



**CONSULTATION DRAFT BLUNSDON - EAST
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (BENP)**

2019

APPENDIX D

Blunsdon Heritage Trail 2019



Appendix D - The Blunsdon Heritage Trail

The Blunsdon Heritage Trail is a wonderful circular trail around the Village following ancient paths and roads and the characteristic escarpment upon which Blunsdon has developed over the centuries. It is a slow pleasurable method of recognising the significant History and Heritage sites within the BENP area.

This is a Trail throughout the BENP area which highlights some of the different Assets that policies within the BENP area seek to protect and preserve. It fully demonstrates the beauty and tranquillity of the area and you will enjoy the different ranges of history that make the Village and area of Blunsdon what it is today.

Enjoy the walk – in the summer you may need pocket secateurs to overcome the fast-growing hedges that might bar your way and in the winter good boots/wellies might be needed in some areas.

1. The Cold Harbour Pub has a car park which you can use and there is also a bus stop opposite the pub on Broadbush (Thamesdown 16). Cross carefully from the pub car park and turn east along Broadbush walking past the remnants of an ancient milestone, then on past Beech Lea and also past the long drive up to Holdcroft House. After passing Park View Care Home and walking a further 100 yards you will see a FOOTPATH sign on the other side of the road where the path goes between MALABAR and Cobley House and down next to a wide paddock and there is a gate in the hedge at the bottom. Cross that field and you arrive at –

2. Bydemill Brook – time to play Pooh Sticks – cross over the brook and carry on up the field next to the hedge and arrive at **Kingsdown Lane**.

3. Turn left along **Kingsdown Lane** and carry on past the Kingsdown Nursery off the metaled surface and into the **green lane**. Walk for about 300 metres and you will see a gate on your right across the tree nursery to Swindon Crematorium. Look to your left and you will see the footpath leading across the field towards the great **Stanton Woods**. There you will join the route of the **dismantled Swindon – Highworth Railway**.

4. Follow the railway path for a short way and then follow the footpath off to your left and keeping Mill Copse on your right, follow the curve of the hill and down again over **Bydemill Brook** and up over the hill towards the main road. The path takes you out onto the B4019 which is very busy so please keep to the verges and turn left up the hill along the road. You will see another more complete **milestone** on the other side of the road. After walking about 350 metres at Stubbs Hill Farm, you will see a wooden footpath sign on the other side (northern) of the road. Cross carefully and follow the path through the hedge to where

5. There are the remains of a **WWII Anti-Aircraft Battery**, showing the gun emplacements and the shell storage bunkers. Continue to follow the footpath across the fields towards the walled **Cemetery** and walk alongside the **Cemetery** with the wall on your left. This will take you out onto **Burytown Lane** and if you walk 250 metres to your right you will arrive at the

6. The ancient **Iron Age hill fort** and **Lynchetts**, also a wide panorama, a lovely spot to stop and sit and drink in the fantastic view across the Thames Valley looking towards Fairford and

Cirencester to the North. Walking back west along Burytown Lane past the Cemetery you will come to

7. St Leonard's Church with its ancient **Lychgate** where coffins waited for the Clergy to arrive, and its prominent tower.

8. Turn right past the Church and walk down the slope along Churchway, again taking in the wonderful views as you follow the road along Back Lane to **Lower Blunsdon** and around to the junction with Front Lane at **St Leonard's Farm**. Walk about 50 metres until you see the footpath between the cottages on your right. As you step out into the fields follow the footpath diagonally to the right hand corner of the field to the bottom of the ridge. Follow the path up the ridge with the hedge on your left until you reach the ridge path and turn right along that path.

9. This path takes you around the **ridge escarpment** with continuous views across the northern plain. The path takes you out on to **Blunsdon Hill** close to the **Baptist Chapel**, which is the ancient **Roman road, Ermin Street from Cirencester to Silchester**. It was also the original A419 which now bypasses the village. Walk up the hill past the entrance to High Street, and if you are thirsty or hungry, turn left and walk 500metres into the village to the **Heart in Hand pub** for a very warm welcome and a cool drink. If not, carry on along Ermin Street back towards the Cold Harbour and you could also eat or drink there as well.

The walk is about 10 Km (6.2 miles) and will take you 2-3 hours. It is steep in places and can be muddy in places too.

Whilst every endeavour has been made to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this publication, no responsibility can be taken for any errors, omissions or subsequent amendments.

1 The Cold Harbour Pub



Through excavation in the area it was discovered that a Roman travellers' resting place existed on the site of the present-day Cold Harbour public house. The main road (A419) lies on the course of a Roman road known as Ermin

Street that linked the historic Roman towns of Gloucester (Glevum) and Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) via Cirencester (Corinium) and Swindon (Durocornovium Dorcan/Covingham).

2 Bydemill Brook



Bydemill Brook is a tributary of the Thames and rises at the junction of Turnpike Road and Kingsdown Lane. It flows through the uncharacteristic valley on the top of the Mid Vale Ridge and down the escarpment through Hannington, where it used to drive the mill of its namesake at Bydemill

Farm and joins the Thames close to Inglesham Forge.

3 Historic Kingsdown Lane

The Lane is believed to be an ancient Saxon path across the Mid Vale Ridge linking the villages of Purton, Blunston and South Marston. It is a green lane and for part is a bridle path through Stanton Wood and the new community forest.

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4 Dismantled Railway



After World War II, passenger and freight traffic on the Highworth Branch of Swindon & Highworth Light Railway declined steadily. At the end of the war the Vickers factory cut back its workforce and workmen's trains ceased to serve the plant although freight trains continued. Advertised public passenger services were withdrawn in

February 1953. Only small numbers of local people turned out in the evening of Saturday 28th to wave farewell to the last train. The branch continued as a freight only line plus the twice daily workmen's trains. Ironically as the upper end of the branch slowly died, its lower end became much more active. The increasing need for siding space at Swindon resulted in several groups of sidings being laid at the old nitrate plant site, where the Plessey company set up a works, as well as on the opposite or east side of the line. Here The Leyland Motor Works was built to take advantage of the excellent main line connection. Today this is the BMW Group plant and it still uses its rail connection.

5 Anti-Aircraft Battery and Milestone

Heavy anti-aircraft guns guarded Swindon and the approaches to London against attack from the air during World War II. It had been seen in the late 1930's that the Thames Valley would be used as an easy navigational aid on the direct route from Germany to cities and industrial towns such as Swindon. The Second World War has left a legacy of anti-invasion devices and anti-aircraft emplacements, alongside evidence of the air and sea

counter offensive, especially airfields and D Day training.

The intensity of the militarisation of the British landscape in the Second World War, as revealed by the Defence of Britain project, cannot be over-emphasised. There was not one square foot of the UK that was not included in some military or civil defence scheme. Roads were blocked, fields were strewn with obstacles, bridges were mined, factories, railways, airfields and ports were protected, towns and villages the length and breadth of the country bristled with fortifications and with weapons, and with troops to man them. Many sites had been surveyed and acquired by the time the threat of German bombers developed into reality although few of the concrete gun emplacements had actually been built. Most operated from open fields or earthen enclosures.



6 Bury Croft Iron Age Hill Fort



In some areas of Britain, Iron Age communities constructed defended hilltop settlements known as hill forts. Areas enclosed by hill forts typically ranged from one to ten hectares. These seem to have been permanently occupied central places, probably controlled by a chief, and dominating a small region of dispersed farmsteads. Many

Iron Age settlements were defended and different regions developed their own styles in response to local traditions and available materials. Hill Forts consist of one or more banks and ditches on high ground, called Lynchetts usually a prominent hill crest. There is a considerable variety of earthworks of this type from the univallate or single bank and ditch

enclosures, probably used in the early Iron Age by pastoral farmers for their cattle, to the huge multivallate fortresses of Ham Hill & South Cadbury, enclosing many acres and known to the Romans as oppida or towns. The tremendous communal effort needed to construct these huge fortifications show how tribal organisations had developed and how much the need for defence dominated the lives of these people.

7 Broad Blunsdon Church

St Leonard's Church is built from local limestone, and consists of a nave, a south aisle, a chantry chapel - now the choir vestry - the chancel where the communion table and choir stalls are situated, the tower and the vestry.

The original church dates from the latter part of the 13th century. The main body of the church is of the 14th century and the tower was added in the 15th. In the Victorian period the church was heavily restored by Butterfield, but much of the original architecture remains.

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



8 Lower Blunsdon Village



Lower Blunsdon, on the edge of the Upper Thames valley plain, developed as an outlier of Broad Blunsdon, a hill-top settlement where medieval church and manor house were established. The name

Blunsdon apparently means Blunt's hill (old English 'dun') and refers to an early Lord of the Manor. There is an Iron Age hill fort, Castle Hill, situated on the ridge to the south east and, west of the hamlet, the A419 follows the course of the Roman road known as 'Ermin Street'. There have been several Roman finds in the locality including the remains of a major Roman religious complex.

Blunsdon is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as 'Blontesdone' and the area's early origins are still evident today in the 13th century work to be found in St. Leonard's Church in Broad Blunsdon and St. Andrew's Church in Blunsdon St. Andrew. There is a reference to one Henry Fowler in 1281, the origins of Fowler's farm, but no further information relating to any settlement.

Over the past 400 years, building in Lower Blunsdon has been small-scale, unpretentious and almost exclusively associated with farming. The community's social buildings (public houses, chapels, school, village hall) have been located in Broad Blunsdon.

Today, Lower Blunsdon is a generally sleepy tranquil place with little traffic or other bustling activity.

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

9 Blunsdon Ridge

Broad Blunsdon is situated in rural surroundings on a rise of land overlooking the Upper Thames. The village lies on Coral Rag above the clays of the Upper Thames valley. To the north, at the foot of the scarp, is the associated settlement of Lower Blunsdon, a close but distinct settlement which is also a conservation area. Beyond this open countryside stretches north towards the Cotswolds. To the south of the conservation area lies open land whose rural character is diminishing as Swindon expands northwards. This path has outstanding views over the Thames Valley and Gloucestershire and these views form part of the Conservation Area of the

village.

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



Blunsdon East Neighbourhood Plan - 2019