

ENGLISH BICKNOR CONSERVATION AREA

CHARACTER APPRAISAL

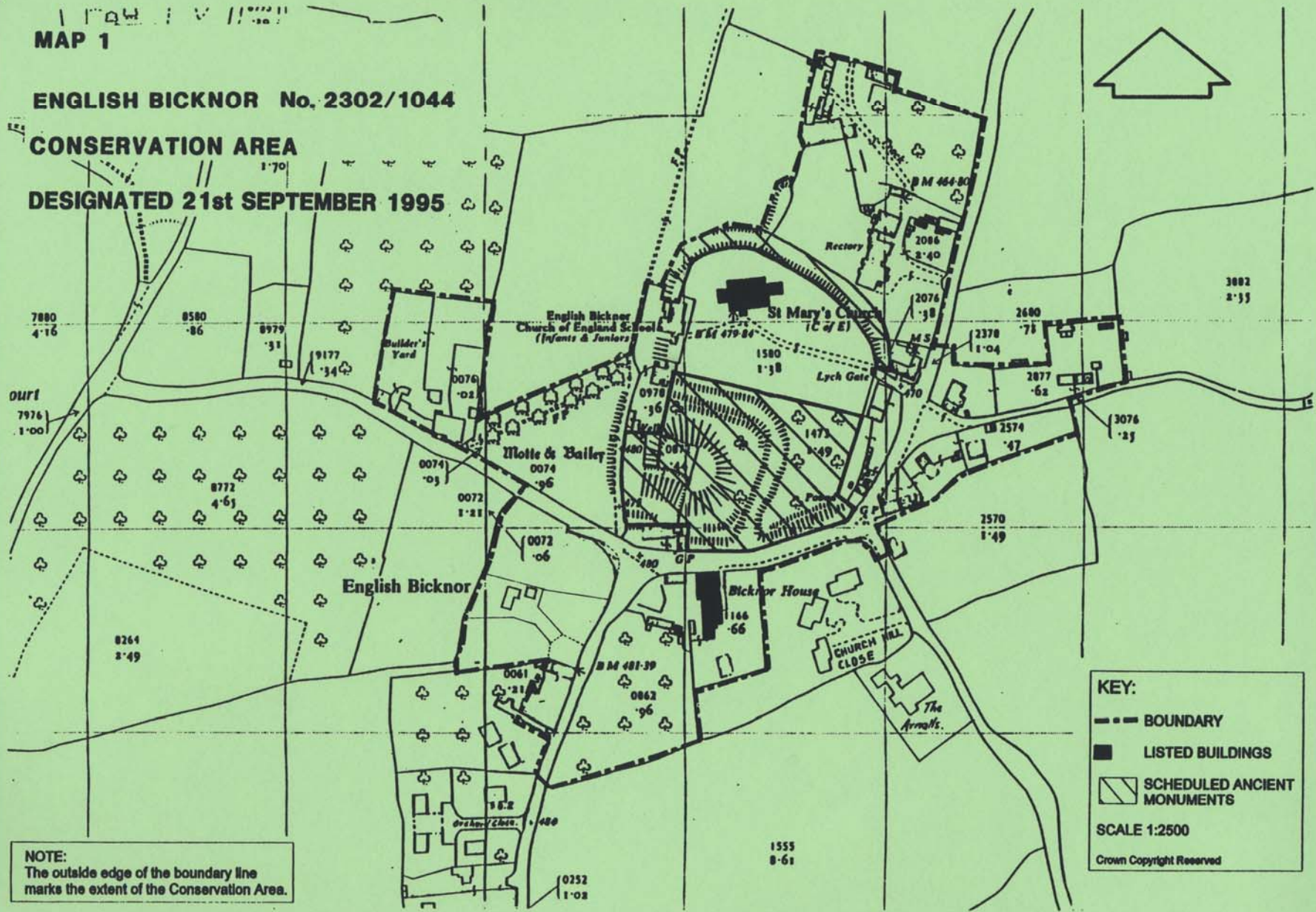


MAP 1

ENGLISH BICKNOR No. 2302/1044

CONSERVATION AREA

DESIGNATED 21st SEPTEMBER 1995



NOTE:
The outside edge of the boundary line
marks the extent of the Conservation Area.

KEY:

-  BOUNDARY
-  LISTED BUILDINGS
-  SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS

SCALE 1:2500

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Introduction

English Bicknor is a small and relatively isolated village located on an unclassified road (formerly B.4228) between Coleford and Lydbrook. It is set in a prominent position within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and is very visible from the surrounding countryside. The built form is made up of several components. The focus is provided by the fine village Church and the school, both set within a former motte and bailey castle (an Ancient Monument) and associated with a number of other attractive large buildings. To this loose nucleus is attached a small area of modern housing. Further south the village developed in a linear form with several farmsteads beside the road. There has also been a small amount of infilling and small groups of housing constructed in the Post War years.

The proposed Conservation Area is based on the historic core of the village around the Church and the site of the former motte and bailey castle, including the small group of traditional properties in the vicinity.

The Forest of Dean Local Plan (Deposit Draft) July 1993 proposes that the historic core of English Bicknor should be designated as a Conservation Area (SEE MAP 1)

What is a Conservation Area ?

A Conservation Area is defined by statute as "an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 - Planning and the Historic Environment states:

"It is the quality and interest of areas, rather than that of individual buildings, which should be the prime consideration in identifying Conservation Areas. There has been increasing recognition in recent years that our experience of a historic area depends on much more than the quality of individual buildings - on the historic layout of properties and thoroughfares;..... on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on the quality of street furniture and hard and soft surfaces; on

vistas along streets and between buildings; and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits the pedestrian use of spaces between buildings. Conservation Area designation should be seen as the means of recognising the importance of all these factors and ensuring that conservation policy addresses the quality of townscape in its broadest sense as well as the protection of individual buildings."

This appraisal of the character of the proposed English Bicknor Conservation Area is the first step in the preparation of proposals for its preservation and enhancement. This appraisal aims to provide a clear assessment and definition of the special interest of English Bicknor, and the action needed to protect it. It is hoped that this document will generate discussion as success is dependant upon co-operation and goodwill between all parties who have an interest in the area. Successful conservation cannot be achieved solely by planning controls; there must be a broader approach where those who have an influence on the character of the area are involved in the process of preservation, maintenance and enhancement.

The Implications of Designation

The designation of a Conservation Area imposes specific duties on the Local Planning Authority. The Authority must formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area, and submit them to public consultation.

In addition, in exercising their planning powers, the Local Planning Authority must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Areas.

The Implications for the Local Authorities

It is essential that all departments of both the District and County Council understand the significance of the Conservation Area, and act in coordination, in order that public works, such as street works, do not damage the historic fabric or appearance of the area. Other agencies, such as the water supplier or telecommunications companies must also be aware and show respect to the special architectural and historic character of the area.

Implications for Owners and Residents

In normal circumstances, householders have certain "Permitted Development" rights to carry out minor works to their properties, such as small extensions and the erection of garden buildings. However, in many places such as within an AONB or a Conservation Area, these rights are reduced. In the case of householders within the proposed English Bicknor Conservation Area, "Permitted Development" rights are already reduced because it lies within the Wye Valley AONB, and therefore there will be few implications for residents. However, some works would require the consent of the Local Planning Authority after Conservation Area designation and these include the demolition of buildings and works to trees. In addition, any new development including extensions would be expected to be of good design, appropriate to the special character of the area. As with all development proposals it is advisable to seek advice from the planning department at an early stage.

Conservation Area designation can also benefit property owners and occupiers. There may be added status to a property being located within a Conservation Area. Also the development controls aimed at maintaining and enhancing the appearance of the Conservation Area may sustain or enhance the appearance of properties within it.

English Bicknor Conservation Area and Character Appraisal

The decision to designate English Bicknor Conservation Area and adopt the English Bicknor Character Appraisal was taken by The Planning and Leisure Services Committee of The Forest of Dean District Council on the 21st September 1995. The draft version of the English Bicknor Character Appraisal had been the subject of widespread public consultation and various amendments had been agreed as a result. This version of the Character Appraisal incorporates a map of the boundary of the designated Conservation Area.

The Setting and Topography of the Conservation Area (see Map 2)

The older part of English Bicknor is located on a spur in an exposed hilltop position, with the Wye Valley to the north, and small valleys to the east and west. It is located within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is very visible from the surrounding countryside. Historically English Bicknor developed in a linear form, north-south along a hilltop, with a concentration of buildings around the church and the remains of a motte and bailey castle. This historic core is sited predominantly on the hilltop with the land dropping away on three sides.

Views

The hilltop position of English Bicknor ensures that there are extensive views across the surrounding landscape. At almost every point within the Conservation Area there are views out of the settlement across the undulating plateau and into the Wye Valley. The surrounding landscape is sparsely populated and is characterised by open fields and

woodlands. The prominence of English Bicknor in the landscape means that there are many views into the settlement from surrounding roads, footpaths and isolated properties. Views into the settlement tend to be from a distance, but the built form of English Bicknor, particularly the Church tower, is very visible from these distant vantage points because of its setting on a ridge which shows buildings against the skyline. The tree cover in and around the village is also evident, and softens the appearance of the village, especially in summer.



Fig.1 English Bicknor is very prominent in the landscape

Tree Cover In and around the area

Tree cover in and around the Conservation Area is particularly significant, with many mature trees softening the appearance of the

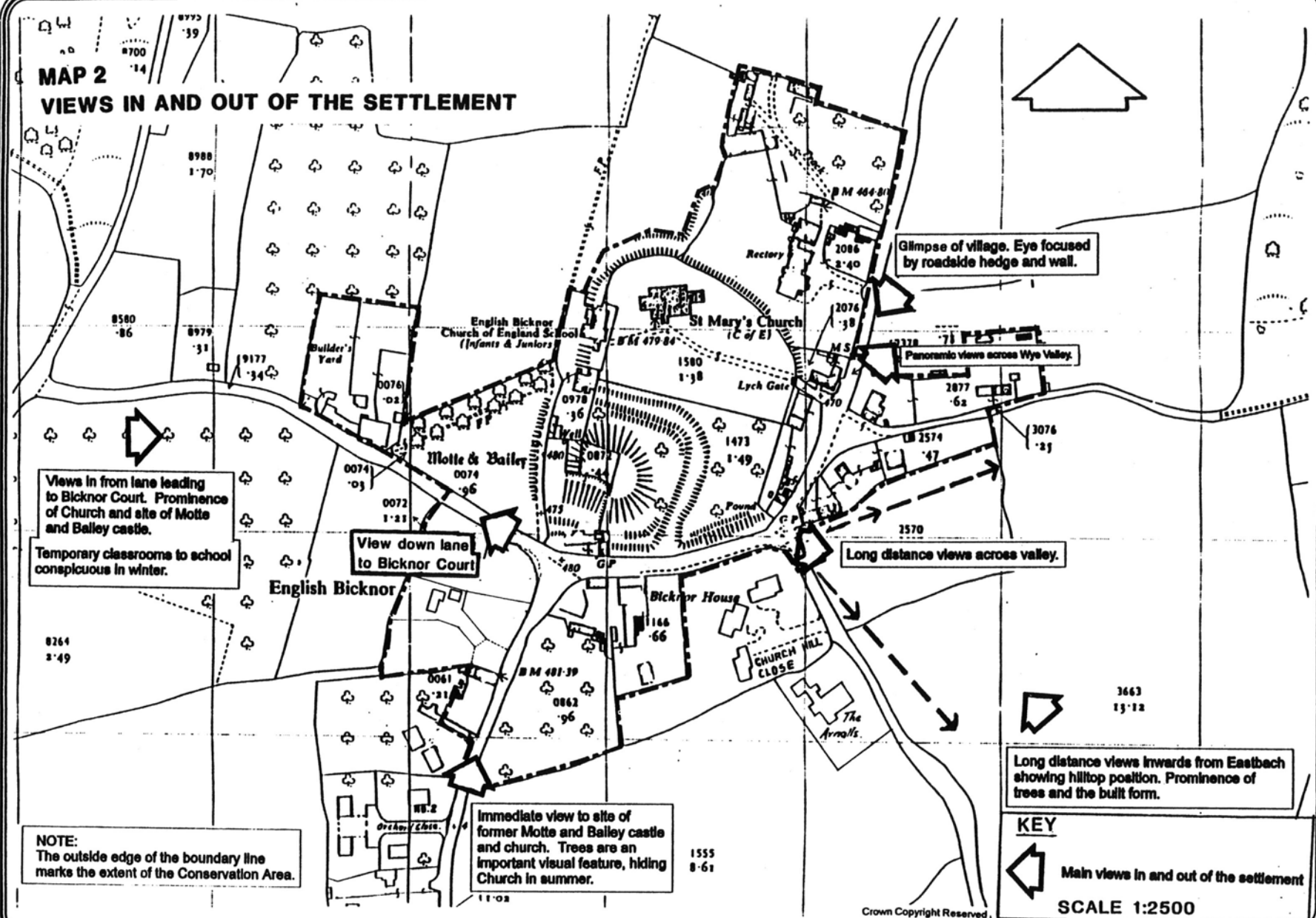
village. There is an important grouping of mature trees leading up to the school from the south west, which are covered by a Tree Preservation Order, and another group around the motte and bailey. Immediately to the east of Bicknor House are a row of limes, an oak tree and a cedar. These trees, which are of amenity value are located (with the exception of the cedar) just outside the boundary of the Conservation Area, but are covered by a Tree Preservation Order. Trees in and around the Conservation Area also act as a wind break in this exposed location.

Colours within the area

The predominant colours are the subdued natural colours of the landscape, the greens and browns of the stone, the deep orange/brown of the clay roof tiles and dark grey of the slate roofs. The properties that have been rendered and painted white or cream are particularly prominent. In the summer the tree cover ensures that the greens and browns predominate.

MAP 2

VIEWS IN AND OUT OF THE SETTLEMENT



Views in from lane leading to Bicknor Court. Prominence of Church and site of Motte and Bailey castle.
Temporary classrooms to school conspicuous in winter.

View down lane to Bicknor Court

Glimpse of village. Eye focused by roadside hedge and wall.

Panoramic views across Wye Valley.

Long distance views across valley.

Long distance views inwards from Eastbach showing hilltop position. Prominence of trees and the built form.

NOTE:
The outside edge of the boundary line marks the extent of the Conservation Area.

Immediate view to site of former Motte and Bailey castle and church. Trees are an important visual feature, hiding Church in summer.

KEY
Main views in and out of the settlement
SCALE 1:2500

The Historic Evolution of the Area (see note1)

The Church and Motte and Bailey Castle

The village of English Bicknor grew up around a Norman Castle on a spur in the centre of the Parish. This Norman Castle may date from the reign of King Stephen as there are references to it in the early 13th century, but it is believed to have been destroyed soon afterwards. It is one of many such earthworks on the Welsh border. The parish church of Saint Mary is much altered and stands in the castle's outer bailey. There are remnants of unaltered Twelfth Century north and south arcades in the present church building. The original Norman tower was central, so the west tower is a complete re-building.

There have been several encroachments onto the castle site including the old rectory to the north east and the school building which date back to the 1830's. In the mid Nineteenth Century, part of the ditch was filled in to enlarge the rector's garden, and in 1880 part of the castle motte was excavated during work to make a garden for the schoolmaster.

Other buildings

To the south-east of the church, in the late Eighteenth Century there was a small cluster of buildings which included an inn and the parish or church house, which were recorded from 1548.

Nearby was the pound, recorded in 1725 which is indicated on some Ordnance Survey maps. To the south-west, there is Bicknor House, formerly known as the Great House, which dates from the late Eighteenth century. To the west, where the Coleford Road turns south, was a farmhouse built probably after 1608 and known as Cross House in 1792. A house to the south was rebuilt in 1756. Later buildings in the village included an almshouse, erected in 1858 in place of the inn by the churchyard, now called Lucy Court and converted to flats.

Land uses and patterns of movement

Most buildings in the area are in residential use. The Church and churchyard, however, take up a large amount of land at the centre of the village, along with the school.

The main vehicular movement through the village is along the former B4228 Coleford/Lydbrook road with only local traffic using the lanes leading onto this road. There is little pedestrian movement. The primary school generates some vehicular and pedestrian movement during term time, at the start and end of the school day. However, overall the village is peaceful and tranquil with little activity.

The pattern of building

The settlement has evolved in a linear form along the former B4228 though focused around the site of the Church and the motte and bailey castle. The road which goes through the settlement swings round to the south and then east of the old motte and bailey castle and the church.

Later building has occurred close to this road at varying angles and distances from the road with no overall form or pattern.



Fig. 2 Buildings are sited at varying angles to the road.

Walls form a unifying feature

The density of buildings

The historic core of English Bicknor has seen very little development since the Nineteenth Century, with the exception of the 3 dwellings at Church Hill Close (located just outside the Conservation Area).

There has been no infilling between the older properties which means there is an open character to this area, where spaces between buildings are particularly noticeable. The most prominent of these open spaces is the site of the motte and bailey which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. At present there is a wide undeveloped area to the north of a cottage known as The Glebe. Construction work has recently started on this site which has planning consent for 5 detached properties. The houses are to be sited at varying angles and to be constructed of a mixture of rendered finishes, clay, brick and local stone with grey concrete roof tiles and slate replicas. The impact of this development remains to be seen, but the houses will be very visible from afar and in the street scene. The completion of this small group is likely to lessen the open character of the approach to the Church from the south. To the west of the lych gate to the church is a tighter group of buildings, with a small group of cottages located close to one another. However, even here there are spaces (gardens) between the buildings which ensure that the open feel to the village is continued.

The type and style of buildings

English Bicknor has a variety of type and style of buildings which range from a grand country house to modest cottages. Bicknor House is a 3 storey imposing property located close to the road with a large landscaped garden behind. It was built in the Eighteenth Century and extended later. It is built of coursed and dressed rubble stone and painted white and has a slate roof. It has sash windows and stone lintels with key stones. Another notable building is the Rectory which is a 2 1/2 storey property, located to the east of the church, and constructed of local stone with a slate roof. This building was constructed in the early Eighteenth century and has a range of associated stone outbuildings. Lucy Court is now converted to flats, but was previously almshouses, and is constructed in rough red sandstone with grey/green dressed stone quoins. It is 2 1/2 storey with windows for the top floor being positioned at the top of the gables. The school to the west of the church dates from the 1830's, but has been re-roofed with modern concrete tiles.

The majority of buildings within the Conservation Area are modest single and double cell cottages of two storey construction

Building materials and construction

The majority of properties in the Conservation Area are simple 2 storey cottages of pile construction with lean-to extensions and outhouses. More substantial properties like the Rectory and Bicknor House, a Grade II Listed Building, reflect a more formal approach to their architecture with the use of render, parapets and sash windows. In the main local stone is used in wall construction of the earliest properties, although brick is used for some detailed work. The stone used in construction is mostly from seams of Forest sandstone, except Lucy Court which is built of local old red sandstone. Many buildings have been rendered and painted white or cream. Some buildings are roofed with natural slate including The Glebe and the Rectory though, unusually in this part of the District, there has been extensive use of clay double roman and plain roof tiles.

The Church which is of stone construction is roofed in an assortment of differing coverings, but clay plain tiles are used here also.

The survival of building features

The scale, form and proportion of the original cottages has been maintained retaining small outbuildings and lean-to extensions. Most of the original window openings have been maintained although there are cases where modern replacement windows are inappropriate. It is notable that many of the buildings have natural clay or slate tiles of varying sizes and forms - small plain clay tiles or larger (Bridgwater) tiles.



Fig. 3 Terraces and detached dwellings retain the character of the village because they maintain an appropriate scale and relate well one to the other.

Landmarks, focal points and special features

The church is the focal point of the village, and its tower is visible from many miles around. The site of the motte and bailey castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and is still visible to the inquisitive. However, there is no indication of its existence to the casual visitor and no interpretation. It is a special feature within English Bicknor, which has on the whole been respected in the development of the village.

A prominent and important feature in this Conservation Area are the stone boundary walls to the older properties which form an almost unbroken line along either side of the pavement and road edges (see Map 3). They maintain the vistas through the Conservation Area. They are built in predominantly coursed Forest sandstone finished with 'cocks and hens'. They vary in height but are normally 1.2 m (4ft), occasionally opening out with the use of iron railings. Where new development has been

allowed in the past, every effort has been made to retain the walls in their original or modified form. These stone walls are a notable feature, and should be retained, repaired or enhanced whenever possible.

Bicknor House which is located close to the main road is particularly imposing because it is constructed in 3 storeys and is built in a grand architectural style.

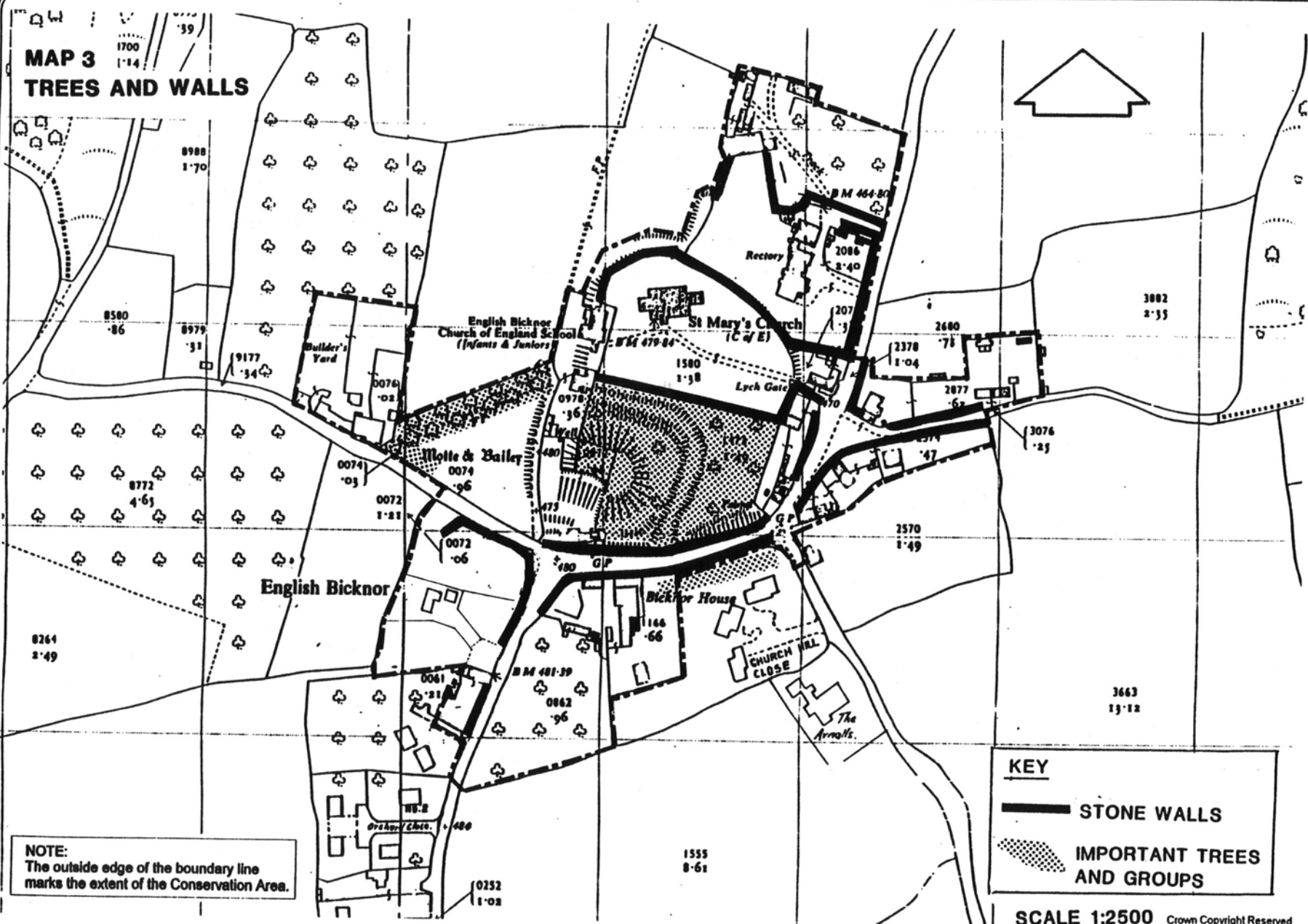
Tree cover in and around the Conservation Area as detailed earlier is another contributor to the special character.

In conclusion, it is the overall character of the Conservation Area as described earlier which gives English Bicknor its special architectural and historic character. However, the features indicated above are particularly prominent within the proposed Conservation Area.

Open spaces within and around the area



The site of the motte and bailey is a very visible 'open' area (though it is not public open space). The space between buildings is one of the most notable factors about English Bicknor. Although the spaces are mostly gardens or other private land, they add significantly to the character of the settlement and can be viewed from the roads and footpaths in the surrounding valleys. The small green opposite Lucy Court has a seat, but is disfigured by other unsuitable and unattractive street furniture.

**MAP 3
TREES AND WALLS**



NOTE:
The outside edge of the boundary line marks the extent of the Conservation Area.

KEY

-  STONE WALLS
-  IMPORTANT TREES AND GROUPS

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Proposed Enhancement

The proposed Conservation Area of English Bicknor is relatively unspoilt. There are few sites that detract from or disfigure the proposed Conservation Area. Any proposed enhancement scheme would therefore be limited to minor works to improve the appearance of the area. These are outlined below.

Disfiguring features and sites which could enhance the area

The area in front of the Lych Gate and communal driveway to Lucy Court is rather unsightly with poor surfacing and fencing. The access leading to the Lych Gate is part grass and part scalplings making an uneven surface with an unattractive appearance. Separating the Church access and Lucy Court driveway is a concrete and wire fence. The Rose archway makes a 'gateway' to Lucy Court.

The improvement of this important part of the Conservation Area would enhance the appearance of this part of the village considerably.

Opposite Lucy Court there is the village green which could be enhanced. This small area has some inappropriate street furniture, namely a black plastic litter/gravel bin and a green Telecom box. There are also many telegraph poles and wires which detract from the appearance of the Conservation Area.

At the junction of the road southwards out of the village towards Eastbach Court is a traffic island with 3 orange and white traffic bollards. The traffic island and bollards are an intrusive feature, in a rural location and they detract significantly from the appearance of the Conservation Area.



Fig. 4 Scope for a small scale scheme to enhance the appearance of the village green.

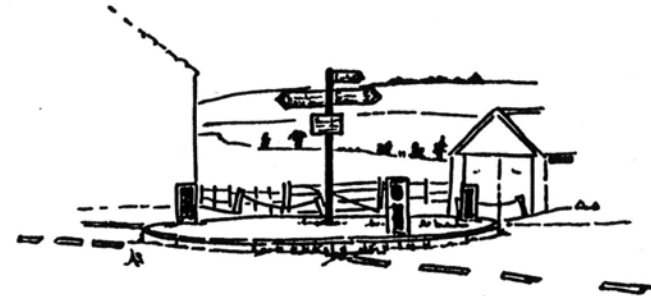
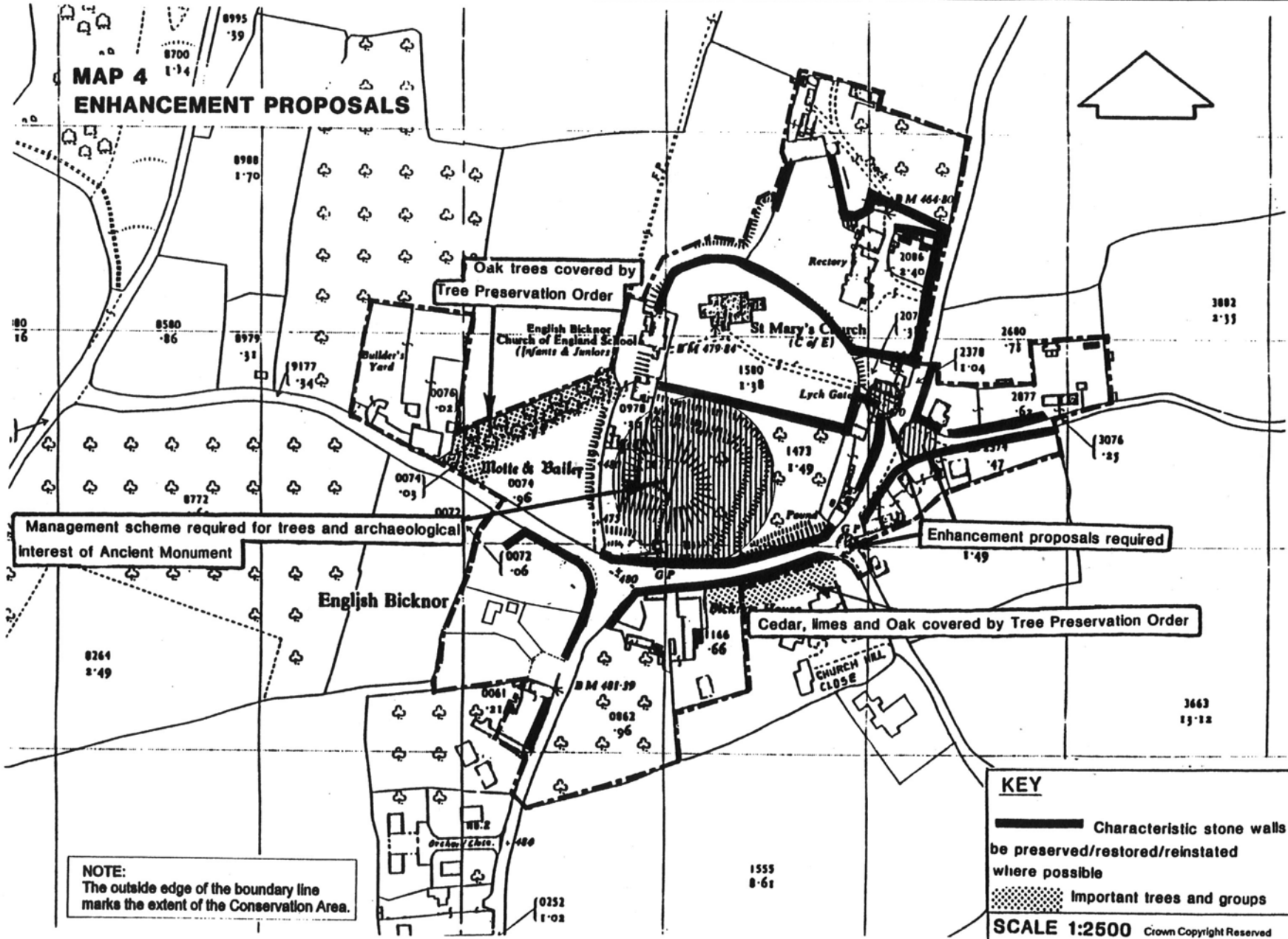


Fig. 5 The appearance of this traffic island fits uncomfortably into the rural nature of the village.

The enhancement of these three areas should be discussed with those parties involved, and a suitable scheme prepared if possible.

The former motte and bailey castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The tree cover in and around the monument is a notable feature, but it would be prudent to discuss with the owners of the site, the long term management of the tree cover so that the archaeological interest of the site is maintained. It may also be worthwhile to consider some sort of low key and unobtrusive interpretation of the Ancient Monument.

**MAP 4
ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS**



Management scheme required for trees and archaeological interest of Ancient Monument

Oak trees covered by Tree Preservation Order

Enhancement proposals required

Cedar, limes and Oak covered by Tree Preservation Order

NOTE:
The outside edge of the boundary line marks the extent of the Conservation Area.

KEY

- Characteristic stone walls to be preserved/restored/reinstated where possible
- Important trees and groups

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Concluding Analysis

In conclusion, this analysis shows that the proposed Conservation Area of English Bicknor is an area of special architectural and historic character which should be preserved and enhanced. The main aspects of its special character which are identified from this report are:-

- that it is a small tranquil settlement in an exposed hilltop location giving it an isolated and rural character.

- It has a historic core made up of Church, school and remains of a former motte and bailey castle

- It is a relatively unspoilt village with traditional buildings constructed of predominantly local materials sited at varying angles to the road with open spaces between. English Bicknor is a village that has suffered the passage of time with grace.

- Road side walls constructed of Forest of Dean sandstone are a strong visual feature and

maintain a link through the village giving a hard edge between the road and the land at each side.

- the muted colours of the buildings are an important feature and they reflect the natural colours of the landscape with the greens and browns of the stone, the deep orange/brown of the clay roof tiles, and the dark slates on other buildings.

Conclusion

The preservation and enhancement of this Conservation Area should be a partnership between the many individuals and agencies involved. This document provides an assessment of the character of the area and makes suggestions for preservation and enhancement. However it is only the first stage. What happens next is dependent upon the goodwill and cooperation of all those with an interest in the area.

Enhancement proposals should focus around the Lych Gate and Lucy Court, the improve-

ment of the village green opposite Lucy Court and the 'suburban' traffic island. In addition, consideration should be given to the reduction in the amount of overhead cables in the Conservation Area, where possible.

Development Proposals for which planning permission is required should have regard to the special character of the Conservation Area as defined in this document. In addition, there are some very minor proposals which constitute 'Permitted Development', and other matters that are not 'development' at all. It is hoped that the information contained in this document will provide help and guidance to property and land owners, so that such minor works do not harm the special character of this Conservation Area. It may be possible for such minor works to enhance the character of the area such as the use of appropriate materials or the use of windows of an appropriate scale, form and design. In addition, the reinstatement or repair of the stone boundary walls, where necessary, would also make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

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(Note 1) The Forest of Dean District Council acknowledge that much of the information in the section dealing with the Historic Evolution of English Bickor comes from a draft of the forthcoming volume on the Forest of Dean in the Victoria County History of Gloucestershire. The copyright of which is owned by University of London. The information is reproduced with their permission.