

Shipston Town Design Statement

Draft Recommendations following Public Consultation in 2012

Shipston Town Council

Revision 3, July 2014

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Introduction

As part of the process of developing a Town Design Statement for Shipston, an exhibition was held at Shipston Library in May 2012 to invite the public to give their views on matters of design and character in the town. Questionnaires were completed on paper and online during May and June 2012. A total of 22 paper questionnaires and 29 online questionnaires were submitted.

The purpose of this document is to identify design principles which have been supported by the majority of the respondents, and to recommend these as objectives for the emerging Shipston Town Design Statement.

It should be noted that although the sections are 'stand alone', there will inevitably be some cross linking to other sections depending on the nature of a development proposal and where it is (e.g. a hypothetical scheme outside the town boundaries incorporating a mix of housebuilding, non-domestic building, with existing tree groups).

The full survey results are appended. Shown below are the key conclusions from those results.

Landscape setting of Shipston on Stour

Shipston lies in gently rolling countryside in a valley of the River Stour, which flows roughly south to north. The settlement is wholly confined to the area west of the river. The historic settlement is located in the valley bottom. The river banks are at about 60 m above ordnance datum (AOD). The ground rises from the valley bottom to the west and forms Hanson Hill at 120 m AOD and Whaddon Hill (116 m AOD). There is also high ground to the north, of about 80-88 m AOD, which the river meanders around beyond the settlement. There is a small hill of 83 m AOD to the south, at Church Hill Farm. The ground rises to the east of the town and forms Borough Hill at 94 m. All these low enclosing hills create a bowled setting for the town, which historically has nestled quite comfortably within the surrounding landscape. Brailes Hill further east is dominant at 232 m AOD and can be seen from many viewpoints in the town and countryside.

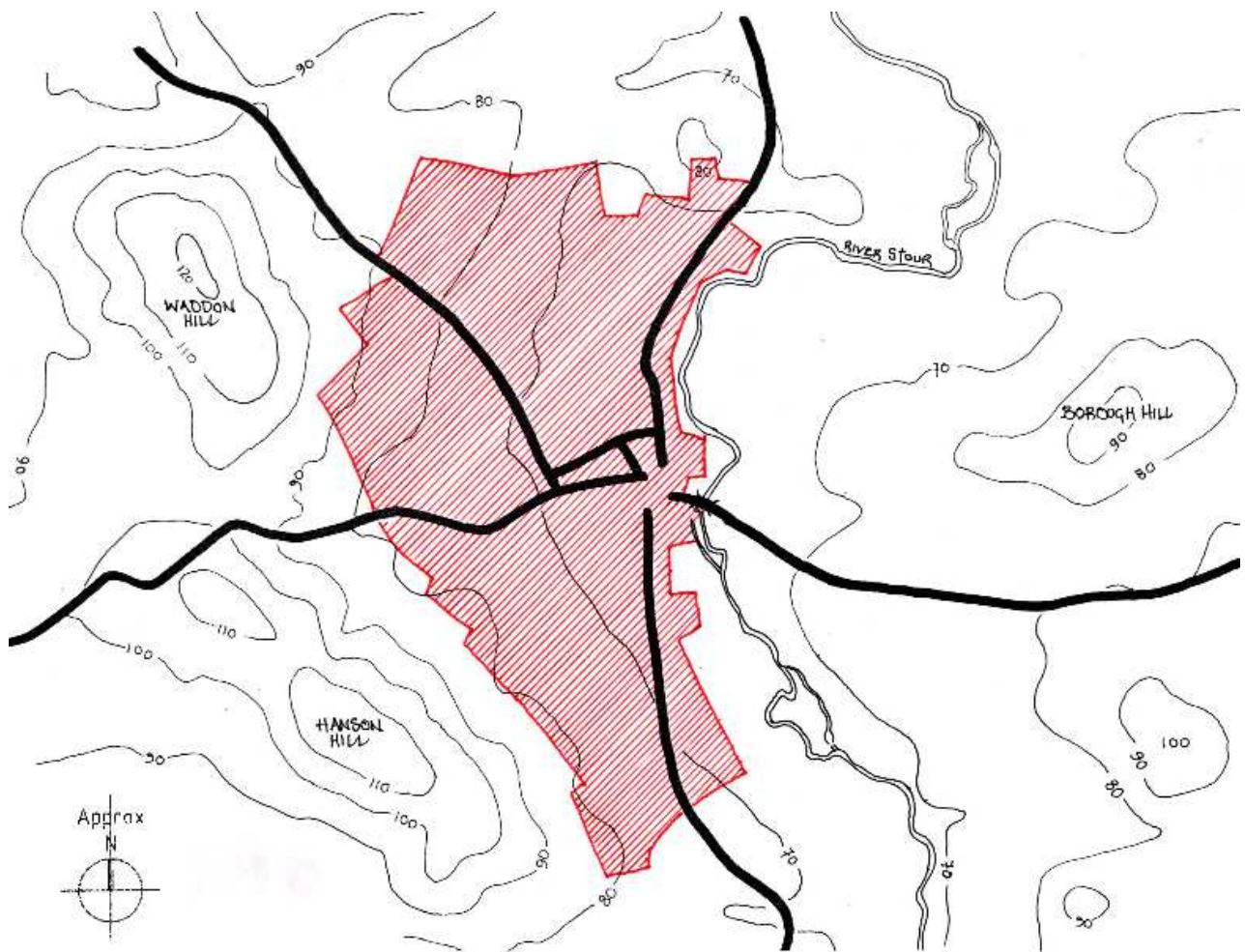


Figure 1: Shipston 2011

The Stratford on Avon District Design Guide identifies Shipston on Stour as being in the middle of a small character area known as Upper Stour. This is a small area, being only 3 km east to west and 6.5 km north to south. The area is distinct from the surrounding character areas of Fringe Downlands, Stour Vale, and Clay Vale of Feldon. The Design Guide identifies the main characteristics of Upper Stour as:

- Middle reach of the Stour valley, a distinct basin defined by the rounded Tredington hills and the flatter, rolling southern edge of the Feldon;

- A medium to large scale geometric field pattern; small areas of permanent pasture often with well preserved ridge and furrow; wide roadside verges typically bounded by a thick hedge and ditch; numerous hedgerow elm stumps;
- Compact valley bottom settlements and small estate villages;
- Main building materials are Blue Lias Limestone, 'Hornton Stone' (Marlstone Rock Bed), 'Cotswold Limestone' (Oolitic Limestone) and brick.

Housebuilding

Like many towns, 20th Century housing expansion in Shipston has to a large extent paid little heed to the special architectural character of its host settlement. As a result, there are areas of Shipston which could be 'Anywhere Town'. It would be wrong to merely build more of the same, just because a proposed development borders one of these areas. Instead, reference should be made to the intrinsic architectural character of the historic centre. These characteristics are:

- A street pattern with visually enclosed spaces and 'pinch points'.
- Strong continuous building lines along streets.
- Predominantly horizontal form defined by 2 and 3 storey buildings with irregular rooflines.
- A varied mix of simple vernacular buildings with occasional landmark buildings in the streetscape as points of interest.
- Alleyways and vehicular accesses through arches in the street frontage.
- Roof ridges on long axis and predominantly parallel to street.
- Avoidance of cul-de-sacs which serve only to isolate development from other parts of the neighbourhood.
- Variety of building materials.
- Chimneys, dormers and other features breaking up rooflines.

A large majority of respondents thought that there should be more design control over housing developments. The following matters were considered of most significance in achieving good design:

1. Green spaces, trees & hedges
2. Mix of building designs reflecting Shipston's character
3. Layout of roads & footpaths
4. Variety of facing materials and colours appropriate to Shipston
5. Variety of roof shapes and building heights

It was clear from submitted comments that there are some examples of recent developments that are liked, and some considered very poor.

Recommended objectives for Housebuilding

Planning applications for housing schemes should incorporate the following design elements:

- Adequate amount of green spaces, trees and hedges, sufficient to provide enough space for recreation, to enhance Green Infrastructure, and provide screening & view framing. Existing trees and hedges to be retained, protected & reinforced by additional planting of native species. Existing green spaces to be retained and protected, and additional open space and play facilities to be provided.
- Designs inspired by the local distinctiveness of Shipston (mix of building designs, facing materials, colours, roof shapes and building heights).
- Roads, footpaths and buildings laid out to suit the character of the area. All new development should, at the outset, be conceived as an extension to the built environment which it adjoins, not as a self contained 'estate'. Vehicular and pedestrian routes should link with the surrounding movement networks. Buildings should be arranged in forms that take their reference from the historical characteristics of Shipston, for instance courtyards, linked buildings, roof ridge lines running along the long axis of the building and parallel to roads.
- Designs should be to the standards set down in 'BfL 12' (Published by Building for Life Partnership, 2012) and its successors.

Non-domestic Building

A large majority thought that there should be more design control over non-domestic buildings (e.g. industrial, educational, leisure, health, community etc.). Matters of importance are:

1. Soft landscaping.
2. Preservation of key views of the town.
3. Control of building heights, especially in prominent locations.
4. Use of materials and colours appropriate to Shipston.

6 out of 14 thought that there were no good examples.

Recommended objectives for Non-domestic Buildings

Planning applications for non-domestic buildings should incorporate the following design elements:

- Adequate soft landscaping, sufficient to break up the bulk of the buildings and to minimise visual intrusion.
- Protection of key views of Shipston – both inward and outward looking.
- Control of building heights in prominent locations.

- **Use of materials and colours appropriate to Shipston.**

Key Gateways

The majority thought that the key gateways into Shipston did not need improvement. From this feedback, it can be inferred that the gateways are adequate in their current state (2012), and that standards should not slip. In the event of the gateways being moved further out as a result of expansion of the town, a similar level of standards should be adopted.

Standards are in the questionnaire (tree and hedge buffers, signage)

Key gateways are the five road entrances to the town (named in the questionnaire). To be shown on a map.

Recommended objectives for Key Gateways

Use of native tree and hedge species to frame and enhance the built environment and to provide a buffer between town and countryside at Key Gateways.

Key Views

The majority of respondents considered the following key views within the town to be important (in order, starting with most important):

1. The Historic Core
2. Bridge and Old Mill Hotel
3. Cemetery Chapels
4. Black Horse Inn
5. School for Females
6. Horseshoe Inn
7. Shipston House

Of more distant views, the majority preferred the following:

1. Shipston and beyond, from Brailes Road
2. Shipston from Fell Mill Lane
3. Brailes Hill from Shipston
4. Shipston and beyond, from top of Hanson Track

5. Shipston and beyond, from Campden Road
6. Shipston from Shakespeare's Way

Maps to be done.

Recommended objectives for Key Views

New development should not block or obstruct Key Views. Planning applications for any development that will have an impact on any of the Key Views identified above should include an assessment of the effects and a report justifying how the design mitigates those effects.

River Stour

Overwhelming majority in favour of:

1. Improving access to, and views of, the riverside area.
2. Establishing a riverside walk.
3. Establishing a proper picnic area near, and with views of, the river.
4. Improving pedestrian safety over the bridge.

Recommended objectives for the River

- **Planning applications for riverside sites should wherever possible include a publicly accessible river bank.**
- **The design of any proposed footbridge should be given careful consideration, particularly in terms of its appearance in relation to surroundings, and flood resilience.**

Signage

Many thought that the independent shop signs (in most cases hand painted) suited their buildings and surroundings. Consideration should be given to avoidance of standard corporate shop & business signs, avoidance of plastic sign boarding and gaudy colours.

A large majority would like to see better design and coordination of street signs and furniture.

Recommended objectives for Signage

- **Standard corporate signs, plastic signs and gaudy colours will not be permitted, especially within the Conservation Area and where affecting the setting of listed buildings. Design considerations:**
 - **Scale of sign in relation to shopfront.**
 - **If illumination is allowed, encouragement of external rather than internal illumination.**
 - **Requirement will be for individually applied lettering or hand painted lettering, and hanging signs.**
- **Street signage and furniture should be subject to design and coordination, with consideration given to its context. Redundant items should be removed.**

Green spaces

Of the **publicly accessible green spaces**, the most important to the respondents are (in descending order):

1. Sports Club Ground
2. Riverside picnic areas
3. Rugby Club Ground
4. Queens Avenue Park, and play areas generally
5. Oldbutt Road, Angela's Meadow, Hawthorn Way
6. Gyrotory Garden
7. Horniblow Piece

Of **other green spaces**, the most important to the respondents are (in descending order):

1. School playing fields
2. Riverside meadows
3. Allotments

4. Sheldon Bosley Hub

Recommended objectives for Green Spaces

- Existing green spaces are a precious asset to Shipston. Planning applications to develop on these spaces **will not be granted**.
- Proposals which add new green spaces to Shipston are to be encouraged. These spaces should be conceived as promoting Green Infrastructure. Green Infrastructure: The linking together of natural, semi-natural and man-made open spaces (which may include leisure or recreational facilities) to create an interconnected network that provides opportunities for physical activity, increases accessibility within settlements and to the surrounding countryside while enhancing biodiversity and the quality of the external environment.

Tree groups

Tree groups important to the respondents are (in descending order):

1. Avenue of trees along London Road
2. Riverside trees
3. The Plantation
4. Major trees on private land

Recommended objectives for Tree groups

- Proposals that adversely affect trees and tree groups **will be opposed**.
- Proposals that augment and enhance tree groups **will be encouraged**.

Infill developments, alterations & extensions

The majority of respondents want more design control both within and outside the Conservation Area, as some recently built schemes were considered to be poorly designed and inappropriate to the area.

The majority would like to see more design control over alterations & extensions, and infill development, within the Historic Core (See map).

Good examples of small scale domestic infill (1 to 10 dwellings) were identified by respondents. It is significant that almost all were built in the last 10 years by one developer. What characteristics make these schemes a success, and appropriate to Shipston, can be summarised in the following common design objectives:

Making a positive contribution to the townscape. In cases such as Brindles Alley, Billington House and the Old Council House, the new frontages are close to the back of pavement and help to recreate enclosure to the street scene, even though (for Brindles Alley at least) the historical pattern had no such building line. Brindles Alley also has frontages running along one of the pedestrian alleyways that are very characteristic of this part of the town. Two of the schemes use an archway through the street frontage for vehicle access to a private inner court for parking. Such archways are a local feature in the town, their origins dating from the 18th Century when coaching inns were developed to serve the increased coaching trade along the route from London and Oxford to the prospering north-west. Old Brewery Close is a group of 4 new dwellings on a small and unpromising infill site outside the conservation area. Informal grouping and individual house designs make this an attractive and distinctive addition to this part of Shipston. Roadside boundary walls help to visually link the scheme to the streetscape.

Using scale and massing. At the Brindles Alley development, the street frontages are generally two storey plus 'room in roof', reflecting the surrounding buildings. Individual houses in the terrace are given different treatments from their neighbours, in some cases with steps in the roofline and different roof pitches, with a variety of facing materials, fenestration, lintols and cills. The whole effect is to break up the massing of the development to give the impression of a group of buildings that have been built at different periods, rather than all at once. This reduces the overall impact of the scale and bulk of the development and gives it a liveliness that seems appropriate to this part of Telegraph Street. Old Brewery Close consists of one and two storey building forms with variety of plan shapes and elevational treatments. Rooflines broken with insertion of dormers, chimneys, and gables. Informal and close arrangement of building forms helps to give an intimate sense of place.

Using natural materials. Reclaimed clay facing brick, natural stone, painted render, timber windows and doors, lintols and cills in brick, stone or timber, subcills, clay roof tiles and natural roofing slates, all are essential in achieving the 'lived in' effect of buildings of differing periods. Had Brindles Alley been built of lesser materials such as artificial stone, cheaper bricks, and artificial slates, the effect would have been much less attractive. Old Brewery Close has stone and reclaimed brick, reclaimed stone dressings, brick dentil work, bullnose bricks on building corners, avoidance of fascia boards, natural roof slates and tiles, all reflecting the mix of facing materials characteristic of Shipston.

Respecting neighbouring buildings. This is achieved by ensuring that scale, roof form, facing materials etc. are commensurate with adjoining and adjacent buildings. In the case of Billington House, the road frontage building relates more appropriately with its neighbours across the road than with the bungalows next door. Although Old Brewery Close is only a small development, the scale, roof form, facing materials

are in keeping with the neighbouring buildings, and in fact the scheme sets a standard for later developments nearby, e.g. Hornsby Close.

Using characteristics that are distinctive to Shipston. Brindles Alley has various architectural features found elsewhere in the town, such as dormer windows, door hoods and railings. Chimneys help to break up the skyline. It is interesting to note that the faceted turret house, that (in different guises) negotiates the corner of both Brindles Alley and the Old Council House, is not native to Shipston. However, its good proportions and overall quirkiness works well and has been generally welcomed as part of Shipston's townscape. Compare this corner-turning architectural device with that at Mill Court on the gyratory.

Recommendations for infill developments, alterations & extensions

- **Make a positive contribution to the townscape**
- **Use scale and massing**
- **Use natural materials**
- **Respect neighbouring buildings** (See 'Respecting neighbouring buildings' section under 'Infill developments, alterations and extensions')
- **Incorporate characteristics that are distinctive to Shipston**

Design approaches – traditional or modern?

The overwhelming majority agree that 'old' designs are not always right, and 'new' designs are not always wrong.

The design guidelines in this document are not intended to stifle innovation in new buildings. Today's tradition was, after all, yesterday's innovation. Character and local distinctiveness should be a stimulus - rather than a barrier - to innovation. The very nature of Shipston, with its diverse range of building types, materials and features, presents opportunities for innovation that other towns might envy.

Recommended objectives for design approaches

- **Both traditional and modern designs have their place, provided that the building design is stimulated by the character and distinctiveness of the locality.**

Making the Historic Core more pedestrian friendly

The majority would like to see improvements to the High Street/Market Street area, whilst acknowledging that the current level of convenient customer parking spaces close to many shops in High Street and Market Street is essential for the continuing vibrancy of this shopping area and should not be diminished. Among the suggestions is good traffic management. It should be noted that such matters are only relevant to this Town Design Statement if they result in changes on the ground, for instance widening and relaying pavements, where the opportunity arises for better materials, etc.

Recommended objectives as a result of making the Historic Core more pedestrian friendly

- **If hard landscaping and street furniture are to be changed, careful consideration must be given to ensure coordination of materials, signage and street furniture.**

Extending beyond Shipston's boundaries

➤ Accessibility to the countryside

The following matters (in descending order of importance) were considered significant in ensuring the accessibility of the countryside when Shipston's boundaries are extended:

1. Preserving and enhancing existing footpath routes.
2. Creating more green spaces within developments and forming green networks.
3. Improving signposting for existing footpaths.

Recommendations for accessibility to the countryside

- **Where development is likely to affect public footpaths and the like, measures to be taken to preserve and enhance these routes, including signposting.**
- **Development to include green spaces and green infrastructure.**

➤ Reduction in the impact of development

Whilst it is clear that Shipston's setting in the landscape is defined by its location within the bowl, it is also noted that the bowl is not even-sided. There is development on the fringes of Shipston e.g. at the north east side where the top of the bowl is just over 80m AOD beyond which the land falls, and other areas notably to the north west, west, and south west where the land continues to rise beyond the settlement by another 30 or 40m. Critically the aim should be to avoid development **encroaching on sight lines by approaching** the rim of the bowl and appearing to tower above it or even spill over. This **consideration** was acknowledged by the planning appeal inspector for a housing development proposal west of Hornsby Close in 2013, where he imposed a maximum ground floor level of 75m AOD and a maximum roof ridge level of 82.53m AOD. Parts of existing development in the town are already above the 75m AOD floor level. For instance, the ground level at the Shipston Business Village at the top of Tilemans Lane is about 85m AOD, where the combination of dominant large scale buildings and the flattening out of the key gateway of Darlingscote Road as it approaches Shipston conspire to give an impression of development boldly marching out of its valley bottom confines and invading the surrounding countryside. Also, much of the fringes of the Hanson Avenue development are already above 80m AOD.

There are few opportunities to extend beyond Shipston's boundaries without encroaching on the sides of the bowl in which Shipston sits. This sets some particular design challenges.

The following were considered important (in descending order) by the respondents:

1. Provision of hedge and tree screens at the town edges to ensure a sensitive transition to the countryside.
2. Restriction of development above a certain contour level.
3. Restriction of number of storeys on upper slopes to maintain dominance of the historic core.
4. Reduction of housing density at the town edges.
5. Restriction of number of storeys at the town edges, whatever the ground slope.

Most respondents wanted no more large housing estates, aware of the visual damage that past generic housing schemes have had on the town. Large housing estates can be defined as those greater than 2% of existing housing numbers in Shipston (i.e. 50 dwellings).

Reduced housing density at the town edges could conspire against affordable housing provision which is necessarily high density.

There are some drawbacks to a restriction in the number of houses per planning application – a lack of economy of scale for the developer (resulting in lack of resources to pay for specialised designers), piecemeal development without a masterplan, smaller green spaces, diminished Section 106 funding and reduced number of affordable dwellings - but on the other hand it could result in a more varied set of building designs in a given area, which would be a benefit to Shipston’s diverse character.

Recommendations for reduction of impact of development

- **Provide hedge and tree screens at the town edges to ensure a sensitive transition to the countryside.**
- **Future building development between Darlingscote Road and Campden Road, and between Campden Road and the southern end of Hawthorn Way, shall be limited on plan to the 85m AOD contour, and ground floor levels shall not exceed 85m AOD. The only exception is school building at the High School. Refer to map.**
- **Future building development between Darlingscote Road and Stratford Road has to be considered differently from the preceding recommendation, because a) the more undulating topography does not lend itself to blanket contour limits, and b) 75m AOD has been cited as a limit towards the eastern end, yet some of the existing buildings at the western end already exceed the 85m AOD. The impact of future building development shall therefore be considered on a case-by-case basis with a view to refusal of applications where encroachment on sightlines, spilling over the top of slopes into the surrounding countryside, and/or towering over the town, are considered to be unacceptable.**
- **Restrict number of storeys on upper slopes to maintain dominance of the historic core.**
- **Reduce housing density at the town edges.**
- **Restrict number of storeys at the town edges, whatever the ground slope.**
- **Restrict the number of houses per planning application.**

Contour map to be provided

General planning requirements

Some past developments have deviated from approved drawings and the as-built results have been disappointing. It is necessary to tighten up the rules.

Recommendations for all developments requiring planning permission

- **As-built developments shall closely follow the approved planning application drawings and statements. Deviations from the approved drawings and statements shall be resisted.**

Appendix – Questionnaire Results