Birlingham

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

July 2017
INTRODUCTION

What is a Village Design Statement?
A Village Design Statement (VDS) describes the distinctive character of the village by reference to its landscape setting, the settlement shape and the nature of the buildings themselves. It is more than just about housing design, as it also describes the things that are important such as open spaces, features and views. It draws up design principles based on these characteristics and it is used to work with planners and developers to ensure that the agreed principles are observed wherever possible. It does not describe where development should or shouldn’t go but it is a source of information available to Wychavon District Council to guide planning decisions. The aim of the VDS is therefore to guide the process of change but not prevent it.

Planning policy context
Planning decisions in Birlingham are currently made by reference to the general policies included in the new South Worcester Development Plan (SWDP). Birlingham also has two areas identified as Conservation Areas and development within these areas is subject to additional restrictions. The Government has encouraged parishes nationwide to consider the creation of either a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) or a Village Design Statement (VDS) to guide planning decisions. An NP or VDS is adopted by Wychavon DC and sits under the design policies of the South Worcester Development Plan (SWDP) as a supplementary residential housing policy.

In the village survey of all 302 village residents in August 2015, 76% of respondents voted in favour of the development of a Village Design Statement. 70% were against the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for reasons of time and cost.
Resident’s views and input

In order to develop the VDS it was vital that we sought the views of residents so that the information was evidence based. This also ensured that residents had an opportunity to comment on the findings during the process and review its contents. There were three parts to this process.

Village Survey

In 2015 the Parish Council carried out a comprehensive survey of all residents asking them a range of questions about village life and seeking their input on issues such as housing, environment, facilities, amenities and businesses.

Village Consultation

In 2016, at the start of the process to develop the VDS, a sample of residents were interviewed to get additional input and comments not covered by the Village Survey.

VDS Open Day

Part way through the development of the VDS, an Open Day was held to which all residents were invited. This ‘exhibition style’ day gave attendees the opportunity to discuss the information collected by the working groups and to express their views and preferences by voting on various aspects of the information, including:

- A Photographic Survey - favourite landscapes and views
- A Property Survey including the ways that village architecture, monuments and settings influence life in the village.

References to these activities will be found throughout this document along with the Resident’s Views.
How the VDS was produced

The development of the VDS required significant involvement from parish residents and was based on research into the history, development and current structure of the village. The decision to develop a VDS was made by the Parish Council following the village survey in 2015. This survey was sent out to every resident in August 2015 and the results presented to a packed meeting in the village hall in November 2015. The results were also posted on the village website. The first formal meeting to start the process of developing a VDS was held in May 2016. The objective of this meeting was to outline the process that would be followed and to ask for volunteers. Several working groups were defined:

- Existing Village and its History
- Landscapes and Views
- Protected Areas and Natural Heritage
- Village Architecture
- Landmarks and Monuments
- Residents’ Views

Several residents volunteered to head these groups and to recruit others to assist in the research and development of the material. In all, some 35 residents became involved in the process, which was very encouraging. There followed several further meetings to review progress at which point it was decided to hold the Open Day. This was held in the Village Hall on the 15th October 2016 and 96 residents (32% of the village adult population) attended. See Open Day photos. A great deal of useful ideas and input was obtained which was then used at the next stage to develop a draft of the VDS.

The VDS draft went through several further iterations before it was ready to be presented to the village for final comment and approval. The final draft was made available on the village website in September 2017 and the completed version which incorporated all final comments and changes was published at the end of 2017 and submitted to Wychavon District Council for adoption.
THE PARISH OF BIRLINGHAM

Birlingham is a secluded village and civil parish in the Wychavon district of Worcestershire. It is 10 miles from Worcester and about 2 miles south west of Pershore. The Parish of Birlingham, identified by the yellow boundary on the accompanying map, covers an area of approximately 515 Hectares (1272 Acres). It sits in a loop of the River Avon which surrounds it on its North, East and South sides. In the South East it is watered by Berwick Brook, a tributary of the Avon. Bow Brook and Tiddesley Wood bound it on the North and West. The parish is crossed by the A4104 Pershore to Upton Road and the B4080 Eckington/Tewkesbury Road. The centre of the village is accessed either from the A4104 at Bakers Hill or from the Eckington Road at New Barn Lane.

The whole parish is low lying and sits in an open landscape of fields. The ground reaches its highest point at c.38m a short distance above Defford Bridge in the West, and falls to 12m at its lowest point in the South. As a result the land along the river bank is liable to flood. Birlingham Parish is classified by Wychavon as Predominantly Rural. In general the geology of the parish is of Charmouth Mudstone.

Village Survey – resident’s profile:

- 85% of residents are over the age of 45
- Half the residents are retired or house-makers
- There is very little unemployment so the balance are in work and of those 46% work locally or from home
- Only 14% of households have children under the age of 18
- Most households have access to the internet and use it for keeping in touch with village activities
- Main reasons for residents moving to the village are the right housing and nearby countryside with 65% having lived here for more than 10 years
Formation (laminated shales and limestone beds), overlain with Wasperton sand and gravel from alluvial deposits along the River Avon. This results in free-draining, slightly acid, loamy soils which would have been attractive to settlements in the past and are attractive to modern agriculture today for growing crops such as cereals, peas and potatoes. This fertile land is popular with both farmers and market gardeners who reap the benefit of the local climate in the Vale of Evesham. Bredon Hill to the South East is a prominent feature of the landscape and provides an important backdrop to the village.

History of the settlement

Birlingham is an ancient settlement. Stray finds of Roman pottery and worked flint together with human remains (scientifically dated to the Neolithic period 4000BC to 2351BC) are recorded in the parish. Items from the Bronze and Iron ages have been found. All these finds indicate that the area has been inhabited and settled for many centuries. 1000 years ago it was located in a clearing in the Forest of Horwell which lay between the Avon and the Severn. The earliest record of its existence occurs in a Saxon charter of 972AD. The spelling was then Byrlingahamm. It is thought that the name is derived from “Byrla’s” people who inhabited the settlement and from “hamm” which means a piece of flat land in a river bend. Byrla’s people were probably the ancient Britons who were in occupation when the Saxons arrived. In a comparatively short space of time the spelling had changed to Berlingeham. This is how it is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086AD.

Medieval History from Domesday (1066AD-c.1539AD)

After the Norman Conquest much of the land of Birlingham and the Saxon settlement at Nafford was given to the notorious Urse d’Abitot, Sheriff of Worcester. Urse d’Abitot was one of William the Conqueror’s Norman invaders who grabbed much land in Worcestershire. Urse’s interest passed with his other estates to the Beauchamps of Elmley Castle, the manor being held by them until the 15th century.

By 1256 Birlingham, together with Woolashill and Nafford, had become a sizeable parish with a church and a priest. There had been a church in Birlingham since the XI century. From the Norman Conquest to c.1500, parishes were governed by a feudal system. The manor was the basic unit of society, granted by the King to the Lord of the manor in return for his services.

Birlingham formed part of the earliest endowments of Pershore Abbey. Ten manses (ecclesiastical residences) were said to have been restored to the abbey by King Edgar. In 1086 Pershore lost Birlingham as King Edward the Confessor granted it to the Abbey of Westminster.

Post - Medieval (c.1540AD-c.1900AD)

In 1774 the Inclosure Act for the “Inclosure of certain lands within the Parish of Nafford and Chapelry of Birlingham” was obtained at a cost to the parish of £1200. The objective was to enclose the Common Fields in such a way as to give each Landowner the equivalent in value of what he already held, but in more convenient lots. Thus instead of many pieces scattered all over the parish, each received a compact allotment. Moreover, instead of being compelled to cultivate his land exactly as his neighbours did, and had done from time immemorial, he could now grow what he liked and improve his farming methods in accordance with new knowledge.
Analysis of pollen remains showed that in prehistoric times the area was quite marshy within a general landscape of open grassland. Further evidence suggests that this part of the floodplain was used as a hay meadow through medieval and post-medieval times. Originally the area was quite wooded, but the woods have long since disappeared. There is more pasture than arable land due to the fact that the parish is low lying and liable to floods.

**Historic Landscape**

The historic landscape and character of the parish is defined by its agriculture with field patterns being as a result of field amalgamation, reorganisation and modern subdivision. In the latter half of the 19th Century and first half of the 20th Century fruit growing in Britain began to expand and small commercial orchards came into prominence such as one at Rough Hill. It is recorded that Pershore was, and still is, famous for its plums and the rapid growth of apple, plum and pear orchards became part of the tapestry of the countryside. Birlingham was no exception.

In the 1920s and 1930s there were four large farms and two or three smaller ones in Birlingham. At that time they were called common fields. The four largest fields were called Upper Leyfield, Churchyard Field, Broadway and Shorthill. Tithes for the parish are likely to have been commuted to payment by rent charge at the time of the Inclosure Act leaving only Asham Meadow to be accounted for in the tithe map and apportionment. Asham meadow, which is bounded by the River Avon and B4080 Tewkesbury Road at Eckington Bridge, is one of a very small number of Lammas fields still left in the UK today. It is an example of a riverside meadow still farmed under the old “Lammas Meadow” system. Lammas meadows are traditionally shut up for hay in early spring by the owners of individual strips, cropped in July and grazed in common after Lammas Day in August. Nutrients are supplied by flooding episodes in winter. This unique system results in a rich and characteristic...
meadow flora in late spring/early summer and also provides nesting habitats for curlews, redshanks and skylarks. These traditional methods of farming help many common and rare wildflowers to flourish on the meadow, including meadow sweet, meadow cranesbill, mousetail and fine leaved water dropwort.

In the 1920s most fields were used for cereal crops, sheep and cattle. There were also some small market gardeners with holdings. In the 1930’s there would have been about 100 head of beef cattle, 20 or so milkers, 60 to 70 ewes with up to a 100 lambs and some 200 pigs resulting in a lot of agricultural activity. In the 1950’s the largest field in Birlingham was 12 acres but with the use of larger agricultural machinery and the resulting demise of trees and hedgerows, the fields have grown substantially.

The second half of the 20th century saw a steep decline in the demand for local fruit, as cheap imports became available all year round. An increase in imported pulp also reduced the demand for local fruit for jam making. As a result, orchards were grubbed up in favour of arable crops and the traditional orchard landscape in Birlingham was gradually lost. However, salad crops and vegetables are still widely grown today although there is very little livestock rearing in the village.
MODERN LANDSCAPE AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Location and setting
The boundary to the South and East of Birlingham Parish joins the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) by Bredon Hill. Bredon Hill is one of the most important wildlife sites in England, providing a range of habitats including ancient woodland, calcareous grassland and scrub. A large section of the western and northern scarp was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1955. Since 2005, an overlapping area has also been designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the European Commission Habitats Directive. Part of the SAC is a National Nature Reserve. Bredon Hill is most important as habitat for rare invertebrates, such as the violet click beetle.

The boundary to the North West of the Parish joins Tiddesley Wood, also an SSSI managed by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and one of their Flagship Reserves. This large woodland was once an enclosed deer park and was previously owned by the Abbots of Pershore Abbey and local nobility as well as the Forestry Commission. The wood is carpeted with wildflowers in spring – bluebells, wood anemones, violets and cowslips and the environment is known for its butterflies, insects and warblers.

At the extreme south of Birlingham, where a branch of the Berwick Brook flows into the Avon, is Nafford lock. The parish boundary here passes to the south of the river to include Nafford. Located in this area of the parish is the Gwen Finch Wetland Reserve. Created in 2001 this 20-hectare wetland is a true haven for otters. The pools and marshes also attract birds; redshank, water rail and reed warbler breed here while green sandpiper and other waders are regular passage visitors. Hundreds of house martins and swallows are attracted by the insects over the reeds and pools. Dragonflies and damselflies are abundant along the river and pools. The margins of the pools have developed a rich and varied flora with purple loosestrife, marsh speedwell, soft rush, water plantain and brooklime. Work in 2010 created a neighbouring reserve, the John Bennett Wetland. This is helping to expand the habitat created at Gwen Finch Wetland.
Landscape

Landscape and views are central to the character of Birlingham. The open spaces in the village are often used for community events (such as the village fete) and the well-developed footpath network provides excellent land for walking, and the open spaces allow villagers to roam off designated footpaths. The river is used for fishing, boating and for irrigation. The landscape is therefore a key part of parish life and it is important to preserve it for future generations.

To collect information for the VDS regarding the importance that the community placed on the landscape and views of the parish, a photographic survey was carried out. Members of the community were invited to send in photographs that represented aspects of the landscapes, views and natural heritage that were important to them. These photos were examined for common themes and plotted on a map to show important locations within the parish. At the VDS Open Day residents were invited to vote on their favourite themes and to highlight the views or landscapes that were most important to them on the map.

With around 50% of the submitted photos containing a vista looking into or out of the parish, it is clear the views within the parish are important to the community. Of the photos that were submitted by the community, a significant proportion contained views of Bredon Hill, which is visible from almost the entire parish and is a major feature of the village landscape. Other aspects of the landscape which were regular subjects of the photographs were the main settlement of the village itself, the Malvern Hills and Tiddesley Wood. It can therefore be assumed that these are also important to the community.

Wooded Areas

Tiddesley wood directly borders the parish and is home to many bluebells in the spring. While not within the parish borders, it provides both a route of access into Pershore, the nearest town and walking routes which are often used by residents of the parish.

There are, however, several wooded areas within the Parish, which often featured in the photographs submitted and are clearly valued. These included Rough Hill Orchard, the wooded area along Upper End and the copse beside Swan’s Neck. Many of the trees within the village are covered by two Tree Preservation Orders (TPO’s).

The most significant exceptions to the relatively flat landscape are Shorthill, from which views of Pershore and views looking into the heart of the parish can be seen, Bakers Hill, which is the setting of the A4104 and contains more open views West across more farmland, and Rough Hill. Rough Hill Orchard is an area of important natural heritage and is managed by the People’s Trust for Endangered Species (PTES).
harbours over 100 fruit trees and is home to many saproxylic, or dead wood loving, invertebrates, rare types of bees, birds such as the greater spotted woodpecker, bats and even the occasional otter.

**Access and the River**

The submitted photos were taken from both on and off the footpath network demonstrating that easy access around the parish is an important aspect of village life. 30% of the photos submitted were of the River Avon. The most popular areas were around the Wharf, Common Land and wooded area by Swan’s neck, the area around Nafford weir and the river bank that runs through the wetlands.

**Open spaces**

There are many open spaces within the parish, varying from fields to common land to wetlands. Much of the open space are fields used by the local farms for grazing or growing crops. The farms also create tracks along the hedgerows that typically border the fields, which are often used by residents instead of the footpath network for getting around the parish. Although these tracks are not rights of way, walkers use is tolerated by the farms.

The churchyard and village green serve as the main centre point for the parish and featured heavily in the photographic survey. The Spring bulbs in the churchyard are very well known in the wider local area, attracting many tourists each year and generating important income for St James’ Church.

Also included was the cricket pitch, which is home to community events such as Birlingham Flower and Produce Show, Birlingham Car Rally or Birlingham Village Fete. The pitch is used for grazing sheep in the winter, and during the cricket season is home to Birlingham Cricket Club. This open space is central to the parish. Asham Meadow, the John Bennet Reserve, Gwen Finch Wetlands and the large number of fields that are farmed around the parish were also popular subjects in the survey as they maintain the open views important to residents of the parish.

**Open Day** – Views of 91 residents who voted as follows:

“I value the views and vistas in the parish. They are key to its character and should be preserved in the future”. 74 votes/81%

“I value the wooded and open spaces in the parish, the balance between them should be preserved” 71 votes/78%

“I value the river and my right to access it as it is a key part of the village character” 46 votes/50%

“I value my right to roam off the official public footpaths in the parish because otherwise I would not be able to experience the parish fully” 32 votes/35%

“The hedges, fences and walls in the parish are an important part of the village character” 27 votes/29%

“The setting of major roads in the parish is in keeping with the character of the village and should be preserved” 23 votes/25%
VILLAGE ENVIRONMENT

Community Life

Much of village life in 2017 revolves around the pub, the village hall and church but there are also a number of active clubs, societies and charities. These include the Cricket Club, Parochial Church Council, Bell Ringers, Flower and Produce Show, Birlingham IW, Photography Club, Sporting Gun Club, Pilates, Karate, Darts Team, Friends of St James’ Church, Jubilee Committee, local magazine The Bystander, Skittles Team, a very active Parish Council and several Social Clubs.

Every two years the Cricket Club hosts a classic car event on the cricket pitch which is attended by enthusiasts far and wide. This was so successful in 2016 that future events have been called into question to avoid gridlock on local roads. There is a very strong community spirit in the village with residents prepared to commit significant time and effort in support community activities.
Although Birlingham is still recognised for its farming activity, there are more than 30 other businesses in the village. Many of these businesses operate from home and range from Bed and Breakfast accommodation, picture framing, garden centre, music lessons through to high tech consulting. There is even a vineyard. The largest employer is a company set up to market and pack vegetables. Due to the seasonality of the produce, many of their employees come from outside the UK.

**Roads and Traffic**

The parish is served by two major roads, which provide easy access to a large local area. The A4104, which runs North to South and is situated at the West of the parish, can be used to access Pershore and Worcester to the North, or Upton and Malvern to the West. The B4080, which branches off the A4104, provides easy access to Eckington, Tewkesbury and Cheltenham. These routes allow for access to the M5 and Birmingham and the train station at Pershore provides a direct connection to London and Oxford. This access is an important part of village life, particularly for those members of the community that work outside of the parish borders to support their lives within it. The residents of homes along the A4104 and B4080 enjoy expansive views that were typified by their photographic submissions. The rest of the highways within the village are minor roads, and are usually devoid of any road surface markings. They are typically quite narrow and winding, and in areas where hedgerows are quite tall, visibility can be limited. All the highways within the parish are unlit and many contain potholes. Residents of the village generally feel that the highways in the parish could be subject to some improvement although this does not suggest that roads should be widened or kerbed.

**Village Survey – Cricket Club and Grounds**

- 83% of respondents said the club and grounds were important to them and 40% said they either played in or watched matches.

**Open Day - Residents Views**

“The hedges, fences and walls in the parish are an important part of the village character”
Sign posts to the village from the main roads are also in a poor state of repair. However, many residents feel that they are an important part of the parish character.
One important observation is the importance of the materials and design demarking property boundaries. The historic metal 3 and 4 bar fencing used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century can still be seen around the village, especially along the boundaries of the larger historic properties. This, coupled with well-established hedgerows to mark both field and property garden boundaries, provides a very traditional feel to the village which residents feel should be strongly encouraged. Examples of these boundaries are shown in pictures in this document.

**Services and Amenities**

In 2016 the village comprised 149 households with 339 residents, of which 37 were children under the age of eighteen. The village is designated as Category Three due to its very limited bus service and lack of local amenities such as a school and village shop. This lack of amenities today is in contrast with those in the past. In the early 20th century there were shops at each end of the village. Earlier still there was a butcher`s slaughterhouse together with a large Tudor barn; this was wood-sided with a thatched roof and a huge painted sign on the side dating from about 1700 which said “All ye vagabonds found wandering by here will be put in ye stocks” (The stocks still survive in the church today.)

Birlingham also used to have a school (public elementary), with master's house attached. It was built in 1855 and was enlarged in 1895 and again in 1912. Today there is not a huge amount of interest in shops or other amenities being introduced, a pragmatism perhaps about the realities of the situation in a small village. There is significant appreciation of the number of events and social activities in the village and a desire to ensure that the facilities that allow these (church, village hall and cricket ground particularly) are valued and kept.

This, together with an overwhelming enthusiasm for feeling part of the community from 70% of respondents, speaks well for the future of Birlingham.

**Village Consultation** – Residents views on traffic

Responses stressed need to manage existing issues – HGV’s and speeding. People raised the impact this had on:

- the ability to walk and cycle safely
- damage to verges and in some cases walls and trees
- road surfaces

Other feedback:

- there was support for speed reductions in the village.
- strong feelings that we should avoid typical traffic calming measures that involve kerbs and street lighting which would change the rural feel.
Open Day – Resident’s Views

The lack of village services and an ageing population focused numerous respondents on the need for transport solutions both within the village and connecting to nearby villages and towns.

- 50% of respondents referred specifically to the need for a more frequent bus (public transport) service.
  - “We will not be able to stay when we get old as we will not be able to get anywhere”.

- Residents were creative in their suggestions as to how we could address these issues
  - Community ‘sharing’ models from carpools, to prescription or goods collection services and advice on trade’s people shared on social media.

- Cycle and walking safety were key concerns. Whereas, in general, footpaths are well signposted and maintained, the provision and then maintenance of cycle paths was seen as equally important to having better connections.

- Two specific footpath requests were mentioned:
  - In the village centre at Withy Walk, changes to access gates to allow for parents with prams and wheelchair users to pass easily.
  - On the fringes of the village at Shirepool Lane, Berwick Lane and Nafford Lock, better maintenance of the track to the river and better signage of footpaths and byways through to the lock and onto Eckington for both local and visiting walkers.
St James’ Church
St James the Great is a limestone Grade II listed building situated at the heart of Birlingham village. The original 12th century Norman chancel arch is now the main churchyard entrance. The west tower is 15th century. The remainder of the church was rebuilt in 1784 and again in 1871-72 when the then vicar, the Reverend Robert Rashleigh Duke, set about upgrading the church. At the same time, the Rev Duke’s daughter Eldie supervised the planting in the churchyard. Today, tens of thousands of snowdrops carpet the churchyard every January and February. The snowdrops are preceded by winter aconites and succeeded by crocuses and primroses, so the churchyard is a beautiful sight for a period of many weeks, even in the coldest months of the year. Today, the church is supported by local groups including ‘The Friends of St James Church’ who raise considerable sums through local events to support its upkeep in view of its significance to the village of Birlingham.
War memorial
Birlingham’s War Memorial shares a triangular village green with a magnificent old plane tree positioned in front of St James’ Church. The memorial is a stone cross with a Celtic pattern at the top and inscriptions on the shaft and plinth which stand on a two-stepped base. The memorial was paid for by public subscription. The names of those lost in World War II were added in 1948. The memorial hosts the annual Armistice Day remembrance services, organised by residents of Birlingham.

Cricket pitch
Birlingham Cricket Club was thought to have been formed around 1890 and many years later moved to this picturesque setting in the heart of the village. The land is leased from the Porter family.

Eckington Bridge
Eckington Bridge is a stone bridge over the River Avon at Eckington built by Worcester masons Robert Taylor and Thomas Wilkinson. It is a Grade II listed building and has been scheduled as an ancient monument. The first bridge at the site was built in 1440, replacing an earlier ferry, but this fell into disrepair and was eventually replaced by the current stone bridge in 1728. The bridge is 44 metres long and consists of six arches built of red sandstone with the piers being protected by cutwaters. On the northern side of the bridge, slightly downstream, is a World War II pillbox.

Nafford Weir and Lock
At the southernmost point of the parish, where a branch of the Berwick Brook flows into the River Avon, stands Nafford lock and weir. This is one of many navigable locks on the Avon and is also a favourite walking and jogging route for many villagers.

Telephone box
Located in the centre of the village adjacent to St James’ Church, this historic landmark is now used as a village resource to encourage vegetable growing and gardening with people using it to deposit produce for others to share.

Wind powered water pump
Located by the Gwen Finch Wetland, it has contemporary relevance to many residents as a source of water extraction for the otter waterways.

Swan Inn
The Swan Inn on Church Street is a picturesque thatch-roofed Inn thought to date back more than 500 years. It is not a listed building, though it is an important one to many villagers and visitors alike.
**Millennium time capsule**
Donated by a village resident for the Millennium celebrations, the capsule holds a number of 20th Century items of interest to those who may uncover it in future millennia. It is sited on the village green.

**Old road signs**
Some residents expressed a preference for the older style road signs, which they felt were more in keeping with the village.

**Stocks**
Birlingham parish stocks are though to date from 1787. Prior to their relocation inside St James’ Church, thought to be before 1929, the stocks were located outside the churchyard wall, to the southeast.

**VILLAGE ARCHITECTURE**
To collect information for the VDS, all buildings within the parish were inspected from the nearest public access point to the property, whether on the boundary with the lane, a public footpath or other. This was the most appropriate position from which to record the characteristics of the property and its orientation/relationship to the public domain. Pictures of each property were taken as a future reference. In addition a proforma was completed recording details of each property surveyed, with regard to: type, height, gardens, construction/materials, windows, special features and an indication of the approximate age of the property.

**Housing and the built environment**
Buildings in the parish are located in two general areas: inner village (comprising Upper and Lower End and the village centre) and outer village (comprising properties on the Pershore and Eckington roads). Although buildings are predominantly detached two-storey residential use, there is an interesting and varied mix of three storey and single storey residential units, as well as functional farm buildings. The main distinguishing feature of the buildings as a collective is that almost all are of a unique design, size and style as can be seen from the accompanying photographs.

The buildings relate to a predominantly linear structure, with some sitting flush with the road or lane, while others are set back, having substantial and mature gardens between them and the road. Indeed it is in many respects this rich divergence of building type and orientation which contributes considerably to Birlingham’s unique quality and environment. There are 149 residential properties in the parish of which 13 are Grade...
II listed. Three of these are in Upper End (Hills Cottage, barn adjoining Court Cottages and barn at the Court House), two in the village centre (the Old Rectory and the Old Post Office), seven in Lower End (Ivy Cottage, barn at the Manor House, the Manor House, the Almshouses, Lower End Cottages, the Thatch Cottage and the Cottage) and one in the outer village (Bakers Hill). In addition the Church of St James, the Churchyard Entrance Archway, the War Memorial and Eckington Bridge are also Grade II listed.

Scale, density and style

The village survey conducted in August 2015 identified 302 residents over the age of 18 and 37 children. There are 149 residential properties and four dedicated commercial properties (many residential properties also have part commercial use). However the group actually surveyed and recorded 163 separate buildings, as indicated later. The style and scale of the buildings within the village is disparate. This is mainly for historic reasons. An example is that Birlingham, being predominantly planted with fruit trees, was used by the Earls of Coventry as their Croome Park partridge shoot. More recently many farm buildings have been converted into family homes, providing them with a new lease of life. As an overview, out of the 163 separate buildings surveyed, there were 67 detached/semi-detached houses, 67 cottages, 22 terraced properties and 7 commercially orientated buildings. The residential dwellings...
vary from grand country residencies, barn and stable conversions, purpose-built terraced almshouses through to a converted school house and blacksmiths. The age of the buildings and any additions or extensions were recorded, which showed that the 163 properties covered many different periods. There is very little new build. Even the “post 1900” properties were mainly constructed more than three or four decades ago. It is this diverse mix of types, styles and age of properties within Birlingham that contributes to the uniqueness and charm of the parish.
Further examples of the diversity of property in the parish
**Materials and construction**

The construction of the buildings is as diverse as the buildings themselves. Most are of brick construction but others include half-timbered with wattle and daub, rendered brick, painted brick and two have wooden cladding. Although there are some properties with modern UPVC windows, by far the majority of the buildings within the parish have traditional wooden or metal casement windows. Most roofing is generally of tiles or slate with a small number having traditional thatched roofs and a couple having cedar tiles. Very few have modern composite products.

**Residential setting, gardens and drives**

Residents commented on the importance of the setting of each building within its own plot, and its relationship to public areas and countryside as contributing to the character of Birlingham. There is a “low plot density” in the village. Although the size of individual gardens varies, all buildings have access to a generous private space commensurate to the building type and size. Even properties built to a higher density, such as the terraced almshouses, have access to a very generous private garden area. Typical period farm buildings/barn conversions, which sit almost flush to the lane, all have private gardens either to the side or to the rear. However the generous plot sizes are only half of the true picture, as just as important is the large expanse of farm land interspersed throughout the parish.

**Village Survey - Residents Views**

If development were permitted, what is preferred type and scale?

- Preferred Type: 31% of respondents wanted Small family homes, 21% starter, 12% large family, 12% mixed development, 8% retirement
- Preferred Scale: 42% of respondents preferred infill development in settlement boundary with 29% single houses and 21% small scale development outside settlement boundary

**Resident’s housing needs and concerns:**

- 15% of respondents need access to additional housing for family members or to allow downsizing
- Concerns included: Access to medical facilities, flooding and drainage, noise and changes to the character of the village

**Village Consultation - Residents Views**

There is a real understanding in the village that life and the community cannot continue as is.

- Just under 50% of respondents said: “No large scale development”, “wary of expansion”, and “no brick estates”.
- However many others said: “We need some smaller homes to bring young individuals and families into the village”, “We must avoid slipping into a coma”, “We must not upsize everyone out of the village,” “We need some starter homes”.
- General concerns were that development could change the current nature and openness of the village: “make sure development is not stuck along road fringes”, “keep open nature of land”

**Commercial activities**

The commercial activities include two nurseries, a smallholding shop and caravan, landscape gardeners, offices, public house and farms. In addition to the specific commercial uses just identified, several residential properties incorporate self-contained holiday let accommodation.
Wide variety of commercial buildings in the parish
SUMMARY OF RESIDENT FEEDBACK

Likes

- The way that views and vistas are central to the parish character. (eg: Bredon Hill, the Malvems and Tiddesley Wood)
- Open landscape (eg: Asham Meadow, Gwen Finch Wetlands, John Bennet Reserve, farmed fields)
- Private and public open spaces (eg: cricket pitch, churchyard, village green, large gardens between properties, the River Avon)
- Easy access around the parish on footpaths and farm tracks
- The individuality of housing design and architecture and rich diversity of building type and orientation
- Low density ‘Garden Village’ with spacious plots around houses
- The wide variety of road edge and field boundary treatments (eg: walls, hedges, fencing)
- The lack of kerbs, road markings and street lighting in the centre of the village
- The relative ease of access to centres of employment by car

Dislikes

- The difficulty in accessing major retail areas and centres of employment by public transport (eg: Worcester, Gloucester, Cheltenham and Birmingham). There is a lack of a regular bus service and train station location and connections make travel slow and inconvenient.
- The lack of cycle paths and footpaths for safe access to Eckington and Pershore
- HGV’s and speeding in the parish with damage to road service, verges, walls and trees

General comments

- There is a real understanding in the parish that village life and the community cannot stand still.
- 7% of survey respondents supported medium scale development of 10-30 houses but only 1% supported large scale development of greater than 30 houses
- 50% of survey respondents supported small scale development comprising 1, 2 or 3 small family homes for young families, elderly relatives or to allow people to downsize and still remain in the village.
• The residents respect there are working farms and rural activities which enhance the feeling of a ‘living’ village.
• Small scale commercial property, cottage businesses, holiday lets and live/work units should be considered where no impact on village character
• There is little support for the introduction of shops or other amenities in the parish
• There is a strong feeling that we should avoid traffic calming measures as this would change the rural feel

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPMENT
• Any new housing development should only be on a small scale (1-3 houses) and comprise small family homes to meet the need for young families or residents downsizing.
  o First choice of location would be infill development within the development boundary provided this can be achieved without unduly impacting the open spaces between properties. The development boundary is set out in the South Worcestershire Development Plan under policy SWDP2.
  o However it is recognised that there are very few infill plots available within the development boundary. So in recognition of the need for some development, consideration should be given in future to the extension of the development boundary to allow a small number of individual homes to be built. This could be implemented in line with SWDP_16 (Rural Exception Sites) which seeks to provide affordable housing development on small sites, beyond but reasonably adjacent to development boundaries in villages.
  o If this is not an option then alternatively under SWDP_13 (Effective use of Land) small scale development on brownfield sites might be considered.
• Houses should not be of a uniform design (no brick boxes) but reflect the variety of architecture and orientation of properties in the village as there is no standardised materials such as bricks or clay tiles used in existing properties in the village. The buildings should be set back behind hedges or walls constructed from materials seen in other parts of the parish.
• Overdevelopment of plots where the size of house is out of proportion to the garden should be avoided.
• Each property should include sufficient off street parking screened from the road.
• Alterations to existing buildings should respect the original design or aim to improve its contribution to the character of the parish.
• The views from existing properties should be respected wherever possible along with views considered of importance to residents, such as Bredon Hill, as identified earlier in this document.
• Any new access roads should be designed in an informal way with grass verges rather than kerbs and limited road markings.
• Existing public spaces must not be developed and footpaths and access tracks maintained.
• Consideration should be given to improvements in safe foot and cycle access to/from the parish.
• While respecting existing working farms and rural activities, it is important that any new industrial development should not increase HGV traffic on the parish’s narrow lanes.
IN SUMMARY
The 18 months of surveys and consultations have shown a broadly aligned community with a coherent understanding and care for the village’s future. The results strongly endorse the importance of the individuality of the housing design coupled with the great importance of the private and public open spaces and how this leads to a low density village with unique character. The village is universally valued for its unique geography, which residents attribute to its continuation as a ‘real village’. The village is surrounded by fields that provide an openness shared by all. Nearly all homes have long views and spacious land around allowing enjoyment of the geographic setting. Birlingham maintains a strong sense of community by not being a commuter village and not being a weekend village.

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APPENDICES
Additional information that was gathered during the development of the VDS can be found on the Birlingham Village website by following this link: www.birlingham.org/parishcouncil/vds

More information can also be found on the:

South Worcestershire Development Plan (February 2016) via this link: http://www.swdevelopmentplan.org/