

FRESHFORD and SHARPSTONE

Protecting Historic Villages through Shared Space Principles

New proposals for movement, parking and streetscape quality

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hamilton-baillie
a s s o c i a t e s

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND 1

CONTEXT 2

ANALYSIS AND OBSERVATIONS..... 4

 Local activities 5

 Movement 6

 Parking 7

 Streetscape 8

SHARED SPACE – CHANGING THE MENTAL MAP OF THE VILLAGE 9

PROPOSALS 12

 Gates to the village 14

 Key junctions 18

 Key pedestrian links 24

 Parking 26

PHASING 28

THE WAY FORWARD 29

APPENDIX 30

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BACKGROUND

Hamilton-Baillie Associates Ltd have been commissioned by Freshford Parish Council to produce a document that can provide the Council with a series of ideas and suggestions on how to safely and effectively integrate pedestrians, traffic and cars into the historical grain of the villages of Freshford and Sharpstone. This is part of a series of studies in which the Parish Council has been actively involved. These include Freshford and Sharpstone Conservation Area Character Appraisal (prepared by B&NES Planning Services) and the Village Plan (in preparation).

This study endorses the above documents and aims to supplement the Village Plan with some thoughts on how people move around the village and how to improve the local street network. It summarizes our analysis and observations of the current problems relating to the relationship between traffic, parking and the public realm in the village, and identifies some initial proposals.

The principles underpinning this report are largely based on the emerging street design concepts known as “shared space”, which is gaining support as a means to address the relationship between traffic, people and places whilst avoiding the clutter of signs and road markings generally associated with conventional highway schemes. These principles aim to exploit the distinctive qualities of the villages of Freshford and Sharpstone through proposals based on low-key interventions and small-scale, minor changes that minimise the intrusion of highway components whilst helping to preserve a special sense of place.

The report should be read as a working document, intended to aid discussion and debate within the village community, and between the Parish Council, B&NES, and other interested parties.

CONTEXT



The Parish Council of Freshford includes the two settlements of Freshford and Sharpstone separated by the village green known as The Tying. They are part of the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Bath Green Belt. Most of the built up area has also been a Conservation Area since 1975, more recently extended to include The Tying.

The area is enclosed in a strong physical setting: the A36 on the west side, hills and the railway on the north side and the river Frome on the south-eastern side.

The river has brought wealth to this village since 17th century, when the cloth trade developed, and the surviving mills mark this industrial past. Dunkirk Mill has been restored and converted into dwellings, and Freshford Mill is awaiting planning permission for a similar redevelopment.

The local wealth also produced remarkable buildings such as the Brewery, St. Peter's Church, and Freshford Manor that are well preserved and still form a series of strong landmarks.

The villages can be approached from the A36 through Church Lane and Abbey Lane. Ashes Lane and Pipehouse Lane are minor roads to the village, and access to Freshford is not indicated from the main road. The last stretch of Pipehouse Lane has an eastwards one-way restriction.



From the south, Staples Hill gives access to Freshford through a delightful stone bridge across the River Frome, that is often used by long distance ramblers who walk the riverside path.

The minor road network features a series of narrow lanes enclosed by limestone walls or hedges.

Public transport is reasonably good due to the presence of the railway station, providing an almost hourly service to Bristol, Bath and Salisbury from around 6.30 to 10.30 pm. Buses are less frequent: every two hours from around 7.30 until 17.00 (six services a day)

The centre of Freshford is represented by the junction between Freshford Lane, the High Street, West Lane and New Road. A number of local activities are located at this junction: the Shop and Post Office, Freshford School and the Surgery. Freshford Memorial Hall is located further west on Freshford Lane, between Freshford and Sharpstone, and it is fronted by a small car park.



Sharpstone discloses along two narrow lanes characterised by traditional stone materials: Rosemary Lane (see bottom image) leading to Freshford Mill with an average width of 3 m, and The Tynning, leading to the Village Green and Freshford.



ANALYSIS AND OBSERVATIONS

Access to the village

The roads leading to the village from the A36 are small country lanes with an average width of 4 - 4.5 m. The nature of the surrounding road network does not appear to encourage through traffic in the village, but local activities require access by delivery vehicles.

Ashes Lane, Abbey Lane, Freshford Lane, High Street, The Hill, New Road and Church Lane form the main road network to cater for vehicular movements in Freshford, and all are barely a 6' 6" in width. However, sometimes trucks or delivery vehicles approach minor lanes such as Ashes Lane or Church Hill, often misled by satellite navigation systems that do not necessarily acknowledge the size of the local roads.

The current speed limits are unrestricted in certain stretches of the roads that lead towards the villages, despite the narrow geometry and the low visibility of these rural lanes.

An interesting discrepancy takes place at the junction between Church Lane and the A36, where vehicles coming from the main road, which has a speed limit of 40mph, find an unrestricted speed limit towards the village.





Local activities

The local activities and the school are located around the junction between Freshford Lane and the High Street, where people and vans stop at the shop or at the surgery or local residents meet for a chat. This space feels like a village square rather than a junction.

The school attracts a small crowd of parents and children at the time of entry and exit. Most parents take the children by car, park along the western end of Freshford Lane, and walk them to the entrance of the school. Only a few parents were observed using the car park at the Memorial Hall.

There is a school bus service that stops in front of the school, but it does not appear fully utilised. The school is currently requesting a bus shelter outside their property, but there are also discussions on relocating the bus stop at the Memorial Hall or on the private road adjacent to Freshford Lane.

The School Travel Plan survey has highlighted that parents would welcome improved pedestrian facilities, and also noted complaints in terms of traffic volumes and speeds. However, it was observed that traffic volumes at peak hour are significantly influenced by parents driving to and from the school themselves.

In any case, the school does not seem to create much disruption to the local roads and parents tend to use the parking facilities with respect for passing traffic.





Movement

The village preserves a narrow road pattern that naturally calms vehicular traffic. Higher vehicular movements are only recorded in peak hours, dropping significantly during the rest of the day, and speeds were not observed to be a problem.

The narrowness of the roads limits any formal pedestrian facilities. Footway space often yields to the carriageway, due to the tendency in traditional highway design to prioritise vehicular movements.





Parking

The narrowness of the local roads significantly compromises parking availability for both residents and local employees.

In some areas, resident's parking is a considerable issue, due to the lack of private driveways. Sharpstone appears to suffer particularly from this problem, especially on The Tynning, where residents are forced to park on the street, often compromising proper access to the road, and potentially obstructing emergency vehicles.

In Freshford, there are currently about 7 parking spaces on Freshford Lane, 8 on the High Street (including a doctor bay) and about 25 at the Memorial Hall. Some cars are parked on West Lane, New Road and Church Hill as necessary.

Long/medium term parking tend to take place in close proximity to local activities, denying precious short term stopping spaces for the local shop and the surgery.

Delivery vans also stop in front of the shop, compromising visibility and obstructing the junction.

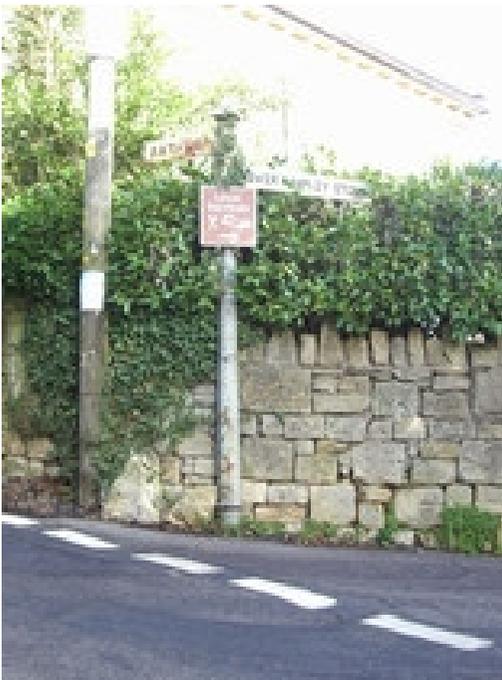




Streetscape

Highway signing appears neglected and redundant in certain locations. Directions are indicated at each junction through traditional cast iron posts, although this practice is not consistent, and a number of modern signs can be found. Signing tends to be located away from drivers' sight lines and to be concealed by vegetation in the summer months.

Steel barriers and plastic bollards can be found in some locations, spoiling the traditional rural streetscape, while wooden bollards on The Tynning offer a positive example of non-intrusive street furniture.



SHARED SPACE – CHANGING THE MENTAL MAP OF THE VILLAGE

The characteristic historical street pattern and the tight road dimensions of Freshford and Sharpstone appear a perfect setting for applying shared space design principles.

Shared Space is a term applied to a set of principles that help reconcile the conflicting demands of people, places and transport. Conventional highway engineering has been built on the assumption that space for traffic movement must be clearly delineated, and where possible segregated, from the public realm and the spaces set aside for other social activities. Such separation is combined with the assumption that safety requires predictability, standardisation and consistency across the highway network, with behaviour premised on rules, regulations, enforcement and engineering. The signs, kerbs and road markings are manifestations of this approach, reinforcing the notional **segregation** between “highway” and village.

For some thirty years, experiments in mainland Europe have explored the potential for challenging the key assumptions behind such segregation. Rather than seeking to isolate the driver from the distinctive peculiarities of each place, pioneers of shared space in places such as Denmark and Holland as well as the UK increasingly apply the principle of **integration** to the design of streets in settlements.





This change is still relatively new to the UK, although many highway authorities (such as B&NES, Devon, Dorset, East Sussex, Suffolk and Wiltshire) are increasingly exploring its potential.

Such an approach is often referred to by the popular press as “the naked street”, due to the typical removal or absence of conventional road signs and markings. However, successful shared space has much more to do with the development of a rich and deliberate relationship between the buildings, morphology and activities associated with each place and the streetscape. Intrigue, uncertainty, and the deliberate heightening of apparent or potential “conflict’ between different users serve to influence driver behaviour, in ways that seem to be considerably more effective than regulation and enforcement of rules.



Shared space is underpinned by an increasing understanding of some paradoxes relating to safety. By introducing apparent hazards, shared space prompts changes in users’ risk perceptions, which in turn increase awareness and the “legibility” of the streetscape. Road markings, especially centre-lines, serve to reassure drivers and emphasize linear continuity. By contrast, shared space relies on a strong emphasis on spatial qualities, and an expression of the human activities associated with each place. Gateways, designed to emphasize the transition between the highway and the public realm, are vital to underpin the contrast in context and behaviour.



Shared space emerges from a realisation that traffic speed is governed, above all else, by the psychological retreat from street space by other users. Reversing this retreat requires changes in the way all users, both visitors and residents, perceive the boundaries of their “mental maps”. Design changes, such as surface treatments, materials, planting and lighting can help prompt such changes. But these are merely prompts to encourage the integration of drivers into the social and cultural context of a town or village, where human values and civility are the key determinants to behaviour. Much of our initial proposals for Freshford and Sharpstone are based on “shared space”

PROPOSALS

The tight geometries of Freshford and Sharpstone do not give scope for major highway re-alignment to accommodate pedestrians and cars “more comfortably”. Some roads are so highly constrained by the historic building pattern that they can hardly accommodate one vehicle at the time. But there is the need and the will to preserve and enhance this local character, promoting a civilized sharing of the available space among users.

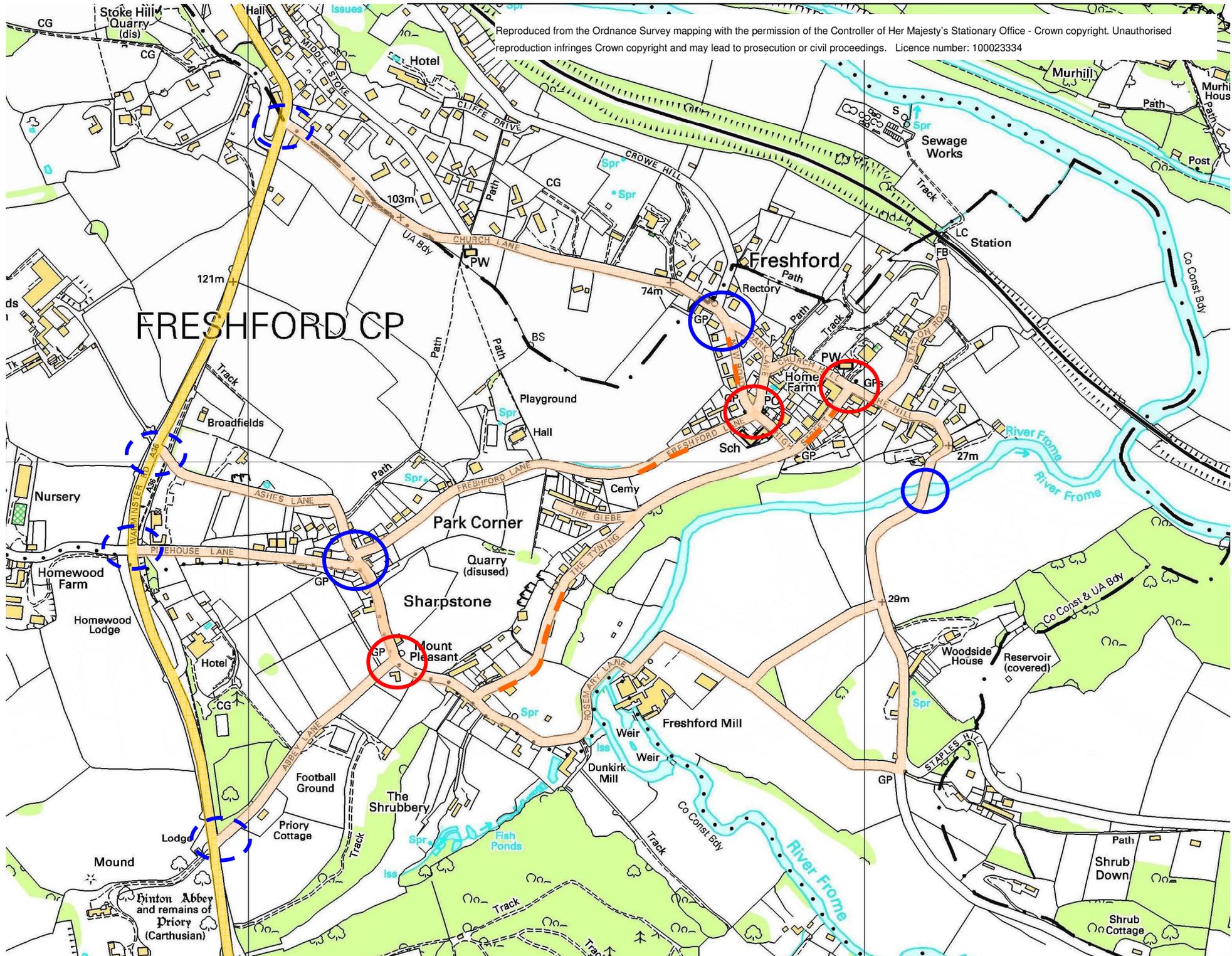
This can be achieved through the principles of shared space described in the previous chapter: a careful detailing of the road surfacing can help develop a language that emphasises the main routes, preserve the local lanes, and allocates highway space to all users. This approach promotes appropriate driving behaviour, mutual respect and awareness.

The plan on the following page highlights the proposed areas of intervention in terms of gates to the village, parking allocation and key junctions that are described in the following chapters.

KEY TO THE PLAN

-  Key junctions
-  Gates to the Village
-  Outer gates
-  Areas where parking can be increased/ re-organised

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FRESHFORD CP

Stoke Hill Quarry (dis)

Hotel

Freshford

Murhill

Park Corner

Sharpstone

Mount Pleasant

Freshford Mill

Hinton Abbey and remains of Priory (Carthusian)

Woodside House

Reservoir (covered)

Shrub Down

Shrub Cottage

Gates to the village

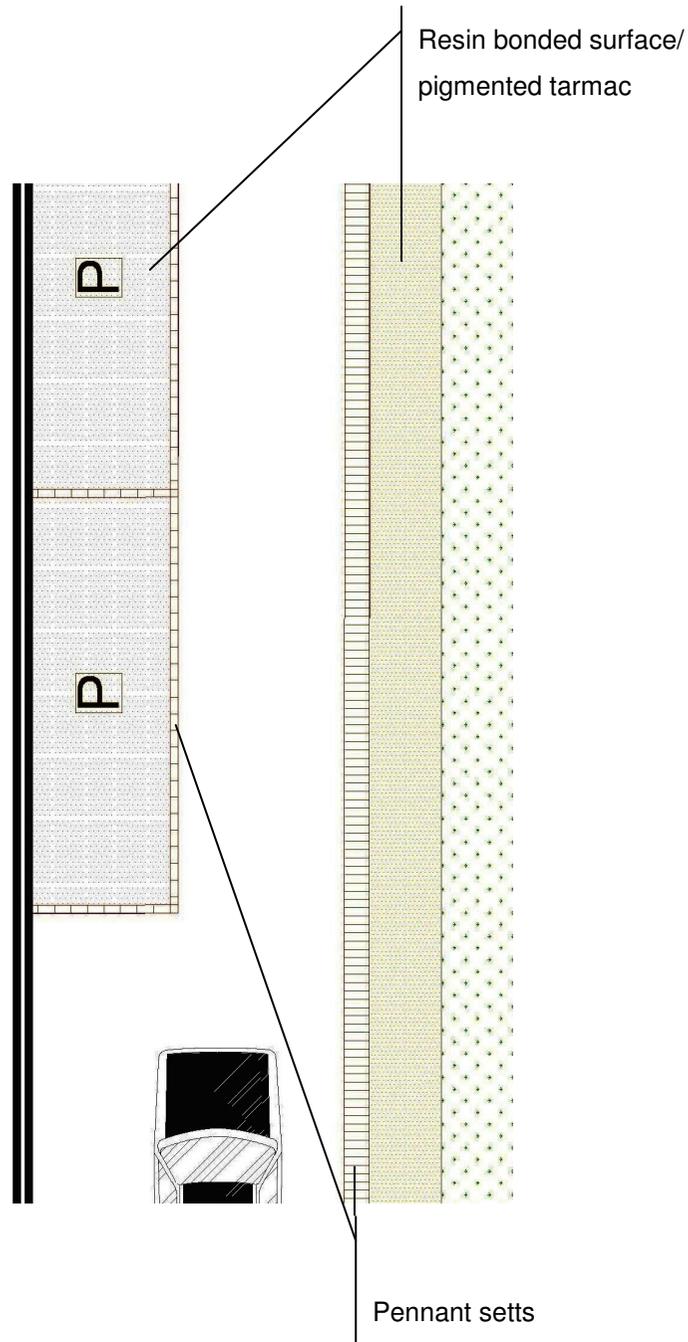


There are two levels of gates to the village: the access from the A 36 into the village outskirts and the gates to the central area, where most of the activities take place and there is more parking demand. The access from the A36 should highlight the nature of the roads ahead, direct vehicles to the most appropriate route and discourage unnecessary through movements. The inner gates should mark the entrance to the heart of the village, defining a design language and a set of material changes that will integrate the highway in its context and encourage appropriate driving behaviour.

On the A36 signing might be necessary, but can be done in a traditional style in order to mark the historical nature of the environment drivers are about to enter.

Unrestricted speed signs should be avoided and, on Ashes Lane and Pipehouse Lane, a cobbled access could emphasise the secondary nature of these roads.

There are suggestions for a westward one way restriction on Ashes Lane that will loop with the eastward one way restriction already in place on Pipehouse Lane. This should not conflict with the recommendations of this report, but it is important to ensure that signing is neatly and accurately detailed in order to be consistent with the signage that will be promoted throughout the village (see examples at the end of the paragraph).



The inner gates of the village could be demarcated at the following locations:

- The bridge on the river Frome
- The junction between New Road/ Dark Lane/ Church Lane and Crowe Hill
- The junction between Freshford Lane/ Ashes Lane and Pipehouse Lane

These will be the key sites to start a surface treatment that will be recognisable throughout the centre of the village.

We suggest a simple palette of materials where the pedestrian areas will be in resin bound surfacing or light asphalt, framed by careful kerb detailing in pennant stone laid perpendicularly to the road alignment. This layout of the setts reflects the pitched footways typical of the Bath area. The kerb can be flush or chamfered in order to be over-run by vehicles if needed. This will allow shaving the apparent carriageway width to the minimum, reducing vehicles' speeds even further and giving more space to pedestrians. Larger vehicles will be able to mount the footway if necessary.

The highway paving should also abandon traditional road marking and straight geometries. This will help establish a relation with the built environment and the local activities, rather than emphasising the vehicular movement. It will also introduce a level of intrigue and uncertainty that will characterise the whole central area of the village, inducing a change in drivers' perception of this space.

The following pages give some ideas of how these areas could be treated.

New Road/ Dark Lane/ Church Lane and Crowe Hill



Freshford Lane/ Ashes Lane and Pipehouse Lane



Key junctions

The junction between New Road, West Lane and Freshford Lane is the heart of the village. The school dominates the junction and the playing children give a unique liveliness to the place. The village shop and Post Office contribute to the vitality, with people stopping and chatting throughout the day.

This area has all the characteristics of a village square, except for its limited size, and the parked vehicles that detract from the quality of this space.

A redesign can overcome the highway role of this junction, giving back this precious place to local people, and making vehicles feel subordinate rather than sovereign.

The new design should define an identity, highlighting the central role of this square, treating the whole junction as a pedestrian space where cars are guests and people feel free and comfortable spending time here. Careful natural stone details should help, integrating the highway in its historical context.

The presence of the school should be enhanced, trimming the hedge that presently hides it from the highway. This will make drivers even more aware of the context they are driving through.

The traditional signing should be moved closer to the road.



The Village Centre (option 1)



The Village Centre (option 2)



Other junctions throughout the village could be designed to emphasize the main road network and discourage unnecessary driving through the minor roads.

In particular, at the junction between The Hill and the High Street there is the need to highlight the presence of the church and the centre of the village beyond, whilst directing vehicles towards the High Street to the left.

At the moment, the hill, the phone box, and in general the poor visibility do not let any visitor realise the presence of such relevant building beyond the junction. Visitors to the village might find it difficult to realise which route to follow to continue their journey, without even noticing the historical relevance of that corner. The highway paving, possibly the removal of the phone-box and the redundant posts and signs can help highlight the presence of the church, and emphasise the bending of the main road without the need for additional signing.

On the opposite side of the village, Rosemary Lane also deserves an appropriate approach at its junction with Abbey Lane. It would be worth emphasising its highly rural and historic qualities with a change in paving that will perform as a gate to the road itself.



The Hill/ High Street



Rosemary Lane/ Abbey Lane



Key pedestrian links



The area in front of the school has a particular importance in the management of peak hours, when parents drop off or pick up their children.

There is currently a keen commitment from the school and some parents to minimise car use, and encourage parents that have to drive to park their car as far away from the school as possible, in order to allow space for the school bus to approach safely. A school travel plan is being developed and is exploring initiatives that can reduce the peak hour congestion at the school.

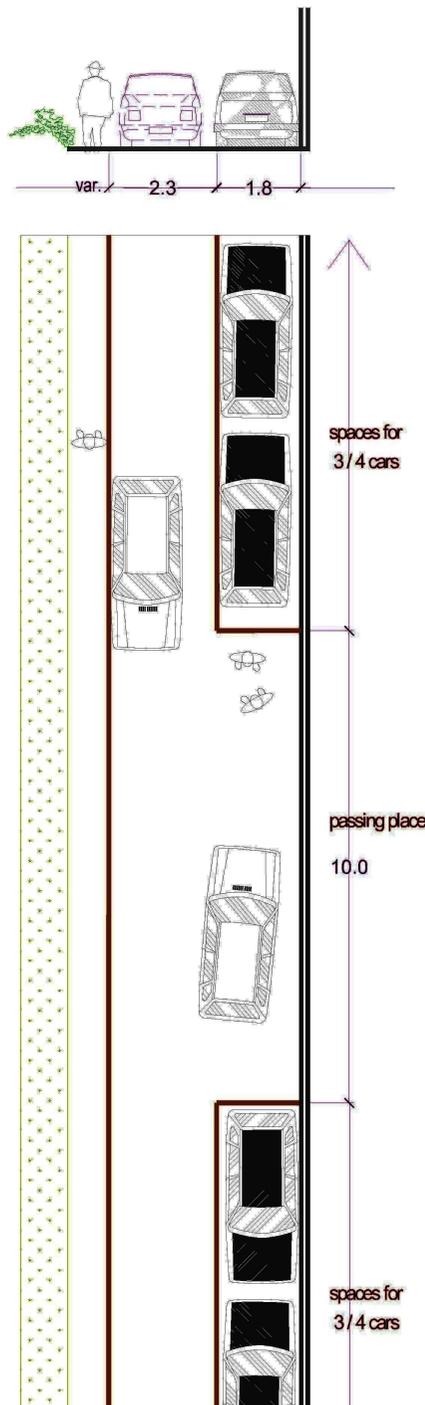
From a design perspective, the school entrance can be integrated in the design of the centre of the village, emphasising the pedestrian activity that takes place in this location. The whole highway area could be paved as a pedestrian space, making cars slow down and feel guests while passing in front of the school. Traditional highway elements such as markings and railings should be avoided, and a bus shelter could be allocated next to the entrance of the school car park, if required.

In addition, the pedestrian link to the Memorial Hall could be widened to 1.50 – 2.00, leaving a carriageway of 3.00 – 3.50 m where a chamfered kerb could allow further width when necessary. This would improve the connection between the centre of the village and the parking on Freshford Lane, where more spaces could be provided (see following chapter).



The school area





Parking

Due to the size of the roads, parking is a significant issue in Freshford and Sharpstone. The local activities attract people that need to park and residents that do not have a driveway or a garage are forced to leave their cars on street. In some cases parked vehicles compromise visibility at junctions, obstruct the carriageway and often appear both visually and physically intrusive.

There is the need to formalise parking in order to ensure that parked vehicles are properly located, and there is the need to discourage parking in particularly sensitive locations. The presence of the Memorial Hall car park should also be signed on the Village Square.

Existing parking on High Street, Dark Lane and The Tynning, can be formalised through a specific paving for parking bays (for instance pigmented asphalt with coarse chippings). The paving in the bays could be framed by pennant stone, and the bays defined by a tile with a “P” as a parking symbol. The doctor bay could be signed in the same manner and a loading bay for deliveries could also be established in the proximity of the shop.

No stopping areas could use stones or wooden posts to discourage vehicles from parking (both already a feature in the village). A sensitive area like The Tynning should maintain the wooden posts to avoid parking, but allow a passing area through the use of some “grass guard” (see appendix).



Some streets like New Road, the eastern end of High Street and Freshford Lane could provide further parking through the creation of a single carriageway road with passing places (see drawing in the previous page). This design approach can be easily integrated in this local context where slow moving traffic already characterises the village.

Parking locations will need to be agreed amongst residents, preferably organising a design workshop for each street. Only in this way it will be possible to ensure that the parking bays will be appropriately allocated and managed by the residents themselves.



Workshops, parish notices and local meetings will also be the means to agree that longer term parking can be located further away from the Village Centre, in order to allow short term parking to take place closer to the local activities. It is also worth encouraging residents with the benefit of off-street parking to use it and leave precious on-street parking space to the ones that need it most.

In addition, it is necessary to ensure that any further residential development provides appropriate off street parking for two cars for each dwelling. Although this may seem a higher figure than normal, this is the only way to protect the local character of Freshford streets.

PHASING

Although we usually recommend that the gates to the village are the first to be implemented, in the case of Freshford and Sharpstone, the road layout naturally calms traffic, allowing priority to be given to the implementation of shared space in the heart of the village. The junction between Freshford Lane and the High Street and the area in front of the School could be the first to be completed and will be of immediate benefit to local people and the image of the village of Freshford.

On the other hand, if parking is felt as a priority, the inner gates and the reorganization of the parking bays could be implemented first, ensuring that these two types of measures are implemented simultaneously. In fact, the implementation of the gates will mark the starting of a “standard layout” that will also improve pedestrian links, reallocating carriageway to pedestrians.

The remaining solutions could be implemented in later stages, but at a constant pace and following a detailed programme of funding, in order to ensure the implementation of the whole plan. A comprehensive approach will ensure the success of the shared space.

THE WAY FORWARD

The ideas outlined above would represent an innovative approach to addressing the issues of traffic and parking in Freshford and Sharpstone. The principles of shared space would appear to be ideally suited to the rich tapestry of the villages' historic fabric. However, it is important to stress that the use of shared space is still in its infancy in the UK, and there are still relatively few precedents. Bath & North East Somerset has already expressed a willingness to explore the potential for shared space as a means to improve the quality of the public realm, and the proposals for Freshford and Sharpstone should therefore accord with the authority's policy principles.

Much work is still required to develop and agree detailed proposals for each of the key elements. A phasing outline has been suggested in this report, but the timing and programming will be critically dependent on the availability of resources, and it is important that a close working relationship is established and maintained between the Parish Council, their advisors, and the key officers in B&NES.

Shared space opens up the potential for much greater participation by residents and local businesses in the configuration and management of the streetscape. Local events, celebrations and activities can be helpful not only as a means to generate enthusiasm, raise funds and encourage volunteer input, but also to help transform the way people conceive of the streets of the village as part of their public realm. Encouraging people to walk rather than drive, to amble down the middle of the street, to extend front gardens beyond the property boundary, are all valuable ways to break down the notion of the streets as solely part of someone else's highway network. As much as any physical changes in the streetscape, it is the social protocols and day-to-day actions of residents that can create valuable shared space, and create the "mental speed bumps" so essential to reconciling the relationship between people, place and traffic.

APPENDIX - DESIGN SAMPLES

Sample of resin bonded surface framed by setts.



Sample of subtle parking marking and signing in Edinburgh



Sample of grass guard (e.g. NetPave) which is a cellular structure that can be filled with soil/grass to strengthen the passing place at The Tynning

