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# Conservation Area Character Survey

# BLEDLOW

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## What are Conservation Areas?

Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest which are considered worthy of preservation or enhancement. They are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Within conservation areas there are special controls on some alterations to buildings and their demolition or partial demolition and on works to trees. The Council's Heritage Guidance Note on conservation areas gives further details of the specific controls that apply.

Designation of a conservation area does not preclude the possibility of new development, but such development must be designed positively to enhance the special character of the area.

## The Purpose of This Survey

This conservation area character survey describes the main features of special architectural and historic interest which justifies the designation of Bledlow as a conservation area. The survey is intended to complement the approved policies for conservation areas in the Council's Wycombe District Local Plan. These Policies are the primary means of safeguarding the special character of our conservation areas.

The survey is also intended to be used as an aid in development control decision making. Proposals for schemes positively to enhance the character and appearance of Bledlow Conservation Area will be produced in the future in consultation with councillors, local residents and other interested parties.



**HISTORY**

The name Bledlow derives from the Anglo-Saxon 'Bledelawe', meaning bloody hill or field and probably refers to a savage battle fought here between the Saxons and the Danes.

The village origins can be traced back to the 10th century, although there is clear evidence of earlier occupation. Close to the Upper Icknield Way is a Bronze Age Barrow known locally as The Cop which was excavated in 1938. The Icknield Way is an ancient track linking Thetford in Norfolk with Avebury in Wiltshire. It was developed to promote communications between Neolithic centres around 3000-1800 BC.

After the Norman Conquest, William I granted the Manor of Bledlow to his half-brother Robert, who held it in 1086. In the reign of Henry VI it was granted to Eton College but in 1650 James Blanck became owner and he built the original Manor House. Records show that the present Manor was sold in 1801 to Lord Carington whose successor holds it to the present day.

Beyond the conservation area boundary is Bledlow Cross cut on the side of the steep hill above the Upper Icknield Way; and is simply the turf cleared away leaving the white chalk below. It is of Greek cross shape and, along with its neighbour Whiteleaf Cross, they are the only known surviving turf cut crosses in the County.

The railway line to the north of Manor Farm and the south of The City runs along an embankment and across a bridge over West Lane. The line was once a branch line from Princes Risborough to Watlington owned by the Watlington and Princes Risborough Railway Company in 1872. It was taken over in 1883 by the Great Western Railway. The line was closed in the 1960s as a passenger line but has now been reopened privately from Chinnor to the Thame Branch Junction.

Bledlow was first designated as a conservation area in 1971.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST**

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the conservation area, however both within the conservation area and in the fields surrounding it the County Archaeologist has identified "areas of archaeological importance".

In the event of archaeological deposits being found the Council may require archaeological conditions attaching to planning permissions where appropriate, including watching briefs, excavation or similar recording procedures.

**ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Bledlow does not lie on a busy road and as a consequence it has the air of quiet isolation, providing a rural haven. The small village is situated along a ridge above a wooded ravine known as The Lyde. The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty lies to the south.

The village contains a mix of building types in terms of age, size and shape and they are spread unevenly along a series of roads which are visually quite divorced from each other.

Simplicity is a characteristic of the main village pattern. The church is the central feature rather than the village green which lies in front of The Lions PH.

To the west of the church small picturesque cottages, some dating back to the 16th century, are clustered on either side of the road. All are of similar style and materials and as a group are an outstanding feature of the street picture.

Manor Farm and The Lions PH are notable buildings at the western end of Church End. The colourwashed inn is particularly important because of its setting and its function as a terminal building when approaching along West Lane.

The Eastern end of the village street is closed by a substantial building which formed part a children's home. Originally built as the parish workhouse, it has undergone many changes in more recent years. At the time of survey the building is vacant and regrettably falling into disrepair, yet still makes an important contribution to the character of the area.

The group of buildings at West Lane are a compact and very attractive cluster of cottages in an orchard setting. Although a wide variety of materials have been used for walls and roofs of the old buildings they harmonise well together to give a pleasant scene. The narrow winding lane enclosed in part by high banks and/or hedges is a feature of this area.

The widespread use of hand-made red bricks, sometimes in herring bone pattern and with timber framing, and mellow red/orange plain clay tiles on roofs give a good sense of unity throughout the village.

The treescape particularly around the church and The Lyde together with the extensive views of the surrounding countryside are important features of the area.

Some of the essential characteristics of the conservation area are its simplicity in layout, use of materials and styles of buildings and the rural, informal nature of the open spaces and gardens.

**ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF BUILDINGS**

There are 19 listed buildings in this small conservation area, including one Grade I and one Grade II\*.

The Grade I listed Holy Trinity Church dominates the heart of the conservation area. The church is of Norman origin with two Norman doorways one of which is blocked. The aisles were added circa 1200 and have simple arcades and the tower is 13th century. There is an early 14th century porch which is a comparative rarity and a fine 14th century south window. The roof was altered in the 16th century and was totally restored in 1909. This Early English church built in the traditional flint of the Chilterns with stone dressings stands in an extensive churchyard which contains the listed remains of a cross built in the 15th century.

The former vicarage now known as Bledlow House lies just behind the church and is mid to late 18th century. The splendid, formal frontage is of vitreous header brick with red brick dressings and an ashlar plinth. All openings on this

elevation have segmental heads with painted key stone blocks. The rear wall is of rubble stone.

The Grade II\* listed building is the Manor House which can be glimpsed behind its garden walls from Church End. This house was originally built in 1648 to replace an earlier Tudor property. The house was extended in circa 1702 as dated on the chimney and altered circa 1800 for the Carington family. The house has considerable architectural quality and grandeur.

The group of dwellings by Aldington, Craig and Collinge opposite the Manor House won an award from the Royal Institute of British Architects. The Committee was impressed with the quality and detail of the design and the simplicity of the materials. A pleasant sense of scale and enclosure is created and the interesting silhouette does not jar with the surrounding traditional types of houses.

The Old Cottage a little further along is a listed 17th century dwelling altered in the 18th and 20th centuries. The unlisted Holm Lodge has unusual tiled cladding.

At the eastern end of Church End is the listed Old Wycombe Union School, now known as Bledlow Homes. This U-shaped, late 18th century building provides a strong terminal focus to the conservation area.

To the west of the church at the heart of the conservation area is a cluster of listed 16th century cottages, Piggots, Church End Cottages, Church End Cottage and Manor Cottage and other significant buildings. This attractive grouping display similar styles and materials and is an outstanding feature in the street pattern.

Further west is Manor Farm, an early 16th century building externally rebuilt in the mid 18th century. The farmhouse and old farm buildings stand in an open setting and make a particularly significant contribution to the conservation area, bringing the countryside close to the heart of the village.

Opposite is a ribbon of comparatively modern houses of little individual character. At the westernmost point of Church End is the village inn, "The Lions", a quaint and rambling listed building of the 17th century.

Going north along West Lane just beyond the railway bridge is a pair of cottages known as The City dating from the 16th-17th century with some 19th century rebuilding. The old tile roof presents an attractive picture. Further north are two groups of farm buildings on either side of the lane. On the east side are Bakehouse Farm and Whitakers. Bakehouse Farm dates from the 17th century, the front range is late 18th-early 19th century. Whitakers was originally two cottages and probably belonged to Bakehouse Farm.

On the west side are Westfield Farm, Westfield, Westfield Cottage converted from the old coach house and stables but not listed, and The Barn Cottage. Westfield Farmhouse was built in the 17th century and displays a timber framed north elevation with later brick infill. The house was refronted in the early 19th century in flint with brick dressings. The barn adjacent to Westfield Farmhouse is dated 1760 on a beam. The main part of the barn has trusses with queen posts, curved principals, braced tie beams and double purlins.

Both Whitakers and The Barn Cottage date from about 1740 and both still have thatched roofs.

**MATERIALS**

Throughout the village there is a widespread use of hand made red bricks, sometimes in a herringbone pattern and with timber framing. Red/orange clay tiles many of which have mellowed to a warm red/brown give a good sense of unity throughout the area. There are a few instances of slate particularly the out buildings associated with Manor Farm.

At West Lane there is a greater variety of materials with the use of flint to the facaded elevation of Westfield Farm and thatch at Whitakers and The Barn Cottage.

Colourwash only appears at the edges of the conservation area such as at Whitakers, Bakehouse Farm, The Lions, The Lyde and Holm Lodge and its neighbour.

Generally speaking there has been little intrusive use of substitute materials for windows and doors with painted timber casements or sliding sashes predominating throughout the historic buildings. The core grouping of historic buildings display attractive casement windows, either leaded or with glazing bars and small panes. Bledlow House has late 19th century sashes. The Manor House has sashes on a larger scale on the north-east front from the early 19th century.

The historic dwellings at West Lane display predominantly small pane casement windows. Whitakers has small, cross-latticed, leaded-light casements.

There are a number of important walls identified in the survey which contribute to the character of the conservation area. The red brick walls surrounding the Manor House are visually important as an historic characteristic of the village and for the setting of the Manor House. The brick and flint low wall to the churchyard is also an attractive and prominent one. Elsewhere however the use of hedges and trees are most appropriate as a boundary treatment in this rural area.

Surfacing within the domestic curtilages is generally of an informal type which is fitting for the rural setting of the conservation area and the historic buildings. Modern materials such as tarmac and concrete would jar against the natural, mellow materials of the historic buildings. Some use of modern surfacing materials is evident particularly to the more modern properties, however this does not appear too discordant due mainly to the extensive vegetation throughout the conservation area.

**TREES AND VEGETATION**

Trees, hedges and garden plants all make an important contribution to the leafy, rural character of the area. Trees of particular importance are indicated on the survey map. All trees within conservation areas are protected and some trees within the Bledlow Conservation Area are also protected by Tree Preservation Orders. Of particular significance are the mature trees fronting Church End from the Holy Trinity Church to Piggots. Other road side and path side trees contribute to the character of the area.

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There are many fine trees within the gardens of properties to the north and west of the church including Bledlow House, The Lyde, Bec House, Church End Cottages, Piggots and Manor Farm. Some trees are individually marked on the survey map, but collectively trees in this area provide a setting for the listed buildings and the conservation area as a whole.

To the south of Church End similarly trees within the grounds of the Manor House, although not all individually marked on the survey map, collectively make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area and to the setting of the listed Manor House.

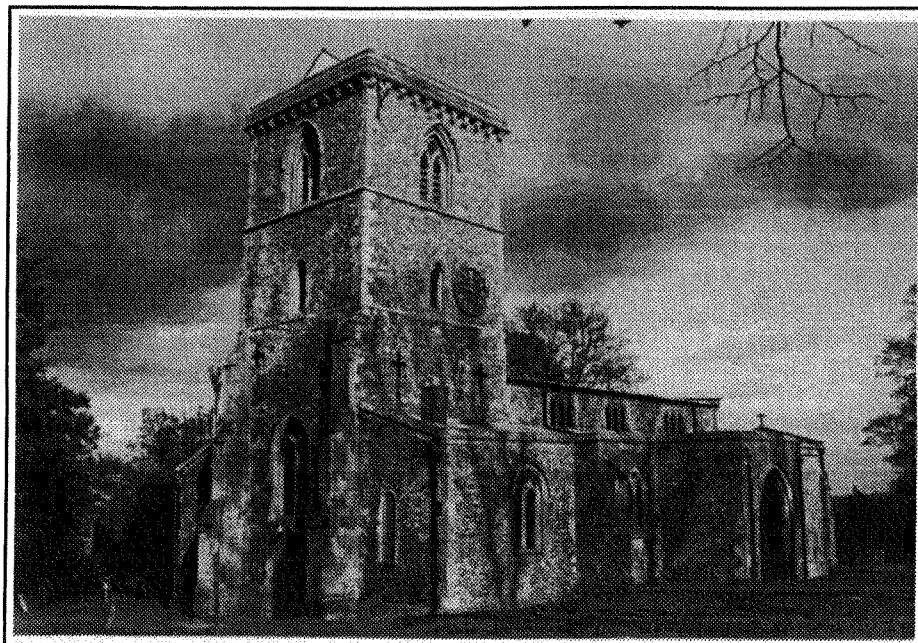
Hedges too contribute to the character of the area and those of particular significance are marked on the survey map.

The Lyde Gardens and the stream flowing through it to the east of the church make a significant contribution to the setting of the village and the individual properties within it. It is important not just as an undeveloped space but also as a well treed area which again provides an appropriate setting for the listed buildings in the vicinity, in particular the church, and positively contributes to the rural nature of the conservation area as a whole.

### OPEN SPACE

Significant open spaces in the conservation area are marked on the survey map. Private spaces although not in public view may also contribute to the character of the conservation area by affording a backdrop of vegetation or setting for individual buildings or contributing to the setting of the village as a whole. As private spaces these are not marked on the survey map although their openness contributes to the character of the conservation area.

The green in front of The Lions PH provides a focus at the western end of the village and a setting for the 17th century inn. The green space in front of Manor Farm and its open barns also gives the historic property an appropriate setting. The churchyard serves the same function for the church whilst also providing a sense of openness after the enclosure provided by the historic core grouping.



The Lyde Gardens is a romantic dell covered with trees, its lower part contains formal paths and board walks leading through specimen trees and bushes. Springs of pure water rise from the bottom of the dell and from here flows the Lyde Stream. The Gardens are provided by Lord Carington for the enjoyment of the villagers.

At the eastern end of the village the tree planted grassed area often grazed by sheep or geese is a fitting open entrance to the conservation area and contributes to the setting of the Manor House and its ancillary buildings.

### GROUPINGS

There are two identified groups of buildings on the survey map. The historic group of cottages at the heart of the village make a cohesive and visually coherent association. Of similar styles and materials they provide a sense of enclosure and are the essence of the historic character of the village.

Architecturally and historically the group makes a vital contribution to the character of the conservation area.

The second identified group is the cluster of historic buildings at West Lane. Unlike the first group they differ in styles and materials yet they also form an attractive and well defined group.

### VIEWS

There are a number of important views within the conservation area and some of these are indicated on the survey map. There are also significant views of the village from the countryside.

Views indicated within the village include views of the important groups and the principal buildings, (the Manor House and the church), from public view points. There are also panoramic views from the edge of the village to the countryside from the footpath to the north, from The Lions and from Church End by Old Cottage which demonstrates the village's close links with the countryside.

## DEVELOPMENT CONTROL ADVICE

The policies and proposals of the Wycombe District Local Plan are the primary source of reference for development control advice. In addition the Council's approved Heritage Strategy is seen as a supporting document to the plan.

This character survey is also intended to provide broad guidance of an informal nature in considering new development in the conservation area. Below is a brief check list taking account of the above text.

To safeguard, preserve and enhance the appearance and special character of the Bledlow Conservation Area:-

- In the conservation area higher standards of design are required as it is the function of the planning authority to consider all applications as to whether they preserve or enhance the special character as identified in this appraisal.
- Any new building works such as extensions, must be designed not as a separate entity, but should be sympathetic in form and scale with the existing buildings and the conservation area as a whole.
- Materials for any new building works or surfacing must be sympathetic to those prevailing in the area.
- Important groups of buildings are identified on the survey map and their specific qualities are described in the text above. Any new development must not harm the integrity or visual quality of these important groupings and it should be recognised that new development may not be acceptable.
- Inappropriate replacement windows and doors can damage the character

of the conservation area. Traditional natural materials should be used in order to safeguard the special character of the conservation area. Generally speaking painted timber windows and doors are appropriate and modern substitute materials such as UPVC and aluminium are not.

- All trees in conservation areas are protected but special consideration should be given to those trees indicated on the survey map to ensure that they are not harmed. New development should recognise this and not present a risk to their continued future growth and habit.
- Although hedges cannot be specially protected through legislation those hedgerows indicated on the survey map should be retained and where possible enhanced.
- Areas of open space, and gaps between buildings will be carefully considered for protection from development or enclosure in order to safeguard the character of Bledlow and any important views.

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## NOTES

### FURTHER INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

Wycombe District Council's Planning, Transport and Development Service has a number of publications which offer further guidance. Ask the Conservation Officer for information on which Heritage Guidance Notes are currently available and appropriate.

The Conservation Officer is always pleased to give advice on all heritage matters and can be contacted on 01494 421578 or seen by appointment in the Council Offices or on site,

Development Control matters within the Bledlow Conservation Area are the responsibility of the West Team who can be contacted on 01494 421517.

Planning Policy matters are the responsibility of the Policy Unit who can be contacted on 01494 421551.