

BERKSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Berkswell Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Proposals

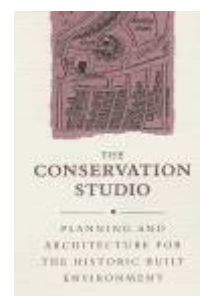


August 2011

This document has been prepared by The Conservation Studio on behalf of Berkswell Parish Council:

The Conservation Studio
1 Querns Lane
Cirencester
Gloucestershire
GL7 1RL
01285 642428

info@theconservationstudio.co.uk
www.theconservationstudio.co.uk



Contents:

PART 1. CHARACTER APPRAISAL

- 1. Introduction**
 - The Berkswell Conservation Area
 - Summary of key characteristics and recommendations
 - The planning policy context
 - Community involvement

- 2. Location and landscape setting**
 - Location and activities
 - Topography and geology
 - Relationship of the conservation area to its surroundings
 - Biodiversity

- 3. The historical development of Berkswell**
 - Early development
 - Post-Conquest
 - 19th and 20th centuries
 - Archaeology

- 4. Spatial analysis**
 - Layout and street pattern
 - Open spaces, trees and landscape
 - Landmarks, focal points and views
 - Boundaries
 - Public realm

- 5. The buildings of the conservation area**
 - Building styles, materials and colours
 - Listed buildings
 - Locally listed buildings
 - Positive buildings

- 6. Character areas**

- 7. Issues**
 - Key positive characteristics
 - Summary of issues

PART 2. MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

8. Introduction

- Format of the Management Proposals

9. Issues and recommendations

- Designation
- Traffic management
- Buildings
- Public realm
- Protecting Berkswell

10. Monitoring and review

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 Townscape Appraisal Map
Character Areas Map
Boundary Review Map

Appendix 2 UDP policies

Appendix 3 Report of consultation

Appendix 4 References

Appendix 5 Contact details

PART 1. THE CHARACTER APPRAISAL

1. INTRODUCTION

The Berkswell Conservation Area

- 1.1 Berkswell is a small village in an attractive rural setting between Coventry and Solihull. It was first designated as a conservation area in November 1968. This was a particularly early recognition of its historical and environmental qualities as the Civic Amenities Act, which introduced the concept of conservation areas, was enacted only the previous year.
- 1.2 The conservation area includes all the buildings along the four limbs of Berkswell's crossroads plan with the exception of the later housing of Pound close. In the north west quadrant, it also includes the village green and almshouses on Church Lane, the extensive grounds of Well House and of the Church of St John the Baptist.
- 1.3 Although a small village, Berkswell has some 23 listed buildings including all those fronting Church Lane.

Summary of key characteristics and recommendations

- 1.4 Key characteristics arising from the Character Appraisal include:
- A well defined historic village core
 - An evolved history that provides a diverse range of building types
 - A nationally important Norman church



The Norman chancel of St John the Baptist Church

- A high proportion of nationally listed buildings
- An important series of buildings created by the legacy of the Berkswell Estate
- A strong sense of enclosure provided by bands of trees
- A consistent townscape of continuous frontages on Church Lane
- A low density of buildings elsewhere making gardens an important element
- Evidence of the rural economy in farm buildings and estate houses
- A significant landscape context of historic field patterns and designed parkland
- Important views over open countryside and parkland
- Consistent two-storey height with pitched roofs
- Consistent use of building materials – timber and brick with clay tiled roofs and occasional survival of thatch
- Important focus of the parish church and of the Malthouse at the main crossroads
- Winding rural character of Lavender Hall Lane contrasting with the straight line of Meriden Road and Spencer's Lane
- Important open spaces at the churchyard and the Village Green
- Historic connection with sporting figures; Maude Watson and Bob Wyatt

Recommendations:

- 1.5 The management proposals in Part 2 include a series of recommendations:

Designation:

- Options for extending the existing conservation area should be taken forward in the light of the public consultation on the character appraisal
- A review of the Local List should include an assessment of:
 - The Reading Room
 - The Forge including the former Smithy

Traffic management:

- Consider traffic management measures as a matter of priority:
 - To reduce the volume and speed of through traffic
 - To enforce the HGV width restriction
 - To improve both safety, particularly for pedestrians crossing Meriden road
 - To improve the appearance of the conservation area particularly by improving provisions for car parking
 - To conserve rural character by limiting standardised treatments during highway improvement schemes
 - Highway landscape schemes should be strongly linked to the surrounding landscape pattern

- Promote the management of hedgerows and landscape features, and avoid the removal of hedgerows

Buildings:

- A review of the scope for interpreting development management, including the possibility of an Article 4 Direction, should be undertaken in order to ensure that the qualities of the Berkswell Conservation Area are maintained
- Solihull Council and Berkswell parish Council should collaborate to publish guidance on the management of change to heritage assets that will help local people to play their part in conserving the heritage values of the village. This might be achieved through an update of the existing Borough-wide guidance for the historic environment as envisaged in the UDP Proposal ENV5/1 (See Appendix 2)

Public realm:

- Every opportunity should be taken to improve public spaces and enhance the qualities of the conservation area
- Enhance tree cover through the planting of new trees
- Establish a protocol to ensure that works in the highway do not detract from the quality of the conservation area
- All proposals for maintenance or improvement of the public realm should take account of guidance provided by English Heritage in its publication '*Streets for All – West Midlands*'
- Design of recreational facilities should seek to reflect the character of existing landscape features



The Village Green with the Stocks, far right, and the almshouses behind

Protecting Berkswell:

- Adopt the detailed advice provided by the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden, to guide new development and land management practices to maintain and enhance regional character and local distinctiveness
 - Conserve and enhance the irregular pattern of species rich ancient hedgerows
 - Conserve strengthen primary hedgelines and manage these more positively as landscape features
 - Every opportunity should be taken to conserve and enhance the natural features in the area – trees, spaces, footpaths and watercourses – through direct action, grant assistance or management agreements
 - In the conservation area, a tree management strategy would provide for planned maintenance and succession planting. It would also encourage private owners to do likewise. Species selection should favour where ever practicable native trees and shrubs
 - Where major developments prove to be inevitable, they should only be accepted with adequate measures to mitigate environmental factors such as noise and visual intrusion, biodiversity, landscape character and local distinctiveness
- 1.6 This document provides a firm basis on which applications for development within the Berkswell Conservation Area can be assessed. However, the omission of any feature or issue in either the appraisal or the management proposals does not necessarily imply that it is of no interest. Both will be subject to regular review, so it will be possible to add any matters arising in successive editions.

The planning policy context

National policy

- 1.7 The current legislation for the designation of conservation areas is Section 69 of the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*. A conservation area is defined as:
‘an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’
- 1.8 Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. Section 72 also specifies that, in exercising planning powers in a conservation area, such

as determining planning applications, special attention must be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

- 1.9 In response to these statutory requirements, this document defines and records the special architectural and historic interest that justifies the designation of the Berkswell Conservation Area and it identifies opportunities for enhancement. It conforms to English Heritage guidance as set out in '*Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management*' (March 2011).
- 1.10 The appraisal also takes full account of government policy set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5) – Planning for the Historic Environment*'. In particular, Policy HE2 expects local planning authorities to ensure that they have publicly documented evidence about the historic environment and heritage assets to inform the plan-making process.
- 1.11 The aim of the document is therefore two-fold:
- To define the special interest of the Berkswell Conservation Area and identify the issues which threaten the special qualities of the conservation area (in the form of the "Character Appraisal")
 - To provide guidelines to prevent harm and achieve enhancement (in the form of the "Management Proposals")
- Local policy framework
- 1.12 This appraisal should be read in conjunction with the wider development plan policy framework as set out in the saved policies of the Solihull Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted in February 2006. Those policies relevant to the conservation area are provided at Appendix 2.
- 1.13 The UDP includes a Proposals Map which shows Berkswell set in the heart of the Green Belt. Apart from its conservation area, the map records two potential Local Wildlife Sites (pLWS) – formally known as potential Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation (pSINCs) – and one scheduled ancient monument at Berkswell.
- 1.14 The UDP is being incrementally replaced by a new Local Development Framework (LDF). This new system, established by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, will replace existing development plans with a suite of Local Development Documents. More information about this important change to the planning system can be found on the Council's website: www.solihull.gov.uk/ldf.
- 1.15 Formal consultation on the Solihull Emerging Core Strategy closed on 4 January 2011. Consultation responses supported the

aims of the document to protect heritage assets and conserve local distinctiveness, and it was suggested that the Core Strategy should encourage the preparation of conservation area appraisals. The draft Core Strategy is being prepared on this basis and is due to be submitted for independent examination in 2012.

Countryside policy

- 1.15 Solihull's countryside lies within the Arden Landscape Character Area, for which a character description is included in Natural England's National Character Area (NCA) 97 – *Arden*. Key characteristics include:
- *Well-wooded farmland landscape with rolling landform*
 - *Contrasting patterns of well-hedged, irregular fields and small woodlands interspersed with larger semi regular fields on former deer parks and estates, and a geometric pattern on former commons*
 - *Numerous areas of former wood-pasture with large old oak trees, often associated with heathland remnants*
 - *Narrow, meandering river valleys with long river meadows*
- 1.16 The Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines (adopted by Solihull MBC as Supplementary Planning Guidance in November 1993) contain a more detailed evaluation of the Arden landscape. The Guidelines state “*Although there are few dramatic physical features, the Arden countryside has an intimate, historic character with a strong sense of unity*”.
- 1.17 The 'Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden' provides a comprehensive landscape assessment, dividing Arden into seven distinct landscape types of which Arden Parklands lies to the west of the historic centre of Berkswell and Ancient Arden to the east. From this assessment a series of management strategies set out the direction that is required in order to maintain and enhance regional character and local distinctiveness. These strategies are supported by a comprehensive set of landscape guidelines that provide detailed advice to guide new development and land management practices.
- 1.18 The historical development of Solihull's countryside is a major factor influencing the character of the present day landscape. In a region with few dramatic physical features it is these subtle human influences, developed over many centuries, which have created a landscape of intimacy and a strong 'sense of place' characterised by a wide range of historical and ecological features.
- 1.19 Most significantly, the appearance of Solihull's countryside remains a wooded landscape with mature hedgerow oaks,

remnants of ancient semi-natural woodlands and historic parklands.

- 1.20 The landscape retains many ancient features such as:
- A small scale farmed landscape with a varied, undulating topography, characterised by an irregular pattern of fields and narrow winding lanes (Ancient Arden character and qualities)
 - An enclosed, gently rolling landscape defined by woodland edges, parkland and belts of trees. (Arden Parklands character and qualities)
- 1.21 The natural vegetation reflects the underlying geology and soils and makes an important contribution to the landscape character.
- 1.22 The Guidelines include reference to areas within each landscape type where the structure and character of the landscape is in decline. These areas, termed ‘*Enhancement Zones*’, are indicated on the accompanying map to show where landscape character is in need of positive intervention to reverse the decline in structure. These zones represent priority areas where resources for landscape and habitat restoration should be targeted. The countryside to the north and east of Berkswell is identified as such an enhancement zone.
- 1.23 Solihull MBC published a Countryside Strategy: First Review 2010-2020 in October 2010 following its adoption by the Council after an extensive process of public consultation as part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF). The accompanying appraisal of Solihull’s Countryside states that:
- ‘the Solihull Countryside is clearly different from more remote rural areas due to the presence of urban influences. It is almost inevitable that it will continue to become increasingly suburban in function. The great danger however, is that through a gradual process of incremental change it will also become suburban in character. Avoiding this must be one of the central challenges of this Strategy.’*
- 1.24 The Countryside Strategy divides the countryside into a number of broad zones. The site falls within Zone 5, the Rural Heartland.
- 1.25 The description of the Rural Heartland countryside zone states:
- ‘This zone contains the most rural parts of Solihull furthest away from overt urban influences and acts as a link with Arden landscapes of the wider Warwickshire countryside. It is the openness of this area, the preservation of its Arden landscape and rural quality, and the limited urban influences that play a key role in maintaining the Meriden*

Gap between the Birmingham conurbation and Coventry. It also provides the setting for many of the villages and hamlets of the Borough with important historical associations, such as Berkswell, Hampton-in-Arden, Meriden and Temple Balsall. It is the importance of their rural setting and of their attributes that contributes towards the special character of these small inset villages within the Green Belt.

'The Blythe Valley and the River Blythe Site of Special Scientific Interest is a major feature within the zone and there are pressures for sand and gravel extraction particularly to the south-west of Meriden. In some cases, permission has been given for tipping in resultant voids. Overall, these operations have a significant impact on local areas at the heart of the Meriden Gap.'

- 1.26 The accompanying Local Objectives for The Rural Heartlands are stated in the adopted Strategy as:
- *Protection of rural character from development*
 - *Enhance the effect of wooded enclosure*
 - *Increase opportunities for access within the countryside*
 - *Determine a long term strategy for the use of old mineral workings*
 - *Locate any developments which are likely to attract significant numbers close to public transport and major roads*
 - *Protect and enhance important ecological features, including the River Blythe corridor*

Community involvement

- 1.27 This document was initially drafted following an Inception Meeting with local stakeholders on 27 April 2010 and a subsequent walkabout with local people, including representatives from Berkswell Parish Council, on 22 May 2010. During this event, the extent of the existing conservation area boundary was discussed, along with some of the main problems and issues that face the community. Maps and an informal prompt sheet were provided to encourage a focussed response to the issues before the document was drafted.
- 1.28 The draft appraisal was agreed with the Parish Council and the document was then put on their website for six weeks from 9 April 2011. During the same period, an exhibition was provided at the village shop and questionnaires were made available. The consultation period was initiated by a public 'surgery' held at the Scout Hall on 9 April 2011.
- 1.29 After the public consultation, the final illustrated document was produced, taking account of consultation responses, which are summarised in the Report of Consultation at Appendix 3.

2. LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

Location and activities

- 2.1 Berkswell lies in a rural setting at the heart of the 'Meriden Gap' – the narrowest part of the West Midlands Green Belt between Solihull and Coventry. Meriden is about two miles to the north and the edge of Coventry is a similar distance to the east. The Birmingham – London main railway line passes about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the south west, so Berkswell Station is actually at Balsall Common. The open countryside of the green belt abuts the conservation area on all sides, save for the development of Pound Close.
- 2.2 The village is at the crossing of two minor roads rotated slightly anti-clockwise from the principal points of the compass. However, the historic centre is not at the cross-roads, but further west between the village green and the churchyard.
- 2.3 The conservation area boundary includes most of the buildings in the village fronting these roads, but not the modern houses of Pound Close to the east. It also includes the band of trees around the western side that form the edge of the adjoining parkland of Berkswell Hall.
- 2.4 Berkswell is primarily residential. It is, however, served by a church, a primary school, a village shop, a public house and the Reading Room. There is also a farm and a former smithy. The main changes in recent times have been infill housing and an increase in traffic.



The village shop on the north side of the Village Green

Topography and geology

- 2.5 At the cross-roads, Berkswell is about 110 metres above sea level. The land rises gently to the north, south and east. To the west, there is a gradual fall towards the shallow valley of the River Blythe.
- 2.6 Berkswell is in the heart of the former Forest of Arden. This covered an area of New Red Sandstone where differential erosion has formed a landscape of gently rolling hills. The sandstone forms part of the wider geological strata of the Keuper Marls, an association of Mercian mudstones and shales that give rise to fine clay soils.
- 2.7 The sandstones available for building are generally of poor quality and, as a result, any fine stone for building was generally imported. Conversely, the clays in the area produced good quality bricks and tiles of a characteristically deep red shade. The clays are also ideal for growing oak trees and the Forest of Arden supplied timber for a well developed timber framed building tradition. This was impeded in many other areas of the Midlands by the historic dominance of arable farming and a consequent lack of woodland.

Relationship of the conservation area to its surroundings

- 2.8 Agricultural improvements in the 17th and 18th century led to large parts of the ancient Forest of Arden being cleared for farming. The resulting landscape is characterised by a rolling landform with winding lanes, small fields and dispersed settlements. Isolated farmhouses of high status in the Berkswell area provide direct evidence of the landowning yeomanry that developed out of individual clearances.
- 2.9 This fine-grained landscape is interspersed with the designed open parkland associated with landed estates. Parkland enclosures continued from the 14th century onwards and that at Berkswell Hall is one of the most prominent.
- 2.10 The open countryside of the green belt abuts the conservation area on all sides, save for the development of Pound Close. To the west and north, this takes the form of parkland edged with trees, and to the east is improved farmland. On the south side there are smaller fields characteristic of the forest clearances.
- 2.11 Despite its rural situation, the proximity of its urban neighbours has an effect on Berkswell through infill development and the volume and speed of traffic. If the planned HS2 railway line goes ahead in the form that has been proposed, this will further erode the rural context.

Biodiversity

- 2.12 The Blythe Valley to the west of Berkswell is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest characterised by watermeadows, fens and heaths. Within the village, the shelterbelt woodlands along the north west side of Lavender Hall Lane and along the west side of Meriden Road form part of the Lavender Hall Lane and Berkswell Road Spinney Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). They are being considered as a potential Local Wildlife Sites (pLWS).
- 2.13 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are local designations that represent the best areas for wildlife in the wider county. They support locally and nationally threatened wildlife, and many sites will contain habitats and species that form strategic priorities for conservation under the local or UK Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). Local Wildlife Sites are protected within the local planning system as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Green Infrastructure

- 2.14 The proposed LWS, Tree Preservation Orders, street trees and long distance paths all contribute to both the green infrastructure (GI) of Berkswell and the wider GI of the Borough. Berkswell's GI should be protected, enhanced and expanded to develop a stronger, healthier, safer, more prosperous community and enable climate change adaptation.



Trees form a significant backdrop even at the heart of the village

3. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BERKSWELL

Early development

- 3.1 The name of the village is said to derive from *Bercul's well*. Bercul being a Saxon chieftain in the 8th century and the well being an early water source possibly regarded as a sacred site. The subsequent dedication of the church to St John the Baptist is a clear reference to this.



Bercul's Well

- 3.2 The octagonal crypt below the church appears to be late Saxon work, which suggests that there was an earlier church and, therefore, a Saxon settlement.

Post-Conquest

- 3.3 Berkswell is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as a manor held by the Count of Meulan. At this time, some 35% of north west Warwickshire was wooded and the entry for Berkswell records woodland one league long and one league broad (a league was about three miles).
- 3.4 In the 12th century, the manor passed to the Amundeville family who sold to the Earl of Warwick in 1227. When John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, was sentenced to death in 1533, his estates were forfeited to the Crown. Berkswell was granted to the Morrow family through which it descended for several generations and then by marriage to the Eardley-Wilmots in the 19th century. However, the estate was sold in 1862 to Thomas Walker and again, in 1888, to JH Wheatley a predecessor of the current owners.

- 3.5 Berkswell Park may have been enclosed as early as the 12th century to contain game for hunting. It is certainly recorded in 1325 as part of the manor and there is evidence of numerous appointments of park keepers being made from the 14th to the 16th century.
- 3.6 The present church has a Norman nave and chancel to which the aisles and tower were added by the late 15th century. The original Norman doorway was relocated in the south aisle and the timber-framed porch was added in the early 16th century, the room above becoming the first village school.



Timber framing at The Malt House

- 3.7 Further timber-framing from the 16th and 17th centuries survives in the Malt House, the Bear Inn, Village Farm, Berkswell Museum, Beehive Cottage and The Thatched Cottage. However in 1670, Samuel Morrow built Berkswell Hall in brick and the Rectory followed shortly after. Three brick-makers are recorded in the parish registers of 1698-1706. There were also 17 flax-weavers indicating industrial activity not necessarily related to the estate.
- 3.8 By the 18th century, local brick had become the general building material and a nucleus of brick buildings developed along the north side of the Village Green.
- 3.9 Berkswell played its part on both sides of the Civil War. It was occupied by Charles I as he travelled from Yorkshire to Oxford at the start of the Civil War and by Cromwell's troops before the slighting of Kenilworth Castle in 1649.
- 3.10 Whatever the ancient origins of the Berks Well, the existing square stone tank dates from the 17th or 18th century. It has a brick floor and a smaller second chamber on the downstream side. Suggestions for its original use have ranged from total

immersion baptisms to a cattle trough. It is more likely, however, that the main chamber provided a clean water supply for domestic use while the lower chamber was used for washing. This arrangement is still in common use in Eastern Europe.

- 3.11 Other public structures of similar date are the stocks on the Village Green, formed of two stout oak planks with five holes and, outside the conservation area, the stone-walled animal pound on Coventry Road.

19th and 20th centuries

- 3.12 Berkswell Hall was rebuilt in its current classical form in 1815. It became a boarding school in 1843 until it was sold to Thomas Walker, an ironmaster, in 1861. It was converted into apartments in 1984.
- 3.13 Berkswell Park was transformed from a hunting enclosure to a picturesque landscape with shelterbelt planting around the perimeter in the manner that had been established by 'Capability' Brown in the late 18th century, a wide avenue on the axis of the house, a plantation of specimen trees, and an ornamental lake. The latter was introduced by Thomas Walker apparently to generate employment as much as to enhance the landscape.



Ordnance Survey of 1886 showing Berkswell Village, Berkswell Hall and the parkland (shaded grey)

- 3.14 The London and Birmingham Railway opened in 1838 eventually becoming the West Coast mainline. Although Berkswell Station is to the south of the village, it clearly played an important part in supporting the local economy that developed largely through agricultural improvements.
- 3.15 For centuries Berkswell has enjoyed the fruits of individual acts of charity whereby the income from specific buildings or parcels of land would be used to benefit disadvantaged people. Increasing prosperity scaled up this philanthropy to allow the construction of the ten almshouses on the west side of the Village Green in 1853. In 1869 a range of local charities were consolidated into the Berkswell Charities which have since endowed several ventures including the late 19th century school and the 1901 Reading Room.
- 3.16 The late 19th century also saw the construction of three pairs of estate houses with a distinctive gabled late-Victorian style. After that, Berkswell stood still for several decades. One reason for this is evident in the substantial memorial built after World War I.



A pair of estate houses on Meriden Road

- 3.17 In the 1960s there was a spirited bungalow development opposite the almshouses designed as a set piece. However, this was followed in the '70s and '80s by further houses of less distinction in Lavender Hall Lane and Pound Close.
- 3.18 Berkswell is not without its celebrities. Maude Watson, who lived at the Rectory, became the first Ladies Singles Champion at Wimbledon in 1884, and Bob Wyatt became Captain of the England Cricket Team from 1934.

Archaeology

- 3.19 The Roman roads of Rykniel Street and the Fosse Way pass well to the west and east of the area probably because the Forest of Arden was not readily hospitable. Nonetheless, there is potential for archaeological evidence dating from the first forest clearances.
- 3.20 Early stonework in the parish church indicates a Saxon settlement and the cross base to the south east suggests that this continued into the Mediaeval period. There is also potential for further interpretation of local field patterns.
- 3.21 The Mediaeval cross base is a scheduled ancient monument.



The Mediaeval Cross in the churchyard

4. SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Layout and street pattern

- 4.1 Berkswell provides a centre for a wider dispersed settlement pattern. The crossing of two routes is clearly significant to its development and some of the oldest buildings are found at this junction – the Bear Inn, the Malt House and Village Farm.
- 4.2 However, the church is set apart in the north west quadrant with its Rectory. Reasons for this include the historical importance of the spring and the relationship with the manor. It may also be that the route past the church was at one time more significant than the footpath it is today.
- 4.3 The 18th century saw a shift of the focus, from the cross-roads towards the church, with the construction of cottages and the village store on the north side of the Village Green. This was consolidated in the 19th century by the almshouses, the school and further cottages.
- 4.4 The village has gradually extended during the 19th and 20th centuries along the four principal roads. The only exception to this simple plan has been the development behind Meadow Bank and Pound Close, both off Coventry Road.

Open spaces, trees and landscape

- 4.5 The rural location means that Berkswell can enjoy a setting of open countryside and parkland. Within the conservation area, building density is generally low so that there are constant glimpses of gardens and farmland.
- 4.6 The exception is in Church Lane where buildings have an almost continuous frontage, but here there is the triangular Village Green. The green once accommodated five elm trees as well as the village stocks. Now it is dominated by a single oak.
- 4.7 The other important open space is the churchyard. Contained by trees and punctuated by standing gravestones, it provides a sheltered and appropriately peaceful atmosphere.
- 4.8 Trees make a vital contribution to the character of the village. There are important individual trees at the Priory, the Village Green, the Malt House and Rose Cottage, the latter two being subject to Tree Preservation Orders.

- 4.9 The conservation area also includes belts of trees along the west side of Meriden Road and Lavender Hall Lane and around the churchyard. Although they help to define the village, they are very much a part of the wider parkland landscape of Berkswell Hall.

Landmarks, focal points and views

- 4.10 The Malt House is the focal point at the cross-roads particularly when approached from the north. From the south, the built-up area is announced by a single tree at the Priory. The Village Green with its emphatic tree provides a focus for the village as a whole, while the eye is drawn up Church Lane to the landmark of the church itself.
- 4.11 Views out of the conservation area over open countryside and parkland are afforded at most of the exits. The most important views are noted on the Townscape Appraisal Map, however the omission of a view does not mean that it is of no significance.

Boundaries

- 4.12 Low brick walls, wooden fences and hedges provide soft boundaries appropriate to the cottage style of most buildings in the village. The Malt House has a wrought-iron fence typical of those that give visibility on corners in rural estates. The 1960s houses on the south side of Lavender Hall Lane tend to follow the open plan of the period with little or no boundary, which complements the openness of the Village Green.
- 4.13 The boundary between the churchyard and Well House is marked by a high wall of venerable brickwork. This maintains the privacy of private gardens but would not be appropriate across the street frontage of properties.



Well House from the churchyard

Public realm

- 4.14 Traditionally, road surfaces were no more than rammed earth with grassed verges and no pavement. Today's tarmac surfaces can be seen as a natural successor to this vernacular past. A small area of stone paving outside the former forge suggests that there may have been a limited amount of formal pavement. An area of stable-block paving bricks, also at the forge, is a reminder of the farrier's work in horse-driven era.
- 4.15 Meriden Road is straight and wider than its unclassified status would suggest. This leads to a higher volume and speed of traffic than might be expected, and this in turn raises expectations for formal kerbs and signage that would undermine the rural character of the village. Lavender Hall Lane, by contrast, retains more of its informality because it is narrower and more winding.
- 4.16 Street furniture is appropriately minimal. There is a circular seat that surrounds the large tree on the Village Green and two bench seats in a plain traditional timber design. There is a similar bench at the cross-roads and a cast-iron and timber seat beside the simple timber bus shelter on Meriden Road. Litter bins are the traditional circular timber slatted type and sensitive siting helps them to be unobtrusive.
- 4.17 The west side of Meriden Road is used for parking of cars at right angles to the road. The rough gravel surface contrasts with the neat grass verges opposite. More successful parking is provided off Church Lane between the school and the trees. It is so discreet as to be hardly noticed.
- 4.18 The choice of street lighting has already responded to the conservation area. There are traditional Windsor lanterns in Lavender Hall Lane and Church Lane, while Meriden Road has taller more urban lights on decorative columns.
- 4.19 Street names are modern but in a co-ordinated white-on-green livery.



Sign at Bercul's Well

5. THE BUILDINGS OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Building styles, materials and colours

- 5.1 The buildings of Berkswell are generally domestic in scale and vernacular in character. Notable exceptions are high status houses, such as Well House or Berkswell Hall, the church, the Reading Room and buildings related to agriculture and service industries.
- 5.2 The variety of these buildings is significant to the character of the area. However, the influence of the estate does give an element of conformity in some of the later pairs of houses.
- 5.3 The church is built of red sandstone to emphasise its pre-eminent status and durability. Even the timber-framed porch expresses status in the close studding of the upper floor compared with the more economic box-framing of the domestic timber work.
- 5.4 Elsewhere, the use of stone was generally limited to plinths for timber frames or monumental work. Timber frames were infilled with wattle and daube and then painted with a protective coat of limewash. Later infilling used brick. Traces of limewash can be seen on the brick infilling of the Berkswell Museum building behind the almshouses.



Berkswell Museum

- 5.5 In the 17th century, brick was a relatively rare material, so its adoption for the construction of Well House was again a matter of status. As brickwork became ubiquitous in the 19th century, decoration was added, as in the blue brick banding on the almshouses. Decoration also took the form of gothic bargeboards

on the estate houses and even a re-interpretation of timber-framing, as applied to the Beeches in Lavender Hall Lane.

- 5.6 The earliest roofing material was thatch, which can still be seen at Beehive Cottage and the Thatched Cottage. Clay tiles were produced from the 17th century onwards becoming the roof material in most general use. From the late 19th century, tiles became flatter as their manufacture became more mechanical, losing some of their visual liveliness in the process.



Beehive Cottage

- 5.7 With the railway age, Welsh slate became widely available. However, the distance from Berkswell Station and the local production of tiles evidently made slate unattractive in the village. Ironically, slate was imported before the railways for the roof on Berkswell Hall. This huge expense allowed the fashionably low pitches of the neo-classical design.
- 5.8 Early windows in timber-framed buildings were iron casements with leaded lights. Later windows were timber casements and this remained the case for cottages up to the 20th century. Sliding sash windows were introduced into higher status and more designed houses, such as Well House, Garden House, Butcher's House on Spencer's Lane and at the school.

Listed buildings

- 5.9 Buildings are statutorily listed for their special architectural or historic interest by central government in three grades (I, II*, and II) of which grades I and II* are a small minority.
- 5.10 Berkswell has a surprisingly high number of some 23 listed buildings, which emphasises the quality of the conservation area. They are:

Church Lane:

- Church of St John the Baptist
- Churchyard Cross
- The Village School
- House next to Village School
- House adjoining Village Stores on West
- Village Stores
- House adjoining Village Stores on East
- The Stocks
- Nos.1-10 – The Almshouses
- Banbury Cottage
- Spring Croft
- Spring Cottage
- The Cottage (Berkswell Museum)
- Berks Well
- Well House
- The War Memorial

Lavender Hall Lane:

- The Garden House
- Beehive Cottage

Meriden Road:

- The Thatched Cottage

Spencer's Lane:

- The Bear Inn
- The Malt House
- Village Farmhouse
- K6 telephone kiosk

- 5.11 The parish church is grade I and the others are all grade II. In addition, just outside the conservation area, Berkswell Hall is listed at grade II* and the Village Pound on Coventry Road is listed at grade II. It should also be noted that the mediaeval Churchyard Cross is a scheduled ancient monument as well as being a listed building.

Locally Listed buildings

- 5.12 Where buildings are locally listed by the local authority, they are not statutorily protected. However, national planning policy (PPS5, 2010) requires that their significance must be taken into account as a material consideration in planning decision making.
- 5.13 Although Solihull Council does have a local list, there are no entries at present for Berkswell. It is suggested that the following be considered for inclusion:
- The Reading Room
 - The Forge including the former Smithy



The Reading Room, opened in 1901

Positive buildings

- 5.14 In addition to the listed and potential locally listed buildings, a number of unlisted buildings have been identified on the Townscape Appraisal Map as being *positive* buildings of townscape merit. Buildings identified as being *positive* will vary, but generally they are good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials help to provide the streetscape quality that justifies conservation area designation.
- 5.15 Most importantly, they make a *positive* contribution to the special interest and significance of the conservation area. Where buildings have been heavily altered, and restoration would be impractical, they are excluded.
- 5.16 Notable examples of positive buildings include:
- The Forge and Butcher's House
 - The Priory
 - Meadowbank
 - Rose Cottage
 - The Beeches
 - Woodside
- 5.17 Government policy (PPS5) supports positive buildings by giving them the same presumption in favour of their conservation as applies to other designated heritage assets, such as listed buildings. Accordingly, any proposals involving demolition or substantial harm to a positive building would have to take account of the building's significance and the contribution it makes to the conservation area.

6. CHARACTER AREAS

- 6.1 The Berkswell Conservation Area has four distinct components that can be considered as areas of different character:
- The churchyard and Well House
 - The Village Green and almshouses
 - The tree belt round the north west quadrant
 - The four limbs of the cross roads

The churchyard and Well House

- 6.2 This area is characterised by well-maintained open space and high quality buildings. The Church of St John the Baptist is described in *The Buildings of England* as 'easily the most interesting Norman village church in Warwickshire'. Its formal stonework is contrasted by the almost domestic quality of the timber-framed south porch and vestry.
- 6.3 The grandeur of Well House, the former Rectory, demonstrates the prosperity that could fund such a living in the 17th century. The use of brickwork and sash windows are early for the area.



Well House

- 6.4 The area includes the recent extension to the church, which manages successfully to combine modern design with an historic setting. All the buildings are listed including the War Memorial which takes the unusual form of a shrine, rather than a cross or obelisk.
- 6.5 While car parking is clearly undesirable outside the entrances to both the churchyard and Well House, the double yellow lines are equally obtrusive. This is the only instance of yellow lines in the

village. If they have to be used, they should take advantage of the dispensation available in conservation areas to halve their width and use a paler colour. However, it would also be possible to employ a positive parking regime where there are no yellow lines and parking is allowed only in marked areas.

The Village Green and almshouses

- 6.6 This area includes the consistently high quality townscape of listed buildings fronting both sides of Church Lane. It is important that this quality is maintained through the provision of adequate advice on repairs and upkeep.
- 6.7 Of particular note is the double bow-fronted Georgian shopfront to the Village Store. Grooves above and below the windows show that there were originally removable shutters. During open hours, these were stored against the adjacent walls and this has been re-created in the current appearance.
- 6.8 Behind the frontage on the north side, the Village School continues to consolidate and expand. A high quality of design for new buildings should be expected, taking account of the conservation area's character, as has been achieved with the extension to the church.



Berkswell Village School

- 6.9 Pressure for car parking has led to suggestions for increasing the size of the Spinney car park. This should be resisted except in the context of a parking strategy for Berkswell as a whole and designs demonstrating that the character of the conservation area would not be adversely affected.

The tree belt round the north west quadrant

- 6.10 This dense line of trees provides a green backdrop for the conservation area that gives the village an immediate distinctiveness. However, it is also an integral part of the designed landscape of Berkswell Hall.
- 6.11 The parkland, with its ornamental lake, incidental trees and a formal avenue, is surrounded by a defining belt of trees of which those in the conservation area are one segment. Thus, while they are important for nature conservation, they also have a cultural significance. Maintaining this significance requires careful planning for succession planting as many of the trees are at an advanced state of maturity.



The tree belt encloses the churchyard

- 6.12 Significant views over the parkland are gained from public footpaths emerging from the tree belt and it is important that their maintenance is also planned for.

The four limbs of the cross roads

- 6.13 This area contains the majority of the buildings and particularly those that are not listed. The late 16th century Bear Inn was formerly the Bear and Ragged Staff, which formed the coat of arms for the Earls of Warwick. Even earlier is the Malt House that provides a black-and-white focus to the southwest corner of the crossroads.
- 6.14 In the 17th century, Beehive Cottage, the Thatched Cottage and Village Farm were added, the former being remarkable for the survival of thatched roofs, while the latter continues to bring farming into the village.

- 6.15 The 18th and 19th centuries saw the introduction of brick-built houses, such as Garden House and the Priory, and the estate cottages. However, the Ordnance Survey of 1886 shows that development was still sporadic. Infilling was provided in the 20th century with the Reading Room, a charitable venture by the Wheatley Family of Berkswell Hall. Then the redevelopment of the Nook by a distinctively symmetrical layout of four attached bungalows in the early 1960s. This was followed by five houses of eclectic design on the south side of the Village Green.



The Forge and Butchers House, 'positive' buildings on Spencer's Lane

- 6.16 Where these buildings are not listed but make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area, there is a measure of protection. However, it is suggested that this should be reinforced, first by acknowledging the significance of buildings that qualify for local listing, and second, by curbing the erosion of quality in unlisted houses that can be caused by small-scale change. This can be achieved through an Article 4 Direction. With any controls should also come clear guidance on planning expectations.
- 6.17 The major issues for this sub-area are related to traffic management. The wide and straight nature of Meriden Road and Spencer's Lane does little to limit the speed of through traffic. Meanwhile, parents with children have a particular need to cross the road in order to reach the school. Speed and volume of traffic is an issue for other roads too.
- 6.18 Lavender Hall Lane has a width restriction, but this is commonly flouted. The effect of heavy goods vehicles on this winding rural lane threatens personal safety, as there is no footpath, and also leads to the erosion of verges. Soft edges are a defining element of rural character and the danger for the conservation area is that

the response to wear will be the universal introduction of concrete kerbs.

- 6.19 Car parking on the west side of Meriden Road is necessary, particularly at peak school times. However, the visual affect could be greatly improved through surfacing and co-ordination of street furniture.

7. ISSUES

Key positive characteristics

- 7.1 This character appraisal concludes that the key *positive* characteristics of the Berkswell Conservation Area are:
- A well defined historic village core
 - An evolved history that provides a diverse range of building types
 - A nationally important Norman church
 - A high proportion of nationally listed buildings
 - An important series of buildings created by the legacy of the Berkswell Estate
 - A strong sense of enclosure provided by bands of trees
 - A consistent townscape of continuous frontages on Church Lane
 - A low density of buildings elsewhere making gardens an important element



Low density housing on Meriden Road

- Evidence of the rural economy in farm buildings and estate houses
- A significant landscape context of historic field patterns and designed parkland
- Important views over open countryside and parkland

- Consistent two-storey height with pitched roofs
- Consistent use of building materials – timber and brick with clay tiled roofs and occasional survival of thatch
- Important focus of the parish church and of the Malthouse at the main crossroads
- Winding rural character of Lavender Hall Lane contrasting with the straight line of Meriden Road and Spencer's Lane
- Important open spaces at the churchyard and the Village Green
- Historic connection with sporting figures; Maude Watson and Bob Wyatt

Summary of Issues

7.2 Based on the analysis of the preceding sections, and on comments made during the initial public consultation/walkabout, the following are considered to be, currently, the most important issues for the Berkswell Conservation Area:

Designation:

- Conservation area boundary review
- Local listing

Traffic management:

- Speed and volume of traffic, particularly along Meriden Road/Spencer's Lane
- Lack of a pedestrian crossing on Meriden Road
- Car parking on the west side of Meriden Road
- Car parking at the end of Church Lane
- The Spinney car park
- HGVs on Lavender Hall Lane

Buildings:

- Maintaining the high quality of townscape
- The control of alterations to unlisted positive buildings through an Article 4 Direction
- Guidance on managing change to buildings

Public realm:

- Yellow lines
- Design of traffic management measures
- Signage
- Street furniture

Protecting Berkswell:

- The protection of Berkswell and its rural setting from the affects of unsympathetic development
- The care of the natural features in the area – biodiversity, trees, spaces, footpaths and watercourses
- The general enhancement and protection of the rural qualities of the conservation area

PART 2. THE MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

8 INTRODUCTION

Format of the Management Proposals

- 8.1 Part 1 of this document, the *Character Appraisal*, has identified the special positive qualities of the Berkswell Conservation Area which make the Conservation Area unique. It has also identified issues for improvement and better management.
- 8.2 Part 2, the *Management Proposals*, builds upon the issues to make recommendations for improvement and change. Most, but not all, will be the responsibility of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. There remains, however, a responsibility for all residents and the Parish Council to monitor change and seek improvements if the significance of the conservation area is to be maintained.

9. ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Designation

- 9.1 Conservation area. The conservation area boundary is unchanged since its designation by Warwickshire County Council in 1968. At that time, the focus was more on buildings than landscape, and boundaries tended to be drawn tightly around town and village centres.
- 9.2 For this appraisal a review has been undertaken of the boundary and its context on both sides. The conclusion is that no areas are recommended for deletion from the conservation area, but there are four areas where extension can be considered:
- i. The Rectory. A footpath links the churchyard to the northern extent of the conservation area on Meriden Road. The area to the south east of the footpath, which includes the Rectory, relates more to the village than it does to the parkland beyond. There is, therefore, logic for including it within the conservation area.
 - ii. The shelterbelt on Lavender Hall Lane. This band of trees extends south west from Berkswell providing a distinctive feature at the entrance to the village. The conservation area includes the first half of it. However, if half is worth including, it would be logical to include all of it.
 - iii. Early field system. Important features dating from the initial clearance of the ancient Forest of Arden include winding lanes and small irregular fields. Many fields have since been amalgamated or realigned, but those immediately to the south of

the village still survive from that clearance pattern. This field pattern is an historical feature that could be recognised by inclusion in the conservation area.

iv. Berkswell Hall and Parkland. As the appraisal has shown, the history of the village is closely related to that of the Hall and its estate. The parkland part of the estate, as opposed to the purely agricultural part, is a designed entity in which the house, associated buildings, gardens, trees and the lake were carefully disposed within a picturesque landscape edged with a perimeter belt of trees.



Berkswell Hall

Part of that landscape is already included in the existing conservation area and there is a case for including the cultural whole. The proposed extension is defined by the extent of parkland shown on the 1886 Ordnance Survey.

9.3 Proposals for extending the conservation area are shown on the Boundary Review Map.

Recommendation:

- Options for extending the existing conservation area should be taken forward in the light of the public consultation on the character appraisal

9.4 Local listing. Solihull Council maintains a local list, with additions being made on a regular basis. The identification of positive buildings in the Berkswell Conservation Area provides a good starting point for a systematic application of the local list criteria to the buildings of the village.

Recommendation:

- A review of the Local List should include an assessment of:
 - The Reading Room
 - The Forge including the former Smithy

Traffic management

- 9.5 It is important that any measures to reduce traffic volume and speed should not compound the issue by introducing features that are themselves an intrusion into the character of the conservation area. Constrictions at the entry points have been proposed, rather than 'humps and bumps'. These should reflect the character of the area through the use of local materials, such as stone or brick. Other devices include on-street parking and the provision of a pedestrian crossing.
- 9.6 The width restriction on Lavender Hall Lane could be enforced by design. Provision of a foot path would improve safety for pedestrians and would restrict the width of the carriageway, while further constriction or level changes could prevent access by HGVs. The challenge, however, is not to prevent occasional passage of local farm vehicles.
- 9.7 Improvements could be designed for the car parking area on the west side of Meriden Road, including better surfacing, planting and street furniture.
- 9.8 A scheme for positive parking in Church Lane could be considered. This would restrict parking to marked bays and keep the west end of Church Lane clear.

Recommendations:

- Consider traffic management measures as a matter of priority:
 - To reduce the volume and speed of through traffic
 - To enforce the HGV width restriction
 - To improve both safety, particularly for pedestrians crossing Meriden road
 - To improve the appearance of the conservation area particularly by improving provisions for car parking
 - To conserve rural character by limiting standardised treatments during highway improvement schemes
 - Highway landscape schemes should be strongly linked to the surrounding landscape pattern
 - Promote the management of hedgerows and landscape features, and avoid the removal of hedgerows

Buildings

- 9.9 The high quality of townscape should be maintained through creative development management, for instance by applying a robust interpretation of what makes a material change, and can therefore be controlled, and by securing high standards of design.

Buildings that are not single dwellings have few permitted development rights and the full range of management controls should always be applied.

- 9.10 Where single dwellings make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area, the removal of permitted development rights through an Article 4 Direction should be considered. This would not necessarily prevent change, but it would allow change to be managed in a manner that supports the character of the area rather than detracting from it.
- 9.11 Publication of guidance on managing change to buildings through maintenance, repair and alterations would help property owners to understand planning expectations for the conservation area and reduce unnecessary applications.

Recommendations:

- A review of the scope for interpreting development management, including the possibility of an Article 4 Direction, should be undertaken in order to ensure that the qualities of the Berkswell Conservation Area are maintained
- Solihull Council and Berkswell parish Council should collaborate to publish guidance on the management of change to heritage assets that will help local people to play their part in conserving the heritage values of the village. This might be achieved through an update of the existing Borough-wide guidance for the historic environment as envisaged in the UDP Proposal ENV5/1 (See Appendix 2)



The modern extension to the Parish Church

Public realm

- 9.12 Little needs to be done about street surfaces themselves as tarmac is a natural successor to the rammed earth and stone of the past. However, it is important to maintain traditionally informal edges and avoid universal concrete kerbs and gullies. Consideration should also be given to paving roadside footpaths as the evidence outside the former smithy suggests.



Survival of sandstone paving and stable setts outside the former smithy at The Forge

- 9.13 Signage should be kept to the necessary minimum. However, the entrances to the conservation area provide a useful opportunity to provide a welcome to the village incorporating a traffic-calming reduction in the perceived width of the road.
- 9.14 Where positive parking is not feasible, serious consideration must be given to the character of the area before embarking on other forms of restriction. Yellow lines must be seen as a last resort and, even then, they must be no more than 50mm wide and a pale yellow.
- 9.15 Street furniture and street names are already fairly well co-ordinated. However, this may be more by accident than design. A design protocol with the Highways Authority could formalise expectations.

Recommendations:

- Every opportunity should be taken to improve public spaces and enhance the qualities of the conservation area
- Enhance tree cover through the planting of new trees

- Establish a protocol to ensure that works in the highway do not detract from the quality of the conservation area
- All proposals for maintenance or improvement of the public realm should take account of guidance provided by English Heritage in its publication '*Streets for All – West Midlands*'
- Design of recreational facilities should seek to reflect the character of existing landscape features

Protecting Berkswell

9.16 The rural setting of Berkswell is already protected in principle by the West Midlands Green Belt. However, this does not necessarily prevent major infrastructure proposals, such as the HS2 rail link. Nor does it prevent the erosion of the landscape through the removal of trees and hedgerows or the suburbanisation of country lanes.

Recommendations:

- Adopt the detailed advice provided by the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden, to guide new development and land management practices to maintain and enhance regional character and local distinctiveness
- Conserve and enhance the irregular pattern of species rich ancient hedgerows
- Conserve strengthen primary hedgelines and manage these more positively as landscape features
- Every opportunity should be taken to conserve and enhance the natural features in the area – trees, spaces, footpaths and watercourses – through direct action, grant assistance or management agreements
- In the conservation area, a tree management strategy would provide for planned maintenance and succession planting. It would also encourage private owners to do likewise. Species selection should favour where ever practicable native trees and shrubs
- Where major developments prove to be inevitable, they should only be accepted with adequate measures to mitigate environmental factors such as noise and visual intrusion, biodiversity, landscape character and local distinctiveness

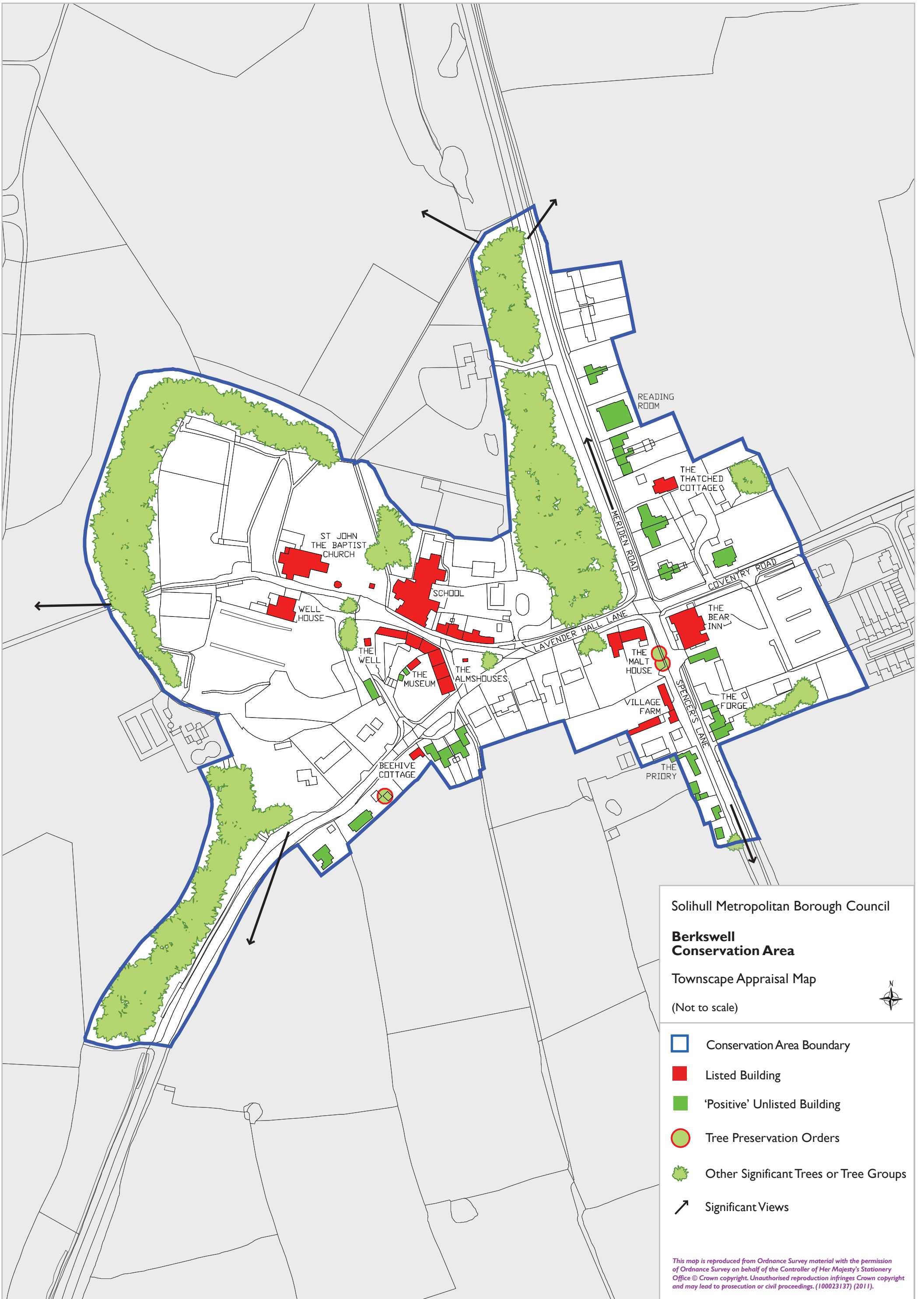
10. MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 10.1 The Planning Acts require local authorities to review their conservation areas '*from time to time*'. This is interpreted by English heritage in its best practice recommendations as a five-year cycle. This character appraisal should, therefore, be reviewed in five years time.
- 10.2 Meanwhile, after public consultation, the recommendations could be adopted into an action plan so that timescales and responsibilities for implementation can be assigned and progress can be monitored.



The War Memorial in the churchyard, the most recent addition to the statutory list of listed buildings in Berkswell

**Appendix 1. Townscape Appraisal Map
 Character Areas Map
 Boundary Review Map**



Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Berkswell Conservation Area

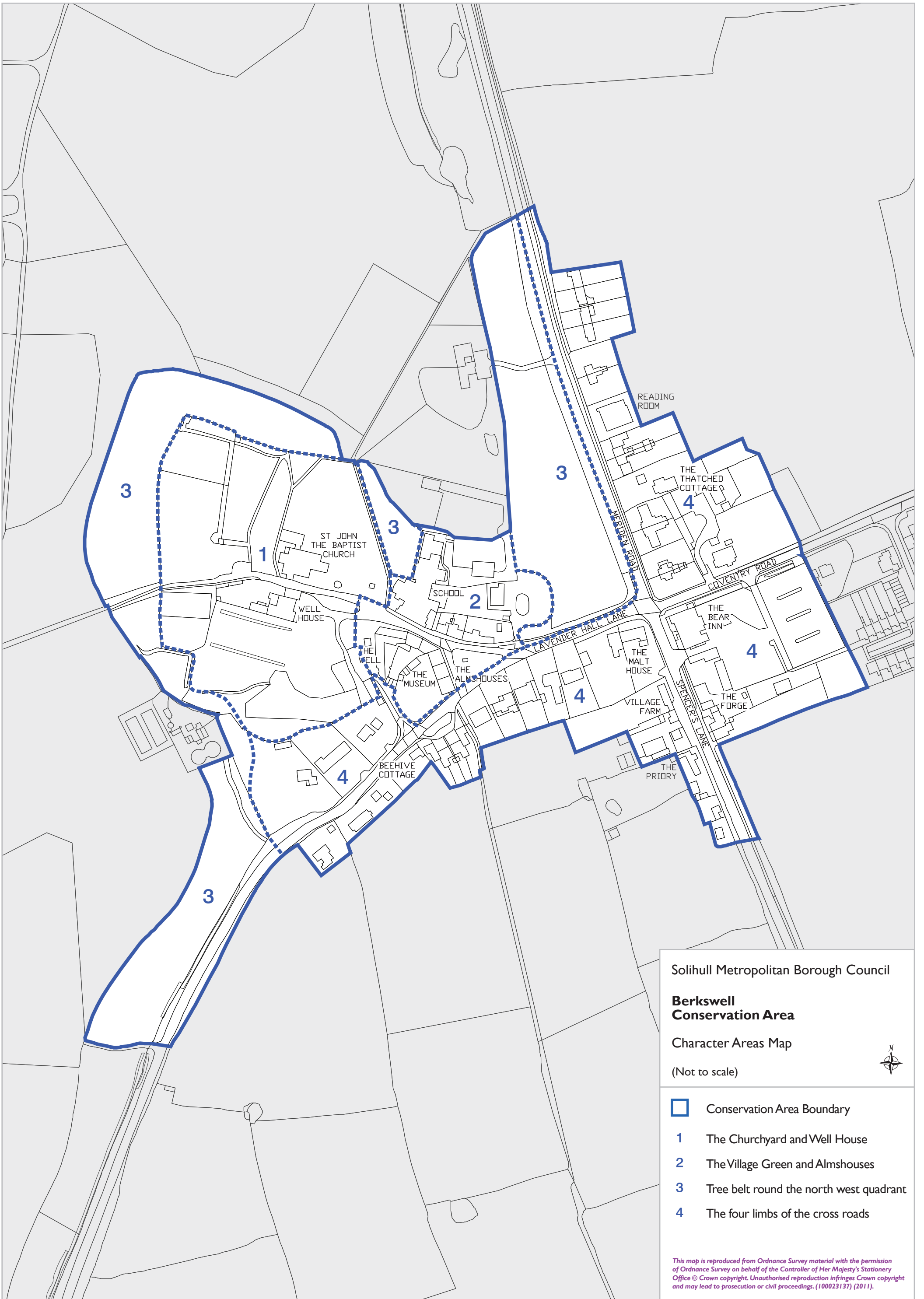
Townscape Appraisal Map

(Not to scale)



- Conservation Area Boundary
- Listed Building
- 'Positive' Unlisted Building
- Tree Preservation Orders
- Other Significant Trees or Tree Groups
- ↗ Significant Views

This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023137) (2011).

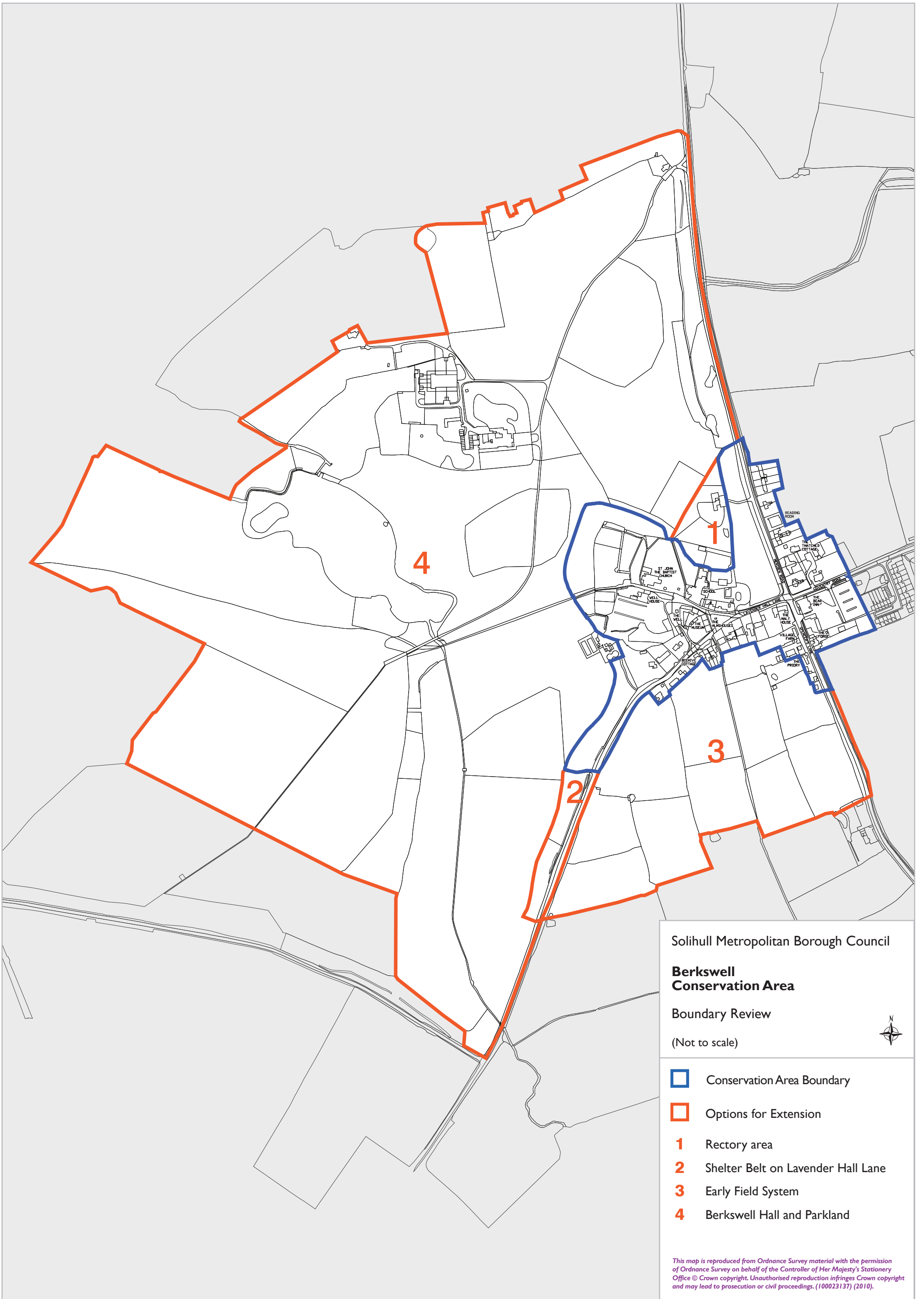


Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Berkswell Conservation Area
 Character Areas Map
 (Not to scale)



- Conservation Area Boundary
- 1** The Churchyard and Well House
- 2** The Village Green and Almshouses
- 3** Tree belt round the north west quadrant
- 4** The four limbs of the cross roads

This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023137) (2011).



Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Berkswell Conservation Area

Boundary Review

(Not to scale)



Conservation Area Boundary

Options for Extension

1 Rectory area

2 Shelter Belt on Lavender Hall Lane

3 Early Field System

4 Berkswell Hall and Parkland

This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (100023137) (2010).

Appendix 2. UDP policies

The relevant document is the *Solihull Unitary Development Plan*, which was formally adopted by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council in February 2006.

Policies relating to the conservation of heritage assets are included in *Chapter 6: The Environment*.

The relevant policies are:

ENV1: Mixed use development

The Council will promote and seek to retain a mixture of uses in town centres and other areas highly accessible by public transport, in order to increase diversity and minimise the need to travel.

ENV2: Urban design

In considering proposals for development, the council will promote good quality building and urban design. Development will be permitted only if it:

- (i) Respects the harmony and relationships between buildings, the urban environment and the landscape
- (ii) Enhances the quality and attractiveness of the Borough
- (iii) Contributes to a sense of local identity and regional diversity
- (iv) Protects and enhances the character and local distinctiveness of the Borough's urban areas
- (v) Protects and enhances the amenity of existing occupiers
- (vi) Optimises the use of the site, makes efficient and prudent use of resources, and supports local facilities and transport networks
- (vii) Allows for ease of movement by pedestrians and cyclists and gives priority to the needs of pedestrians
- (viii) Minimises the potential for crime and anti-social behaviour

ENV5: Conservation areas

The council will review the designation of Conservation Areas through the development plan process. In considering whether changes or additions are appropriate the council will have regard to the special architectural or historic interest of the area.

The Council will seek to preserve and enhance the special character and appearance of the Conservation Areas in the Borough, as set out in the Conservation Area Appraisal documents.

Development within or affecting the setting of a Conservation Area, including the demolition of buildings, will be permitted only if it will preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Proposal ENV5/1: The Council will prepare and review guidance on the conservation of the historic environment of the Borough, which will be adopted as a supplementary planning document.

Proposal ENV5/2: The Council will prepare and review appraisal documents defining the special interest and safeguarding the character of each Conservation Area in the Borough.

Proposal ENV5/3: The Council will prepare and review a programme for the enhancement of the Borough's existing Conservation Areas.

ENV6: Listed Buildings

In considering proposals for development, the Council will safeguard and encourage the enhancement of the special character of Listed Buildings. Proposals for the demolition of a Listed Building will not be permitted, unless it is proven that no realistic alternative for its survival can be secured. Development involving alterations or additions will be permitted only if it would not have an adverse effect on the special character of the building or its setting. Changes of use of a Listed Building will be permitted only if it is demonstrated that the proposal would contribute to the conservation of the building whilst preserving or enhancing its special character.

ENV7: 'Locally listed' buildings

Development that involves the loss of a 'locally listed' building will be permitted only if it is proven that no realistic alternative for its

survival can be secured, and the benefits of the development outweigh the need to safeguard its conservation value.

Proposal ENV7/1: The Council will maintain and review a list of buildings of local architectural or historic interest in the Borough and encourage the preservation of the buildings.

ENV8: Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites

The Council will safeguard and encourage the enhancement of the Borough's archaeological remains, as a finite and irreplaceable resource. Proposals for development that may affect archaeological remains will be required to provide adequate information to allow the impact to be properly assessed, including suitable investigation where the existence or importance of the remains is uncertain.

There will be a presumption in favour of the preservation 'in situ' of nationally important remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings. Development that would have an adverse effect on such remains, either on or under the site, or their character or setting will be permitted only if it can be demonstrated that the benefits of the development clearly outweigh the archaeological value of the site itself and the national policy to preserve such remains.

Development that would have an adverse effect on remains of regional or local importance, or their settings, will be permitted only if the benefits of the development outweigh the archaeological importance of the remains. Where preservation is not feasible or warranted, developers will be expected to make appropriate provision for the prior excavation and recording of the remains.

These policies should be read in conjunction with their supporting text and with other policies relating to, for instance, the natural environment, countryside, green belt, retailing, housing and transport.

Appendix 3. Report of consultation

1. The project was initiated at a meeting of local stakeholders on 27 April 2010. A subsequent walkabout with local people, including representatives of Berkswell Parish Council, was held on 22 May 2010. During this event, the extent of the existing conservation area boundary was discussed, along with some of the main problems and issues that face the community. Maps and an informal prompt sheet were provided to encourage a focused response to the issues before the document was drafted.
2. The draft appraisal was agreed with the Parish Council and the document was then put on their website for six weeks from 9 April 2011. During the same period, an exhibition was provided at the village shop and questionnaires were made available. The consultation period was launched with a public 'surgery' held at the Scout Hall on 9 April 2011.
3. Helpful contributions were made orally by local people at the meeting, walkabout and surgery and this information was used in the development of the document. However, while there was general support for the appraisal and management proposals, and no adverse comments, no formal representations were received from individuals.
4. Four written responses were received from local authority departments and from the land agent to the Berkswell Estate:
 - Places Directorate – Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council**
 - 4.1 The response welcomed the preparation of a conservation area appraisal for Berkswell. It then raised 13 specific points all of which have been taken into account. These were largely suggestions for improving clarity, such as the naming of key buildings on the maps, and updates on important information, such as the Council's Core Strategy and the fact that the War Memorial has achieved its well-deserved statutory listing.
 - Landscape and Ecology – Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council**
 - 4.2 The Landscape and Ecology Team gave enthusiastic support to the appraisal and provided a marked-up version of the text. This included helpful contributions on biodiversity, the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines and the Solihull Countryside Strategy. All of these points have been taken into account.

Archaeological Information and Advice – Warwickshire County Council

- 4.3 The response endorses the findings of the document although it would have preferred to see more emphasis on archaeology. In reply it has to be said that the primary purpose of the appraisal is to address the character and appearance of the area in order to justify its designation as a conservation area.
- 4.4 The response concludes:
‘We wholeheartedly support the proposed conservation area extensions and management recommendations which are generally sound and should help in the continued management of the historic character of Berkswell for the future’

Adkins, Chartered Surveyors, on behalf of the Berkswell Estate

- 4.5 The Estate sees the appraisal process as beneficial for all concerned *‘to ensure that the heritage and landscape assets are afforded the protection they rightly deserve.’* However, there are understandable reservations where the proposals have a bearing on the Estate’s interests:

i. The Estate maintains its heritage assets and, where possible, enhances them. It has provided long-term guardianship since 1888, so why is a conservation area necessary for farmland?

Reply: Farmland is only included in the proposed extensions where there is a specific cultural interest. In the case of Area 3 it is the historic field pattern, which is becoming increasingly rare, while Areas 2 and 4 are part of a designed parkland landscape. Local authorities are under a statutory duty to designate areas of special historic (as well as architectural) interest.

ii. In the Estate’s view, the purpose of designation is to afford protection where there is a risk of damaging change. Where are the risks that warrant the designation of Areas 2, 3 & 4?

Reply: Designation is not just about control, so it is not just about risks. Other purposes include raising public awareness of the historic environment and the potential for enhancement. In this case, the small scale of the historic field pattern in Area 3 is considered to be vulnerable as adjoining areas have experienced amalgamations and the loss of hedgerows.

The planning policy content in Section 1 has been expanded, as a result of consultation, to take better account of countryside policy. Paragraph 1.2 notes that the countryside to the north and east of Berkswell is

identified as an enhancement zone. It is important that any enhancement should pay full regard to the historical interest of the designed landscape and conservation area designation is the means to acknowledge that interest.

- iii. The Green Belt designation of the land around Berkswell already provides protection against undesirable development. How will conservation area designation add to this?

Reply: Green belt policies protect against inappropriate development, but they do not necessarily address the special architectural or historic interest of an area. Conservation area designation places a statutory duty on the local authority to take account of the special interest in considering the use of planning powers.

- iv. Extension of the conservation area would increase the burden of management and costs, for instance in the need for prior consent for tree surgery.

Reply: A managerial approach to maintaining the woodland in the conservation area is welcome. Costs for individual tree surgery can be reduced significantly by entering into a management agreement with the local authority so that prior consent is not necessary on a case-by-case basis. Berkswell Parish Council already does this in respect of the trees it owns within the existing conservation area and Solihull MBC have indicated that the same would be possible for the Estate.

- v. Clarification is required as to the implications of designation for farmland management.

Reply: Conservation area controls apply only to buildings and trees. Day-to-day management of farmland is not, therefore, affected. However, if landscape enhancements were proposed, the special interest of the historic parkland would be an aspect to take into account.

- vi. What is the rationale for the alignment of the northern boundary of Area 4? There is no reference to the process used to consider the appropriateness of this proposal.

Reply: As explained in paragraph 9.2iv above, the line has been taken from the annotation of parkland as shown shaded in grey on the 1886 Ordnance Survey. In the area of Home Farm, the aim was to take in the minimum necessary to include the parkland and perimeter trees using lines defined on the modern Ordnance Survey. A simpler approach would follow the access road and take in Home Farm House and possibly the courtyard of older farm buildings to the north of it.

vii. Clarification is necessary in references to ‘the former smithy’ as the building is integral with the (residential) property known as The Forge.

Reply: The smithy refers to the function, which took place in a building attached to the north side of The Forge. References have been amended to reflect this.

vii. The appraisal refers to areas of woodland on Lavender Hall Lane and Meriden Road as being designated Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINCs), however the Estate’s understanding is that they have not been so designated.

Reply: In 2006, when the Solihull Unitary Development Plan (UDP) was adopted, there were 70 designated SINCs in the Borough. They are shown on the UDP Proposals Map, including the areas on Lavender Hall Lane and Meriden Road.

ix. The Estate is concerned that the Berkswell Estate Ten Year Plan has been miss-represented.

Reply: References to the Ten Year Plan have been removed from the appraisal.

4.6 The support of the Berkswell Estate for careful consideration of design and alteration to properties and street furniture, and for the introduction of measures to reduce the speed of vehicles passing through the village is noted. Their concerns, listed in paragraph 4.5 i-ix above, have been answered by explanation or amendment.

Appendix 4. References

- Communities and Local Government – *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the historic environment* (PPSG5) – 2010
- English Heritage – *Guidance on conservation area appraisal* – 2006
- English Heritage – *Guidance on conservation area management* – 2006
- English Heritage (with CLG and DCMS) – *PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide* – 2010
- English Heritage – *Streets for All: West Midlands* – 2005
- Pevsner, Nikolaus & Wedgwood, Alexandra – *The Buildings of England: Warwickshire* – 1966
- Salzman LF (Ed) – *Victoria County History: County of Warwick: Volume 4* – 1947
- Solihull MBC – *Berkswell Conservation Area* – 1977
- Solihull MBC – *Solihull Unitary Development Plan* – 2006

Websites:

www.british-history.ac.uk

www.countryside.gov.uk/lar/landscape

www.solihull.gov.uk

www.berkswellchurch.org.uk

Appendix 5. Contact details

Berkswell Parish Council

Mrs S Wyldbore-Smith
Clerk to the Berkswell Parish Council
Moat Cottage
Truggist Lane
Berkswell
CV7 7BX

Tel 01676 532923

Email: berkswellparishcouncil@hotmail.co.uk

Solihull Metropolitan Council

Conservation Team
Planning Services
Solihull MBC
PO Box 11652
Solihull
B91 9YA

Tel: 0121 704 8008

Email: planning@solihull.gov.uk