

WELFORD ON AVON VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

*“Helping to manage long term
change - not prevent it.”*

Prepared by the residents of
Welford on Avon with financial
support from the Countryside
Commission.

**COUNTRYSIDE
COMMISSION**

Adopted by Stratford-on-Avon District Council as
Supplementary Planning Guidance on September 20th 1998



WELFORD ON AVON VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

Why did Welford prepare a Village Design Statement?

To help ensure that new development in the village fits comfortably with its surroundings and is in keeping with local character and distinctiveness. The document establishes an awareness of past traditions to which present day proposals should relate.

What does it say?

It describes the physical character of the village as it is now, through the eyes and experience of local people. The village is much more than a collection of individual buildings, spaces, streets and trees; it is the community.

How will it work?

It will be a practical tool capable of influencing decisions affecting design and development in the village. As Supplementary Planning Guidance, its recommendations will be taken into account when planning applications are assessed.

How has it been written?

By local residents, following local meetings and publicity initiated by the Countryside Commission, Stratford District Council and the Parish Council. It has been endorsed by the people of Welford through workshops and consultations and has a very local feel for the features of the village which are familiar and cherished aspects of local character and regional diversity which need to be interpreted for the future.

Direct quotes of comments by the residents who participated in the consultation are shown throughout the document in quotation marks and italics.



“When I took part in the workshop I saw things I had not noticed before although I have lived here for 25 years.”



LANDSCAPE SETTING

Welford on Avon lies four miles West South-West of Stratford upon Avon at the Eastern end of the Vale of Evesham in the Avon valley. The village is situated to the South of the river which meanders around the village in a large loop effectively forming boundaries on the North, West and East. However, river access from the land is awkward on the West and non-existent on the East and North. The land is predominantly riverside pasture, fertile flat land 35m above sea level, and prone to flooding after periods of prolonged heavy rain.

- At the North of the village the parish boundary is located in the middle of the historic Binton bridges river crossing. Beyond the river and its meadow lands the land rises to the wooded slopes of Binton Hill and the Avon ridge lands.
- At the Southern end of the village the land gradually rises, first to Welford and Rumer Hills and then to the Cotswold fringe beyond.
- To the West the land rises steeply to where a steep river bluff gives way to grazing meadows. At 55m above sea level Cress Hill, offers a rare vantage point with sweeping views over Welford, the river and surrounding countryside.
- To the East the valley narrows and flattens and views of the spire of Holy Trinity church in Stratford are visible from the approaches to Welford Hill.

TERRAIN

River meadowlands

The river meadowlands afford Welford a natural green "wedge" so that the edge of the village on three sides has the benefit of open countryside reaching into the village through open green spaces with glimpses of pastureland, hedges and meadows.

Of special merit is the Glebe Meadow and river at the foot of Boat Lane with the weir and indigenous riverbank vegetation. Silted ditches and a few neglected willows mark the boundaries.

The influence of river meadowlands are clearly visible from Cress Hill and approach roads from Binton and Barton. Commercial horticulture is an important element of the landscape and is evident on the rich alluvial soil of the flood plains where the village's horticultural heritage is recognised.

Terrace farmlands

The farmed landscape is dominated by arable production, typically in large geometric fields. Field pattern is defined by low cut hedges and some hedgerow trees. Scattered mature hedgerow oaks occur along roadsides. Farmland is best viewed from the Southern approaches to the village from Welford Hill. Here the coppices running along its spine give way to large arable fields which meet the well-concealed soft edge of the village which is achieved through good tree cover on the outer boundary of the settlement. Remnants of orchards are still a feature. Along with open fields and paddocks, they reach into the village behind the ribbon development, helping to link the cultivated rear gardens into the landscape.

"Soft edges to the village are desirable - no large blocks of buildings on the periphery"



SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The Avon and its surrounding meadowlands have always played a major part in the life of Welford villagers. It is therefore very apt that the village derives part of its name from the ancient "ford" crossing on which today's Binton bridges are built but sadly today the river is virtually inaccessible to the villagers.

The distinctive features of the area are that of a narrow meandering river corridor, flanked by meadows and riverside trees. Before the water table was lowered regular flooding was a feature but is now less common. Welford's proximity to the river is reflected in some street names; Pool Close, Frog Lane, Duck Lane and Boat Lane.

"The river is key and should be respected"

Main access is by crossing the river from North to South through the village centre and on to Long Marston and the Cotswolds. The other route through the village passes East to West joining Bidford with Stratford forming a secondary link South of the river, between the three historic crossing places.

These two main routes have formed the basis for the development of the village. Most additional roads are therefore aligned North/South or East/West. The roads are comparatively wide with sweeping bends and, despite development over many centuries have retained wide grass verges.

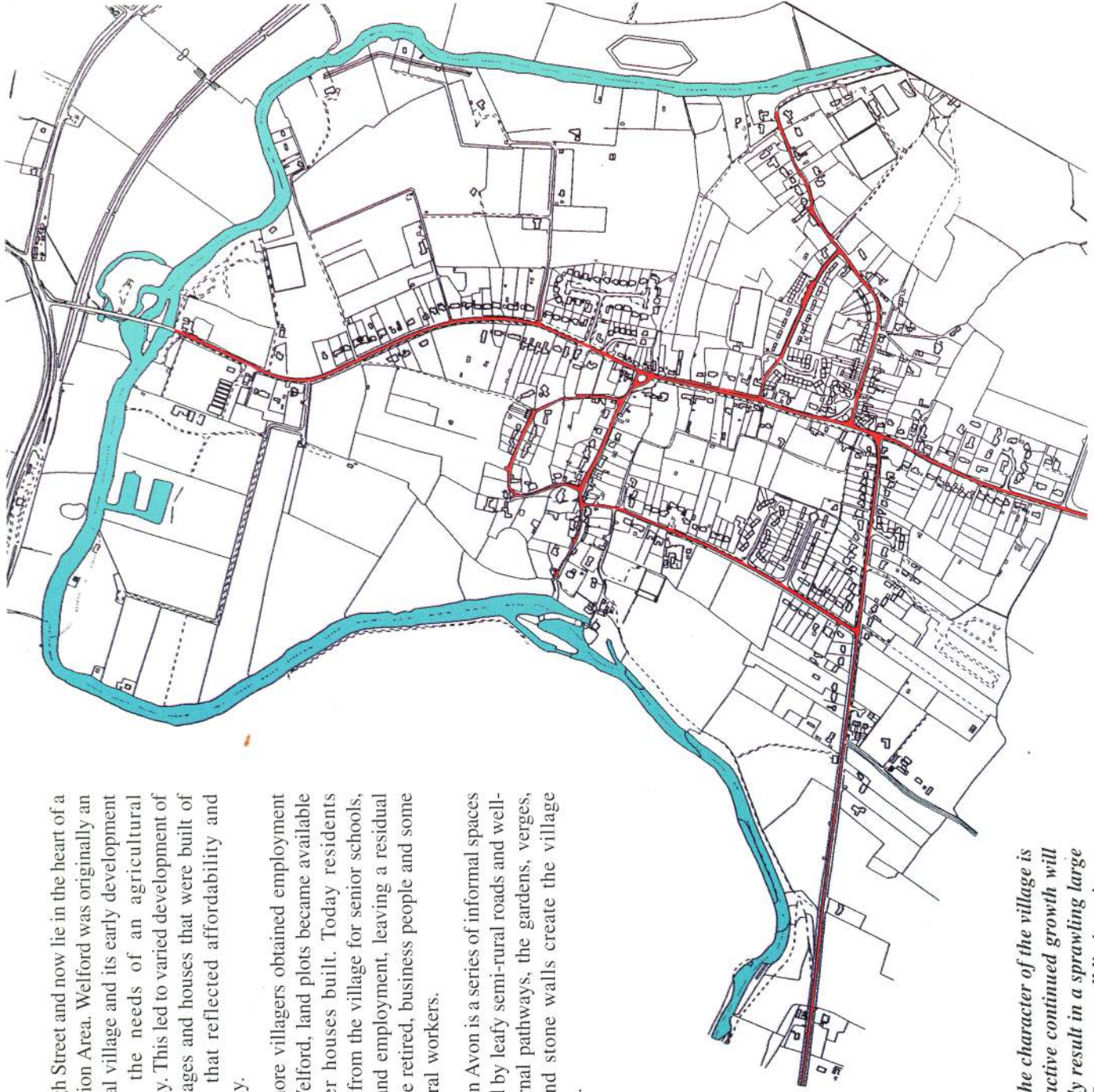
The village has developed around two centres about a third of a mile apart, the Post Office and Church Street area to the North and the Maypole and Chapel Street to the South. These, the oldest parts of the village, are linked

by the High Street and now lie in the heart of a Conservation Area. Welford was originally an agricultural village and its early development mirrored the needs of an agricultural community. This led to varied development of small cottages and houses that were built of materials that reflected affordability and availability.

In time more villagers obtained employment outside Welford, land plots became available and larger houses built. Today residents commute from the village for senior schools, colleges and employment, leaving a residual base of the retired, business people and some horticultural workers.

Welford on Avon is a series of informal spaces connected by leafy semi-rural roads and well-used internal pathways, the gardens, verges, hedges and stone walls create the village ambience.

"Whilst the character of the village is now attractive continued growth will eventually result in a sprawling large village. Can an overall limit to size or boundaries be set?"





THE VILLAGE

First impressions on approaching Welford are that many of its streets have wide grass verges or banks and most of the houses along the approach roads are set well back. The two greens at opposite ends of the High Street add to this open and spacious feel of the village. The gardens that flank the lanes and road are predominantly well kept and there are scattered mature hedgerow oaks along many of the roadsides.

“Gardens are just as important as the houses if not more so”

“The beauty, character and design of buildings are moulded by the trees, hedges, greens etc.”

“Open spaces should be retained and any development respect the important features of wide grass verges. High density developments should be prevented”

Welford is characterised by its open aspect.



FOCAL POINTS

The Maypole, reputed to be the tallest in England, is the Southern focal point of the village complete with a superb Horse Chestnut Tree. On this green several Community events take place each year such as the Street Fair, maypole and morris dancing, and carol singing on Christmas Eve..

The other green is at the opposite end of the High Street. While not used for public gatherings it is an important area that exemplifies the characteristic openness of the village layout.



CONNECTING SPACES

Internal Footpaths

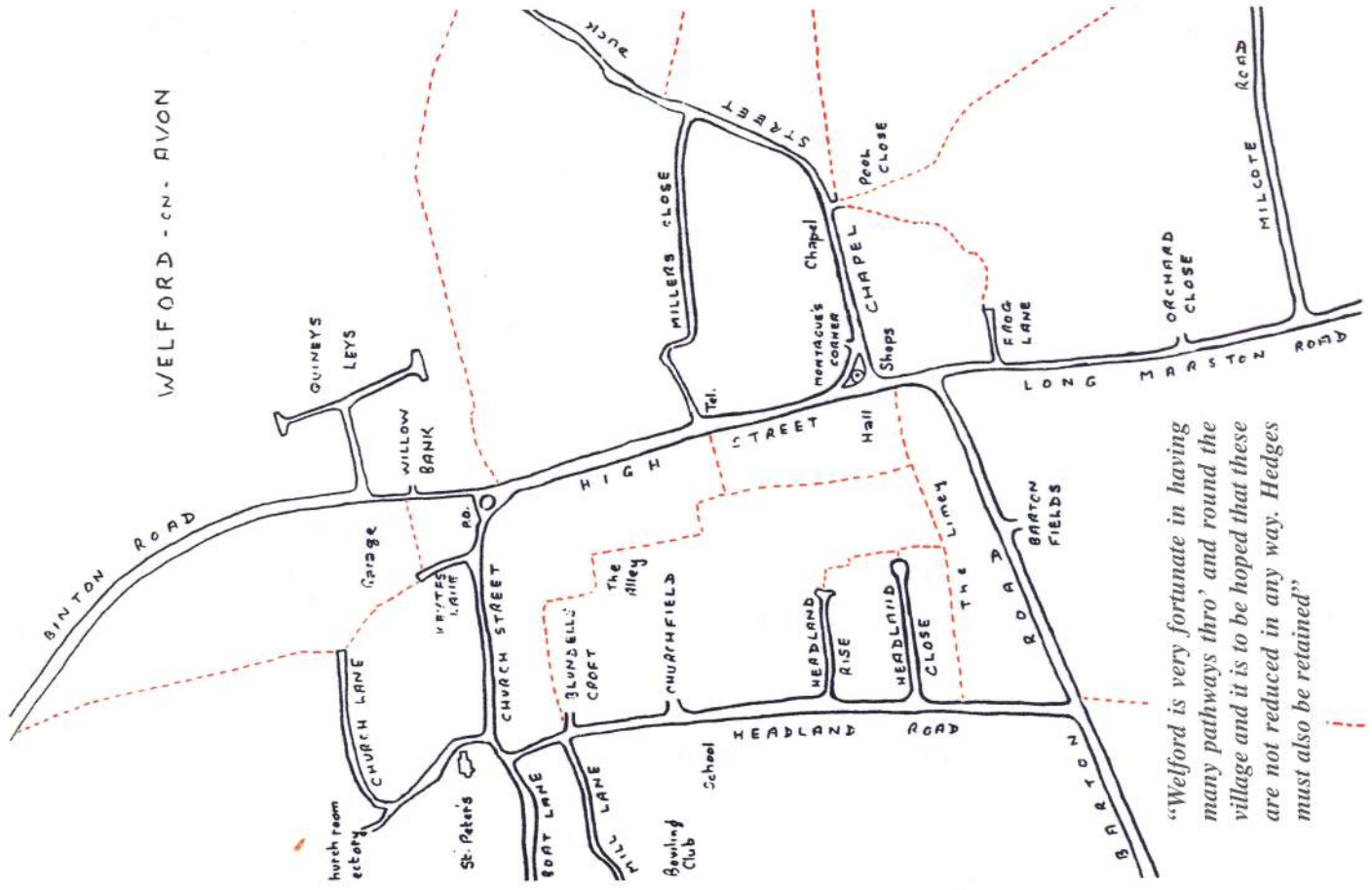
Throughout the village a network of footpaths exists that provide several miles of pedestrian links. These footpaths are diverse in character and are furnished with kissing gates, wicket gates of wood or metal and several old stiles. Those within the built up area are mainly flanked by old hedgerows and fruit trees. The combination of these hedgerows and the open paddock areas beyond enable a wide variety of flora to thrive.

- Footpaths mainly pre-date the existing main highways.
- The path from Binton Road to Church Lane was pre-enclosure and originally the main route from the village to Binton Bridges.
- They provide quiet and well-used routes, avoiding busy roads.
- From The Bell Inn through "Baker's Field" to the bottom of Duck Lane is another short cut with open views to the north.
- The popular, well-used riverside path, part of the Avon Valley Walkway, runs from Boat Lane along the river bank to Cress Hill then on to Marcleiff.

External Footpaths

These paths are more open in character and often pass through the middle of meadows. The paths are predominantly 'padded' grass tracks but some are of gravel or tarmacadam.

- The path from Barton Road to Dorsington is a pleasant inter-village route.
- The two paths from Weston-on-Avon to Duck Lane provide well-used routes to the village amenities.
- The path from Pool Close to Milcote offers convenient recreational walks into open country with good views.



"Welford is very fortunate in having many pathways thro' and round the village and it is to be hoped that these are not reduced in any way. Hedges must also be retained"



OPEN COMMUNITY SPACES

- Synder Meadow situated off Binton Road is a sports field administered by local trustees.
- The playing field by the school is open to the public out of school hours and provides a valuable resource for the young villagers.
- Cress Hill, an area rich in wildlife, overlooks the river. A programme of renovation and maintenance has made it more accessible to the public.

“Wildlife should be considered very carefully and put higher on the list for careful treatment and protection”

- The enclosed Churchyard is surrounded by picturesque cottages and has some notable Yews in amongst its old tombstones. The extended burial ground situated in an old orchard is unique in being accessed only by footpath from Headland Road.

IMPORTANT OPEN SPACES

The various small paddocks with their associated hedges and hedgerow trees which lie within the village boundaries provide natural landscape buffers to large blocks of development.

The Glebe meadow by the river has fine views of the Old Mill buildings, the weir and the lock beyond.



VILLAGE TREES

Much of the land within the village was originally planted with cherry, plum and damson orchards, but has been built on in recent years. Many of the fruit trees remain in gardens and are a feature of the village. The preservation of remaining fruit trees and the planting of new stock should be encouraged.

The Ash Coppices on Welford Hill and Rumer Hill are two particularly prominent features, clearly visible from all compass points. These trees are uncommon in the area and form important refuges for wildlife and interesting woodland macro-fungi which would not be found in association with isolated trees or hedgerows.

Dutch Elm disease caused the loss of most of Welford's major trees and resulted in substantial visual changes to the village scene. Many of the remaining trees of note including several large willows can be found in the gardens of the older village houses. Most recent plantings have mainly consisted of small ornamental varieties.

The verges on High Street used to contain Mulberry Trees and the planting of such trees as Ash, Ginkgo and small leaved Limes would help to soften the various developments there.

The tendency to plant fast growing Leylandii detracts from the character of the traditional English rural scene and the planting of more appropriate species would help to restore the leafy village scene of the past.

“ Trees are very important - the more the better and the current groupings of small ones is very good”

Small trees and hedges in sympathy with the area could improve recent developments. In particular, the verges and frontages of Frasers Way, Barton Croft, Holland Meadow and Mill Farm Caravan site could be enhanced if clumps or fragmented planting was introduced to allow glimpse views.

Suitable sites for planting would be:-

- The West side of school playing field
- The boundary of Bowling Club
- Synder Meadow on the Northern and Western sides
- Willows / Poplars on the perimeter of Glebe
- The Bell Inn Green - A bolder tree or Stand of trees
- At the triangular junction of Long Marston and Milcote Road
- Allotment field hedge in Headland Road

BUILDINGS

Open aspects are a distinctive feature of Welford, a village with much variety of building character and style. Thatched, timber-framed cottages dominate in parts but in other areas styles vary enormously. In the past 50 years building has taken place mainly away from the centres along the North, South and West approach roads, pushing the village towards the edge of the built up area. At the same time some infilling has occurred in the central areas. What is apparent throughout the village is the successful integration of the buildings. The balance has been maintained between surrounding space in siting, retention of tree stands and setting back with open frontages and verges.

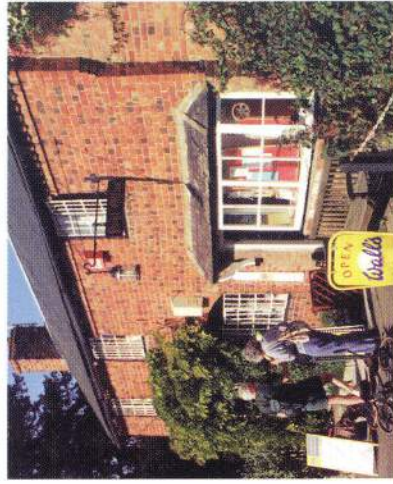
Approaches

The three main approach roads have similar features in building form; previously isolated buildings on the outskirts of the village have been absorbed into a mixture of twentieth-century houses and bungalows with traditional front gardens, hedges and grass verges. Some new developments have been accommodated on old orchard land, but have maintained village features, such as wide grass verges. Road edge development is occasionally interrupted with pockets of horticultural activity, remnants of old orchard and grazing meadows which form a pleasing visual introduction to the village centres.

“Excessive and fast traffic on village roads is problematic.”

“A variety of styles is probably better for the overall village character than uniform development. The village has evolved over many years and it is this we are seeking to preserve.”

Binton Road narrows into a gateway type approach by the Bell Inn which then opens up to become the High Street at the smaller of the two village centre greens. The Post Office, with its characteristic purple header brickwork and the Bell Inn, blend comfortably with Tudor Vale, a Grade II listed timbered property opposite. Church Street meets High Street at this small informal village green, and a variety of building styles and landscape features create a gentle enclosure.



Long Marston Road gently drops into the village from Welford Hill, and this also narrows as it becomes High Street, at Frog Lane and Birds Green. Frog Lane, a narrow pleasing mixture of nineteenth- and twentieth-century buildings, is set behind the small triangular green.



The Barton Road approach has four recent developments within its length. Holland Meadow, the first shared-equity development of starter homes was opened in 1991 and the open grassed area around which the properties are grouped, emulates this village feature. The large “executive” homes of West View Lawns, whilst facing an open green, tend to appear cramped. Barton Fields, a cul-de-sac of five brick detached houses built in the 1980’s, retains a wide verge and old hedgerow. Barton Croft, a further small development follows a traditional cottage style around a central courtyard. Newington House, once a village farm, and Barmdale, formerly belonging to it, form the junction with High Street.



Design Comments

- *House designs should avoid monotonous repetition by inclusion of subtle variations.*
- *Allow sufficient space between properties to reflect this village characteristic.*
- *New development must recognise and be sympathetic to established variants of design, silhouette, scale, density, materials and colour.*



Conservation Area

The points at which these three approach roads join or themselves become the High Street broadly define the commencement of Welford's Conservation Area which has 65 individually listed buildings. The Conservation Area is characterised by a variety of buildings ranging from picturesque timber-framed thatched cottages to Victorian terraces, but there are approximately 80 non-listed buildings, many of them making a contribution to the diversity rather than the conformity of the village's buildings.

The High Street has this variety of old and new houses along both sides of the road, which has no specific building line and open spaces feature between properties. A mixture of long and short frontages add an informality and balance to this part of the village. Victorian houses blend with older houses and cottages. Several of the buildings feature both brick and local stone boundary walls, some with ironwork railings which have been recently revealed.

A recent High Street development features two large detached houses in the former orchard garden of a once derelict house, now successfully refurbished. The entrance drive shared by all three properties and the retention



The former rectory and "Cleavers", a listed Georgian house are sited to the north of the church. A chestnut tree with a small informal green feature at the narrow corner into Church Lane, a cul-de-sac with seven modern detached houses with open front gardens, faced by two thatched cottages and a terrace of small Victorian cottages.

Boat Lane leads from outside the church to the river, passing Ten Penny Cottage (1605), Welford's main landmark property. A high bank fronts more thatched cottages opposite Ten Penny, beyond which some new property fits into the landscape through careful design and use of materials.

of the front orchard garden and mature hedgeline lessen its impact.

The Bell Green at the Northern end of the High Street marks the starting point of Church Street. Thought to have been the original centre of the village, Church Street contains Welford's most cherished picturesque collection of thatched timber-framed cottages, with wide grass verges as well as some modern bungalows and large Victorian detached houses. The boundary walls of the Norman Church of St. Peter, with its Lychgate, are constructed of Binton stone.



Montagues Corner developed in the late 1980's, replacing a village shop and old terraced cottages, contains seven detached houses. Brick and render elevations have been incorporated and each house has open front gardens facing a circular green with a well preserved ancient hedgerow screen.

Running parallel is Mill Lane. Here a large indoor Bowling Club has recently been constructed. This building is the largest in Welford; its roof is particularly visible from Cress Hill.

"There should be more smaller houses and cheaper houses for younger people".

The Maypole Green at the Southern end of High Street is the village's second centre. The Maypole Stores, Butchers Shop, Shakespeare Inn, Memorial Hall and Bus Shelter makes this area a busy focal point.



Design Comments

- *Illustrate on planning applications how the development will appear in relation to neighbouring surroundings.*
- *Future developments should be small in scale and complement the existing density.*



East from the Maypole Green is Chapel Street, a thoroughfare which can boast many architectural styles. Here Victorian terraces and a 200 year old Wesleyan Methodist Chapel blend with seventeenth-century thatched cottages and late eighteenth-century buildings. Sykes Cottages, a range of four two storey cottages set at right angles to the road, and Chapel Row, a range of four timber framed cottages with a continuous thatched roof, are both Grade II listed.

The Conservation Area continues down Chapel Street and terminates just beyond Manor Farm which is partially built from Binton stone with an open aspect to old

orchard land. Duck Lane, a bridleway, extends to the River Avon and has a good mixture of well-spaced larger properties.

The 1920's council development along Millers Close links Chapel Street with High Street. These semi-detached houses, sited on large plots with wide spacing between them have render and brickwork elevations. Elderly persons' low rise bungalows with an open aspect at the rear were added later. An open grass area in front of the bungalows is a valuable addition to the spaciousness. In Frasers Way, retirement bungalows were developed in the late 1980's by Stratford District Council. They lie on a curving narrow entrance, but their extensive open frontages contribute to the open aspect.



Welford School is situated in Headland Road, which links Church Street with Barton Road. On the site of a former Victorian school house additions have been made over a long period, but particularly in the 1960's to cope with new development at that time. Since then prefabricated "temporary" classrooms have been added.

Opposite the school the small 1970's developments of Churchfields and Blundells Croft feature large detached houses in cul-de-sacs, entranced by small greens. Social Housing in the Headland Road area is accommodated in semi-detached brick houses and bungalows on larger than normal plots. Properties have been set at angles on spacious corners, with grass verges and privet hedges.

“Welford is characterised by its open aspect.”

SURFACES AND DETAILING

General features of the houses are gables, white painted multi-pane casements, leaded casements and gravelled drives, Binton stone is prevalent in house and boundary walls, together with local orange-red brick, painted brickwork and cement rendering. Grass verges are laid alongside pavements, open corners to the roads, and informal greens. Roofs vary from thatch to Welsh Slates, handmade clay tiles and modern tiles. Most houses are constructed with chimneys.

“Many of the small properties have had inappropriate large extensions. This also means that there are few small houses for younger people”.

“Quality materials, classic designs and older looking development are important - not ultra modern”.



DESIGN AND THE COMMUNITY

In spite of the housing development of recent years, Welford has retained much of its distinctive character. The many interlinking footpaths and open meadowland have been preserved and efforts have been made to maintain its essentially open aspect. Within the Conservation Area, the wide diversity of buildings reflecting the changing styles of many centuries present a harmonious blend of old and new.

The growth of the village has brought with it some social benefits reflected by the 30 village societies, the local shops, primary school, public houses and garage. The village and school halls and both churches are centres for leisure, social and educational activities. Synder meadow provides good facilities for the cricket and football clubs and the Bowls club has excellent indoor and outdoor greens.

The proliferation of building both in Welford and the surrounding areas has, however, led to mounting problems of traffic congestion. Further proposed development of sites within the village Conservation Area will inevitably lead to an acceleration of this problem and a growing demand for improved community facilities, especially to meet the need of an increasing teenage population.

Because of the desirable nature of the area, the trends in building are towards larger, more expensive properties inevitably attracting buyers typically of an age to have teenage children with access to several vehicles. In spite of the provision by the Council in recent years of 10 affordable houses, concern is felt at the inadequacy of provision of low-cost housing for Welfordian youngsters, which is leading to an imbalance in the village population. Smaller or terraced properties are not being built, many existing houses are being extended and some smaller village cottages combined into one.

“The effectiveness of road signs is greatly impaired if prolific and dirty”.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Landscape Setting

Protect the location and character of the existing footpath network.

Protect and extend the important amenity of natural river access.

Retain and maintain hedges and ditches.

Protect existing grass verges and encourage all new development to incorporate this village feature.

Protect existing trees and encourage planting of appropriate species.

Review and update tree preservation orders.

Ensure open spaces are maintained to reflect the character and evolution of the settlement pattern.

Buildings

Illustrate on planning applications how the development will appear in relation to neighbouring surroundings.

Developments should specify landscaping proposals.

Future developments should be small in scale and complement the existing density.

Avoid stained timber work.

Site Velux roof lights on rear elevations.

House designs should avoid monotonous repetition by inclusion of subtle variations.

Interesting roof lines and chimneys are visually essential.

Incorporate boundaries of natural features; hedges, stone, brick, railings and avoid timber fencing.

Allow sufficient space between properties to reflect this village characteristic.

New development must recognise and be sympathetic to established variants of design, silhouette, scale, density, materials and colour.

Where appropriate extensions to existing properties should incorporate these principles.

Design and the Community

Encourage Statutory Bodies to minimise intrusion and visual impact of their installations.

Seek opportunities to resite overhead cables underground.

Improve quality and reduce quantity of street furniture and fittings.

Encourage awareness of pedestrians and vehicle speed restraints.

Support the reduction of the weight limit on the bridge.

Resist any change to the historic structure of the ancient bridge.



History of Silvesters or Binton Bridges

(M. Deveson abstracts)

The first record in the early thirteenth century shows there was a narrow packhorse bridge, only part way across from the North bank where there was an island. At this time there were two mills here. Binton Mill was on the north side of the river but the exact site of the other Welford Mill is uncertain.

This narrow horse bridge, without parapet walls, continued over a long period to be the only river crossing for five or six miles. The tenants of the land bordering the river were obliged to keep the bridge in repair in lieu of tithes, but records show that this was not always done.

There were disbursements for repairs, stone, lime and other materials made by John Silvester in 1726/7 also in 1730 to Surveyors of Highways. Evidently by 1783 the situation was so unsatisfactory that William Silvester, owner of several islands, took down the horse bridge. He built a series of small stone bridges wide enough for wagons to pass over with a toll gate at the southern end where one shilling was charged for each journey.

This bridge also fell into a very poor state of repair, mainly through bad weather conditions, resulting in the river flooding. Sometimes the water covered the bridge for 6-8 weeks at a time. In fact conditions were so dangerous that a petition was presented to the Duke of Dorset in 1790. In spite of this effort the petition failed. However, a public subscription was raised and the work was carried out between 1804-9, resulting in a bridge of twelve arches. The five southernmost (Welford side) are from that date, and the remainder is substantially that of Silvester's bridge.

In 1892 a public subscription was raised to do away with the toll gates. Together with a grant from the county council, this amounted to around £700. In 1893 a grand ceremony took place when the gates were burnt in an adjoining field and a procession led by the Marquis of Hertford passed over the freed bridge.

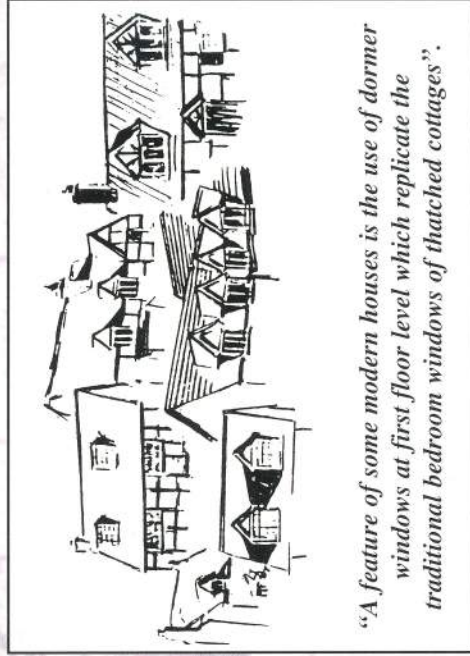
Finally in 1980 it became necessary to impose a weight restriction of 12 tons and the northern end was both widened and strengthened at a cost of £25,000.

Thanks are due to the villagers of Welford on Avon who took part in workshops and meetings, and contributed their expertise in a variety of ways.

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"Villagers would resist any change to the historic structure of the ancient bridge."

"A reduced bridge weight limit would lessen the impact of heavy vehicles."



"A feature of some modern houses is the use of dormer windows at first floor level which replicate the traditional bedroom windows of thatched cottages".

"Help everyone understand local views and perceptions at the outset of the design and development process".