



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

A Borough to be proud of

**PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREA AT
THE VILLAGE OF BILSTONE**

October 2012

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Bilstone is a former Gopsall Estate village which has seen limited changes since the estate was sold in 1927 and the properties passed into private ownership. Within the settlement there are several buildings with unique characteristics which are particular to the estate villages and which need a degree of protection. These include eyebrow dormers, rear service buildings, a corn mill, a former chapel and a listed farmhouse. It is for these reasons that the Borough Council is proposing to declare a new conservation area for the settlement.

2.0 Location

- 2.1 The proposed conservation area of Bilstone is located approximately one mile to the west of the village of Congerstone and 6 miles northwest of Market Bosworth.

3.0 Historical Development

- 3.1 The origin of the name Bilstone or Bildestone 1086 (DB) is thought to be the farmstead of a man named Bildr or a farmstead on a hill or promontory. The village was originally land belonging to the Countess Godiva (Doomsday Book 1086) and has had strong associations with Tutbury and the Harpur family of Calke.
- 3.2 The village formed part of the Gopsall Estate for many years until the estate was sold in 1927, the Earls Howe, the owners of the estate, funded the construction of most properties in the estate villages.
- 3.3 Early in the 19th century the village consisted of 26 houses and had a population of 116 persons although this included Gopsall Hall and the associated estate houses. However by 1927 the 17 village houses were tenanted by 16 families and a further property was rented to the Leicestershire constabulary. At that time these cottages, together with the mill, 2 small holdings and Bilstone Hill Farm, paid an annual rent of just in excess of £24.00. Today, although there has been some limited new building and several cottages have been linked to form an enlarged house, there are still 17 houses including 4 new properties and renovated versions of those present in 1927.
- 3.4 In addition to the houses there was a chapel administered from Norton which was derelict by 1805. It was subsequently incorporated into a cottage although it is still recognisable because of the large pediment on the street frontage. A further unique structure is the village watermill located on the River Sence at the edge of the settlement. The mill was probably built in the 18th century with the attached buildings being 19th century additions. The mill closed in 1962 and has recently been converted into living accommodation.

- 3.5 There have been 2 major incidents which have brought notoriety to the settlement. On May 16th 1737 the daughter of Rebecca Yates, a village resident, fell into the mill pond and was under water for 15 minutes without drowning.
- 3.6 In 1800, John Massey murdered his wife and attempted to drown his daughter by throwing her into the mill pond. The daughter was rescued by William Kirk, the miller. Born around 1750, Massey had been a local celebrity and renowned wrestler often defeating his opponents by throwing them over his head giving rise to the nickname Topsy Turvey. He worked in the fields at Bilstone as an agricultural worker and was reputed to be punctual and industrious. However, he acquired a reputation for heavy drinking and was given to violent outbursts of temper and cruelty to his wives, Sarah, who died in 1797 and Lydia whom he murdered.”
- 3.6 Massey was tried 6 months later in Leicester and was hanged at Red Hill, Birstall, Leicester, in March 1801 and gibbeted at Bilstone. It was said that his skeleton was still on public display in its cage in 1818 and his skull was used in an Atherstone public house as a candle holder. The gibbet post is listed and can be seen a short distance out of the village. Keeper’s Cottage on the edge of the village on Gibbet Lane is reputedly the former home of the Massey family before the murder. During the early 20th century, the post became a venue for religious meetings with a farm dray drawn up in front of the post to serve as a pulpit.

4.0 **Setting**

- 4.1 The village is located on the western bank of the river Sence only 1 mile to the southwest of the site of Gopsall Hall. It is approached by narrow straight roads from Twycross to the north-west and from Wellesborough to the south west. In addition there are 2 further road connections to the north and south ends of Congerstone. Its unique setting, being isolated in the countryside, ensures there are magnificent views all around, particularly to the north-east.
- 4.2 The field system adjoining Bilstone is characterised by small fields, continuous hedgerows and large areas of ridge and furrow. The hedgerows extend into the village and together with the gaps between groups of buildings which provide views into the countryside, reinforce its rural character.

5.0 **Gateways**

- 5.1 From any distance or approach, the village conservation area appears to be set in gently undulating land. From the south the entrance to the conservation area is defined by a triangular piece of land at the intersection of 3 roads. Set within this green space is a fine K6 red telephone kiosk and a red post box attached to a timber post which adds significantly to its character. From the north the road entrance is again very distinctive with a sharp turn to the east. A new avenue of trees defines a pedestrian footpath which links the nearby village of Congerstone to Bilstone on its eastern side. The footpath enters the village

along a timber boardwalk which crosses the River Sence in front of the former Corn Mill. A listed farm house and its former agricultural barns opposite highlight the village's entrance from the northwest.

6.0 Character Statement

- 6.1 The village is characterised by a relatively unplanned organic pattern of buildings which are separated from each other by green spaces, hedges, low walls or agricultural fencing. Until the dissolution of the chapel, this building and the area around it, was the traditional the centre of the village.

7.0 Building Style, Scale and Detail

- 7.1 Buildings in the conservation area fall into four distinct categories.
- 7.1.1 Simple brick vernacular buildings with separate ranges of service buildings at the rear. These are low buildings and are comparatively shallow, being only one room deep set behind short front gardens. They have steeply pitched continuous gabled roofs of plain clay tiles punctured by prominent brick ridge-top chimneys. Windows at first floor are tucked under the eaves and are smaller than those at ground floor which mainly have segmental brick arch lintels and projecting brick sills. There is only one building in the village with eyebrow dormers, 30 Main Street, which is unusual because it was a distinctive feature of Gopsall villages and this is the closest settlement to the Hall. Another Gopsall feature is the V brick lintel over ground floor windows of which there are several examples including 28 and 29 Main Street. The external appearance of the residential buildings is varied and reflects the changes which have occurred over their lifetime. These include a mixture of brick and stone plinths of differing heights, irregular pattern of openings, different sized openings, large areas of blank walls and dentil eaves courses. Several properties now incorporate half brick dormers and an occasional projecting gable on the originally plane fronted facades. These gables are inappropriate and should be resisted particularly on street elevations. However the modern restoration techniques of linking cottages into larger properties, standardising window openings, large rear extensions, the loss of entrance doors, the introduction of eaves dormers and front porches have changed their appearance. All however stand behind short front gardens.
- 7.1.2 Small associated outbuildings add significantly to the character of the settlement. These include former woodsheds, stables, coal houses, wash houses, tool sheds, calf pens, trap houses, fowl house, pigsties and privies. All are single storey structures with tiled roofs and often linked together in long ranges. Pumps, although now rare survivors of the Gopsall Estate ownership, can still be found at the rear of some properties such as Ronaldsway House on Main Road.

- 7.1.3 The large farmhouses, Bilstone Hill Farmhouse and Deans Farmhouse are significantly different to other traditional buildings in the village. They have much grander proportions and have associated farm related outbuildings ranged around a yard.
- 7.1.3.1 Bilstone Hill Farmhouse is a grade II listed structure and to a high degree is the landmark which defines the western entrance into the village. It is dated from the early C19 and is red brick with a plane tiled roof and gable end stacks. It is formed from 2 parallel ranges and is 2 storey's high with a regular 3-window with a central paneled door on the street elevation.
- 7.1.3.2 Deans Farmhouse stands at the northern entrance to the village partly behind a high brick wall and its associated brick farm buildings. This has reduced the impact of this fine brick 2 storey farmhouse considerably. Although its original simple rectangular form has been partly lost due to more recent extensions, it remains a very impressive building with prominent gable end stacks and Georgian style windows.
- 7.1.4 There are also two post Second World War properties set in large plots. They have shallow pitched hipped roofs with concrete roof tiles, large picture windows and attached double garages set well back from the edge of the road. These buildings unfortunately stand out, being suburban in appearance and not in keeping with the traditional character of the village. Any new building should follow the characteristics of the traditional village properties.

8.0 Boundary Treatments

- 8.1 With the exception of the area around the church, boundary treatments are generally low hedges, brick walls or occasional lengths of agricultural fencing which reinforce the village's rural appearance. At the north eastern edge of the conservation area, along the north side of Twycross Road is the high brick wall of the walled garden to the Bilstone Hill farmhouse partly overgrown with ivy which compliments the plane brick walls of the farms former agricultural buildings opposite.

9.0 Surface Treatments

- 9.1 Although the roads are surfaced with tar macadam, traditional gravel surfaces have been retained to many vehicular drives and the access down to the watermill. Where modern street lights and concrete kerbs and pavements have been introduced, particularly along Main Road, they have urbanised the street scene to the detriment of the village character.

10.0 Contribution of Spaces and Natural Elements

- 10.1 The relatively dispersed nature of groups of buildings in the village has provided many large areas of green space. Wide verges and the triangle of grass at the southern entrance to the village also enhance its rural appearance. Only occasionally have leylandii hedges had an unfortunate visual impact.

11.0 Summary of Significance

- 11.1 The retention of agricultural fencing and low brick garden walls with saddleback copings creating a sense of enclosure and highlighting the settlements close links with the countryside.
- 11.2 The predominance of brick one and a half storey cottages and the prominent position of the farmhouses all highlight the rural character of the area.
- 11.3 The leafy character enhances the rural qualities of the local architecture. Greenery in both public and private realm enhances the intimate feel of the area.
- 11.4 Occasional mature trees are an important element in the rural village character of Bilstone and reflect its history as a distinct village settlement within the Leicestershire countryside.
- 11.6 Original streetscape features including gravel surfaces, diamond pattern and plain brick paviers.
- 11.7 The views of the countryside through the green spaces between groups of buildings enhance the rural character of the area.
- 11.8 The unique twists and turns of the road through the village.
- 11.9 The proximity of the river, the mill pond and the mill buildings reinforce the village's unique character.
- 11.10 The shared use of the roads by both pedestrians and vehicles without formal pavements in places.

12.0 Vulnerability

- 12.1 Deterioration, loss or replacement of brick boundary walls and agricultural fencing.
- 12.2 The impact of traffic on the rural village character of the conservation area.
- 12.3 The introduction of additional pavements.
- 12.4 Ageing and subsequent loss of trees.

- 12.5 Insensitive alterations to historic buildings and to building elevations that face the street including the introduction of rendered surfaces or painted brickwork.
- 12.6 Loss of key spaces between buildings.
- 12.7 New development that does not reflect the established traditional form and relationship to the street.
- 12.8 With 2 unfortunate exceptions, all the properties in the village have timber windows and doors. This adds significantly to the character of the settlement and is encouraged.

13.0 Opportunities for Enhancements

- 13.1 Conservation area designation is a planning tool to help protect and enhance areas of special architectural interest. There are elements within the conservation area that could be enhanced to help preserve the established character.
- 13.2 Traffic, although not very intensive, has a significant effect on the historic environment and the quiet rural village character particularly because the village is used by large articulated commercial vehicles as a route to nearby farms.
- 13.3 The limited number of street lights enhances the rural nature of the village. When replacement is necessary it should be with more sensitively styled street lights.
- 13.4 Trees which soften the form of buildings are an important characteristic of this conservation area. Old or dying trees should be replaced and the opportunity for further planting should be investigated.
- 13.5 The re-use of redundant historic buildings should be encouraged. A suitable use and renovation of the farm buildings which were originally part of Bilstone Hill Farm on the south side of Twycross Road should be encouraged.
- 13.6 The use of local building materials should be encouraged to help maintain the continuity of the conservation area.
- 13.7 Traditional brick walls should be retained. Any damage should be carefully repaired using appropriate materials and traditional methods of construction.
- 13.8 Open spaces between buildings, particularly on the eastern side of Main Road should be retained to conserve the views of greenery between buildings. They are a key feature of the character of the area.

14.0 Important Local Historic Buildings

- 14.1 **The Smithy:** The buildings on this plot consisted of a Blacksmiths shop at the rear which until relatively recently was used as a poultry house and is now a games room associated with the house on the street frontage. A beast nose ring set into an internal wall is testament to its former use. The house itself was formerly a barn with granaries above and was then used as a piggery until very recently. A lifting beam on the street elevation highlights the use as a former granary at first floor.
- 14.2 **30 Main Street** was previously 2 cottages although at the turn of the 20th century one was rented from the Gopsall Estate as a police station. At that time the plots also included a separate coal house, wash house, 2 pigsties, a privy and a pump.
- 14.3 **Dean's Farm:** The farmhouse originally contained 3 sitting rooms, kitchen with range, scullery, larder, dairy and 4 bedrooms. It is a brick and tile construction and adjoins a small yard around which are the buildings which housed a coal house, stick house, pump and privy. A second yard links the property to further brick structures including a fodder store, 2 calf pens and a hen house and a 3 bay open cattle shelter. An orchard previously extended northwards along the edge of Main Road.
- 14.4 **Bilstone Hill Farmhouse:** This is a superior farm residence of brick and tile construction set just off the Twycross Road with a southerly orientation. The outbuildings to the rear were used as 3 pigsties with lofts above, a trap house, a stable, a harness room, a foul house and a calf pen although these are now in other house related uses.
- Its gardens consist of a narrow area in front of the house and a large walled kitchen garden to the eastern side with a tool shed, although the garden is now grassed over.
- The brick and tile built farm buildings on the opposite side of the road are in separate ownership. They include a stable for 6 with a fodder store and small corn shed, a large calf pen, a shed for beasts, an open cattle shed with manger, a 6 bay open carte hovel, 2 barns with granary, and 3 cow sheds. Unfortunately due to lack of maintenance, they are falling into major disrepair.
- 14.5 **28/29 Main Road:** These 2 properties formerly belonged to Bilstone Hill Farmhouse and until comparatively recently consisted of 3 brick and tile cottages in a single range. Each cottage had a wash house, pigsty and privy outside although since the sale of the Gopsall Estate in 1927, all have been demolished.
- 14.6 **25/27 Main Road and Ronaldsway House:** These originally consisted of 4 brick and tile cottages but have been converted into three properties. One of the cottages has a brick pediment which is a village landmark feature and can be seen from several locations. This building was, until 1805, a chapel when it became derelict. A parallel range of rear out buildings has given this group of

buildings a unique character which should be protected. These single storey brick and tile structures formerly included coal houses, wood sheds and pigsties, for joint use, a privy and a pump.

14.7 **Drove House:** This structure was once divided into 5 brick and tile cottages which again had a range of rear service buildings. Although the complete pitched roof of the service block is in tact, only 2 linked units remain. Until the time of the estate sale, each cottage had within the range, a pigsty and a coal house. In addition they shared 3 earth closets and a pump which have also been lost.

14.8 **Bilstone Corn Mill:** The mill is built on 3 floors and before it closed in 1962, the ground floor was the corn store with an adjoining wheel house, the first floor was the grinding floor and the second floor was fitted with garners. The adjoining house was relatively large with 4 bedrooms, a wash house and a dairy. Externally the outbuildings consisted of a 2 bay open wagon hovel, a cowshed for 6 beasts, a 2 stall stable, a barn, 3 pigsties and 2 calf pens. The mill and the adjacent outbuildings have been converted into 2 residential properties. The mill race is still operational

14.9 **Keepers Cottage:** To the south beyond the village boundary stands Keepers Cottage, thought to be the home of the infamous John Massey. This brick and tile cottage had 3 bedrooms, a living room, back kitchen, pantry and a pump. Externally this property has been extended and the original structure cased with new brickwork. Its original form is almost unrecognisable.

Gibbet Post: Further to the south on the edge of the road, stands the Gibbet Post itself, now a listed structure.

15.0 Development Guidance

15.1 Any new development must take account of the established character of the area by being of appropriate scale and density and utilising materials so that the buildings will make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area.

15.2 The policies relating to conservation areas are contained within national guidance will form the basis for determining planning applications. This appraisal should be considered in conjunction with those policies. The following checkpoints are to be taken into account when submitting development proposals:

- To be of a high standard of design that respects the established character and appearance of the conservation area.
- Materials to be of a quality and type appropriate to the development and its surroundings.
- Retain and protect important landscape and ecological features.
- Preserve or enhance the special character and setting of listed buildings, conservation areas and Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

- The re-use of redundant buildings is encouraged for uses compatible with their character and setting.
- Historic buildings identified on the appraisal map and areas of open space between buildings are to be retained.

16.0 General Conservation Area Guidance, Planning Controls and Policies

16.1 To maintain the distinctive character and appearance of the Bilstone Conservation Areas it will be necessary to:

- Retain the listed building and buildings of local interest.
- Ensure new development contributes positively to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area regarding siting, scale, design and materials used.
- Ensure house extensions satisfy the Borough Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- Resist development proposals in key areas, which have been identified.
- Ensure the consistent application of positive, sensitive and detailed development control.
- Ensure important views of the village are protected.

16.2 Special attention is given to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the appearance of the Conservation Area. Planning Applications in Conservation Areas are separately advertised. The principal effects of the designation of a Conservation Area are summarised as follows:

16.3 Consent is required for the total or substantial demolition of any building exceeding 115 cu metres or any wall, fence, gate or railing over 1 metre adjacent to a highway or 2 metres elsewhere.

16.4 Applications for Outline Planning permission are not normally acceptable. Full planning applications are likely to be required.

16.5 Planning permission is required for:

- The external cladding of any building with stone, artificial stone, pebbledash, render, timber, plastic or tiles.
- Alteration of the roof which results in its enlargement.
- A satellite dish on a chimney, wall or roof fronting a highway.
- The enlarged part of the dwelling house that would extend beyond the wall forming a side elevation of the original dwelling house, or:
- The enlarged part of the dwelling house that would be more than one storey and extend beyond the rear wall of the original dwelling house.

16.6 The design of all new shop front, advertisements and security grilles should be in accordance with the Council's Shopping and Shop Front Design Guide.

- 16.7 Anyone proposing works to a tree in a Conservation Area must give six weeks written notice to the local planning authority.
- 16.8 These requirements do not cover all aspects of control in Conservation Areas and you are advised to contact the Local Planning Authority.

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