

## 16.0 Management/restoration of particular features

### 16.1 Aims

- Clearly identify those features (such as traditional street signage for example) which make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area in the appraisal
- Produce information leaflets on the importance of certain features including why they are important and general advice on their care and management – these should be distributed to every household within the conservation area(s) subject to available resources
- Build a case (based on the thorough analysis of the conservation area) for a grant fund to be established identifying the particular feature for repair and reinstatement
- Seek regional or local sponsorship of a scheme for the reinstatement of particular features such as shopfronts
- Consultation with grant providers such as English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund should establish at an early stage the potential success of an application and identify a stream of funding for production of a detailed application
- Widely distribute conservation area appraisals and management plans to include public utilities and their contractors

### 16.2 Issues for Aylesbury Vale in relation to the management/restoration of particular features

**16.2.1** There are three groups of features that stand out from analysis of the sample survey and through consultation with local groups and development control. These are:

- Shopfronts
- Boundary walls
- Traditional paving materials

**16.2.2** Shopfronts are strongly represented in Aylesbury and Buckingham (and Winslow and Wendover outside the sample survey) and despite a good shopfront design guide, the issues of poor quality, badly designed shopfronts, inappropriate materials for fascias and poor colour schemes and lighting design are still significant issues in these market towns.

**16.2.3** Boundary walls are a district-wide issue and are also a Buildings at Risk issue throughout the district. Boundary walls often display the most locally distinctive material variations and methods of construction. Particular issues for Aylesbury Vale would include earth walls; witchert and cob that have lost their original capping. This is often the case where tiles and slates have replaced thatch. In addition, these walls are often rendered with inappropriate materials



55. Unrendered cob and witchert walls are part of the character of some areas within the district. These are often mistakenly rendered. If the incorrect materials (cement based render) are used this can have disastrous results.



56. The covering over with modern tarmac and poor repair of historic street surfaces and finishes in Aylesbury significantly erode the special character of parts of the conservation area.



57. Poor quality materials in the public realm (Buckingham)

and in some cases painted. These walls in many cases were left unrendered and this is part of the character of the walls (Figure 55). Stone and brick walls are also a strong characteristic of some parts of the district. Stewkley is a good example of where boundary walls play an important role in the character and appearance of the conservation area (see Stewkley Conservation Area Appraisal – Jan 2001). These are also suffering from poor maintenance with some losing capping details and flint panelling and some being the subject of poor repointing work which has damaged the character of the wall as well as potentially leading to their failure.

**16.2.4** The loss of historic surfaces and their replacement with areas of tarmac is a very significant issue, particularly evident in Aylesbury but seen in almost all of the sample survey settlements (Figure 56). In addition, the repair and maintenance of surfaces; broken, cracked and missing pavers and particularly poor or inappropriate repairs, especially after utilities have been installed, is a major issue in the towns but is also seen in the smaller settlements (Figure 57).

### 16.3 Strategy for Aylesbury Vale in relation to the management/restoration of particular features

**16.3.1** A shopfront survey should be undertaken for larger villages and the Market Towns; Aylesbury, Buckingham, Winslow, Wendover. All traditional shopfronts should be recorded and shopfronts requiring replacement should be identified. Those of a poor quality should be checked to confirm they have the appropriate approvals. If not, enforcement action should be considered.

**16.3.2** Advice should be provided on the importance

and appropriate care and repair of boundary walls. This could be in the form of an appendix to the management plan or as part of separate leaflet for distribution. There is a resource implication here. Taking, for example, the Witchert walls in the south-west of the District, mailshots to all owner/occupiers in these conservation areas is going to amount to a considerable number.

**16.3.3** An audit of historic street surfaces should be undertaken for all conservation areas. Historic survival should be noted on an appropriately scaled map and recommendations for reinstatement highlighted where appropriate.

**16.3.4** Audits of historic street surfaces should be provided to public utilities operators and their contractors. This should be introduced at a presentation to the public utilities providers.

### 16.4 Delivery of the strategy for Aylesbury Vale in relation to the management/restoration of particular features

#### 16.4.1 Short term

**16.4.1.1** Shopfronts should be recorded in some detail as part of the conservation area appraisal. In the towns Aylesbury, Buckingham, Winslow and Wendover a shopfront survey should form part of the conservation area appraisal.

**16.4.1.2** A dialogue should be opened with local amenity societies, town and parish councils to enlist their help in recording historic street surfaces. These should be recorded on appropriately scaled maps and sent to public utilities and the Buckinghamshire County Council Highways Department.

**16.4.1.3** Public utilities should be supplied with conservation area appraisals and be part of the key consultees.

**16.4.1.4** Boundary walls are already noted within the conservation area appraisals. Their condition should be recorded and action taken where necessary (see section 9; Buildings at Risk).

#### 16.4.2 Medium term

**16.4.2.1** Prepare an advice leaflet for boundary walls to be distributed district wide as part of a campaign to highlight their importance and retention. Consider obtaining part sponsorship for this work from the Heritage Lottery Fund or other local charities or building preservation trusts.

**16.4.2.2** Consider a District wide enforcement of unauthorised signage, lighting, fascias and shutters in conservation areas. This could be undertaken on a conservation area at a time basis with a zero tolerance approach so that it is considered fair.

### 16.4.3 Long term

**16.4.3.1** Consider the application of a THI or English Heritage grant scheme for the re-instatement of traditional shopfronts.

## 17.0 Traditional materials

### 17.1 Aims

- The use of traditional materials in conservation areas should be encouraged through conservation area appraisals, Listed Building and Conservation Area Advice Notes, and their use required through Listed Building Consent and planning permission for alterations and extensions in conservation areas
- The Local Authority should provide sample conditions to require the retention of local materials. These could be fixed to any permission to demolish older buildings in conservation areas
- Compile and disseminate information on sources and supplies of traditional materials
- Course providers (possibly the local authority) should widen their programme of courses on traditional materials skills. In particular, traditional paving has not been addressed

### 17.2 Issues for Aylesbury Vale in relation to traditional materials

**17.2.1** The Aylesbury Vale district has a unique and diverse collection of traditional materials and methods of construction but with no surviving source of traditional materials (except possibly straw grown for thatch). This poses a significant problem when considering the repair and maintenance of existing buildings and the construction of new buildings in conservation areas where traditional materials are proposed.

**17.2.2** The breadth of materials runs from the soft red bricks of Brill and the mix of brick and stone of Buckingham (with a number of important eighteenth century stone walls) through to the oolitic limestone of Turweston and runs down through to the chalk and flint of the edge of the Chilterns. One of the most interesting survivals is the belt of naturally occurring chalk and clay which has been utilised in boundary walls and houses and known locally as Witchert (or Wychett). This material has its own language to describe the various processes and features of the walling material; the underpin course constructed of

stone or stone rubble is known as the grumplings and the lifts of materials (with walls often containing horizontal bands illustrating the number of lifts – Figure 58) are known as ‘berries’. The cappings are usually clay tiles but thatch was once common.

**17.2.3** AVDC have produced three design guides on materials; *Building Materials* (1995), *Thatching* (2000) and *How to look after your Witchert building* (2002). These are to be commended and provide a good background to the importance of locally distinctive materials to the character and appearance of the conservation areas within the district.

**17.2.4** From analysis of the sample settlements, it is clear that locally distinctive materials are under considerable pressure. The limited availability of original material and the sometimes prohibitive cost of acceptable alternatives is a major concern for owners and the local authority. In particular and as highlighted in other sections of this report, boundary walls are perhaps the best indicator of the local vernacular and in the case of the earth walls, they are often in poor condition or have not been repaired or maintained with appropriate materials (often earth walls are



58. The witchert (and cob) walls of the district are constructed in lifts known as ‘berries’. These lifts can often be made out as subtle variations in colour and texture denote the next lift. This is a key characteristic of this building type.

## The thatch tradition of Aylesbury Vale

In the case of listed buildings listed building consent should be sought for a change of material for example a change from combed wheat reed to water reed. This is supported by guidance in **Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment** and English Heritage Guidance: *Thatch and Thatching* (2000).

The main aims of requesting an application for listed building consent is to ensure the prevention of the loss of important historic fabric, particularly in the case where it is proposed to remove all the thatch material as important archaeological evidence can be lost through unrecorded removal. In addition, a request for listed building consent is also to ensure that the special character of the building is not lost through in-sensitive use of an unsuitable material on a certain type of building.

Many of the cottages, barns, outbuildings and boundary walls were designed to take straw thatch as opposed to reed thatch. Their form, roof pitch and shape have derived from the use of that material. The use of water reed could be extremely damaging to the character of these roofs.

In the case of unlisted thatch buildings in conservation areas the loss of thatch for an alternative material such as tile or slate should be resisted as the loss of these thatching traditions is a significant erosion of the local distinctiveness of villages within the Aylesbury Vale. Where there is a clearly defined thatching tradition within a conservation area, this should be protected through the use of Article 4 Directions.

rendered with cement based renders which do not allow the walls to breath). This is a national as well as a district issue.

**17.2.5** An often over-looked aspect of local materials is the traditional paving treatments which are rich and varied across the district. The latter also has remnant sections of river washed cobbles to some parts of the town. In Cuddington for example (along with a number of other villages notably Haddenham), areas of stone setts forming historic pavements survive (Figure 59). Long Crendon (not part of the sample survey) has a strong traditional palette of stone setts to cross-overs (Figure 60). Survivals of stone setts are also seen in Brill (Figure 61) and other settlements such as Buckingham.

**17.2.6** The thatching tradition of the Aylesbury Vale is being significantly eroded through inappropriate replacement of traditional straw coats with water reed. The replacement of traditional flush wrapover ridges with untraditional block cut ridges is also a major issue

throughout the district. This was evident in the sample settlements, particularly Weston Turville where all of the ridges were block cut albeit with fairly simple patterns (Figure 62).

## 17.3 Strategy for Aylesbury Vale in relation to traditional materials

**17.3.1** AVDC should consider, possibly in partnership with Buckinghamshire County Council (Bucks CC), the establishment of a grant fund for repairs to boundary walls and thatching. Successful grant schemes in other counties (Hampshire is a good example) have ensured the survival of boundary walls and regional thatching traditions.

**17.3.2** AVDC should consider undertaking a thatching survey (of thatch buildings in conservation areas initially) to establish the survival of the thatching tradition in the district. This will provide useful background information for enforcement and making a case for a grant fund.



59. Survival of historic pavements in Cuddington.



60. Stone setts to pavement cross-overs in Long Crendon.

**17.3.3** AVDC should consider linking with English Heritage, the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, to run a number of courses on the care and repair of materials within the district focusing on the earth walled buildings but also advising on such areas as mortar and render specification for traditional structures. These could be held on-site with demonstrations and opportunities to participate.

**17.3.4** AVDC or the Bucks Historic Environment Forum should open a dialogue with the local thatchers/thatching body with the support of English Heritage to establish whether there is any common ground and how receptive local thatchers would be to a district or county thatching policy.

**17.3.5** Paragraph 19.3.3 identifies the need for historic street audits. This is also directly relevant to this section.

**17.3.6** There should be a presumption in favour of the retention of local materials wherever possible. Where demolition is accepted, materials should be reused on site or donated to a traditional materials ‘bank’ administered by either AVDC or Bucks CC.

## 17.4 Delivery of a strategy for Aylesbury Vale in relation to traditional materials

### 17.4.1 Short term

**17.4.1.1** AVDC should consider undertaking a survey of thatch buildings within the District’s conservation areas initially. A pilot survey could be undertaken to ascertain the necessary resources for extending this to the entire District.

**17.4.1.2** The English Heritage ‘Listed buildings on-line’ website could help in estimating the distribution of listed thatch buildings in order to establish which conservation areas should form part of a pilot project.

### 17.4.2 Medium term

**17.4.2.1** AVDC should consider providing subsidised practical course for local people on the care and repair of boundary walls. These could be run with English Heritage and SPAB (regional groups) and cover such topics as repointing in lime mortar, lime rendering, repair of cob and witchert, limewashing and the simple repair and re-painting of windows.

### 17.4.3 Long term

**17.4.3.1** Consideration should be given to the establishment of a regional (possibly County wide) policy on thatch which can be adopted by the various local authorities and hopefully supported by the local thatchers.

**17.4.3.2** The possibility of a materials ‘bank’ should be explored whereby surplus materials are by way of a planning condition (on demolitions of buildings within conservation areas or the removal of a traditional paving component) given to the local authority or County Council for use in the repair and extension of public buildings, boundary walls or pavements.



61. Survival of stone setts in Brill.



62. Block cut ridges on straw roofs forms the predominant thatch finish in Weston Turville (the hybrid thatch – thatching advisory guide, AVDC)