

# BEENHAM

A PARISH DESIGN STATEMENT







## What is a Village Design Statement?

This Village Design Statement (VDS) describes Beenham parish as it is today and highlights the qualities and characteristics that are valued by its residents, as well as drawing attention to what is special about the buildings, open spaces and surroundings. The aim is to provide a context for new development, based on local character and sense of place. The purpose is to manage change, whether that is major new development or just cumulative small-scale alterations and additions.

The VDS endeavours to set out clear and simple guidelines for sustainable development, so that it contributes to the local environment and is carried out in harmony with its setting.

### How it was produced

This Beenham VDS represents the end of a process which began in September 2000 at an open meeting, called by the parish council to explain the idea. Ten parishioners attended the meeting; four of them were sufficiently enthusiastic to join a steering group with two parish councillors. A start was made on the project with the assistance of the Community Council for Berkshire.

A second public meeting was held at the end of November 2000, to which representatives of all 20 village clubs and organisations, such as the Friendship Club, Women's Institute, Youth Club and Working Men's Club were invited. They were told about the aims of the VDS, shown the Countryside Agency video and were asked to promote the planned workshop.

The workshop, held on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2001 was facilitated by the Community Council for Berkshire. Twenty seven people participated, their ages ranging from 7 to 70. An initial exercise of mapping the village got people into groups talking about the layout of the village, its landmarks and significant features. Five groups were each allocated a part of the parish, preferably one they were less familiar with. The aim was to try and capture the essence of Beenham, by a variety of means, in words, pictures, smells, views, and materials for example. After the groups returned from their investigative walk and had warmed up, each reported to the whole meeting on their findings.

### Beenham Parish context



The parish of Beenham lies to the north of the A4 between Reading and Newbury



Listed parish boundary stone on A4 (see Appendix 1)

When the steering group had analysed all the material produced from the workshop a small exhibition was mounted showing some of the photographs and giving a brief explanation of progress. The exhibition was held on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2001 at the Pre-school Easter Fair in the Community Room and then transferred in the afternoon to the Victory Hall for the village market. Once again residents responded well by providing helpful comments. With the financial support of the parish council, the steering group, who met on a monthly basis, continued work to produce the final document. Throughout the exercise contact was maintained with the appropriate officer at West Berkshire District Council.

West Berkshire District Council consulted statutory agencies, national interest groups, relevant Parish/Town Councils, local interest groups and local developers (or their agents) on the final Draft VDS for six weeks in April/May 2003. At the same time the VDS Group consulted with the local community in Beenham. Comments were taken on board as appropriate. The final version of Beenham Village Design Statement was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) by West Berkshire Council on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2003 and its recommendations will be taken into account when planning applications are assessed.

### How will it be used?

The VDS is intended to be a practical tool capable of influencing decisions affecting design and development in the parish. Its main function is to assist not only residents, builders and designers, but also the parish council and West Berkshire District Council, when dealing with planning applications.

The Berkshire Structure Plan<sup>1</sup> provides the overall framework for development in Berkshire. The general policies of the Structure Plan are explained in greater detail in the Local Plan. Together these documents form the current 'development plan' for the area. The West Berkshire District Local Plan (1991-2006)<sup>2</sup> was adopted on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2002. Councillors, both district and parish and planning officers must decide whether a planning application is in accordance with the Local Plan and take into account other material considerations before arriving at a decision. As SPG, the guidance contained in this Design Statement provides an explanation of the Council's policy position and while it is not a statutory document, it has been the subject of public consultation and has been adopted by the Council's Eastern Area Forum. Compliance with the recommendations does not by itself guarantee planning permission as each case is judged on its merits.

## The character of the landscape setting of the parish

### Location

The parish is mainly situated in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (see page 4). Beenham lies on the north bank of the Kennet Valley mid-way between Reading and Newbury, 9 miles away in either direction. The village of Beenham straddles a ridge of hills to the north of the London to Bath road, the A4. The surrounding countryside is made up of fields used for grazing and arable land interspersed by eleven ancient, semi-natural woods.

The Landscape Character Assessment for Berkshire<sup>3</sup> indicates that Beenham is covered by two landscape character types, which are further sub-divided into landscape character areas:

- Type B – Lower Valley Floor; landscape character area B1 Lower Kennet
- Type H – Woodland and Heathland Mosaic; landscape character area H4 Cold Ash.

This strategic county wide assessment supports the review of the Berkshire Structure Plan and builds upon the existing landscape character assessments carried out by the former Newbury District Council for the District and by the Countryside Agency for the North Wessex Downs AONB.



The parish encompasses varied landscapes including valley floor, rolling farmland and wooded ridges

<sup>1</sup>Berkshire Structure Plan (1991-2006)

<sup>2</sup>West Berkshire District Local Plan (1991-2006)

<sup>3</sup>Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003)





**Geology and landscape**

Beenham parish contains two distinct topographical areas determined by the underlying geology<sup>4</sup>.

- The upland area around Beenham village lies on Tertiary London clay, overlain by a discontinuous layer of Beenham Stocks gravel. This gives rise to village place names such as Clay Lane and Stoneyfield. Vegetation on the clay soil is largely woodland, some ancient or undisturbed, with grassland where the woods have been cleared. These woodlands provide “a significant structuring element in the landscape” and “influence the overall character of the area”<sup>5</sup>.



Carpet of bluebells, High Wood indicating the rich flora, part of the justification for designation as a Wildlife Heritage Site



<sup>4</sup>British Geological Survey, Sheet 268, Reading July 2000  
<sup>5</sup>Newbury District Council, Landscape Assessment 1993

- In the Kennet Valley the London clay is underlain by the sands and clay of the Reading beds. Both are overlain by Quaternary Beenham gravels of the Kennet system. Where undisturbed, these soils still support rich grassland and wetland close to the River Kennet. But where farmed, they produce a landscape of large-scale arable fields. In particular, there is a river terrace of Grade 1 agricultural land stretching from Woolhampton to Englefield, below the ridge of hills, which still supports intensive farming in Beenham.

## Woodland

Ancient, semi-natural woods are those that have been in existence since at least 1600 and still retain tree and shrub cover which has not obviously been planted. These are generally the most valuable woodlands for biodiversity. Old Copse is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This wood was designated in 1984 as a particularly important example of the unusual coppiced wet ash/wych elm stand type and contains four other woodland types:

- neutral valley alderwood
- wet ash/maple
- oak hazel ash
- hazel/oak.

When designated, its ground flora was rich and varied. It still includes several species indicative of ancient woodland, some of which are uncommon, such as wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* and the sedge *Canex stigosa*.

Many areas of woodland within the parish are designated Wildlife Heritage Sites by West Berkshire District Council because of their nature conservation importance. Several of the woods have wonderful displays of bluebells in the spring and later in the season honeysuckle creates a distinctive heady aroma particularly at dusk. Some of the woods include areas of closely-planted coniferous trees which can support unusual species of fungi and invertebrates and provide a feeding ground for visiting birds, such as the redpoll and crossbill. The good management of coppice woods helps to maintain the herb and shrub layer and offers opportunities for a wider range of wildlife. According to English Nature “the existing natural vegetation of ancient woods, the associated animal life and the often undisturbed soil and drainage patterns ... comprise an irreplaceable asset of great importance to nature conservation, which once destroyed can never be recreated”<sup>6</sup>.

The main threats to woodland are development, lack of appropriate management and neglect, often due to the loss of markets for traditional products.

## Hedgerows

Hedgerows provide safe corridors not only for small mammals but also for birds and bats to fly along. Territorial songbirds will use intermittent trees as song posts and feed from the berries in the winter months. Hawthorn and blackthorn are major contributors to the hedgerows but analysis of one local farm shows the presence of hazel, field maple, dog wood and spindle.

As with woods and ponds, hedgerows need to be sympathetically managed and where possible cutting should be delayed until late February or March to help them realise their potential for wildlife conservation. Creating an A shape (i.e. with a wider base and narrower top) helps ensure that the bottom of the hedge does not die. It is also beneficial to encourage hawthorn planting within hedges as it is the largest nectar supplying plant in the UK and provides food for various species of birds and insects.

The Kennet Valley Countryside Project (KVCP) organised funding and assistance with planting an in-fill hedge behind the church, to link it to the Old Copse and Hall Place Farm hedge plantings. KVCP may also help with an intended formal survey of hedgerows in Beenham. The local Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) has given advice on the grassland management of the old churchyard as well as on the restoration of the pond at Beenham School.



In a village with one through road, the network of footpaths form important connections



The churchyard has been sensitively managed to maximise its environmental quality

<sup>6</sup>English Nature, Ancient Woodland Inventory 1995





### Water features

There are at least seven ponds within the parish which need sympathetic management and maintenance if their potential for environmental conservation is to be reached. Many of them are over-grown but are likely to have accumulated a complex plant and animal community. For example, species such as the ringed plover and little ringed plover are attracted to the large area of surface water within Marley Tiles. Greylag geese, cormorants, more common water birds and eight species of duck have been spotted at Marley Tiles lake. The pond adjoining the A4 and Grange Lane has the added advantage of having an island, thereby providing additional sanctuary for wildlife. The vegetation surrounding this pond provides good roosting and resting-places for ducks where willow trees have fallen into the water. As with some of the smaller ponds, gently sloping edges provide access for various visiting mammals.

Small seasonal streams and springs are also important for specialised species. These can be seen in Old Copse and Greyfield Wood, and in particular beside Clay Lane. They provide important wildlife corridors in conjunction with the various hedgerows which border and divide the surrounding arable and pasture land.

As new ponds can provide a valuable habitat for amphibians and other wildlife, the school has decided to encourage the regeneration of its pond as an ongoing project both for the benefit of pupils and of conservation in general.

### Agri-environment schemes

Hall Place Farm, a lowland farm, producing arable crops and farming a mixture of sheep, cattle, geese, ducks and seasonal turkeys, has taken advantage of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This has involved taking part in a land survey with the purpose of helping the owners to farm less intensively and manage hedgerows and woodlands appropriately to reduce the use of chemicals. Hall Place Farm has a wide range of tree and shrub species (over 30 in its hedgerows), diverse flora and fauna and a pond which is due to be restored. The farm will also provide access for schools and other educational groups under the scheme and allow them to use the land for fieldwork.

#### Planning guidance

1. *New development should conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the parish.*
2. *Native species of local provenance should be used for new and replacement planting in the wider landscape in order to conserve and enhance the rural character of the parish.*
3. *Individual trees, woodland and copses, hedgerows, ponds and existing field patterns help to form part of the landscape setting of the parish and should be conserved and enhanced wherever possible.*
4. *The (re)planting, restoration and management of hedgerows is encouraged in order to improve the habitat for wildlife.*



Gravel extraction and more 'natural' areas of wetland have provided a complex habitat particularly for birds



Hall Place Farm

## Patterns of development in the parish

### Historical background

The earliest records for the parish show the grant of the Church and the Manor of Beenham (Bena's Hamme or Bena's Homestead or Manor) by Henry I to the Abbot and monks of Reading Abbey. After the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in 1539, records relate only to the larger farms in the area. Many of the older listed buildings in the area, for example Park Farm, White Cottage, Oakwood (formerly Fodderhouse) Farm and Malthouse Farm and those on Beenham Hill were estate farms and workers' cottages belonging to an expanding Beenham Estate. The Beenham Estate and its farms preserved the area from industrial development taking place, unlike the situation in the valley below, where the development of the coaching road (A4), the construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal (1716) and the spread of the railways (1830-1860) are evident. The population of Beenham in 1801 was only 381, falling even lower after the Inclosure Award of 1811 and only increasing to 508 in 1901. The sale and break up of much of the Beenham Estate in 1914 meant that land which had previously been protected became available for development. Most significant house building happened after World War II.<sup>7</sup>



White Cottage, reputed to be the oldest house in the village

### Industrial

Industrial development within the parish has been concentrated along the valley floor and the A4 road. For instance, since World War II, the sand and gravel deposits have given rise to the development of gravel extraction works and an associated roof tile plant. Marley is one of the largest European manufacturers of roof tiles with extensive storage yards which have security lighting 24 hours a day. Grundon, a large, privately-owned waste disposal and recycling company, has a large site adjacent to the A4 which is currently being used for landfill. Methane from the filled pits is partly used to fire furnaces at Marley and some is converted to electricity and fed into the National Grid. There has been sporadic mixed development along the A4, and there is a small industrial area (Grange Lane). The industrial and commercial development along the A4 is quite separate from the village settlement some 100m up on the ridge above.



### Agricultural

Farming in the form of livestock rearing on the upland areas and arable in the valley still predominates. Recent national changes in farming policy have led some farms to cease dairying; Oakwood and Malthouse Farms have become horse riding and horse breeding establishments respectively. Horse grazing is an increasing use for upland pastures. Nevertheless Beenham still has working farms which form a critical part of the surrounding landscape.



### Residential

The population of Beenham parish (estimated in 2001 by West Berkshire District Council to be about 982) is mainly concentrated in the village of Beenham. The Village Envelope (see page 10) as defined in the Local Plan, has acted as a constraint on housing development within it. It is possible the Village Envelope may be revised as part of the Local Plan review in 2006. The population total does include some 200 people living in new houses at Aldermaston Wharf. These houses were built in 1998 on a brownfield site vacated by the Sterling Greengate cable factory. This site includes some affordable housing. The Aldermaston Wharf development is geographically separate from the main bulk of the village and despite being in Beenham parish forms part of a small settlement which straddles three parishes Beenham, Aldermaston and Padworth, at the canal crossing. This small canal-side community has an identity of its own which may benefit from a separate study.

### Social and recreational

In common with many English parishes, changing social and economic patterns have impacted on Beenham, notably with the loss of some village facilities such as one of the pubs and the village shop. Nevertheless, village and parish activities are strongly supported in Beenham by long established villagers and newcomers alike.



Agricultural and industrial uses impact on the setting of the village

<sup>7</sup>Summarises original work undertaken by History of Beenham Group, published in "Beenham: A History" 1999





The built environment and natural landscape are important but the vitality of the community depends on the involvement of the people and children who live here

- There are at least a dozen activities listed in the monthly church magazine which, together with the Parish Council Newsletter, is a reliable source of information for all parishioners both in the village and at Aldermaston Wharf.
- St Mary's Church organises activities such as the annual carol and Christingle services, a Harvest Supper and Rogation Day walk. It also has a very successful team of bell ringers.
- The Victory Hall (built in the 1920's) hosts dances, functions and a monthly market for local produce, plants and crafts.
- The school houses the community room and school/community hall under the same roof. They are used for children's and after-school activities and sports clubs, such as badminton.
- An active Parent, Teacher and Friends Association raises funds for extra school equipment by running fairs, quizzes, auctions and fetes.
- In recent years very successful village events have been organised on the recreation ground including a V.E. Day fair in which 1940's dress featured, a millennium fancy dress parade, fair and bonfire and annual summer concerts by the revived Beenham Band, a band which is growing in popularity.
- There are also adult education classes organised by Newbury College and West Berkshire Council held weekly in the Victory Hall.

A group of villagers formed the Beenham Investment Group (BIG) to buy the lease of Greyfield Wood in order to preserve it as a village amenity. Shares in the company have been bought by villagers.



### Planning guidance

5. Any development along the A4 should conserve and enhance views from and to the wooded skyline of Beenham, through sympathetic siting, design and landscaping.
6. The impact of the siting, design and layout of future development, (such as large buildings, prominent roofs and telecommunication masts) on the wider landscape of the parish should be shown to have been carefully considered by developers.



## Beenham village

### The settlement area – its relationship with the surrounding landscape

The larger settlements in this area “favour ridge-top locations, having developed along lanes which exploit the natural grain of the landscape”<sup>8</sup>. The village of Beenham follows this pattern. Although it is situated at the top of a ridge of hills it does not feel exposed; in the adjacent farmed landscape, the amount of planting-woods, trees and hedgerows, contribute to its sense of containment.

Originally the village began as three separate settlements:

- at the eastern end, around the former Stocks public house
- another, just over half a mile away at the western end, clustered near The Six Bells public house
- the group of old houses on Beenham Hill

A mix of Victorian houses, twentieth century houses and bungalows and a small council estate, built in the early 1950's, have linked the older eastern and western settlements together (see page 10). The primary school, built in 1985, and the Victory Hall/ Beenham Club buildings form the focal centre mid way between the two ends of the village. Much of the village is only one house deep; many houses back directly onto fields.

The parish church of St Mary's, (part eighteenth century and part Victorian), the adjacent Church Cottage (Grade II listed) and the site of the old village school, now occupied by two houses, are slightly separate from the village, down Church Lane. From the church and the burial ground there are striking views across the Kennet valley. The white facade of Beenham House, set below the ridge, is one of the few large buildings visible from the A4.

### Shape and form

Travelling through the village the route closes and opens. The Warings, a small recent development of affordable housing promoted by the parish council and the Rural Housing Trust, is one of the first areas seen when reaching the top of Beenham Hill. In places the village is almost sub-urban: for example Stoneyfield and Back Lane where semi-detached houses which are not very sympathetic to the local vernacular were built in the 1950's. They were built to a standard design and layout that failed to reflect the complexities of the older houses of the village which are much closer to the road.

The road narrows along the single track section of Back Lane, by Butlers Farm, with high hedges on both sides. It opens again just before the school with wide grass verges. This linear village has a number of focal points along its length; the agglomeration of the school, Victory Hall and Beenham Club at the junction of Picklepythe Lane with Church Lane is one of them. The village closes again, past the school, a relatively narrow road with bungalows on one side and houses on the other. The road twists through the village with a number of sharp blind bends which prevent distant views. New short vistas open up at each turn.

In general, the more recent developments in the village, such as The Strouds, have introduced regularity and depth, which was not previously present in the irregularity of the older houses. Modern estate roads, albeit quite short, and cul-de-sacs, have altered the simple one-building-deep characteristic of the older parts of the village.

The Recreation Ground, the second focal point, is the main public open space and focus for the village. Edged by listed lime trees, 'the rec', as it is known, has children's play equipment, a small football pitch for informal games, a basketball net and two picnic tables. The rec is an important open space used for band concerts, community events and informal play. Views from the road, which runs along beside it at a slightly lower level, are important. This significant open space represents an historic 'green lung' in the heart of the village.



Beenham is a linear village with groups of houses clustered close to the road, interspersed with open spaces.



The children's play equipment on the rec is a magnet attracting both parents and children

Beyond the rec the village closes in again. The older triangle of houses in Clay Lane is closely packed together creating an interesting complexity of planes and spaces. The old houses and cottages which are loosely centred around The Six Bells public house front almost directly onto the road with very small gardens. Beyond a short single track section by The Six Bells the road dips and curves down to the River Bourne, this narrow section marks a pinch point, a sense of closure which indicates the end of the old village. There are further houses beyond but this is where the village effectively stops. Due to recent hedgerow removal views have been created from this corner across the countryside. Local opinion is divided, some liked the sense of containment of entering the village from Bucklebury through a tunnel of trees and hedges, and others appreciate the new views.



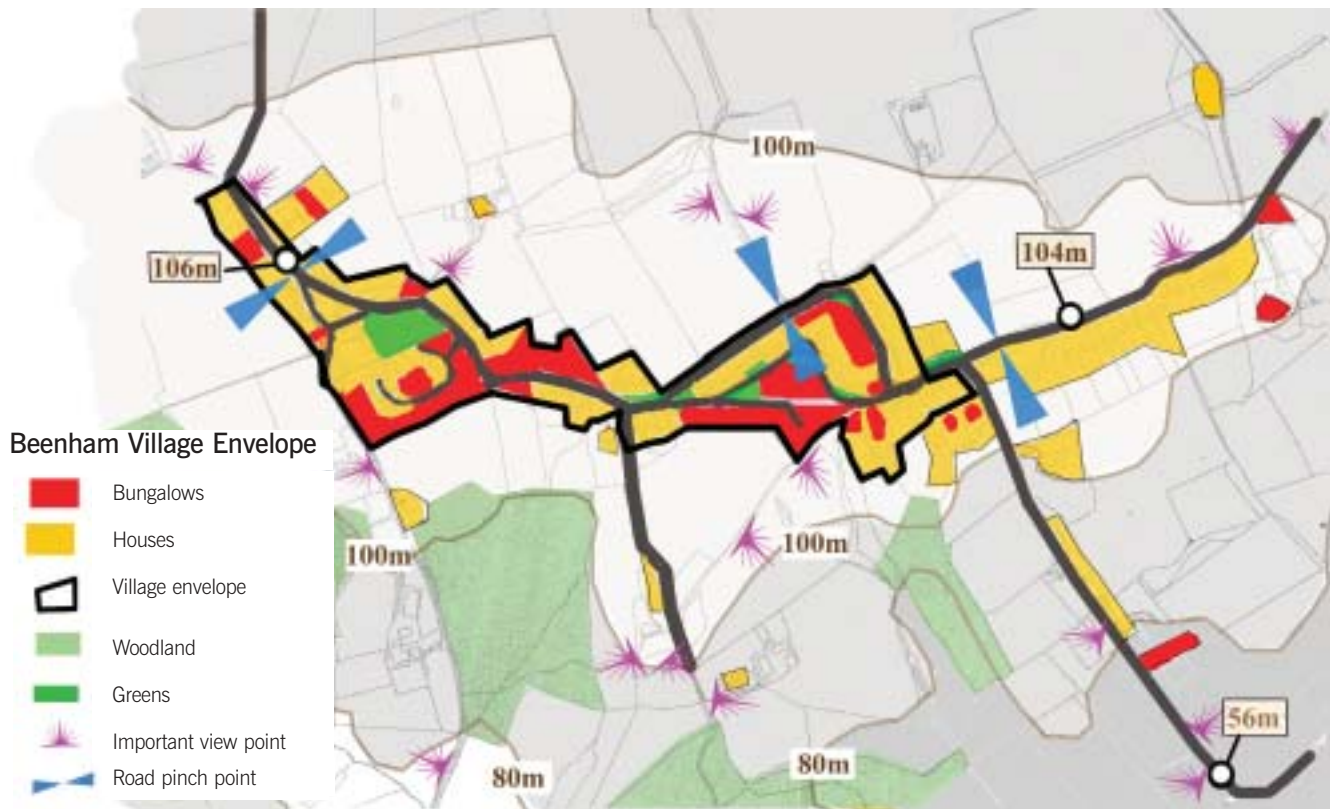
The Six Bells a vital social focus for Beenham!

**Planning guidance**

7. *The setting of Beenham in the wider landscape should be conserved and enhanced by any future development, allowing the village to retain its own identity.*
8. *Any new development should respect the prevailing settlement pattern and character of the village.*
9. *In any new development important views into and out of the village should be respected by developers. Those across the Kennet Valley and towards Bradfield are particularly valued by residents. (see below)*
10. *Landscaping should be considered as an integral part of any new development.*
11. *The spatial effect of the road network (moving from narrow corridors to wide spaces) should be retained by new development, (particularly Back Lane, around the old Stocks pub, Church Lane, Clay Lane and Bourne Lane by the Six Bells).*
12. *The Recreation Ground, the greens in Stoneyfield and the swathe of verge by the school are highly valued as areas of open space and should be conserved or enhanced by any new development.*



In a village with decreasing facilities the school plays a pivotal role, socially and physically, with the community room under the same roof





## Building design

A detailed analysis of randomly selected photographs of houses taken during the workshop (20<sup>th</sup> Jan 2001) was undertaken. Objective results obtained from the analysis have proved to be useful in describing the unique character of Beenham.

Any new development (including extensions and alterations) should take its cue from what already exists; however, the opportunity to be creative and innovative is available too. Opportunities should be taken to learn from the past; what designs work in a particular situation and what does not. The VDS is not meant to be prescriptive but aims to provide guidelines which can act as a springboard to creative design.

The incorporation of energy efficient measures in the design and construction phase is particularly welcome; as is the integration of sustainability into the whole development process.

### Siting

Most houses, and consequently building lines, are sited close to the road, (65% within 0-10m). Older houses are closer to the road with smaller or non-existent front gardens and newer ones tend to be set further back with larger front gardens.

### Alignment

The alignment of houses, relative to the road, is predominantly parallel (72%), and facing onto the road. Many houses back onto fields and/or woodland which contribute to the perceived linear nature of the village.

### Size

In the main houses are of two storeys. However, there are a significant number of bungalows (11%), which tend to be grouped in particular areas (e.g. Church View, The Strouds and Picklepythe Lane), leading to distinct zones.

### Roofs

The prevailing roofing material is red tile (89%), with predominantly red clay tile (a warm orange-red) on older houses, and concrete-compound tiles (reddish brown or dark brown) on newer houses. Some slate and asbestos tile is to be found, a few thatched roofs occur, and two houses, unusually, have cedar shingles.

Roof design varies with 69% gabled and 31% hip-roofed. Again, there is a tendency for these features to be grouped. Some new houses have successfully incorporated these features into their design.

A significant number of properties have had roof conversions, which have resulted in full or partial dormer windows (42%), and roof lights (9%).

### Chimneys

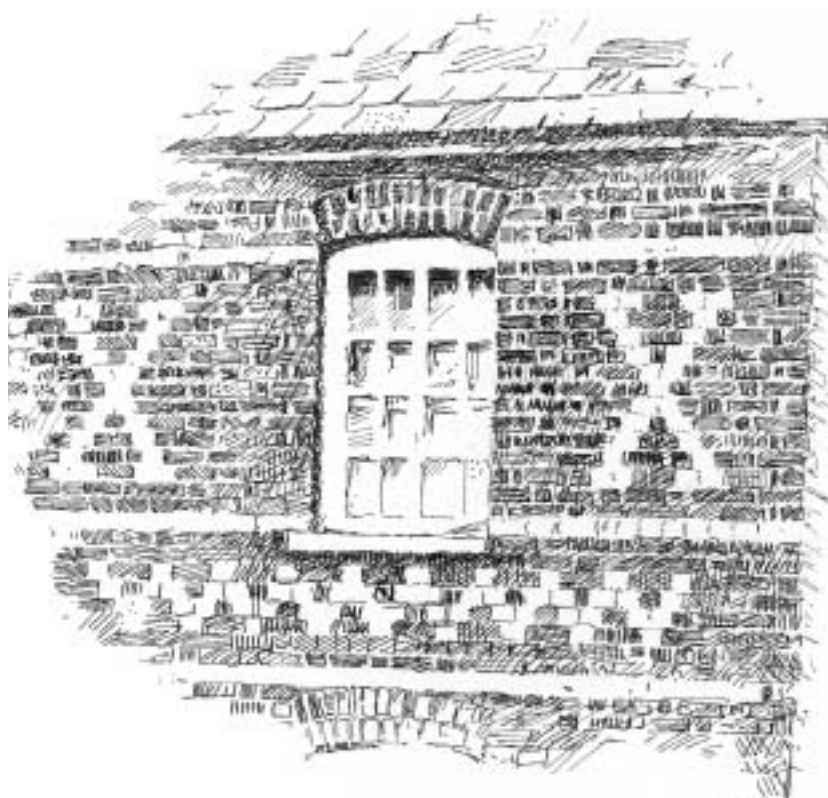
Chimneys are also a characteristic of Beenham, 93% of them are potted and many exhibit some degree of distinctive corbelling. There are fine examples in particular on some of the older houses. Good brick detailing would mark new houses as being particular to Beenham.



Most houses front directly onto the road; the older houses often have little frontage

Complex roof planes and intricate brick detailing, particularly at eaves and on chimney stacks are characteristic of Beenham





New affordable housing has managed to incorporate distinctive features such as arched brick lintels and decorative brick work which echo older village houses

### Gutters, fascias and bargeboards

Old cast-iron guttering is being replaced by plastic. On newer houses there tends to be a wide variety of styles, colours and profiles. Black guttering predominates conferring a less obtrusive appearance allowing other structural features to be more prominent. 10% of gutters are white; but these can be prone to visible algal and grime staining.

Prominent fascia boards are found on over a third of properties, and bargeboards on 14%. Of all of these, 55% are white and 30% are brown. Most are plain in character, but there are a few which are decoratively styled.

### Windows

Older houses have timber window frames. As alternatives became available, some houses have been fitted with steel frames, then subsequently aluminium frames, and finally uPVC frames. Many newer properties started with timber frames but a large proportion of householders have opted for uPVC ones. Overall, nearly 66% of all window frames are white; brown and black account for the remaining third.

While 75% of windows are rectangular and of portrait configuration, over half of house walls are glazed to only 1/5 of the total wall area. Large picture windows were popular for a while but concerns about security and insulation are bringing a return to smaller windows.

### Wall materials

The visible surface of most houses in Beenham is brick (64%). The predominant brick colour is a warm red (over 75%), with which many of the older cottages have been built. More recent housing has introduced other colours, but lately greater efforts have been made to replicate local brick colour, with a degree of success e.g. The Warings. Over 33% of properties have some decorative brick patterning (e.g. the Old Shop and Hillside), not only demonstrating the bricklayer's craft but also adding distinctive character to the village. Some of the cottages have been rendered (28%), and then painted; over 75% of these are white or cream in colour, while a few of the older buildings are of part-timber construction.







These listed buildings provide a diverse palette of design details which could be incorporated into new development

### Doors and porches

Most front doors have some form of weather protection with either a canopy (51%), or a porch (19%). Most doors appear to be of timber (70%), but, as with window frames, replacement doors are increasingly made of uPVC; security and durability are probably the main considerations bringing about this change. A large proportion (66%) of doors have some element of glass relief in them. As with windows, doors are critical features in the overall design and outward appearance of the house.

### Boundary fences and hedges

Most properties have clear boundaries, although they do take a variety of forms:

- fences (42%)
- hedges (28%)
- walls (12%)

A wide range of materials is used in each category. However, there is a lack of uniformity or cohesion in the substance and style of boundaries which results in a jumbled patchwork, particularly around the older properties. The Strouds and The Warings tend to have open-plan gardens with boundary materials appropriate to the age and style of the properties. Hedges are not always practical due to their maintenance implications (see Appendix 2 for list of suggested suitable domestic garden hedgerow species). Well designed walls and fences can be attractive.

The overall impression from passing through Beenham is one of greenness. This is achieved through the presence of field hedgerows and remnants of them in property boundaries. There is a fair level of domestic planting too, many gardens having trees in them (nearly 50%) and this is combined with a predominance of evergreen hedges (59%). Rural character is enhanced by holly, yew and privet plantings, affording all-year screening and privacy.

Beenham has a number of trees which are locally significant. Some of them have Tree Preservation Orders on them (see Appendix 3), others, however, such as the old orchard on Beenham Hill and the holly tree near St Mary's Farmhouse, have no statutory designation but are viewed with affection by residents.

### Drives

Gravel driveways predominate (nearly 66%), in strong preference to tarmac and brick/concrete ones (just over 33%).



### Planning guidance

13. *New development should respect the existing overall layout and siting of existing development within the village.*
14. *New development should reinforce the grain and form of the village by continuing to be designed in an alignment parallel to the road*
15. *Any new development should have due regard to the scale and siting of neighbouring properties.*
16. *Any new development, however small, should respect the prevailing design features of the parish. This does not mean that new or innovative designs will be rejected, indeed they would be welcomed but they should display a thorough understanding of the style, materials and vernacular of the area.*
17. *Developers should avoid mixing styles and historical references in the same building.*
18. *Extensions to existing buildings should use similar materials which match the original development and should be sympathetic in style, scale and proportion.*
19. *Roofs should try to reflect the prevailing predominance of red clay tile and incorporate a degree of complexity in their design through the use of hipped and half-hipped roofs.*
20. *Builders and developers should give careful consideration to the position, size and detail of windows when designing roof conversions.*
21. *Where appropriate, the continued inclusion of chimneys, particularly those which are potted and have brick corbelling, is encouraged in new development.*
22. *The inclusion of decorative fascias and barge boards is to be welcomed where suitable.*
23. *Guttering and downpipes should be discreet and appropriate to the design and age of the house.*
24. *When replacing windows, the scale, style and materials used should match those of the original building. This is especially important in older properties.*
25. *In new development, the size of windows should be in correct proportion to the facade, preferably in "portrait" configuration and with frames predominantly white in colour.*
26. *To harmonise with existing buildings the use of traditional red brick is preferred. Distinctive features such as decorative brick patterning are also encouraged.*
27. *Doors which are appropriately designed for the age and style of the property are encouraged.*
28. *Developers/householders should carefully consider the visual impact of the location and design of garages and other ancillary garden buildings on their surroundings and the wider street scene.*
29. *Property boundaries should be rural in character and content. Traditional styles of brickwork and hedging are preferable (see Appendix 2 for list of suggested suitable domestic garden hedgerow species). Emphasis should be given to achieving a more cohesive effect, especially where boundaries are viewed from the road.*
30. *Driveways are characterised by loose gravel materials. Future developments should try to match these, using bound natural materials.*



A diversity of design within a limited range of materials have contributed to the creation of the village as it is now.





## The street scene

### Footways

Footways are scarce in the parish of Beenham due to its rural nature. In the village, fewer than 20% of properties have a footway adjacent to the boundary and only about 20% have a grassed verge. In recent years a footway was put inside the trees along the edge of the rec to make it safer for pedestrians. However, there is a general reluctance to introduce further footways except where necessary for the safety of pedestrians.

### Street furniture

A variety of traffic signs are located along the road verges throughout the parish; there are also rural footpath signs. There are "Beenham" village name signs at either end of the built up area and large directional signs on the A4.

Outside the Victory Hall is the only public telephone in the parish, housed in a traditional red phone box. There are three bus shelters in the parish; one is situated in Stoneyfield, (an urban glass design), the others are on the A4 and are of brick construction. There are a number of litter bins and benches strategically placed throughout the village.

### Street lighting

Street lighting has been installed only in The Strouds, part of Church View and the new Aldermaston Wharf development. A poll undertaken on behalf of the parish council over 10 years ago showed a majority of people in favour of restricting any further introduction of street lighting as it was felt to be inappropriately suburban. The A4 is illuminated, as is the Marley site which operates a continuous production cycle. These lights are visible from the village.

### Wirescape

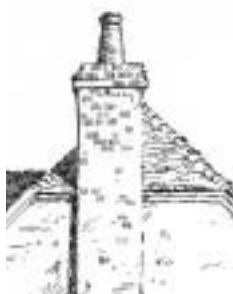
Most electrical and telephone distribution throughout the parish is by overhead lines. The possibility of changing this is slight due to the high cost. Modern housing estates such as Aldermaston Wharf and The Strouds have power supplies which have been placed underground and wirescape does not exist; this is preferable. Mount Pleasant, in particular, would benefit from the removal of unsightly wires and poles.

### Highways

The main metalled road up to Beenham village from the A4 runs across the Kennet Valley floor and past Field Barn Farm. There are striking views towards the wooded ridge, with distant views of Beenham House and its parkland. The road, called Beenham Hill at this point, climbs steeply past eighteenth century houses and older thatched cottages to a junction with Webbs Lane, which runs east to Admoor Lane. The main road continues west along the hill ridge through the village, changing its name from Back Lane to Picklepythe Lane. It then becomes The Green and finally Bourne Lane, before dropping down to the River Bourne which marks the parish boundary. The road continues north up to The Avenue, Bucklebury. Admoor Lane leaves the A4 and forms one side (eastern) of the parish, linking through to Bradfield. The other two north-south lanes are unmetalled for part or all of their length. Church Lane, which eventually turns into Grange Lane, is classed as a bridleway (although it is actually metalled) and Clay Lane is a by-way. This results in a degree of isolation for Beenham which helps to maintain the 'village' feel.



The road through the village ranges in 'feel' from suburban with pavements to rural with high hedges and no footpaths



## Rights of way

Beenham has a network of bridleways and rural footpaths which evolved when walking was virtually the only means of travel. Most bridleways are along old estate roads. Footpaths are now used mainly for recreation, although some like Church Path and the path to Douai Abbey are used as short cuts to avoid roads. Some footpaths have a hard surface (see page 18).

## Car parking

On-street parking is perceived as a problem by some residents, particularly outside the normal working day and in particular parts of the village. However, it can also have the effect of reducing traffic speed which many residents welcome. There are three privately-owned car parks which belong to The Six Bells public house, the school, and the Victory Hall/Beenham Club; the hall/club car park conveniently adjoins the school and is used at busy times of the school day. The school playground is also used for parking when necessary.

## Traffic

Proximity to the A4 and M4 and to main line rail services has meant that villagers commute to London, Swindon and further afield. However, many villagers are employed locally in service and manual industries and travel by car each day to Newbury, Reading and Thatcham. This traffic puts pressure on the existing road network, particularly at peak hours and at the time of the school-run. Most families have their own car(s) and use supermarkets at Calcot and Thatcham, while older villagers tend to use the weekly buses to Reading and Newbury on market days. Support for the shop and post office dwindled to a point where neither was viable. The nearest post offices and shops are two miles away or more at Chapel Row, Southend Bradfield and Upper Bucklebury. Doctors' surgeries serving Beenham are at Chapel Row, Bradfield and Theale.

Minor roads through the village are narrow and were originally built for horse-drawn traffic. They have been widened where verge width would allow. The roads have to accommodate wide commercial and farm vehicles and also horse boxes, particularly during the working day. Significant numbers of horse riders use village roads to connect between bridleways. Roads within the village are mostly subject to a 30 mph speed limit.

Cycle lanes do not exist in the parish. However, cycling occurs as a recreational activity and (if there were better provision) potentially, as a method of commuting or connecting to the railway stations at Theale and Aldermaston.

## Public transport

Although recently improved, bus services serving the parish and in particular, Beenham village, are limited in their frequency and some are circuitous in their routes. Beenham currently has a Monday to Saturday day-time and early evening bus service from Newbury to Calcot. It connects with the rail service at Theale and other bus and coach services at Calcot. There is also a bus service from Beenham to Reading on Wednesdays and a Thursday market day bus to Newbury where volunteers help passengers who are aged or infirm to board (the "Help Aboard" service). This bus travels by a roundabout route which is different from the daily Newbury bus route and serves several villages to the north west of Beenham.

Great Western Trains operate services from Aldermaston Station, Theale and Pangbourne giving connections to the north, London and the west. There does not appear to be much co-ordination between train and local bus services.

A volunteer car service, supported by Beenham Parish Council, is available for parishioners without transport, to carry them to and from the doctors surgery at Chapel Row. It also collects and delivers medicines and prescriptions.

The nearest taxi services are in Theale and Thatcham.



The footpaths and bridleways provide a good off-road network. Unfortunately, many houses especially older ones don't have any parking space and therefore park on the road



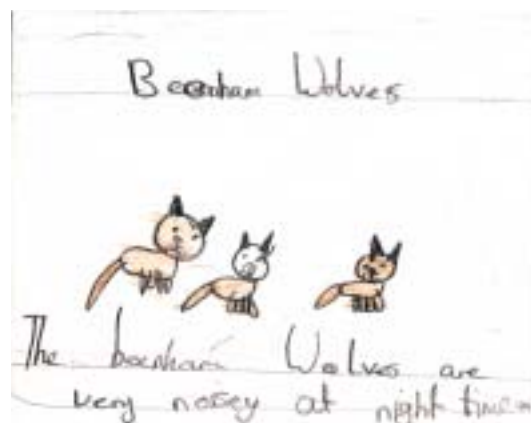
### Planning guidance

31. When considering new footways, the character of the narrow winding lanes which predominate through much of the parish should be carefully considered. The materials also need to be appropriate to the rural setting, for example, granite setts are used extensively as curbing.
32. When new signs, of any type, are introduced, existing poles should be used where possible. Where appropriate every opportunity should be taken to amalgamate or reduce the number of signs.
33. Street furniture should be sited with sensitivity and grouped to reduce visual clutter.
34. Street lighting is considered to be an urbanising feature in this rural location and its necessity should be very carefully considered before inclusion in any new development. In areas where street lighting is essential, the use of cut off lanterns would be appropriate.
35. Any industrial or security lighting, particularly along the valley bottom and the A4, should be carefully designed and sited so as not to increase light pollution.
36. In the interests of conserving and enhancing the rural nature of Beenham, all new cabling should, where possible, be laid underground.
37. Where appropriate, new development should incorporate and signpost rights of way which link into the existing network of public rights of way.



### Concluding remarks

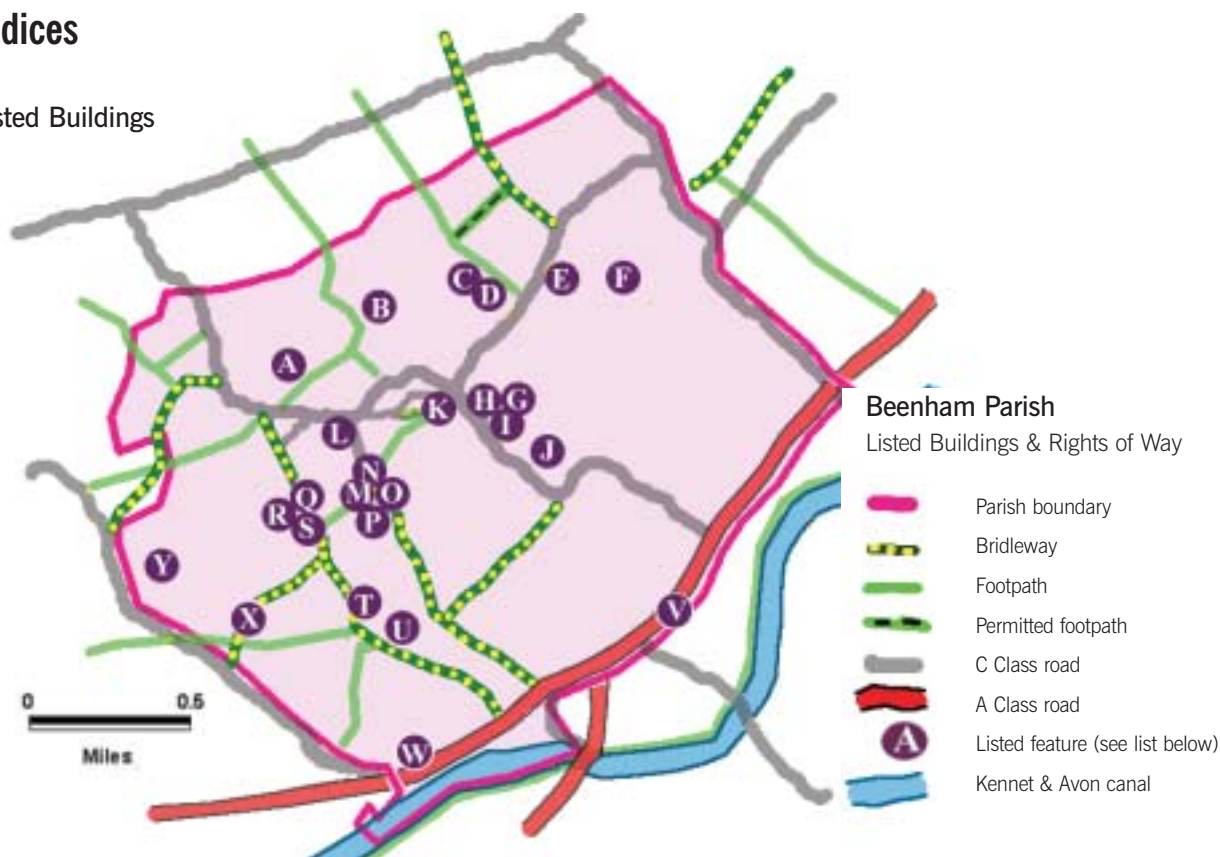
Beenham is a mixed parish incorporating industrial and commercial development, concentrated along the A4 in the Kennet Valley and housing development mainly in the village on the ridge to the north side of the valley. The village has evolved over the centuries and exhibits a wide mixture of housing types. The village itself will never be of the 'chocolate box' variety. Nevertheless, the aim of this VDS is to retain what is special about it and to enhance that particular quality through any new development which may occur. Innovative design solutions are welcomed where they respect the local design vernacular and materials. Beenham will continue to grow and evolve, and any improvements to its outward appearance which result from this VDS will be very welcome.



Butlers Farm is home to the UK Wolf Conservation Trust. The sound of wolves howling is unique to Beenham

# Appendices

## 1. Listed Buildings



- A **Awbery's Farmhouse**, early 19<sup>th</sup>c. red brick farm house (II)
- B **Butler's Farmhouse**, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>c. timber framed (II)
- C **Barn at White Cottage**, 16<sup>th</sup>c now garage and flat (II)
- D **White Cottage**, Early 16<sup>th</sup>c timber framed with solar. (II\*)
- E **Park Farmhouse**, 17<sup>th</sup>c with additions, timber framed (II)
- F **Beenham House**, early and mid 19<sup>th</sup>c (II)
- G **The Malthouse**, early 19<sup>th</sup>c house (II)
- H **Appletree Cottage**, late 17<sup>th</sup>c and 18<sup>th</sup>c timber frame (II)
- I **The Malthouse**, early 19<sup>th</sup>c, railings, gate and wall to front (II)
- J **Hillfoot House**, 1737 (II)
- K **No's 1, 2 and 3 Stock Cottages**, timber framed 17<sup>th</sup>c. cottages (II)
- L **St Mary's Farmhouse**, Late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>c. (II)
- M, O **Bushnell Tomb and Bigg Tomb in churchyard of St Mary**, chest tombs 1815 and 18<sup>th</sup>c. (II)
- N **Church Cottage**, timber framed 17<sup>th</sup>c. cottage (II)
- P **Church of St. Mary**, tower 1794, aisles 1859, chancel 1871 (II\*)
- R, Q, S **Oakwood Farm**; farmhouse 17<sup>th</sup>c with 20<sup>th</sup>c additions, granary and barn (II)
- T, U **Hall Place Farm**; barn 16<sup>th</sup>c and cart shed 18<sup>th</sup>c (II)
- V **Parish boundary stone** 1828
- W **Milestone**, late 19<sup>th</sup>c. north side of Bath Road (II)
- X **Malthouse Farmhouse**, late 17<sup>th</sup>c timber framed (II)
- Y **Ferrises**, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>c house (II)

The trees and landscape setting of the parish need positive management, to be enhanced by future planting



Information supplied by West Berkshire District Council



## 2. List of suitable species for domestic garden hedgerows and trees

| Suitable garden hedging species | Suitable garden trees                | Suitable large garden trees |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Spindle                         | Alder                                | Willow                      |
| Guelder-rose                    | Alder Buckthorn                      | Cedar of Lebanon            |
| Holly                           | Birch                                | Oak                         |
| Yew                             | Cherry<br>(incl. flowering cherries) | Ash                         |
| Dog woods                       | Cotoneaster                          | Field Maple                 |
| Hornbeam                        | Crab Apple                           | Deodar                      |
| Common Hawthorn                 | Dog Woods                            | Scots Pine                  |
| Blackthorn                      | Elder                                | Beech                       |
| Beech                           | Euonymus                             | Lime                        |
| Field Rose                      | Field Maple                          | Aspen                       |
| Dog Rose                        | Japanese Maple                       | Norway Spruce               |
| Field Maple                     | Lilac                                | Cherry                      |
| Hazel                           | Rowan                                | Douglas Fir                 |
| Privets                         | Snowy mespilus                       | Blue Atlas Cedar            |
|                                 | Apple                                | Wellingtonia                |
|                                 |                                      | Holly                       |
|                                 |                                      | Yew                         |
|                                 |                                      | Rowan                       |
|                                 |                                      | Thuja                       |
|                                 |                                      | Larch                       |
|                                 |                                      | Black Pine                  |



## 3. Tree Preservation Orders

| Council Ref. No.  | Date of order                   | Situation                                     | Ordnance survey grid reference | Trees specified  |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|--|
| 201/21/83         | 28 <sup>th</sup> August 1973    | Recreation Ground, Beenham Village            | SU 586688                      | 7 Lime trees   |
| 201/21/141 (G.I.) | 23 <sup>rd</sup> January 1976   | Stocks Farm, Beenham Hill                     | SU 595689                      | 26 Poplar trees  |
| 201/21/239        | 11 <sup>th</sup> September 1987 | Land at 'High Reach', Clay Lane, Beenham      | SU 585687                      | 2 Horse Chestnut trees   |
| 201/21/390        | 16 <sup>th</sup> April 1993     | Land at Grange Place, Beenham Industrial Area | SU 595678 to SU 596679         | 10 Oak, Lime and Horse Chestnut trees                                    |
| 201/21/617        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2004   | Land at Ferrises, Upper Woolhampton           | SU 587673                      | 27 individual trees including Oak, Scots Pine, Horse Chestnut, Lime, Ash |



St Mary's Church, an historical focal point



**Notes:** Information supplied by West Berkshire District Council.

- These Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) were made by the local planning authority in order to protect and preserve significant trees under threat. Consent must be obtained from West Berkshire District Council before work is carried out but the owner remains responsible for their condition. The legislation excludes gardens and hedgerows, covered under The Hedgerow Regulations 1997.
- Other trees in the parish, not covered by a TPO, are equally deserving of care and preservation. Trees in the countryside are covered by The Forestry Act, whereby a felling license is required.



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Ken White: maps  
Children of Beenham School: drawings



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[www.westberks.gov.uk](http://www.westberks.gov.uk)  
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