

Bath and North East Somerset
Planning Services

Pensford Conservation Area Character Appraisal



March 2008



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Introduction



Pensford was identified as being of special architectural and historic interest and was designated a Conservation Area in May 1988.

The Council has a duty to pay special attention to preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of Conservation Areas in exercising its planning powers, including periodic re-appraisal of boundaries. This provides a consistent and sound basis upon which to determine planning and other applications.

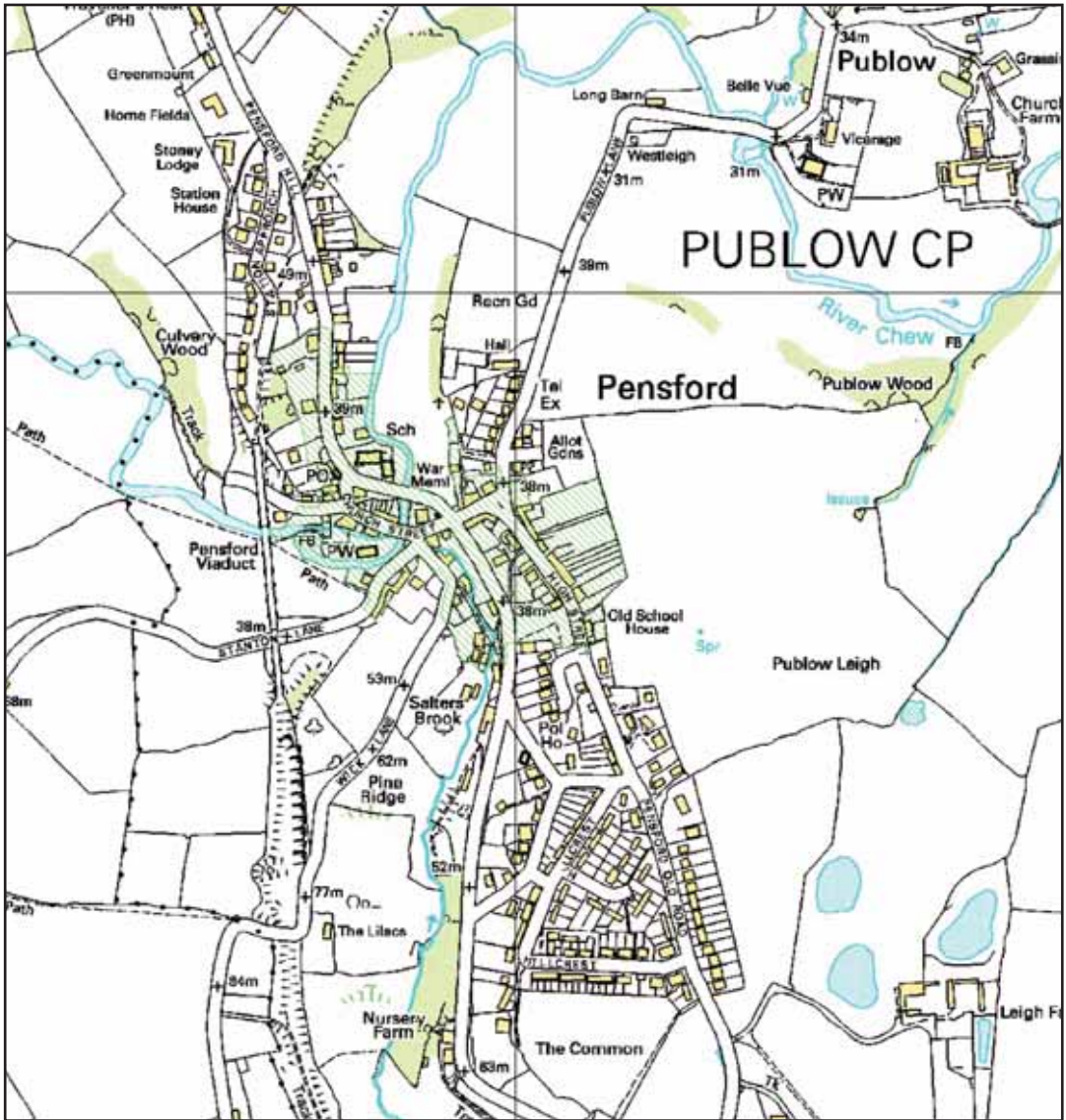
The appraisal identifies features which contribute toward the character of the area and those that detract from it. This provides a base upon which to develop proposals for preservation and enhancement.

The preparation of the statement also enables local residents to participate in the identification of features which are important to the special character of the area in which they live.

Summary of Special Interest

- The exceptional landscape setting within the gently undulating countryside of the Chew Valley
- The medieval street pattern centred on the old market place
- The central features of the River Chew and Salter's Brook which physically divide the village
- The strong association with the medieval cloth trade and vestiges of the industry including water wheels and mill leats
- Evidence of the former mining industry including miners' cottages, the miners welfare and abandoned mineworks in the surrounding area
- The dominant landmark of the disused North Somerset railway viaduct and associated structures
- The close grain of the buildings, often built hard on to the road
- A significant number of listed and other historic buildings
- The prevalent use of locally distinct materials, particularly pennant sandstone and clay pan tiles
- The contrast between intimate enclosure within the village and the fine open space of the surrounding countryside
- The characteristic roofscape of pitched roofs, clay tiles and chimney pots, more visible due to the undulating nature of the landscape





Modern map of Pensford showing Conservation Area shaded in green

Assessment of Special Interest

Location and setting

The village of Pensford is located on the lower slopes of the Chew Valley about six miles from Bristol and 11 miles east of Bath.

Administratively, Pensford on the south bank of the river has always belonged to the parish of Publow, whilst on the north bank of the river the village used to belong to the Parish of Stanton Drew. The parish boundaries were relocated to bring the whole of Pensford into Publow parish, but the old administrative divisions have shaped the development of the village.

General Character and Plan Form

Pensford is a small village with a loosely nucleated form. Development is clustered around the focal points of the river crossing and the market place with linear development along the old High Street.

Later ribbon development lines the 'new' route through to Bristol formed in the 19th century and there is a substantial amount of new housing development outside the Conservation Area boundary.



Early development is clustered around the river crossing



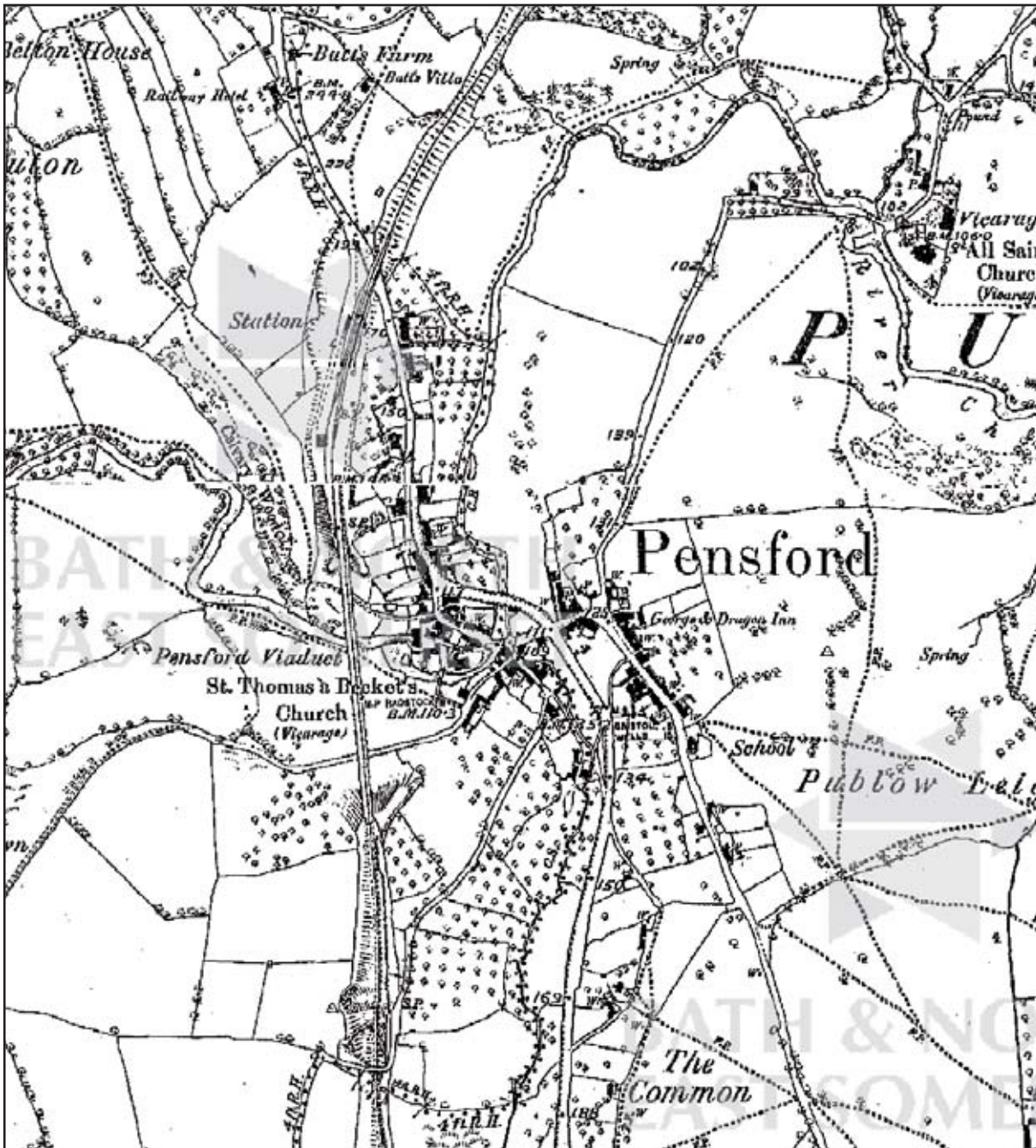
Traditional buildings are typically built hard onto the road emphasising the sense of enclosure



During the late 14th and 15th Centuries Pensford had the most important market in north Somerset, a developing textile trade, agriculture and a major road between the expanding city of Bristol and the channel ports to the south. These influences, along with the changes to the parish boundaries, have shaped the older parts of the village.

Evidence of the early industry and commerce is apparent today in the street patterns, the type and appearance of the buildings and in the surrounding countryside.

Historic map of Pensford (1885)





The landscape setting of rolling grassland is essential to the rural character of Pensford

Landscape setting

Pensford lies within the gently undulating landscape of the Chew Valley¹, characterised by rolling grassland and arable farmland which forms an irregular pattern of fields bounded by hedgerows.

Trees and woodland cover the valley sides, enhancing the intimate character of the settlement. The old coal spoil heap just south of the village has modified the local landform in a dramatic way.

The village straddles the River Chew and its tributary Salter's Brook. The river valley is framed by steep slopes on all sides except the north east giving the impression of Pensford being dominated by its surroundings. This impression is heightened by the presence of the disused railway viaduct. This imposing structure is formed of sixteen tall stone arches which carried the railway across the valley at the western edge of the village.

Pensford's inclusion within the Bristol-Bath Green Belt signifies the importance of the landscape setting and helps prevent development which would be harmful to the area.

¹ Area 2 of the 'Rural Landscapes of Bath & North East Somerset Landscape Character Assessment' SPG which may be read in conjunction with this document.



The River Chew physically divides the village



Trees and woodland frame the built form

Historic Development

The earliest reference to Pensford Church appears in 1291 in the Taxatio of Pope Nicolas II, where it is described as 'a Chapel of Ease to the St Loe family and a Chapelry of Publow'. Nearby Publow Church belonged to Keynsham Abbey until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538. The Abbey exercised a considerable influence over the parish, particularly in the establishment of the Market at Pensford and the development of the textile trade.

Pensford rose to importance with the textile industry and the development of its market. By the middle of the 14th Century Pensford Market was one of the most important in the county, specialising in Broadcloth for which the West Country was famous. It continued to be pre-eminent through the following two centuries, although by the end of the 16th century it was beginning to decline.

In the mid 16th Century Leland described Pensford as a '*pretty market townlet, occupied with clothing*' with a few tucking mills on the river.

Following the decline of the textile industry iron mills were established, but were quickly superseded by the opening of Publow Mill in 1718 by John Freeman & Copper Company. The copper and brass industry flourished and was a major source of employment in the parish until 1860 when Publow Mill closed following the diversion of water from the river by Bristol Water Works.

Coal was mined from pre-medieval times in Pensford but the first shaft at Pensford Mine was not sunk until 1911. Many of the houses dating from the 18th and 19th Centuries were built for miners, mostly of local brown Pennant sandstone. Cottages from the woollen, copper and coal mining eras still front the High Street. The nearest visible mine works are a mile south of the centre.

The opening of the Bristol and North Somerset railway in the late 19th century had a dramatic effect on the village. The commercial importance of Pensford at the time is signified by the fact that it was the only place in the Chew Valley (apart from Keynsham) which had a railway station. The line ceased to carry passengers in 1959, a victim of Dr Beeching, and the railway line and station were closed after the great floods of 1968. This disaster is discreetly commemorated by markers indicating the flood level on several houses in the village.

The philosopher John Locke grew up in nearby Belluton, and benefited from the patronage of Sir Alexander Popham, the lord of the Manor, for whom his father worked as Attorney and Agent. Later in his life John Locke owned considerable property in Pensford and Publow and in his will he left money to both Churches and to the poor of the parish. Many of his notebooks survive with comments about his tenants.






The 1968 floods had a significant impact throughout the Chew Valley

The imposing viaduct is a silent reminder of the importance of industry to the area

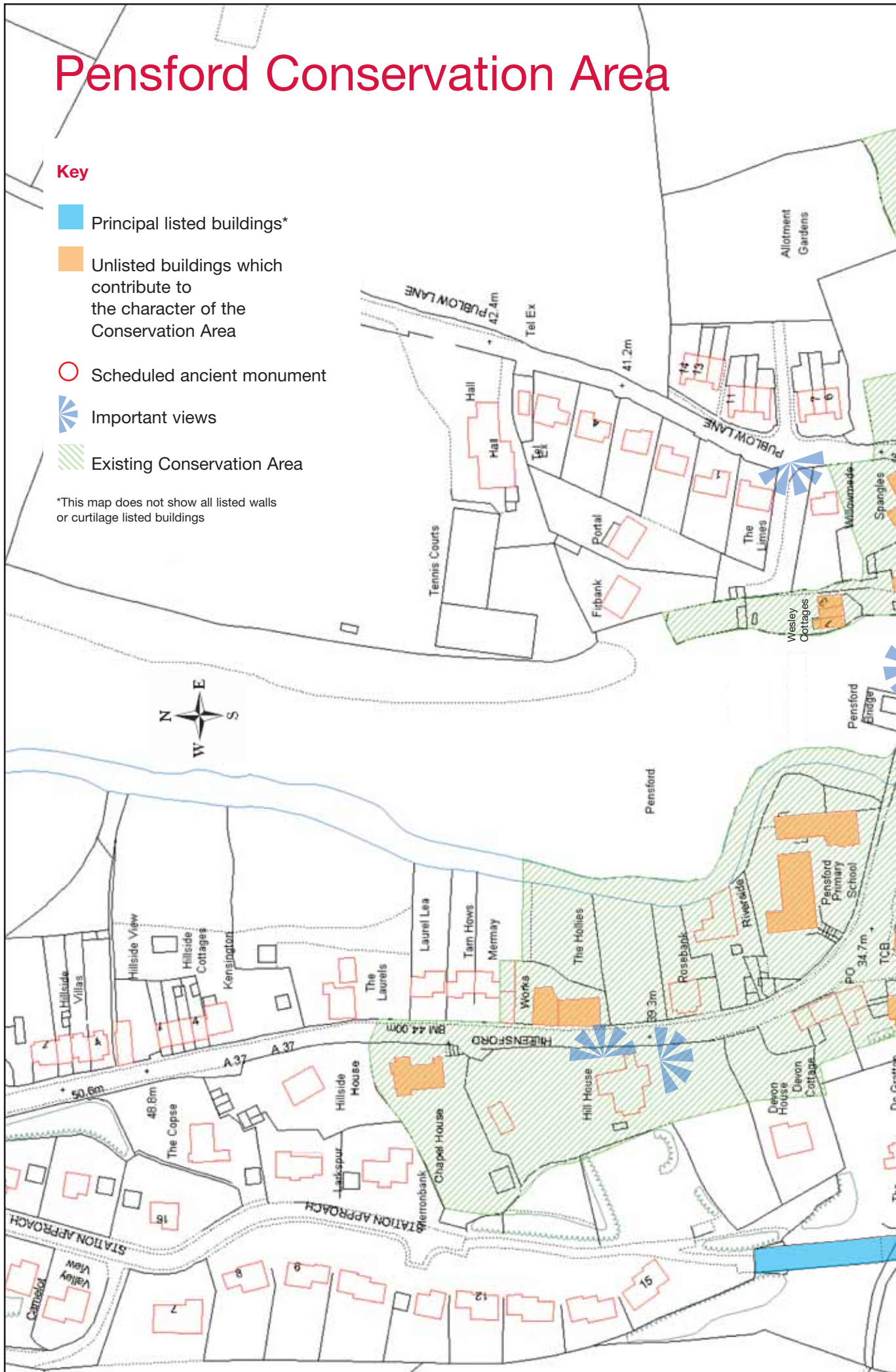


Pensford Conservation Area

Key

-  Principal listed buildings*
-  Unlisted buildings which contribute to the character of the Conservation Area
-  Scheduled ancient monument
-  Important views
-  Existing Conservation Area

*This map does not show all listed walls or curtilage listed buildings





Archaeological Significance

Little archaeological field work and excavation have taken place in Pensford itself but the village has been identified as having considerable potential for further research. Excavations during the 19th Century revealed the remains of a Market House where the triangle of grass lies in front of the Lock-up.

The most important ancient monument in the area, the Wansdyke, passes the villages of Pensford and Publow around a mile to the north.

The pattern of pitched clay tiled roofs is characteristic of the Conservation Area



Spatial Analysis

The Conservation Area takes in the historic core of the village, centred on the cross-roads of the High Street and the A37 (Bristol Road). The traditional buildings are generally built hard on to the road; while 19th century and later ribbon development tends to constitute larger buildings set back in more generous plots of land.

The former market shaped the spatial character of the village, with the High Street and lesser roads and lanes leading to and from it. Although much historic detail has been erased by modern alterations and re-development, Pensford's original tight nucleus, formed around the market place, church and river crossing, has retained its medieval form and character. This is probably due to the fact that the modern A37 road and bridge are based on an early 19th century line which effectively by-passed the medieval core, leaving the road pattern intact.

The combination of a loop of the river Chew and the mill stream has left the church on an island, one of only four island churches in England.

Key Views and Vistas

The railway viaduct dominates the village and can be seen from many vantage points within the village and in the immediate area. Views from up near the viaduct into the village and to the surrounding hills are superb although sadly there is no access on to the viaduct itself.

There are several fine views out of the village into the open countryside, particularly northwards. Here a break in development allows open views out to the surrounding pasture where grazing cattle and vegetation enhance the rural character of the village.

Views from the top of High Street and higher ground around the village highlight the importance of Pensford's roofscape. The irregular pattern of pitched roofs with traditional clay tiles and chimney pots is a characteristic of the village. Development within and around the Conservation Area should reflect this.

Narrow, unmarked lanes contrast with the busy main road





Character Analysis

Architectural and Historic Qualities of the buildings

There are sixteen structures on the statutory list of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest. These include the church, the railway viaduct, the village 'lock-up', the medieval bridge, several public houses and a mixture of mostly eighteenth and nineteenth century houses and cottages. Unusually there is a lack of fine gentry houses which are often found in wealthy mill villages. Most of the domestic buildings are modest in scale and appearance.

The most important building is the parish church of St. Thomas a Becket which is listed Grade II*, largely on account of its 14th Century tower. It is first recorded as a chapel-of-ease for the St Loe family. It has never been a Parish Church, but in most ways has fulfilled the function of one for the people of the parish. Pevsner describes the tower as *'typical of its period, a simple, sturdy and commanding presence'*.

The George and Dragon Inn was a stop for stage coaches on the Bristol -Wells road when the High Street was the main road. It bears the date 1752.

In the 18th century the Lock-up would have been used for local drunks and for safe keeping overnight of prisoners being moved by stage coach. This is a fairly rare survival and is listed Grade II.

The bridge in Church Street is medieval, although it was largely rebuilt following the 1968 floods with white lias stone. At its east end stands a curious group of medieval buildings, the most prominent being 'Bridge House', so called because it is partly built on a bridge over Salter's Brook. Bridge House is a 16th century timber framed building faced with Bath stone ashlar. This is rare in Pensford and indicates that it was a building of some significance. At one time it was the Church House.

Fragments in the walling of two derelict cottages depicting the crucifixion are thought to be from the medieval market cross. These precious relics are incongruously attached to the wall of a very ordinary looking building in The Barton.

Pensford contains many modest 18th and 19th century houses and cottages, mostly built of brown Pennant sandstone from the immediate neighbourhood. This





Traditional surface details and cast iron signs enhance the streetscape

Many unlisted buildings make a contribution to the area's character

gives the Conservation Area a characteristic appearance quite different from the pale Bath stone to the east or the grey carboniferous limestone to the west towards Mendip.

Natural clay roof tiles are a highly visible and attractive feature of the Conservation Area. Where roofs have been covered in concrete tiles or poorly detailed machine-made replacements the appearance detracts markedly from the general character of the buildings.

Simple cast iron fingerposts found at road junctions are appropriate in this rural setting and many cases would benefit from restoration. Pennant stone paving, kerbs and setts survive in places and make an important contribution to the streetscape. In contrast, the harsh urban detailing of the main road through the village detracts from the generally rural character of the area.

Unlisted Buildings of Merit

While the most significant buildings in Pensford are statutorily listed, many modest cottages and other buildings make up the bulk of the built form and knit the Conservation Area together into a coherent whole.

A number of these buildings make a significant contribution to the character of the area either individually or as a group, and could be considered for inclusion on the Council's list of Locally Important Buildings. A more detailed survey is necessary to identify possible candidates.

Pensford Primary School is a typically detailed late Victorian-style institutional building from the early 20th Century, which occupies a prominent spot beside Pensford Bridge.

The Miners Welfare opposite the school is a reminder of the strong association with coal mining in the area. This building would benefit from restoration.

The group of cottages around the George and Dragon and further along the High Street, the cottages along Church Street and the group of buildings around Gays Farm provide an attractive backdrop for the listed buildings.

Other buildings of note are The Hollies and the former Methodist chapel at the northern edge of the Conservation Area.

Activity and former uses

Whilst the textile industry, copper industry and coal mining have been the main influences in Pensford, there is also a strong agricultural tradition and this still provides some employment within the village. There are a number of local businesses but there is no longer major employment within the village. Activity is dominated by through traffic on the A37.

Various buildings and features suggest their former associations both in their architectural styles and their names, such as The Old Bakery, Old Railway Tavern, Millstream Cottages, Old School House and Chapel House. Retaining the local names and often distinctive physical features of buildings helps preserve the character of the village, despite modern changes of use.

Trees and Green Spaces

In the past orchards were common around Pensford, as throughout the area, and there are some remnants of these in and around the village. The remains of orchards make a significant contribution to the character and setting of the Conservation Area.

The village wraps around an area of rich wet grassland immediately to the north, which brings the countryside into the centre of the village and provides a pleasantly pastoral scene, in contrast to the busy main road. This area is a significant green space with a clear relationship to the village and development in this area would have a detrimental impact on the character of the area. As this area is outside the Housing Development Boundary and within the Green Belt it is not considered necessary to include it within the Conservation Area.

Another area of important Green Space which forms part of the setting of the Conservation Area is the area between the church and the viaduct at the western edge of the village. This open area of green space connects the village visibly to the immediate countryside, helping to reinforce its rural character.



Orchards are an historic feature of most villages in the area



The pastoral setting of the Conservation Area is essential to its rural character and should be protected

Opportunities for Enhancement

The busy main road to Bristol is a dominant and noisy feature, splitting the settlement in two. The impact of speeding traffic could be reduced by careful traffic management and appropriately designed speed control at the entrance and exit of the village, or other traffic calming methods in line with *Manual for Streets* where appropriate.

Although the medieval street pattern and many of the buildings in the village have survived, much of the visual character has been lost as a result of unsympathetic changes to details such as windows, doors, roof-coverings and external cladding. Restoring traditional painted timber windows and doors would enhance the character of the Conservation Area.

Alterations which materially affect the appearance of buildings should be managed through the planning system where possible.

It is a great shame that the disused railway line running across the viaduct has been blocked at both ends, preventing the railway line from being used for another purpose, such as a footpath and a cycle track. Bringing this historic transport route back into use in some form would enhance the character of the village and benefit those who live in or visit the area.

Neutral Areas

There are some areas of modern housing on the edge of the Conservation Area and dotted around as infill in the village. For the most part these have a neutral

impact on the Conservation Area although in places a lack of attention to details such as external materials has had a negative effect on the appearance of the area.

General Condition

The general condition of buildings in Pensford is fairly good, however the church of St Thomas a Becket is on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register due being unoccupied and vulnerable to deterioration.

There are also a number of rather run-down and derelict buildings in the village which would benefit from repair or renovation. Finding a use for empty buildings and ensuring they are maintained is a priority if they are to survive in the long term.

Sadly the railway viaduct is blocked at both ends, preventing an alternative use



Excessive or intrusive signage can detract from Pensford's rural character



Restoring derelict buildings would enhance the area's appearance

Summary of Issues and Recommended Management Proposals

- It is recommended that an Article 4 Direction be considered to cover changes to doors and windows, roof coverings, insertion of rooflights and the demolition of walls under 1m high. This would help prevent loss of traditional details and protect the visually important roofscape.
- Enforcement action should be considered in cases of unauthorised works which adversely affect the character of the Conservation Area or listed buildings.
- The use of underground cables for services would help prevent the streetscape and wider landscape being interrupted by overhead wires.
- Unlisted buildings of note should be considered for inclusion on the Local List.
- When works are carried out to the highway or streetscape the opportunity should be taken to reinstate traditional signage and, where relevant, should be considered with reference to the adopted *Streetscape Manual*² and *Manual for Streets*³.
- Trees provide a significant contribution to the special character of the Conservation Area. Where appropriate the Council will use its powers to make Tree Preservation Orders to protect trees that are under threat.
- The policies that govern development in Conservation Areas in the *Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan* should be carried forward into the any replacement Local Development Document.

Community Involvement

Public support and involvement is essential to the successful management of Conservation Areas. Following the production of a first draft by Bath & North East Somerset Council, copies of this appraisal were provided for local amenity groups, Councillors and Local Libraries. A copy was posted onto the Council's website and a press release sent to local papers. Six weeks were allowed for comments to be submitted, after which the final draft was completed. This appraisal was approved by the Council on [insert date].

Bath and North East Somerset Council thank Publow with Pensford Parish Council, local residents, and especially local historian Barbara Bowes for their invaluable contribution of local knowledge and support during the production of this document.

Planning Policy Context

A Conservation Area is designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990) and is defined as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. The quality and interest of the area as a whole, rather than individual buildings, is the main consideration when designating such areas.

Section 71 of the Act requires the local planning authority to periodically formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas within the district. Section 72 requires that in considering applications for development in a Conservation Area, attention shall be paid to the desirability of conserving or enhancing the character of that area.

Conservation Area appraisals are considered by English Heritage to be vital to the conservation of these special areas. The content of this statement is based on the suggested approach set out by English Heritage⁴.

Regional Planning Guidance 10 (2001) and the saved policies from the *Joint Replacement Structure Plan* (2002) (to be replaced in 2008 by the *Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West*) contain broad policies regarding the built and historic environment and Green Belt.

More detailed policies are to be found in the *Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan*. This was adopted in October 2007 and will be 'saved' for three years in the Council's *Local Development Framework*.

General Guidance

Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan 2007

Bath & North East Somerset Council, *Rural Landscapes of Bath & North East Somerset*, (Adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance 2003)

Bath & North East Somerset, *Living in a Conservation Area*, 2003

Bath & North East Somerset *Streetscape Manual*, (Adopted April 2005)

Manual for Streets, DoT, 2007

Avon Historic Landscape Characterisation Methodology, Chapman, 1997

Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage, 2005

Guidance on Conservation Area Management Plans, English Heritage, 2005

The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: A Guide to Good Practice, English Heritage, 2006

Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment

Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable Energy

² 'Streetscape Manual, A guide to the selection, design installation and care of the District's streetscape and its historical preservation', Bath & North East Somerset Council, adopted April 2005

³ *Manual for Streets*, DCLG et al. 2007

⁴ 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals', English Heritage, 2005

Further Reading

The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol, Pevsner N. (1958)

Pensford, Publow and Woollard: A Topographical History, Rowland Janes, (1989)

www.pensford.com is a local history site with further information on Pensford and the surrounding areas

Glossary

Listed Buildings: Buildings on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest compiled by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Conservation Area: Defined by English Heritage as ‘*areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*’. Some permitted development rights are removed for owners of buildings in a Conservation Area and special planning controls may apply.

Article 4 Direction: A direction under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. Article 4 Directions remove specified permitted development rights and can be made to cover parts of a Conservation Area where there is a clear and immediate threat to the amenity of the area.

Locally Important Buildings: Buildings of particular local importance for their architectural interest, their contribution to the local environment or for their historical associations. Although these buildings do not benefit from the same statutory protection as listed buildings, their inclusion on the local list will be a material consideration in determining applications for planning permission. The council is currently in the process of drawing up a list of Locally Important Buildings.

Tree Preservation Order (TPO): An order made by a Local Planning Authority in respect of trees or woodlands to prohibit works to trees without consent (part VIII of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999)

Contact Details

Contact Planning Services for advice regarding
Listed Buildings and Listed Building Consent: 01225 477632
Unlisted Buildings and Conservation Area Consent: 01225 477632
Works to trees within Conservation Areas: 01225 477520
Planning Permission: 01225 477722
Archaeology: 01225 477651
Planning Policy: 01225 477548

Email: historic_environment@bathnes.gov.uk

All the above teams are located at Planning Services, Trimbridge House, Trim Street, Bath, BA1 2DP

This document about the Pensford Conservation Area can be made available in a range of community languages, large print, Braille, on tape, electronic and accessible formats from Planning Services on 01225 394100

Prepared by Bath & North East Somerset Council Planning Services.