

# Wickwar

## CONSERVATION AREA

### WHAT IS A CONSERVATION AREA?

A Conservation Area is an area of "Special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance."

Designation is a recognition of the group value of buildings and their surroundings and the need to protect, not just the individual buildings, but the distinctive character of the area as a whole. The special character usually derives from a combination of many features, such as - trees, hedgerows, walls, open spaces, groups of buildings, the degree of enclosure, the massing and detailing of buildings. Each area is unique.

### WHAT CONTROLS APPLY?

Within the Conservation Areas a number of special controls apply. Planning policies seek to ensure that any development accords with the areas' special architectural or visual qualities. These are set out in the Local Plan and further details are given in **CONSERVATION AREA ADVICE NOTE** - available from the Council. The emphasis is on preserving those buildings, spaces and features which give each Conservation Area its special character. Where changes can be justified, great care must be exercised to ensure that there will be no adverse impact on this character.

### PURPOSE OF THE LEAFLET

- 1 To provide a detailed appraisal of those buildings, features and spaces which characterise Wickwar Conservation Area.
- 2 To set out a strategy for its preservation and enhancement.
- 3 To provide guidance for development proposals.

Wickwar was originally designated as a Conservation Area on the 13th January 1973 (with some minor amendments in 1991 and an extension included on the 14th May 1998). It comprises the High Street, with its many listed buildings, the area to the north around the listed parish church of Holy Trinity and the open land to the west.

### Why is Wickwar important ?

The special character of Wickwar derives from its medieval origins in the 13th century as a planned settlement. It is one of 4 such towns in the South Gloucestershire area and although smaller than the other towns at Chipping Sodbury, Thornbury and Marshfield, it still displays the characteristics and layout typical of such medieval settlements.

The village was developed on a main trade route and is essentially linear in character. Its wide main street also served as the market area. Alongside was a continuous row of houses each with a narrow frontage and long burgage plots to the rear served by a back access lane. To the north is the church of Holy Trinity and the location of the original Saxon settlement which has now disappeared.

Wickwar contains many listed buildings. Today, despite some modern development mainly on the village edges, the medieval layout and historic character of the former market town remains reasonably intact and is an important part of our heritage.

### Setting and Location

Wickwar is a small linear village which lies astride the Wotton - Under - Edge to Chipping Sodbury road, the B4060 in the northern part of South Gloucestershire. It is located approx 4 miles north of Chipping Sodbury in a rural setting. It lies adjoining the Severn Vale, on the south - west edge of the Cotswold scarp. The High Street is situated on a flat spur of land running north to south with the land falling on the west and east sides of the town to the Little Avon river and one of its tributaries before rising up again steeply on either side. The church stands in a commanding position on a second high area of ground to the north of the town and is prominent in surrounding views.

### Conservation area boundary

The boundary is shown on the plan and has been drawn to include the historic core of the medieval village comprising the High Street and associated back lanes as well as the area to the north by the Church and the Brewery building. It also includes the fields to the west to protect the village settings and views. Most of the surrounding modern development is excluded.



# The historic Context

**The earliest surviving reference to Wickwar is the Domesday Book (1086) which records details of 28 of the inhabitants. The original Saxon village was centred to the north of the village around the Church and the nearby Pool House the medieval manor house.**

In the late 13th Century the de la Warre family developed the present settlement to the south with the establishment of a market in 1285. This may have resulted in abandonment of the settlement by the church leaving only Pool House still occupied. The main street, the present High Street, was laid out around the market place with uniform burgage plots and rear access lanes. Burghers paid an annual fixed rent to the overlord but they could sell their tenancies much as in the free market today. In addition they often carried on trades and crafts which, together with their property rights, distinguished them from the feudal peasant. Livestock were often kept on the burgage plots behind the house and this necessitated the rear access lane.

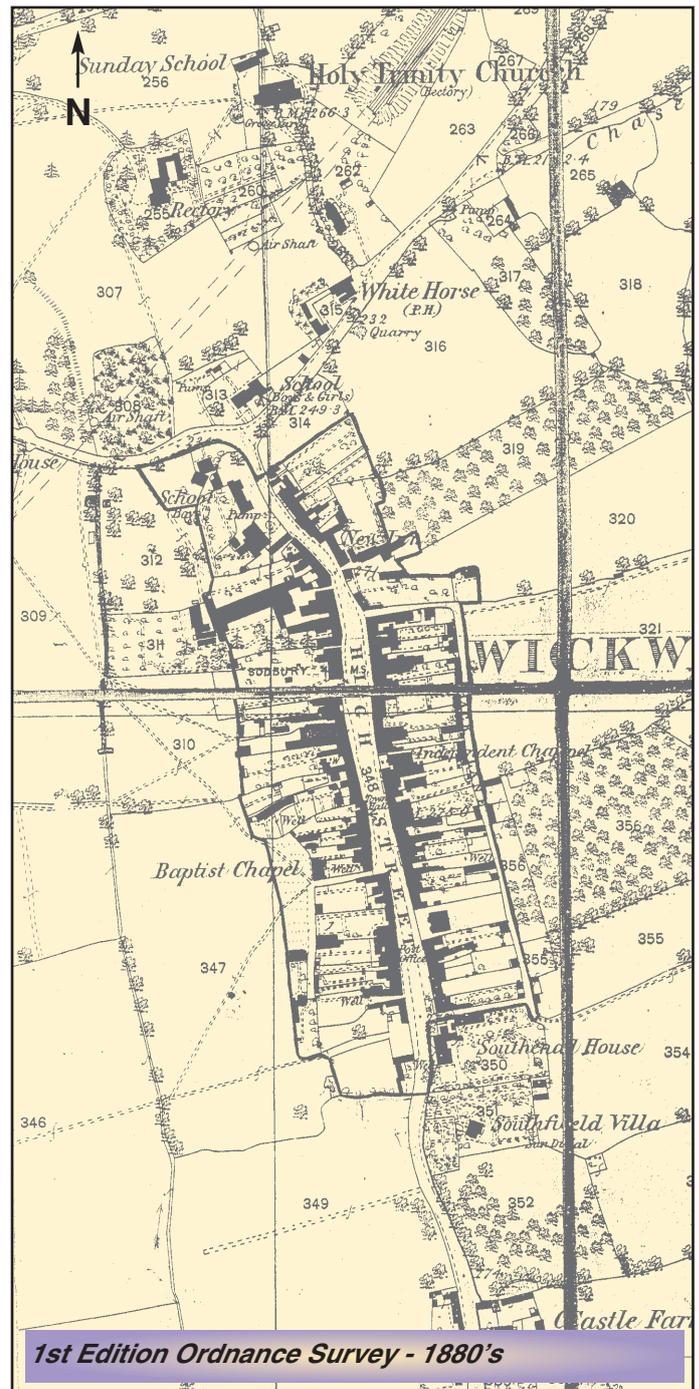
Its wealth and prosperity, especially during the late middle ages, derived from the clothing industry when many people were employed in the weaving and dyeing trade. However, there was a marked decline towards the end of the 18th century as the hand weaver was superseded by mechanical means.

Another source of employment included Clay Pipe making which began in the late 17th century and continued until the early 19th century however the number of people involved would have been small.

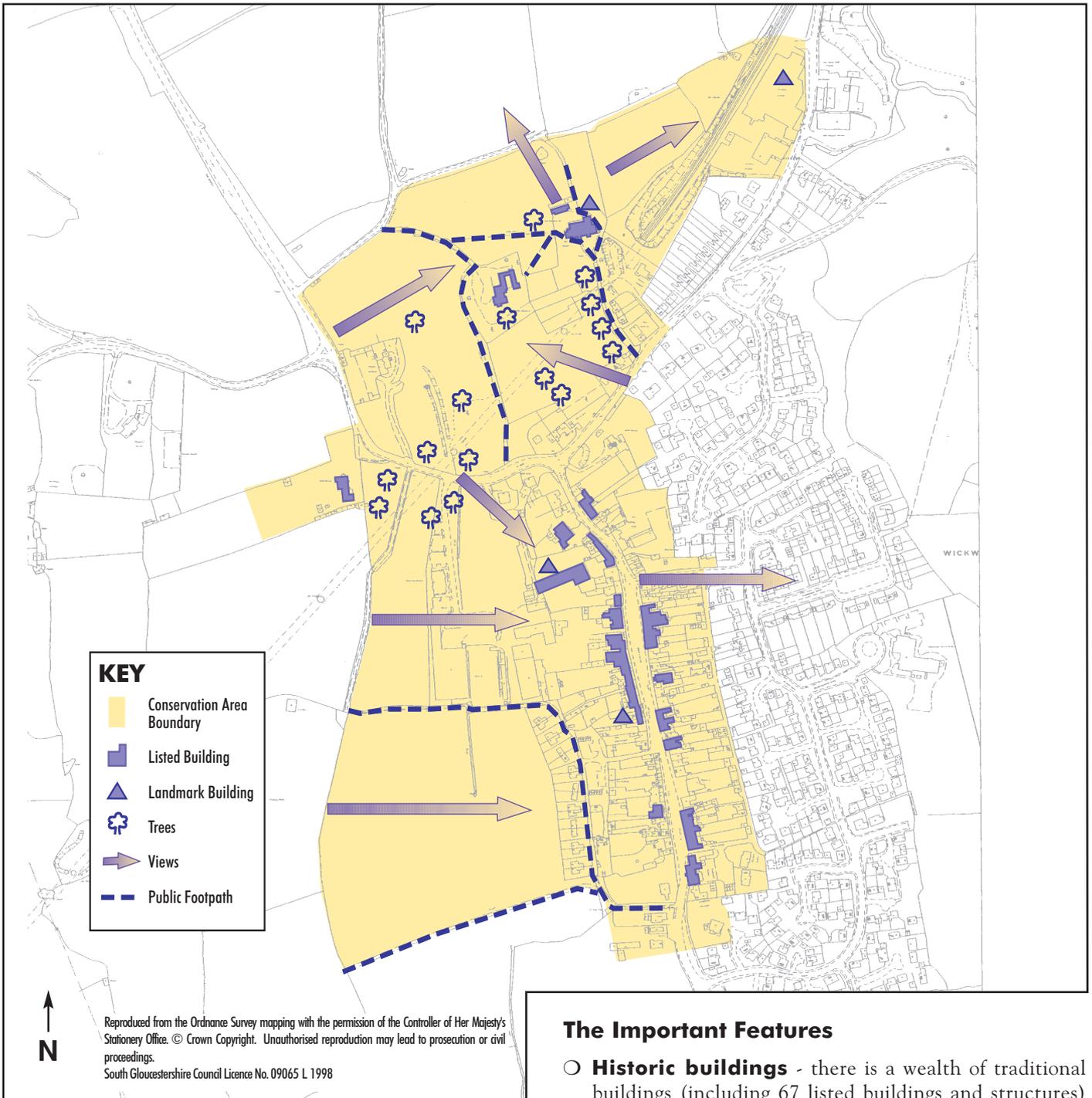
Industrial development in the town appears to be restricted to commercial malting and brewing, which began in 1800 when Mr Thomas Arnold opened a brewery in the High Street (now thought to have been split into two buildings at 36 and 38). A second larger Brewery was subsequently built to the north of the town.

The railway came in the first half of the 19th century and lay on an important route between Exeter, Bristol and Newcastle. Its construction in 1844 involved boring a tunnel over 1 km in length through solid limestone rock resulting in the subsequent demolition of the 16th century Pool House the probable medieval manor house of the parish. Today, all that remains of the Manor is its terraced garden south west of the church which formerly stood on the edge of a lake.

Wickwar was one of the first towns in England to have its own electrical street lighting in about 1888 even before the city of Bristol. This was a result of the installation of a hydroelectric generator by Arnold, Perret & Co, Ltd for their brewery in Station Road and their excess capacity was used to supply electric lighting to the High Street. This continued until 1920. The population in the 19th century remained fairly constant



with a figure of just below 1000 inhabitants. However in the 20th century the population declined rapidly and by 1975 there were only 680 people living in the town. Since then new housing development on the eastern and southern edges of the town has resulted in an increase in the number of inhabitants. Although this modern development is generally not visible from the historic core, the High Street suffers from the affects of through traffic including heavy goods vehicles and the visual impact of parked vehicles and overhead wirescape. Some small scale industrial development has been established to the west and north of the town some utilising older buildings connected with the former brewery.



The market towns, such as Wickwar, produced richer and more varied structures than other contemporary settlements (such as the villages and hamlets that they served), and this is reflected in the surviving buildings and archeological deposits and structures in the village.

There are 4 distinctive character areas which include:

- 1) The High Street,
- 2) The Back Lanes (Back Lane and The Buthay)
- 3) The area to the north around the church.
- 4) The land to the west of the settlement.

### The Important Features

- **Historic buildings** - there is a wealth of traditional buildings (including 67 listed buildings and structures) which contribute to the period character.
- **Historic layout and plan form of the settlement** - including the narrow burgage plots, boundary walls and back lanes.
- **Trees** - the mature trees in the north and west of the conservation area contribute to the attractive character.
- **Stone boundary walls** - are important features providing enclosure and permanence
- **Building materials** - a mix of stone and render
- **Archaeology** - there are numerous sites on the Sites and Monument Record reflecting the importance of the village
- **Views** - in and out of the area are important

## THE HIGH STREET

The village High Street has an enclosed urban character formed and framed by the more or less uninterrupted row of adjoining buildings which line either side of the street (to west and east). Most of the buildings are located on the pavement edge and consist of a variety of building styles with varying rooflines. From within the wide and level High Street the opportunity for views out are restricted with individual buildings to the north and south acting as pinch points and enclosing the space. The space varies in width with its widest part opposite the town hall where the market cross would have stood. The public space consists of the roadway, pavement and an open area of former market pitchings which would benefit from better demarcation. The space is characterised by traffic passing through and extensive parking.

### Building types and characteristics

Wickwar contains a mix of small cottages, larger houses and important social buildings such as the Town Hall, Congregational Church, Old School and Malthouse which gives variety to the street. The majority of buildings lining the street are of 18th Century origin although several buildings date from the 17th Century and many conceal older cores. Two buildings in the town are known to date to the late medieval period: - 42 and 46 on the west side of the High Street date to the 15th century, and number 73 on the east side of the High Street is possibly 16th century in date.

The buildings are generally 2 storeys in height though the roofline varies quite considerably along the length of the street with the mix of small cottages and larger buildings. Roofs are predominantly of the simple gabled type with their ridges running parallel to the street although there are a number of exceptions where the gables or gabled dormers face onto the street adding variety to the street scene. Pitches are steep and, in conjunction with floor plan depths, give a regular and distinct sense of proportion to the overall street scene. Chimneys are a prominent feature and add considerably to the historic, architectural and especially, the visual interest of this part of the conservation area.

The majority of buildings are located right on the street edge forming a consistent and virtually uninterrupted line along either side of the street. This means that the buildings and their architectural detailing are very visible and thus any unsympathetic alterations will have an adverse affect on the street scene. Of those few buildings that are set back from the street such as the Congregational Chapel the gardens to the front have a significant and softening affect on the street scene.

Many of the buildings are listed of historic interest however, it is apparent that those buildings not protected by listing have suffered from the gradual erosion of their historic character. This includes the removal of render and the use of inappropriate modern replacement of traditional details such as windows and doors. Other features such as railings and steps need to be reinstated and repaired.



*The enclosed High Street*



*Traditionally most of the buildings were rendered*



*Variety to street provided by gabled dormers*

### Enhancement Strategy

- seek environmental improvements to paving and pitchings in the High Street and traffic calming measures. Encourage public transport initiatives.
- encourage conservation and sympathetic reinstatement of traditional elevations and details such as windows, doors, chimney stacks and pots.
- shopfronts and signs need to be more sympathetic to the character.
- resist the removal of traditional render.

## THE CHURCH AND AREA TO THE NORTH

**The northern part of the conservation area is more open in character and contrasts with the hard urban character of the High Street. It comprises a number of isolated buildings and structures set within an attractive undulating landscape of greenfields with clumps of trees and stone boundary walls.**

### The Church

The most significant feature is the Church of Holy Trinity (grade II\* listed) standing in isolation on a hilltop overlooking and providing a focal point to the surrounding area. It is of 12th Century origin though it has been altered in the 14th and 15th Centuries and further restored in 1881.

To the north of the church, within the churchyard is the Sunday school, built in 1837 in a Tudor Gothic style. Its appearance has been harmed in recent years by a small unsympathetic modern extension.

The churchyard has 18 listed tombs, including a number of chest tombs, which are important to the setting of the church however, many are in need of repair.

### The legacy of the former settlement

The bumps and lumps in the landscape around the church today reveal the evidence of the site of a former Saxon village which was abandoned following the establishment of the planned medieval settlement to the south. This left only Pool House the medieval manor house, which stood on the edge of a lake. However, with the construction of the railway in the mid 19th century Pool House was subsequently demolished and lake drained with only the former walls of its terraced gardens now remaining. These walls which hang below the southside of the churchyard date from the 17th century and need some restoration work as does the retaining wall to the churchyard itself.

### The distinctive isolated buildings and structures

The undulating landscape with its groups of trees provides an attractive setting for the individual buildings such as the Old Rectory and Hill House. The Old Rectory in particular, is an impressive house dating from 1864 with its interesting doorway and decorative stacks. Views of the house set within the landscape amongst the trees are particularly appealing.

The construction of the railway and its 1 km long tunnel had a significant impact on the area. It has resulted in a line of distinctive circular stone airshafts along its route which are an unusual feature in the surrounding landscape.

### Views and open character

This area of the village is particularly attractive and it is important these open areas are protected. There are a number of attractive views from the churchyard over the surrounding countryside. The Nibley and Somerset Monuments both notable landmarks are clearly visible. The Brewery building, a significant landmark on Station Road is also highly prominent to the immediate north east.

### The stone walls

Stone walls are an important feature of the area. Entering Wickwar from the north, via West End Road or the B4509, the natural stone walls provide a strong sense of enclosure and pinchpoints to the roads.

### Trees

Groups of trees within the landscape and individual trees on the skyline are an important feature. They also help to provide enclosure and greenery along the main road and to the south side of the churchyard. The pathway up to the Church ('The Stank') is particularly attractive lined by mature trees which gives a strong sense of enclosure. The loss of these mature trees would have a detrimental effect on the character of the area.



*The Old Rectory*



*The railway air shaft - set within the landscape*

### Enhancement Strategy

- seek the removal of electricity cables and poles which are visible in the landscape particularly by the Church
- seek the repair & conservation of stone walls, and gravestones within the Churchyard.
- seek to retain the open character and protect views by ensuring careful control over extensions to properties and changes to landuse.
- seek improvements to the unsympathetic Sunday School room extension, and enhancements to the Brewery Site.
- retain trees and promote a tree planting strategy for the future.

## THE BACK LANES

Running to the rear of and parallel to the High Street lie Back Lane and The Buthay. These narrow lanes formed an important part of the medieval layout providing access to the long narrow back plots (burgage plots) which served the individual properties. These plots were used for gardens, workshops and storage etc. Each plot was separated from its neighbour by a stone boundary wall. Within the plots many outbuildings and other structures were constructed for the various small scale industrial, horticultural and other activities that took place. Waste was usually disposed in pits dug into the garden so the area has potential as a rich source of archeological information.

Today, this area is distinguished by its quiet, enclosed and informal character with its mix of stone boundary walls and 'ad hoc' muddle of outbuildings and less formal back elevations to properties. This contrasts with the more formal, open and busy High Street. The main elements are as follows:-

### 1) The Informal character is provided by

- the variation in width of the narrow lane with its pinch points and grass verges and the absence of pavements and road markings and signs. The removal of the grass verges or changes to the road width will be resisted where this would result in a loss of the informal character.
- the mix of stone walls and cluttered mix of outbuildings, including the less formal rear elevations to properties which front the High Street. Many of these properties have been extended overtime as more space was required and this has resulted in a variety of roof profiles and extensions which add to the 'ad hoc', muddled, informal mix.

### 2) Historic elements

- The outbuilding, stone walls and their historic layout are an important legacy of the past and they should be retained and repaired. In particular, it is important that the long narrow nature of the burgage plots are preserved and the removal of the walls resulting in the combining of plots and loss of historic layout will be resisted.
- New uses and alterations should respect the historic character. The introduction of too many openings, changes to the size of the building and the use of unsympathetic modern details can harm the character.
- the use of some former outbuildings as garages with modern up and over doors is harmful to the historic character. The use of vertical boarded timber doors (non framed) would be more appropriate.

### 3) The strong feeling of enclosure

- is provided by the narrow width of the lanes which are bounded by high stone boundary walls and outbuildings located tight against the road. The widening of accesses and removal of boundary walls and outbuildings will be resisted as this would destroy the enclosed character.

*Back Lane is better preserved than The Buthay where more recent residential development and poorly designed garages and open grassed area on the village edge has resulted in the loss of enclosure. Both areas would benefit from landscaping and better treatment to boundaries to help screen adjoining modern development which impinges on the historic character.*



Back Lane with its informal, enclosed character



Stone boundary wall to Burgage plot

### Enhancement Strategy

- resist the removal of outbuildings, boundary walls and other historic elements and encourage their repair. New development which would harm the Burgage plots will be resisted
- seek better boundary treatment, landscaping and screening of adjoining modern development
- ensure any new development, alterations and details are sympathetic to the traditional character
- protect the informal character and enclosure to the lane by retaining grass verges, variation in width, walls and muddle of outbuildings
- seek improvements to footpath network.

## The land to the West

This comprises the open fields and higher land to the west of the settlement, including Arnolds Field trading estate and the Buthay, which contributes to the rural setting. It also provides the foreground to the buildings along the High Street allowing important views of the medieval core and particularly the malthouse, and the backs of the High street properties with their jumble of rear extensions, outbuildings and interesting roofscape. It is important that this area remains open and that development in the foreground associated with the industrial or housing area does not adversely affect views and the appreciation of the historic core beyond. Both these areas would benefit from landscaping improvements to screen and soften their impact.

*Landscaping at Arnolds field would enhance the view towards the Malthouse and historic core,*

### Enhancement Strategy

- retain existing trees & vegetation generally, promote additional tree & shrub planting and improvements to screen & soften the impact of modern development
- enhance the edges of the developed area
- any new or redevelopment proposals should seek to be of a scale and design sympathetic to those of the traditional buildings.
- seek to retain the open rural character and protect views of the historic settlement.



## OTHER FEATURES

### Building Materials

Traditional materials and details are an important aspect of the character. Wickwar lies on a narrow band of carboniferous limestone and most of the buildings in the village are made of this stone although there is also some pennant sandstone. Along the High Street, a more formal finish was required, and the majority of buildings would have traditionally been rendered with some lined to look like ashlar. However, in recent years many of the unlisted buildings have had their render removed to reveal the underlying stone. This has resulted in a change in the character and texture of the street with the dominance of stone frontages rather than the more formal looking render with its generally lighter appearance and variety of colours.

To the rear, away from public view, along the Back Lanes the materials used were predominantly stone and wood (with some red brick detailing around openings) and this should be used in any alterations or new work to reinforce the character.

### Architectural Details & Features

It is important to retain period details and features to preserve the traditional historic character. The use of inappropriate modern details, window proportions and materials can downgrade the appearance of the property and area as a whole.



*It is important that these details and features are retained to preserve the period character*

## OTHER AREAS / FEATURES REQUIRING ENHANCEMENT

Within the Conservation area there are a number of modern buildings and other negative features which detract from the special architectural and historic character and appearance of the conservation area. It is proposed to encourage enhancements to minimise the impact of these features as listed below:

**The overhead poles and wires.** The electricity supply in Wickwar is of historical interest as one of the earliest in the country and this should be investigated further. It is thought some of the original poles, characterised by the finials on the tops of the poles are still in use and these should be retained - perhaps with a plaque explaining their significance. In other parts of the area the removal of overhead wires and relocation or screening of transformer equipment (eg by Church) will be encouraged.

**The adjoining areas of modern residential development.** New development on edges of the historic village core and on approaches to the village has resulted in a loss of views and appreciation of the surrounding landscape setting. The harmful impact could be reduced by better landscaping, boundary treatment and sensitive management to preserve a sharp, but green village edge.

**Highway improvements and traffic management.** The main approaches and High Street are characterised by busy traffic, parking, poor floorscape and a clutter of signs. Traffic calming measures, a reduction / rationalisation of signs and appropriate environmental improvements and landscaping would improve the appearance of these routes. The further reduction in height and setback of boundary walls to improve visibility on approaches will be resisted as this will erode the character and sense of enclosure.

# PRESERVATION & ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

The main objective is to preserve and enhance the historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area, its historic buildings, features and their setting as follows:

## 1) Preserve and reinforce the historic character

By encouraging repairs and ensuring that any works to both the listed and unlisted buildings, features and surroundings are considered in relation to the historic context and use appropriate materials and detailing.

## 2) Minimise the impact of modern development

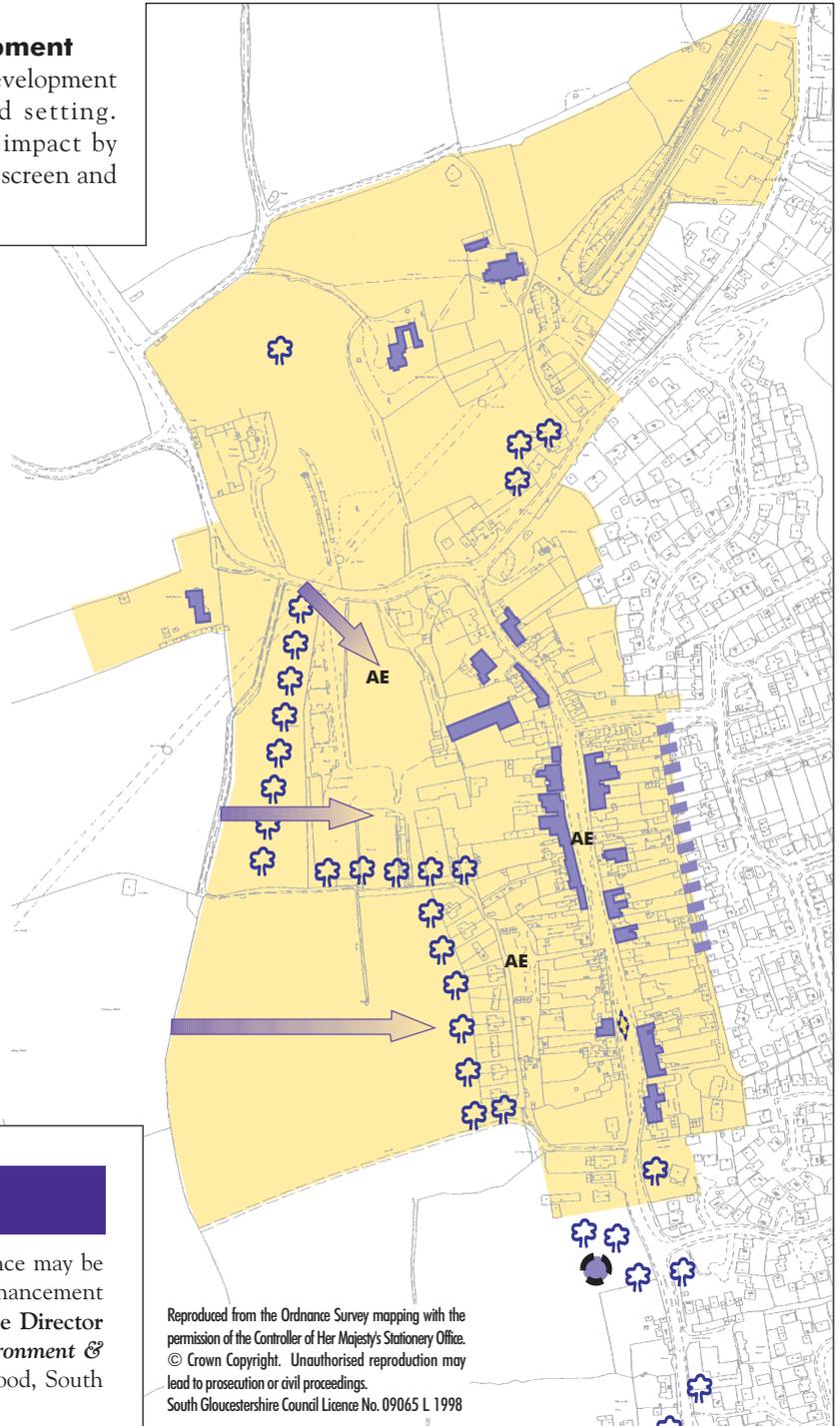
The historic core area is surrounded by modern development which impinges on the historic character and setting. Enhancement proposals will seek to reduce this impact by protecting important views and using landscaping to screen and soften the impact of obtrusive features.

## 3) Ensure any new development (or alterations) is sensitive to the historic context

Any new development needs to be small scale and sympathetic to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It is important that it does not adversely affect the setting of existing historic features or harm the underground archeological resource.

**KEY**

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Building
- AE** Areas for enhancement
-  Tree / Shrub planting
-  Protect important Views
-  Protect gaps on village approaches
-  Traffic management measures
-  Improvements to boundaries



## GRANTS AND FURTHER ADVICE

Financial support (up to 50%) and other forms of assistance may be available to individuals and local organisations towards enhancement schemes. For information and advice please contact **The Director Planning, Transportation & Environmental Services, Environment & Conservation Section**, Civic Centre, High Street, Kingswood, South Gloucestershire BS15 9TR. Tel: 01454 863579

This advice note was adopted by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance on the 24th October 1998 following a period of public consultation. It supplements the policies of the Local Plan and the Council will bear the guidelines in mind when assessing the merits of planning applications.

This leaflet takes into account the Good Practice Guide on Conservation Areas from English Heritage & PPG 15. This leaflet should be read in conjunction with the **Conservation Area Advice Note** which gives general advice & details of special controls and policies which apply in Conservation Areas.