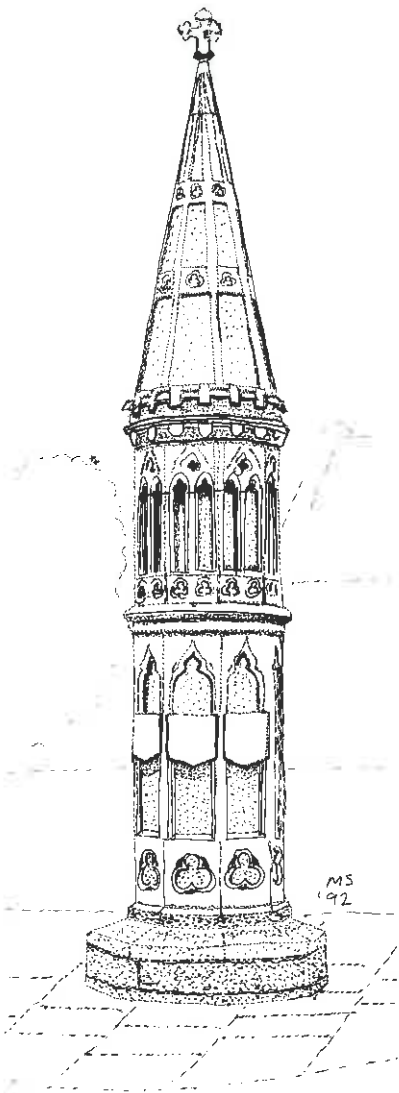
As an architectural assessment, Church Street as a whole is the most important part of the conservation area characterised by two distinct groups at either end. To the north and creating the central feature stands The Market Cross, a fine hexagonal 15th century Scheduled Ancient Monument and Listed Building. Much of the ashlar work, particularly around the three base steps, is well worn and no doubt reflects its long-changed role to informal recreation and seating area.

Immediately to the south two late 18th century listed buildings, Sungate and The Court House, make individual contributions to street quality which, with rubble forecourt walls, survive as intact architectural units. The remainder of the street meanders away to the south with apparent disinterest flanked by a range of two storey dwellings. The real purpose of the street, and championing the southern limit of the village, is the extremely important group around the River Yeo. The west side and most visible, is dominated by the strongly perpendicular St. Andrew's Church and adjacent Church Farm House and Church Farmhouse, probably from the 15th century. The church, churchyard and Kings of Wessex site largely defines the area of ancient historical interest which strongly underpins the conservation area designation. The east side of the Yeo, approached over the narrow and tortuous Cheddar Bridge is in total contrast, its densely wooded appearance concealing a full appreciation of the large 17th century Fairlands House, the adjacent barns (previously linked to a former tannery) and the pair of 17th century rubble cottages (Moonrakers and Clift Cottage) bordering Froglands Lane.

The many mature trees in this southern part of the conservation area, between the village and Froglands Farm, greatly enhance the southern approach to the village.

# Lympsham

Designated 1987



19th century hexagonal ashlar monument probably for J. H. Stephenson (listed grade II).

## BRIEF HISTORY

Four miles north east of Burnham-on-Sea and four miles south of Weston-super-Mare Lympsham is located in a flat low lying area. The village still contains active farms but now has become established around the junction of three roads along the arms of which it has tended to extend. The village probably functions mainly as a dormitory and retirement area for Weston-super-Mare and Burnham-on-Sea. The present population of the parish is about 750.

The historic and architectural development of Lympsham is strongly influenced by the pre-Victorian and Victorian-Gothic style of building initiated by the so-called "Squarson" Stephenson (the local squire and parson) in the mid 19th century. The conservation area is centred on the Manor

House set in extensive grounds, the Church of St Christopher and the group clustered around Church Road/West Road/South Road.

Recent development in Lympsham is largely modern bungalow and estate type housing in character. Only modest development is envisaged for Lympsham for the foreseeable future although a small housing scheme has recently been completed on the north side of Lympsham Road which incorporates low cost housing and the provision of improved recreation facilities for the village.

## CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Lympsham is recognised as one of Somerset's outstanding heritage settlements. St. Christopher's Church,

from the 15th century, is a prominent feature in the local landscape and is central to the conservation area which is otherwise dominated by the Manor House and its extensive grounds. The Grade II\* listed Manor House, rebuilt approximately 1813 for Reverend Stephenson is in the most strongly Gothic style with irregular frontage and embattled and pierced parapets.

To the south the Manor Lodge with fish tail tile roof, its gate piers and associated splayed walling are also listed in addition to the entrance gates at North Drive, the eccentric garden room in similar style but complementing the Manor House and the two stone monuments within the grounds.

Overlooking the Manor grounds from the east side of Church Road is an attractive group of buildings which includes the Post Office and The Old Forge. The mid 19th century hexagonal ashlar stone monument to the south-west of the Post Office adjoining the roadside provides a visual focus for the area together with the seating, although the surrounding apron of paving is in poor condition. The northern limit of the conservation area, particularly when viewed from Church Road, is strongly defined by the Manor Hall and School (1873), again by Stephenson, a substantial single storey Gothic building with prominent rose window to the gable. The field on the east side of Church Road allows an attractive open view of Church Farmhouse and St. Christopher's Church from the north.



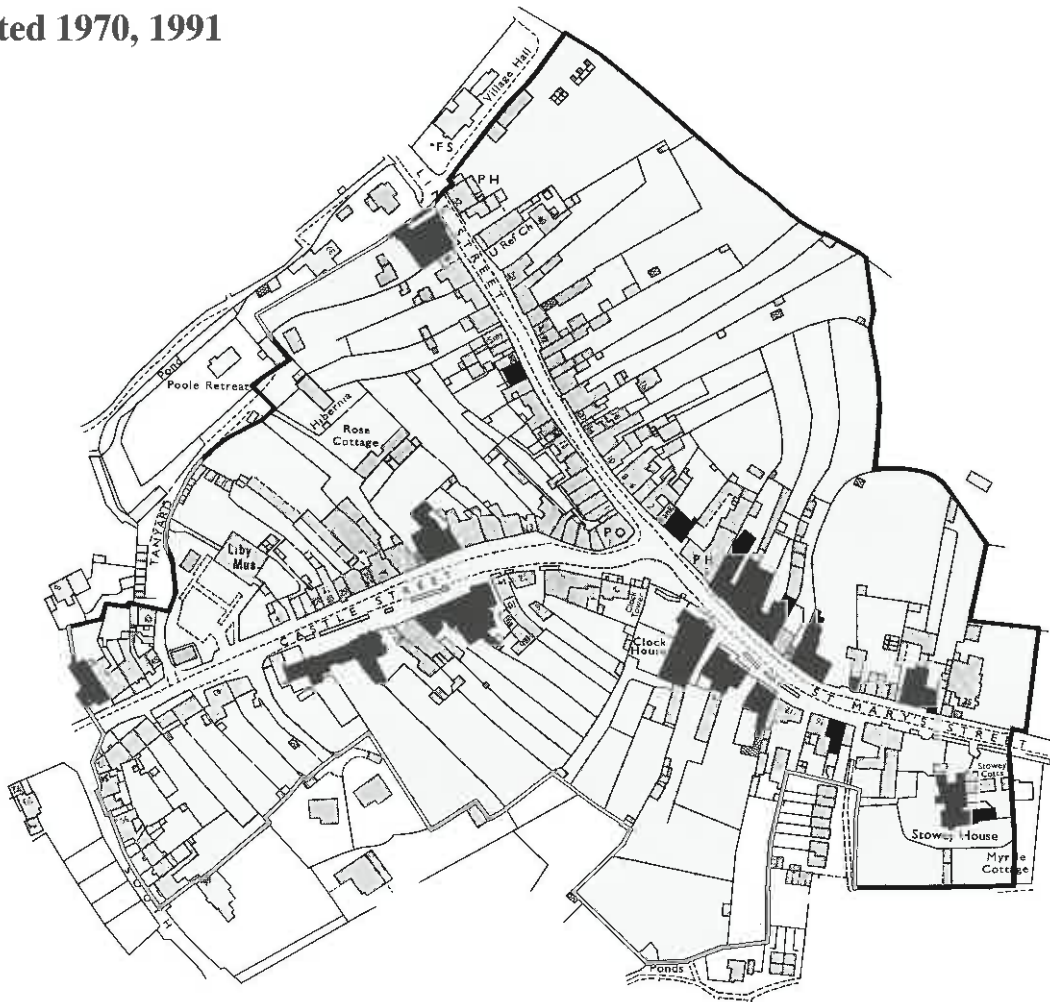
*The Stephenson gothic legacy as epitomised in the rich detailing of the Manor Lodge. The roof is of plain and "fishtail" tiles in a diaper pattern with crested ridge. The splayed rubble walling and dressed stone cross-gabled caps to the piers echo the extravagant gabling to the lodge.*

*The open nature of much of the conservation area allows a good appreciation of the few, but mostly listed buildings. To the left, the four distinct roof sections of the tudor-gothick Old Forge and the hipped roof Post Office combine with emphatic proportions to present the principal elements of the often cited "group value".*



# Nether Stowey

Designated 1970, 1991



## BRIEF HISTORY

Nether Stowey, meaning "lower stone way" nestles in the eastern foothills of the Quantocks and is one of Sedgemoor's largest villages with a population in excess of 1,350. The village has a considerable architectural history and some remarkable associations with English literary culture. In Saxon times the village lay on an important route linking the royal Saxon estates of Cannington and Williton. Overlooking the village from the west are the remains of a motte and bailey castle which was probably built by William Fitz Odo in the 11th century and was held against King Stephen in 1138. With the declining importance of the settlement as a stronghold the village assumed the role of a rural centre in the 18th and 19th centuries based on Castle Street, Lime Street and St. Ma-



*The three stage Victorian clock tower stands sentinel - style adjacent to the former gaol at the junction of Stowey's three main streets. Constructed of red sandstone with freestone dressings and wooden open bellcote, the tower is further protected from traffic by an extended pavement enhancement scheme.*

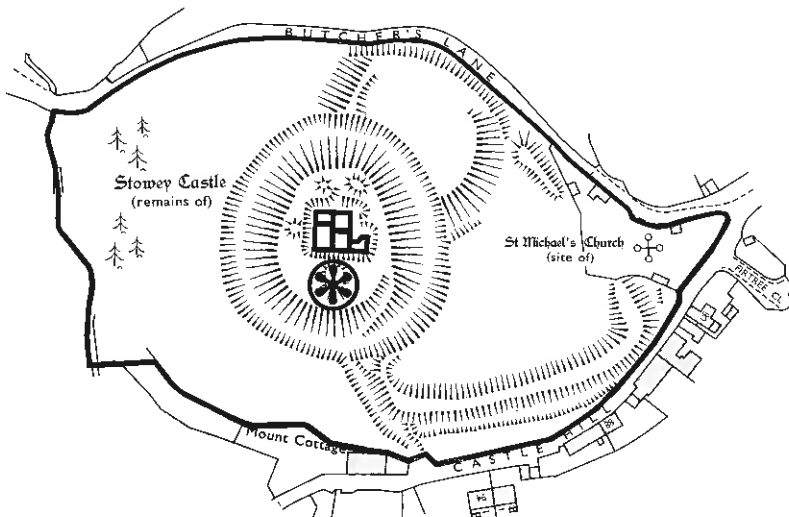
ry's Street, which largely comprises the designated conservation area. This period attracted several literary and scientific figures the most notable being the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge who lived in a cottage at the northern end of Lime Street (No.35) from 1797 to 1800 which though retaining little of its original form, is owned by the National Trust. Coleridge and colleagues such as William Wordsworth, Robert Southey and Thomas de Quincey all shared literary evenings in the back room of the house of the cultured local tanner Thomas Poole at 21 Castle Street.

Since the 1960s the village has seen a significant amount of development with the completion of the bypass in 1970, which removed through-traffic from the historic streets and estate housing development at St. Mary's Fields to the south. Today the village





*Landscape context. There is a need to pay special attention to the preservation or enhancement of character and appearance, not just of historic buildings. It should also be a material factor in assessing development proposals outside conservation areas which may reflect its setting or views into or out of the area.*



*Stowey Castle conservation area.*

supports a wide range of facilities and services and is an economic focus for a wide rural area.

In planning policy terms the village is designated as a Rural Centre and outstanding heritage settlement in the Somerset Structure Plan. Because of physical, historic and landscape constraints, however, new development in the medium term is envisaged as being modest. The original conservation area was designated by Somerset County Council in 1970 and related to the three separate areas of the former Stowey Castle, Stowey Court and church and the village core area. The latter area was redesignated and extended in 1991 by Sedgemoor District Council to include most of the medieval plot boundaries which are an important historic component of the physical structure of the conservation area.

## CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

### STOWEY CASTLE

On a lofty site, known today as The Mount, at the western end of the village are the remains of the 11th century Stowey Castle. The fortification was originally a motte and two baileys and the foundations indicate a tower of about sixty feet by fifty feet and an enclosure suggesting a settlement within the bailey. The walls of the castle were over six feet thick and are believed to have been later used in the construction of Stowey Court. Below the castle is the site of a church and although only a few fragments of Norman masonry remain, the position and dedication indicate an early site, possibly pre-conquest. The church may have been built with the castle. On the west side of the castle are the earthwork remains of a dam and a mill site which might be of medieval origin and are included within the area scheduled as Ancient Monument.

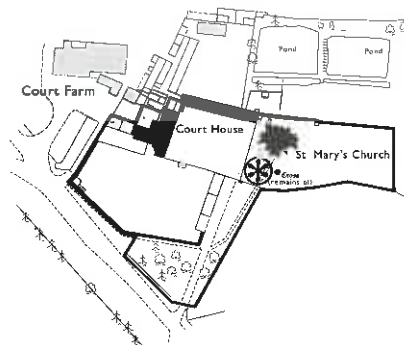
Most of the scheduled area is open grassland with a public footpath traversing part of the Mount from which views over Nether Stowey, surrounding villages and Bridgwater Bay can be spectacular. From such a vantage point the historic military and strategic significance of the site is self-evident.



*Stowey Court, gazebo, attached walling and St. Mary's Church comprise the main elements of one of the three conservation areas, today physically separated from the village by the bypass.*

### STOWEY COURT AND CHURCH

Physically separated from the main body of the village, the conservation area remains intact on the north side of the bypass and approached from the east the immediate setting of the village against the Quantock Hills provides the outstanding landscape context. The parish church of St. Mary with 15th century tower, unusually at a peripheral rather than more central village location, defines the eastern edge of the built development. The most striking feature is undoubtedly the forecourt wall to Stowey Court terminating in the elevated 18th century roadside gazebo concealing the extensive gardens to the rear. The diversity of the conservation area is created by the variety of



*Stowey Court and church conservation area.*



*Originally divided from a 16th century cross passage house, Nos. 20, 22 and 24 Castle Street (south side) represent three simple cottages and were listed in 1985 as part of the national re-survey. The statutory protection of such buildings recognises the enormous contribution of vernacular buildings to the character of historic villages. No. 24 (right) was extensively repaired with grant aid from the District Council in 1987 thus helping to reinforce investment confidence in the conservation area.*

materials comprising rendered and colour-washed front elevation to Stowey Court, red brick of the gazebo, random blue lias rubble of the attached wall and the coursed and squared red sandstone of St. Mary's Church.

### CORE AREA

The main body of the village conservation area recognises the compact arrangement of buildings of very varied styles, periods and materials along the three street pattern. The original designation in 1970 related only to the buildings immediately fronting these streets but the re-designation in 1991 encompassed the boundaries of the plots which are an integral part of the historic built core of the village. The components of the designation in this respect are similar to Axbridge although the quality of Nether Stowey as a conservation area relates very much to the grouped character of buildings rather than examples of individual excellence.

### CASTLE STREET

The widest of the three streets, Castle Street rises up towards The Mount and affords an excellent appreciation of the variety of building styles and volumes. At most points the street character is audibly enhanced by the open roadside stream running down from the Quantocks and defining the south side of the highway with intermittent bridging. The wide forecourt area between the stream and buildings at this point affords a good appreciation of the overall street quality, although the surface is extensively scarred from repairs.

Generally the eastern end and south side consists of two-storey, vernacular houses, some of which are rendered, others displaying their rubble red sandstone. Towards the western end of the street the properties are larger and individually more imposing. The roofscape, although of very varied heights and pitches, is particularly visible from the higher ground and is strongly unified by the red clay pan-tiles but noticeably punctuated by the slate of the large listed buildings of No. 21 (Poole House) and No.28. The remainder of the extended conservation area is defined by South Lane which comprises a good collection of traditional cottages, which, whilst of no outstanding historic merit, make a positive supporting contribution to the character of the area.



*10 St. Mary Street, approximately 1800.*



*Castle Street (north side). As throughout most of the conservation area, the absence of overhead wires considerably enhances the character of the street with its mix of frontages, styles and volumes. No.21 (left, listed grade II) was at one time the house of Thomas Poole, local tanner and associate of Samuel Taylor Coleridge who lived in the village from 1797-1800. Well documented historical associations of national importance can increase the case for the listing of a building and may justify a higher grading. There should nevertheless be some quality or interest in the physical fabric of the building itself to justify the statutory protection.*

### ST. MARY'S STREET

As a whole the street is strongly Georgian with some large and elegant facades of measured proportions. The frontages of this style, often rendered and colour-washed are well represented by the group of Clock House, Oakford House and No.10 on the south side. In some contrast, Nos. 7 and 9 opposite are a clear reminder of their Quantock location displaying the characteristic red sandstone. The stonework is squared and coursed indicating some superiority over the random rubble of many of Stowey's humbler cottages. Alterations over the years have somewhat eroded the architectural detail of groups like these, such as the loss of the forecourt railings of Oakford House and the large projecting shopfront at No. 7 inserted into the right-hand side in total contravention of the majestic three-bay symmetry of the facade.

### LIME STREET

This is a long narrow street of simple two-storey terraced double-fronted cottages terminating in Coleridge Cottage on the south-west side. Generally the buildings appear in good physical condition although the group quality of the facades has been eroded by inappropriate replacement windows, particularly where this is to accommodate commercial uses, and reflects the unlisted status of these buildings. With tarmac footways either side, the resultant narrow carriageway width creates severe traffic congestion with the current two way traffic regime and on-street parking.



*The character and appearance of many conservation areas can be strongly influenced by the treatment of roads, pavements and other public spaces. Traditional surfaces and layouts should be retained wherever possible or re-introduced where there is historical evidence for them. The local fashion for "stowey cobbling" adds enormous texture, dimension and interest to St. Mary Street.*



*Lime Street.*



*Castle Street.*

# Shapwick

Designated 1991

## BRIEF HISTORY

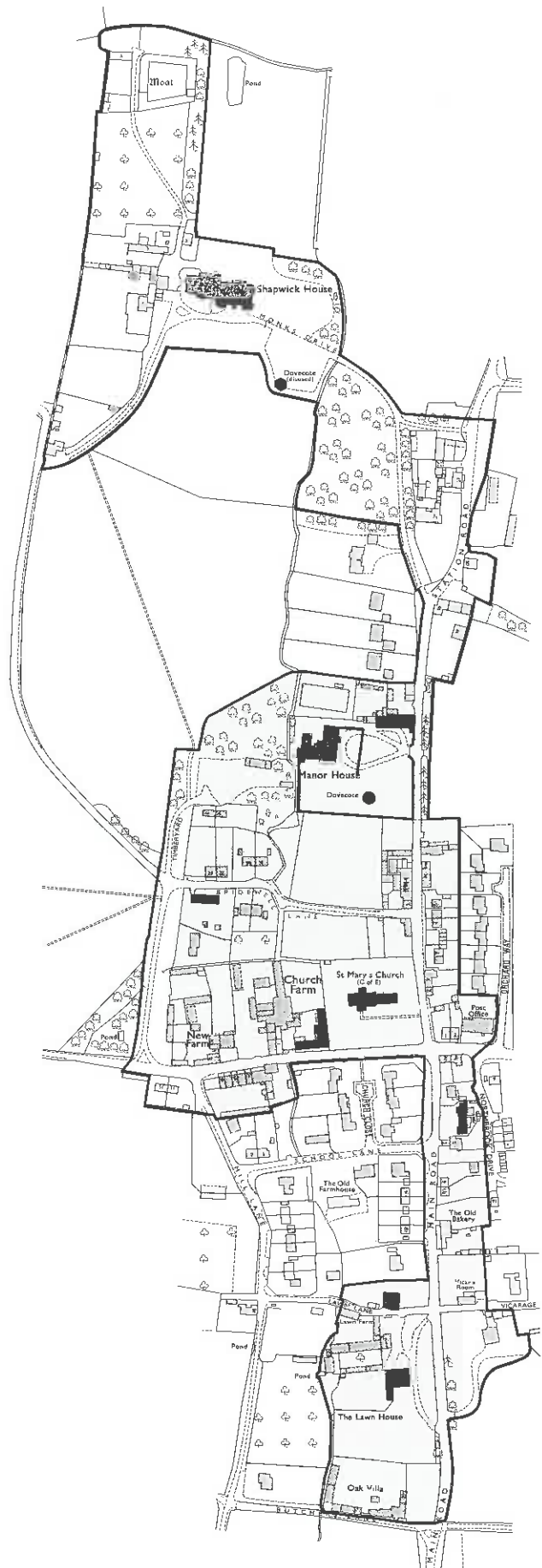
One of a string of villages along the gentle northern slopes of the Polden Hills which bisect the flatlands of Sedgemoor, Shapwick was once a stop-over point for pilgrims to and from Glastonbury Abbey. In common with other villages along this side of the Poldens, Shapwick had a well known holy well. The local springs from the clays of the lower lias were also later known for their mineral salts similar to the therapeutic waters of Harrogate. About the early 1800's there was consequently a bath house for the visiting sick although this was later demolished and the stream diverted.

In contrast to many old villages Shapwick seems to have developed, as the pattern of both its fields and the settlement suggest, as the result of a planned and wholesale reorganisation. The rectangular patterns of streets and lanes so defined are similar to those of Edington, Cossington and Woolavington, although the volume and rate of development has differed between them.

In the north of the village, Shapwick House was built by Judge



*As with several of the Polden villages, the distinctive quality of Shapwick is derived from the extensive use of lias stone as the principal construction material which underpins so much of the character of the conservation area.*



Rolles (who was later relieved of office by Cromwell) on the site of the old Court House of Abbot John de Taunton. Constructed in the 17th century, altered in the 18th century and now a hotel it retains much of its original work. Shapwick also has the rare distinction of possessing two ice houses, one at Icehouse Copse, the other at Shapwick House which is thought to be much older and of Norman origin. Development in Shapwick in the current century has largely consisted of consolidation of the rectilinear pattern with modern but relatively small-scale, estate style housing development and some infilling. For the foreseeable future, development is not anticipated beyond the current built extent of the village which has a current population of about 400.

## CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Although the development pattern of the village is predominantly linear with pockets of modern frontage and estate type development, there are several identifiable components of the conservation area.

### MAIN ROAD

The lias stone which locally is so characteristic, is generally coursed and squared for buildings and walls. The natural stone can contrast sharply in colour and texture with development which employs the reconstructed stone varieties, particularly as its appearance can change significantly with weathering. The lias stone for boundary walls, barns and most older buildings presents the visual and material cohesion displayed in the street scene. There is



*St. Mary's Church provides a significant focus for the linear conservation area.*

a considerable array of overhead wires in Main Road and Church Road and their future undergrounding would be desirable.

### ST. MARY'S CHURCH AND CHURCH ROAD

The buildings comprising the church, Church Farm, the several stone barns to the west and the cottages on the south side of Church Road provide an important group, particularly significant as the gateway to the village from the A39 to the west. St. Mary's Church, from the 14th century, is dominant in the street scene at this point with large walled churchyard and stone paths for which Church Farmhouse provides an important complement.

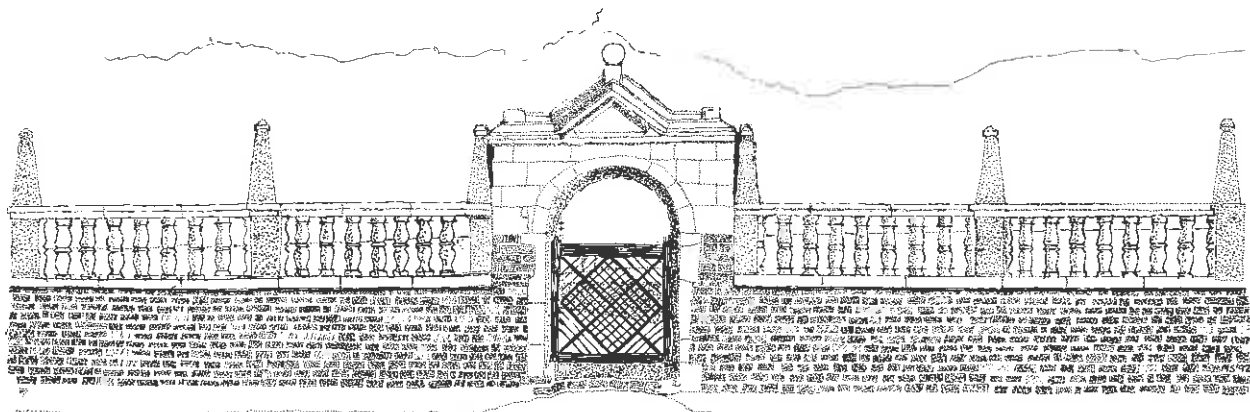
### MANOR HOUSE

Shapwick Manor House (now Shapwick Senior School) of medieval origin and built for the Almoner of Glastonbury Abbey, is an outstanding feature of Main Road. Set in large grounds and rebuilt in the early 17th

century for Henry Bull, MP for Somerset, Manor House contains a wealth of historical features in the grounds, including a stone screen, the former stable block with coach house and a medieval dovecote. All these structures are listed Grade II\*.

### SHAPWICK HOUSE

Dating from 1630 the house was built for Sir Henry Rolle, Chief Justice to Charles I, although the building was much altered in the later 18th century. The house stands in extensive landscaped grounds and is now a country hotel accessed via a private road. The service wing to the left is now a separate dwelling. The remainder of the designation here includes the 17th century octagonal dovecote and the site of the former tythe barn west of the main house. The moat to the north of Shapwick House is believed to have been connected with the former monastery for fish farming.



*Many historic former houses have a fine range of associated garden architecture which is often listed separately. The 17th century stone screen at Shapwick School (formerly Shapwick Manor) enclosed a former parterre to the front (listed grade II).*

# Spaxton

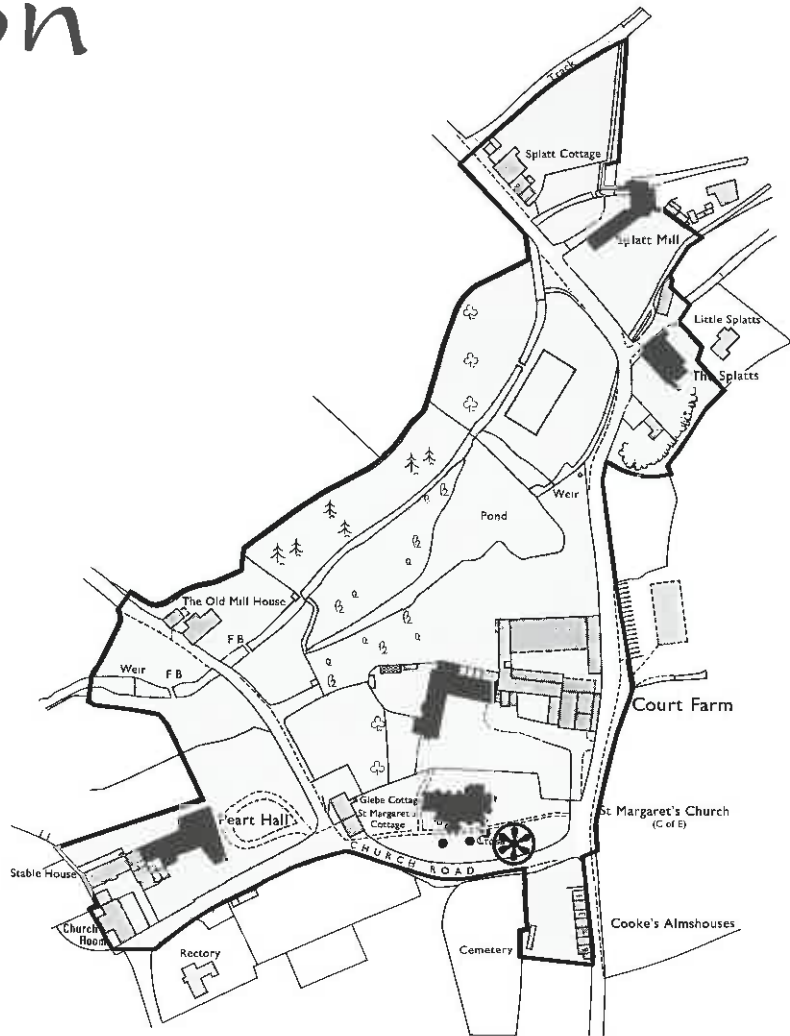
Designated 1991

## BRIEF HISTORY

Three miles west of Bridgwater, the Spaxton conservation area is strongly rural in character and is comprised of a collection of low-density buildings grouped around the Peartwater Valley. A designation of only five hectares, the area is generally well-wooded, particularly on the rising north side of the valley which provides the immediate backdrop for many aspects of the area. It is thought that there has been a settlement on the banks of the Peartwater Stream since the 9th century centred on the knoll to the north of the present day church. The later development of the settlement became the domesday manor of "Spacheston".

## CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

The built form is largely characterised by red sandstone rubble for domestic buildings, barns and walls. The composition of the parish church, Court Farm and associated barns is a central feature. St. Margaret's Church is mainly 15th century but there are traces of 12th century and 13th century work. The church has a distinctive embattled tower and stands in an elevated churchyard behind roadside walling



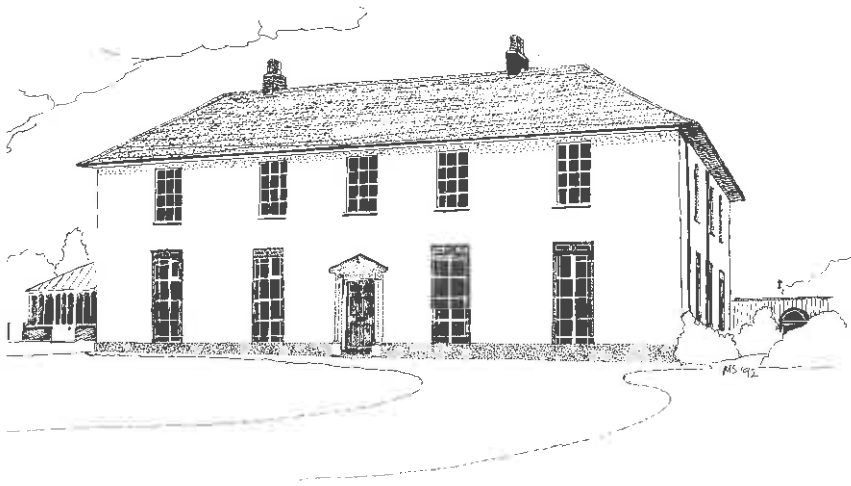
The setting of the church is enriched by some fine monuments within the churchyard, particularly the 14th century grade I listed cross with octagonal base. The adjoining Court House Farmhouse was the 15th/16th century manor house. It has an L-shaped plan and first floor hall in the right-hand wing and adjoining range with cruck

built roof. The imposing former rectory, Peart Hall, is generally concealed behind high wall and offset entrance drive with large single tree in front of the facade.

The northern part of the designation on the lower ground of the valley comprises the group of houses adjoining the streams. Representing dreamy



*Court House Farmhouse.*



*Peart Hall. The roughcast frontage suggests a date of about 1830 and the asymmetrical glazing bars of the ground floor windows are characteristic of the "frothiness" of the Regency style rather than that of the more serious Georgian.*



rural splendour is the 16th century Tuckers Cottage, a colour-washed rubble cottage with a thatched roof punctuated at the eaves by dormers. In close proximity at right angles to Splatt Lane dating from about the same period is the long two-storey rubble Splatt Mill House. The adjoining former mill (also listed) was extensively restored with full set of milling machinery, apple wood gear wheels, millstones with housings and grain hoppers in association with grant aid from the District Council in the mid 1980s. Completing this group is the thatched symmetrical two-storey terrace of Splatt Mill Cottages adjoining a banked green roadside verge which, whilst not of outstanding individual interest, positively complements the rural qualities of this designation.

*"Tuckers", Splatt Lane, a 16th century cottage thatched in wheat reed. Thatching is of some debate as regards "traditional" buildings. Although Sedgemoor now has relatively few thatched buildings, much of Somerset and the West Country has generally employed wheat reed as opposed to water reed. Wheat reed tends to be lighter in colour and presents a softer, more rounded appearance than water reed, which is particularly characteristic of East Anglia and its steeper pitched roofs. Re-thatching with wheat reed does not always require complete stripping of the old thatch thus helping to preserve historic roof structures and creating the thickness of coverage.*

*Thatching in water reed.*





# Stone Allerton

Designated 1991

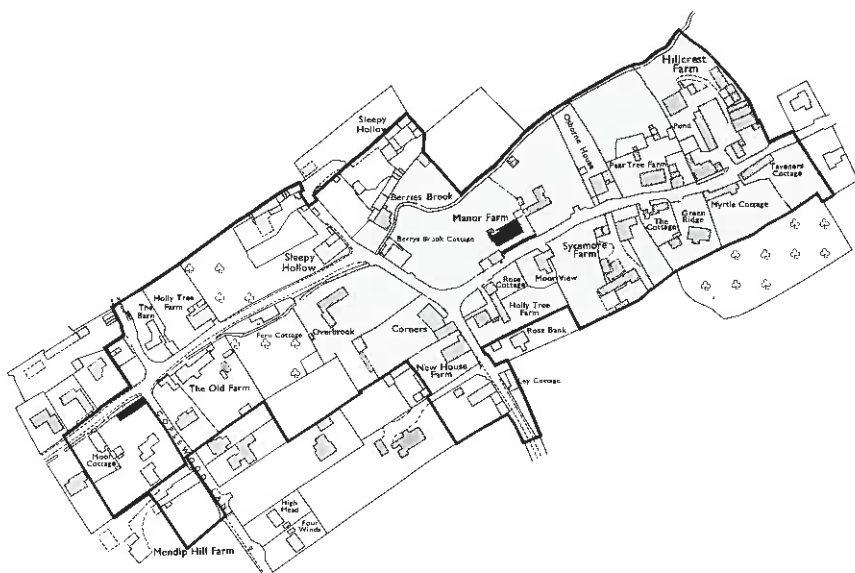
## BRIEF HISTORY

Stone Allerton is one of a small group of historic estates on the Isle of Wedmore which were probably laid out as newly planned communities in the 10th or early 11th centuries. Others include Alston Sutton, Badgworth and Chapel Allerton. No direct trace of that period remains other than the street pattern which is probably long established. The village has quietly developed over the centuries and the widespread use of local limestone in the building of farmhouses, barns, cottages and boundary walls has created an attractive and harmonious rural settlement.

## CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Approximately one and a half miles south west of Weare, Stone Allerton conservation area has several similarities in character and components. Main Street contains all the valued components of grass verge, stone rubble building and boundary wall with mature planting set in low density rural framework, although the existing overhead wires are a considerable visual detraction.

The road through the village is particularly characterised by the widespread use of local limestone in boundary walls and buildings. Windows and door surrounds in some buildings are in brickwork and clay tiles are the usual roofing material. Manor Farm dates from the early 19th century and departed from the local vernacular style with its fishscale slate roof and rendered walls scribed as ashlar. Manor Farm and Underhill Cottage are the only listed buildings in the conservation area. The open areas by Overbook and Sleepy Hollow, emphasise the open aspect of the village.



*The village does not have a particular focus such as church, green, square or group of buildings of particular quality; the character is that of the mix of traditional farmhouses and cottages of varied and attractive style.*

*Early 19th century Manor Farmhouse with decorative cast and wrought iron railings.*



# Weare

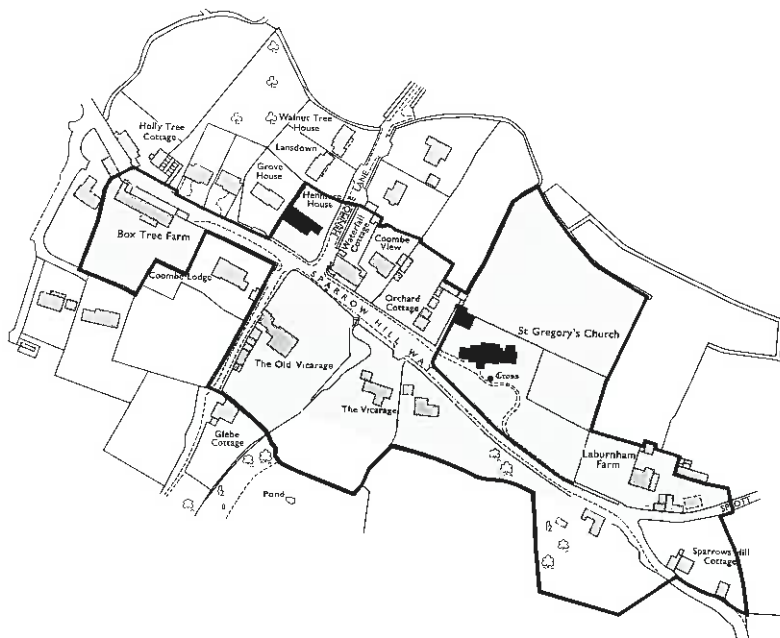
Designated 1991

## BRIEF HISTORY

Historically the settlement has tended to develop in a linear manner along Sparrow Hill Way although the conservation area is clearly defined around St. Gregory's Church and several detached properties on the well wooded, south side of the road. The name of the village is taken from the English "wer" (weir, dam or fish trap).

## CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Although comprising only about a dozen properties, the conservation area was designated in recognition of the relatively unspoilt survival of an old core area of a rural settlement. The extensive use of lias stone as the principal construction material, particularly for boundary walls, is largely responsible for the unity and attraction of the area and warrants special consideration to ensure its proper retention.



## ST. GREGORY'S CHURCH AND SETTING

This is the most memorable feature of this linear settlement framed against the wooded ridge south of Sparrow Hill Way in the immediate locality and the Mendips in the distance. The churchyard retaining wall, gate piers, iron gates and overthrow lamp (all listed) provide a collective statement of the architectural importance of the church. The single storey church room tucked away in the north west corner of the churchyard further complements the homogeneity of this group in terms of coursed rubble, slate roof and interesting Gothic-style glazing bars to the windows. The view up the stone

walled path to the church room is rewarding.

## SPARROW HILL WAY

The remainder of the conservation area is subservient but complementary to the church area comprising a collection of detached dwellings set in wooded grounds on the south side with a couple of modern infill developments. The listed early 19th century villa-style Henmoore House, Waterfall Cottage and Orchard Cottage of rubble stone make the greatest visual contribution to the scale and proportions of the street scene.



*The mainly 15th century church with its extensive churchyard and few but prominent trees, occupies an elevated position at the eastern end of the conservation area and is the visual "goal" of the village.*

# Wedmore

Designated 1971, 1991

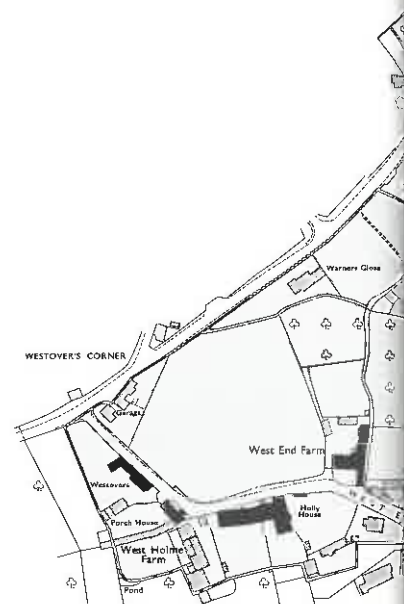
## BRIEF HISTORY

Situated 11 miles to the south-east of Weston-super-Mare, Wedmore stands on a long, low fertile "island" above the moors between the Mendips and the Poldens. When the sea extended as far as Glastonbury it really was an island with water lapping around its shores. This topographical context is especially important to the historical development of the settlement. It was the essential factor of height combined with a valuable workable soil which has consolidated Wedmore and the smaller villages of Blackford and Theale into an isolated but identifiable group.

Historically the area has links with King Alfred the Great who, recognising the obvious geographical advantages of Wedmore, chose it as the site for his palace and in 878 signed a

treaty with the Danes. This event has since lent itself to one explanation for the place name as "moor of the agreement, pledge or reconciliation". Whatever the origins, the Peace of Wedmore marked the acceptance of the fact that eastern England was now the Danelaw. A church existed at Wedmore by 1075 and chapels at Mark, Biddisham, Allerton and Mudgley strongly suggest an early Saxon settlement with minster, as does the present church fabric, much of which dates from around 1200. The hoard of 10th and 11th century coins discovered in the churchyard is likely evidence of important early local commerce.

The central part of the village is dominated by the medieval square street pattern comprising Church Street, The Borough, Grants Lane and Glanville Road with pockets of older develop-



*With its rich display of buildings of most periods and styles, Wedmore was one of the first conservation areas to be designated in the county. The sustained investment by property owners in the conservation area is readily apparent by the condition of the historic fabric today and is testimony to the first requirement of conservation policy - the need to take the long term view.*



ment along Pilcorn Street, the rising Combe Batch to the east and the more isolated cluster at West End on the far western periphery of the village.

Wedmore is an attractive place to live and has become popular as a commuter base. Pressures for modern housing development have been accommodated on a variety of peripheral sites. Fine stone houses, high walls and attractive lanes impart a real distinction to the village and its conservation area of deserved outstanding heritage status.

#### CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

In broad terms the conservation area is very varied but of a high standard and does not suffer from any particular excessive environmental problems. Throughout much of the designated area the landscape setting provides an important and recurring green backdrop which needs to be protected from

inappropriate and damaging development.

The original conservation area, designated by the County Council in 1971, related to the medieval square-shaped street pattern, including Pilcorn Street and West End. The designation was extended by Sedgemoor District Council in 1991 to include previously identified "fringe areas" but which are now considered to be of sufficient quality to merit statutory protection.

#### WEST END

In marked contrast to the activity of the focal centre, West End is an area of quiet rural charm to the south of the B3139 Blackford Road into the village. The fine group of listed buildings straddling the south side of West End comprising Westovers (1680), Porch House, Westholme Farmhouse and Holly House are particularly prominent overlooking the large field opposite which provides an extremely



*New infill developments can be most challenging proposals particularly in part of a conservation area with existing low density development, as here at West End. The guiding consideration is that of context - not necessarily to mimic established styles, nor to suppress flair in design. The building to the left was constructed on a corner site in 1988 within the curtilage of a listed building and behind a retained perimeter stone wall.*



*West End. Holly House, Westholme Farmhouse, Porch House and Westovers have an integral relationship with the open space opposite.*

important open aspect and is integral to the character of this local scene. As a street, West End is perhaps the epitome of much that is Wedmore; stone buildings, stone walls, grass verge and winding lane. The overhead wires and supporting poles are particularly intrusive in this situation. The eastern part of this cohesive area is defined by Gog's House, an imposing 17th century two-storey house with metal tent canopy hooded porch and adjoining high wall emphasising the curve of the lane.

#### COMBE BATCH

This linear part of the designation on the far east side of the village, acknowledges the older development on the south side of Combe Batch, the historic route to Wells, now the B3139. Here the street scene is characterised by roadside walling with groups of terraced stone cottages set back with varying building lines against the rising green hillside to the rear. The street

rises towards its crest in the east with perhaps the most interesting buildings comprising the listed group of Cobblers Cottage, Acacia Cottage and North View. These early 19th century rendered terraced houses each have very distinctive frontages with interesting and varied window patterns. Generally, the street picture as a whole is not of outstanding quality but the designation will protect this eastern approach to Wedmore.

#### THE BOROUGH, GRANTS LANE, CHURCH STREET, AND GLANVILLE ROAD

This group constitutes the historic square-shaped street pattern, The Borough and Church Street emerging as the focal centre. Particularly on the west side The Borough is an attractive collection of generally small-scale buildings although several of the original frontages of the surviving buildings have been added to or altered on the front elevations for retail use. The

street scene up and down The Borough terminates in elevated green hillside, an overall feature of importance to Wedmore's setting. The listed group of rubble stone buildings at the southern end of The Borough and turning into Grants Lane (Bridgwood, Prospect Villa and intervening house) display a humble dignity in contrast to the dominant and flamboyant attitude of 1 and 1a Church Street, whose prominent corner location is very much an integral part of the varied architectural experience of The Borough. The greatest environmental problem in The Borough is perhaps the traffic congestion due to the intersection of the B3151 and B3139 through roads aggravated by the on-street parking related to the commercial and retail uses.

In architectural terms the highlight of Wedmore is probably Church Street and the area in the vicinity of the Parish Church of St. Mary. The open aspect of the elevated churchyard with the dramatic single yew tree (planted in 1728, the year of the Coronation of George II) allows full appreciation of the generous proportions of the wealth of listed buildings along the gently curved Church Street.

This vista is particularly enhanced by the almost total lack of overhead wires which emphasises the roofscape of these mostly 18th and early 19th century two storey stone buildings and is a good example of the long term visual benefits that can be achieved from undergrounding of overhead installations.

The remainder of the "square" is characterised by intermittent groups of dwellings with only a small amount of modern development which has little overall adverse impact. Grants Lane which rises up from The Borough contains some individual buildings of note such as the Chalet and the Baptist Church and at its far western end an attractive two-storey terraced group



*Often reflecting their present and previous importance in society, many religious buildings are powerful architectural statements also. There is doubtless a clear translation of Methodism into the built presentation of the Wesleyan Chapel (1817 listed grade II) at Sand Road with forceful proportions and massive hipped roof. Listed building control over alterations etc. to ecclesiastical buildings is currently being reviewed with a proposed system of self-regulation for nominated religions including the Church of England, which has been exempt from the legislation for many years.*



*No. 1 Church Street (left) in “flamboyantly Italianate” style and adjoining building provide a striking contribution to the street scene and the rich architectural variety of the conservation area.*

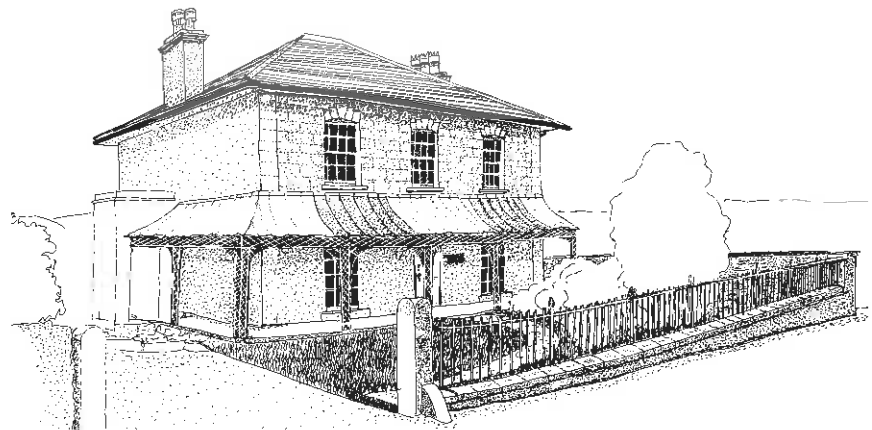
with varied roof pitches, stone boundary walls and railings.

#### GUILDHALL LANE AND PILCORN STREET

Guildhall Lane, a narrow road linking Pilcorn Street and Sand Road contains a cluster of stone cottages near the brook and, despite a substantial number of modern bungalows, the street retains an historical feel. The pedestrian route to Glanville Road is also known as Guildhall Lane and includes a notable massive stone boundary wall on the south side. Sand Road includes several listed buildings, stone boundary walls, mature trees and an absence of footways, all of which reinforce the historic qualities of the street. An ancient farmhouse known as The Close and the adjacent area of pasture form another distinct component of the conservation area.

In Pilcorn Street, the principal route into Wedmore from the west, the conservation area begins with The Grange. Set well back from the road, this is an imposing early 19th century house rendered and symmetrical in design. Overall the street scene is characterised by stone boundary walls, good tree cover and an older, substantially built-up frontage with some modern infill.

The eastern end of Pilcorn Street as it drops down to Lascot Hill affords a rewarding view of the church and the roofscape of Church Street.



*The Chalet, Grants Lane (early 19th century, listed grade II).*



*Group of stone buildings at Guildhall Lane. Increased levels of modern residential development tends to elevate the contribution made to the overall character of conservation areas by unlisted buildings such as these. The legislation protects all buildings from demolition in conservation areas without a thorough assessment of their role in the historic built context and consideration of what would take their place.*

# Acknowledgements

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Whilst care has been taken to ensure that the information in this publication is accurate, Sedgemoor District Council cannot accept responsibility for any error or omission.

