



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## Conservation Area Character Appraisal

# Bladon

### What are Conservation Areas?

Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. Groups of buildings, walls, trees and hedges, open spaces, views, and the historic settlement patterns all combine to create an individual sense of place. It is this character, rather than individual buildings, that Conservation Area status seeks to protect. The first Conservation Areas in the District were identified in the late 1960s. Since then, there has been a rolling programme of designations. Recent Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Bladon Conservation Area was designated in 1990, following a process of public consultation.

### The purpose of this document

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes the main aspects of character or appearance which contribute to the special interest and quality of the area. This document is intended to complement the approved polices for Conservation Areas contained in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan. In Conservation Areas there are controls over the demolition and minor alterations of unlisted buildings, and on works to trees. Full details can be obtained from the Planning Service. The Preservation and Enhancement document for Bladon accompanies this Character Appraisal and describes strategies for the future maintenance and improvement of Bladon, as well as providing development advice and guidance on conversions, extensions and the design of new buildings within the Conservation Area.



## Location and setting

Bladon lies on the eastern side of the District, against the south-eastern edge of Blenheim Park. The settlement has developed in linear form along the ancient trackway, Port Street, which links the towns of Witney and Woodstock. The historic core of Bladon has been elongated at each end by more recent development, with the built form to the north-west remaining constrained by the wall of Blenheim Park.

Bladon is situated between the Cotswolds to the north and the Upper Thames clay vale to the south, and consequently is underlain by a mixed geology of cornbrash limestone and Oxford clay. The surrounding landscape to the east and south comprises gently rolling semi-enclosed limestone wolds. This landscape is dramatically incised by the valley of the river Glyme. As a result of this topography Bladon Heath to the east stands some 40m above the village.

Land use in this area is predominantly arable, historically taking place within fields of regular shape, lined with drystone walls and hedges. The setting to the north-west is characterised by its more open character and the distinctive mature clumps and blocks of woodland that make up Lower Park.



## Historical development

Evidence of early settlement in the area includes Iron Age remnants found at the 'Round Castle' on Bladon Heath. The village derives its name from an earlier name for the river Evenlode: the 'Bladene'. The settlement is recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086, at which time it had a population of 28.

The evolution of Bladon is intimately connected with the medieval park of Woodstock. This conglomerate royal manor was administered from the old manor house in the park and included the surrounding 'demesne towns', one of which was Bladon. In the 12th century the borough of New Woodstock was created out of part of Bladon parish.

As a result of competition with the new borough, there appears to have been little or no medieval or post-medieval growth at Bladon. Meanwhile, New Woodstock also failed to thrive, mainly as a result of competition from the more vigorous market at Witney nine miles to the west.

Epidemics in 1545 and 1624 further constrained post-medieval growth. However, by the 1600s there was a slight population increase. The parish originally also included land on the north of the Glyme, which became part of the park in 1767.

In addition to agriculture, forestry and service activities connected to the palace and park, the economic history of the village was influenced by glove making and limestone quarrying (which yielded the material from which many of the houses in the area are built).

Population changes after WWII have seen an influx of commuting residents, coinciding with the slow decline in agricultural employment and rural industries. The village has evolved to become a commuter village and place for retirement, rather than an estate village.

Nowadays, Bladon is perhaps best known as the burial place of Sir Winston Churchill, in the Spencer-Churchill family plot in St. Martin's churchyard.

## Settlement pattern

Bladon's intimate relationship with the adjoining royal parkland finds its most conspicuous expression in its settlement pattern, which sees linear growth along both sides of the main road fringing the Park's south-eastern limit.

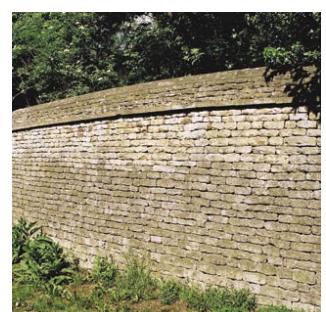
Whilst there is evidence of early settlement on the elevated land to the south-east (on Bladon Heath) later settlement seems to have concentrated further down, in the Glyme valley itself, adjacent to an early route located here. In this location settlers could also take advantage of the ready water supply and the flatter, fertile meadowland adjoining the river.

The early core of this settlement appears to have been centred around the medieval church of St Martin, which is picturesquely sited on an eminence above the village. Early houses cluster below the church along the ancient road and Church Road.

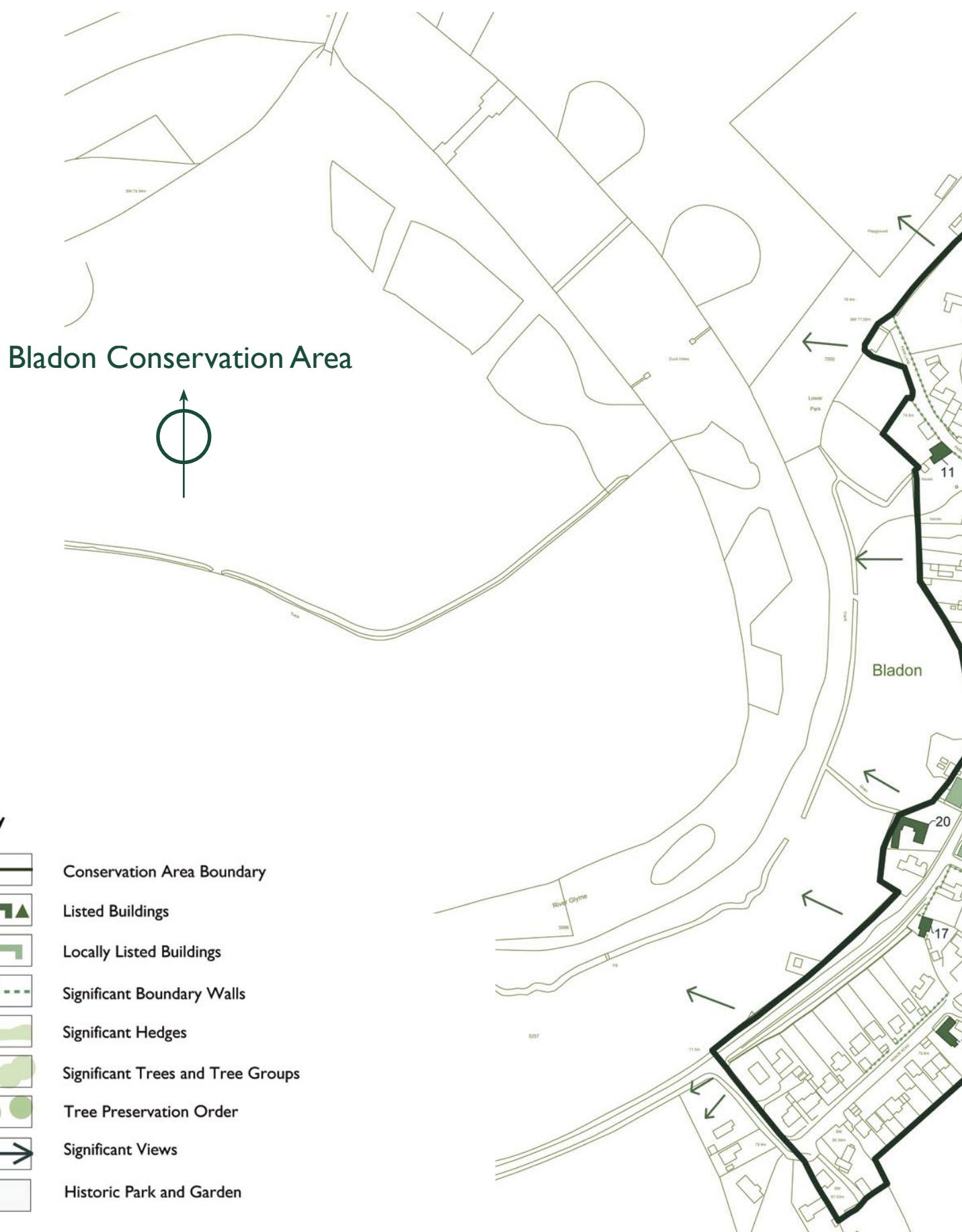
Today, the only significant deviation from the main axial route through the village is the spur formed by Lamb Lane and Heath Lane, which heads off up the hillside to the south-east. Here, a series of narrow interconnecting lanes forms an intimate streetscape punctuated by small cottages. These cottages are often linked to form short terraces.

Farm groups are located at Manor Farm (dating from 1720) and Rectory Farm just south of the church, and again at Home Farm, which lies against the park wall to the north. The medieval church was rebuilt in 1804 (and there was a Victorian 'restoration' by A.W. Bloomfield, which amounted to a re-building, in 1891).

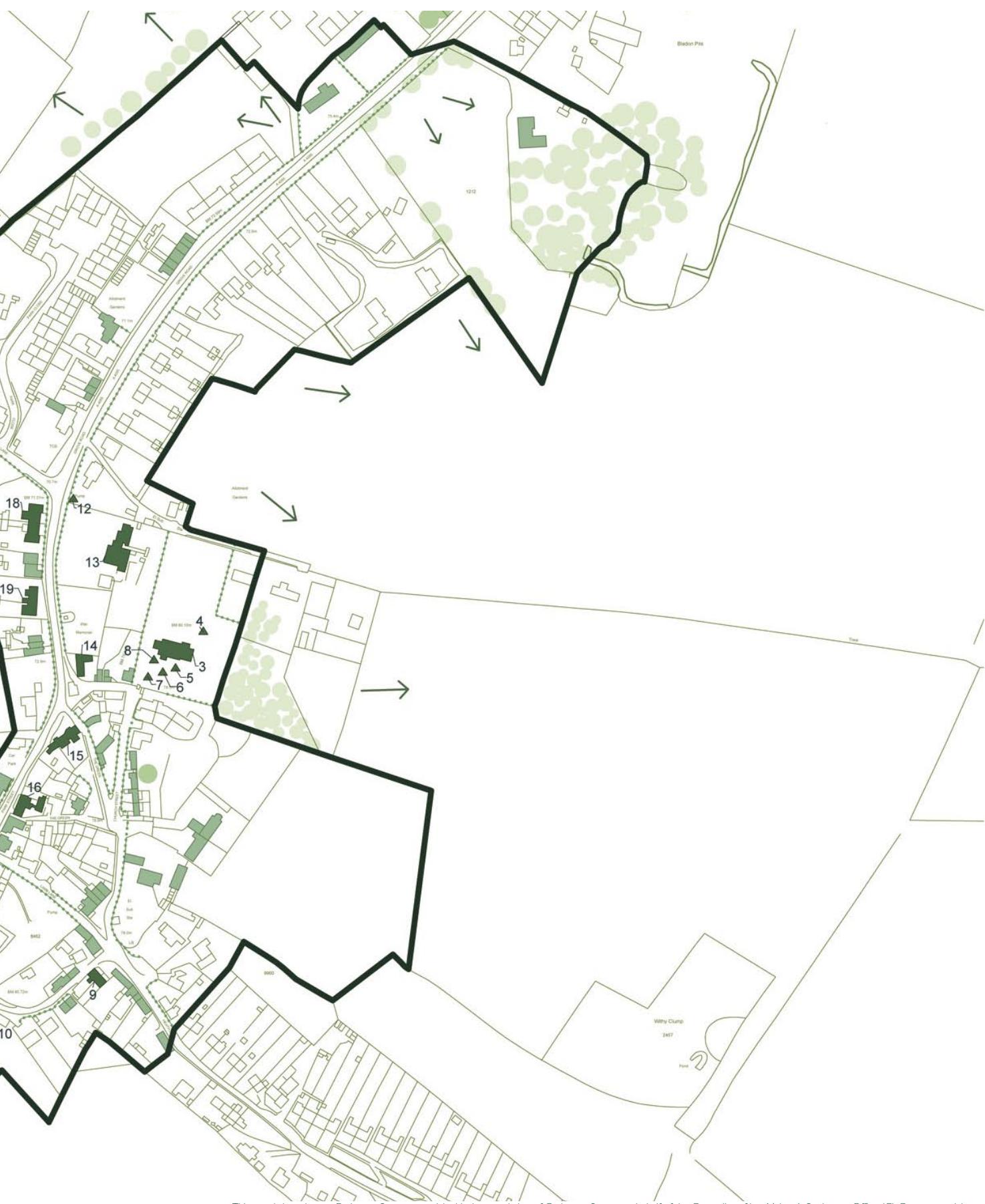
Part of the green was appropriated in 1858 as the site for a village school. Infilling and linear expansion along the main road, and south-east along Heath Lane, took place during the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 1920s and 1930s two groups of council houses were built at the east end of Heath Lane. The village hall in Bladon was built in 1946.



## Bladon Conservation Area



## Bladon Conservation Area



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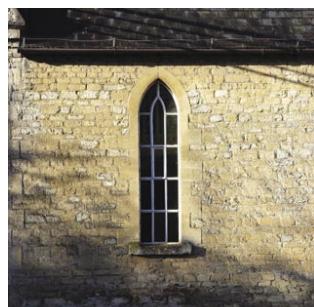
## Listed Buildings

There are 18 Listed structures of architectural or historic interest in the Conservation Area. Listed Buildings are classified in grades of relative importance.

### Grade II – Buildings of special interest

- 20/3 CHURCH STREET (East side) Church of St. Martin
- 20/4 CHURCH STREET (East side) Chest tomb approx. 6m ENE of chancel of Church of St. Martin
- 20/5 CHURCH STREET (East side) Headstone approx. 7m SE of S porch and 8m S of nave of Church of St. Martin
- 20/6 CHURCH STREET (East side) Chest tomb approx. 5m S of S porch of Church of St. Martin
- 20/7 CHURCH STREET (East side) Chest tomb approx. 12m SW of S porch of Church of St. Martin
- 20/8 CHURCH STREET (East side) Chest tomb approx. one m W of S porch and 4m S of nave of Church of St. Martin
- 20/9 HEATH LANE (South side) Nos.2 (The Mount) and 4
- 20/10 MANOR ROAD (East side) No.9 (Manor FarmHouse)
- 20/11 PARK LANE (West side) The Old Malthouse
- 20/12 PARK STREET (East side) Village Pump
- 20/13 PARK STREET (East side) Bladon Church of England Primary School and School House
- 20/14 PARK STREET (East side) No.17 (Kings View)
- 20/15 PARK STREET (East side) Nos.21 and 23
- 20/16 PARK STREET (East side) No.27 (Knutsford House)
- 20/17 PARK STREET (East side) No.35 (Cobblers Cottage) Formerly listed as No.35 (Hill Rise)
- 20/18 PARK STREET (West side) Nos. 2-8 (even)
- 20/19 PARK STREET (West side) Nos.14 and 16
- 20/20 PARK STREET (West side) Moyallon

*Note: The numbers indicate the unique identification number by which Listed Buildings are referenced*



## Architectural character and quality of buildings

The early village buildings of Bladon are generally of simple vernacular form, well befitting the agricultural nature and relative poverty of the community down the centuries. Most of the houses and cottages are constructed from a local pale grey or creamy-coloured limestone employed in coursed rubble form. A more sophisticated palette of design and details began to appear after the construction of Blenheim Palace. Manor Farmhouse (dating from 1720), and Knutsford House (of 1726) are indicative of this influence, both incorporating a more formal architectural vocabulary.

In the 19th century the variety which today characterises the built character of Bladon began to establish itself. New materials (including brick and Welsh slate) began to appear, in conjunction with considerable architectural variation. These developments are well seen in the range of terraced cottages that fringe the main road through Bladon; and express themselves in, for instance, the distinctive and memorable array of dormer windows found here.

Also in the 19th century, the control exercised on the settlement by the Blenheim Estate became more manifest; the Estate being responsible for the construction of the school and schoolhouse of 1858, together with the row of Estate cottages in Park Street, of 1860.

The village's later buildings, many of which use materials other than limestone, tend on the whole to follow the precedent set by the colour of this stone. Simple plan forms predominate, while roofs tend to be of stone slate or Welsh slate, with wooden casement windows. Most of the buildings are two or two-and-a-half storeys in height.

The village's older properties are generally set parallel to the road (and close to it), with a narrow footway in front. 20th-century groups generally follow the layout principles advocated by Raymond Unwin, and are detached, semi-detached or terraced, and set back from the road within generous front gardens.

## Boundary treatments

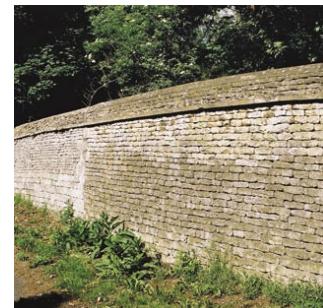
The primary boundary feature of the Conservation Area is the Listed wall surrounding Blenheim Park. This forms the north-western edge of the Conservation Area and is built of local limestone rubble. Natural stone boundary and retaining walls of a more modest scale characterise the core of the village. The 19th century is represented by iron railings (topping low walls). These are an unusual survival in the District and are especially in evidence along the north side of the main road opposite Lamb Lane.

## Landscape, trees and views

Attractive internal views are created as a result of the undulating topography and the irregular layout of houses. The main road through the village alters both laterally and vertically, resulting in a series of changing views. The most striking of these is arguably from the south-west, from where the church appears as the highpoint, with the village houses and cottages clustered below. Numbers 21 and 23 Park Street provide a significant visual stop to the view south along Grove Road.

The view north-west up Park Lane towards Blenheim Park combines the village in the foreground with the park and palace beyond (these latter framed by the gates at Bladon Lodge). From certain points on the northern edge of the village significant views out over Blenheim Park can be enjoyed.

Trees contribute markedly to the character of the village (as well as the park), with ash, hazel and field maple common throughout both the village and the surrounding semi-enclosed limestone wolds.



**West Oxfordshire District Council - Planning Service**  
Elmfield, New Yatt Road, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 1PB

General planning enquiries and application forms

**01993 861683**

List entries and grant enquiries

**01993 861666**

Trees and landscape enquiries

**01993 861662**

Architectural and technical enquiries

**01993 861659**

