WILSFORD
CONSERVATION AREA
STATEMENT
May 2004
INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this Statement is to identify and record those special qualities of Wilsford that make up its architectural and historic character. This is important in providing a sound basis for the Local Plan policies and development decisions, as well as for the formulation of proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the character or appearance of the area. The Conservation Area was designated in 1975. This Statement includes a review of the Wilsford Conservation Area and is intended for all those with an interest in the village, or undertaking work on the buildings, landscape, roads or public spaces. It is also essential reading for anyone contemplating development within the area. By drawing attention to the distinctive features of Wilsford it is intended that its character will be protected and enhanced for the benefit of this and future generations.

LOCATION
Wilsford is close to the centre of Wiltshire 6.5 miles south east of Devizes in the west part of the Vale of Pewsey half a mile north of Salisbury Plain and close to the River Avon. It is situated in quiet lanes a quarter of a mile off the A342 main Andover road. The small village of Charlton St Peter in the combined parish is a separate designated Conservation Area.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION
The village appears remote, somewhat bare and undeveloped. There are few trees and hedgerows, the more significant tree groups are at its east and west ends. It is a quiet rural village predominantly of cottages, several of the 16th century and earlier. Most have thatched roofs and timber frame walls consistently painted in the estate cream. One building group lies at the west end adjacent junctions in the lane and includes the historic Manor House and farm buildings, a former maltster’s house and several cottages. Cottages and modern outbuildings with intervening pasture extend along the lane to the east where there is the nucleus of the village. The churchyard with the 15th century church stands at a cross roads with a cluster of cottages, the modern village hall, a former vicarage and the former main farmyard. Outlying to the north east is a former miller’s house beside the river Avon.
LANDSCAPE SETTING AND GEOLOGY
The village lies in the north part of the parish close to the course of the river Avon at about 350 feet above sea level on the comparatively flat ground of the Vale of Pewsey among pasture and meadow. Much of the landscape around the village appears to be bare, treeless and exposed. Trees and hedgerows however are significant along the course of the river where alluvial soils form the banks. River and Valley gravels underly the eastern nucleus of the village and also to a lesser extent the western end. Greensand on the Lower Chalk underlies the slopes leading towards Salisbury Plain where large open fields are mainly under arable cultivation.

ARCHAEOLOGY
West of the village a Neolithic henge is visible in aerial photographs and several linear features that relate to it. Within the Conservation Area there are three major areas of buried evidence of a Saxon settlement. South east of the village there is a group of ring ditches adjacent a Romano-British villa complex with quantities of buried building material, 3rd and 4th century pottery, wall foundations and painted wall plaster.

The historical map of 1844 shows a network of lanes. Less than half of these have been mettled as modern roads but some survive as bridleways and footpaths while others have largely disappeared from disuse or under cultivation. Buildings shown on the historical map are perhaps only approximate representations but were obviously numerous in 1844. Since then several cottages together with their garden enclosures have disappeared with little trace. Some have been replaced but there have been few additions. Also some original long cottage gardens have been shortened and part fenced into adjacent agricultural land.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE VILLAGE
Wilsford’s name derives from the Old English ‘Wifel’s ford’ or ‘Wifelesford’ first recorded in AD.892. The ford itself was a crossing of the river Avon probably situated just south of Cuttenham Farm on the Woodborough Road where there is now a small road bridge.

Like many parishes that are close to the north scarp of Salisbury Plain, Wilsford extends some 4.5 miles from the vale in the north to the top of Salisbury Plain in the south over the full range of soil types of the rich pasture through arable land to rough grazing on the downland but is only about one mile wide.

Architectural evidence suggests that the village remains much as it did in the Middle Ages. The population in the parish has been continuously employed in agriculture from Saxon times until recently. It is recorded that in the parish in 1377 there were 77 poll taxpayers, in 1801 the population was 224, in 1841 it had grown to 304, but by 1971 had reduced again to 100. Today almost no one is dependant on agriculture and the population in 2004 is down to just 60 of whom 11 are children. The regular congregation of St Nicholas parish church number between 6 and 9.

In the 13th century it was recorded that the tithing at Wilsford was divided length ways into the main manorial farm of Wilsford Manor Farm and Wilsford Dauntsey. The history of a watermill in the Wilsford area extends back at least until 1419 when the lord of Wilsford Manor rented Mill mead from the lord of Puckshipton. By 1500 a water mill nearer the present site formed part of Wilsford Manor. The millers and the tenants of the mill and its land during
The 18th and 19th century were the Springbatt family, several of whom lie in the churchyard. In 1875 the miller’s holding in addition to the mill comprised 85 acres of arable and 20 acres of water meadow. The mill continued in use until the 1920s although by then the Mill House was let separately as a private residence. In 2004 this house remains but the mill buildings have fallen into decay, which together with a timber barn opposite the house were damaged in a storm in the 1960s, have almost disappeared.

The most direct route from Rushall to Devizes was originally through the village by the winding lanes through Charlton, Marden, Chirton, Conock and Stert. The lane south of Wilsford was part of this route. Improvements began in 1707 when Parliamentary approval was gained for a turnpike from Devizes to Lydeway via Etchilhampton Hill. In the 1760s roads were being improved generally in the vale and the Andover and Devizes Turnpike Trust built a completely new road from Lydeway to Rushall. This was the present A342. In 1840 the Kennet and Amesbury Turnpike Trust improved the north-south route through the valley from Upavon to Amesbury and in the same year a link made from it to Beechingstoke was also turnpiked.

The agricultural estates were first combined and sold as one in 1875. In 1897 the downland south of the main Devizes Road was sold to the War Department. In 1919 the remaining estate was sold to Mr Henry Horton who opted to live at the eastern farmhouse and to name it Wilsford Manor. The Manor House at the west end was part of the estate and became known as Lower Farm. In 1975 both the Manor and Lower Farms were still working and the estate cottages occupied by agricultural employees and their families. Since 1975 agricultural activity has ceased from the farmyards and Lower Farm, renamed Wilsford House, has been sold as a private residence and Wilsford Manor is vacant.

The estate tied cottages are either occupied by the elderly retired, vacant or have been sold. The farm at Wilsford Manor ceased dairying more than 15 years ago and the farm buildings are redundant except for a little storage in 2004 while the land is leased and farmed from Worton.

A church is first recorded in the village in 1142. In 1227 its priory at Farleigh along with Manningford and Wilsford was appropriated by the Bishop of Salisbury to fund a chaplaincy at St Nicholas Hospital Salisbury and it was in that year that the chancel was built. In 1840 the Hospital was still receiving tithes, or rents in lieu, from Manningford and Wilsford. St Nicholas Hospital is first recorded as presenting a vicar at Wilsford in 1332 and continued to do so for many years. Wilsford was separated from the chapel at Manningford Bohun in 1939 when Wilsford became a united benefice with Charlton and North Newton. The master of Christ Church College Oxford was patron of Charlton and shared with the master of St Nicholas Hospital in presenting a vicar to the united benefice. In 1972 Wilsford, Manningford Bruce, Charlton, Beechingstoke and Woodborough were combined under the united benefice of Swanborough.

There was a vicarage house in Wilsford in 1783 but this may have been No.3 The Street. The building known as the Old Vicarage is of the early 19th century and was sold as a private residence in 1946. In 2004 the ministry of the Church is conducted by the Redhorn Team based at Urchfont.
In 1783 there was a school at the church for up to 10 children taught by a dame in a small room attached to the north side of the nave. By 1818 this school had ceased but in 1848 the rector of Beechingstoke and the parishioners of Wilsford built a school on land west of Church Lane. The school was united with the National Society and up to 40 children were attending in 1859. In 1906 numbers were down to 26 and declined still further as children aged 12 or over were sent to Rushall school. In 1965 the school closed and was demolished. The site was shortly afterwards developed with two detached houses that stand there today.

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC CHARACTER

The village is exceptional for the number of surviving thatched and timber-framed cottages. This is attributable in no small part to their maintenance by the agricultural estate. The form of the village is extended along a lane between two end groups where intervening green spaces between buildings are integral to its character. The west end includes the historic Manor House and attendant buildings. The east end is the village centre or nucleus presided over by the parish church situated at the crossroads of the Street and Church Lane.

The churchyard is bounded by a fine range of 19th century iron railings running along the roadsides. Tall yew trees flank the gateway and a sarsen stone path curves towards the 15th century church porch. A spreading yew tree shades the path and covers a group of late 18th and 19th century railed stone monuments to family members of the Harrises, Wells, Boxes, Haywards and Springbatts. These chest tombs are in fair condition though most have subsided a little, the rails are rusty and some inscriptions have eroded away to be almost illegible.

The church has a fine tall perpendicular tower crowned by an elegant octagonal top to the stair turret. Below the battlements is a frieze of stemmed trefoils. Above the plinth is another frieze of quatrefoils. The 15th century nave is attached to a low and modest chancel with a roof of the 15th century. The walls however are of 13th century cob with limestone dressings around the lancet windows, a south priest’s door, and inside an arched piscine, all unusually with little evidence of 19th century restoration. The nave however was repaired and refitted in 1864 and further repairs were complete in 1963 and included a rebuild of part of the tower. In 1959 the north chapel which had served as a school room and as a bakery was demolished. The 14th century arch that led to it can be seen next to the priest’s door in the wall of the nave.

No.3 ‘The Timbers’ overlooks the churchyard from the north and has been used as a vicarage. The massive chimney breast appears to be the centre of a lobby entry house. There is evidence of earlier cruck structure from the 15th century. No.2 with No.1 attached to the north were part of a contemporary build of all three. No.2 the central house contains a wide historic staircase that may have served the combined building from a cross passage. No.1 suffered a fire which precipitated the rebuild in brick of Nos 1 and 2. In 1818 the east gable wall of No.3 was also rebuilt in brick following serious uneven settlement of the original wall of timber frame. The three houses together form a group in close relationship to the church and Church Lane. The exposed timber frame of No.3 is original structure and shows an interesting history of external alterations. The roof plate is now below the upper floor window sills indicating a raising of the front wall under the roof to allow full storey height upper rooms instead of attics. Inserted casement
No.4 and 5 The Street are of 18th and 19th century. No.6 and 7 are of the 17th century.

Windows larger than the original have required the removal of some structural framing and nogging. On the front elevation brick has replaced the wattle and daub infilling of the frame. The west gable wall is a recent reinstatement of the frame with a rendered insulating block infill. The building has however many surviving historic features including the central chimney breast, original corner posts, tie beam and ogee curved corner braces.

Opposite are cottages No.s 6 and 7 both painted the deep cream of the Horton Estate. These are sited on the street corner in an ‘L’ shape of late 17th century date in thatch and timber frame retaining the original small scale single storey and attic. The attic windows are within long dormers above the wall plate. The framing, infill and casements are all replacements but the original chalk stone plinth, now painted, still shows in the passage at the side. The group stands out in the lane in front of the row starting with No.8, where No.7 is particularly significant in the long view from the west.

Part of the same group at the east end of the village street are No.s 4 and 5 also of ‘L’ shape plan set back from the frontage. The chimney gable wall only is close to the street. This pair are of the later 18th and 19th century period of a full two storeys with painted brick walls.

To the side of No.4 is a thatched shed that was the former building to the Blacksmith’s Shop. It is significant to the character of the roadside at the eastern entry into the village.

The east lane into the village from the south opens up a fine view of the long thatched outline of cottages dominated by the church tower rising behind. The roadside hedge is important to maintain a thick strong screen to conceal domestic clutter in the cottage back gardens and ensure privacy for the residents.

The Old Vicarage is a listed building dating from the early 19th century with walls of stucco under a wide hipped slate roof. The original windows are 16 pane sashes. However on the south and east elevations these have been replaced with multi paned steel framed casement and door combinations beneath flat roofed projecting bays. These detract from the original character of the house that in many ways retains much of the usual dignity of the country vicarage standing in its own wooded grounds. The former coach house of similar date and style is neglected and dilapidated. In 1844 there was also a barn and outbuildings on land to the south for use in farming the Glebe.

Trees surrounding the Old Vicarage on the three sides to the south are particularly significant in the comparatively bare landscape around the village. The listed cob wall on the north side is significant to the rural character of the village street.

No.8 with No.6 Street opposite define the width and space of the road at its junction with the lane. No.8 is of traditional scale and form but now appears largely modern in materials and detail.

No.9 is a simple gabled thatched brick house with a date stone inscribed 1772 K over EM in a blind panel over the door. The walls in a blue header bond with red quoins and dressings are on a projecting plinth. Patterning in the brickwork continues up the gable chimney stacks. The three light casement windows are set flush in the openings with finely gauged brick flat arched heads. The six
The panelled door is covered by a slatted timber porch that projects out on to the roadside. Against the western gable is a hip roofed lean-to with a thatched roof that is continuous with the coping of the adjoining cob wall.

The village hall on the north side is a modern timber building set back from the roadside in a grass forecourt. It is a valuable amenity but of a 20th century design and materials that is not in-keeping with the character of the village. The copper beech and yew trees in the grounds however do much to enhance the setting of the building.

Continuing on the south side a modern house is set back in its plot behind a significant tree. Next door No.12 is another traditional but unlisted detached thatched cottage. It too is significant in the Street, defines the frontage and has several historic features including areas of exposed timber frame. The thatched roof is hipped over a lean-to at one end and there are good 19th century style timber casements spaced one in each original structural bay.

No.13 is a small listed brick and tile cottage with a date-stone in a recessed panel 1819 W over WD. It was originally symmetrical about a central front door with a good façade although unlike No.9 it is without the blue headers or patterning but built in red brick in Flemish bond. The six panel door with blind fanlight has a fine semicircular arched head. The ‘S’ tie plate has no doubt been required because of internal alterations concurrent with the 20th century extension.

No.14 and 15 is another interesting former single house listed as 17th century and timber framed. No.14 is the gabled cross wing part where the exposed frame and rendered infill panels are complete except at the inserted door and large 19th century 3-light casement windows. The division wall is on the line of the original massive central chimney with fireplaces facing into both cottages. No.15 is the attached two bay block that has surviving timbers in the exposed first floor plate and upper frame. There is a big gabled dormer above the door and an added single flue chimney stack to the half hipped gable end. The walls and thatched roof are in their original historic form.

No.16 and 17 is a similar 17th century timber framed building divided into two cottages but more extensively now of brickwork. The original central chimney is in the party wall with breasts facing into both cottages. One cottage with a central entry is within the cross wing and the other in the adjoining two bays. Both have brick porches and lean-to outshuts now more less incorporated into the accommodation and thatched as long continuous roof slopes. The surviving parts of the exposed timber frame are evident on the north side gable wall but have only the

No.7 The Street closes the view along the village street. No.9 adjoins the Old Vicarage cob wall.

The site of the former school on the north side of the Street demolished in 1965 when these two houses were subsequently built.

The well maintained 20th century village hall is enhanced by copper beech and yew trees.

No.s 14 & 15, 16 & 17 The Street are of 17th century timber frame with alterations of the 19th century.

Typical Plan of the 17th century Wilsford timber framed house
first floor plate with the frame above. There are several cottages of the 16th and 17th century that are of similar plan and design that appear to have been built as single houses. All except for one example have been subdivided into cottages. These are No 14 & 15, No 16 & 17, No.20 (still a single house), No.21 & 22. No.26 & 27 (much extended).

No.18 the Street is another type of timber framed building but of quite remarkable early design and construction. The original roadside block is of a single storey with attic in four bays. The central part was originally a former hall open to the roof with smoke blackened pairs of full crucks. Trees used in the timber framed structure have been dated by dendrochronology at 1309-10 that make it arguably the oldest house in the village. In 1996 it was modernised and extended with painted brickwork construction at the rear. The east wall revealed a leaded light window with diagonal bars jointed directly into the structure. Other windows are 20th century casements. The chimneys are later although the east bay chimney breast may be an insertion as early as the 17th century.

No.14 and 15 together with No.18 in their simple open roadside context are together a particular asset to the Conservation Area.

The loose alignment of thatched vernacular cottages on the south side of the Street from No.s 4 to 15, the cob wall attached to No. 9 together with No.18 are closely related as a group of unusual and exceptionally strong rural character.

Separated by intervening pasture to the west No.19 St George’s Cottage is an unlisted but traditional cottage of small scale, and thatch situated close to the roadside. And even behind a thorn hedge it makes a positive contribution to the Street with its low undulating thatched roof and traditional chimney.

Adjacent is Yew Tree Farm, No.20, that is listed as an early 19th farmhouse. Externally the rendered walls and the sash windows on each side of the door seem to bear this out. It does however have fundamental features such as the position of the main chimney and the presence of a cross wing that are characteristic of the 17th century as those of some other buildings in the village ie. No.s15,16 and No.s17,18. These latter though relatively unaltered have nevertheless progressed someway towards the early 19th century appearance carried through in No.20. In particular features such as the raising of the walls and the provision of a second chimney stack for the west rooms. Installation of sash windows and a central door were the fashion of the early 19th century. The lean-to outshut even has a coped gable in-keeping with the façade. Sadly the building in 2004 is in poor condition. However the on-going repair of the
20th century farm buildings
decayed east wing wall reveals evidence of a timber frame. An overall repair scheme could reveal that the structure is indeed an historic timber frame. Beyond Yew Tree Farm a green field gap includes various redundant 20th century agricultural barns and sheds. These seem to have been related to a small holding based at No.21 the first of several cottages clustered in the western part of the village.

No.s 21 and 22 are estate cottages that were formerly a single timber framed house of an origin older than its appearance from the Street. The single large stack off centre and the blind gables to the rear indicate it to have been of three bays covered by a roof with a one and half storey high eaves all round. In addition an historic lean-to section is attached to the rear and there is a former outshot at the west end. The lower walls on the north and east are of brickwork that replaced decayed parts of the timber frame. The upper walls are of late 18th century frame raising the original front to a full two storeys. Most of the windows are casements from the early 20th century but in the shelter of the upper east wall there is an early 19th century glazing bar example.

The building has suffered from varying standards of maintenance and alterations. In 2004 it is vacant and in poor condition. Renovated it would again be an asset to the Conservation Area.

A near neighbour is the Malt House, a former maltster’s house. The malthouse with a barn for the storage of barley was sadly demolished in about 1987. It stood immediately to the south west of the house orientated north to south and was a long range of brick with a thatched roof dated 1770.

The Malt House dates from the 16th century, an extended ‘H’ shape on plan, the timber framed structure was originally a single storey and attic raised in the 18th century to a full two storeys. The central part is of three bays with a lobby entrance where back-to-back chimneys occupy a whole bay. To both ends there are wings projecting forward. The west is of a later date than the east with a wider span but is still in its original attic form. Both timber framed wings project on the south side and together with the centre bays are surprisingly clad up to eaves level in late 18th century red brick. In addition there is a brick wing and chimney of the same period attached to the east end. The eastern wings have 2-storey semi-circular bays with glazing bar sash windows on either side of a six panelled door. Other windows facing south are casements of various patterns including some of the 20th century. Those on the north side are generally of the smaller 19th century type that fit in with the exposed frame.

The Malt House is very important to the character of the Street and the Conservation Area generally.

Next to ‘the Malt House’ and forming a small courtyard between is No.23 a 2-storey thatched cottage close to the lane and tapering to the west with the bend in the roadside. It was brick built originally with two bays including the west part and an east gable chimney. Added shortly afterwards was a further bay extending east in keeping with the original. Attached to this is a lean-to at the rear.
No.23 The Street, a brick cottage of the early 19th century. The west façade endows the corner with a strong sense of place but is somewhat marred by the prominent wires and pole.

No.23 is both listed for group value and significant in the lane because of its distinctive narrow windowed façade and hipped thatch roof directly in the view on entering Wilsford from the west.

No.24 is listed as a 17th century house but is of a full 2-storeys, the upper of timber frame and the lower of rendered cob or chalkstone. Once of lobby-entry plan it is again one house with a central chimney and two hearths although in 1844 it is recorded as two cottages. The lower rendered walls project beyond the thinner upper walls. To shed water an overhang has been effected by various means in the past including corrugated steel sheeting. The large thatched roof steeply pitched and fully hipped with low wide eaves over small windows are all important to the character of the east part of the village.

The Poores stands near the corner beside a branch lane north off the Street. It was once the village beer house and known as recently as 1934 as The Poore’s Arms. The early 19th century unlisted building is of 2 storey brick construction and extends along the roadside. A straight joint indicates two separate periods of construction for the front wall. To the south there is a 2 bay cottage with a north gable chimney. To the north is a 3-bay symmetrical fronted cottage of the same scale with central entrance under a thatched porch. This is joined to a single storey wing extending further along the lane and is also thatched over brickwork. It is of comparatively narrow span in painted brick and covered by thatch. Most of the windows are wide 3-light casements under cambered brick arch heads.

Several factors combine in this area to give a strong sense of place. Four buildings; The Malt House, The Poore’s, No.s 23 and 24 the Street are in a close relationship with the junction in the lane which being confined by a brick retaining wall form a relatively tightly knit group.

Further to the north on a bend in the lane are two 20th century houses one of which was the former post office and store of the village. These replaced former cottages that were on the site in 1844.

Wilsford House is a late 18th - early 19th century residence of some architectural quality that was formerly the Manor House of Wilsford. It is probably the latest in a series of houses that have stood on this site. This house is of brick in Flemish bond with a slate roof. The 20 pane sash windows are set within arched openings and the original front door is within a pedimented doorcase facing east. The south side has been remodeled as the entrance façade and a round window put in on the east side in the 20th century. Lawns and mature trees within the mainly brick garden walls enclose the grounds around the house in contrast to the bare landscape without.

The red brick and slate covered farm buildings also appear to be replacements of earlier buildings and even these are being steadily replaced by new buildings of other materials. Some traditional construction in the form of a small outbuilding and yard walling survives of cob with roofs of thatch.

Cruck End is sited beside a branch in the lane leading north from the green outside Wilsford House. It is a picturesque one storey and attic thatched cottage complemented by an adjoining roadside garden wall of traditional cob with thatched coping. The timber
framed cottage structure is exposed to view. One pair of the 15th
century crucks is part of the west gable wall. The cruck blades
are joined across their tops by a collar and the eaves of the half
hipped thatched roof shelter the wall. The infill to the frame is
brick nogging painted white. Of just two bays long the chimney
is within the second bay as part of the east gable wall. Windows
are glazing bar casements with a door on the south side. There is a
flat roofed kitchen extension on the north side but does not detract
from the original character which is well preserved.

No.26 and 27 the Street also have surviving timber framed walls
facing north and east of 17th century origins on much the same
original plan as others of that period in the village. It has been
raised to two full storeys and twice extended south
accommodating the two dwellings. The result is that the original
is now overwhelmed by the extensions and almost entirely spoilt.

BUILDING MATERIALS AND DETAILS

Wilsford is remarkable for the number of thatched and timber
framed buildings, where there are at least two are of late medieval
origin.
The timber frames are of oak or elm originally erected on
relatively impervious plinth walls of chalkstone, greensand stone
or flint or a combination of more than one of these. Since the
local use of brick this has replaced the original materials and has
in several cases been built up to replace decayed parts of the
lower frame.
The oldest frames are based on pairs of crucks known as blades.
For one cottage trees with appropriately curved trunks would have
been selected for the several pairs of blades needed. Each pair
would be pit sawn from a single curved trunk. First laid on the
ground the cruck blades would be jointed to cross beams of
lighter section. To support the roof short lengths of timber would
be strongly jointed to the blade at eaves level to carry a beam or
plate. The joints are an area of weakness and vulnerable to decay.
See the cruck on page 10. The cruck blades would be fixed and
set up with the smaller eaves plates and braces fixed to stabilize
them longitudinally. This would be the main frame. Rafters and
wall frames would then be added.
Some internal crucks are jointed together at the ridge while others
for the external end walls are shorter and connected across the
tops by a collar to allow for a partly hipped roof.

WALLS

Surviving timber frame walls of the 17th century and earlier are
largely infilled with hazel wattle. The wattle is daubed in a mix of
lime, dung, hair, grit and stone dust or sand and lime rendered.
Today surviving exposed timber frames may often be filled in
with brick noggin. The bricks are painted or rendered to maintain
the original appearance. Brick noggin however is heavier and of
inferior thermal insulation value to the original.

Cob is a combination of pebbles and fragments from the upper
and middle strata of chalks with clay, straw, dung and hair bound
together in a lime slurry. It is laid in compacted layers, sometimes
contained within a shuttering for low walls as in agricultural
buildings and boundary walls. It is very vulnerable to softening
and weakening through damp and frost action. It must be well
founded on an impervious layer or base wall clear above the
ground and sheltered by a roof with wide eaves.
Few buildings with exterior walls of cob survive although interior
cottage walls and exterior walls that are smooth rendered may
conceal this material.

**Brick** is a universal material and was manufactured in the vale from
the 17th century. Initially used sparingly for chimney stacks and
impervious base-walls for timber-frame, malmstone and cob walls it
became more readily available in the late 17th century for dressings
in combination with local traditional materials and then in the 18th
century for complete walls. Handmade examples from the 18th and
early 19th century have mellowed with lichens growing on the
surface. The best brickwork from the late 18th century includes
vitrified headers built in solid walls of Flemish bond. There are one
or two examples of gauged brick arches to door and window
openings formed in fine brickwork. These are flat, cambered and
semicircular as well as the four centred arch with keystone. The
example shown is at the Manor Farm coach house.

**ROOFS**

Thatch has continued as a tradition in the village due in no small
way to the management of the estate. As an agricultural estate it has
quite logically seen no reason to change from a material that
continues to be grown over large areas of its arable land that
produces vast quantities of straw. Roofs have regularly been re-
thatched at low cost. Any alternatives would have to be brought in
by cart and the structure beneath is not easily adapted to bear any
other covering. Historically all the farm houses, farm buildings and
cottages would have been thatched in ‘long straw’ together with the
copings for the cob walls about the village.

Some examples remain in the traditional ‘long straw’ and thatch
about the village but others are of ‘combed wheat reed’.

For economic reasons slates and tiles have become more prominent.

**The Principles of design in thatch.**

Extensions to existing buildings in thatch should respect certain
principles:

a) Thatch should be pitched at 50 degrees or more and continue the
   local tradition of ‘Long Straw’ where existing .

b) The layout plan should be of simple rectangular form without
   irregularities or acute angles. Round or curved plans are
   practicable in thatch but any inside radius must be generous.

c) Single storey extensions added to the rear of a 2 storey building
   of maximum span may be covered by a continuation of the
   main slope or a ‘cat-slide’. The span of the extension must be
   limited to allow the pitch of the thatch to continue on down
   consistently.

d) The creation of valleys and large dormers should be avoided.

e) Thatch should not rest on an existing flat roof surface. Clear
   ventilation and drip space under eaves is important.

f) Mortar weatherings to chimneys are preferred by thatchers to
   those in lead.

**Welsh slates** were brought in to the vale by canal barge via Bristol
and coastal shipping from North Wales. Exported in vast quantities
from the end of the 18th century, slate, at a reasonable cost, offered
an alternative to thatch. It is a durable roof material requiring low
maintenance, easy to lay, light in weight and incombustible. Several
examples of buildings in the village have slate as the original
covering. These include: The Old Vicarage, The Mill House

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**Manor Farm**

An example of high quality bricklaying. The
unlisted late 18th century carriage house doorway
has a 4 centred radial gauged arch of rubbed bricks
with a Bath stone key block set in a wall built in
Flemish bond incorporating some overburnt
headers.

The timber doors are not the original.

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**Thatch. A group of cottage roofs showing the adaptability of straw, its simplicity and neatness.**

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**The late 18th century buildings at Manor Farm have both hipped and gabled slate roofs.
The hip ridges are covered by lead flashings in short lengths lapped, clipped and dressed over ‘mop stick’ wood rolls.**
Wilsford House, Wilsford ‘Manor’ and farm buildings.

St Nicholas’s Church was probably originally thatched but has been roofed in the more durable Welsh slate although these too have perished and reslating has again become necessary.

PROBLEMS AND EYESORES

In 1844 Wilsford was a thriving agricultural village of over 300 population. In 160 years this has steadily dwindled and is now just 60 persons with only one man employed in agriculture.

There are no longer any working farms in the village. The former busy community based on the many agricultural related activities of the farmyards, the blacksmith and carpenter’s shop, beerhouse, post office/stores and the village school have all disappeared. There is no longer the wide variety of buildings in different uses. The village hall and the parish church are the notable exceptions.

There are redundant traditional agricultural buildings and several empty estate cottages some of which need repairs and refurbishment. Only two cottages are currently undergoing building work.

Eyesores are confined to the following:

1. Prominent overhead wires and poles.

2. Redundant and derelict 20th century agricultural buildings.

3. Thin and missing lengths of hedgerow replaced by barbed wire.

Buildings, trees and hedgerows extend sparsely along the Street between the east and west ends of the village. There are archaeological remains of the Saxon settlement around the village and beneath the field to the north of the lane.
PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

Thatched roofs and cob walls to all buildings should be preserved. Any proposed extension or redevelopment should respect the scale, siting, design and materials of existing traditional buildings particularly those with thatched roofs which are steeply pitched and low at eaves. Single storey and attic is the common form of dwelling. The few buildings of two full storeys are invariably low and of small scale.

Where thatch might not be appropriate for roofs to new extensions slate may be acceptable. For new walls, brick painted or render on block painted might also be in-keeping. Standard solutions of repair and minor alterations are likely to adversely affect the character of traditional buildings. Traditional design solutions and construction techniques should be applied to any traditional building proposed for alteration or repair.

Changes to the natural environment both private and public may occur through neglect, lack of expertise or attention to traditional rural practices.

New infilling developments would not be appropriate. The character of the village is such that the green spaces between buildings are essential. Development in the gaps would also cumulatively result in increased traffic on the lanes within the village and detract from the tranquility of the Conservation Area.

AREAS OF POTENTIAL CHANGE

1. The traditional farm buildings at Wilsford Manor are redundant and the Manor farmhouse empty. The 20th century steel frame barns are still in use seasonally for agricultural storage. The early 19th century buildings of red brick and slate that front the roadside are part of the setting for the listed house and of a quality worthy of preservation and of a new use. The group around the yard is close to the village centre, screened and quite self-contained yet with a well established and wide vehicular access. The redundant traditional buildings have potential for conversion to up to three cottages.

2. Wilsford House is part of a group at the west end of the village that also includes several traditional farm buildings that are no longer in agricultural use. The brick and slate roof buildings are part of the setting to the listed house and of a quality worthy of preservation and of a new use. Some of the buildings are integral with the use of the house itself. Others further from the house have independent vehicular access and would seem suitable in size and scale for conversion to up to three cottages.

The visual and sustainable impact of such small residential developments would be small but the increase in population could be very beneficial.

3. East of the Conservation Area there is an area of land referred to on the 1844 tithe map as ‘late part of the Common’. The Parish Council proposes to establish the current status of this land and other riverside land with a view to adopting and maintaining it as public amenity space as if it were a Village Green.

THE PLANNING CONTEXT

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to determine which parts of their area are "Areas of Special Architectural or Historic Interest,"
the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" and to designate them as Conservation Areas. The Act, and advice given in Planning Policy Guidance Note15 - Planning and the Historic Environment, states that the local planning authority should formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of all Conservation Areas and this assessment, published as the Wilsford Conservation Area Statement is part of the process. This Conservation Area Statement was adopted by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on 3rd June 2004. SPG provides additional information on the interpretation and implementation policies and proposals contained in the Local Plan.

Consultation procedures, consistent with the advice contained at paragraph 4.7 of PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment, have been undertaken during the preparation of this Statement. Paragraph 3.16 of PPG12 – Development Plans, also states that an adequate consultation is a requirement for adoption of SPG. The Council considers that the consultation undertaken meets with obligations set out in PPG12.

The Kennet Local Plan 2001-2011 has been adopted by the Council and became operative on 30th April 2004. and provides background information for the detailed interpretation of policies contained in the Replacement Local Plan, particularly Policies PD1, HH5, HH6, HH8, HC5, HC24, HC32a, ED9, ED11a and HH12.

SUMMARY
The agricultural community has disappeared from the village. The population of 60 is largely retired, work at home or commute to work or school. One or two have another home elsewhere. The Parish Council feels that as an indicator of the sense of community the social activities of the village hall and Church are supported by almost too few to be viable. There should be more in the village to join in such activities if a sense of community is to be revived. This could only be brought about by a general increase in the village population. The Local Plan however states that because the village lacks facilities any housing development will be restricted. This however is no comfort to the dwindling population to whom there is a real threat to the future and conservation of the village.

CONCLUSION
The village has been subject to a decline in agricultural activity and a modest demand for new development. Wilsford is however subject to Development Plan restrictions on the construction of new houses. Any new development must therefore be very small and it is paramount that it should be appropriate to the existing character of the Conservation Area. Even infilling of single plots is inappropriate as cumulatively they would alter the bucolic character of the village. Fortunately, small compact schemes that re-use significant traditional buildings could provide a suitable alternative.

The preferred policy of conservation is therefore the revitalisation of the village through limited residential conversion of the redundant farm buildings in conjunction with preservation of the ‘status quo’ in all other parts.
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CONSULTATIONS
Charlton and Wilsford Parish Council
Wiltshire County Council
  The Director of Environmental Services
  The County Archaeologist
Wiltshire Buildings Record
The Campaign to Protect Rural England
English Heritage

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This booklet and future www.pages is one of a series of Conservation Area Statements and Guidance Notes. If you require any further advice or information please contact:-

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