

SETTLEMENT ASSESSMENT

GROUP ASSESSMENT

Surveyors(s): Robert Davies, Aylet Anderson, Niels Cross, Penny Rogers.....

Character Area: PRISTON VILLAGE.....

Date: 01/11/13.....

Weather: ...showery.....

- Look through all the questions before starting.
- For almost all the questions on Pattern and Buildings just ring a word (or two) in each box that best fits what you know/see and, as necessary, add some notes about quality, condition etc. in the space below.
- The final Summary questions include their own instructions.
- Leave any questions that do not seem to apply.
- Take a form, clipboard, map, camera and a pen or two with you when you go out.
- Take any photos you think are useful (often more useful than some words) and add any photo names/numbers in the right hand boxes once you get back to 'base'.

1. PATTERN

Character Element	Photo(s)
<p>A. Topography: Flat Hilly Steep Shallow Plateau Valley Linear valley Several valleys</p> <p>Priston sits within a valley and on adjacent sloping land in the foothills of the Mendips. There is some level ground within the village, particularly close to the centre, but beyond the houses the surrounding landscape is undulating, and there is a significant slope to the North East and East. It is impossible to walk far in any direction without going up or down hill. This is very similar to other villages in the immediate area such as Combe Hay, Dunkerton and Compton Dando. However, all these settlements, Priston included, have their own character on a micro scale which makes them very distinct.</p>	<p>PV1.jpg 8.11.2013</p>
<p>B: Layout: Linear Grid-like Winding Regular Irregular Buildings close to the road Buildings well set back Front gardens Back gardens Long plots Thin plots Short plots Wide plots Clear centre No obvious centre</p> <p>Priston is broadly a linear village with most of the buildings lining the winding main street. The general character is of ribbon development and there is only one area (Summer Lea/Hill View) where the houses are more than one deep. There is one 'estate' (Summer Lea) which is quite small and, generally, the housing is spontaneous and irregular-giving an informal feel to the village. Most of the 81 houses are close to the road, with small front gardens and larger back gardens. The plots of land vary considerably, but tend to be long and thin, and are backed by open fields. There are several substantial dwellings in their own grounds. A fairly well defined centre exists around the small village green (with its walnut tree encompassed with a circular</p>	<p>PV2.jpg 8.11.2013</p>

<p>commemorative bench) and includes the pub (The Ring O’Bells) and the Village Hall, though the Church of St Luke and St Andrew lies some distance from this and off the main street.</p>	
<p>C: Spaces: <i>Gaps between buildings Green spaces Hard space Places where local events take place Well used Not well used</i></p> <p>Priston, like many of the surrounding communities including Bath, has ‘fingers’ of countryside protruding into the village which give a great tranquility and feeling of spaciousness. The tendency for these spaces to be regarded as natural sites for infill development (supported in Planning policy) has worked against this. But such green spaces as remain (for example, Evan’s orchard between Applecot and Brook Cottage, the Church Farm vegetable plot adjacent to the listed Granary, and the graveyard) should be valued and preserved for the contribution they make to the character of the village.</p> <p>Hard spaces are limited-to Village Hall’s back yard/car park and the public highway round the village green and pub which is used extensively for local fund-raising events and for the Priston festival. The area is also used, particularly in the summer months, as a socializing and meeting area. The village is fortunate in being able to access adjacent land at the Manor for such popular events as May Day.</p> <p>The cricket field near the Church is in regular use during the summer months and attracts a good number of villagers and visitors.</p>	<p>PV3.jpg 8.11.2013</p>
<p>D: Green and Natural Features: <i>Trees Bushes Hedges Green backcloth to buildings Areas of intense greenery Arase without greenery</i></p> <p>The village of Priston, when viewed from one of the surrounding vantage points, is quite heavily wooded, though this is not so evident from within the village itself. The largest and most dense tree cover is to be found in the grounds of the manor, old Rectory and Church, where there is an ancient yew, though almost every garden has its share of hedges, shrubs and smaller trees. There is no well-defined division between the village and the field systems which surround it and consequently there is a green backdrop to buildings everywhere. Farmed land abuts all the housing so the village feels very rural.</p>	<p>PV4.jpg 8.11.2013</p>
<p>E: Wildlife and Ecology: <i>Area used/inhabited by wildlife Not used at all Area used for wildlife to pass through What wildlife? Important plants?</i></p> <p>The combination of green cover, a small stream, as well as a lack of heavy traffic make the village a valuable site for a wide variety of wild life. However, we feel there has been a distinct decline in the range and quality of wild life over the past twenty five years.</p> <p>Bird and insect life is prolific. We note in particular the large rookery in</p>	<p>PV5.jpg 8.11.2013</p>

<p>the trees adjacent to the Churchyard, starlings roosting in the Manor grounds and owls around Church Farm. One of our surveyors registered 23 bird species in her garden in 2013 as well as 12 species of butterfly and many dragonflies. Another has observed within and around the village red kites, buzzards, sparrow hawks, kestrels, barn owls, little owls, tawny owls and kingfishers.</p> <p>Much other wildlife has been observed including roe deer, muntjaks, badgers, squirrels, mink, foxes, hares, rabbits, stoats, weasels, bats, shrews, voles, water rats, otters, hedgehogs, newts, frogs, toads, adders, grass snakes, slow worms, glow worms and lizards.</p> <p>Among the flora are to be found orchids, primroses, violets (white and mauve), Bath asparagus, golden hops, meadow blewitts, St George's mushrooms and at least 9 other varieties of edible fungi, wild mint and wild marjoram.</p>	
<p>F: Roads, Streets and other Movement Routes: <i>Pavements Kerbs Grass verges Drainage ditches Wide roads wide Narrow roads Straight roads Curving roads Cul-de-sacs Through roads On-plot parking On-street parking Parking courts</i></p> <p>The main street and other lanes in the village (abutted by stone walls or grass verges) are rarely wide enough for two cars to pass in comfort. There is rarely any specific provision for pedestrians other than a couple of small sections of pavement. While the volume of traffic is small by most standards, it is growing alarmingly due to the practice of taking rat runs. Perhaps more than the volume is the speed of through traffic such that the issue of pedestrian safety is coming to the forefront. The 20mph speed limit, while often not observed, is judged to be essential to promote road safety.</p> <p>Due to the expansion of multi-car households and a lack of parking capacity, the main street tends to become a parking lot which adds to the issue of pedestrian hazard. The village hall car park is available at modest cost to village residents for parking, but is little used.</p> <p>Priston is a dark village with no street lighting, which most villagers seem to prefer.</p> <p>Drainage on the roads is a problem. Apart from the two runnels leading down Priston Hill (not well maintained) there is very little effective drainage contributing to the flooding problem in the lower part of the village. The four lanes which access the village are technically through roads, though one in particular is unsuitable for vehicles of any size (Watery/Wood Lane) and all are prone to flooding.</p> <p>Off the main street there is one lane leading to Tunley and one dead-</p>	<p>PV6.jpg 8.11.2013</p>

<p>end lane heading towards the Church. Leading off that there is a small cul-de-sac containing a development of bungalows.</p>	
<p>G. Landmarks: <i>Are there key landmarks visible from a distance (church tower), community landmarks (pub) or special but smaller features (old milestone)?</i></p> <p>From outside the village, the Grade 1 listed Church with its extremely distinctive golden cock weather-vane is virtually the only recognizable building due to the lie of the land and the extensive green cover.</p> <p>Within the village, apart from the church, the main landmarks are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Grade II listed village hall. • The Ring O’Bells pub. • The ancient Grade II listed granary at Church Farm. • The cricket pitch. • The village green complete with its well and trough. • The traditional cast iron signpost near the Manor entrance is a valuable and distinctive feature. The remains of the old ha-ha around Priston Place. • The willow avenue in Evan’s orchard. • Priston Brook edging the village main street. • The curved road bridge between Brook Cottage and Village Farm. • Village tap in the wall by the small green which supplied water from the old Priston Waterworks for over 100 years until the early 1970s 	<p>PV7.jpg 8.11.2013</p>
<p>H: Views Out: <i>Are there places (often, occasional) where one can see out to other areas or to the landscape?</i></p> <p>From the main street of Priston, lying as it does in a valley, the views out are limited. There are few “public” views out from the village, although several houses on the higher slopes have superlative ones. There are certain vantage points offering more distant views, for example from Church Farm out towards Tunley, and from Pressbarrow Farm to Bath, Wilmington and the Conygre Valley. Within the village, views along the main street from either end, and from the village centre up to the church are highly important.</p>	
<p>I: Views In: <i>Are there places around* where it is possible to get views into this area? (* You will need to go round and about to spot these.)</i></p> <p>The most accessible views are from the top of Priston Hill [the lane to Dunkerton] which gives virtually the only complete view of the village. From Farmborough Common, the Church tower is visible and from Priston New Farm the line of poplars towards Wood Lodge is distinctive.</p>	<p>PV9.jpg 8.11.2013</p>

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2. BUILDINGS AND DETAILS

A: Predominant Building Shape and Heights: *Wide frontages*
Narrow frontages Terraced Semi-detached Detached 1 storey
2 storeys 3 storeys Common shapes Varied shapes

In terms of vernacular architecture, Priston is composed mainly of fairly humble and small two-storey cottage-type dwellings of largely 18th or early 19th Century origin. There is a mixture of detached, semi-detached and two longer terraces. While there is a pleasing irregularity and informality to houses in Priston, there is also a good deal of consistency in terms of height, depth and general appearance even though most buildings have been extensively modified and added to over the years. A large proportion of the houses in the village have been altered by knocking two cottages into one or by the construction of single or double storey extensions.

There are a handful of more substantial old buildings, ranging from the fairly grand Manor House and Old Rectory to more modest but very attractive buildings such as Pressbarrow Farm, Church Farm and Village Farm.

There have been a number of conversions of agricultural buildings to residential e.g. at Church Farm and Hill Farm which vary considerably in scale and height. There are also conversions which have arisen from change of use (The Old Post Office, Priston Garage, the new Rectory, Dog Inn).

Modern development, apart from the cul-de-sac of bungalows at Summerlea, has been confined to infill though there is a block of half a dozen Council-built properties close to the village centre. Though the character of the village is defined by the old buildings, about 40 per cent are post war dwellings. With certain exceptions, and in common with many other similar villages, the modern dwellings do not complement the architectural style of their older neighbours, nor do they use traditional materials. Their design and construction was not informed by a sense of the uniqueness of their situation. Yet, partly because many of them are bungalows or chalets with rooflines which do not stand out, they do not dominate the character of the village which still takes its cue from the traditional cottage dwellings.

PV10.jpg
8.11.2013

PV8.jpg
8.11.2013

B: Roofs: *Flat roofs Pitched roofs Steep pitch Shallow pitch*
Varied pitch Lean-tos Parapet fronts (hidden roofs)

The rooflines of the traditional cottages are fairly higgledy-piggledy, which contribute greatly to their charm. Most roofs have a fairly steep

PV11.jpg
8.11.2013

<p>pitch and there are several flat roof extensions, but these do not dominate.</p>	
<p>C. Predominant Materials: <i>Some common Nothing common</i> <i>Walls (brick, stone, render, hung tile)? Roofs (tile, slate, other)?</i> <i>Boundaries (walls, hedges, fences)? Ground (tarmac, concrete, setts, paving stones)?</i></p> <p>Vernacular buildings are generally roofed with old clay tiles which have a pleasing colour and texture which complements the buildings and surrounding landscape. Over the years, buildings have been re-roofed and this has sometimes been carried out in slate rather than tile, which also fits in well with the architecture and landscape. Some of the grander dwellings were probably always slated rather than tiled. Many dwellings now have appropriate parts of the roof covered in solar panels.</p> <p>Postwar buildings are also generally tiled but concrete tiles have been used which give a hardness and regularity contrasting unfavourably with the older buildings. However, many of these are weathering to become less noticeable</p> <p>Vernacular buildings are mostly built from the local white lias and appear organically connected to the surrounding landscape. Dressed Bath stone is used in the Manor and is often used in the form of quoins on corners and window and door surrounds. The majority of village properties are walled to the front (and are often decorated with the odd fossil commonly found in the area) but rear boundaries are more often hedges or fences. Paved parking areas are tarmac or gravel.</p> <p>Modern buildings are constructed in a variety of materials, but rarely in natural stone. Brick (fortunately not red) has been used in some of the council-built properties, which is rather at odds with the character of the village. Render is extensively used which can blend successfully with traditional materials. Many of the modern buildings are built of reconstituted stone which does not match natural stone textures nor does it age well.</p>	<p>PV12.jpg 8.11.2013</p>
<p>D: Details: <i>What details contribute to character: porches, window shapes, roof decorations, chimneys, benches, letter boxes, signs, flags?</i></p> <p>Vernacular buildings have simple but quite diverse features in terms of doors, windows, porches etc sometimes enlivened by Bath stone detailing. Fenestration consists normally of small window openings sometimes defined by stone mullions, though larger window openings have sometimes been introduced to let more light in. As window frames require replacement from time to time, styles and materials are quite varied. There is some tendency for cost and insulation reasons to</p>	<p>PV13.jpg 8.11.2013</p>

employ UPVC instead of the more traditional timber.

Many houses have traditional oblong letter boxes in their front doors, but more and more houses are using American-style mail boxes at their garden gate.

The only flagpole is on the church tower. The Union flag or St George's flag are flown on important days, and there is a touching tradition whereby, on the passing of a villager, the flag is flown at half-mast until the funeral.

3. SUMMARY

A: In a few words or a sentence or two, what are for your group the key positive features about this area? What makes it special?

Though Priston does not contain any architectural masterpieces other than the Church and the quality of the vernacular architecture is not distinguished, there remains a quality of gentle harmony between the built environment and the natural world which both visitors and residents find very welcoming. Priston is rural (despite its proximity to two major cities), has definite boundaries, and is surrounded by countryside in good heart on every side. Despite the addition of many modern houses as well as various conversions and changes, the overall feeling is very pleasant and not at all 'twee'. The village is very well kept and the gardens, many visible from the highway, a pleasure to the eye. There is a particular view, beloved by all Pristonians, from the top of Priston Hill, from where you can see the village nestling securely in its valley.

Priston is also becoming a much busier place in economic terms. People nowadays both live and work in Priston again, after years of it being, once the early morning rush hour had taken away the schoolchildren and the commuters, a silent empty place. It is still a commuter village for Bath, Bristol and indeed for an intrepid few even London, but there are also businesses in the village – farming, equine, building, service and consultancy.

Activities, for a community of some 200 people, are endless: Church, Cricket Club, Toddlers' Group, Morrismen, Somerset Ladies Morris, a monthly village magazine, book club, history group, bellringers, pilates and circuit training classes, art classes, children's Thursday after-school Kids' Club; the Saturday café; Mayday, the Priston Music Festival; quizzes; duck races; dinners, concerts/gigs; gourmet nights in the Ring o' Bells.

The village and its surrounding landscape are photographed continually. A well known artist, Annie Parkin, lived here in the 1980s-90s, and immortalized many views in and around Priston in her pointillist style.

The village has had a magazine, The Link, for the last 36 years. This is becoming an increasingly important domestic historical record, and is in the process of being archived. Much more recent is the 'Priston Web' which is a veritable mine of information on Priston both historical and current.

Our surveyors identify with Priston firstly because it is a most beautiful spot tucked away in the Mendip foothills. Beautiful to look at, surrounded by rolling, tranquil countryside, yet not so isolated that Tesco and DHS Freight cannot find it. Occasionally in winter it gets cut off for a day or two by snow and we can all revert to our childhoods and go tobogganing – or retire to the pub for the duration. Many appreciate the fact that there are still two working farms on the outskirts of the village, that cattle are still driven along the village street; and that at harvest time you see the flotillas of forage harvesters etc driving through with their loads.

Also, though a modest village in size, it sets itself high standards. There is a sense of noblesse oblige. Most of the residents consider themselves very fortunate to live here and many put a huge amount into the community. Priston is also, overall, a very happy village.

B: In a few words or a sentence or two, what are for your group the key negative features about this area? What detracts from it?

Villagers understand that, as is to be expected in such a small community, Priston lacks many facilities including public space, school, shop, and gas supply. However, there is great concern about the vulnerability of Priston to flooding in the lower part of the village due to a high water table and run-off from the surrounding hills. Drainage is very badly maintained and unable to cope-the main street runs like a brook in heavy weather. The sewage works can become very overstretched resulting in an increasing problem of build-back affecting several houses at the bottom of the village.

Other facilities give rise to concern, particularly the erratic electric supply and lack of broadband and television reception.

Also, Priston is a bit of a cross-country rat-run, but luckily its propensity to flooding, and ice and snow in the winter, puts people off. Its situation does mean that an ambulance, fire engine or police car can take up to half an hour to get through the lanes. Hence over 20 villagers are now trained to use the village defibrillator.



PV1.jpg



PV2.jpg



PV3.jpg



PV4.jpg



PV5.jpg



PV6.jpg



PV7.jpg



PV8.jpg



PV9.jpg



PV10.jpg



PV11.jpg



PV12.jpg



PV13.jpg