



Forest of Dean District Council

# Hewelsfield Character Appraisal

January 2007

<b>Part One</b>	<b>The purpose of the Character Appraisal</b> <b>Best Value Performance Indicators</b> <b>Target Audience</b> <b>Process</b> <b>Hewelsfield Conservation Area</b>
<b>Part Two</b>	<b>Evolution of area</b> Development Archaeological significance <b>Townscape Analysis</b> Setting Skyline Approaches Landmarks Views Structure Hierarchy Quality of Spaces <b>Landscape setting</b> Topography <b>Identification of Sub Areas</b> <b>Condition of built fabric</b> Buildings Occupation levels Negative spaces Street Furniture Wirescape <b>Local Building Patterns</b> Local building patterns Materials Paving traditions <b>Activities, uses and linkages</b> Uses <b>Images and associations</b> Sounds
<b>Part Three</b>	<b>SWOT Analysis</b> Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
<b>Part Four</b>	<b>Management proposals</b> Application of policy guidance Consideration of the resources needed to maintain area Monitoring change Procedures for consistent decision-making Enforcement strategy Proposals for article 4 directions Intended action for Buildings at Risk <b>Proposed enhancement schemes</b> Wirescape <b>Economic development and regeneration</b> New development Building regulation relaxation Strategy for the management of trees and other greenery <b>Conclusion</b>

## The purpose of the Character Appraisal

The statutory definition of a conservation area is 'an area of special architectural or historical interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.' Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for designated conservation areas. This requirement is expanded on in government guidance.

This document is also written to support the wider policies for the historic environment stated in the recently adopted Forest of Dean District Council Local Plan 2005. Character appraisals will ultimately fit with the new Supplementary Planning Guidance for the historic environment.

As Hewelsfield is an existing conservation area the additional planning controls over whether certain development needs planning permission already exist. These controls do not alter because a character appraisal is produced. However the Character Appraisal will clearly identify the features or aspects of special architectural or historical interest that should be preserved or enhanced when development is proposed.

## Best Value Performance Indicators

In recent months the percentage of up to date and completed character appraisals has become a Best Value Performance Indicator; the indicators are used to determine the effectiveness of a local authority. It is therefore important that the Forest of Dean has an increasing number of up to date adopted character appraisals.

## Target Audience

This document has been written as an aid to determining planning applications and for residents, agencies and people with a general interest in the area. It is hoped that through the analysis of the area the elements that produce its special character will be clearly identified. Once the special character has been established any new development that is permitted can be designed to fit harmoniously in the village.

## Process

The draft character appraisal for Hewelsfield Character Appraisal was subject to a six-week public consultation, which involved public exhibitions and a public meeting. The residents of Hewelsfield were invited to make comments on the draft appraisal, all of which were considered by members of the Development Control Committee and Executive Committee, before agreeing to adopt the appraisal on the 26th October 2006.

On the 26th October 2006 the members of the Forest of Dean District Council also agreed to amend the boundary line of Hewelsfield Conservation Area. On the whole the alterations were only to allow the boundary to run along visible



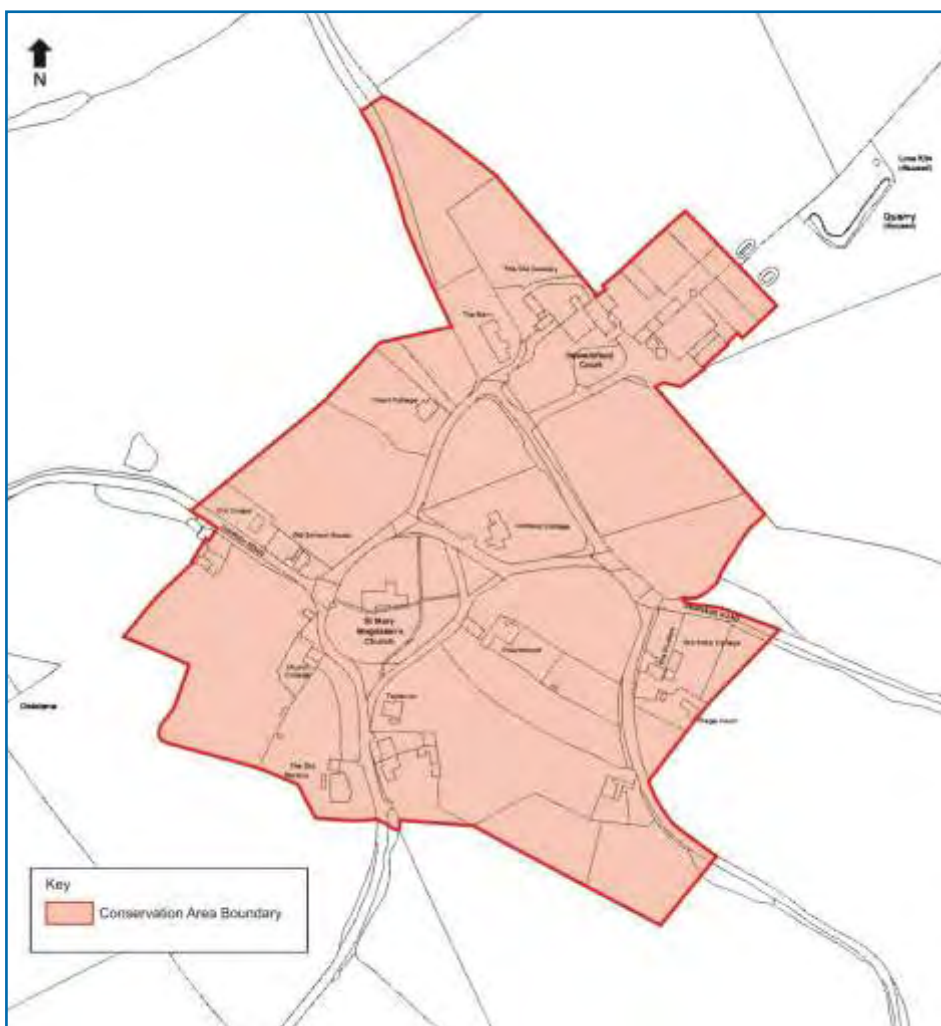
features, which meant the extent of the conservation area could easily be identified.

The character appraisal is also the subject of a Sustainability Appraisal, in order to allow the document to be a Supplementary Planning Document. This gives the document sufficient weight to be used as evidence at planning appeals and therefore be of as much use to the Forest of Dean District Council as possible.

## Hewelsfield Conservation Area

Hewelsfield was designated a conservation area on 31st January 1990. The area covers 9.15 hectares, (22.61 acres) and centres on the dispersed historic settlement around the Church.

Where the boundary of the conservation area is shown on a wall, fence, hedge row, tree line or other means of enclosure, it shall be deemed to be included within the designated area.





## Archaeological significance

Hewelsfield is an area rich in archaeology, and its current status as a small settlement, shouldn't mask the importance of the area historically.

The churchyard surrounding the 12th century Church is circular, which could indicate that it is a reused pagan site, which means it has considerable age. (Gloucester County Councils Sites and Monuments Record (SMR))

Evidence of Hewelsfield Castle remains as earthworks to the south west of the Church, situated on a hill. It is thought that the castle was a masonry structure, but very little evidence remains. The bailey associated with the castle has either disappeared completely or never existed. (SMR)

Around the site of the castle there is a series of earthworks, thought to be the remains of a deserted medieval village, possibly connected with the castle, although there is another theory that the earthworks are the remains of medieval field systems. (SMR)

At the base of the castle motte there is a series of linear earthworks possibly medieval in date, and are likely to be field boundaries. (SMR)

In the fields to the northeast of Hewelsfield Court there is evidence of an extensive historic field system, covering up to 32 hectares. The system is evident as earthworks, rectangular enclosures with linear field boundaries, all linked sharing a common border. Remnants of ridge and furrow can also be seen. (SMR)

Near Hewelsfield Court there is a disused road running from the settlement to neighbouring St Briavels. The road was closed in 1837 and is still used as a footpath, although it is currently overgrown. (SMR)

To the northeast of Hewelsfield Court there is a disused limekiln in an associated old quarry. (SMR)

There is another small, disused lime quarry within Hewelsfield settlement. (SMR)

As a result of this long history of settlement, Hewelsfield has considerable archaeological potential. Below ground archaeological evidence of medieval or possibly earlier, settlement, will be preserved on the sites of the Church, castle, medieval village and surrounding field systems. All of these sites merit protection.

## Townscape Analysis

### Setting

Hewelsfield is situated in a large area of open countryside, with gently undulating landform, which falls away to the northeast of the settlement.

To the west of the settlement lies the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but the settlement is not included within this area.

### Skyline

Mature trees dominate the skyline in Hewelsfield; many varieties are present, including both evergreen and deciduous species. See Fig 1.

### Approaches

Hewelsfield can be approached from a number of directions, but in each case the roads leading to the village are narrow and twist between the hedgerows which define the road. See Fig 2.

All the roads converge at the Church, which is the focus of the village.



Fig 1.



Fig 2.





Fig 3.



Fig 4.



Fig 5.



Fig 6.

### Landmarks

The main landmark is the 12th century Church, St Mary Magdalene, situated in its circular churchyard. *See Fig 3.*

The Church is a squat building situated in an area of flat land on an otherwise falling slope, which means that the building cannot be viewed from a distance and is chanced upon when travelling down the lanes.

### Views

Looking northwards from the southeast of the settlement, views of distant areas of higher ground can be appreciated.

Within the more enclosed area of the settlement, views are restricted to those along lanes and glimpses of buildings sheltered behind hedgerows. *See Fig 4.*

### Structure

The structure of Hewelsfield is one of sparse sporadic development, centred on the Church. The buildings have been constructed on the edge of the lanes which run through the settlement. *See Fig 5.*

### Hierarchy

The two most significant buildings in Hewelsfield are the Church and Hewelsfield Court. This is due to the scale of the buildings, but also the status they would have held in the village.

Historically the Church would have been very important, both socially and culturally, and is still the focal point of the settlement.

Hewelsfield Court farmed and still farms the majority of the surrounding land and its importance is demonstrated in the large three-storey farmhouse.

### Quality of Spaces

Hewelsfield is not a built up area, and is classed as open countryside in the Forest of Dean Local Plan, so the vast majority of the conservation area is open space.

The land is mainly agricultural, used to graze cattle and sheep. Due to the position of Hewelsfield and the lack of services it is not suitable for further development and therefore the open countryside is not under threat.

The circular churchyard is a very important space, different to the surrounding spaces. As previously mentioned the churchyard may have been a reused pagan site, which means that it has been an important area for centuries. *See Fig 6.*

Confined by a low stone wall the churchyard is surround by a number of impressive mature trees, and contains 17 listed grave monuments.

One of the trees in the Churchyard is an ancient/veteran yew tree, believed to date from approximately 690 AD.

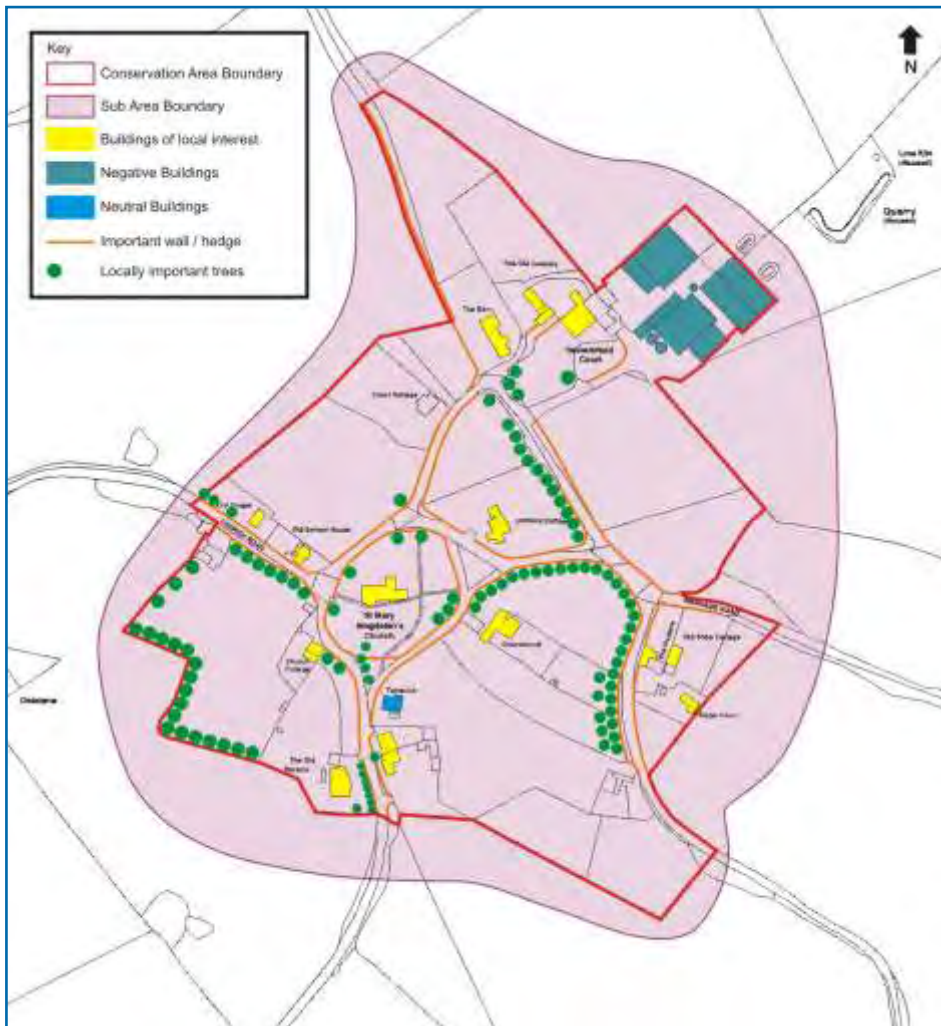
## Landscape setting

### Topography

Positioned on a limestone plateau, the ground is characteristically suited to pastoral uses. Fields tend to be large in form, but with vestiges of previous field systems being evident. The topography is identified in the Forest of Deans District Council's Landscape Character Assessment document, adopted in 2002.

## Identification of sub areas

Due to the small size of the settlement at Hewelsfield there is no need to divide it into sub areas, as the whole conservation area can be analysed as one space.



There is no discernable building pattern within the settlement, however the buildings are based around the church, all be it in an open informal manner.

Properties are situated in their own grounds, which are defined by hedges and stone walls. See Fig 7.

Due to the unusual shape of the settlement, it is very fragmented and when walking around as it is difficult to orientate yourself, as the area of raised ground on which the churchyard sits, blocks views through the area. See Fig 8.

The high hedges, stone walls and banks that surround the roads create a sense of enclosure and divide the settlement. See Fig 9.

A number of lanes and tracks lead to and from Hewelsfield, and they are a characteristic of the settlement. They also identify Hewelsfield as being a place of importance historically.

There are many mature trees in the heart of Hewelsfield, which shelter and define the settlement, as groups of trees are not found in the surrounding open countryside. See Fig 10.



Fig 7.



Fig 8.



Fig 9.



Fig 10.



## Condition of built fabric

### Buildings

There is only one group of buildings which are in a poor condition, situated on Church Road. They are now in a ruinous state, although they were once a fairly sizable building in relation to the surrounding properties. *See Fig 11.*

The remaining buildings are mostly residential and are well maintained by their owners.

Behind Hewelsfield Court there are large and unattractive prefabricated buildings. These buildings however, are necessary for modern farming practices and the continuation of a functional farm within the settlement, is an important characteristic of Hewelsfield. *See Fig 12.*

### Occupation levels

Apart from the afore mentioned derelict buildings, the remainder of the buildings are occupied or in agricultural use.

### Negative Spaces

The positive spaces are described in Quality of Spaces

As Hewelsfield is a collection of buildings situated within open countryside there are no spaces that could be described as negative.

### Street furniture

There is no street furniture of note in Hewelsfield.

### Wirescape

Around Hewelsfield Court there are electricity poles which do detract from the area, and clutter the skyline. If the wiring were redirected below ground, the rural nature of the settlement would be enhanced. *See Fig 13.*

## Local Building Patterns

### Local Building patterns

- Vernacular is a term used to describe buildings that are built to suit the needs of the owner, with materials that are to hand, rather than following a set form of architectural style such as neoclassical or Gothic. Vernacular buildings are generally simple in form and primarily functional.
- Polite architecture is the reverse of vernacular; it relates to buildings which are architecturally designed in a well defined style, using materials sourced from afar that sometimes needed to be transported into the area. This form of architecture generally relates to country houses and other status buildings.

Most of the buildings in Hewelsfield are vernacular in style; even the Church, which in many other cases portrays more architectural elements than the surrounding properties, has an unpretentious and vernacular appearance. *See Fig 14.*



Fig 11.



Fig 12.

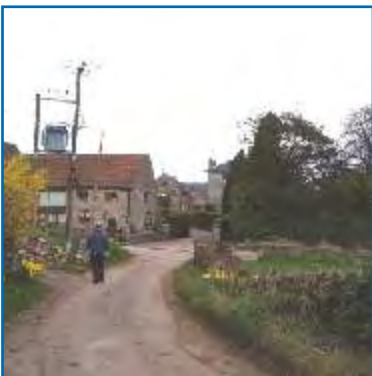


Fig 13.



Fig 14.

Some buildings do show elements of detailing, such as the old school building which has ornamental lintels over the windows. See Fig 15.

Hewelsfield Court can be described as being Georgian. By building the house in this style its importance over the surrounding properties was evident, given its large scale and impressive facades.

The properties are mainly two storeys in height and all have chimneys. Dormers are found in the area, but they appear to be insertions rather than part of the original design of the buildings.

Roof pitches vary as the roof coverings differ between properties. However the most common roof shape is gabled, with only Hewelsfield Court having a hipped roof. See Fig 16.

Some buildings which display Georgian proportions also have sash windows, but the majority of the buildings have simple casement windows.

### Materials

Sandstone is the building material used in the settlement. In some cases the buildings have been rendered to protect the stone, and the render is painted either an off white or soft cream. See Fig 17.

Slate and pantiles are the most common roofing material in Hewelsfield, with one example of concrete tiles, which are not in keeping with the area.

Artificial slates have been used on a newly altered and extended building by Hewelsfield Court; these slates are easily recognisable as reproduction, as they don't have the range of colour found in natural slates, and they give the roof a flat appearance.

### Paving traditions

The roads through the settlement are tarmaced, but most were covered in a layer of mud at the time of the survey. New tarmac is very dark and uniform in colour, and if laid in Hewelsfield would have a very significant effect on the character of the area.

It is unlikely that the roads were ever properly metalled in the past; they were more likely to have been mud tracks. See Fig 18.

There are no pavements in Hewelsfield - only grass verges with vegetation which creeps over the road edge and softens its appearance.

## Activities, uses and linkages

### Uses

A large proportion of the land around Hewelsfield is still in agricultural use, and Hewelsfield Court is still a large functioning farm. The remainder of the buildings in Hewelsfield are residential. There are no shops or services provided in the area.

The lanes around Hewelsfield are used as a 'rat run' during peak times such as rush hour. This is not desirable given the narrow and enclosed nature of the roads and the increased number of cars and therefore noise levels, have a detrimental impact on the conservation area.



Fig 15.



Fig 16.



Fig 17.

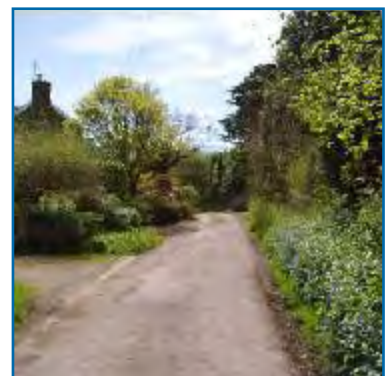


Fig 18.

# Images and associations

## Sounds

Background noise is created by the farm, but this only strengthens the areas rural atmosphere, as does the noise from the cattle and sheep grazed on the land.

However the compulsory reversing vehicle warnings on tractors and other large vehicles disrupts the peace of the conservation area.

Generally the area is a peaceful place, with little local traffic to disrupt the area. Bird song is often heard throughout the area too.



## SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis, identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the area.

### Strengths

- The open countryside
- The sporadic nature of the settlement
- Properties set within their own grounds
- Attractive lanes edged with stone walls and hedges
- The ancient and unusual Church and Churchyard.
- Mature trees in the conservation area

### Weaknesses

- Some buildings which do not sit completely at ease in the area
- Use of lanes as a 'rat run' for cars at rush hour
- Noise created by reversing vehicles.

### Opportunities

- To maintain the atmosphere of an attractive rural settlement
- To remove overhead wiring when the opportunity arises

### Threats

- It is unlikely that the form of Hewelsfield will alter drastically over time, given its rural situation
- Main threat is minor alterations occurring to buildings which degrade their character
- The removal or un-repaired damage of hedges and walls that line the roads

## Management proposals

### Application of policy guidance

The Forest of Dean Local District Local Plan 2005 sets out a number of policies that this authority will follow when dealing with conservation areas. The policies are as follows:

#### **(R)FHE.1 Preservation and Enhancement of Conservation Areas**

The Council will seek to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of designated Conservation Areas and will review from time to time the need for further designations. Development which would detract from the visual, historic or architectural character of such areas or their settings will not be permitted. Consideration will be given to the use of Article 4 directions where permitted development would be likely to have an adverse effect, particularly upon a programme or scheme of conservation works, or on buildings which have been grant aided.

#### **(R)FHE.2 Demolition in Conservation Areas**

Where the buildings or walls make little or no positive contribution to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area, their demolition will be permitted, but only if the demolition proposal is accompanied by fully detailed and acceptable plans for the redevelopment proposed after demolition which demonstrate that the redevelopment scheme will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Where buildings or walls in any Conservation Area make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of that Conservation Area, their total or substantial demolition will not be permitted unless:

1. All reasonable efforts have been made to sustain existing uses or to find viable new uses
2. Preservation in some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible
3. Redevelopment would produce substantial benefits for the community that would decisively outweigh the loss resulting from demolition.

#### **(R)FHE.5 Change of Use of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Importance**

Where an alternative use is proposed for a Listed Building or a building of local historic or architectural importance planning permission will be granted where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will preserve the historic and architectural character of the building in its setting and that no other reasonable alternative use exists which would better safeguard the architectural or historic importance of the building.

#### **(R)FHE.6 Development Affecting Archaeological Sites**

Nationally important archaeological remains whether scheduled or not will be required to be preserved in-situ. Planning Permission will not be granted for development which would involve significant alteration or damage to such remains or which would have a significant impact on the setting of visible remains.

Where proposals affect remains of lesser importance, planning permission will only be granted where the need for the development outweighs all other material considerations, and where appropriate and satisfactory arrangements have been made and can be implemented for the excavation and recording of any remains.

Where permitted, development affecting remains of archaeological importance must be implemented in such a manner as to minimise any adverse effect on the remains concerned.

In all matters relating to this policy the Council and the developer will be expected to take appropriate specialist advice.

#### **(R)FHE.7 Requirement to Provide Archaeological Information**

Development proposals likely to affect sites of archaeological interest and their settings or within areas of known or likely archaeological potential must be accompanied by an archaeological assessment and where appropriate the results of a field evaluation appraising the likely extent or nature of the archaeology, together with an indication of how the impact of the proposals on the archaeological remains will be mitigated. This information will be a material consideration when determining an application.

There are wider issues relating to conservation areas and these are set out in government guidance, these together with the local plan policies will be used to guide the consideration of proposals in the designated conservation area.

#### **Bats and Policy (R) FHE.2 demolition in Conservation Areas**

The Forest of Dean has a significant bat population; bats and their roosts are protected under Section 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. A licence is required from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), before bats or their roosts can be disturbed.

It is therefore important to determine whether bats are using a building or structure before it is demolished. Given the rural nature of Hewelsfield the possibility of their being a bat population in the area is quite high.

#### **Consideration of the resources needed to maintain area**

There are no major financial resource implications arising out of this character analysis for local authorities.

There are extremely limited resources available from central or local government specifically to maintain Hewelsfield conservation area; however the character appraisal may be useful for Hewelsfield and Brockweir Parish Council in identifying proposals for the future. For other agencies or authorities such as the district council and Gloucester County Council this character appraisal can identify issues that may be able to be dealt with when considering on going maintenance or planned programs affecting the village.

It offers an opportunity for private developers investing resources in the area to recognise the needs of the village when undertaking major or minor development.

#### **Monitoring Change**

Change in Hewelsfield needs to be monitored over the coming years in order to control the small alterations which take place, but which could eventually further erode the character of Hewelsfield. Monitoring will take place subject to officer time and as funds allow; the photographic recording of the conservation area every two years would produce a comparison exercise and a record for use in the future.



### **Procedures for consistent decision-making**

There is considerable detailed government guidance for dealing with development in conservation areas which is used by all local authorities in England and Wales. However the nature of historic buildings and conservation areas means that it is virtually impossible to produce a standardised strategy, as every building or area needs to be dealt with individually. The production of character appraisals, a Local Development framework and Supplementary Planning Guidance will help provide a consistent base for decision-making within this local authority.

### **Enforcement strategy**

It is occasionally necessary for local authorities to use their statutory powers to initiate the repair of buildings which are having a detrimental affect on the conservation area. These powers included urgent works notices and section 215 notices.

Local authorities also have the statutory powers to instigate the repair of listed buildings, and non-listed buildings within a conservation area, through the use of urgent works notices. If an urgent works notice were to be issued on a non-listed building in a conservation area, it would require permission from the Secretary of State. An urgent works notice is used to secure emergency repairs to a building to alleviate the deterioration of a building. The notice is issued to the owner, but if the owner refuses to carryout the necessary works the local authority may do so, and then claim the costs back from the owner.

Section 215 notices are part of the local authorities' planning powers; the notice can be served on the owner of any land or building where the condition affects the quality of the area. If the notice were served, the owner would be expected to redeem the situation through cleaning up the site or building. If the owner does not comply with the notice the authority can carryout the works then reclaim the cost from the owner.

Enforcement action will be taken where there are breaches of regulations and where it is necessary to do so. Aspects such as the introduction of satellite dishes to walls and roofs fronting a highway without permission are issues that need to be seriously considered.

### **Proposals for article 4 directions**

A local authority has power to withdraw further permitted development rights by issuing Article 4(1) and 4(2) directions. However a conservation area has to be deemed of considerable importance before Article 4 directions can be justified. This is an option available to the Forest of Dean District Council. However there are no proposals in this Character Appraisal to introduce article 4 directions.

### **Intended action for buildings at risk**

Hewelsfield does have one building that is in need of repair, but it is not listed, which means that Hewelsfield conservation area has no buildings formally identified on its Buildings at Risk register.

## **Proposed enhancement schemes**

Planning Act 1990 (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) states that Local authorities have a duty to prepare schemes for the enhancement of conservation areas. Many of the suggested areas of enhancement are included in this character appraisal, these suggestions relate back to the policies for the historic environment

as set out in the Forest of Dean Local Plan 2005. At the present time there is no specific budget or strategy for the completion of such schemes, which means that they can only be achieved through close partnership with other public bodies, agencies or sections within Local Authorities.

There are some ways in which the Local Authority could guide the enhancement of Hewelsfield.

Hewelsfield is not under pressure from development or even extensive change, and it requires very little management or enhancement, however a suggestion for enhancement has been made.

### **Wirescape**

Where the opportunity arises electricity and telecommunication wiring could be provided underground, to the benefit of the village. The removal of these overhead wires will reduce the clutter seen along the rural lanes.

## **Economic development and regeneration**

### **New development**

Conservation area status is not designed to stop all future development in that area. However it is also made clear in government guidance and the local authority's own local plan that new development in conservation areas should be of a high standard.

New development should relate to its surroundings, in scale and form, and the grain of the settlement, e.g. street patterns. However in order to relate to its surroundings new development does not automatically have to be an imitation of the buildings already present in an area. Conservation philosophy advises against the reproduction of old styles in new buildings, and encourages new development to be in the style of the time. It is the quality of a design that is fundamental in producing a high quality of building, linked with the level of detailing and finish.

However Hewelsfield is identified as forming part of the open countryside in the Forest of Dean's Local Plan. This means that the settlement is not suitable for further development, given the poor access to the area and the lack of sufficient services.

### **Building regulation relaxation**

The Building Regulations through Government policy requires new buildings, building works or services installed in them to be continually achieving better energy efficiency and lower CO2 emissions, as well as requiring in certain circumstances better access in and around the building.

Special considerations apply if the building on which the work is to be carried has special historic or architectural value and where compliance with the current requirements of the regulations would unacceptably alter the character or appearance of the building.

When undertaking work on or in connection with buildings with special historic or architectural value, the aim should be to improve energy efficiency and access where and to the extent that is practically possible. This is provided that the work does not prejudice the character of the listed building or increase the risk of long term deterioration to the building fabric or fittings.

Therefore when carrying works to such buildings which require Building Regulations Consent, it is important to speak to the Building Control section at an early stage so that any perceived conflicts of legislation can be identified and resolved in a manner that satisfies the current requirements of the relevant Regulations and Legislation.

### **Strategy for the management of trees and other greenery**

Most trees within the conservation area boundary are automatically safeguarded, as written notice is required to be submitted to the local authority six weeks before the work is carried out. This allows the local authority time to place a tree preservation order on the tree in question if it is felt worthy of the designation. It is the Forest of Dean District Council's Countryside Section that deals with such queries.

The protection granted by the designation of conservation areas does not normally extend to hedges or small scale planting. The loss of such features should be seriously considered before the work is carried out, as the impact on the conservation area could be harmful, both visually and ecologically.

## **Conclusion**

Hewelsfield is a settlement with significant history, for example its name having Saxon origins. The area has maintained its rural layout and atmosphere, with the large 12th century Church dominating the area. It is an attractive and pleasant area and it is hoped that through the writing of the character appraisal its character can be appreciated with greater understanding.

On its own the designation as a conservation area will not fully safeguard the area's special character. But it will help by clearly identifying the issues of primary importance to maintaining Hewelsfield's special character. It is the responsibility of all those with an interest in the area including the parish council, developers, planners, agencies and organisations that are responsible for services in the public domain, as well as local residents, to respond sensitively to change in the settlement and its surroundings.

The Forest of Dean District Council has limited funds to enhance the area but intends to work with all others with an interest in undertaking work in the settlement. When initiatives are proposed, sound conservation advice will be offered to try to ensure that the special character is safeguarded and enhanced wherever possible for the benefit of the existing and future generations of the area.