



**BLUNSDON
VILLAGE DESIGN
STATEMENT**

An aerial photograph of a village, likely Blunsdon East, showing a dense cluster of houses with a prominent church spire in the center. The village is surrounded by green fields and trees. A semi-transparent dark box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title and text.

PREFACE

This Village Design Statement (VDS) has been developed as part of the Blunsdon East Neighbourhood Plan (BENP). Its purpose is to manage change, whether through new development, small scale additions or alterations. It does not deal with whether development should take place, but with how planned development should be implemented, so it is in harmony with its setting and contributes to the conservation or enhancement of the village environment.



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Introduction

- 1.1. This document aims to assist all those involved in the development of existing and new residential areas within the BENP area, to ensure the ambitions of achieving high quality development are understood and realised.
- 1.2. This statement sits below the adopted Swindon Borough Residential Development guide. It sets out to provide a clear set of principles and guidelines to enable high quality design and shape new development in line with the National and local planning requirements.
- 1.3. The BENP recognises that new development will occur and the quality and sustainability of these future developments is a priority of this guidance. Good design is a key consideration for all future developments and this guidance directly supports the local plan with this objective.

- 1.4. The purpose of this document is therefore:
- To achieve sustainable development through high standards of design
 - To enable successful applications and expedite those that satisfy policies of the BENP and SBC Local Development Plan.
 - To provide timely and objective design advice
- 1.5. This VDS is intended for adoption, following a referendum, by Swindon Borough Council and is therefore a material planning consideration. This document aims to assist all those involved in the development of existing and new residential areas of the BENP area, to ensure the ambitions of achieving high quality development are understood and realised.

'Good design has a social, environmental and economic value and is the collective responsibility of all those involved in the process from planning through to implementation and for the life of the development.'

Swindon Residential Design Guide
2016

Vision

2

The community has said it wants the plan to shape the future so that:

'Blunsdon will continue to be a safe and tranquil rural area with a strong community spirit and a diverse population. It will value its unique rural setting on the Mid Vale Ridge and its historic heritage while improving communication links with Swindon and the wider area'.

- 2.1. This VDS sets out to further define Policy DE1 of the Development Plan for the BENP area and to describe the distinctive character of the Village and the surrounding countryside.
- 2.2. This is done through DESIGN PRINCIPLES based upon the distinctive local character.
- 2.3. The vision encapsulates the view of the BENP in 2026. There are four recurring key themes throughout this document that set out the communities vision for Blunsdon over the plan period.
- 2.4. These themes are woven through the chapters.

A Place people want to live

Pride in our Heritage

Supporting the Community

Conserving the Environment



A place people want to live

- Maintain the village character of Blunsdon by managing development on the scale envisaged in the Local Development Plan. In practical terms this will be limited to small scale developments over the plan period.
- Maintain areas of separation to protect the unique identity of Blunsdon and prevent coalescence with adjacent existing and proposed urban areas such as Kingsdown.
- Ensure the urban development of Kingsdown provides benefits to the Parish of Blunsdon such as new sustainable links and rights of way and environmental enhancements.
- Ensure the four themes are achieved, we will seek collaborative solutions for infrastructure and road safety.



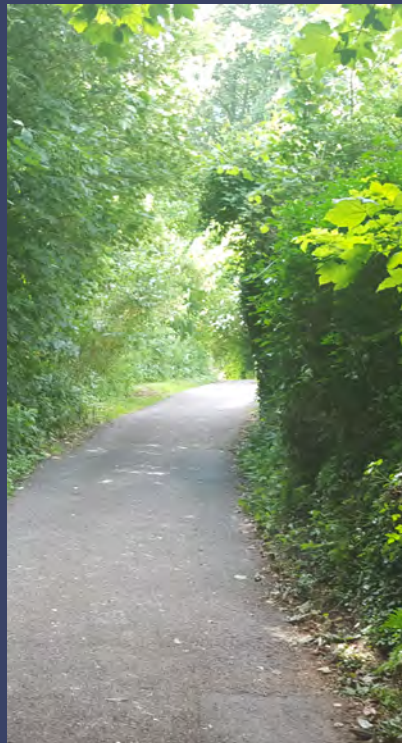
Pride in our Heritage'

- Protect and enhance the heritage and historic sites within the BENP area for the benefit of present and future residents and the community.
- Ensure developments and alterations are sympathetic and appropriate.
- Recognise and and promote the area's heritage and history.
- Register and protect Assets of Community Value throughout the BENP area.
- Protect valued views in and out of the village.



Supporting the Community

- Ensure opportunities for employment on existing sites and to consider future use of land for employment where this would be compatible in size and scale with the village setting.
- Enhance the lifestyle of the Community by
 - improving footpath and cycle links
 - providing allotment space
 - working with partners to ensure access to super-fast broadband
 - maintaining and improving existing open spaces
- Protect and improve sports facilities and play areas.
- Encourage the addition of open space and green infrastructure.



Conserving the Environment

- Preserve, improve and enhance the green infrastructure and environmental assets within the BENP area.
- Provide habitats that support and improve the biodiversity of the area.
- Preserve special views from the hilltop village.
- Reduce light pollution to minimise risks to health, hazards to road users and to encourage the presence of nocturnal wildlife.

Landscape Environment

3

- 3.1. Blunsdon is located at the eastern end of the Midvale Ridge National Character Area. Being situated at the end of a ridge results in the land sloping away from the centre of the village to both north and south. The area itself has been occupied since ancient times as indicated by the presence of worked flints dating back to Neolithic times suggesting human occupation back to 4500 BCE, an Iron Age hill fort on Castle Hill (c. 600 BCE) and the presence of Ermin Street originally a Roman road.
- 3.2. The location of the village along the ridge influenced the original development and has also impacted on later developments. The original village was a linear development along what is now the High Street. Later development occurred to the south along Broadbush with the creation of market gardens which now dictates the plot format and streetscape. Further, later development mainly straddled the High Street. This development over time has created a series of areas, often constructed contemporaneously, which display specific characteristics which are described in detail below.
- 3.3. Lower Village, a separate Conservation Area, has always been a separate community based on agricultural occupancy with large farm houses and associated outbuildings. Although most of these are no longer actively used for agricultural purposes they contribute to the very rural feel of the Lower Village.
- 3.4. The ridge top location creates views in both directions over the Bydemill Brook valley to the south and, more extensively, to the north over the Thames Valley where there are some exceptional panoramic views. These views are considered to be a key aspect of the village landscape. The importance of and preservation of these views is seen as a critical element of the BENP and is covered by a specific policy (Policy 10) within the main plan.
- 3.5. While the area does not include extensive woodland there are a number of copses and the large number of hedgerow trees, combined with the extensive network of hedges, which does create the appearance of the area being well wooded. These features remain as important habitats for the wildlife within the plan area. The requirement to retain and improve these tree and hedgerow features is dealt with in Policy 11 of the main plan.



FIG 1 LANDSCAPE VIEW NORTH BLUNSDON

- 3.6. Being located on a ridge the village forms a watershed with springs and streams flowing down each of the scarp slopes. To the south these link into the Bydemill Brook system and create one of the few ridge topped valleys along the Midvale Ridge. The sound of running water is an established feature of Lower Village to the north where the main stream links in to the River Ray and thence into the Thames. It is important that these watercourses are retained.
- 3.7. Current and previous land use, mainly agricultural and horticultural which created the village in its current form with its panoramic views, green environment and historic buildings, has established a strong rural ambience and it is considered vital to retain this pastoral landscape.
- 3.8. The community seek to ensure the landscape resources (woodlands, hedgerows, ponds, streams/verges/ditches, geological features and views) that contribute to the distinctiveness of the Village are preserved, enhanced and in future development, created.

Where appropriate any proposals for development should be accompanied by a detailed Landscape Statement. This should combine with a 5 year commitment to maintenance and replacement of any failures.

The retention and enhancement of existing streams, verges and ditches is expected. When considering proposals for changes to the road network, or where new development is adjacent to existing streams, verges or ditches the retention and enhancement of existing features will be encouraged.

LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS

3.9. These next sections seek to help define key features of the intrinsic character, diversity and local distinctiveness of BENP area.

AGRICULTURE

3.10. The village historically was defined by the surrounding farms and their buildings (FIG2) Although several of these no longer function as farms, they remain key buildings of interest (FIGs 4 and 5), surround the village and establish a strong rural and agricultural ambience (FIG 3). The principle land use is agriculture with the prevalence of the surrounding farms, in particular beef and dairy farming. It is vital to retain this pastoral landscape, which includes swathes of grassland, hedgerows and trees, streams and brooks.



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FIG 2 LOCAL FARMS AROUND BENP AREA



FIG 3 VIEW TO OXLEAZE FARM



FIG 4 FOWLERS FARM



FIG 5 HISTORIC FARM BUILDING

WOODLANDS

3.11. Although the areas of the BENP with woodland are not extensive, the large number of hedgerow trees gives the appearance of the area being wooded. Historically it was covered in broadleaved woodland featuring oak and ash and was managed as covers for hunting. This historical context is important and the Copse areas still form important habitats for many species (FIG 6). Elsewhere along Bydemill Brook stands of Alder and Willow can be found which funnel down towards the Great Wood at Stanton to the east.

Wet woodlands like those alongside of the tributary of the Bydemill Brook forming stream corridors are to be retained where possible. We will resist the drainage of wet woodlands associated with stream corridors.



FIG 6 COPSES AND FEATURES

HEDGEROWS

3.12. All over the area existing native species can be found accompanying other features of the landscape, brooks and ditches, small copses (Owl and Water Eaton) and some of these are protected by the Conservation Area Appraisals. The pattern of boundaries varies as the field systems developed and this is reflected in the variety of hedgerow species encountered. Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Bramble and Holly are prevalent, there is some Wych Elm Alder and Maple also Plane is found in the Lower Village. These combined with Honeysuckle, Elder and Rose (Rose Lane) as well as Ash and Sycamore form the main species building divisions.

The retention of existing in-field trees and hedgerows will be encouraged including, (where appropriate) the creation and enhancement of native woodland. This is subject to the applicant ensuring that key views and glimpses are not lost.



FIG 7 STRONG HEDGEROWS CHAPEL HILL

BOUNDARIES

3.13. As included in the Conservation Area appraisal, stream and spring, boundary walls, roadside kerbs of sarsen stone, iron railings and gates, and gardens are essential local details and features to help inform decisions about new development settings (FIGS 8 & 9).

Within the built form of the BENP, boundary features should be retained or sympathetic to those already extant. The use of native and local species in hedgerows, trees, grass verges and other soft landscaping appropriate to the locality and situation will be encouraged, as will the planting of new trees in new developments.



FIG 8 STREAM & STADDLE STONE

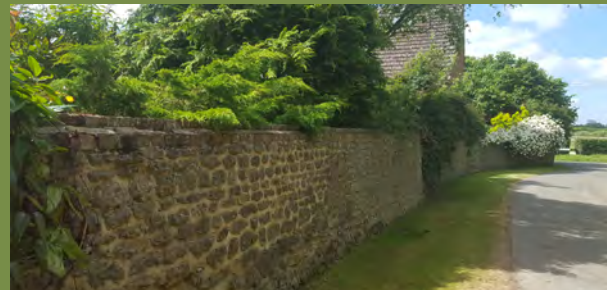


FIG 9 STONE WALL & GRASS VERGE

RIGHTS OF WAY

3.14. Access to the countryside was a clear premise set by those involved in the consultations that were held. There is a great network of footpaths and bridleways that cross the BENP area. Both Broad Blunston and Lower Blunston settlements have kept their network of historic footpaths and routes as a sustainable communication system to connect the countryside, the green areas and the neighbourhoods. It is an essential part of the character of both settlements, and a historical and local infrastructure that helps to recognise this. The key circulating footpath has been identified as the Heritage Trail (Appendix D of the BENP). It clearly links valued areas, buildings and heritage sites and also illustrates the history of the settlement.

STREAMS VERGES AND DITCHES

3.15. The BENP area was first inhabited and developed as a result of the prevalence and availability of water, through natural ridge based springs and unique ridge topped valleys. A key feature of the Lower Village is the capture of that spring water in the roadside streams along Front and Back Lane (FIGS 10 & 11). Also the tributary of the Bydemill Brook that flows over the scarp to the Thames creates marshy lush grassland in its valley, bisecting the area and providing great habitats for a myriad of species. The rate of flow through the water course varies throughout the year but is always present. In the Lower Village Conservation Area the constant sound of water has become an established characteristic. Grass verges and soft road edges are a feature of the Lower Village stream and they are often manifested as roadside ditches. These are not robust and need constant attention to keep them flowing and to stop minor floods.



FIG 10 ROADSIDE STREAM & VERGE

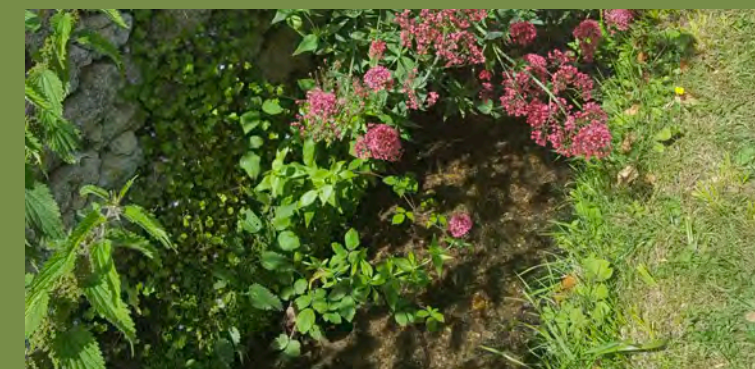


FIG 11 BOUNDARY WALL & STREAM

VIEWS

3.16. Landscape setting is an important part of this area, as the views of the surrounding land are a significant input to its character which reinforces the distinctive identity as a rural settlement on and above the Thames plain. There are spectacular views both from and into the village from many viewpoints (FIG 12).

3.17. **Northwards**, there are some exceptional panoramic views over the Thames valley towards the Cotswolds, and back inwards towards the village (FIG 14).



FIG12 VIEW FROM HIGH ST



FIG 13 PANORAMIC VIEWS

3.18. **Southwards**, the views are blocked by new developments; nevertheless some open views of fields are visible and provide some evidence of the settlement's pastoral origins, helping to depict its rural location. And there are good views from the public footpath from Broadbush to the tributary of the Bydemill Brook (FIG 14).

3.19. Particularly noteworthy views set out in FIG14 include:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 Castle Hill - panorama | 2 Burytown Lane / Churchway - northwards |
| 3 Cemetery - southwards | 4 Churchway northwards |
| 5 Grains Farm/Rose Lane - southwards | 6 Broadbush footpath |
| 7 Stubbs Hill | 8 Kingsdown Lane - north-east |
| 9 Junction of Backlane and Ivy Lane | |



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PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

3.20. Owing to its linear development the Village lacks a Village Green. The Recreation Ground [3] in the centre of the Village provides a central focus to community activities, sports and leisure. It gives the Village a 'Green Heart' close to the school and central play area. This area could be enhanced by a more structured sport area around the old, decaying tennis court [4] and proposals for a multi use games area (MUGA) are progressing. This is a partnership developed between Parish Council, School, Football and Cricket clubs and Swindon Borough Council and will allow some respite to the over-used recreation ground.

3.21. Other designated public open spaces include the Millennium Garden [1] (FIG15) and the Sam's Lane Copse [2].

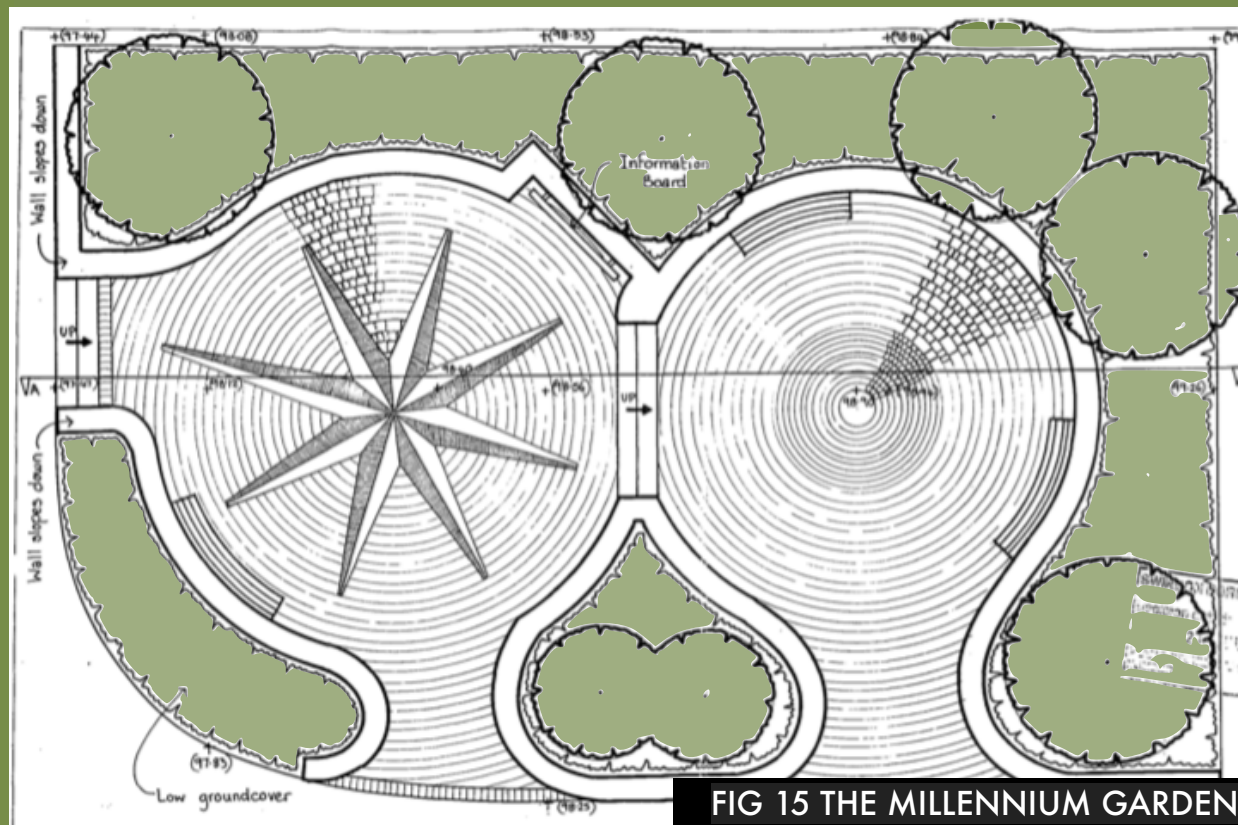


FIG 15 THE MILLENNIUM GARDEN



1



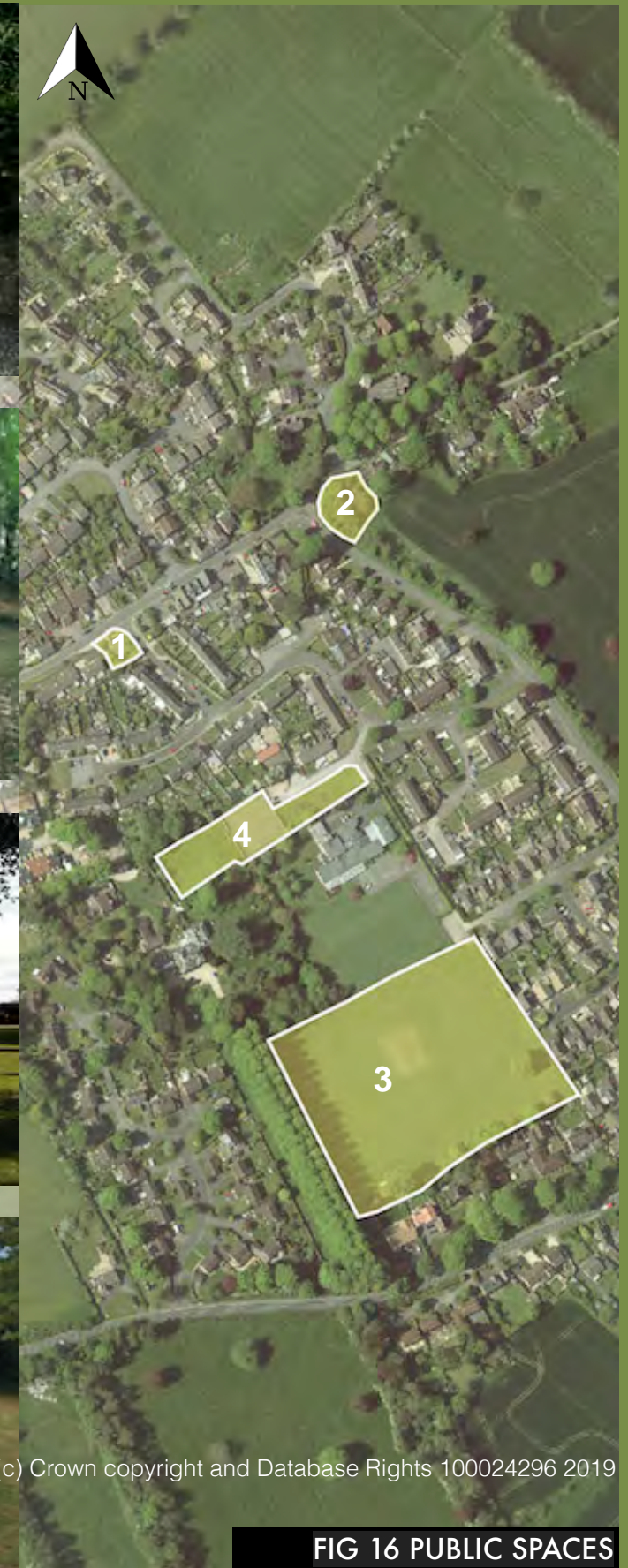
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3



4



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FIG 16 PUBLIC SPACES

Built Environment

4

- 4.1. Whilst buildings in Broad Blunsdon and Lower Blunsdon have always exhibited a range of styles, they have historically been constructed using similar, traditional materials such as timber, stone, red brick and Cotswold stone tiles, slates and thatch. More recently traditional materials have been replaced with modern concrete products which closely match the original materials. Some of these modern equivalents are manufactured nearby.
- 4.2. The larger scale of developments and the use of standardised designs and materials became more common after the Second World War. As a result many villages are losing their distinctive character and the special sense of place created by older buildings.
- 4.3. In the past decade or so, the tide has begun to turn owing to an increasing appreciation of the importance of good design and the need to use locally-produced materials.

In considering any new developments, the scale proposed should reflect the gradual incremental and historic growth that has formed Blunsdon's special character. Any proposals for developments should reflect the grain, density, quality, and materials of the area within which it lies.

VIEWS AND VISTAS

- 4.4. Emphasis should be attached to the views and vistas within and without the BENP area as discussed in the Conserving the Environment section. The key views demonstrated are not exclusive.



All new development should be of a height, mass and appearance that does not adversely affect key distinctive views into and out of the BENP area. Particular attention should be given to views surrounding listed buildings, the conservation areas and key landscape features.

The design of all new buildings should be appropriate to the setting of adjacent buildings, especially if they are of historic character. New developments over two storeys in height should demonstrate that highlighted views and vistas are unaffected

CONSERVATION AREAS

- 4.5. The Conservation Areas are characterised by vernacular stone cottages. The buildings in general are two storeys, residential use and built up by locally available materials. Broad Blunsdon listed buildings are monitored in the Conservation Area Appraisal, which at the same time reflect other buildings that make a strong input to the architectural and historic interest. Thus their attributes should inform decisions about new development features.
- 4.6. When a development is undertaken adjacent to, or in a Conservation Area, the relevant Conservation Area Appraisal needs to be taken into account as well as the principles opposite:



FIG 17 BLUNSDON CONSERVATION AREAS

Matches to local materials, should be used to build the traditional architecture and spaces, enhancing its use in the new design. It should reach a balance between the mixed historic essences of the built environment, yet be in keeping with its surroundings.

Any new small development near to either a listed or an old building (identified by the Conservation Area appraisal) has to look at the opportunity to enhance the visual setting and significance of the existing heritage asset.

Consider how the views from inside the Conservation Area and from outside towards the Conservation Area are affected. Thus identifying the key views and integrating them in the new development as a starting point to generate an attractive area.

Any new small development has to reflect the informal nature of the surroundings. The rural undeveloped character of the roadways and the rural pattern and layout of the streets and paths has to be protected and maintained.

Any new small development around the existing old farm buildings, have to enhance the visual setting of these buildings.

Any development within or adjacent to the Conservation Areas should seek to enhance the character and distinctiveness of that Area. The ridge and eaves height of those developments adjacent to historic buildings should not dominate in terms of height scale and mass.

Extensions beyond the building line of a group of buildings should be designed to reflect the rhythm and balance of that group.

STYLE SCALE AND FORM

- 4.7. Below is a description of the building typologies that form the character of the BENP area.
- 4.8. The traditional farm buildings across Blunston contribute significantly to the character of the area. There are still some working farms, and numerous former farms now converted to other uses, most of which retain their traditional buildings and appearance.
- 4.9. In recent decades there have been significant changes in farming practices. There is now a need for larger buildings which offer increased flexibility in use, and the need is recognised to build up new storage facilities suitable for new requirements. Although the traditional buildings may not be appropriate for modern agriculture, they may be suited for alternative uses.



FIG 19 FORMER FARM BUILDING BACK LANE

When considering proposals for appropriate development within BENP, the use of simple, rural building forms will be encouraged.

Extensions or alterations to buildings of architectural merit should be discreetly or sensitively positioned.



FIG 18 SENSITIVE INFILL DEVELOPMENT

When considering new proposals for buildings that create employment or are for business use, they should not radically alter the appearance of the building and ensure that any extensions reflect the design of the original one.

When extensions are done to old buildings, modern architecture can achieve this purpose, providing even more attractive result than the traditional interventions.

Existing openings should be retained and limit the number of new openings affecting directly to old buildings; e.g. try not to break original roof slopes with dormer windows. They should keep as much of the original structure and limit the subdivision of both internal and external spaces as possible.

MATERIALS

4.10. Materials within the area vary according to the origin type and original function of the building, the most common being:

- Cotwold stone,
- Highworth stone
- red brick,
- timber and render
- thatch
- locally produced aggregate based alternatives

4.11. The choice of sympathetic materials should not preclude the use of alternative technologies. Where the carbon footprint of a building can be reduced by using green technology and sustainable resources it should, and this may include the use of more modern materials and design.

The use of traditional or natural building materials such as brick, Cotswold stone, timber and render in new buildings is encouraged. Artificial or manmade replicas of these materials should be avoided. This should not discourage modern design of a very high standard, in which materials and scale should be appropriate to the context of the site.

The use of materials, methods and technologies that reduce the carbon footprint of buildings are welcomed. All new houses should be encouraged to use more than one green technology including the use of grey water recycling.



FIG 20 MONTAGE OF PROPERTIES OF BRICK, STONE, RENDER AND TIMBER

DETAILS: ROOFS

4.12. There is an immensely varied roofscape throughout the BENP area, with both gabled and hipped roofs in existence in a variety of materials from slate through pan tiles to thatch on buildings of historic interest. Most of the buildings demonstrate simple rectilinear roof with varying pitch and height from slate at around 30 degrees to the steeper thatch incorporating dormer arrangements. Some of the ridge work is of terracotta some of clay or lead or just stone. Most gable ends face at 90 degrees to the road or path and unless of historic interest are plain and practical.

All new developments should be constructed with aerials either in roof spaces or unobtrusive positions with communal satellite provision for terraced constructions.

Where rooflights and or PV/ solar panels are proposed, they should where possible be positioned on non-obtrusive roof slopes. They should be minimised in size and number. In listed and pre 1920 buildings 'conservation' type design principles should be used.



FIG 21 SIMPLE RECTILINEAR SLATE ROOFS

DETAILS: CHIMNEYS

4.13. Although chimneys are an important feature for historic and less recent buildings in the area they are mostly square massed and redbrick even on the thatched buildings. Some of the old 'farm' houses have feature chimneys of Cotswold stone. New development tends not to use chimneys except in a decorative function. Although there is an increasing popularity for wood-burning stoves of late. Where this is the case they should follow the standard design in existence in the area.



FIG 22 BRICK AND STONE CHIMNEYS



DETAILS: DOORS WINDOWS

4.14. Doors and their surrounds in the older buildings in the area are generally simple and of practical construction – painted timber or stone in keeping with the architectural character of the buildings themselves. Rainwater goods traditionally were of cast iron, lead and timber and attractive and well designed rather than functional. This is reflected in the listed and conserved areas of the BENP. area. Windows commonly seen on traditional buildings in the area include sliding sash, some shaped, stone and timber framed leaded windows and casements. Most of these are simple without surrounds. Flat lintels and vertical brick lintels feature with some still demonstrating wooden lintels.

Full details of these common details are encouraged to be outlined where they are proposed so that the intended design and style may be assessed and advice given.



FIG 23 SIMPLE PORCHES



FIG 24 SIMPLE WINDOWS



FIG 25 SIMPLE PORCH

DETAILS: BOUNDARIES AND GARDENS

4.15. Gardens are generally large, with native planting and trees. Some frontages include strong distinct boundary treatments separating building from public highway. Examples of grass verges and some cottages on street edge.

Hedges to the front and side boundaries are of indigenous planting especially holly, beech, hornbeam and hawthorn. Low Front boundary walls are stone or brick with timber or cast iron gates.



FIG 26 STONE WALLS



FIG 27 HEDGEROW BOUNDARIES



FIG 28 GRASS VERGES AND STONE BOUNDARY

DETAILS: STREET FURNITURE

4.16. There is a variety of street furniture around the BENP area some of which add to the character of the area. There are black and white painted fingerposts, ancient milestones, decorative road name signs and some singular decorative lamp posts.

4.17. The BENP area has a myriad of styles and patterns of street furniture however there are many traditional wooden fingerposts and ancient Milestones in use, demonstrating the main character of the area. Street lighting is mixed with installations from Victorian through to modern concrete, with a variety of lighting patterns.

Storage of waste: details should be submitted with all applications, including extensions and changes of use.

Where street furniture is proposed it should be of traditional materials whenever possible.

Street lighting and floodlighting in the open countryside of the BENP will be discouraged, unless for over-riding reasons of safety or later-day recreation. (See 'Dark Skies Policy - BENP')

All developments designed with external lighting should be accompanied by a planned external lighting proposal, including lux levels. Use should be made of technologies that reduce light pollution and preserve the 'dark sky' effect associated with the area.

In general external lighting should be avoided where possible and at least directed to the required object only and not 'over-lit'.



FIG 29 STREET FEATURES