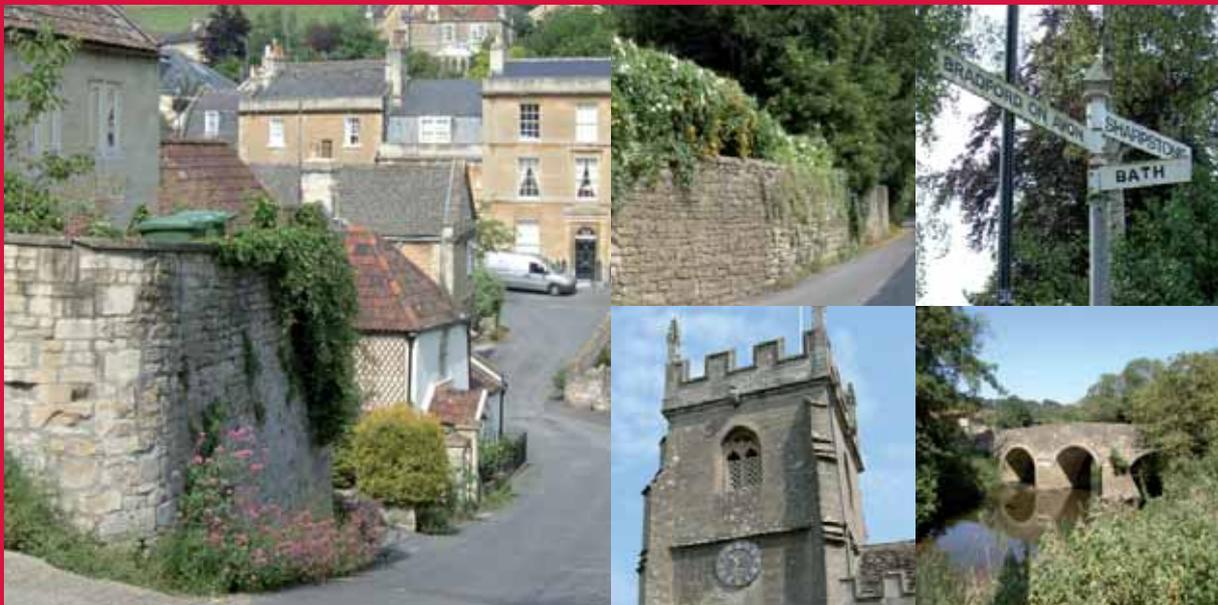


Bath and North East Somerset  
Planning Services

# Freshford and Sharpstone Conservation Area Character Appraisal



March 2007



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# Introduction

Freshford and Sharpstone were recognised as having special architectural and historic interest and were designated as Conservation Areas in November 1975.

Bath and North East Somerset Council has a duty to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of Conservation Areas in exercising its planning powers, and to periodically reappraise the boundaries. This appraisal is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The appraisal identifies elements 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.

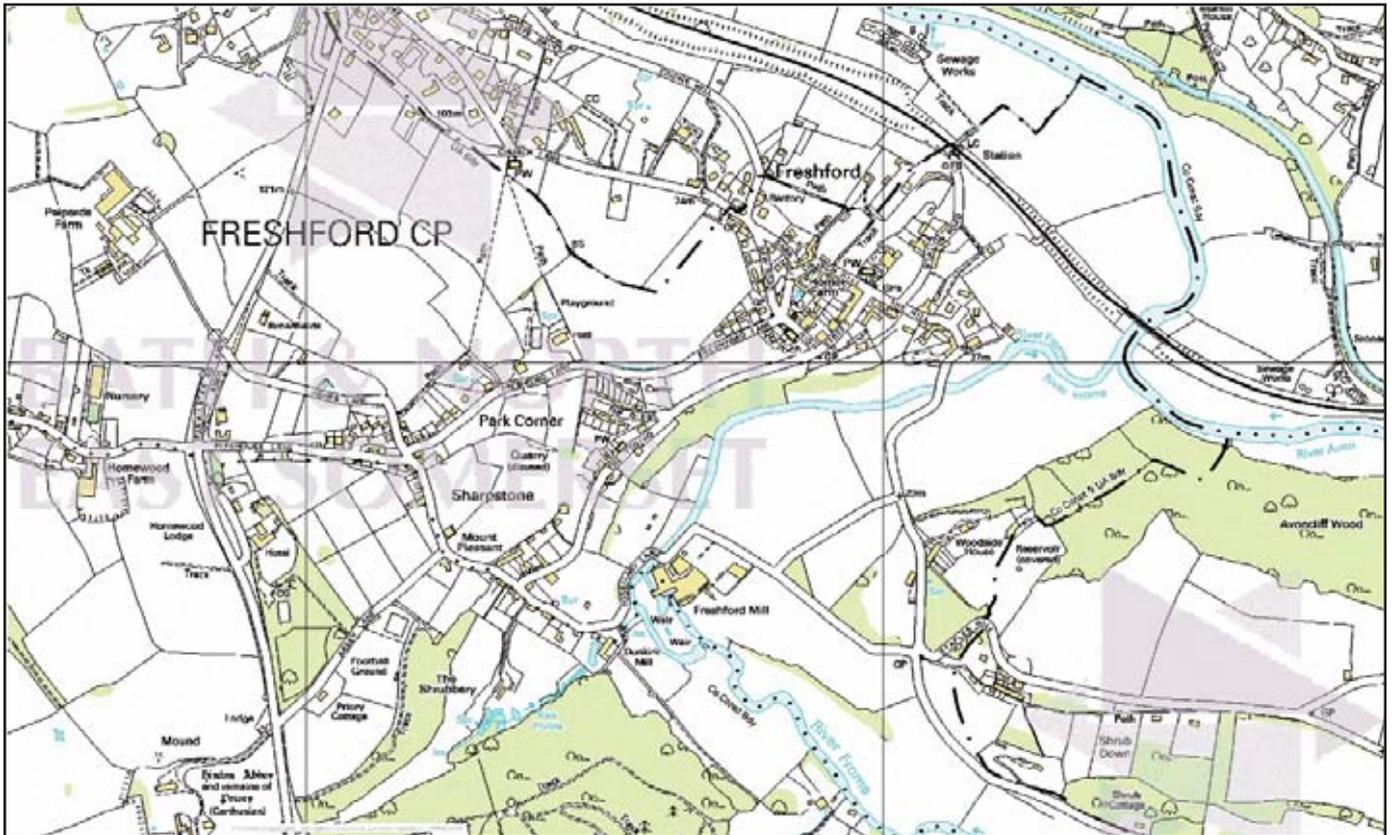
The preparation of the statement also enabled local residents to participate in the identification of features which are important to the special character of the area in which they live.



## Summary of Special Interest

- The secluded location in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- The landscape setting within a valley, framed by hills and woodland
- The proximity of the River Frome as a landscape feature and formerly the power source for the wool mills
- The physical separation of Freshford and Sharpstone by the Tynning
- The close grain of the buildings, often hard on to the road
- Remnants of the industrial past, in particular Dunkirk Mill, Freshford Mill, and former weavers' cottages
- The familiar landmark of the brewery chimney
- The variety of traditional building materials
- High rubble stone boundary walls
- The wide range of buildings of varying status within a small area
- Narrow, unmarked roads and rural verges
- The particular contribution of the natural landscape, trees and vegetation to the character of the area





Modern map of Freshford and Sharpstone

# Assessment of Special Interest

## Location and Setting

The small parish of Freshford is located on the Somerset / Wiltshire border, six miles south east of the city of Bath, at the confluence of the Rivers Frome and Avon. The Conservation Area consists of the village of Freshford and the nearby hamlet of Sharpstone.

Though collectively known as 'Freshford', and sharing a Parish Council, the two settlements are different in their layout, and physically separate. The parish boundary between Freshford and Hinton Charterhouse runs along Rosemary Lane, so that some buildings in Sharpstone are within the neighbouring parish. References to 'the village' refer to Freshford village, while 'Freshford' refers to the Conservation Area as a whole.



The landscape setting of open countryside framed by woodland is essential to the rural character of the Conservation Area



The River Frome encloses the village to the south



The physical setting of Freshford has changed little over the centuries

### General Character and Plan Form

The physical character of Freshford derives largely from its landscape setting, nestled within the slopes of the Avon valley and confined to the south and east by the River Frome and the railway respectively. These physical boundaries enclose the village and emphasise the secluded nature of the settlement within the landscape.

Much of the charm of both settlements derives from the steep, narrow streets, high rubble stone walls and the interplay between dramatic open landscape and the mellow fabric of the buildings.

There is a contrast between the larger properties, which tend to be tucked away behind high walls, gates and hedges, and the more humble mill workers' cottages which are often built hard on to the street.

The appearance of the village and hamlet were largely moulded by the cloth trade which flourished from the early 17th century to the late Victorian era. Evidence of this industry remains at the now derelict site of Freshford Mill, set slightly apart from the village on the opposite bank of the river, the converted Dunkirk Mill, and the numerous weavers' cottages in the village.



### Landscape Setting

A late 18th century description of Freshford relates that it was 'a considerable parish, situated on the southern declivity of a hill in a part of the country well cultivated and rendered picturesque and romantic by a pleasing intermixture of hills, woods, glens and deep vallies'<sup>1</sup>. The physical setting of Freshford, after nearly two centuries, remains largely unchanged; picturesque and tranquil.

The settlements lie within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the Bristol-Bath Green Belt. These designations signify the importance of the landscape setting and help prevent development which would be harmful to the area.

Freshford and Sharpstone lie within the 'Bathford and Limpley Stoke Valley' area as defined in *Rural Landscapes of Bath and North East Somerset*<sup>2</sup>.

1. *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset*, Rev J Collinson  
 2. B&NES 2003

## Historic Development

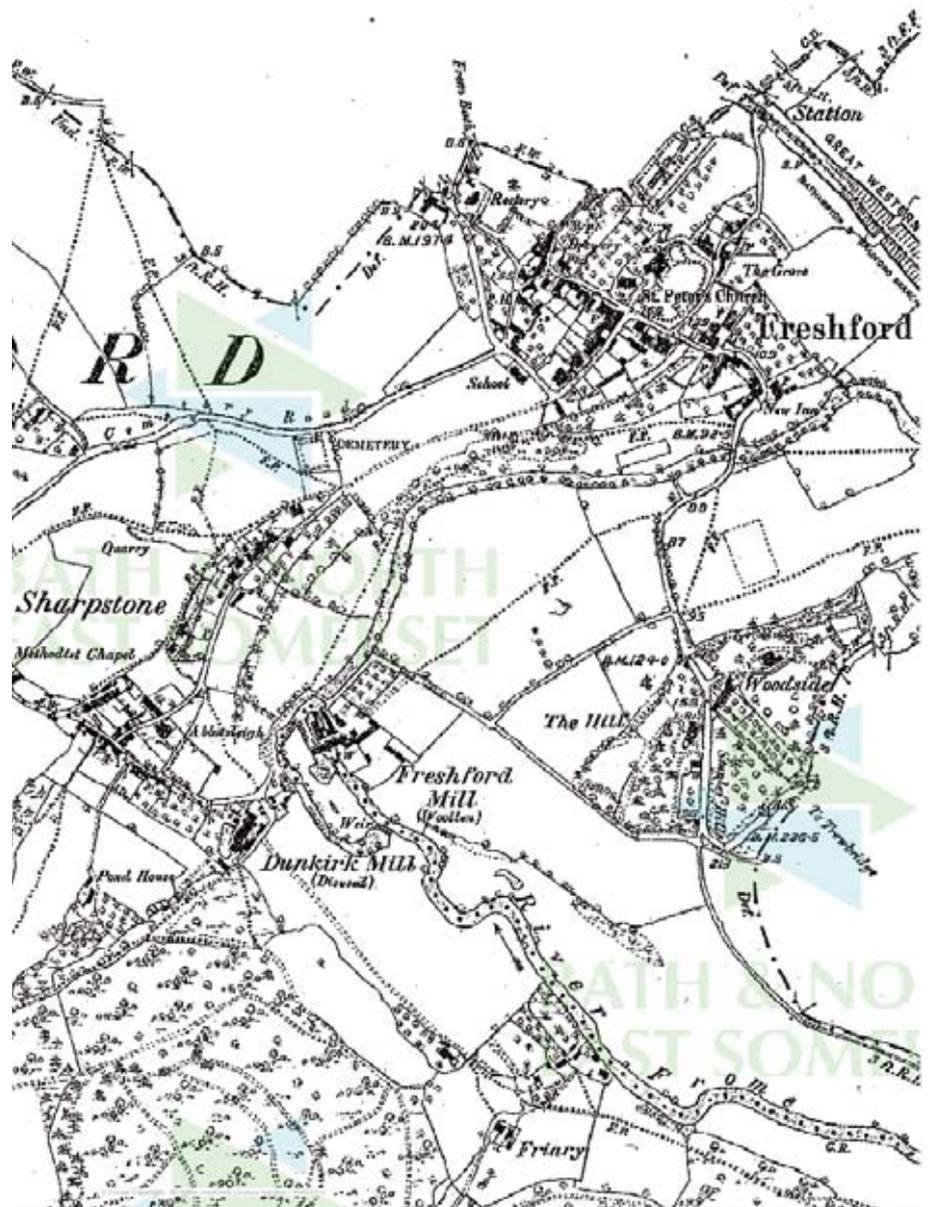
The history of Freshford goes back to Saxon times, the settlement being already established when land at 'Fersceforde' was given to Bath Abbey after the Norman Conquest.

It has traditionally been a prosperous place, enjoying a thriving manufacturing industry and attracting numerous visitors, drawn by its salubrious environment and proximity to Bath.

Freshford and Sharpstone have long been associated with the fulling and cloth trade, first as a cottage industry and then as a prosperous manufacturing centre. Sharpstone expanded mainly in the 19th century to house the growing number of mill workers.

Changes in technology and the industrial revolution affected the way in which cloth was manufactured; machines replaced workers, and the industry finally died out towards the end of the 19th century. With the collapse of the wool trade, the mill site was subsequently used as a manufactory of rubber components for the automotive industry. The factory closed in the 1990s.

The arrival of the railway in 1857 brought renewed prosperity to the area, allowing easy access to Bath and Bradford on Avon. Not only could the factories export their cloth but, as that industry declined, the washerwomen of the village became renowned for their skills, importing the grubby laundry of the city dwellers for washing and airing in the country air at Freshford<sup>3</sup>. Nowadays the railway serves as a commuter link to Bath and as a convenient mode of transport for visitors to the area.



OS first edition map of 1885



3. *Freshford – History of a Somerset Village*, Alan Dodge, 2000



## Spatial Analysis

Freshford village is clustered around the parish church of St. Peter and the adjacent manor house, set on a plateau overlooking the wooded slopes to the north, and the open valley to the east. The tall chimney of the former brewery building is a familiar landmark, drawing the eye to the centre, and accentuating the diminutive character of the village.

Sharpstone is considerably smaller and largely linear, built along just two narrow lanes. Sharpstone Lane leads across the hillside through the hamlet, meeting Rosemary Lane which climbs up the steep slope from Freshford Mill.

The two settlements are separated by a stretch of land called The Tynning, a medieval word denoting an area of enclosed land. This is valuable both as a village green, and as a 'no-mans land' between the two settlements, preventing them from merging through infill development.

The water meadows along the river's edges provide an historic buffer zone between the flood-prone river and the buildings. The landscape surrounding the village has been managed and cultivated over the centuries, and the landform retains the late medieval enclosures and field boundaries. These contribute to the wider historic interest and appearance of the area but can be easily lost through insensitive development.

## Archaeological Significance

The earliest existing building is probably St. Peter's Church, the oldest part of which is the tower which dates from the early 15th century.

The area has notable industrial archaeology, particularly Freshford Mill and Dunkirk Mill. Documentary sources indicate a mill in Freshford as early as 1086 and a mill is known to have existed at this location in the 1540s. Substantial remnants of the 16th or early 17th century mill buildings still remain<sup>4</sup>.

Dunkirk Mill is the converted shell of a late 18th century wool mill. The building contained some interesting features such as the wheel pit, steam engine with chimney and some cast iron columns. It is now a dwelling.

A series of narrow roads encircle the church and manor, with lanes leading away to Freshford Station, down the hill to the river crossing towards Trowbridge, up the steep hill towards Bath, and westward to Sharpstone and Park Corner.

The village is approached via a narrow road heading steeply down into the valley. Dark Lane was originally the main route into the village and aptly named, as its overhanging branches create a gloomy approach which opens up to reveal the village nestled in the valley. New Road, built in the mid 19th century, provides a less constricted passage.

The grain of the buildings is close, with the occasional larger house set back in its own grounds. In contrast to the historic layout, modern development at the edge of the village consists of detached dwellings in generous plots.

## 4. Bath and North East Somerset SMR



Narrow lanes enclosed by boundary walls and hedges are a particular feature of the area

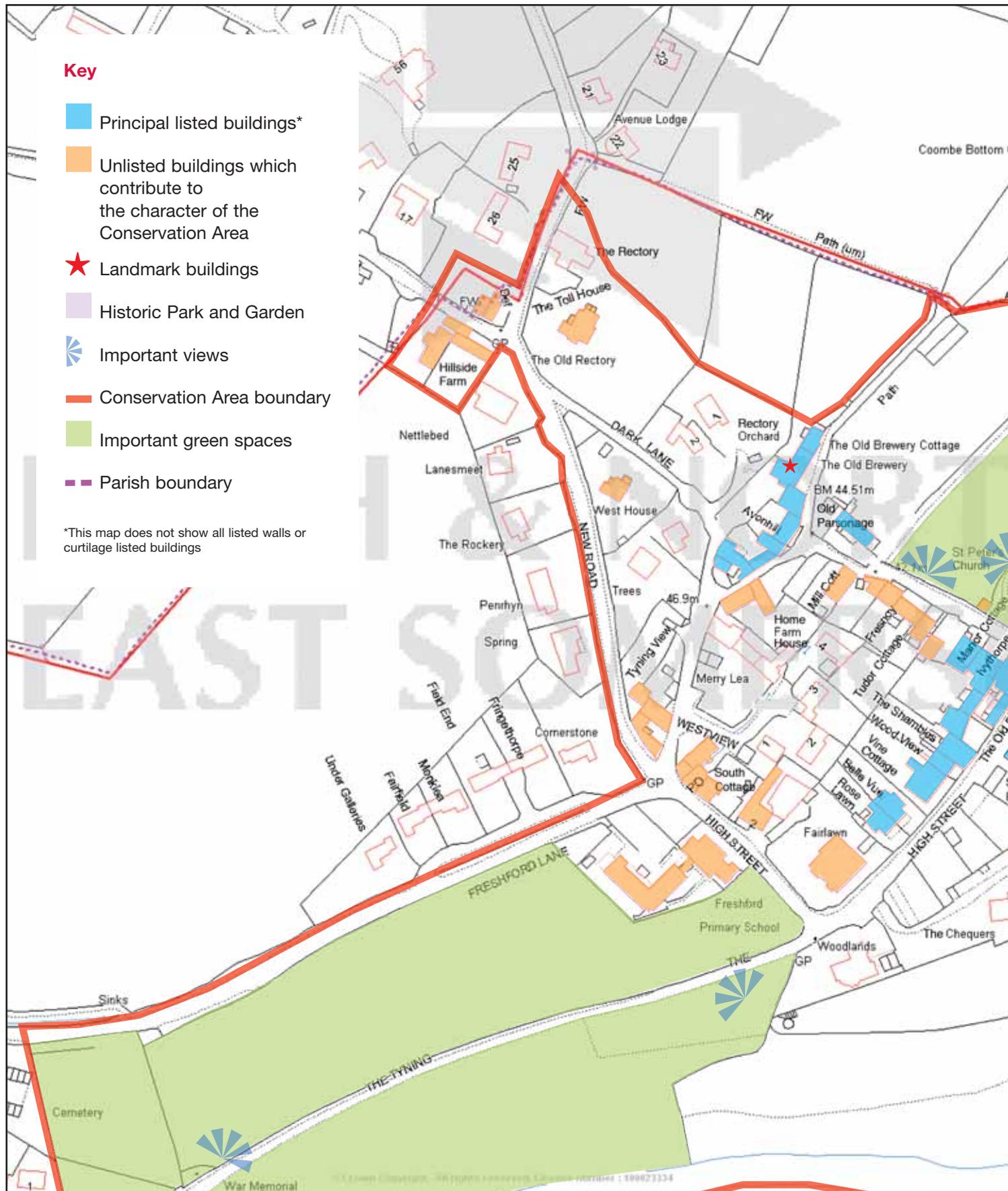


The water meadows along the river's edge separate the buildings from the flood-prone river



# Freshford Conservation Area

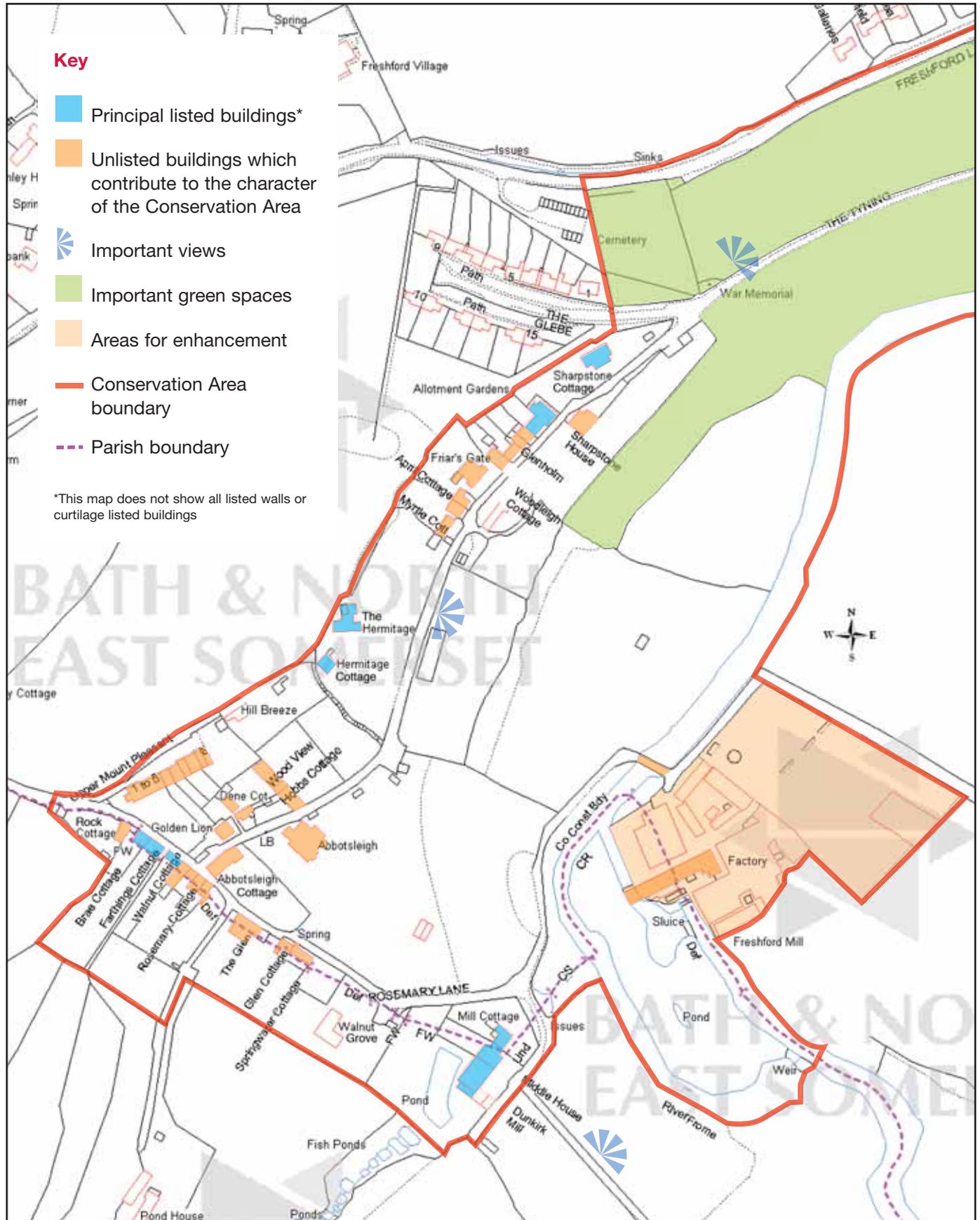
(extended 3 April 2007)





# Sharpstone Conservation Area

(extended 3 April 2007)



## Key Views and Vistas

A good vantage point from which to view the village is the parish church in the centre. The churchyard is a welcome space to rest after a climb up The Hill, and gives a fine aspect over the village and beyond. Views to surrounding hills and wooded slopes emphasise the impression of being tucked away in the valley setting, with little sign of neighbouring habitation visible. The preservation of the historic roofscape in this area is particularly important given its visual prominence.

The built form is fairly dense in Freshford, but occasional gaps between buildings allow far reaching views across the valley, and the hilly topography provides many attractive glimpses of the immediate area.

Sharpstone in particular enjoys fabulous views to the east, as the land drops away across the valley floor into the Wiltshire countryside. A distant view of the 18th century country house The Hall is also visible on the hillside opposite.



The hilly topography provides many fine vantage points to the village and surrounding countryside



# Character Analysis

Various dwellings betray their former uses both in their architectural style and their names such as Golden Lion Lodge, Church House, Abbots Leigh Coach House, The Old Brewery amongst others. Retaining the names and architectural features of these buildings helps preserve the character of the village.

## Architectural and Historic Qualities of the Buildings

Freshford and Sharpstone have a significant number of listed buildings. The most prominent public building is the parish church of St Peter which is listed Grade II\*. The churchyard also has a number of impressive Georgian chest tombs, four of which are listed in their own right. The chest tombs represent a good collection of classical and traditional local tomb forms and contribute to the setting of the church.

Several large Georgian houses enjoy prominent sites. Grade II\* listed Freshford Manor is the most important house in the village, taking pride of place alongside the church. Nearby, at the top of Church Hill, a cluster of 18th and 19th century houses form an attractive group of polite buildings. Ivythorpe is a particularly fine early 18th century building also listed Grade II\*.

### Character Areas

Freshford and Sharpstone form two distinct character areas. They share a parish church and local amenities, and have historically been associated, the residents working mostly in the mills. It is therefore appropriate to look at them together, whilst appreciating their physical separation and differences in character.

### Activity and Former Uses

The single biggest influence on the development of the area for the last 400 years has been the cloth trade. Although the site at Freshford Mill has been derelict for some time, the buildings remain – a substantial symbol of the former industrial nature of the village. The earlier Dunkirk Mill which is presently just outside the Conservation Area has been converted into a dwelling.



The use of local limestone gives Freshford a distinct sense of place



Interspersed between the grand old houses, numerous cottages and outbuildings complete the streetscape. The variations in height, roof pitch and decorative details contribute to the rustic charm of the historic streets.

Freshford Bridge crosses the River Frome near The Inn along the road towards Trowbridge. Sixteenth century in origin, it has been carefully restored and is now listed. The bridge is mentioned by Leland who *'rode over Fressheford Bridge, of 2 or 3 faire new arches of stone'* on his way to Bradford on Avon in 1542<sup>5</sup>.

In Sharpstone, the most prominent house is The Hermitage, a substantial hall house of 15th century origin, although much altered. Its supreme position on the hillside above the sweeping valley below is emphasised by the raised pathway of rock-faced stone which zigzags up to the entrance. The landscaped gardens have an open aspect and are entirely to the front of the building, allowing the passer-by to appreciate the fine building within its setting and the resident to fully enjoy the spectacular views.

The bulk of Sharpstone is made up of charming, mostly 19th century former mill workers' cottages built of local stone. These climb up the steep hillside with an artless charm and as groups are integral to the character of the area. High 'weaver's windows' are a charming local detail found in many of the former workers cottages.

Abbotsleigh and its associated cottage and coach house form a group at the junction of Sharpstone Lane and Rosemary Lane at one end of the village while Sharpstone House enjoys a prominent position at the other end of the lane. These 19th century houses are built in a restrained Victorian style while Church House and Sharpstone Cottage exhibit the early 19th century fashion for gothick details.

Most of the buildings and boundary walls are built from the local Oolitic limestone which gives the area a mellow unity and a distinct sense of place. Pennant stone paving, kerbs and setts survive in places and make an important contribution to the streetscape.

Natural clay tiles are common, although a significant number of buildings retain their Cotswold stone tiles. Where roofs have been re-covered in concrete tiles or other man-made materials, this detracts markedly from the general character of the buildings.

The simple cast iron finger-posts found at road junctions are appropriate in this rural setting, and in some cases would benefit from restoration. Iron railings are found in some cases instead of stone walls for field boundaries. These would also benefit from repair in places.

The diversity of building types and variety of ornament gives Freshford and Sharpstone a particular appeal. With an impressive medieval hall house, elegant Palladian houses, frivolous Georgian gothick and simple weavers' cottages, the fashions of the previous centuries are well illustrated in the buildings.



Traditional stone tiles contribute to the attractive roofscape in Freshford

The diversity of building types and decorative details adds to the special interest in the area





## Unlisted Buildings of Merit

Many modest cottages and other buildings form the bulk of the built form, and knit the village together into a coherent whole. In such a small community every building, from the grand houses to the humble outbuildings, contributes to the exceptional group value of the whole and to the overall character of the area.



There has been a general resistance to excessive gentrification, which can rob humble buildings of their charm and dilute the varied character of a traditional village.



In addition to the statutorily listed buildings, there are a significant number of buildings which are of local significance and could be considered for inclusion on the Council's list of Locally Important Buildings. A more detailed survey is required to identify possible candidates.

Unlisted buildings make a major contribution to the streetscape



## Trees and Green Spaces

The most notable public green spaces are The Tynning and the churchyard. The water meadows along the river's edge provide a pastoral setting for the village itself.

The wooded slopes which frame the village intensify the secluded rural environment while individual mature trees are important to the setting of the buildings in the Conservation Area. Informal grassy banks and wildflowers soften the road edges.

Large formal gardens attached to the grander houses enhance the setting of the higher status buildings and contrast with the more modest plots attached to the cottages. Those of Freshford Manor and The Old House are on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.



Soft verges, wildflowers and mature trees further emphasise the rural setting

## Negative Features

Road signage and markings tend towards the suburban in some areas, generally associated with modern development. In places traditional signage has been replaced or obscured by standard, modern signage which detracts from the special interest of the area.

Modern housing tends to deviate from the close grain of the historic village, while concrete tiles and other modern materials contrast poorly with existing traditional details.

Some rubble stone buildings have had their traditional lime-wash finish removed or replaced with inappropriate modern paint.

## Neutral Areas

Like most villages, Freshford and Sharpstone have absorbed a small but significant amount of post-war housing, most notably in the Glebe cul de sac in Sharpstone and along New Road and Freshford Lane in Freshford. These neutral areas are excluded from the Conservation Area.

Excessive or ill-placed road signage and markings can detract from the informal rural character



Most of the later development uses the local stone and, although lacking the traditional detailing of the older buildings, blends fairly unobtrusively into the landscape setting. Development within these areas should take into account their proximity to the historic village and the effect on the setting of the Conservation Area.

## General Condition

Freshford is a well-to-do area, and the good condition of the buildings reflects this. There are currently no buildings in Freshford on the Council's Buildings at Risk Register. A thorough survey of the area would help to identify possible candidates.

The ruined Freshford Mill has a very strong connection with the village, and is in a sadly dilapidated state at present. Proposals for conversion of the mill buildings are being brought forward.

The ruined shell of Freshford Mill



## 2007 Boundary Changes

(see centre page map)

Reassessment of the Conservation Area boundary is one of the purposes of an appraisal. The boundary was amended to include:

- Dunkirk Mill and Freshford Mill. Dunkirk Mill is a listed building and the collection of mill buildings, weirs and ponds are of considerable architectural and historic interest. In addition, the mills are directly related to the development of the village, providing employment and bringing prosperity to the area over several centuries. Were it not for the existence of the mills, the workers' cottages and grand houses of the mill owners would not have proliferated to form the village that exists today. The mills are integral to the character of Freshford and Sharpstone and of considerable interest in their own right.
- The immediate setting of the water meadows by the river. This area includes a section of the river itself including two stone bridges (one listed) which contribute to special architectural and historic interest of the village and merit the extra protection that Conservation Area status affords. Trees in this area are also protected by Conservation Area designation.
- Some important green spaces, notably The Tynning. This functions as a 'village green' as well as forming an important separation between the distinct character areas of Freshford village and Sharpstone. The inclusion of The Tynning links the two areas to form one larger Conservation Area.
- Some small areas at the edge of the village which contain buildings of special architectural or historic interest, notable stone walls or traditional buildings

within the village setting. This ensures that all buildings of merit within the immediate village boundary benefit from the protection of Conservation Area status.

## Summary of Issues and Recommended Management Proposals

- Encroaching new development or infill may affect the integrity of the village within its rural setting. Any new development within the village or its setting should take into account the grain of the village, the traditional materials and the special architectural and historic interest of the area as a whole. Applications for new development will be carefully assessed and inappropriate proposals will be refused.
- Unsuitable alterations such as the use of plastic windows and doors on unlisted buildings and the loss of traditional roof coverings detract from the character of the area. It is recommended that an Article 4 Direction be considered to control alterations to doors, windows and roofs. This would help prevent further loss of traditional details which cannot be controlled at present.

- Alterations to boundary walls or inappropriate repair techniques such as the use of cement mortars or unsuitable pointing has occurred in some cases. Protection of the boundary walls is a high priority and they should not be neglected. Traditional repairs with lime mortar should be encouraged. The removal of boundary walls to provide access or parking should be resisted. Enforcement action should be considered in cases of unauthorised works which adversely affect the character of the Conservation Area, and an Article 4 Direction is recommended to control demolition of walls under 1m high (walls over 1m are protected under the Conservation Area designation).
- Unlisted buildings of particular local importance for their architectural interest, their contribution to the local environment or for their historical associations should be considered for inclusion on the list of Locally Important Buildings which is currently being prepared by the Council. Locally Important Buildings are protected by existing policies in the *Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan* (emerging).



Cast iron finger-posts would benefit from restoration in some cases

- The unmarked, rural character of the road and the cast iron finger-posts contribute significantly to the character of the village. Any works to the highway or streetscape should take into account the special character of the area and, where relevant, be considered with reference to the Adopted *Streetscape Manual*<sup>6</sup>.
- Trees provide a significant contribution to the special character of the Conservation Area and there are special provisions for their protection under the Town and Country Planning Act (1990). Where appropriate the Council will use its powers to make Tree Preservation Orders to protect trees that are under threat. Planting new specimen trees should be encouraged to provide and maintain a varied age range of trees and sustain the appearance of the area for the future.
- The use of underground cables for services would help prevent the streetscape and wider landscape being interrupted by overhead wires.
- The policies that govern development in Conservation Areas in the *Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan* (emerging) should be carried forward into any replacement Local Development Document.

Overhead wires can detract from the streetscape



## Planning Policy Context

A Conservation Area is designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990). 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 approach suggested by English Heritage<sup>7</sup>.

The *Joint Replacement Structure Plan* (2002) and *Regional Planning Guidance 10* (2001) (to be replaced in 2007 by the *Regional Spatial Strategy*) contain broad policies regarding the built and historic environment and the Green Belt.

More detailed policies are to be found in the *Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan* (emerging). This was examined at a Public Inquiry in 2005. The Council has now prepared a response to the Inspector's Report from this Inquiry and modifications to the plan have been proposed. The *Local Plan* is programmed for adoption in early 2007. It will then be 'saved' for three years in the Council's *Local Development Framework*.

## Community Involvement

Public support and involvement is essential to the successful management of Conservation Areas. Following the production of a first draft by Bath and North East Somerset Council, copies of this appraisal and the accompanying maps were provided for the parish council and local Members. 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 5 March 2007.

## General Guidance

*Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan* (emerging)

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*

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

*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*

<sup>6</sup> *Streetscape Manual*, Bath & North East Somerset Council, adopted April 2005

<sup>7</sup> *Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals*, English Heritage, 2005

## Further Reading

*Freshford – An Historical Survey*, Alan Dodge, 1979

*Freshford – History of a Somerset Village*, Alan Dodge, 2000

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

www.freshford.com is a local history site with further information, maps and photos of Freshford and Sharpstone.

## 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 394171  
Unlisted Buildings and Conservation Area Consent: 01225 394171  
Works to trees within Conservation Areas: 01225 394171  
Planning Permission: 01225 477722  
Archaeology: 01225 477651  
Planning Policy: 01225 477548

Email: [historic\\_environment@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto: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 Freshford and Sharpstone 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.