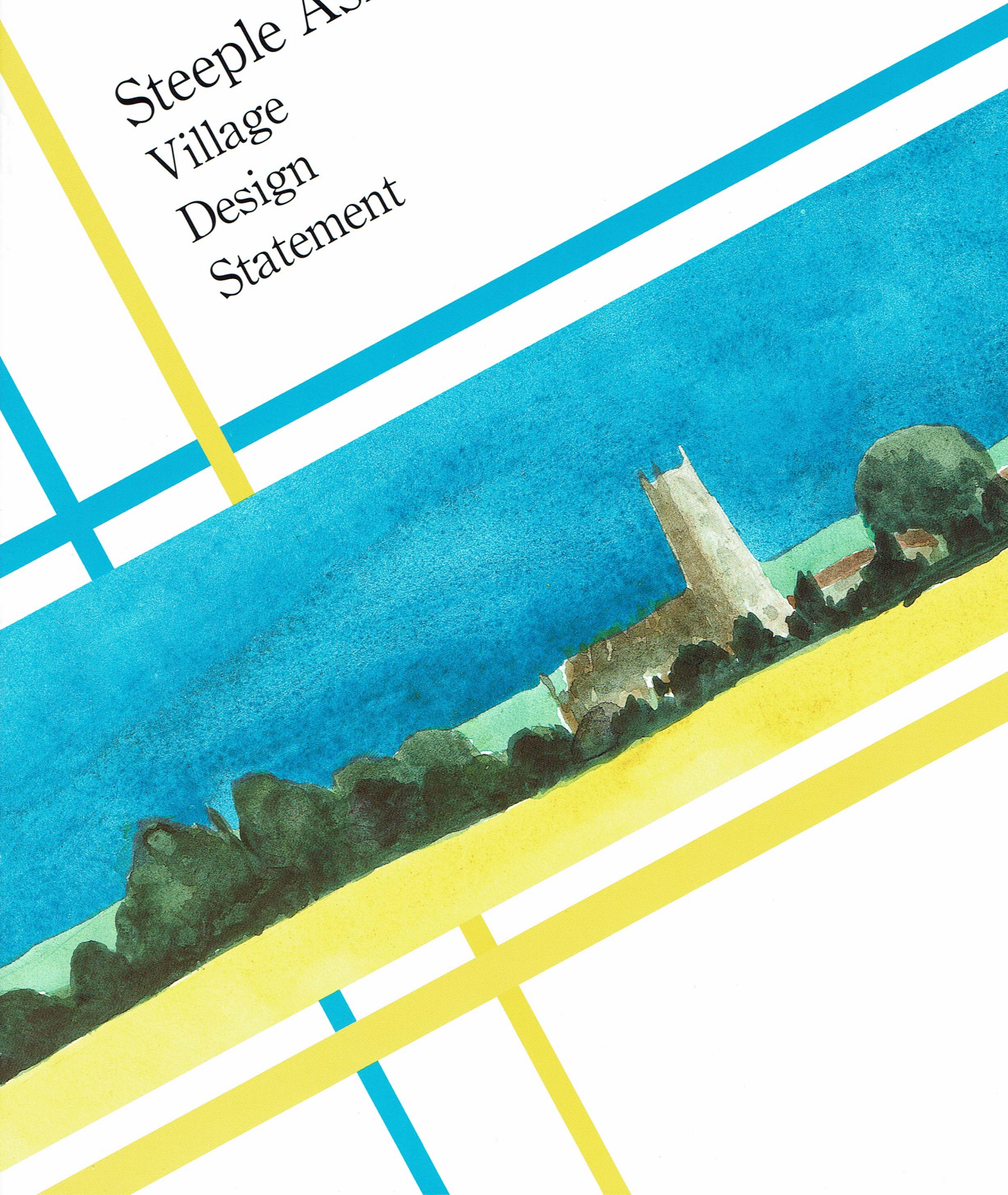
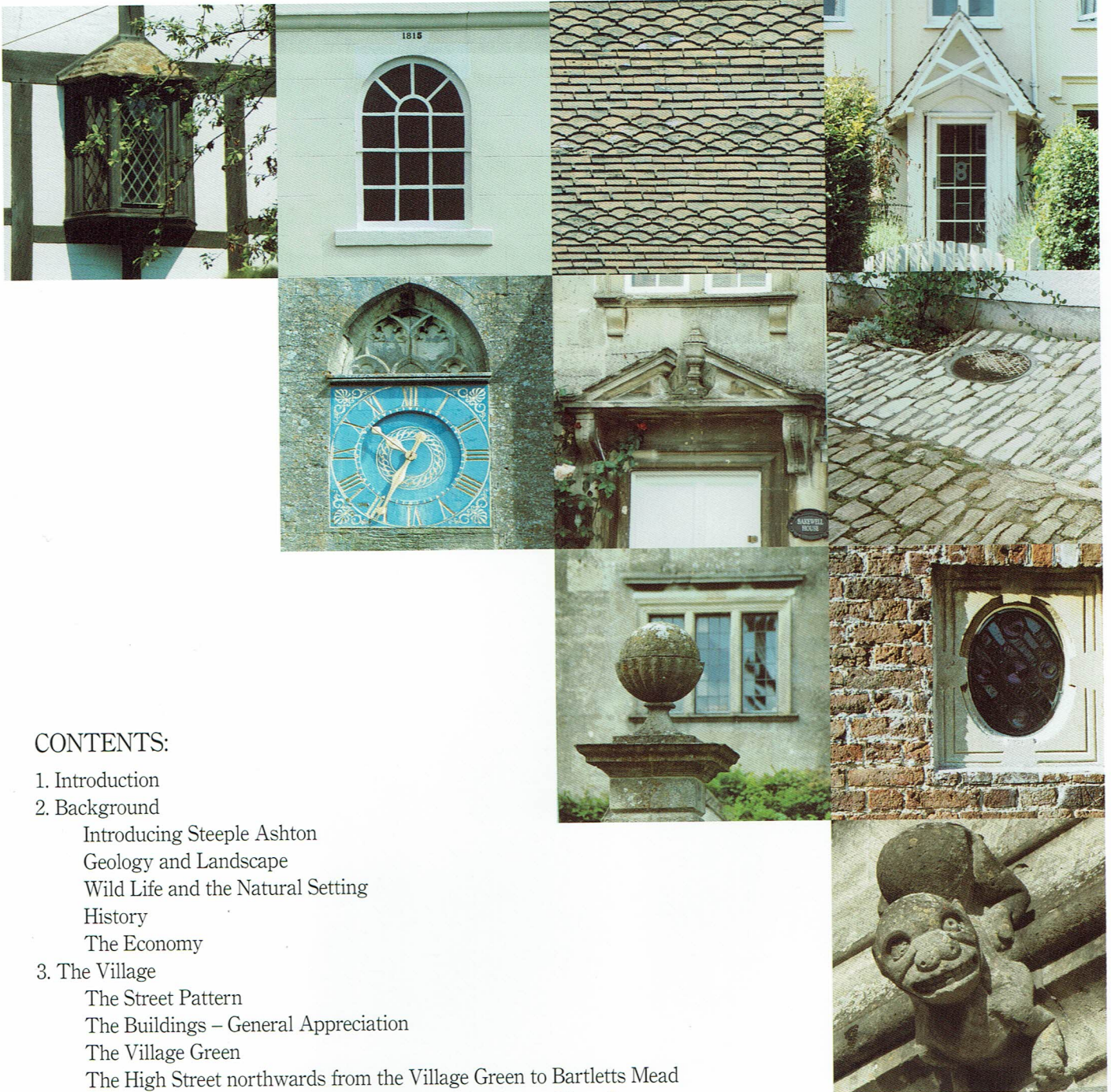


Steeple Ashton
Village
Design
Statement





CONTENTS:

1. Introduction
2. Background
 - Introducing Steeple Ashton
 - Geology and Landscape
 - Wild Life and the Natural Setting
 - History
 - The Economy
3. The Village
 - The Street Pattern
 - The Buildings – General Appreciation
 - The Village Green
 - The High Street northwards from the Village Green to Bartletts Mead
 - The High Street southwards from the Village Green to Silver Street
 - Church Street, The Manor and The Strand
 - Dark Lane North and South
 - Silver Street
 - Acreshort Lane
 - Butts Lane
 - Bartletts Mead
 - The Butts
 - Common Hill and High Street north of Bartletts Mead
 - The Approaches to the Village
 - Roads and Traffic
 - Trees and Open Spaces
4. Guidelines for the Future
5. Following-up the VDS

1. Introduction

Villages throughout England can now have a greater influence over their future development if they draw up a Village Design Statement (VDS). Originally proposed by the Countryside Commission, the VDS has been given official status; once approved by the local authority, the planners are obliged to take it into account when considering new planning applications. Technically it is known as Supplementary Planning Guidance, and what it supplements is the local Development Plan. A VDS is expected to assess the visual character of the village, and to suggest how new development should be designed to protect and enhance that character.



The Steeple Ashton VDS – the first in West Wiltshire – was drawn up by a specially created group under the ægis of the Parish Council and the Friends of Steeple Ashton. Two meetings were held in 1998 to which all villagers were invited for a briefing on the purpose and benefits of a Village Design Statement, and to recruit volunteers to help with the research. Over 100 people put their names forward. Volunteers took part in a census of village houses, and they manned round the clock a seven-day traffic survey to count and categorise all vehicles entering or leaving the village. Specialist groups drafted the background sections of the document. The recommendations arising from the research were presented at a third public meeting in August 1999 and were circulated in draft form for comment. The final document was endorsed by the villagers at a public meeting in the village hall on 9th July, 2000.

The VDS thus represents the views of the village. It has been approved by the West Wiltshire District Council, and will therefore be taken into account when the planners consider building applications from Steeple Ashton. It will supplement the District Plan for West Wiltshire.

2. The Background

Introducing Steeple Ashton

Steeple Ashton is a West Wiltshire village situated in a triangle bounded by Trowbridge, Devizes and Westbury. It is a linear village, being only some one and a half miles wide, situated in a parish extending for a distance of some three miles in a south easterly direction from the edge of Trowbridge. It contains about 400 houses, and has a population of some 1,200. A map of the village appears on page three.

Geology and landscape

Around 150 million years ago, the Steeple Ashton area was a coral reef beneath a warm and shallow tropical sea. The remains of this reef now form the low ridge of limestone rock on which the village is situated, together with neighbouring Keevil and East Town. Fossil corals were once abundant, appearing as stones in the surrounding fields, especially on the south side of the village.



The soils in Steeple Ashton comprise mainly limestone brash and some clay, with some drier loams to the south of the village. Watercourses are few, the only significant stream being that running west from Drove Lane and draining into Stourton Water at Rood Ashton. The limestone ridge is surrounded by lower-lying clay valleys on all sides, and the village cannot be viewed from the immediate surrounding countryside, except from the high ground to the west. The church tower is, however, visible from a distance in many directions.

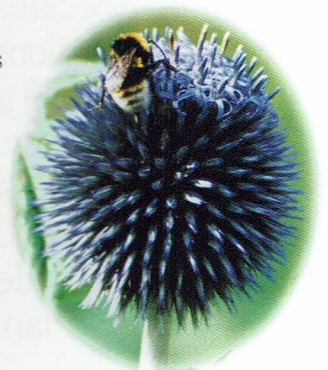
From various vantage points around the village, the panorama is quite impressive with views westward to East Town and West Ashton; south to the escarpment of Salisbury Plain; east towards Keevil and the high chalk downs beyond Devizes; and northwards from Ashton Common towards Trowbridge, Bradford on Avon, Bowden Hill and Corsham.

Wildlife and the Natural Setting

Arable fields and pasture surround Steeple Ashton. Some woodlands have survived, such as Biss Wood and Green Lane Wood, which belongs to the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. Ditches and established hedgerows border the fields, although many hedges have been grubbed out during the last forty years.

This habitat is home to normal populations of the commoner mammals, such as fox, badger, brown hare. The village itself contains many trees and green spaces that attract songbirds and larger birds such as owls, cuckoos and woodpeckers.

In summary, although Steeple Ashton's natural history has no extraordinary features it greatly contributes to the character of the village, and developments should strive at least to maintain, and if possible to enhance, its existing diversity and rural character.



Recreation Space



R2, R3

Conservation Area



C12-C17

Area of Minimum Change



H6

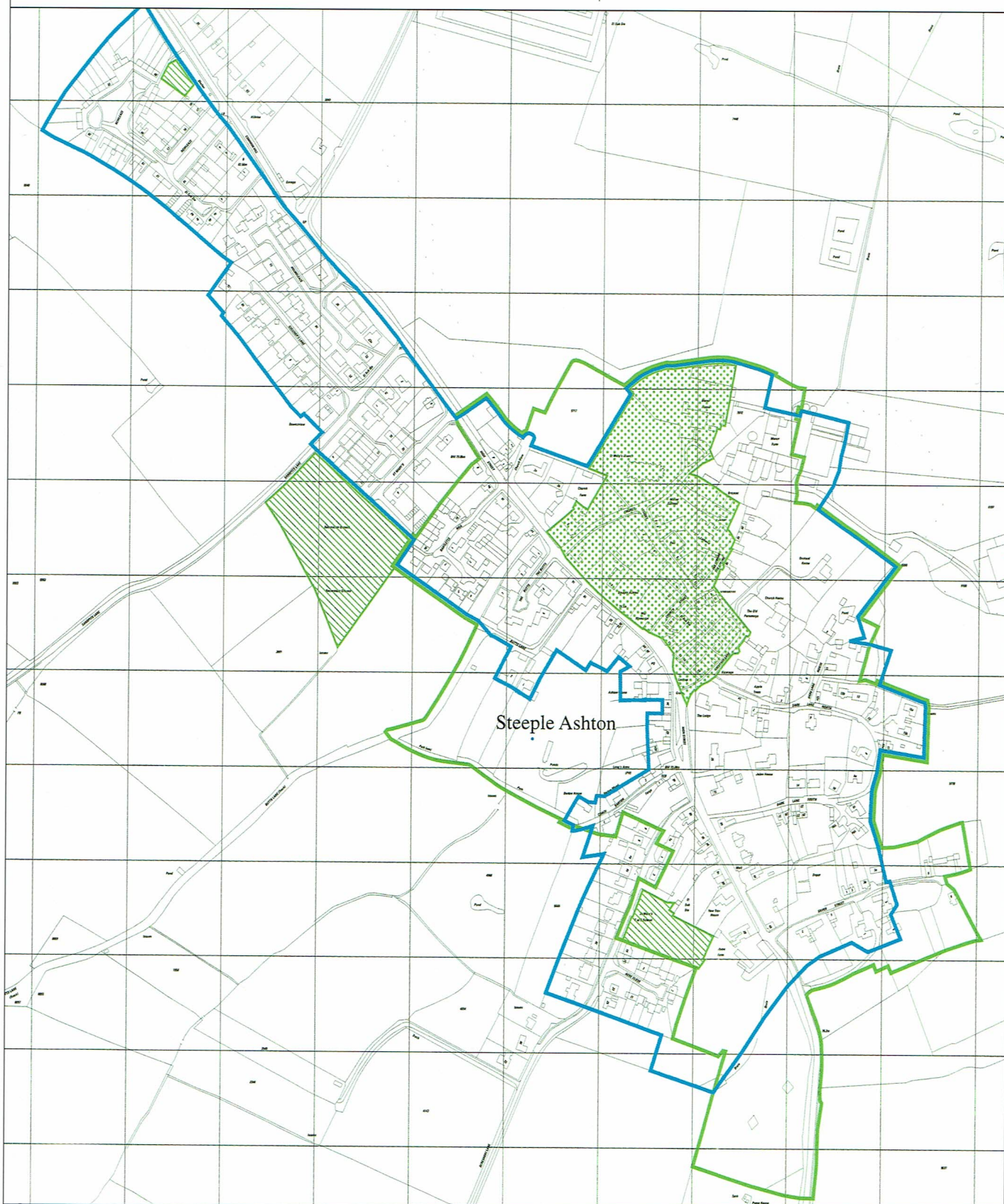
Village Policy Limit



H5



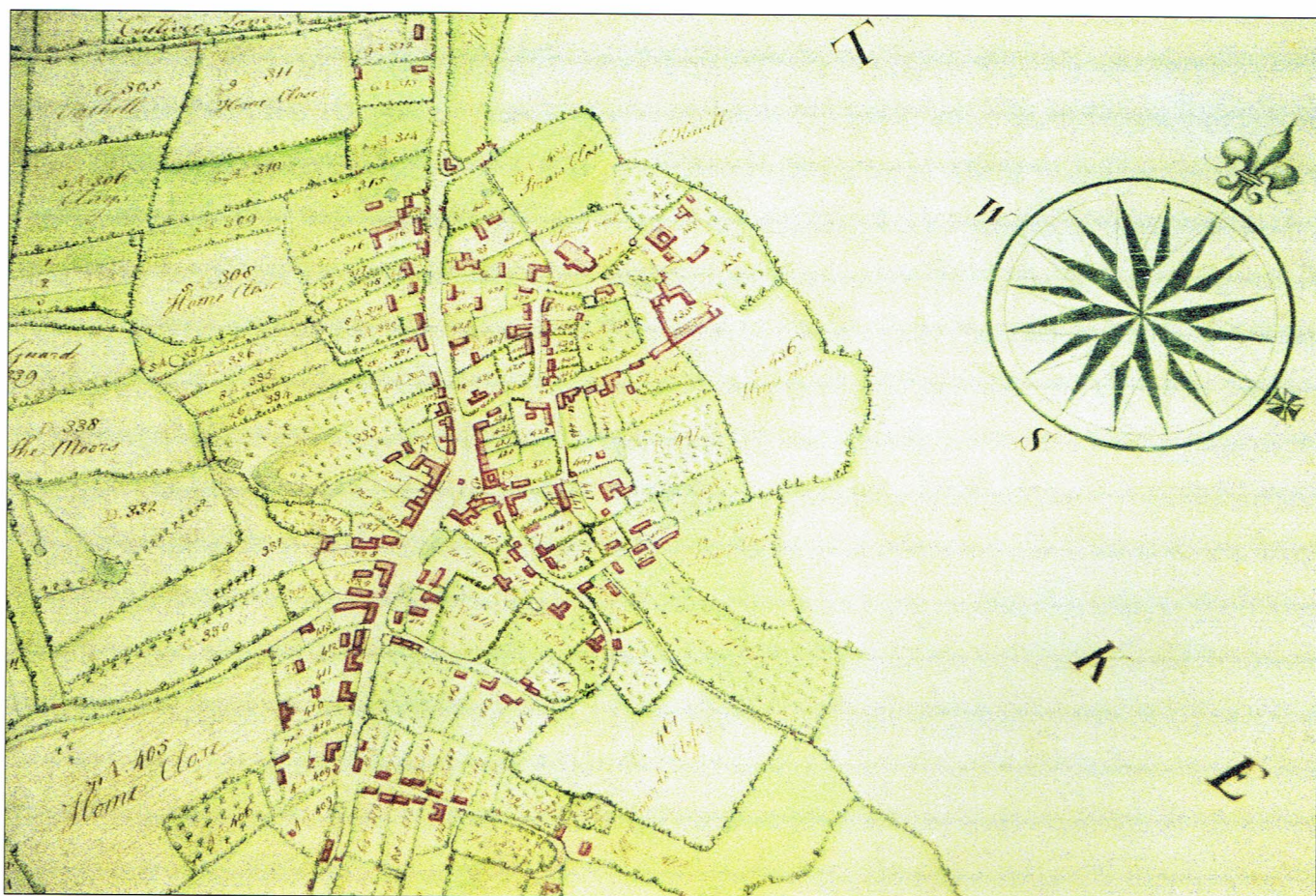
Scale



History

There has been little archaeological investigation inside the Steeple Ashton parish. The only probable prehistoric site of note was discovered during quarrying near Elmsgate Farm to the south of the village, where reports suggest as many as twenty-nine 'crouched burials' were encountered. In 1996, the remains of a substantial late Bronze Age or early Iron Age settlement, dated to around 800 BC, were discovered just north of the parish, and it is likely that the area has been settled since prehistoric or early historic times.

The first known mention of a place called Ashton is in a document of 964, when King Edgar defined its boundaries. These show an extent far wider than the present parish. From soon after that time until the Dissolution of the Monasteries these lands belonged to the nunnery of Romsey in Hampshire. Steeple Ashton was their administrative centre, where the courts were held and the steward lived. A grant of the right to hold a market was obtained in 1266. In the 15th century, the growth of the local cloth industry added to the prosperity of the town; the church is a splendid reminder of this, and several other houses in the village have structures of the medieval period.



About 1500, a fire destroyed a part of the village; the market fell into disuse, and the most prosperous clothiers moved away. Steeple Ashton entered a long decline, although it remained a prosperous village with a lawyer, a doctor, and a number of tradesmen living side by side with the farmers. Attempts to revive the market failed. In the mid 18th century the main road from Bath to Salisbury ran through Steeple Ashton, but after a short period the coach traffic moved to the Warminster route.

In the second half of the 20th century, it became possible for the first time to live in the village and work in the neighbouring towns and further afield. This has led to a considerable expansion of the village with the construction of several sizeable new estates.

Outside the main village, developments over the centuries have largely hinged on the fate of the common lands. In the Middle Ages Steeple Ashton was farmed by the common field (strip-field) system, but gradually the arable lands were enclosed with hedges.

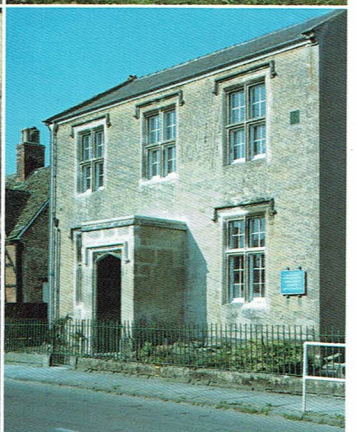
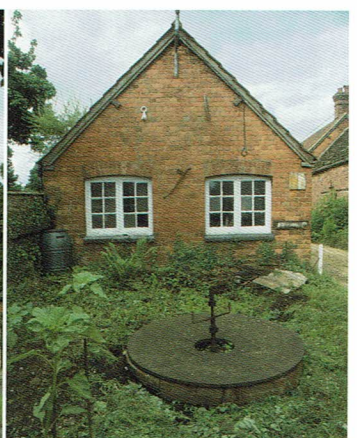
Long before enclosure, groups of cottages had appeared around the fringes of the common. Generally the pre-enclosure dwellings lie back from the road, for instance the groups of cottages known as Ashton Common and Bleet, while the post 1818 houses, like those at the top of Common Hill, were built close to the road.

The Economy

After the decline of the cloth trade, agriculture became the mainstay of Steeple Ashton. There are still three working farms in the village: Manor Farm, Bartletts Farm and Loppinger Farm; and another five just outside it. Many of the other old farms are recalled only in the names of houses.

A few forms of light industry have been established in the village. The local transport company, Geo. T. Brown, has operated from Steeple Ashton since its establishment in 1872. There is a poultry unit producing eggs for a chicken hatchery to the south of the village, and a separate unit producing eggs to the north. There is a meat processing factory and a caravan site. A small industrial estate at Spiers Piece supports timber manufacturing, transport and glass fibre moulding companies. A warehousing business is situated on the site of an old hangar used for the assembly of Spitfires during World War II.

The post-war years have seen the number of village pubs drop from three to one, and the village lost its last surviving shop in 1998. It has a sub-post office run by the Longs Arms public house. The primary school survives thanks to a merger in which it took on some of the pupils from Edington School.



3. The Village

The Street Pattern

The main village street, High Street, winds through Steeple Ashton from roughly southeast to northwest. The village green is centrally located where High Street forms a gentle S-bend. Church Street, Vicarage Lane and Dark Lane form a series of loops off the northeastern side of High Street and these streets contain most of the older buildings. Several culs-de-sac extend off the south western side of the main village street and serve housing developments that are more recent.



The winding alignment and varying width of High Street result in a constantly changing street scene full of surprise and delight. The southern end of the village is especially notable, with the magnificent tower and pinnacles of the Church of St Mary rising above the historic buildings on The Green as a focal point of the panorama. The narrow, curving lanes on the north eastern side have a sense of containment that maintains the small-scale, rural character of the village. Stretches of ancient pitch paving which must all be retained and, where necessary, restored (Church Street, Dark Lane North, The Strand and the rural part of Butts Lane), roadside walls, grass verges, trees and hedges – all contribute to this sense of enclosure and village character. Several of the lanes extend out into the countryside, linking the centre of the village with a network of rural footpaths and green lanes.

High Street extends to the north west as Common Hill, which falls down to Ashton Common, a loose cluster of two-dozen or so dwellings separated from Steeple Ashton by a swathe of mainly open countryside.

The Buildings – General Appreciation

The focal point of the village is the splendid Church of St Mary the Virgin, which dates from the late 15th Century and is listed in Grade I. Even without its original steeple, which blew down in 1670, the church with its tall tower and many pinnacles is the dominant feature of Steeple Ashton and the surrounding area. The oldest houses in the village, some dating from the 15th Century, line both sides of High Street south of Bartletts Mead as well as Church Street, Vicarage Lane and Dark Lane North. Among the most notable historic buildings are The Manor House, next to the church (listed in Grade 1); Ashton House, standing in spacious grounds opposite The Green, Black Barn House at 46 High Street, and The Old Parsonage in Vicarage Lane, all listed in Grade II*. Altogether there are 68 listed houses, gateways and other structures in the village. The Steeple Ashton Conservation Area also contains a number of interesting unlisted buildings, including three pairs of late 19th Century estate cottages at the southern end of High Street. There are two other such cottages in Dark Lane South. The Primitive Methodist Chapel, together with the adjoining cottages, was built in 1854; the Chapel was renovated in 1991.

There has been a certain amount of 20th Century infilling within the Conservation Area, but most of the more recent building has taken place on the western side of High Street. Developments include Acreshort Lane, St Mary's (started in the 1920's and completed in the 1970's), Newleaze (built in the late 1940's), Homeleaze (1950's), The Butts (1970's), Bartletts Mead (1980's) and Home Farm (1999).

The older parts of the village contain a rich variety of house types, styles, and materials. With the exception of The Manor, The Longs Arms and Woodlune House in Ashton Common, no houses have elevations of more than two storeys, though some have a third storey in the roof. Walls are mainly of load bearing brick and stone construction, some of which have been painted and others rendered. There are also a number of timber-framed houses dating from the 16th and 17th Centuries. The older houses are usually quite narrow (measured at right angles to the roof ridge), which makes them more slender and lower than most standard modern houses. Modern infill housing can therefore look bulkier, higher and more dominant than their older neighbours, unless care is taken at the early design stage to avoid this happening.

Many of the newer houses in the village have been faced with reconstructed stone. There are two thatched houses and a number with Welsh slate roofs but, overall, clay tiles predominate on the older buildings (the newer ones usually have cement tiles). Most roofs are gabled, not hipped, and have chimneys that add interest to the skyline. Roof slopes vary, but are mainly between 40° and 50°. The great majority of windows and doors are of traditional timber construction. There are few UPVC windows in the Conservation Area. A number of the 19th Century houses have porches – several with attractive cross-braced framing.

The more recent housing developments tend to be rather more geometric in layout, with evenly spaced, formally related houses designed on a unified theme and displaying a limited range of materials. Roof slopes and materials are consistent, as are window proportions and joinery details. The overall effect is of a much more uniform and standardised townscape compared with that of the historic core of the village. The use of open front gardens contributes to the collective community feeling and emphasises the overall uniformity of the development.



The Village Green

Although St Mary's Church is the visual focal point of the village, the geographical centre is The Green. This triangular grass area contains the 18th Century Blind House and 17th Century Market Cross and is surrounded by some of the oldest houses in Steeple Ashton. The houses in this central core are closely packed together, with those on the western side of High Street, including the imposing Ashton House and The Merchants House, forming a continuous unbroken frontage onto the road. The more modest houses behind The Green are also clustered tightly together, creating a dense urban feeling in the heart of a once thriving, mediaeval market centre. Only some overhead wires mar the character of this historic street scene. Situated on a gentle S-bend in High Street, the southern approach provides one of the finest views in Steeple Ashton, with the church tower rising behind The Green framed by 17th and 18th Century buildings.

The High Street northwards from the Village Green to Bartletts Mead

The High Street, more than any other single feature, gives Steeple Ashton its character. As with the southern section of High Street, the east and west sides of the street differ considerably in character.

Most houses on the western side either face directly onto the pitched stone and pennant paving or hide behind short gardens bounded by brick or stone walls. A number of these are substantial former farmhouses that feature prominently in the street scene when approaching from the north. The double gables at 16, and the timber-framed cottages at 20–24 are particularly notable. There are three modern houses in this stretch, one at the entrance of The Butts, one at the entrance of Bartletts Mead, and one between the two which, despite being modern, conform to the general pattern and scale of the houses they sit by.

On the eastern side of High Street most of the houses, ancient and modern, sit back from the road either behind hedges or walls which, in turn, have grass verges of varying widths to the road. An exception to this is the Methodist Church and the two adjoining dwellings that stand close to the edge of the main road. Immediately to the south of these, the roadside verge widens where the old village duck pond was located, and beyond this are the attractive cluster of buildings associated with Church Farm. Generally, the buildings on the eastern side are more widely spaced and, in a number of cases, set well back behind hedges, giving a greener, more spacious feel to this side of the road.

It is important that these characteristics of the street scene are retained in this approach to the village green from the north. In particular, where cottages have been long demolished opposite the War Memorial, special care is needed to maintain the general appearance of the village around this sensitive area close to the centre of the village.



The High Street southwards from the Village Green to Silver Street

This part of High Street has also remained largely unchanged over the past 100 years. It contains many of the listed buildings in the village, with houses ranging from the 15th to the 19th centuries. A number of the older buildings were the substantial houses of wealthy cloth merchants. No one period or style dominates, with half timbered, stone and brick houses. One interesting aspect of the village is the difference between the east and west sides of the street.

On the west side, the houses tend to be packed close together, fronting directly on the street. There are few with gardens exceeding one metre in depth. Those houses with vestigial gardens have low stone or brick walls, generally surmounted by

wrought iron railings of varying heights together with wrought iron gates. Most houses have front doors opening directly onto the pitched stone and pennant stone pavement. This decorative stone footway, which is a significant townscape feature, extends along the west side of the street for some 500 yards, between Home Farm and Bartletts Mead.

The houses on the east side, from Vicarage Lane to Silver Street, are widely spaced and stand further back from the road in spacious gardens with many trees. The road on this side is edged with a grass verge between one and two metres wide. Stone or brick walls generally define the property boundaries. At the southern end of this stretch, there are three pairs of semi-detached estate cottages dating from the turn of the century, the boundaries of which are hedged behind the grass verge.

This variety has created a harmonious setting in which there is no significant jarring element other than the unsightly web of overhead wires. The open spaces and trees between the buildings contribute to the image of a small unspoilt village, and it will be important to ensure that these are not lost or diminished.

Coach Barton is a narrow, unadopted, gravel surfaced cul-de-sac running west from the High Street between the Longs Arms and the village smithy, still in occasional use. It is part of a public footpath which may be followed to Rood Ashton and East Town. There are three fine brick houses and a cottage situated in the lane, which retains much of its original rural character.

Church Street, The Manor and The Strand

This is a very important area in the village. At the corner of Church Street stands Church Farm. Church Street runs in a horseshoe and returns to the High Street just north of the village green.



The Church and Manor dominate the area in a spacious setting that is complimented by stone walls running either side of the street from the High Street to the church. The ancient pitched stone path runs along the street on the side furthest from the church, and then crosses the street to run towards the church in one direction, and along Church Street in the other. The road widens at this point and the Church is seen in its historical relationship with The Manor and two nearby cottages, Manor Cottage and Old Manor Cottage, that are set back from the road behind a grass verge.

Church Street turns sharp right at this point and the pitched stone path, a feature throughout the main pedestrian thoroughfares of the village, follows it on the eastern side. This part of Church Street and the Strand follow a fairly similar pattern with houses set adjacent to the path, or with only small gardens separated from the path with brick or stone walls,

some surmounted with wrought iron railings on one side and the occasional native hedge, and more recent larger properties set back on the other side. The village hall, on the site of cottages demolished to allow its building, follows the building line of other cottages on this side of the street. On the west side of the street are two larger houses, numbers 4 and 2, that were previously farmhouses. These are set back from the street, one with a small lawn in front bounded by a stone wall, the other with a small open garden, one time part of the street if early maps are followed.

At the junction of Church Street with the Strand the pitched stone path crosses the road and continues towards Vicarage Lane. Church Street turns sharp right here, and the Strand left. From this junction looking up the Strand the scene is one that is common throughout Steeple Ashton with half timbered and brick cottages fronting directly onto the road or pavement with one exception, a modern bungalow behind a substantial concrete block wall. Towards the top end of the Strand are the Manor Farm buildings. Manor Farm buildings, nearly all of which are listed, show the arrangement of a typical manor and it is important that they are preserved in their existing juxta-position in the future. To the left are several modern bungalows that sit uncomfortably in this environment of traditional buildings. Recently a large modern house has been built on a spare plot. This also illustrates the need to maintain a sense of proportion when infilling is permitted to prevent an appearance of over-intensive development in relation to surrounding development. Along the Strand there are many spaces occupied by trees. Both the spaces and the trees are important to the street scene in this area.

Following the road back to Church Street there is a pretty row of Victorian cottages on the right north side, set back from the road behind hedging. The middle cottage has a porch with unusual cross bracing found elsewhere in the village (e.g. in Dark Lane South). Beyond these is a large garden, behind hedging, that provides an appropriate background for the War Memorial, an important feature of the village. A modern house that is set up on a mound of earth dominates the south side of the road. It dwarfs the neighbouring cottages, which have front doors straight onto the road.

The whole of this area consists of narrow streets, some of which are bordered by the pitched stone paths common in the village. Church Street and the Strand are narrow roads entirely unsuitable for heavy traffic. This is aggravated by the fact that many of the houses rely on street parking.



Dark Lane North and South

Dark Lane lies to the east of the High Street, joining it at the north end through Vicarage Lane. Progress around the horseshoe of Dark Lane North and South is remarkable for the reminders it gives of the village's agricultural past. Dark Lane North is a narrow cul-de-sac, only three metres wide in places, lined with grass verges, thick native woodland hedges and a few notable trees. The fruit of the walnut tree, of which there is at least one overhanging the verge, are reputed to have given the lane its name.

It contains a number of yeoman farmers' and workers' dwellings originating in the 16th century, or maybe earlier. These are 2/4, Quince Cottage (Listed), Old Chesils (Listed), Corner Cottage, The Sanctuary (Listed), The Cruck House (Listed), progressing to 13 and 15. The setting and relationship between these ancient cottages is extremely important visually; Old Chesils and 2/4 Dark Lane in particular retain some of their original surrounding land, which contributes greatly to the ambience in the lane, and the view from The Lodge/Vicarage Lane is outstanding and can have changed little over the centuries. Despite there being

some modern building by The Sanctuary, there remains substantial evidence of the pitched stone pavement common elsewhere in the village. Additionally, within The Sanctuary grounds there are the remnants of a pitched stone farmyard.

Modern building is, for the most part, low key, set back from the path and masked by hedges, so that the illusion of ancient rural peace is maintained.

Old Chesils in particular receives attention from visitors from abroad, as it was once a Mormon Meeting House. It has a timber barn on the road frontage, which adds a further rustic feature to the 'street' scene.

On reaching number 15 the road becomes a public footpath which skirts the edge of development with splendid open views to the east and south, and towards Keevil Church, and the northern escarpment of Salisbury Plain, with the Old Dairy House set in its grounds in the foreground. The reverse view is that of St Mary's Church. Again modern bungalows on the western side have been screened by thick hedging, and the entrance to Dark Lane South from the footpath gives the impression of grass and open space, the focal point being numbers 23, 25 and 27 a cluster of three ancient cottages, two of which now make a single dwelling. It retains its character and some of its surrounding land and farm buildings, behind a stone wall direct on to the road. There is a pair of Victorian estate cottages with typical cross-braced open porches. The lane narrows between stone and brick walling on to the High Street and is here overhung by trees in the garden of the Old Firs. This is a favourite walk for villagers and visitors alike, that still manages to convey an impression of the village as it has been for many centuries.

Silver Street

Silver Street extends east from High Street at the southern end of the village. On the northern corner of the entrance to Silver Street, and directly adjacent to the road, stands an old thatched cottage, one of only two remaining in the village, which was once the Three Tuns public house. Behind this is Brown's Transport yard from which a substantial fleet of HGVs operate. Originally, a horse and cart operation serving the village, it has grown and changed over some 125 years into an international haulage operation.

To the south and opposite the yard are three old cottages, numbers 1,2 and 3 Silver Street, each with smallish front gardens bounded by brick walls to a pavement. Beyond these is a new development of three large modern houses, screened from the street scene by substantial mature native trees. The road at this point has narrowed to a three-metre lane with grass verges on either side leading to The Dairy House farm previously mentioned in the description of Dark Lane. The lane ends in a footpath leading to the neighbouring village of Keevil with views to the east, south and west of the northern edges of Salisbury Plain. The reverse view is again one of the village, heavily wooded with the church in the background.



Acreshort Lane

The narrow entrance to the lane is flanked on both sides by listed buildings, The Old Shoppe, once the village bakery on the southern corner, and on the other the ancient 16th century Black Barn, both springing directly from the roadside. This is a major constriction and adds to the impression of entering a country lane.

The lane was developed during the 1950's and 60's, with equally spaced bungalows and chalet-bungalows on the north side in a variety of styles. On the south side are the remains of the boundary wall of the old Shoppe garden, in parts fronting bungalows 1 to 3. Beyond these bungalows is the village school playing field, a valuable open recreational space in the village, fronted by a three metre grass verge and native hedgerow that gives an open look to the lane.

The dwellings on the north side of the lane are fronted, unlike much of the older parts of the village, with suburban style gardens bounded mainly by brick walls.

In the 1960's, Acre Close was built as a cul-de-sac of 12 semi-detached houses all of similar design, many of which have been extended at the rear over the years.

The lane continues as a public footpath and bridleway to open countryside leading to East Town and West Ashton. There are important outward views to the west and southeast of the northern escarpment of Salisbury Plain and Bratton Castle. The reverse inward views are of a village dominated by its church. This is again part of a circular walk round the village frequently used by walkers with or without dogs.

Butts Lane

A delightful village lane that leads off from the village street and which quickly takes the walker, after some 200 metres, into a network of rural footpaths across paddocks and fields that link neighbouring villages and hamlets with Steeple Ashton. In places, remnants of medieval pitched stone footpaths can be seen, matching those actually within the village. Access into Butts Lane from the High Street is very narrow but this is a public road only to the first bend and serves the three homes, two modern and one the converted barn of a farm. From the first bend it becomes a public footpath and this has become an important amenity to the villagers who wish to stroll in safety and quiet, in a very unspoilt rural environment. There is a well-used public seat having good views of both the village church and surrounding fields. Almost all Steeple Ashton residents would regard the conservation of this lane and its immediate environment as a very high priority.



Bartletts Mead

Situated on the western side of the High Street, Bartletts Mead is a development of about 30 houses of differing sizes all built in the 1980's. The construction is of brick and stone with tiled roofs. Most villagers regard this development as a successful addition to the village landscape. Its features combine well into the rural environment, with terraced buildings, balanced proportions, stone quoins and general building materials that emulate older elements elsewhere in the village. It is a pity that there is a lack of pedestrian footpaths within the complex. In some cases white plastic porches have been added to the houses. This highlights the need for ensuring that planning permission for extensions of this kind in the village should be necessary and carefully considered before being permitted. All such additions should be in keeping not only with the parent house but also with the general village vernacular.

The Butts

The Butts is a six house estate built in an old farm yard in the style of many of the farmhouses in the village with stone mullioned windows, stone porch lintels, string courses and building materials all reflecting the traditional architecture to be seen elsewhere in the village. The spacing of the houses is generous with good-sized gardens, open at the front, and most villagers regard The Butts as an ideal small village development. The open spaces between and in front of the houses, the style and proportions of the fenestration and doors and the absence of modern plastic materials are important components of the visual attraction of the close.

Common Hill and High Street north of Bartletts Mead

The High Street extends northwestwards through the village, becoming Common Hill beyond the junction with Hinton Lane. The eastern side of the main road is mainly open, except for two short strips of houses interspersed with wide gaps affording attractive open views of the downs around Devizes and the Salisbury Plain escarpment. The gap between Church View and Hinton Lane also provides superb views of St Mary's Church when travelling south into the village. Further north, the gap between the two strips of houses is occupied by the buildings of Loppinger Farm set some 300 metres back from the road, in its own farmland and with several notable native trees surrounding it. The open, semi-rural character of this side of Common Hill/High Street is reinforced by the hedgerows and continuous grass verges which line the side of the road.

The western side of the main road is fully built-up by a series of housing developments, most of which are served by culs-de-sac access roads: St Mary's, Gullivers Lane, Homeleaze and Newleaze. As a result, there are few houses with direct access onto the main road. Newleaze and Homeleaze are set back from High Street/Common Hill behind wide grass verges and footpaths, with groups of fine, mature forest trees helping to soften the impact of the housing. To the south of Newleaze, the western side of the road is bordered by open countryside as far as Ashton Common.

The Approaches to the Village

The village approaches are the gateways to Steeple Ashton and deserve special consideration. The winding approach from the south affords changing views of the church tower across the fields and it is important that these views should not be further eroded by intrusive new development. The northern approach through Common Hill and High Street is more built up, but the open, semi-rural feeling described above can, and must, be preserved, including the open gaps on the eastern side of Common Hill that offer views of the countryside and escarpments. The approach from the west along Sandpits Lane affords significant views of the village extended along the crest of the north-south ridge, with the church tower rising behind. It is important that the linear form of the village, with countryside approaching close to the spine road, should not be threatened by any further development in depth on the western side. The approach from the east along Hinton Lane provides possibly the finest and most impressive views of the church, which can be seen in its entirety, and should be preserved.

There are a profusion of footpaths around Steeple Ashton. Reference to older maps of the last century will show that many of these were inter-village roads. Some were blocked when the airfield at Keevil was built during the Second World War. Every attempt must be made to preserve these routes.



Roads and Traffic

The High Street and the approaches to the village are unclassified C roads that in places are less than five metres wide and include a series of difficult junctions and bends. It has to accommodate a substantial volume of local vehicles and through traffic, including commuter cars from villages situated to the south and going towards Trowbridge and the A350. This latter is the main trunk road between Portsmouth, Poole and Southampton to the south, and Melksham, Chippenham, the M4 motorway and the Midlands to the north.

To establish the facts, a seven-day twenty-four-hour survey at two strategic points was undertaken by the inhabitants of the village, to identify the types and numbers of vehicles entering and leaving Steeple Ashton.

The data collected showed that the number of vehicles passing through the village was some 2,100 per day, a substantial proportion of them originating from the south. Of all vehicles passing through, or stopping in the village, some 80% were private cars; 2% were articulated lorries; 4% rigid HGV's; 11% commercial and tradesman's vans, the remainder being farm vehicles, motorcycles and PSV's.

Large lorries can have difficulties negotiating the junction of the Melksham/Trowbridge roads at the bottom of Common Hill (Ashton Common), and between there and the village all vehicles face a difficult blind bend.

Within the village, the volume of traffic along the High Street causes noise and pollution that affect the quality of life. There is danger to pedestrians, and in particular to village children, when HGV's mount the pavement in order to pass each other. Much of the High Street has pennant and pitched stone paving with low natural stone kerbs and natural grass verges, most of which are being severely damaged.

A number of houses are a minimum of only one metre from the road. In the past few years at least three have sustained damage through being hit by lorries. Additionally, the poor state of maintenance of the roads and drainage in the village causes large and deep puddles through which vehicles splash, drenching listed buildings, not to mention pedestrians.

In the High Street there is unrestricted parking. The amount of kerbside parking is particularly apparent during peak times in the area of the village school. It makes the passage of both private cars and lorries difficult.



Trees and Open Spaces

The Green, with its blind house and 17th Century market cross, is the most important open space in Steeple Ashton, extending the full distance from Vicarage Road to Church Street. Sadly, the part outside the former 'Rose and Crown' public house has succumbed and become a parking space. The Green provides a central reference point for the village, like the market square in the middle of a town. It offers an appropriate setting for the historic buildings that surround it, and the broadening of High Street affords fine views of the church tower. This widening is extended to the south in the form of a linear strip of 'green' outside the Longs Arms Public House; where in years gone by market stalls were set up by traders. Another important open space is in Church Street in front of Old Manor Cottage and at the side of 1 Church Street, where there were animal pens in which cattle were grazed awaiting market. These are now marked by a post and rail fence at the roadside to prevent car parking, and a picket fence set some three metres back from Church Street.

To the south of the village, by the new Home Farm development, the grass verge becomes quite wide and it is here that there was once a toll house on the Bath to Salisbury turnpike. Another fine grass verge is to be found alongside the school playing field in Acreshort Lane, unfortunately used for parking cars.

Opposite Bartlett's Mead Farm house there is a wide patch of grass on which grows a sycamore tree. It is here that the village pond was situated until it was filled in during the early 1920's. Further up Common Hill there are open spaces in front of Holmleaze and Newleaze. Another is found at Loppinger Farm (reminding us of the rural past of Steeple Ashton), where there is a fine Horse Chestnut tree on the opposite side of the road.

An impressive stand of trees that should be protected is to the north of the Newleaze development. In Dark Lane North there are fine trees at The Sanctuary and at Old Chesils. Also close to Old Chesils is an important grass verge, not yet used for parking, which needs protecting. The grounds surrounding the Old Parsonage contain many trees; while in The Strand there is a fine beech tree.

As well as these areas of public open space, there are many private gardens and gaps between buildings. These make a significant contribution to the character of the townscape. The great fire of Steeple Ashton created some of these, others by individual fires in houses with thatched roofs. In a number of cases these gaps contain trees and bushes that complement the buildings and provide a green and leafy contrast to the man-made environment. They also give views out of the village to the escarpment of Salisbury Plain from Dark Lane South, and towards East Town and Rood Ashton from various public footpaths and Sandpits Lane.

The open field on the northeast side of High Street opposite Homeleaze and Sandpits Lane is an especially valuable gap that affords the best views of St Mary's Church on the northern approach to the village.

Public recreational facilities are available for young children at the village school playing field outside school hours, at St Mary's recreation field where the local football team has its pitch. There is a children's play area with swings and a slide here and also at the Newleaze development.

4. Guidelines for the Future

On Buildings

From the planner's viewpoint, Steeple Ashton falls into three zones: the Area of Minimum Change, the Conservation Area, and the remaining area bounded by the Village Policy Limits.

The Area of Minimum Change defined by the District Council is subject to severe restrictions on new development, and these are fully supported by the village. However, the area is relatively small and many of the listed buildings fall outside it including virtually all the oldest houses. The historic part of the village is thus substantially larger than the Area of Minimum Change. At some stage the village may wish to propose an extension of the Area of Minimum Change to cover the whole area in which there are listed buildings, but this will not be possible before preparations start on the District Council's Development Plan for the period beyond the year 2011.

Recommendation 1: Within those parts of the village that contain listed buildings but are outside the area of Minimum Change, the original character of the houses and their settings must be preserved. To achieve this, particular attention should be paid to such matters as the form of the building's features and details, building materials, the design of extensions, conservatories and garages and the spaces between houses.

Recommendation 2: Within other parts of the village that are away from the listed buildings but inside the Conservation Area, any new development should be designed with sensitivity to its setting. The village policy should encourage flair and originality, so that contemporary buildings will leave a legacy as attractive as that of past centuries without destroying the overall sensibility of the scene. New houses, and other buildings, should reflect the size and character of surrounding buildings.

Recommendation 3: There are many houses which, though not statutory listed buildings, are nevertheless of historical or architectural interest. Changes, which would harm the character of these houses, should be resisted. These would include the construction of garages, conservatories or other extensions in unduly prominent positions. New ancillary buildings should be subordinate in scale to the main house, and building lines should be respected.

Recommendation 4: Beyond the village policy limits any new buildings (including agricultural buildings) should blend as harmoniously as possible into the village setting, and be located close to existing buildings rather than isolated in open countryside. The spaces that separate the main village from the houses at the top of Common Hill, and these houses from Ashton Common, should be preserved.

On Gaps and Spaces

Recommendation 5: Where a gap or space between buildings in the village makes a significant contribution to the character or appearance of the street scene, any proposal to infill that gap or space with new development or a large extension to an existing building should be resisted.

On Streets and Footpaths

Recommendation 6: The informal alignment, narrow width and rural character of the older streets and lanes should be preserved. Any new roads created within the village should be as close to the traditional pattern as feasible. Old paving should be kept, and matched with the original when repair is needed. Grass verges should be retained, as should old walls, hedges and railings. Existing footpaths leading out into the countryside should remain. Signposts and street names should be traditional in character.

On Roads and Traffic

Recommendation 7: The Parish Council and the Friends of Steeple Ashton should press the appropriate authorities for early and effective solutions to the traffic problems being encountered in the village.

On Trees

Recommendation 8: Trees that make a notable contribution to the village setting should be identified, irrespective of whether they are subject to Tree Preservation Orders. Indigenous species should be chosen when replanting is necessary. In any new building development, landscaping and planting plans should be implemented before buildings are occupied.

On the Approaches to the Village

Recommendation 9: The fine inward views of the village on its approaches should be protected, e.g. the views of the church from the north, east and west, and especially from Hinton Lane, Lower Common Hill, Sandpits Lane, Edington and the designated public footpaths.

On Telephone and Power Lines

Recommendation 10: As opportunities arise, telephone and power lines should be placed underground in the Area of Minimum Change and the Conservation Area.

On Commercial and Industrial Development

Recommendation 11: Further commercial or industrial development in the area outside the village policy limits should be permitted only if small-scale, and compatible with the rural character of the village.

5. Following-up the VDS

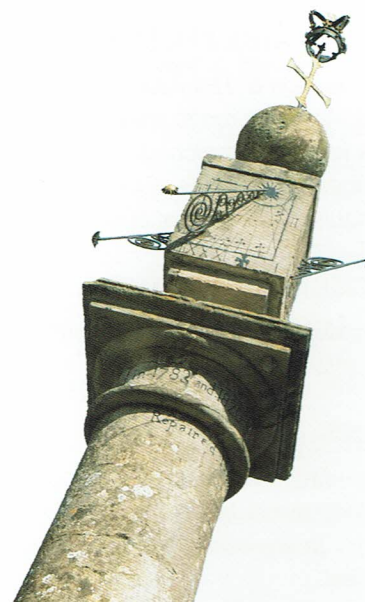
Over the short term

Since the group responsible for drawing up the VDS will be disbanded once the exercise is finished, this will have to be done by the Parish Council and /or the Friends of Steeple Ashton. The following actions are recommended:

1. Assign one or more individuals to be responsible for following up the findings and recommendations of the VDS.
2. Draw up design briefs, including examples of good practice and a specific range of acceptable materials, to be made available to any party planning construction in the Area of Minimum Change and Conservation Area.
3. Draw up a register of houses which, although not listed buildings, are nevertheless of historical or architectural interest.
4. Identify trees that make a notable contribution to the village setting, and propose sites where additional tree planting would add to the attractions of the village.
5. Identify relatively minor improvements that would bring certain features of the village more in line with its essential character, and might be proposed for inclusion in the District Council's Historic Areas Enhancement Scheme. These might include more attractive telephone booths, a more rural style of bus shelter at Newleaze, and repairs and restoration to the pitched stone and pennant flag pavements.
6. Press the appropriate authorities for early and effective action on roads and traffic.

Over the medium and longer term

In a few years' time the Parish Council and the Friends of Steeple Ashton should consider whether the VDS needs to be revisited, and perhaps updated. When work on a new Development Plan for the period after 2011 is being started by WWDC, the village should consider requesting an extension to the Area of Minimum Change so that it covers all the listed buildings.





The Last Word

The residents of Steeple Ashton have produced this Village Design Statement.

This document describes the character of the buildings, street pattern, trees and open spaces of the village, and recommends design guidelines for the future. It will be used to influence the design of future development within the village.

This Statement is the first of its kind in West Wiltshire and is the result of widespread village participation and consultation. A Village Design Statement Committee co-ordinated the production of the Statement, with the assistance of the West Wiltshire District Council.

West Wiltshire District Council adopted the Statement as Supplementary Planning Guidance at its Central Area Committee on 8 June, 2000. The Document supplements the following policies contained within the adopted West Wiltshire District Plan:

C12–C17 Conservation Areas; C18–C21 Listed Buildings; C29 Trees and Tree Planting; R2 Protection of Recreation Areas; H4 Flat Conversions; H5 Village Policy Limits; H6 Areas of Minimum Change; H9 Residential Conversions in the Countryside; E5 Rural Employment; E6 Farm Diversification; E8 Horse Related Development; CF3 Rural and Village Facilities.

The Village Design statement will be referred to when the District Council considers planning applications for new development within the village.

Councillor Jeff Osborn
Chair of Central Area Committee

Sponsors:

Geo. T. Brown

Hauliers & Machinery Sales, Steeple Ashton

Bishop, Longbotham & Bagnall

Solicitors; Trowbridge, Bradford on Avon, Bath and Swindon

Hebline Security Systems

Bradford on Avon

Middleton & Upsall

Solicitors; Trowbridge

Christopher Horley

Solicitors; Trowbridge

Rural Action

Beaufort Homes Development Group

Friends of Steeple Ashton

Steeple Ashton Parish Council

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