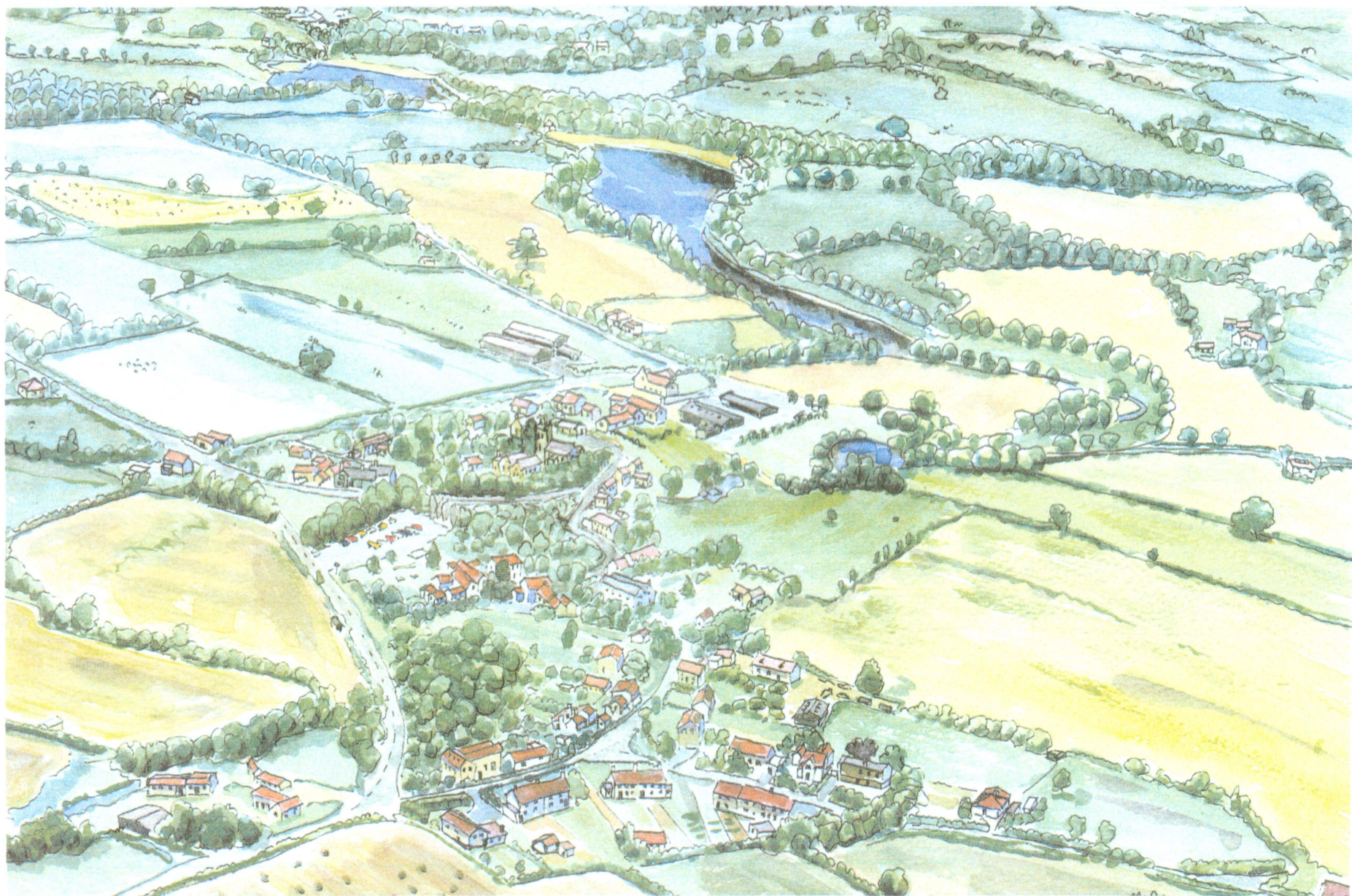


Litton Parish Village Design Statement



Approved by Mendip District Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance on 26 June 2000

What is a Village Design Statement?

The Village Design Statement describes the parish of Litton as it is today and highlights the particular aspects of it that are valued by its residents. The Litton Statement has been written by its residents so that local knowledge, views and ideas may contribute to the future growth and development of the parish while retaining the high quality of its environment. The aim is to ensure that any such development and change that may occur is based on the considered understanding of the parish's past and present; that it will contribute positively to the future of Litton parish and protect and maintain those aspects that enhance its special nature.

Who is it for?

Change happens not only by large developments, but also by the smaller day-to-day adjustments to homes and gardens, open spaces, paths and hedges, all of which alter the look and feel of the whole parish. This Statement is addressed, therefore, to:

*statutory bodies and public authorities;
planners, developers, builders, architects, designers, engineers:
local community groups:
householders, businesses and landowners.*

How does the Design Statement work?

The Statement was approved by Mendip District Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance on 26 June 2000 and its recommendations will be taken into account when planning applications are assessed. In this way, it will support the Local Plan as it affects the parish of Litton and will assist the work of the Parish Council.

TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF THE LANDSCAPE, THE VILLAGE AND ITS HAMLETS



Introduction

The parish of Litton has a long and varied history stretching back over many centuries. It has seen changes in the use of its land and habitation, yet still holds traces of its earlier lives in the fields and buildings within it.

The Village, Parish and the Three Hamlets

Central to the parish is the village of Litton itself. It is the largest of the settlements within the parish and has the hamlets of Greendown to the south-west, Ford to the east and Sherborne to the west. To the south, the land rises gently to the limestone plateau of the Mendip Hills, reaching 1000 feet above sea level in parts. The river Chew forms much of the northerly border of the parish.

The origins of the parish can be traced back to the days before the Domesday Book of 1085; the Canons of St Andrew's stated that they held the manor of Litton before 1066. It is likely that the first settlers within the parish boundary were attracted by the spring in Back Lane, Litton more than 3,000 years ago. Certainly, the main influences to shape the village were the river Chew, the springs that fed it and the early trackways between the spring-line villages. The river played a vital part in the settlement and employment of the area in its earlier days; not only was it the source of life for the inhabitants and their livestock, it also powered mills in Sherborne (recorded in use by 1374) and Litton. From 1850, a large part of the flow from the springs at Chewton Head and Watery Coombe was piped to a reservoir at Barrow Gurney to supply the needs of Bristol, followed later by the building of Litton's own reservoirs to compensate the mills lower down the river.

Around the village lie many medieval village fields with names such as Oatfields, North Field and Lord's Mead, some of which were used for strip cultivation or lynchets as they were known, evidence of the intensive cultivation that was required as early as the 13th century.



The Changing Scene

In common with most parishes based upon an agricultural economy, Litton suffered a traumatic change in the second half of the 19th century. The earlier development of the steam engine reduced the need for labour in the countryside and created many new jobs in the towns to produce and sell manufactured products.

As a result, the population of the parish fell from 421 in 1851 to 154 in 1901. The greatly reduced need for housing, probably coupled with increasing legislation to condemn the less desirable, explains the disappearance of many of the one and two room cottages shown on the Tithe Map of 1839.



LITTON CHURCH AND THE OLD RECTORY

The advent of mains electricity and the internal combustion engine caused a further loss of agricultural jobs, but also made it easier and more pleasant to live in the country and more possible to work outside the parish. The population rose from 159 in 1931 to 236 by 1981. During this period, most new housing was built in Straightmead and Short Lane. Since that time, there have been a small number of new dwellings within the village, both new build and conversions.

Today, the great majority of parishioners commute to jobs outside the Parish. They enjoy a much wider range of job opportunities than could be provided locally but are heavily dependent upon private car ownership.

The Parish of Litton is a very old agricultural settlement that changed slowly over the years until the mid-19th century. It is unusual in that it has received neither the benefits nor disturbances of coal mines, canals, railways nor even major road-widening schemes. This is particularly noticeable in the narrow winding village street of Litton village with its high stone walls. As a result, it retains a strong sense of identity with its past and ways of life that have long gone.

LANDSCAPES

Over the centuries, there has been very little development outside the immediate boundary of the various villages and hamlets within the parish. This means that open countryside runs right up to the edges of the settlements. The landscape of the parish has changed little over the centuries, with many reminders of earlier times still much in evidence, although some of these are now used in a different role to that which was originally designed. The 13th century church and 15th century pub in Litton village continue to give their own kind of sustenance, but while there are still one or two working farms

within the parish, some of the earlier farm buildings have now been converted to housing. There have been small areas of development over the decades, much of which has been sympathetic to the local character and environment and even some of the very recent additions to the landscape have been to a style that will soon blend into the area.

The open landscape of the parish, together with its river and reservoirs, is home to a large variety of wildlife including members of the hawk and owl families, waterfowl, including occasional rare exotic foreign visitors, badgers and foxes. Many indigenous British flora can be found in the parish, including oak, ash, hazel, elder, blackthorn and willow, helped in part by the fact that many of the old hedgerows are still intact and they support their own plant, animal and insect populations. The parish sits within the designated Mendip Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the valley as a whole being in a beautiful location, one that is worthy of preservation.

This is Litton parish, a largely unspoilt area in the north east corner of rural Somerset, a place where there is a feeling of open space and a close contact with nature, where one can see the night sky because there is hardly any artificial lighting and a place where the slow pace of life and the feeling of belonging to a community are valued.

Conclusions

1. Householders and landowners should be encouraged to preserve old hedges and copses. Where trees and new hedges or boundaries are planted the use of local species of flora such as hawthorn, hazel and field maple should be encouraged to promote wildlife habitat.

THE SETTLEMENT & SPACES OF LITTON & ITS HAMLETS

The settlement pattern within the parish has been dominated largely by the river Chew. In the past, it has been the source for that basic requirement for all habitation - drinking water. As dependency on the river reduced over the centuries, the villages spread out into the surrounding countryside, but even then, only within a very small, confined boundary, thus contributing to the very strong community feel within the villages and hamlets of the parish.

Within Litton itself, the original old narrow road, characterised by its high limestone walls and having no pavements, runs through the village, past the old village pump, across one of the bridges over the river, up between more high stone walls which give a good sense of enclosure, before joining the arterial B3114 road. A picturesque lane leads to the medieval church of St Mary's The Virgin and the Manor farmhouse which was the house of the Manor Farm. The historic core of the village is centred on this area, with its closely clustered houses and the nearby 15th century King's Arms Inn. The remainder of the houses on the high street to the south are a pleasing mixture of old and new properties on varying-shaped plots.

Within the heart of the village, the limited open green spaces that have been retained enhance the village's tranquil atmosphere. Of note are the walled garden, the old orchard opposite Rose Cottage and the triangular plot opposite the entrance to Thierry House.



WINDOW DETAIL - ROSE COTTAGE - LITTON

The hamlet of Ford nestles in the valley of the Chew and is a continuation of the intermittent ribbon development along both the road and the river. At intervals along the road there are small clapper bridges which give access to attractive properties to the south of the river. An old narrow road bridge over the river at Ford carries the lane that runs into the hamlet of Greendown. This little hamlet is arranged in a loop, with large, well-spaced housing interspersed with agricultural land and woodland. The narrow roads here have high hedges and the area has superb views of Ford, Litton, the Chew Valley and the rolling countryside beyond.

Conclusions

1. The heart of Litton village, especially the area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the walled gardens and structures, is of paramount importance in maintaining the character of the village and should be retained.
2. All development however large or small should pay attention to the local settlement patterns.
3. Special care should be taken not to remove hedgerows, mature trees and other important features that would destroy the setting before any building work starts.
4. Views through a site are often locally important and should be maintained wherever possible.
5. The setting of a building and a garden should relate to its neighbour and large areas of hard surfacing should be avoided. New build garages and car-parking areas should not obscure house fronts and blocks of garages should be avoided.
6. The relationship between buildings is as important as the design of buildings themselves. Skilful use should be made of the spaces between buildings

and the alteration of existing building lines should be done only after consideration of the resulting spatial effect.

7. Where appropriate, new dwellings in Litton village should be located close to the road to retain the sense of enclosure, unless they are located in the areas of looser development such as that around the church.



FRONT DOOR DETAIL • ROSE COTTAGE

BUILDINGS & DETAILS

Of all the various details that give an area its unique character, that which has the greatest impact upon the local environment and the one that is the most fragile in many respects is, arguably, the buildings. These reflect the history of earlier inhabitants, their lifestyles and work patterns. Whilst many of these structures now find a use different from their original purpose, their character is still a very vulnerable one, despite being of substantial construction in most cases.

This distinctive quality, which probably developed without the involvement of either architect or surveyor during its evolution, is the result of the local builders of the day using the materials and styles that were familiar to them. Local materials were used in almost every instance because the builders had neither the means nor the funds to use anything else.



Litton high walls & walled garden

Today, however, this scenario no longer applies. It is all too easy to destroy this priceless character by the casual replacement of a door or window with one of modern design, or the addition of, perhaps, a new-style porch or conservatory. Often, this change is irreversible and the essence of the building's identity and history is lost forever. The demand for village housing over the last few decades has placed an increasing pressure on the vernacular architecture of the village. This, coupled with the ready availability of a much wider range of modern materials at an affordable cost, has meant that this intangible factor which makes a village unique and attractive, both to the local residents and those that pass through it, is very fragile indeed. It is imperative that every effort is made, both by the occupiers of the properties and the planning department of the local council, to do all in their power to retain the character of the buildings that give Litton parish its own individuality and not to make it simply a continuation of the ubiquitous modern building programme.

The majority of the buildings in the parish are constructed of the indigenous white lias stone and are generally flat-fronted with very few additions to the original design. Roofs have a fairly steep pitch, indicating that they were thatched in earlier days, but are now laid with either slate, pantiles or double roman clay tiles. Gables are a mixture of parapet style on the 17th century buildings or overhanging eaves with chimney stacks at the end of the roof ridge on later-build properties. More recent post-war building includes terraced, single and double-storey houses, courtyards and garage blocks, but a sympathetic relationship in terms of height and scale is still evident.

There is a variety of distinctive features that determine the character of the parish; the limestone walling of the area is as much a distinctive feature as the landscape and buildings. These display a considerable variation in height and form, indeed the high walls within the centre of Litton itself are a notable feature of the village. Coping is usually in the cock's comb style, but other materials such as the pantiles which top the walled garden in the centre of Litton or the ashlar stone, probably from the nearby village of Doullting, have also been

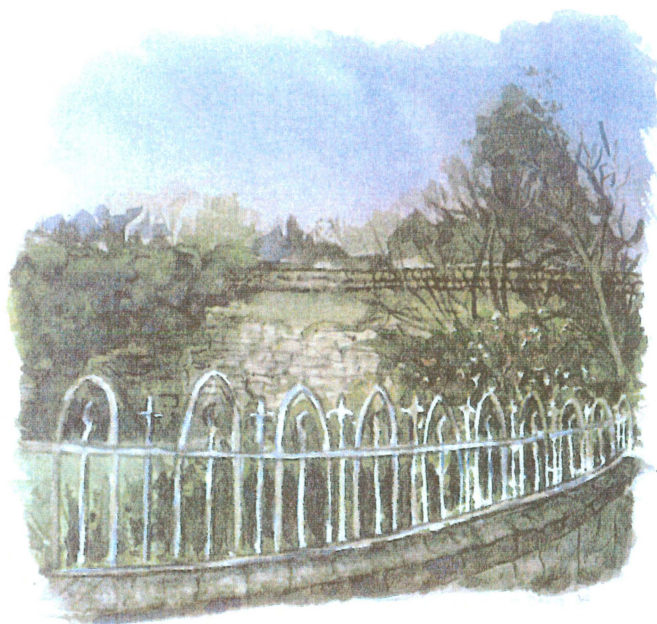
used. This material was also used to great effect for the quoins on some buildings that were originally of higher status, such as The Old Rectory. Fenestration within the Conservation area varies from stone mullions, wood or stone moulds or, more commonly, small-paned wooden sash or casement windows. There are instances of sympathetic restoration, such as Manor Farmhouse at Litton for example, where the existing wooden windows have been replaced with leaded ones that are very similar to those as fitted originally.

The Character of Litton & Sherborne

The centre of the village of Litton is mainly in a designated Conservation Area that lies between Manor Farm to the north, The Homelands to the east and Spring Farm to the south.

Within this area is an attractive collection of limestone-built cottages, linked by stone walling and a quiet winding lane. Clustered around the area of the church is a mixture of older cottages and some larger houses which reflect the Litton atmosphere.

Here also is the old stone-walled garden in the heart of the village alongside the river Chew.



VIEW FROM VILLAGE HALL • LITTON

This is one aspect of Litton that should be given a very special and sensitive treatment and kept free of any future development.

The village hall, which was converted from two stone cottages, can also be found here. Unfortunately, from an architectural point of view, the hall is a poor re-development example, as the exterior of the building bears little design relationship to the surrounding houses. The large angular timber stained windows are out of character and there is little or no acknowledgement of the adjoining architectural style. We should learn from this earlier attempt at "improvement"

On the west side of the village is Thierry House and its old stables, which have now been converted to residential dwellings. North of the village along Back Lane are some original barns that have recently been converted to residential dwellings and have integrated well into the village character. Two larger houses have been built alongside the converted barns and they look out over fields that were once historic closes.

North of here lies the hamlet of Sherborne, where the main house has a pleasing sense of scale and space. Scattered about at Sherborne is a stable block with Dutch style pantiles on the roof, a well-restored barn and Sherborne Cottage, which has attractive porch detailing. Also here you will find the old Button Factory with its distinctive patterned barge boarding.

East of the village centre and up the winding, enclosed lane is a terrace of stone cottages facing the high stone walls of Litton House. Around the corner is The Homelands, a former farmhouse with its cart store now converted to a dwelling called Cartwheels. This section of the lane is a mixture of house types and includes Spring Villa, once the village shop and post office. Along this stretch of the lane that leads out of Litton and onto the by-pass is a mix of housing styles and ages, including a row of council-built houses and some others of more recent design.

Similarly, heading east out of the village and up Short Lane, there is a range of dwelling types on both sides leading to Litt Hill Cottage and The Cottage. It is here that the narrow winding lane climbs up Litt Hill to reach the busy A39 Bristol/Wells road above.

The dwellings that line the B3114 road date from various periods and differ in design. The stone-built Spring Farm stands in a prominent position at the entrance to the village and shows a lot of character and age, with its wavering stone coursing and irregular window openings.

The Character of Ford



Further south along the River Chew and along the B3114 road towards the hamlet of Ford there is a variety of dwellings which are sited ribbon-style. These include Long Roof Farm and Vine Cottage, the latter is actually set back from the main road in an old apple orchard and is currently un-modernised. Across a rebuilt stone bridge is Dalesford House, which has its angled gable wall, running parallel to Ford Lane.

The Character of Greendown



Ford Lane climbs up to Wooten Hall and then along to Ashel's Batch and the collection of farmhouses at Greendown, which include Radford Farm, Greendown Farm and Holmwood Farm.

Dropping down the lane to Bell Hill one finds Lilycombe Farm which has changed its function to industrial use in recent years. This is also where the old Bell Inn can be found which prospered during a time when Bell Lane was a main thoroughfare from the turnpike at Coley to the Bathway and Emborough, when the road was developed in 1795 by the West Harptree Turnpike Trust. This old inn has now been converted to a residential home (Bell Farm) and the window detailing is of particular note.

The roads around Greendown are characteristically narrow and winding, sometimes steep and designed for a by-gone age. Widths vary, but single lane traffic with passing points is commonplace and, in places, the lanes drop to 3 metres (Primmerfield Lane) between high hedge banks.

The dwellings at Greendown enjoy sweeping views towards Chew Valley Lake and sweeping rural views.

Conclusions

- 1. Any extensions, alterations, changes of use of existing buildings or the erection of any new ones should respect and complement the inherent scale, style and setting of the surrounding buildings within the parish. New buildings should avoid standardised designs and development on 'in-fill' sites must exhibit a progression and renewal of the distinctive character and tradition of Litton's built environment.*
- 2. The proportions of traditional buildings, such as steep pitched roofs and limited sized openings in relation to the area of the wall should be reflected. Extensions usually take the form of a lean to or projection at right angles to the main building.*
- 3. Any replacement of existing doors or windows should retain the scale and detail of the original openings.*
- 4. A common factor throughout the parish is the use of natural stone walls to define the curtilages of dwellings. It is important that any new dwellings respect this characteristic.*
- 5. Chimneys are a distinct feature of traditional buildings and are usually constructed of brick or stone with clay chimney pots. They should be incorporated into new development where appropriate.*
- 6. The characteristic building material in Litton and the parish is natural rubble stone laid in rough courses with ashlar used for higher status buildings. The use of ashlar for the quoins (corner stones), window and door surrounds also occurs. Painted stonework or render is fairly uncommon although examples of painted window surrounds do exist.*
- 7. Roofs are of particular importance to the character of the buildings in Litton and the hamlets and are almost universally of clay pantiles or double Roman*

tiles with slates being used for the larger buildings. This use of roofing material should be respected and roof lines should be in keeping with the general form of the parish.

- 8. Where appropriate, barns should be re-used through conversions as this form of development can integrate well with the existing village character. Mendip Council's barn conversion guidelines should be followed.*



The Old Button Works, Sherborne

- 9. Developers should provide perspective drawings or artist's impressions to show how any new development will appear in relation to its overall surroundings.*

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

Parishioners value the way in which the character of Litton and its hamlets has been shaped and maintained over the centuries by the pattern of roads, lanes and bridleways. In particular, its sunken and narrow lanes and extensive stonewalling are seen to contribute to its unspoilt nature. Local footpaths and lanes are well used both by residents and visitors alike for their recreation and enjoyment.

While the relatively low level of through traffic has protected the unspoilt character of the parish, it is also seen to have certain disadvantages. The total lack of any public transport serving the parish creates numerous problems for those without access to private transport. The nearest busroute is outside the parish boundary at Chewton Mendip, which is reached along a busy and, at times, hazardous road. Parts of the parish have encountered problems due to heavy lorries using lanes that were not designed for such traffic. The lanes, too narrow for this type of use, are now polluted with potential damage to property. Some residents also experience difficulties with on-street parking, made worse when the number of vehicles in the area is increased by visitors' transport.

An issue of widespread concern is the B3114 road through the parish. In parts, this road is dangerously narrow, with traffic travelling at speeds that make it unsafe for walking or cycling, especially in the section between Ford and Litton. In the past, there have been discussions regarding widening the road for safety reasons, but this may produce the opposite effect by allowing faster speeds and exacerbate the dangers for the non-motorists, schoolchildren included, who have to use the road for access.

Concern is also felt by many of the residents of Litton village regarding the use of Litt Hill as a short cut to the A39. The facts are that this is a single-track road with passing places, it has poor visibility along certain parts of it and the speed of the traffic using this route through the village,

creates much concern regarding potential accidents, damage to property, noise and inconvenience for those living along the route.

Access within the parish is not seen to require any additional street furniture, such as road, traffic signs or markings. There are strong views about street lighting in the village, with the consensus that it would be inappropriate, especially any form of modern sodium-type lamps. However, one or two isolated lowlevel, relatively low wattage, downdirected lights at key points in the village may receive some support from the residents. The lack of pavements in the village is regarded as part of its unspoilt character, although, conversely, their absence on the B3114 is seen as creating an additional hazard.

All the issues identified above have a bearing on the impact of any future development within the parish. If this were on a largescale, it would almost certainly require the widening of roads that would, in turn, impinge upon the parish's unique character. Access to and from the village would become more difficult and parking problems would grow.

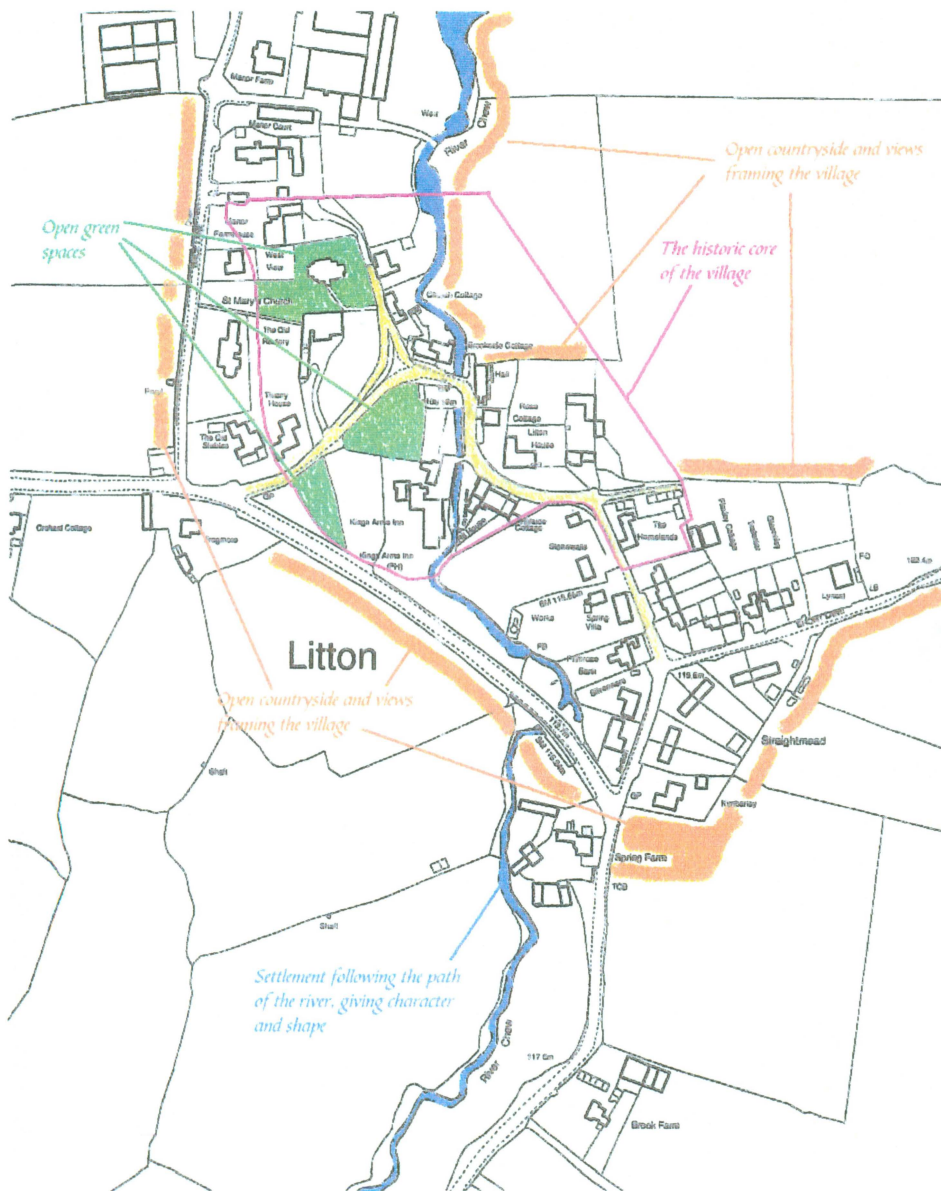
Conclusions

1. The impact of any proposed new development on the various aspects of the parish infrastructure should be considered, especially that of increased traffic volumes.
2. The introduction of all unnecessary signs and street furniture should be resisted and utility companies be made aware of their responsibility to respect and maintain the heritage of the parish.

This publication has been produced with the help of:

Rural Action
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The parishioners of Litton

Litton - The Story Continues...



This map shows Litton village circa 1996 which, when compared to the one on page 3, shows how few changes have occurred over the decades.



BROOKSIDE COTTAGE - AFTER EXTENSION

The painting above, by a local artist, of one of the oldest houses in the village depicts how sympathetic development to a property can be achieved without destroying the character of the area.