

Melksham Neighbourhood Plan

Rapid Community Character and Heritage Assessment

March 2020

DRAFT V2

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Thank you to Visit Melksham and Melksham and District Historical Association who have contributed to this document.

[www.visit-melksham.com](http://www.visit-melksham.com)

[www.melkshamhistoricalassociation.org/index.asp](http://www.melkshamhistoricalassociation.org/index.asp)

# Introduction

This document forms an appendix to the Melksham Joint Neighbourhood Plan (2020-2026) and supports the delivery of Policy 16 Landscape Character, Policy 17 Locally Distinctive, High Quality Design, and Policy 18 Local Heritage.

Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council jointly support development within their parishes that protects, conserves, enhances and extends the positive and distinctive characteristics and attractiveness of the town and its surrounding settlements.

The document has been prepared by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group with the support of plan consultants, Place Studio.

It is written to help and inform successful distinct development design. It should be read by those promoting development and those assessing proposals. Its two sections provide the reader with information specific to Melksham and Melksham Without about:

- Section A The history, heritage designations designated and locally treasured heritage assets
- Section B The positive and distinctive characteristics of the built and natural environment that the community consider

to make Melksham a special place for its residents.

The assessment methodology used in section B gives a rapid broad-brush overview of townscape characteristics and heritage assets across the Neighbourhood Plan area. Character areas and types were identified and assessed used survey forms that were then prepared enable Steering Group members to undertake rapid assessments of character areas, to identify positive and distinct transferable characteristics across the Neighbourhood Area.

Development applicants should demonstrate how their proposals have referenced and interpreted positive townscape characteristics highlighted in this report to achieve positive locally distinct development.

The document should be read together with other reports in the Neighbourhood Plan evidence base, notably the Green Infrastructure Evidence Base Report and Local Landscape Character Evidence Base Report.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/1685/ross-on-wye\\_rapid\\_townscape\\_assessment.pdf](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/1685/ross-on-wye_rapid_townscape_assessment.pdf)

# Section A Heritage

## Introduction

Section A focuses on the heritage value of Melksham and Melksham Without.

Much of the text in this section is extracted from the Melksham Tourist Information website, the Melksham and District Historical Association website (<http://www.melkshamhistoricalassociation.org/contact.asp> and <http://www.visit-melksham.com/melksham-information/history-melksham>), and 'Around Melksham in old Photographs' by the Melksham and District Historical Association.

More detail and information on history is included in Appendix 1.

## Heritage Policy Context

Section 16 of the NPPF – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment - sets out how heritage assets are “an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations” (para 184).

Further guidance is contained in the Planning Practice Guidance Note – Historic Environment (July 2019).

Heritage assets are defined in the Wiltshire Core Strategy as:

- listed buildings
- conservation areas
- scheduled ancient monuments
- registered parks and gardens
- registered battlefields
- world heritage sites
- non-designated heritage assets such as buildings and archaeological sites of regional and local interest.

Wiltshire Core Policy 58 - Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment Assets - states development “should protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment.” All heritage assets are covered as well as ‘non-designated heritage assets, which contribute to a sense of local character and identity’ will be conserved, and where possible enhanced.

## Historic Development and Settlement Form

### Melksham

#### Historic Development

The origins of the settlement lie in its location at the fording point of the river, fertile land and elevation above the river flood level. The name 'Melksham' is believed to come from the old English 'meoloc' meaning 'milk'. As the name implies, the area has long been associated with pasture and dairy farming.

From its beginning Melksham focused around Church Walk and the Market Place, the town of Melksham initially grew and infilled along its arterial roads such as Lowbourne, Forest Road and Spa Road, responding to its position on the coach route between London and Bath. These routes still reflect this linear, organic and informal form of Melksham's historic development, containing buildings ranging in age from former farms and rural cottages, Georgian town houses and terraces, Victorian villas and cottages, to infill development of the 20th and 21st centuries.

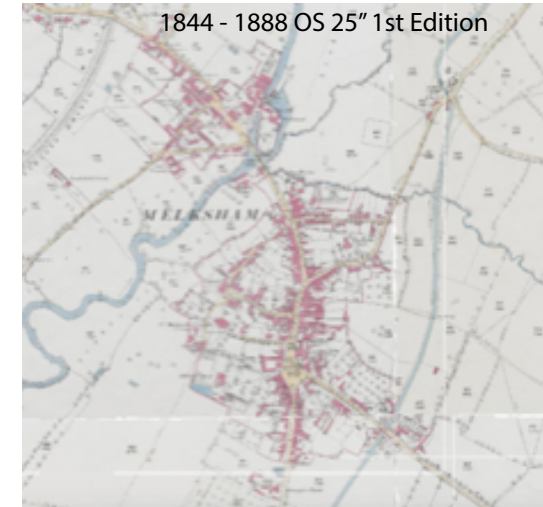


Figure 1: Melksham Town Historic Map Regression

## 20th & 21st Century Development

Later public and private 20th and 21st Century housing estates have added a further development form to Melksham.

These are largely constructed in clusters that individually or in groups form distinct neighbourhood groups located between the arterial routes to the south and east of the town centre, Bowerhill to the south and Roundponds to the north-west.

*Awaiting photos - War Memorial and Mulberry Cottage in Church Street /  
Canon Square*

## Settlements in the Rural Parish of Melksham Without

### Whitley and Shaw

The parish of Melksham Without was created under the Local Government Act of 1894 which divided the ancient parish of Melksham into Melksham Within (the town or urban district council area) and the rural Melksham Without. Parts of Melksham Without, adjacent to the town, were subsequently transferred to Melksham Within in 1914 and 1934, 1964, 1991 and 2017. In the past, the three villages in the north; Beanacre, Shaw and Whitley were ancient centres of population.

Whitley was probably settled around the same time as Shaw and the origin of both names means a white clearing or wood / copse. There would appear to be three settlements - Upper, Middle and Lower - linked together by the route from Atworth to Lacock. Although Whitley is mentioned as a manor in 1546 it is unlikely to have been one and was probably an estate. Whitley House dates from the 17th century and it could have replaced an earlier building.

Medieval Shaw was a small community centred on its manor house and the chapel here seems to have had more to do with the barony of Castle Combe than local needs. The

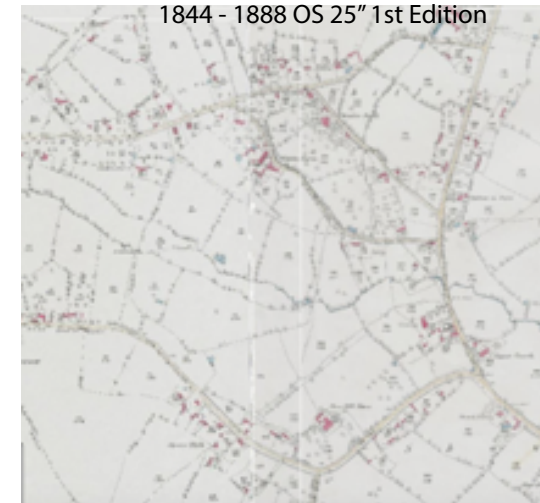


Figure 2: Whitley and Shaw Historic Map Regression

settlement remained small and rural but by the 17th century there were a reasonable number of houses.

In the mid-17th century it became a stronghold of the Society of Friends with Quakers travelling from around the area to meetings here. The population grew during the 19th century and a church and school were provided. In Shaw in the 1870s there was a post office, a grocer, a brewer and two coal merchants and the postmaster also made shoes. In the latter part of the 20th century there was more building on and around Shaw Hill.

*awaiting photos - the Toast Office, Pear Tree Inn, Whitley Reading Room*



## Bowerhill

Bowerhill is the largest of all the settlements in Melksham Without Parish and was a rural area until early in 1940 when work began on a new RAF station. Towards the end of the Second World War a large number of Royal Naval Air Service mechanics were trained here and after the war, RAF Melksham resumed its Electrical and Instrument courses and continued with these and other education programmes until the early 1970s.

After the departure of the RAF, the site saw a mixture of industrial, commercial and residential use, with much development in the 1980s. Its history is remembered in the area's street names, many of which are taken from historical aircraft. These include Falcon Way, Lancaster Road and Fulmar Close.

It has a population of around 3,000 people and continues to grow with the most recent developments including Hunter's Meadow and Pathfinder Place.

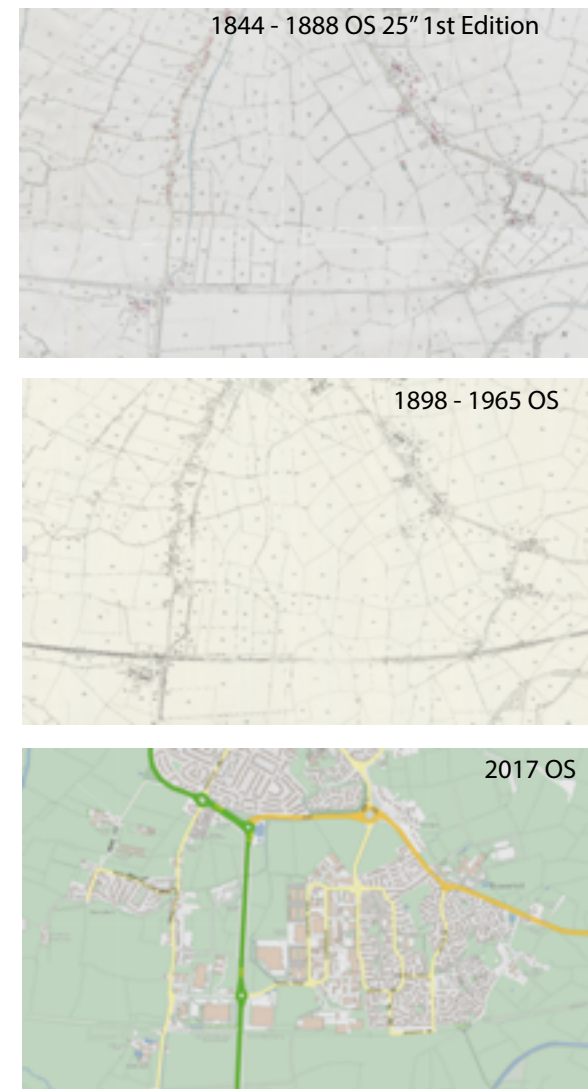


Figure 3: Bowerhill Historic Map Regression

## Melksham Conservation Area

Since the Civic Amenities Act 1967, over 9,000 Conservation Areas have been designated as areas of special architectural or historic interest in England, and the centre of Melksham Town is a designated Conservation Area. A Conservation Area is, in law, an area of special architectural and historic interest. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires Planning Authorities to pay special attention to the 'preserving or enhancing the character or appearance' of a Conservation Area.

A study of the key features of character was undertaken in 2006 as an Urban Design Study. This study which identified the special characteristics of the Town by looking at vistas, distinguished buildings, groups of buildings and the spaces between buildings. It also included suggested enhancements and improvement projects.

The earliest buildings to be found in the town are of the 17th century with many examples in Church Walk. The other key area is the Market Place which is thought to be medieval in origin dating to 13th Century when in 1219 the first recorded market and fair was granted. The Town Hall is located in the Market Place which was recently the subject of investment and public realm improvement works.



Above: Market Place and the Town Hall – a key space in the Conservation Area



Above: The War Memorial, Canon Square – a key space in the Conservation Area

The Conservation Area of Melksham has no associated Appraisal or Management Plan. This would provide a record of an area's special architectural or historic interest, and set out how the area or place has evolved and identify the key features of its character that have helped to justify its designation as a Conservation Area.

### Listed Buildings

Listing marks and celebrates a building's special architectural and historic interest, and also brings it under the consideration of the planning system, so that it can be protected for future generations.

- Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest, only 2.5% of listed buildings are Grade I
- Grade II\* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest; 5.8% of listed buildings are Grade II\*
- Grade II buildings are of special interest; 91.7% of all listed buildings are in this class and it is the most likely grade of listing for a home owner.

There is one grade I listed building in the plan area – Beanacre Old Manor house, a late C14 to early C18 building. Other listed buildings and structures in the Plan area are generally

grade II. There are over 70 listed buildings and structures in the Parish and over 150 in the town - the majority of which are in the Conservation Area. See Figure 4 and the Historic England website ([historicengland.org.uk/listing](http://historicengland.org.uk/listing)) for more



14 Church Walk



Highfield House, 22 Llanon Street



26 Church Walk

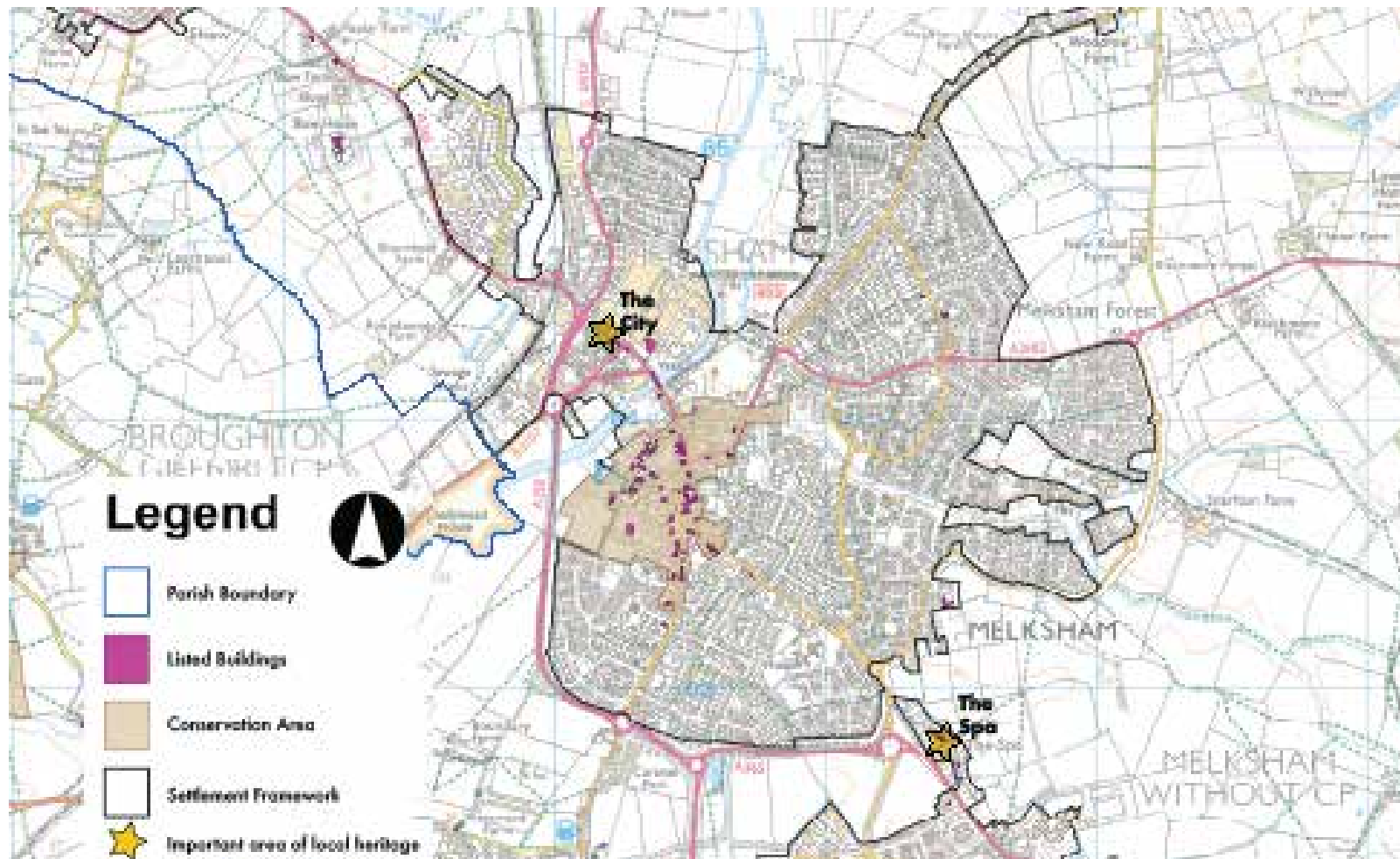


Melksham Conservative Club, Bank Street

Above: Selection of Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area, taken from Melksham Urban Design Study 2006

## Locally Important Heritage Assets and Areas

Figure 4: Conservation Area and Important Areas of Local Heritage outside of the Conservation Area



## Important Areas of Local Heritage

Important areas of local heritage interest are defined by their historical and architectural interest and their area or group integrity.

### The Spa

The Spa is about 1 mile from Melksham town centre on the A365 Devizes Road. Its name originated from the discovery of saline springs on the Devizes road out of Melksham in 1813 and the water was found to have properties thought to cure various ills. In 1815, the Melksham Spa Company was formed which led to the building of a pump room and three prominent boarding houses in preparation for an influx of visitors to partake of the claimed medicinal benefits. The crescent of six houses on the north side of the road show the original attempt to rival nearby Bath. People came to take the waters for a while but the fashionable Bath meant that the efforts at Melksham were doomed to failure.

An early nineteenth century book entitled *The Melksham Guide* prophesied that Melksham "... will increase in extent and respectability and soon become a celebrated watering place and a resort of beauty, wealth and fashion" However, efforts to imitate Bath were short lived and by 1822 interest



Figure 5: Listed Buildings in The Spa, shown in pink

in the waters had declined. This area has been surveyed by the Neighbourhood Plan steering group as part of the work to prepare this statement. Key points from the survey are set out below.

#### Key Characteristics

- This is one of the most distinctive parts of Melksham, and there have been calls for The Spa to become a conservation area.
- A single straight street partly a cul-de-sac having been “bypassed” in the 1970s. It has footpath/housing on one side only and has trees / green verge on the other side.
- Houses are enclosed with hedgerows and are a mixture of 1930’s semis and Georgian detached and semis detached with some 1970’s bungalows.
- Houses are set back from the road with gardens and driveways.
- Although the Georgian semi-detached houses are unusual (in this area), the buildings very much demonstrate the archetypal architecture of their period, with ashlar front and sides; rubblestone to rear, Welsh slate hipped roof, ashlar and brick stacks. Three of the pairs are over 4 storeys, there are 4 windows to each storey and there is a further 2 storey building

- The three pairs of attached Georgian buildings are highly distinctive, grade II listed with very long verdant front gardens
- The area might be termed very “leafy” in comparison to Melksham generally
- Very little vehicular traffic within the cul-de-sac, but busier on the A365. Some parking within the cul-de-sac, but most properties have driveways/off-street parking.
- There is high level of pedestrian traffic at school start and



Above: 'The Spa' taken from The Melksham Guide, 1814. The image above is an architectural rendering produced before the buildings in The Spa were built.

## The City

The area of housing for industrial workers known as 'The City' is likely to date from the 17th century when the town expanded to the north of the river for the first time. A few buildings still survive including an old pub (The Red Lion), now vacant, and a row of attached cottages, built in early 18th century of rubblestone with a stone slate roof. The Red Lion Public House building is Grade II listed.

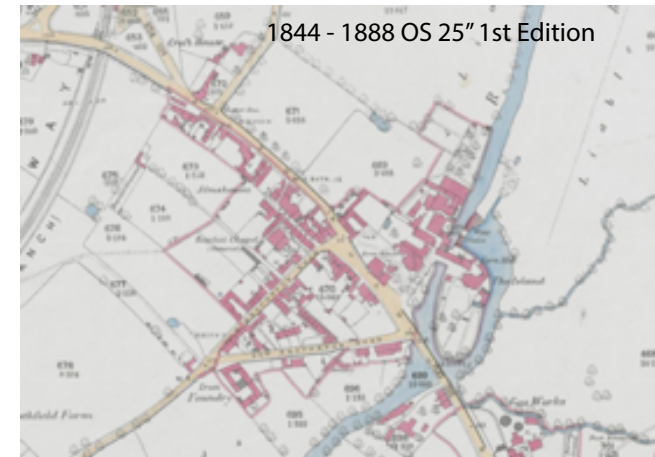


Figure 6: The City Historic Map Regression

## Wilts & Berks Canal

The historic alignment of the Wilts and Berks Canal through Melksham is no longer suitable for reinstatement as a canal, and an alternative route has been identified (see Wiltshire Core Policy 16: Melksham Link Project – this is a live planning application). However the historic line through Melksham can still be followed, and the identification of the route and historical significance is underpinned by a local walking routes (Walking Melksham's Lost Waterways). Figure 2 to the right is extracted from the 1844 – 1888 OS 25" 1st Edition and shows the canal to the right of the core of the town centre.



Figure 7 (left above): The W&B Canal can be seen to the right of the core of the Town Centre



### Locally Significant Undesignated Heritage Assets

Alongside of the buildings that are listed as being of national heritage or architectural importance, there are many buildings that are of local importance. There are many buildings built of local stone in a traditional style and when seen together they make a 'high contribution to the whole character of the street scene and give the town centre a feeling of completeness" Melksham Urban Design Study 2006.

The 2006 Study identified a number of buildings in the town centre as noteworthy stone buildings. These are mapped in Figure 8 to the right and include The Bear Public House, buildings in Bath Road adjacent and the Alba Italian restaurant building.

Note: Extensive detail about the historic environment is contained within the Historic Environment Record (HER) which includes detailed information about listed buildings, historic landscape and heritage assets of archaeological interest. This can also be found in the Neighbourhood Plan evidence base.



Figure 8: Listed and noteworthy buildings within the Conservation Area (taken from Melksham Urban Design Study 2006)

# Section B

## Built Form: Positive and Distinct Characteristics

### Introduction

This section draws out the key positive and distinct characteristics that have been highlighted through local level character assessment work.

It provides those wishing to promote development and those guiding and assessing development with direction and guidance about what the community consider to be the positive and distinct characteristics of the built and natural features of the built environments of Melksham and Melksham Without.

### Method

An initial assessment of the Plan area was undertaken based on:

- Local knowledge
- Desk top survey using the maps and the online historic mapping system - know your place

As a result of the initial assessment a number of character areas and types across the Plan area were identified.

A rapid survey of a range of character areas that were thought to embody positive transfereable characteristics was undertaken by Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group members.

Full Character Assessments are found in Appendix 2.

### Policy Context

Part 12 of The National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) sets out importance of design in the planning and development process “Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.” (NPPF, Para 124, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019).

In the NPPF the government sets out the role of communities in realising this aim: “Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area’s defining characteristics. Neighbourhood plans can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development”. (NPPF, Para 125).

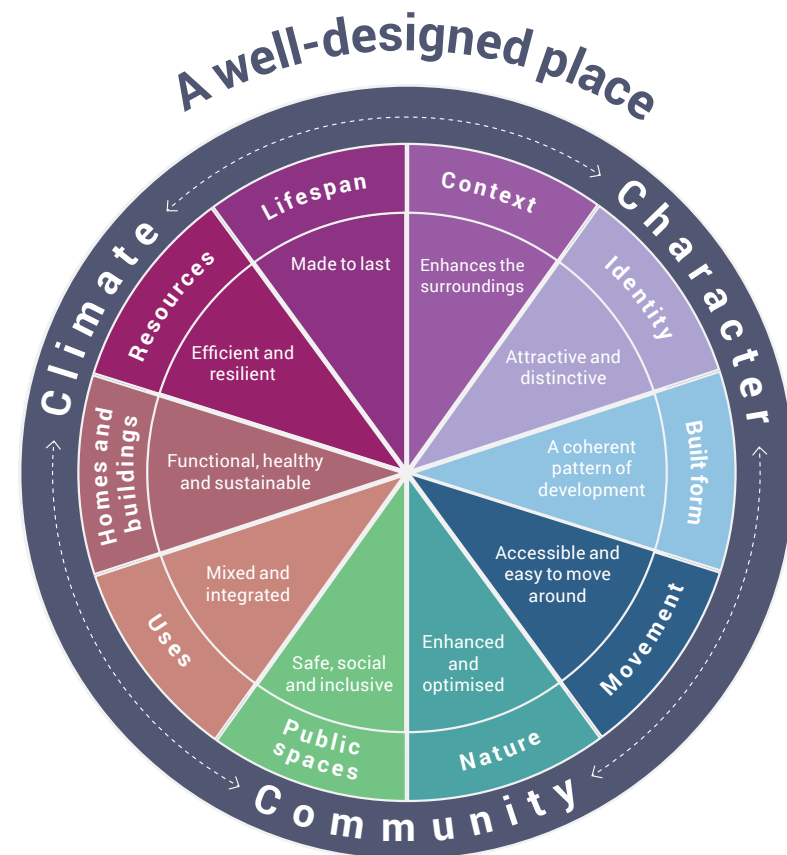
Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on Design (MHCLG 2019) takes this further in reinforcing the importance of design, the value of guidance such as this Statement and the role of

communities in ensuring good design.

In parallel with the new PPG, the government also published a 'National Design Guide'. Though targeted at developments of all sizes, it places great emphasis on the importance of understanding and responding to local character (in many senses) and on community engagement.

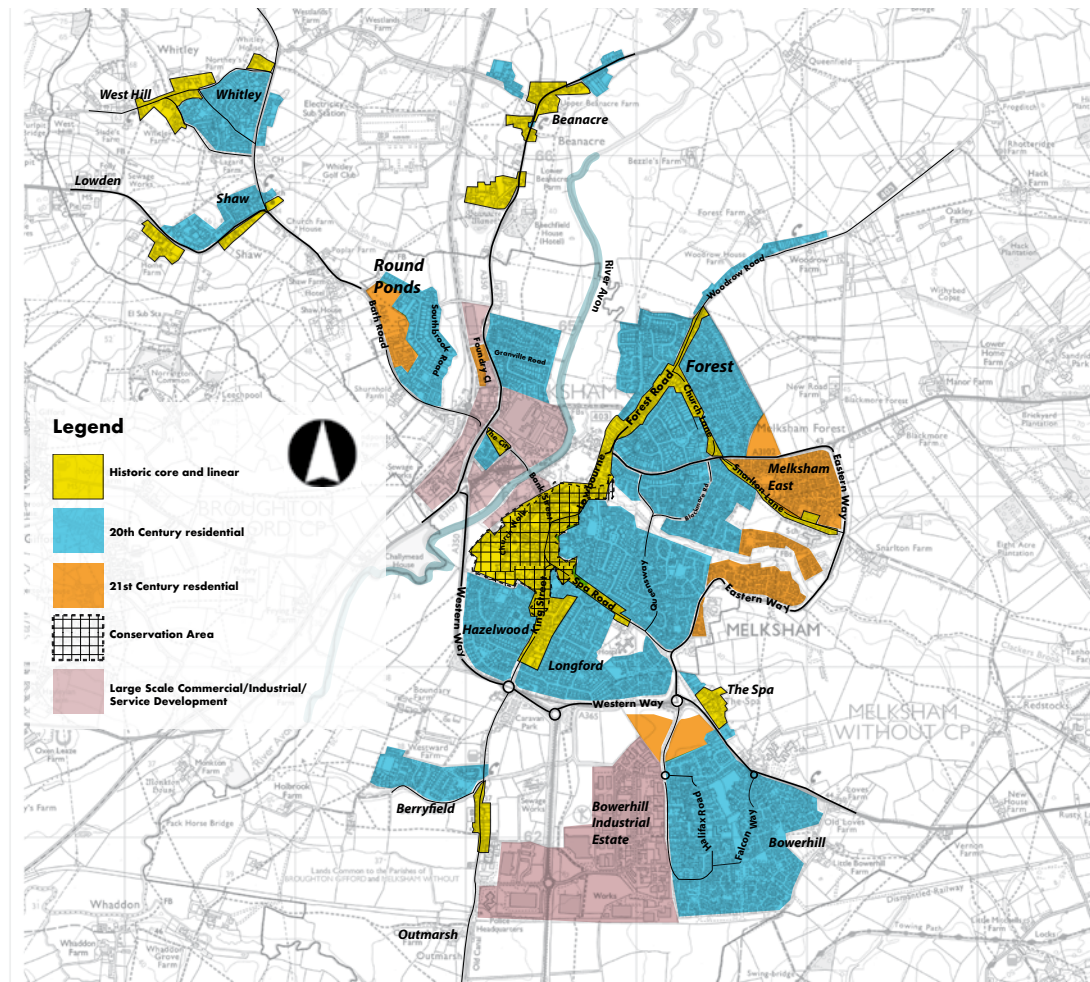
The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the importance of achieving 'well-designed places' and asserts that "policy and decisions should ensure that developments... are visually attractive... (and) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change" (NPPF, para 127).

It is recognised that any design guidance should strike a balance between promoting and reinforcing local distinctiveness and allowing for innovation and originality. Wiltshire Council Core Strategy Core Policy 57 - "Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping" - provides a detailed high-level policy which sets out how development is expected to make a 'positive contribution the character of Wiltshire'. The content of this Statement aims to relate directly to the aims of Core Policy 57 at the local level of the joint Neighbourhood Plan.



Above: Ten characteristics of a 'well designed' place, taken from the National Design Guide

Figure 9: Character Areas



## Settlement Form

### Historic Linear Development in Melksham Town

Housing development along Melksham's historic road network develops out from the town centre. Along Lowbourne, Forest Road, Church Lane, King Street, Spa Road and to a lesser extent Snarlton Lane, there is a variety of building forms, line, orientation and materials, reflecting its organic pattern of development and infill from rural beginnings. This informal and varied characteristic of Melksham is one that has been observed as a positive characteristic across the town.

### Twentieth Century Residential Neighbourhoods and Estates – Melksham Town and Bowerhill

During the 20th Century, and continuing into the 21st Century, Melksham has experienced significant housing development. This has largely been in the form of municipal and private housing developments. Whilst some of these have created large neighbourhoods of a similar form (e.g. Longford) the neighbourhoods that reflect incremental development of smaller clusters and infill, creating a more varied character (e.g. Forest, Hazelwood and Snowberry (see photo to the right)) in Melksham town and Bowerhill in Melksham Without, are considered to provide preferred cues to inform future growth.



Photos above from left:

1. Varied plot, building form and materials on King Street
2. 3 and 2 storeys with a varied roof form and building line on Spa Road
3. Key building addressing the junction of Forest Road and Church Lane



## Landscape and Green Space

A characteristic common to Melksham's most valued neighbourhoods is the relationship with a communal green space and network of linking green space and tree-lined roads. Where development addresses the rural edge or River Avon valley, successful housing layouts and routes link to and address communal green space and allotments positioned at the rural edge to provide links and views into the open countryside.

The neighbourhoods that are considered most successful continue an informal layout which include the following features:

1. Varied building orientation and building line
2. Off street car parking in a range of arrangements
3. Linking green routes combining grass verges, tree-lined avenues and informal communal green spaces with trees.

Photos to the right, clockwise from left:

1. Churchill Avenue
2. Dorset Crescent, Queensway
3. Granville Road looking toward Riverside Drive and the River Avon



## Building Layout and Design

### Plot Size and Coverage

Regardless of density, residential neighbourhoods that are identified as having a positive contribution to the quality of place are where houses are nearly always set within a garden plot. This enables the landscape to become the setting for the building and collectively, the neighbourhood. This contributes significantly to the overarching positive character of linked green routes and spaces, which themselves, link to the countryside and river. The photo to the right is Riverside Drive and housing facing on to shared greenspace and the River Avon corridor.



Photo above: Riverside Drive and housing facing on to shared greenspace and the River Avon corridor

### Height and Form

Building height is predominantly two-storey across the residential neighbourhoods. Within the centre of Melksham, and out along some of the arterial routes, taller buildings of 3 storeys can be found. Taller development should therefore be related to the town centre, arterial roads or buildings with community value and carefully located at nodal points within neighbourhoods.



Photo above: a recent development on Lowbourne, close to the town centre

## Roof Forms

There are a range of roof forms for domestic buildings from the simple pitched roofs with gable ends as well as cross gabled roofs, and hip roofs.

## Materials

Melksham's distinctly informal character is strengthened by the varied use of:

1. Stone
2. Red Brick (Stretcher and English Bond)
3. Render (White / Cream)

Roofs are predominantly clay tile, although slate is also evident.



Photos above: Hip roofs in Roundponds and simple gable and cross gabled in Hazelwood.



## Use of Stone

Stone is a commonly used material for Melksham's older and more prestigious buildings. It is also used significantly as window surrounds, lintels and as quoins at corners, often marking a transition between stonier and brick faces.

The variety of stone dressing and bonding found within the towns, often within single buildings and walls, adds significantly to local distinctiveness, interest and legibility.

- Ashlar stone: Used to face civic and focal urban buildings, lintels and window surrounds and boundary wall pillars
- Blockwork: Used on façade panels, boundary walls and industrial buildings
- Coursed Rubble: Predominant material and bonding found in Melksham's 17th and 18th Century development and used in frontage and side boundary walls, often with "cock and hen" coping.
- Random Rubble: Used to construct and face buildings reflecting Melksham's rural settling and past. Also found in boundary walls and more recent stone-faced panels.



## Details

Across the eras of Melksham's development, housing has distinct elements of detailing that create further variety, richness and interest within neighbourhoods. In the examples, these details relate to individual or small groups of housing, within frontages of more differently or simply designed frontages.



Photos to the left, clockwise from top left: Timber framed gables in buildings from the 18th Century (The City), 20th Century (Sorrel Close), and the 19th Century (Forest Road)



Above: Tile hung upper storeys on buildings of different ages along Forest Road

Below: Decorative English Bond brickwork of the early 20th Century Blackmore Terraces on Forest Road



## Gardens and Boundaries

Analysis of the town's neighbourhoods recorded that good sized front gardens were a prevailing characteristic across the town. Whilst a significant number had been given over to car parking, retained front boundaries and frontage landscape added significantly to the quality and distinctiveness of streets and neighbourhoods.

Typical approaches to Boundaries within Melksham shown in the three photos opposite.



## Open Frontages, Green Space and Trees

Where housing estates have been designed with frontage parking hard standing, the sense of enclosure and balance between hard and soft landscape is lost. Well designed neighbourhoods provide parking within a range of solutions including side and courtyard bays. Communal landscape and tree planting helps to rebalance the environment (see Landscape and Green Space above). Bowerhill is an area with a significant presence of trees – many of the with Tree Protection Orders (TPOs). Trees and green verges contribute positively to character across the area, notably along Forest Road (see photo above) and as gateways to areas, such as Longford Road and Lambourne Crescent.



Photos to right, clockwise from top left: 1. Homes in Snowberry 2. Parking in Queensway 3. Mature pairs of trees and green space as neighbourhood gateway / focal area at Lambourne Crescent 4. Mature Chestnut tree and green verge forms a gateway to Longford Road.

## Rural Settlements

Melksham Without Parish surrounds Melksham urban area and creates the gently undulating rural setting for the town as well as the parish's four main settlements of Beanacre, Shaw, Whitley (villages) and the large settlement of Bowerhill.

Melksham Without's villages are have distinct development forms which should inform any future development of growth proposals.

All are set within their own rural landscape, separating them from each other and Melksham town. This important quality is essential to conserving the distinctiveness and individuality of each village. The villages share common qualities of built form and landscape which unite them within their wider landscape and development character.

## Settlement Form

Organic linear development of the villages' historic road networks has produced loose building lines and varied building orientations similar to that in Melksham. Where villages have expanded in the 19th and 20th Centuries, infill housing, small terraces and groups have added to the historic linear form



Photo top left: Shaw Church, a landmark on the Bath-Melksham road looking south east  
Photo below: Former Officer's House in Berryfield



as in Beanacre, and Berryfield (photo to the right) or formed intimate clusters and cul-de-sacs as in Whitley. Dwellings maintain an informality of layout. Gardens and landscape continue to be an important element of placemaking.

#### Landscape Character

Larger garden plots with more dense and extensive tree cover reinforce the rural character of the settlements, distinct from Melksham's settlement character. The informal arrangement of development along village edges create gaps that retain countryside boundaries within the villages, as at Beanacre and Shaw. Such rural gaps are an important asset in village character and sense of place. Landscape gaps between the villages and the town are also important for maintaining a distinct identity.

Boundary treatment employs higher stone and brick walls through to rubble and ashlar lower stone and hedge front gardens boundaries.

#### Roads and Pedestrian Links

Roads are not formal or straight, increasing the informal rural character of the settlements, distinct from that in Melksham.

Traffic volumes and poor quality of pavements are issues particularly in Beanacre. However, villages are well served by connecting footpaths linking to the countryside beyond.

#### Building Form

Each village has its own focal and historic buildings, recorded in analysis sheets, around which the villages houses have expanded. Buildings nearly all range between one and two storeys with tile hung pitched and gable end roofs. The architecture is also varied, enabling the villages to authentically represent their development over the centuries.

#### Materials

Course rubble limestone, ashlar corners and details and tiled roofs are a common feature of Melksham Without's villages' historic farms and houses. More recent development has added red brick and painted render to add to the variety of layout and form of the settlements.

## Full Character Surveys

Character Surveys were undertaken of areas within the joint Plan Area that are considered to have positive characteristics that are transferrable to new development. Surveys were undertaken of:

- Beanacre
- Berryfield
- Bowerhill
- Forest
- Hazelwood
- Queensway
- Roundponds
- Shaw
- Snowberry & Campion
- The Spa
- Whitley

Full surveys are found in Appendix 2.

# Appendix 1 Heritage

The following is an amalgamation of information from Lisa Ellis, Cllr Baines and by the Melksham and District Historical Association (including from their book 'Around Melksham in Old Photographs' and website: <http://www.melkshamhistoricalassociation.org/index.asp>).

A Royal medieval forest covered part of the parish which, combined with Chippenham Forest, covered 33 square miles. It extended from Calne in the east to Semington in the west and was administered by the Constable of Devizes Castle. William I gave the local manor and lands to Britric Aloeric a descendent of a Norman knight. Today, the name is carried by Aloeric Primary School close to the Town centre.

In 1219 a weekly market and Michaelmas Fair was granted to the town. Medieval settlement was probably concentrated in the Church Street, Church Walk, High Street and Market Place area. The cloth industry was active by this time and Fulling Mills were in operation. By the next Century the area to the north of the river known as The City was occupied and expanding. The cloth industry finally came to an end when the last mill, Matravers Mill, closed in 1888, and was taken over by the Avon who moved from Limply Stoke the following year.

In 1847 a private company built the Cheese Hall (now the

Town Hall) where the sale of the cheese and local farm produce was traded. Prior to the construction of the Market Hall, Chippenham was becoming very popular with the sale of cheese and it was feared that people would not make the additional trip down to Melksham to buy the local farmers' cheese; after all, Melksham was renowned for its milk. Building the cheese market encouraged the train line to be extended down to Melksham. You could say cheese brought the train to Melksham. And Melksham's train line was especially important to Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who gave a rousing speech in the Town Hall. The Assembly Hall nearby was used for many purposes and is perhaps overlooked in its importance to the town. Originally built for food storage for the cheese market, it also had both military and entertainment use; the latter bringing some very well known acts in the 1960s and more recent years.

In 1848 the Wilts, Somerset & Weymouth Railway came to the town which kick-started a wealth of industry development. An engineering works was started in Bath Road by C J Spencer; this moved to Beanacre Road in 1903. 1889 saw the Avon India Rubber Company move from Limpley Stoke producing rubber goods and later tyres, a business which continues to this day. Sawtell's feather factory, Hurn's, Coombs carbonated beverages business and Co-op Creamery also opened. What



became Wiltshire Farmers started in Atworth in 1916. Charles Maggs, grandson of the ropeworks founder, started a milk depot and butter factory at West End Farm before moving to New Broughton Road in 1888. The business grew into the Wilts United Dairy Company, later to become part of Unigate.

The ropeworks (and later coir matting) business was in a former cloth mill next to the W&B canal on Spa Road, having moved from the gardens of Place House in the Market Place in 1803.

The Post Office Telegraph Service was introduced in 1870 followed by the National Telephone Company in 1898, and Trowbridge Water Company provided a public water supply at this time. Electricity came to the town in 1924, eventually becoming Wessex Electricity by Nationalisation of the industry.

The now defunct Wilts and Berks canal linking the Kennet and Avon canal with the Thames opened in 1819. It ran almost through the centre of town and traces remain such as the Wharf House adjoining the hump that was the canal bridge in Spa Road, and the relics of a bridge at the junction of Forest and Sandridge roads. The canal was abandoned in 1914, and the area redeveloped.

At the beginning of the 20th Century dairy farming continued

to be a major industry and businesses were expanding. The population continued to expand as a result, leading to many housing developments. The Wiltshire Agricultural Co-operative Society started up and became Wiltshire Farmers in 1942.

The onset of World War 2 gave rise to the establishment in 1940 of the R.A.F. No 12 School of Technical Training at Bowerhill. This facility was used until the abolition of conscription in the early 1960's.