



Conservation Plan

Abbey Fields Kenilworth



**CONSERVATION PLAN FOR ABBEY FIELDS
KENILWORTH, WARWICKSHIRE.**

Prepared by Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee

Abbey Fields

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Section One

1.1. SUMMARY

The large site of Abbey Fields is of the utmost significance to the people of Kenilworth and beyond for its recreational areas and Abbey ruins.

The aims of this Plan are the conservation and enhancement of the heritage merit of the area.

These aims may be achieved by:

- protection against adverse change
- interpretation of the site to the public
- provision of high quality public amenities
- research into its history and archaeology.

This Plan has regard to the balance between potentially conflicting demands on the site.

1.2. BACKGROUND

1.2.1. Brief introduction

A short distance to the east of Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire, and on the north bank of the Finham Brook, lie the remains of the Abbey of St Mary. From the few standing walls and hummocks of turf, it is hard to appreciate that one of the greater Augustinian houses in England was here. Nevertheless, its extensive Abbey Fields still dictate the main road pattern of Kenilworth while providing refreshment to the souls of the surrounding area.

1.2.2. Preparation

This plan has been prepared by members of the Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee and the Friends of Abbey Fields, in consultation with organisations and individuals having an interest in, and concern for, the area.

It has been written to conform broadly with the template given in 'Conservation Plans for Historic Places' by the Heritage Lottery Fund, March 1998. In order to avoid repetition, Section 3 of that document, Understanding the Asset, has been combined with Section 4, Assessment of Significance, to form Part Two.

1.2.3. Designation of the area

The whole area of Abbey Fields was designated in October 2003 as Scheduled Ancient Monument SM35115, grid reference SP 2849772214.

1.2.4. Formulation of the Plan

This Plan has been formulated as a result of English Heritage Inspector Ian George recommending the preparation of a strategy for management of the site. It is intended for use in directed maintenance of the fabric, in promotion of the significance of the site, in enhancement of the area, and in seeking additional funds to achieve this.

Its scope is to cover the Abbey remains site and the newly scheduled Abbey Fields. Certain areas of the original Abbey Fields are in private ownership and subject to special agreements between the owners and English Heritage and these are excluded from the Plan.

1.2.5. Relationship to the Warwick District Council Local Plan

The Warwick District Local Plan, together with the Warwickshire Structure Plan, form the statutory development plans for the District. The Local Plan balances the demand for jobs, homes and leisure against the need to protect and conserve the District's high quality environment, both in the towns and in the countryside.

The District-wide policy for the historic parks and gardens makes reference to the need for any restoration to be based on thorough historical research. Perhaps most significant of all is the District Council's commitment, in conjunction with English Heritage, the National Trust and other interested parties, to seek to secure the management and maintenance of archaeological sites. This policy encourages accessibility and the introduction of interpretation facilities for both education and recreational purposes (Policy ENV.23).

Introduction

1.2.6. The Consultation Process

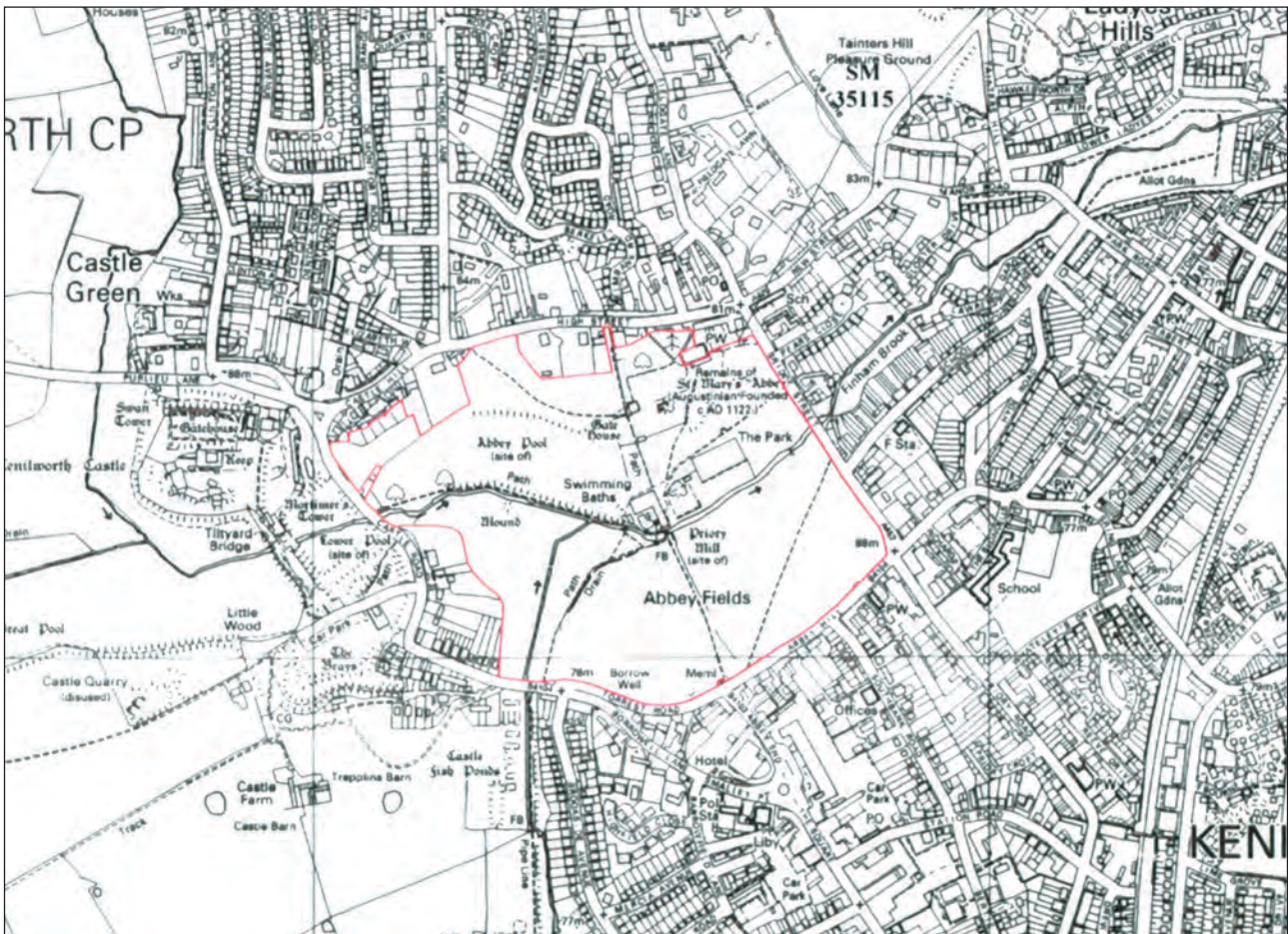
The first Draft Plan was submitted to all members of the Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee who are representatives from the following organisations: English Heritage, Warwick District Council, Kenilworth Town Council, The Kenilworth Society, St Nicholas' Church Parish Council, and Friends of Abbey Fields. It was also sent to many interested parties, including tutors of Warwick University who do research on this site.

Amendments were made in the light of their comments and the present Plan produced.

1.2.7. Endorsement

This Plan will be submitted to the organisations above seeking their endorsement.

Fig.1. Plan of north Kenilworth showing Abbey Fields Scheduled Monument 35115 (By permission from English Heritage).



Section One



Fig 2. Aerial photograph of Abbey Fields (By permission of John Cooke, Flight by Patrick Murphy)

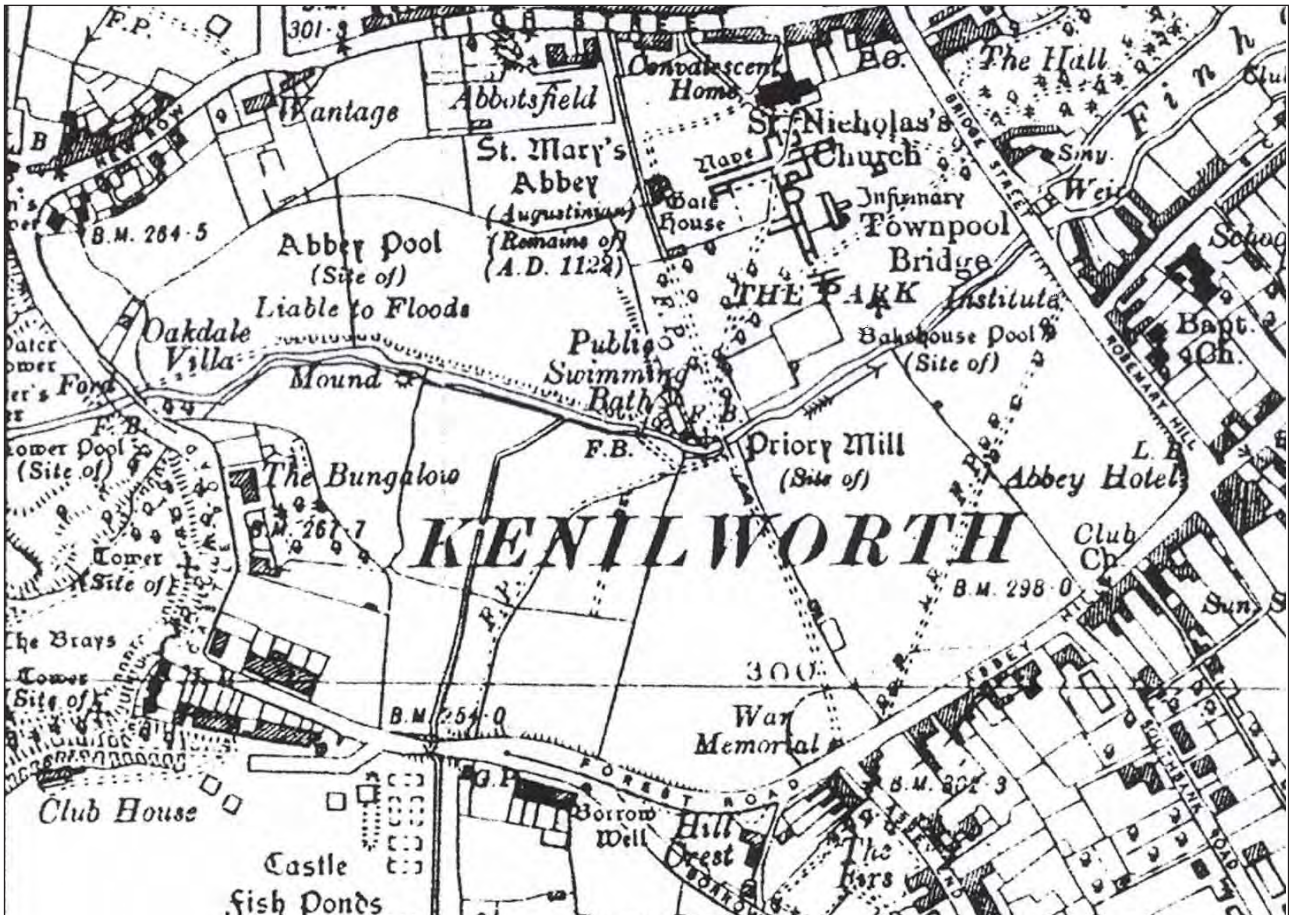


Fig 3. Plan of Abbey Fields (Source O.S. 1:10000, 6 inch map 1925, enlarged)

Introduction

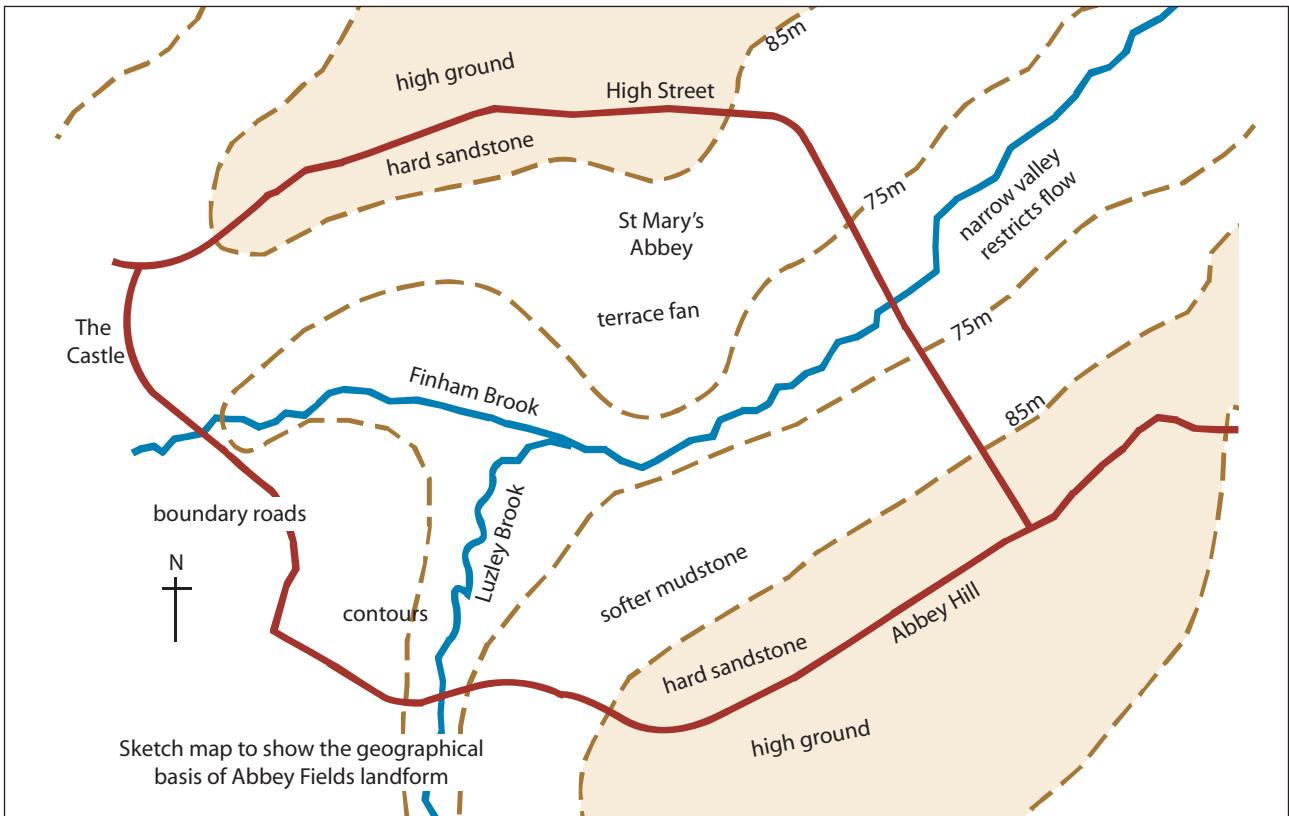


Fig 4 Sketch to show the geological basis of Abbey Fields landform (Source G.M. Hilton from ref 2)

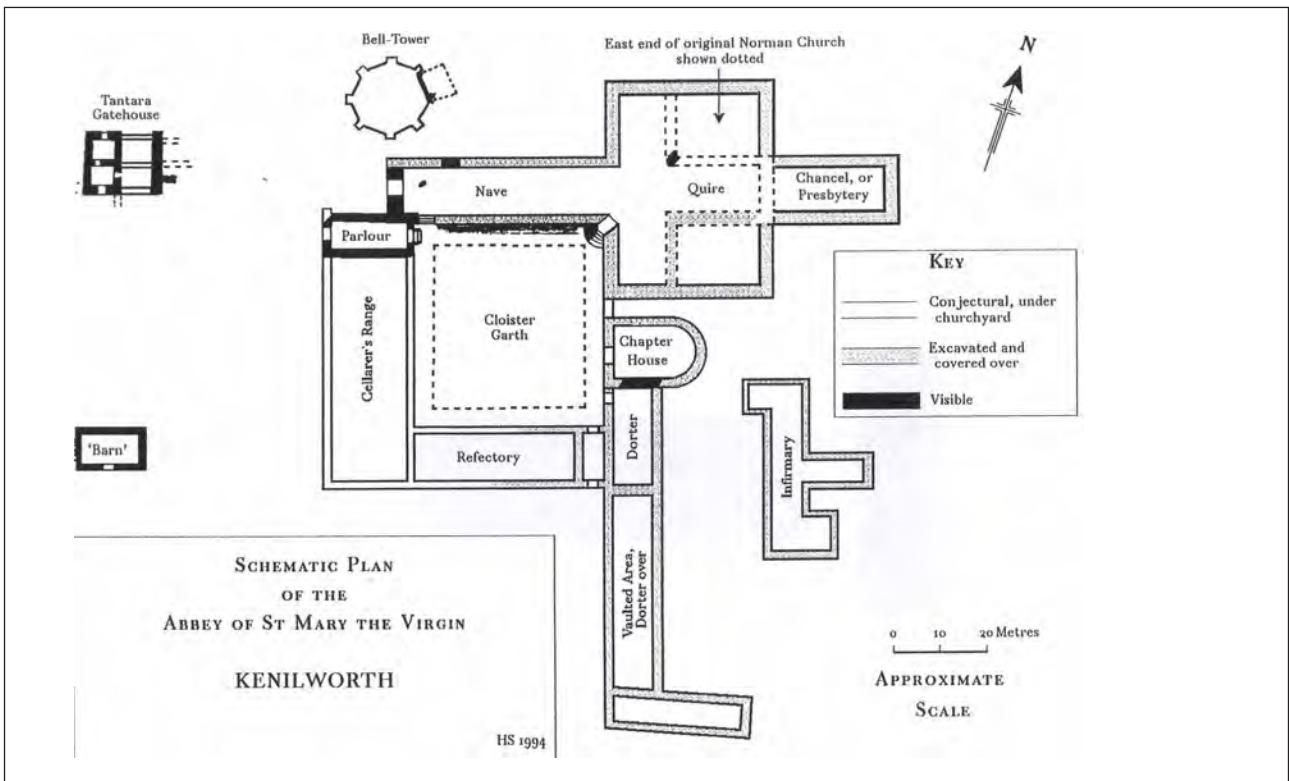


Fig. 5. Schematic Plan of the Abbey. (Source H.L.G. Sunley, ref. 5)

Section Two

A. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The site is essentially one of open fields, in which are located historic ruins, a church, a lake and areas for both formal and informal recreation. Its origin is a monastic estate within a precinct wall and it is remarkable that it has survived into the 21st century largely intact. This is due to intense public concern, expressed in the activities of several local societies and the representations of local Councillors. The whole area was scheduled as Monument 35115 by English Heritage in September 2003 and this is a key indicator of its significance.

For more than eight hundred years the Abbey has been part of the background of Kenilworth people, whether in its active phase of power and prosperity, or in its more passive phase of fading relics since the Dissolution. A study of the Abbey's archaeology and architecture, the records of its properties, and the Chronicle of its 14th century canon John Strecche, show how the site has changed through time from a reserve for the privileged few to a resource for the physical exercise and education of a whole town and its visitors from far and near.

Abbey Fields are a precious asset and are a feature that gives Kenilworth special character. At one and the same time they are a landmark, an ancient monument, a venue for sport and recreation, a place of worship, and a haven for wildlife. They serve some of the purposes of a town park, but still retain some of the characteristics and feel of pastureland.

B. DESCRIPTION OF EACH ELEMENT

2.1. THE LANDSCAPE OF ABBEY FIELDS

2.1.1. Location

The Abbey Fields are situated in the north west corner of Kenilworth, at OS grid reference SP28722. The area of 27.3 hectares is bordered by the B4104 (Abbey Hill) to the south, the A452 (Rosemary Hill, Bridge Street) to the east, the B4103 (Borrowell Lane, Castle Road) to the west, and High Street and Castle Hill to the north. The spectacular ruins of the Castle lie to the west.

Although they are no longer literally the centre of town, Abbey Fields are at the heart of historic Kenilworth. They are surrounded by older housing and listed buildings, such as the houses in Little Virginia in Castle Hill, and together with the Castle and Parliament Piece make up the bulk of the main Conservation Area¹ in Kenilworth. They also form part a swathe of greenery that runs through Kenilworth along Finham Brook, from the Castle and Castle Farm areas in the west to Kenilworth Common in the east. The high quality of many of the buildings abutting Abbey Fields, and the views across open country to the west, greatly enhance their visual appeal.

Abbey Fields seem almost homogeneous when viewed from Abbey Hill or High Street, but contain several distinct areas. The Kenilworth Inset Plan of 1989 and the Local Plan of 1995 identified five: grass fields for informal recreation; a formal recreation area (including the swimming pool, bowling green and tennis courts); the churchyard and Abbey ruins; an area to be flooded permanently (now the lake); and the car park off Bridge Street.



Abbey Fields

“For more than eight hundred years the Abbey has been part of the background of Kenilworth people.”

Understanding and Assessing The Site

2.1.2. PERMANENT STRUCTURES AND ARTIFICIAL FEATURES

The oldest and handsomest building is St Nicholas' Church, situated south of the eastern end of the High Street, and not to be confused with the Abbey church, which was older and larger but is now a ruin. St Nicholas' is built of locally quarried red sandstone, which gives it a warm and pleasing appearance. The surrounding churchyard and garden of remembrance, with their tombstones and memorials, extend into the Abbey ruins.

There is a modern indoor and an outdoor swimming pool in the centre of Abbey Fields. Although the building is large, it is not unduly conspicuous as it is at the bottom of the valley and well screened when the trees are in full leaf in summer. It is visible from Abbey Hill, and is most noticeable at night when its lights shine through the glass roof.

The pavilion next to the bowling green is typical of a town park, but too small to have a significant impact. Five tennis courts complete the formal recreation area. They are obvious to anyone walking along the track from the car park to the swimming pool, but are well hidden from other parts of Abbey Fields. A children's play area, with standard play equipment, lies between the Abbey Barn and the swimming pool. A screen of trees conceals it from the informal parts of Abbey Fields. However, the brightly coloured play equipment impinges on the southern aspect of the Abbey Barn.

The town's War Memorial, built in the style of the Cenotaph, stands on the top of the hill at the southern boundary of Abbey Fields.

The memorial site commands a splendid view of open country out to the west and of High Street and St Nicholas' Church across the valley, essentially that of a historic landscape that has survived for over four hundred years.



Above: St Nicholas' Church, south east aspect



Above: Kenilworth's Memorial to the Fallen

Section Two

The churchyard and some of the Abbey ruins are surrounded by stone walls. On the south and east sides they are built of ashlar and were topped by iron railings until World War II. The north/south wall which divides the churchyard, Gatehouse and children's playground from the lake area is made of undressed stone.

The weathered sandstone has a mellow charm that brick walls and wooden fences lack, and is valued by Kenilworth people. Redevelopment of Little Virginia in 1973 revealed the base of part of the Abbey precinct wall, dated 12th/13th century by pottery, with a 17th century wall built alongside it³.

There are several well-established tracks in Abbey Fields. Two are said to go back to at least Roman times or even earlier. Today, the main tracks have tarmac surfaces, although only the ones running from Bridge Street to St Nicholas' Church, and from Bridge Street to the swimming pool, are capable of taking vehicles. Five footbridges over the brooks give walkers easy access to all parts of Abbey Fields. They are functional, not decorative, features. However, the old sandstone Town Pool Bridge, where Bridge Street becomes Rosemary Hill, enhances the view to the east along Finham Brook.

On the south bank of the brook there is a distinctive dome-shaped hummock known as The Mound, and a second lower mound at the western entrance by the ford across Castle Road.

An underground pipe was laid in the 19th century to take water from a point in the brook below the ford. It ran alongside the path to feed the original swimming pool. There was an extra outlet, halfway between the ford and the swimming pool, that allowed water to be diverted to the meadow during winter months to provide a safe area for skating when frozen. A simple sluice-gate in the ditch near the pool allowed this lake to be drained for the Summer Show. In the 1990s the Warwick District Council created a permanent lake at the western end of Abbey Fields on the site of the old Abbey Pool. The Lake is now well established as a natural-looking and striking feature of the landscape, popular with both visitors and wildlife.



Above: The Mound from the south side, with the lake in the background.

2.1.3. Landform

The land making up Abbey Fields lies on each side of the valley of the Finham Brook which runs from west to east. A stream, known to some older residents as the Luzley Brook but unnamed on OS maps, flows up from the south to join it in the centre of the Fields. The land rises sharply from the floor of the valley, where it is 74 metres above sea level, to the 92 metre contour line on High Street in the north and Abbey Hill in the south. The slopes, although steep, are smooth with no outcrops of rock. Much of the land at the bottom of the valley is flat and marshy, and forms part of the flood plain of the Finham Brook. The land rises and becomes slightly uneven as one goes west along Finham Brook towards Castle Road.

The bowl-like landform is derived from two parallel ridges of hard Kenilworth sandstone forming the high ground to the north and south. Swollen rivers between episodes of glaciation cut into this sandstone to form a deep narrow valley through Kenilworth. The valley has been widened in the Abbey Fields area by the presence of a more easily eroded band of mudstone to the south. This gave space for a higher level river 30,000 years ago (Middle Devensian age) to deposit a terrace fan of sands and gravels, eventually used as the site for the Abbey². The former powerful rivers, flowing out of a lake derived from melting ice, have been reduced to the mild-looking Finham Brook. This can still cause flooding problems when its exit through the narrow valley to the east is impeded.

Understanding and Assessing The Site

2.1.4. The natural landscape

In keeping with its name, most of Abbey Fields are grassland, on the south side showing evidence of ridge and furrow drainage, not necessarily mediaeval strips. There are no true woodland areas but it is trees that contribute most to the landscape, as seen in aerial photographs.

The majority of them are native species and the planting is mostly informal. An exception to this is the area along Abbey Hill, where the style resembles that of a traditional urban park. There is a formal flowerbed around the War Memorial, and the trees growing here include variegated Acer, Catalpa, and ornamental cherries.

Avenues of lime trees frame the approaches to St Nicholas' Church and the Abbey ruins. These were planted circa 1910, presented by Mr Keyes of Parkhill in memory of his late wife⁴, and are therefore mature specimens, unfortunately showing some signs of decay. In winter their trunks and bare branches bring to mind the nave of a cathedral, but substantial branches have fallen in recent gales. The churchyard is well-endowed with evergreens such as yew and cypress. An uncommon tree for a churchyard is the fig that is growing in a now shallow depression known as the 'monks hole', the site of the Abbey Bell Tower.

There has been some relatively recent planting on the north slope of Abbey Fields, from the swimming pool up the hill to the High Street/ Malthouse Lane junction. This has created small clumps of alder, oak, ash and birch, and a row of pines on the fringe of High Street. These young trees contrast with the older oaks nearby on the bank above the lake.

Finham Brook has a well-wooded margin for most of its length. Alder is the commonest species but oak, beech and poplar trees grow on its banks as well. There are some good examples of mature oaks and beech near the Mound for example. The Luzley Brook is only lightly wooded. Here the majority of trees are introduced weeping willows.



Above: Willow along Luzley Brook in centre of photo. Finham Brook runs parallel to the lake.

The southern slopes of Abbey Fields have fewer trees than other areas. The area north-west of the War Memorial down to Finham Brook is virtually treeless and still has the form of ridge and furrow farming, though this is not necessarily mediaeval. It is the most popular spot for sledging in the Kenilworth area. Further east, a number of mature lime trees grow alongside the track that runs diagonally from the War Memorial to the School Lane/Bridge Street junction.

Little remains of the hedges that existed when cattle grazed on Abbey Fields, a practice that continued well into the 20th century. There are traces of them along the paths between Abbey End and the swimming pool, and between the swimming pool and Borrowell Lane, and they may indicate the margins of earlier, larger, Abbey pools. What is left is typical of an English hedgerow - hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel and elderberry.

Section Two

Significance of the landscape: Very high

The Abbey Fields' landscape has been shaped by geomorphology and human activity over the centuries, lending it interest, charm and variety. Although Abbey Fields has a formal recreation area and a large modern building within its boundaries, it still has a rural feel, linking the town of Kenilworth to the countryside out to the west. It is also the perfect link between the area's two great ancient monuments, providing visitors with a beautiful walk from the Castle along the side of the reed-fringed lake to the ruins of St Mary's Abbey and the parish church.

The stretches of boundary roads without buildings permit appreciation of the historic property and differing architectural styles in High Street, Bridge Street, Rosemary Hill and Abbey Hill. Its aesthetic importance is emphasised by the contrast with encroaching buildings along parts of High Street.

Vulnerability of the landscape:

Adjacent areas of land are highly desirable to developers contemplating demolition and in-fill. Repeated planning applications are submitted for three-storey housing that could dominate the surroundings.

Statutory services have the right to lay pipelines and cables, with an obligation only to consult. In practice, they have behaved responsibly. Recreational pursuits become increasingly sophisticated and noisy.

2.2. ABBEY FIELDS HISTORY

2.2.1. Pre-Dissolution

The Priory of St Mary was founded about 1120 by Geoffrey de Clinton, who also built the castle in the small hamlet of Chinewrde on the edge of the Arden Forest. The Priory was the home of 'black canons': they followed the rule of St Augustine of Hippo (not the St Augustine who brought Christianity to England in 597) and unlike monks, they were all ordained priests⁵.

The canons received generous grants from the founders and others, in return for undertaking to pray for them in perpetuity. These grants comprised both land and churches, including three 'cells' or dependent priories. At the Dissolution, Kenilworth had the highest revenue of any monastic house in Warwickshire, except Coventry Priory⁶. The de Clintons continued as patrons and founders until King John assumed the patronage for the crown. The patron was entitled to hospitality and even Henry VIII styled himself as founder and patron, although this did not prevent him from dissolving it later. England was ruled from Kenilworth during the Great Siege of the Castle in 1266. Since the Priory was the only other substantial building in the area, for six months King Henry III and the Archbishop of Canterbury must have lived there with their entourages and the Priory was later compensated for the privations it suffered.

At the time of the Black Death, the Priory would have had to supply clergy for many parishes where the priest had succumbed to the disease. It is likely that Prior John Peyto was a victim, as he died in 1361 when the second phase of the plague was most rampant. John of Gaunt, who held the castle in the next century, had a room in the Priory. The Priory was enlarged and rebuilt from the 13th century onwards and in 1448 it was elevated to the status of Abbey, an uncommon honour for an Augustinian house. As well as up to twenty-six canons on the site, there were lay-brothers, servants and pensioners. Some of the lay-brothers were the craftsmen for the buildings.

Understanding and Assessing The Site

The fields round the Abbey would have supplied the Abbey with essential resources such as fruit, vegetables, fish and waterpower. The Abbey Pool was probably established in the 12th century by damming the Finham Brook. It occupied the western end of the valley, close to Kenilworth Castle, on the site of what later became the Oxpen Meadow. At the eastern end of the pool, early maps record a mill and three fishponds alongside the brook. Traces of the stone abutments for a packhorse bridge, destroyed by floods in 1673, are visible in the banks of Finham Brook, just west of the iron footbridge by the swimming baths.

2.2.2. Post-Dissolution

Kenilworth Abbey was dissolved by King Henry VIII in 1538. The sixteen canons remaining were pensioned off, some becoming local vicars. Its lands were sold and the valuable roofing lead melted down into 'pigs', one of which went astray and is in nearby St Nicholas' Church. Documents that survived the dissolution include the abject deed of surrender, a charter of Henry III granting the Priory a water supply, and a history of England written by one of the canons, John Strecche⁷. This provides architectural and historical details about the Priory and its priors, giving the date of foundation as 1119.

Following the Dissolution, three sedilia were transferred to St Nicholas' Church and its west doorway was reconstructed, using Norman stonework from the Abbey but in the Renaissance style⁸.

Other stonework was used at the Castle, Rowington Church and for the foundations of Kenilworth dwellings. The loss of lead roofing and stonework resulted in the ruination of the buildings, except for The Barn and the Gatehouse. The pool was probably drained in the 17th century. In the 1920s, some stone was sold at thirty-five pence a barrowload to fund an excavation, and lies in gardens and rockeries of Kenilworth.



Above: West door of St Nicholas' Church

Shortly after the dissolution the Abbey lands were let, then sold, to Andrew Flammock. They passed through marriage to John Colbourne, and were then sold - probably on easy terms - to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Thereafter the title to the site descended with the Castle. The Abbey Manor persisted as the Manor of Augmentation, still separate from the Duchy Manor (Castle property) even when owned by the same Lord. Kenilworth was thus split between the manors of Castle and Abbey⁹ and today the Abbey Fields still separates these ancient Settlements. Land within the Abbey walls was farmed up to Victorian times, when the Local Board began the process of acquiring Abbey Fields for the people of the town. Public spirited owners also donated land, in the first instance to the parish of Kenilworth and later to the Urban District Council. This has ensured the unique survival of the monastic estate.

Section Two

St Nicholas' churchyard encroached on the site of the Abbey itself and ruins were struck under the soil in 1793 and 1840. In Victorian times walls were constructed within the nave and around the north transept, which make the identification of the ruins confusing: the installation of informative bronze plaques in 2002, by the Abbey Interpretation Project, have greatly improved this situation. An excavation was undertaken by T.W.Whitley in 1890, resulting in a plan¹⁰, but no report. Further excavation took place in 1922-23, followed by a comprehensive report by E.Carey-Hill¹¹. The ruins remained exposed until 1965, when they were covered over for protection.

Many pieces of stone-work recovered by the later excavations are exhibited in the Barn, and others are stored in the Gatehouse. As well as the few mouldings in situ, a lapidary wall along the north side of the cloister comprises 132 mouldings¹². Additionally, there are significant collections of window glass and floor tiles, some in the County Museum, Warwick.

Significance of the history: Very high

Understanding local history offers a way in to national history. See Section 2.6. Education.

2.3. THE ABBEY RUINS

The Abbey church and buildings lie to the south of St Nicholas' Church and are orientated approximately east-north-east to west-south-west. The visible ruins comprise the west end of the nave and parlour, the north transept, the chapter house south wall and the location of the bell tower. They show the typical Norman plan of most monasteries, with the attention to ritual, learning, charity and sanitation that was a beacon for mediaeval times.

The construction material, red sandstones of the Enville Group in Upper Carboniferous/Permian deposits, was quarried locally, particularly from the Malthouse Lane area. Some of the decorative stonework is more durable Liassic and Oolitic limestone. Lightweight tufa from Dursley, Gloucestershire, was used for filling between the vaulting ribs in the Chapter House¹¹. Some of the walls have been rebuilt, mostly in

Victorian times, and there is on-going repair of loosened stonework by Warwick District Council. A video film of every face of the ruins was made under the auspices of Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee in 2002, as a form of evidence for any future deterioration¹³.



Abbey Fields

“The Abbey Fields' landscape has been shaped by geomorphology and human activity over the centuries, lending it interest, charm and variety.”

Understanding and Assessing The Site

2.3.1. Abbey Church entrance, Parlour and Cloister

The west doorway of the nave is now approached from the west along a short passage-way formed by a low modern churchyard retaining wall to the north and, on the south, a reconstituted face of the north wall of the parlour. This area was originally a small forecourt or vestibule to the church, bounded on the south, as now, by the parlour wall, and probably closed on the west by the boundary wall extending from the Gatehouse. On the north it was open to allow public access to the nave.

The entrance to the nave was through a late 13th century doorway, replacing an earlier Norman feature. Only the lower jambs remain, restacked with mis-matching profiles, but the basic form on the west side is clustered shafts with hollows; the east side is plain.

The parlour lies immediately to the south and at a lower level. It is narrow with a step-down from the west end doorway and a further step-down at the east end, to the level of the cloister, about a metre lower than the level of the nave. The eastern doorway of two orders has shaft bases *in situ*. The face of the now low south wall of the parlour is essentially original, with plaster remains, as is the higher north wall; this had a hearth, now filled in.

The south and west sides of the cloister are unexcavated, and the east side has been reburied. The north wall is now the lapidary wall, below which is a line of stone benching, probably reconstructed.

Significance: Moderate

South and west sides of cloister are unexplored, offering scope for further archaeological discoveries.

Vulnerability:

Stonework is damaged by penetrating water; loose stones are then prised apart by some visitors. Buried features of unknown position or nature may be unwittingly damaged.

2.3.2. The Abbey Church

During the 1890 excavation, the remains of the north wall of the aisleless nave were reburied and a new retaining wall was built parallel to it, about a metre inside. Only an alcove with a modern seat shows the original line of the wall. A substantial part of the south-west corner of the nave is still standing; this is rubble-work with remnants of plaster over, but near the west doorway it changes to ashlar. At the east end of this standing section, processional steps lead down to the cloister walk. The remainder of the nave south wall has been lost to the modern lapidary wall, but the quadrantal steps at the east end of the nave are extant. The present land level of the nave is approximately the original, and the area is now a Garden of Rest.

The visible remains of the north transept, also a part of the Garden of Rest, represent in size the original Norman transept, extended eastwards in the 13th century. At the north-west corner of the crossing is a pier with clustered shafts, to the west is a free-standing column of clustered shafts in the form of a rhombus, and in what was the north-east corner of the original Norman transept there is another column. The transept walling was rebuilt as a retaining wall for the churchyard. Two sculptures have been reset in the west and north wall adjacent to the north-west corner; in the west wall is a standing effigy, originally recumbent, now identified¹⁴ as Prior Robert Salle; the head is damaged and depleted, but the body is otherwise in good condition.

On the North Wall is a reset gargoyle in the form of a robed figure. The transepts were extended at the latter end of the 13th century, and the chancel extended eastward. This is now all covered over but the east end of the church nearly reached the position of the fourth tree in the avenue of limes and the total length of the Abbey church was twice that of St Nicholas' Church.

Section Two

Significance: High

Dimensions of the north transept can be appreciated. Processional steps at each end of nave are in place, and evidence of mediaeval liturgical practice.

Vulnerability:

Penetration of stonework by water. Prior Robert's effigy deteriorating by exposure to elements.



Above: Effigy of Prior Robert Salle in transept wall.

2.3.3. Chapter House and Bell Tower

Only a length of south wall of the Chapter House remains above ground, rising to a height of 4m. It has rubble-work facing, but was originally decorated with intersecting blind arches, of which a sample has been reconstructed in The Barn exhibition. The footprint of this building has been outlined in the turf above its buried foundations.

The foundations of the Bell Tower are in St Nicholas' churchyard, north of the west end of the nave of the Abbey. Exposed in the 1890 excavation, and thought to be the end of the Chapter House, it was later recognised as the octagonal bell tower depicted on one of the Abbey seals. After the excavation, one side was left exposed up to ground level, with a retaining

wall forming a pit some 1.5 m deep, known as the Monks' Hole. This was cleared out and the feature recorded¹⁵ in 1991. After considering the danger of this open pit in the churchyard, it was reluctantly filled in 1999, and only the rim can now be seen, marked with a descriptive plaque.

Significance: High

The Chapter House wall is largely a rubble core but can be related to the photographs and reassembled arches and vaulting ribs in The Barn exhibition.

Vulnerability:

A challenge for climbers, who dislodge stones, but this danger has been lessened by the erection of railings.



Above: Chapter House wall, south side. The railings were installed as a safety measure in 2003.

Understanding and Assessing The Site

2.3.4. The Tantara Gatehouse

(Listed building, Grade I)

Appearing on the 1642 Map as Tantarow, the gatehouse is held to have been constructed 1361-75 in two closely dated phases¹⁶, the north half before the South. It was more extensive than now and has lost its upper storey. The access to the abbey was through two bays and between them are the main and pedestrian doorways, with niches for seating on the east side, each side of the door

The west side of the building has two interconnected rooms, both with stone pointed vaults, accessed through a pointed arch in the southern bay. Both are now used as a store for abbey stone-work. The south room had a doorway on the south side converted to a window, probably post-Dissolution, and on the west wall, a rectangular window with part brick reveals, also post-Dissolution. There is also a hearth with an external wall-scar for a flue; this too has been adapted with brick to form a smaller feature and the floor is brick. It is known from a print of about 1785¹⁷ that there was a chimney, and that the building was inhabited.

The north room has two garde-ropes, one above the other, and originally within a short block extending to the north but now within a 19th century buttress. This room had a long narrow defensive-type window with deep splays in the north wall, later opened out to form a doorway, now blocked. The floor consists of irregular sandstone slabs, with a hearth constructed for drying herbs during World War I. As well as a ground floor level pointed doorway between the rooms, there is an upper level aperture: although there are corbels for upper flooring in the inner room, there are no obvious means for supporting such a floor in the outer room.

Externally, the north end of the west face has 19th century consolidation, but there is a scar where the boundary wall of the monastery started a westward course. To the south, as mentioned, there is also the scar from a flue. The exterior east face is more complex: near

the south end there is a pointed arched doorway leading to a two storied extension, for there are the remains of an upper window. A wall extended eastward from this doorway towards the Abbey church. There are areas of wall peppered with shot holes, possibly in 1642 during a Civil War skirmish.

Significance: Very high

In contrast to the Abbey church and cloisters, this is a substantial ruin. Much of the vaulting remains, and two rooms are still intact and used for storage. Enough survives to show what a magnificent building it was, an entrance befitting a wealthy abbey, and John Strecche's 15th century manuscript describes its construction. It encapsulates the local style of architecture of the later 14th century, a mixture of two- and four-centred round, segmental, arches, and small windows having ogee heads. A study of its archaeology provides clues to its subsequent history.

Vulnerability:

The general condition of the Gatehouse is unsatisfactory, mainly due to leakage of rainwater into the building from the roof. When the upper part of the building was lost, presumably after the Dissolution, the building was made leak-proof for habitation by packing the top with clay, ideal for vegetation, and in the 1970's trees were growing from it.



Above: Tantara Gatehouse, south side.

Section Two

Consideration was then given to its demolition. Instead, consolidation work in 1977 provided concrete roofing, but this has led to problems at the interface with the sandstone. Rainwater penetrates the stonework, causing deterioration of both exterior and interior surfaces, and making the rooms very damp.

Young people scale the building by means of the Victorian buttress and dislodge stones. The building is vulnerable to forcible access.

2.3.5. The Barn (Listed building, Grade I)

Nominally 14th century, a mismatch, or batter, between the foundations and the wall, suggests rebuilding at some time, making its age uncertain. It was said to be the guesthouse of the Abbey, although this is now regarded as unlikely. After the Dissolution it was used as a farmer's barn.

It was two storied, with a lower entrance in the centre of the south face, and an upper west entrance by means of a lost stairway to a doorway, now blocked: the present upper floor was installed in 1993. The six lower windows, in pairs on the south, east and north faces, are small with horizontal and vertical external splays, and curiously shouldered lintels on the interior. Along the exterior south face, except at the eastern end, there is a string, or projecting, course against which a pentice roof ran, turning round to the western face and running up and over, to protect the stairway and upper entrance. There is also evidence for an annexe projecting southwards from the east front of the building: there was one there at the turn of the century, but an earlier monastic version is possible.

At the upper level, north and south, there were two pairs of ogee-headed lights, but those on the north side have been heavily mutilated. Inside, these have deep splays with heavy three-centred arches over, some with mis-matching voussoirs. At the east end there is a large upper window that has lost its head to the later upper gable. This has had the central part of its sill cut to floor level, perhaps to provide some additional access. The western upper access

arch, also three-centred, has been rebuilt and is in a poor state. The building has been reroofed since the Dissolution, with timbers dated by Nottingham University¹⁸ to about 1600: there are three pairs of redundant roofing slots along the north and south walls for the original roof.

The central section of the ground flooring has large rectangular slabs of blue lias, but the sections on either side have irregular paving, possibly of 1930s age.



Above: The Barn, south side.

On the east side there is the floor scar of a former wall, and excavation below the flags by Warwick University revealed postholes with creosoted timber remains. Central in the north wall is a recess with another massive three-centred arch over, and centrally there are two small rectangular windows, one on each side of a downward chute that emerges at the present external ground level. There is a similar chute, now completely blocked off in the west wall. A ledge runs round the building for the original upper floor joists and two large square beam-slots, with lower strut-slots in the east and west walls. An ugly gash has been cut in the north wall for purposes unknown.

Understanding and Assessing The Site

An earlier use of the building is indicated by some 300 masons' marks which have been recorded on the inner surfaces: at both levels there are many incised designs made using masons' dividers and templates, or moulds. In addition a full-sized arch has been scribed on one wall. A 'mass' or scratch dial¹⁹ has been incised on the external south face of the south-west corner. Like the Gatehouse, the Barn has its exterior surface well peppered with larger and smaller shot. It has been suggested²⁰ that this arose in 1642 when there was a Civil War skirmish in Kenilworth.

The architectural features of the Barn are unusual in the dominance of three-centred arches, six types in all, and the use of shouldered lintels on the lower windows.

Significance: Very high

It is a rare example of a mediaeval building which has survived relatively intact. Details such as the scratch dial, masons' marks and shot holes enhance its archaeological importance. The roof is interesting for its timber structure, and adaptation to a building for which it was not originally made. It presents an opportunity for on-going archaeological research. It has played a crucial role in maintaining local interest in the ruins.

Vulnerability:

Spoil from the 1890 excavation was dumped at the rear of the building to level the churchyard so the present ground level on the north side is about a metre higher than the floor.

This exacerbates dampness in the building. Windows have been broken deliberately and break-ins have occurred.

2.4. RECENT RESEARCH

2.4.1. The Priory Aqueduct

In May 2000, following heavy rain, a metre-deep depression appeared in the grass of Abbey Fields. Excavation by Dr Stephen Hill of the University of Warwick revealed a stone-lined shaft four metres deep. At the bottom was an arched culvert, one metre wide and 1.4 metres

high, running in a direction approximately from Castle Hill towards the Abbey. The shaft was probably for clearing the culvert of silt²¹. A Charter of King Henry III confirms that the Priory may take water from a spring at Kenilworth in the holding of Edith Lawerthin and lead it by any route they wish to the Priory⁵:

Priori et conventui de Kenell quidem aquam fonte illius qui est in cunque Edith Lawerthin apud Kenell ducti faciant per conductum quo voluerint per curiam et domos Prioratus sua ita



Above: The stone-lined shaft

The Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society, KHAS, has commissioned two surveys by the company Stratascan, which uses ground penetrating radar to detect anomalies²². These show the likely course of the culvert from beneath a property on the south side of Castle Hill to beneath the priory church which was extended over it in the 13th century²³. The spring itself, possibly with a holding tank and sluice gate, will now be sought.

Section Two

2.4.2. The Mound and the Lake

The three-metre-high mound is visible from half-way along the southern lakeside path but it is on the opposite side of the Finham Brook. It has been variously described as a barrow, a spoil heap, the burial place of soldiers from the 1266 siege of the castle - even a windmill base - or a signal tower, since it is marked with a flag on Morden's map of 1676. David Brock has made surveys of it in relation to the levels of the castle and former priory pools²⁴. Before construction of the priory dam, a chorobates (Roman and mediaeval surveying instrument) would have to be set up half-way between the base of the castle dam and the proposed priory dam. His surveys establish that the mound is in this position.

He also shows the likelihood of the original priory pool being at a level of 75.4m above O.D. This would have flooded too much of the valleys of both the Finham and Luzley brooks, so the level was lowered to 74m above OD (the present lake being 73.8m above O.D.).



Above: Finham Brook and the lake from The Mound

2.4.3. Location of Abbey Buildings

In place of expensive and damaging excavations, the foundations of the Abbey buildings are being investigated by geophysical methods, principally resistivity Surveys have been made by students of the University of Warwick, and Dr Stephen Hill is training members of the K.H.A.S. in applying this method to various areas of the precincts of the Abbey, such as the graveyard, and buildings west of the gatehouse.

If the graveyard could be accurately located and funds were available for an excavation or a targeted incision, evidence for mediaeval diet and disease could be recovered.

2.4.4. Historical manuscripts

The Abbey Interpretation Scheme has stimulated renewed interest in the site: its Research Associate, Dr Christine Hodgetts of the University of Warwick, has rediscovered the importance of *The Chronicle of John Strecche*, ca. 1425, British Library Additional Manuscript 35295, which inserts into a history of England ten pages about the Priors of Kenilworth and their building works²⁵. Dr Hodgetts has identified from this manuscript that the effigy at present in the west wall of the north transept must be that of Prior Robert Salle: 'he gave his body to a tomb in the chapel he had built in praise of the Virgin Mary, which bore his effigy clad in priestly robes'¹⁴:

*reddidit corpus suum sepultae in capella quam
anteam construxerat in lauderu virginis maria
sculpta ex eius imagine quum in vestis
sacerdotali*

Strecche gives a vivid description of this magnificent Chapel: 'it was built with the skills of stone masons and wood-carvers and that which he made stood firm'²⁵.

*erexit in arte latamorum valde curiosum lignea
artificiter fixa cuius facta non vacilant*

Further transcription and translation of this remarkable document is in progress and it is likely to enhance our understanding of the ruins.

Understanding and Assessing The Site

2.4.5. The Monastic Slab

A large tomb slab in the churchyard has recently been investigated by H.Sunley, President of K.H.A.S. Although appropriated by the Poole family in 1851, it bears a beautiful mediaeval floriated cross on a calvary base. It is likely to be a slab from the abbey's burial ground.²⁶



Above: Monastic slab with floriated cross

Significance: High

The importance of the site has been related to structures above the ground, or now buried, or known to us from previous excavations, but there is potential for the interpretation of further remains. Fragments of Roman pottery were discovered recently in the access shaft for the culvert and the open fields may reveal pre-monastic remains. The water-logged ground and organic deposits of the valley floor are conducive to the preservation of archaeology.

Vulnerability:

So long as they are unrecognised, remains are of course liable to destruction by dredging, trenching and compaction.

2.5. ECOLOGY OF ABBEY FIELDS

The 27.3 hectare site is large enough to furnish many different habitats and is a major part of the wildlife corridor through the town. It is designated by Warwickshire Biological Records Centre as Ecosite 68/17 (for sites which do not have statutory protection), the Lake being a potential Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. In this account, 'Latin' names have not been included, pending a full ecological assessment, to include non-flowering plants.

2.5.1. Grassland

Much of Abbey Fields consists of grassland that has been undisturbed for centuries. Because it is not agricultural land it is not subjected to agricultural pesticides. It is regularly mown by Warwick District Council. The grass is kept relatively short all the year round in most areas so that members of the public can use it for informal recreation. Several areas are being mown less frequently and a greater range of species has been recorded, including hedge mustard, wild turnip, honesty, wood avens, broad-leaved willow herb, white bryony, cow parsley, lady's bedstraw, broad-leaved dock, common cat's ear, yarrow, ox-eye daisy, pineapple weed, foxglove, cocksfoot, yorkshire fog and wild oat. The areas of longer grasses provide a habitat for voles, which in turn provide prey for owls and kestrels.

2.5.2. Marshland

The flood plains of the Finham and Luzley brooks contain marshy areas and there is a patch of wetland at the western end of the lake. These support a wetland flora with species such as lady's smock, meadowsweet, purple loosestrife, nodding bur-marigold, water mint, yellow flag iris and alder. As much wetland has been destroyed elsewhere by modern agricultural practices and building over the flood plain, surviving areas such as that in Abbey Fields are of great value. In November 2002, the Friends of Abbey Fields planted cowslips, meadowsweet and purple loosestrife in the area at the western end of the lake. The plants were provided by Warwick District Council and should make an

Section Two

2.5.3. The lake and streams

The lake supports a resident population of waterfowl, including mute swan, mallard, coot and moorhen. It also attracts a large number of winter migrants such as whooper swan, oyster catcher, heron, Canada geese and bar-headed geese.



Above: Gulls, mallard and a swan on the lake

Some are rare visitors to this country, e.g. Bonaparte's gull and grey phalarope. The fish include perch, roach, dace and carp. Finham Brook, with stretches of bank well-wooded with oak, holly and alder, provides a habitat for small fish, and this encourages kingfishers to come to Abbey Fields.

2.5.3. Trees and hedgerows

For an area that is predominantly open grassland, Abbey Fields has a good number and variety of trees, including ornamental trees planted in the south-eastern area. The mature oaks and limes provide rich habitats for insects, and the yews and firs in the churchyard provide winter shelter for birds. Bird species regularly observed include robin, pied wagtail, grey wagtail, blue- great- coal- and longtailed-tits, nuthatch, tree-creeper, mistle and song thrush, blackbird and jackdaw. Spotted flycatcher, reed bunting and cuckoo have also been recorded.

Many nest-boxes have been installed and are well used. The hedgerows are fragmented remnants of the old field boundaries and are being studied as evidence for the former boundaries of the lake. The local society, The Friends of Abbey Fields, is carrying out hedge restoration projects. Abbey Fields contains several bat species: pipistrelle, noctule and Daubenton's have been clearly identified and either whiskered or Brandt's is also present. Bat boxes have been erected to increase roosting and nesting sites.

Significance: High

The Abbey Fields makes a very important contribution to the ecology of the local area. Its overall value is more than the sum of the parts that have been discussed in previous paragraphs. It acquires much of its significance from its context, i.e. from being open fields in an urban area. It is exempt from the usual pressures to destroy wildlife habitats, including the demand for more houses and intensive agriculture.

Abbey Fields is also ecologically important because it acts as a green corridor through Kenilworth and is part of a network of links between town, countryside, and local nature reserves. This is vital for many species of plants and birds, which need these connections in order to thrive.

Active management to increase biodiversity and encourage colonisation by plant and animal species is considered appropriate for this area, and will increase the enjoyment and interest people will get from its natural history.

Vulnerability:

The ecology is vulnerable to constant pressure to intensify and diversify the use of Abbey Fields. Some of the suggested activities, for example fishing, would directly affect wildlife. Others such as skateboarding and cycling, would require significant construction work, which would obviously have an impact on the landscape and ecology.

Understanding and Assessing The Site

2.6. EDUCATIONAL USE OF ABBEY FIELDS

The Abbey Fields and the Abbey ruins are in themselves educational resources for Kenilworth. They are also interpreted in a variety of ways.

The Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society actively pursues research, involving its members, and publishing an annual magazine with the results of this research.

It maintains, and staffs with its members, a Local History Museum visited by hundreds of people from Kenilworth, Coventry and surrounding areas. Members are frequently asked to conduct parties round Abbey Fields and The Barn.

The Friends of Abbey Fields clear litter and have initiated schemes to increase the value of the area by planting herbs and hedgerows and installing boxes for birds and bats

The Heritage Lottery Fund gave a grant towards the £100,000 Abbey Interpretation Scheme, together with additional grants from Warwick District Council, and Kenilworth Town Council. This scheme, begun in 1999, has resulted in an exhibition in The Barn, a series of open-air explanatory boards round the Fields, 13 plaques indicating the position and purpose of ruined Abbey buildings and a free guide leaflet on card. The exhibition dramatically displays the origin and meaning of the abbey and reconstructs some of the vaulting ribs and blind arcading of the Chapter House. Visitors can understand and appreciate the Norman monastic plan by following the trail of plaques around the ruins.

2.6.1. School visits

The site is relevant to the National Curriculum for schools:

- *Key Stage 2, Britain and the wider world in Tudor times, 10. A study of some significant events, e.g. The impact of the closing down of a religious community on the local area.*
- *Key Stage 3, Britain 1066-1500, 8. A study of major features of Britain's medieval past, e.g. Characteristic features of life: the influence of monastic communities.*

It is important for children to listen, talk, touch and see, to sit on the Barn floor and to stand among the ruins. The descriptive plaques in the ground help them to understand the complexity and size of what was once there. To the children of an increasingly secular and multi-faith society, they are a vivid testimony to the former power and influence of a Christian monastic system.

Schools value the safe environment away from roads, surrounded by open parkland, with toilet and refreshment facilities to hand. In the light of present day security concerns, these factors mean it is visited by schools further afield as well as local ones.

2.6.2. Adult education

Many studies by adults are served by the site. The museum and fields are used frequently by the University of Warwick for Continuing Studies courses, including not only informative visits but also active research, such as resistivity surveys. Historical research into the Priory/Abbey documents in Warwick County Records Office can be related to features on the ground. Numerous parties are conducted round the museum and site by staff of Warwick University, members of Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society and officers of Warwick District Council.

Increased leisure and longer retirement for many people will increase the site's importance not only for historical and ecological studies, but also for drawing, painting and photography, which may feed back into historical recording. Sunday afternoon opening of the Barn Museum in the summer is made possible by volunteer stewards from many local organisations. Individuals pursue special interests in local and family history and casual visitors from the nearby recreational facilities gain insight into their local environment.

Section Two

Websites facilitate national and international access to the site where a physical visit is not possible:

- www.kenilworthabbey.org
(Abbey Interpretation Scheme, 2001)

The success of the Priory Gardens Visitor Centre in Coventry is indicative of the appeal of monastic sites in this area and St Mary's Abbey Kenilworth ranks alongside in terms of educational potential.

Significance: Very high

2.7. RECREATIONAL VALUE AND COMMUNITY USE

The grounds are of the utmost importance for the recreation of the people of Kenilworth and are extensively visited by people from Warwick, Leamington Spa, Coventry, Rugby, Solihull, Birmingham and other places in the region, and by tourists who initially came just to see the castle.

The Abbey Fields fulfil the role of a large-scale village green. They give the visitor a chance for relaxation and reflection as if in a more remote area of beauty, yet here one is within the boundary of a busy Midlands town.

2.7.1. Access and Inclusion

The greater part of the area is in public ownership and open free of charge at all hours every day of the year. Two bus companies have stops on the surrounding roads and there is a free car park within the Fields. Most paths are easy to walk on and suitable for the disabled. The Warwick District Council bans the use of cars beyond the car park, except for disabled access to the swimming pool.

All age-groups can be seen on a daily basis taking advantage of the variety of attractions. The numbers peak in July and August but there is a steady flow throughout the year and at all times of the day. Generally it is, and is perceived to be, a safe environment and is visited by local people, and increasing numbers from further afield, as a well-known, well-loved, well-maintained public amenity.

2.7.2. Activities

The Abbey Fields provide members of the public with very good opportunities to participate in outdoor pursuits, swimming and other forms of healthy exercise.



Above: The tennis courts in "The Park"

The provision of an indoor swimming pool, play apparatus, bowling green and tennis courts is modern but continues traditional usage since Victorian times.

Intrusive activities such as cycling, golf and boating are not permitted on grounds of safety. Less structured activities such as summer games, picnics, kite-flying, sledging in winter and walking, take place in the wider grassed areas that spread beyond the central leisure buildings. Some paths are links in long-distance walks, e.g. Warwickshire County Council's Centenary Way, or are short cuts between the two centres of the town and the castle.

Regular users furnish an informal patrol of the Abbey Fields, monitoring their condition and reporting minor problems. The re-created lake, with its through-flow of water keeping it fresh, has become a main attraction. Surrounded by mature trees and colonised by water birds, it is a beautiful and tranquil sight. Restoring the lake, albeit for purposes of visual amenity rather than economic necessity, is a very appropriate measure in the flood plain, and its maintenance as a successful wetland habitat is a priority in a county where many such have disappeared.

Understanding and Assessing The Site

Activities within Abbey Fields are varied but rarely mutually exclusive: a family during a single visit may ride on the swings, feed the ducks and visit the exhibitions in the Barn Museum. The historic setting adds a welcome extra dimension to their enjoyment of the amenities.

2.7.3. Community events and traditions

The Abbey Fields provides the setting for a series of events throughout the year, some serious, some sporting, and some entertaining, such as fairgrounds and theatrical pageants. The open space is large enough for these not to interfere with other uses. The town lacks a civic centre, so the Fields provide a natural alternative venue for major fund raising events and public celebrations. Weddings, christenings and funerals at St Nicholas' Church gain from the backdrop of green space and dignified sandstone walls, as does the churchyard within the curtilage of the Abbey itself. Remembrance ceremonies are held at the War Memorial, and some seats and trees commemorate individuals and organisations.

Significance: Very high

In the collective memory of people who were born in Kenilworth, childhood experiences and holiday outings form the foundation of their powerful attachment to the Abbey Fields. Incomers also are very appreciative of the Fields: it is one of the amenities that attracts them to the town. Overall, the inter-relationship of the local community and the area is as close as at any time in post-Reformation history. The Fields provide a unifying element for a town which has diversified and expanded from its original location. Far from being a neglected backwater, they remain an integral part of 21st century life.

Vulnerability:

There is now a precarious balance between the different forms of recreation. Although most activities are compatible with one another, conflicts between different user groups surface from time to time, as in the arguments about whether dogs should be kept on leads and not admitted to the children's play area.

The Abbey Fields are vulnerable to the sheer volume of people who seek to enjoy its facilities. Even informal and apparently harmless recreation such as walking can eventually destroy vegetation and bring about soil erosion. The Fields are also vulnerable to pressures on Warwick District Council to intensify use and extend the range of activities that are permitted.



Abbey Fields

“The site is essentially one of open fields, in which are located historic ruins, a church, a lake and areas for both formal and informal recreation.”

Section Three

DEFINING ISSUES AND CONSTRAINTS

The physical nature and past history of the site dictate its present significance, make it vulnerable to change, and impose constraints on how it may be developed in the future. This section inevitably considers some negative aspects but need not obscure the fact that the Councils, voluntary bodies and English Heritage co-operate well, working to the same end of conserving and enhancing the site.

3.1. Physical conditions

The fields are in good condition, subject to winter flooding without appreciable earth movement, although the ground collapsed into the Abbey aqueduct access shaft in May 2000. The exposed ruins of the Abbey are in poor condition and need much more protection than can be reasonably afforded. The state of the ruins is regularly examined by the Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee (K.A.A.C.) and by Warwick District Council (W.D.C.). The Council executes consolidation works, where permitted by English Heritage. The Chapter House wall in particular has lost most of the calcium carbonate from its lime mortar and could collapse. Firm and rapid repair of loose stonework is delayed by the strict controls of a Scheduled Ancient Monument, unless imminent danger can be proved.

Unless totally enclosed, the ruins will inevitably deteriorate further through spalling of the soft sandstone and damage by vandalism.

3.2. Ownership

The Abbey Fields were given to the people of Kenilworth by several donors, to be cared for by St Nicholas' Parish Council and Kenilworth Urban District Council.

Warwick District Council assumed ownership on 1st April 1974, with Kenilworth Town Council as statutory consultee on planning applications but with no special standing legally. W.D.C. has the prime legal responsibility and a duty to maintain the area. Its Property Services unit is responsible for the upkeep of the Abbey ruins and its Leisure and Amenities unit manages the open space.

The churchyard to St Nicholas' Church, with some of the Abbey ruins, is closed for burials and now vested in the ownership of the Diocese of Coventry, from whom permission for conservation operations must be obtained.

Properties on High Street, Castle Hill and Castle Road are in private ownership and are excluded from the Scheduled Monument area.

3.3. Current land use

This is appropriate for the large site. Parts of the monastic remains lie in the churchyard and form a garden of remembrance for the church. Other parts support recreation, with structures that cover remains and would prevent further excavation if that were ever considered desirable.

3.4. Area and boundaries

The area includes all the Abbey remains and nearly all its precinct and fields. It is large enough to support all aspects of present land use and the number of visitors envisaged in the future if its significances (see Part Two of this plan) are promoted as proposed (see Part Four).

The field boundaries adequately prevent access by motor vehicles. With the exception of the Chapter House wall, the monastic remains have no fencing and are vulnerable to frequent attack by adventurous persons climbing up and pulling at loose stones. Warning notices have an adverse impact visually but are legally necessary.

3.5. Financial resources

Maintenance of Abbey Fields, with the ruins and the buildings, is the responsibility of W.D.C. There is no specific budget or fund for the area, consequently it must take its place according to priorities for all the Council's responsibilities.

Maintenance of the interior of The Barn and its exhibitions, and Public Liability insurance, is funded by Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society (K.H.A.S.), which also funds specific research projects (such as the ground-penetrating radar survey, costing in excess of £1000).

Defining Issues and Constraints

A large grant was received for the Abbey Interpretation Project from the Heritage Lottery Fund and supplemented by W.D.C. and Kenilworth Town Council. Another grant was received in 2000 from Warwickshire County Council for The Barn interior improvements by K.A.A.C.

3.6. External factors

Appreciation of the asset is not affected by traffic noise, which is distant, or noisy leisure pursuits. Most housing on the boundaries is in harmony with the site, although a recent planning decision permitted what is locally regarded as a visually intrusive property development. Since the private gardens along High Street are excluded and vulnerable to developers, scheduling of the whole site does not protect the precincts from intensive building, or the horizon from more prominent rebuilding.

3.7. Understanding

W.D.C., the K.A.A.C., and K.H.A.S. have a pool of skills and consultants available for present management and are aware of areas where further surveys could assist conservation. This recently occurred when W.D.C. held a meeting at the Gatehouse to investigate the roof problems with the aid of a hydraulic platform. Lack of a full understanding of the site is an important aspect of its vulnerability.

3.8. Previous alterations

Some of the Victorian walling is causing problems, particularly around The Barn, where the lack of drainage has led to damp decaying walls and severe erosion of stonework. Buttresses of that time now provide climbing footholds for Gatehouse roof adventurers. Excavation in the past has been piecemeal and not always adequately recorded. Systematic research is essential for the future.

3.9. Community expectations

The leisure facilities, swimming pool, snack bar and toilets have been in place for a long time and there is at present no pressure to expand them to the detriment of the site. Traditional use of parts of Abbey Fields for a fairground, the Lion's Grand Show and the Duck Race, have not in the past proved damaging.

Provision for additional leisure activities, especially cycling, has been mooted and could cause conflict in the future.

3.10. Access

The site is approached by good footpaths on all sides, and Information Boards at the entrances show the paths linking the Castle and the Abbey. A wider path on the steepest slope has been agreed upon but will not conflict with the landscape. A review of the suitability of paths for wheelchairs is desirable.

Health and Safety aspects of paths, their surfaces, slopes and condition in wet weather, and of unrestricted access to ruins with loose stonework, must be taken into account. Pedestrians crossing the road to walk from the Castle to Abbey Fields face considerable danger: there is no footpath on either side of the entrance to the Castle Brays car park.

Two companies run local services and bus routes between Coventry and Leamington Spa which currently encircle Abbey Fields with a bus at least once per hour: buses run along Abbey Hill every 20 minutes. In some summers there are tourist buses from Stratford upon Avon and Coventry.

The car park near the church has a muddy surface in wet weather and is often full. Marked parking bays could greatly increase its capacity but the rough surface cannot be marked and English Heritage considers a hard surface unacceptable. Any pressure for additional car parking on the perimeter of Abbey Fields would be vehemently opposed by Kenilworth residents.

Section Three

There is access for the disabled to the lower floor of The Barn, where a ramp is available, but there are restricting stairs to the upper floor. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 may have implications here from October 2004 when reasonable adjustments to physical features must be considered by service providers.

3.11. Statutory controls

The whole of Abbey Fields is now scheduled and this will afford greater protection against change: Scheduled Monument Consent is required for any works on the site, though Class 5 Deemed Consent may be appropriate for urgent Health and Safety works. English Heritage acts as agent for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport from whom Consent must be obtained, e.g. the problem of fixing a secure door grille in the Gatehouse without damaging heritage quality stonework has so far not been resolved.

Article 3 of the Valetta Convention from the Council of Europe appears to require prior notice and licensing for geophysical techniques and even for field walking and aerial photography. However, English Heritage (statement 18.7.01) favours adherence to a voluntary Code of Conduct rather than a licensing system.

Faculties from Coventry Diocese, adjudged by the Diocesan Advisory Committee, are required for all works within and without the Church, and in the churchyard, which is also subject to planning permission from W.D.C.

The Finham Brook, which flows west to east across Abbey Fields, has main river status under the jurisdiction of the Environment Agency. W.D.C., as riparian owner, is responsible for the maintenance of Finham Brook and of Luzley Brook, which joins it in the middle of the fields.

Most of Abbey Fields is subject to restrictive covenants. In essence, they limit its use to 'recreational walks and pleasure grounds' and specify that certain areas have to be preserved as grassland.

3.12. Areas of conflict

The desire to increase visitor numbers will cause additional wear and tear to The Barn: this is more likely to affect the modern staircase than the ancient walls and roof timbers.

Bats inside The Barn foul exhibits with their droppings, and protective covers have to be replaced after every opening event. The antiquity of the roof would make it difficult to exclude them.

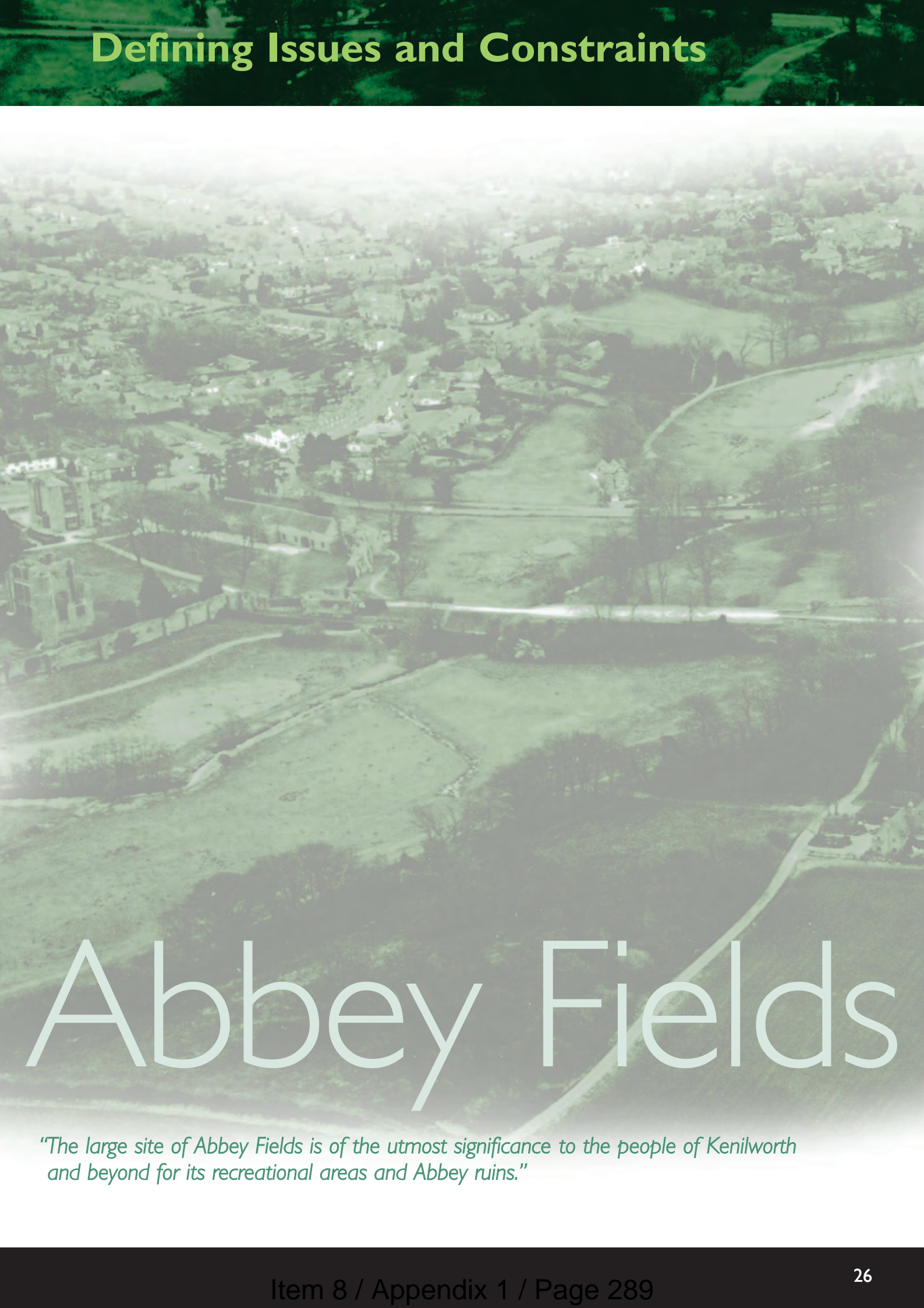
A bye-law forbidding cycling is difficult to enforce and many pedestrians are annoyed by this. A case could be made for responsible cycling on through-routes: children face many hazards if forced on to the surrounding road network.

Similarly a bye-law forbidding fishing is difficult to enforce and there is some desire for it to be permitted for young people along limited stretches of the Lake shore. This would, however, conflict with wild-life interests.

Dog-walking is a widespread and valid activity in the fields but dogs have on occasion been allowed by their owners to attack water birds, and the fouling of the ground, particularly near the children's playground, can be a problem.

Sign boards for information and trails may detract from the informality of the area. However, the plaques recently inserted in the grounds of the Abbey are very discreet.

Other sources of conflict in enhancing the significance of the site include: the possibility of litigation over works which might be claimed to have caused accidents; the expense of insurance to cover this; adequate security for exhibits in The Barn and Gatehouse; protection of all exhibits against damp conditions.



Abbey Fields

"The large site of Abbey Fields is of the utmost significance to the people of Kenilworth and beyond for its recreational areas and Abbey ruins."

Section Four

CONSERVATION POLICIES

The policies outlined below are based on our conservation philosophy that, to be valuable, the site must be used: only then will the past development of Kenilworth and its people be linked to their future.

The policies are consistent with our aims and objectives stated in Part One. The policies, and the proposals to implement them, are presented as a series of options, including radical and expensive ones. Some are more aspirational than others: we believe that the best options will be chosen if alternatives are presented, even if they are not attainable at present.

Policies will, as far as possible, generate action to

- protect the site against weather, human damage and unsightly development
- promote public facilities with the highest possible safety standards
- interpret the site and promote further research into its past
- explore financial resources for their implementation

Our vision is one of increased awareness of the heritage value of the site, among people both local and from further afield.

4.1. POLICY FOR ABBEY FIELDS

The policy is to maintain the Abbey Fields in a way that directly relates to its traditional functions as a green space and as a venue for religious practice and for public recreation.

To achieve this there should be consideration of the following:

- Clear boundaries visible between the recreational and the contemplative areas such as church yard and Garden of Rest
- More uniform signage, with a logo and house-style, well-maintained, contributing a professional appearance of the standard of the National Trust or English Heritage sites.
- Adequate and carefully positioned litter and dog litter bins

- No further encroachment on the landscape by inappropriate new building in surrounding properties, or by high buildings on the perimeter
- No further sports-type recreational installations
- No further vehicular access
- A planned and extensive archaeological survey of the Abbey Fields, beginning with a resistivity survey which volunteers from the K.H.A.S. are being trained to carry out. This would identify areas of special interest such as the conduit, drains, precinct walls, and gateways. More expensive ground-penetrating radar could then be used to investigate these features further
- An ecological survey of the area to determine whether there are plant and animal species that need special protection
- A management programme to assess and replace elderly trees with suitable species
- A policy of not planting trees on the north side of the brook and lake, where archaeological remains may lie, at least until the surveys above have been undertaken.
- Unrestricted entry to visitors, except where safety considerations must deny access
- No charge for access, except for use of the swimming baths, tennis courts and bowling green
- Raised public awareness. This includes installation of signposts 'To the Abbey' at the Castle and in the town, and the use of promotional literature. Guided tours of the Abbey-Castle-Church Trail could be offered, although past experience is that initial success does not lead to sustained public demand
- Greater publicity to organisations about Guided Tours. K.H.A.S. fulfills many requests from Societies and Conference organisers for guides to The Barn, the Abbey ruins and the Millennium Trail. The Barn should be the focal point for tours
- Greater involvement of the community in the care of Abbey Fields. The Friends of Abbey Fields are already contributing to this.

Conservation Policies

- Improve the bio-diversity of the area. The Friends of Abbey Fields are doing this through activities such as restoring hedgerow fragments, planting native bulbs and wild flowers in appropriate patches, and through the provision of bird and bat boxes
- Improve the landscape by restoration of a former dividing hedgerow
- Use of web-sites. Material can be submitted to the W.D.C. site, the Kenilworth Town Council site and two excellent private sites. A site solely for Abbey Fields would require an annual maintenance fee, although hosting or sponsoring agreements could be sought
- Improved facilities for car parking. The car park needs a smoother surface which can be marked out so that there is optimum use of the available space. Grasscrete blocks would reduce the compacting weight of a hard surface and could be used to mark parking bays. The counsel of perfection not to compact the surface in case of archaeological remains below must be tempered by some realism here. An assessment of the mechanics of loading by surfaces and cars might even remove the fear of compaction. The difficult entrance between two lime trees restricts the size of vehicles that can enter the car park
- More policing of the ruins in the evenings to prevent vandalism to stonework. An alternative would be to fix back dislodged stones with a stronger mortar, with advance agreement with English Heritage. A ranger service does not seem necessary at present. It would divert funds from structural maintenance or volunteers from more rewarding interaction with the public as guides for the Barn or the site
- Installation of CCTV on the Swimming Baths, directed northwards, should be considered to protect the The Barn door and the Play Area

4.2. POLICY FOR THE ABBEY RUINS

The policy is to prevent further deterioration, to ensure that what remains is maintained to the highest possible safety standards, and to enhance our understanding of the ruins.

The following measures should be considered, particularly to ensure that decay and destruction does not continue to overtake efforts to preserve the ruins:

- Install railings round the west end of the nave and the parlour. Fencing is necessary to deter people from climbing up and severely damaging the vulnerable walls. Railings would also provide a fenced-off boundary to the Garden of Rest, giving some security to visitors there. Although fences are a challenge to the more adventurous visitors, they do engender a feeling of limitation to running riot. If fencing is too expensive, hedging could be considered but would be visually obstructive
- Bury the parlour walls and western processional steps until they can be adequately protected
- Remove the effigy of Prior Robert Salle in the north transept, and possibly the gargoyle as well, to The Barn in order to prevent their further deterioration. Replace them by fibre-glass replicas. Alternatively, a holograph or other photographic record should be prepared and lodged in The Barn. The effigy is important, having been identified from the manuscript of John Strecche, a striking example of the union of history and archaeology
- Mark the position and outline of some major features of the Abbey, as was done for the Chapter House. The descriptive plaques now in place round the site are an important step forward in giving it meaning, and indicating the dimensions of the Abbey Church

Section Four

- Uncover and consolidate some additional structures. A start could be made with the south-east corner of the cloisters, to demonstrate their extent
- Cover the excavation of the cloisters with a thick layer of armoured glass so that the public could see it and walk over it. If mounted as a man-hole cover, it could be unlocked and lifted for cleaning as necessary
- Excavate the Chapter House floor after the cloisters. Since the site has been repeatedly, and often inexpertly, uncovered in the past, this could form a training exercise for student archaeologists
- Allow the Chapter House wall to deteriorate gracefully, adorned with a protective mantle of ivy to remind visitors of the Victorian taste for the romantic ruin. Alternatively, reduce it to a safe height. The Chapter House wall is of value in being one of the few surviving structures above ground which help to indicate the position of the east range of the cloisters. It has, however, lost all its ornamental stonework and its ashlar facing, and is merely a rubble core which attracts climbers. Its mortar is deficient in lime content and the wall is likely to be unstable. The protective railings give it an aura of importance
- Promote the north cloister lapidary wall so that it receives better recognition as a source for architectural study
- Provide protection to the west doorway of St Nicholas' Church, which is a splendid array of Romanesque material from the Abbey
- Foster a greater input from a qualified strategic body like English Heritage, which has the experience of protecting its own ruins. Indeed, one solution would be for English Heritage, who administer nearby Kenilworth Castle, to adopt the ruins and apply its experience to their conservation

4.3. POLICY FOR THE BARN AND ITS MUSEUM

The policy is to protect and maintain the structure of The Barn, and to make it into the focal point for educational activities for the whole Abbey Fields site.

The following measures would promote the aims of this policy:

- Open The Barn more frequently in the summer months (it is too cold and damp during the winter, unless an augmented electricity supply could be installed)
- Retain free admission. A charge seems undesirable: visitors give quite generously to the donations box
- Find out what the public wants by extending the existing visitors' book to a suggestions book. A report on a survey of the opinions of visitors to the Barn was made by Marion Spendlove of Warwick University during 2001: visitors wanted more opening and better advertising, a marked trail through the ruins, a seated discussion area, and more 'hands-on' interest for children
- The Abbey Interpretation Scheme's free leaflet is very informative and much appreciated. Supplies should be maintained in libraries, Kenilworth Connection, and distributed to Schools, who should also be told about the website, www.kenilworthabbey.org
- Provide access to the upper floor for the disabled by means of a chairlift
- Replace spoil up against the north wall by a wide French drain up to the nearest burials. This would be a continuation of work to reduce the damp atmosphere. Diversion of the rainwater drain at the north-east corner has already been carried out.
- Improve light and ventilation by unblocking the upper east window. This would require strengthening of the lintel in the crude timber framing, and would result in the loss of some exhibition space
- Reconstruct the south-east annexe, lost about 1900, and possibly the external staircase to the upper floor. This would provide extra storage space, but is an ambitious proposal

Conservation Policies

4.4. POLICY FOR THE GATEHOUSE

The policy for the Gatehouse is to maintain the fabric in good condition and to give the public greater access.

This policy, and any consequent practical measure, has to provide a solution to the problem of ingress of water from the roof. Even with a bituminous flat surface, water runs into the stone walls. The following measures would address this policy:

- Reconstruct the upper storey with a pitched roof, as still exists at the Augustinian Maxstoke Priory in Warwickshire. This would be the ultimate solution to the problem of ingress of water from the roof
- Alternatively, cover the flat roof with fibre-glass that drains water into integral guttering, sitting on the walls to be visually unobtrusive
- Unblock the north doorway and revert to an opening door which could admit light and air when research is in progress on the stones
- Retain the Gatehouse as a valuable stone store, but enable the public to examine its interior, at least as members of a conducted group. For safety reasons this would only be possible if adequate electric light was installed. This could not be taken from the limited supply to the Barn and a trench would have to be dug from the Swimming Baths, requiring full authorisation from English Heritage and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport
- Increase storage space by restoring the upper floor in the inner north chamber: the corbels survive but the top shelf of the existing storage would have to be removed. The increased accommodation could free some space for access downstairs, although part would be taken up by a stairway or ladder-well

4.5. POLICY FOR FUNDING

The policy is to ensure that funding is sufficient to fulfil the aims and objectives of the Conservation Plan, and to achieve this in a manner that is compatible with essentially free public access to Abbey Fields and the Barn.

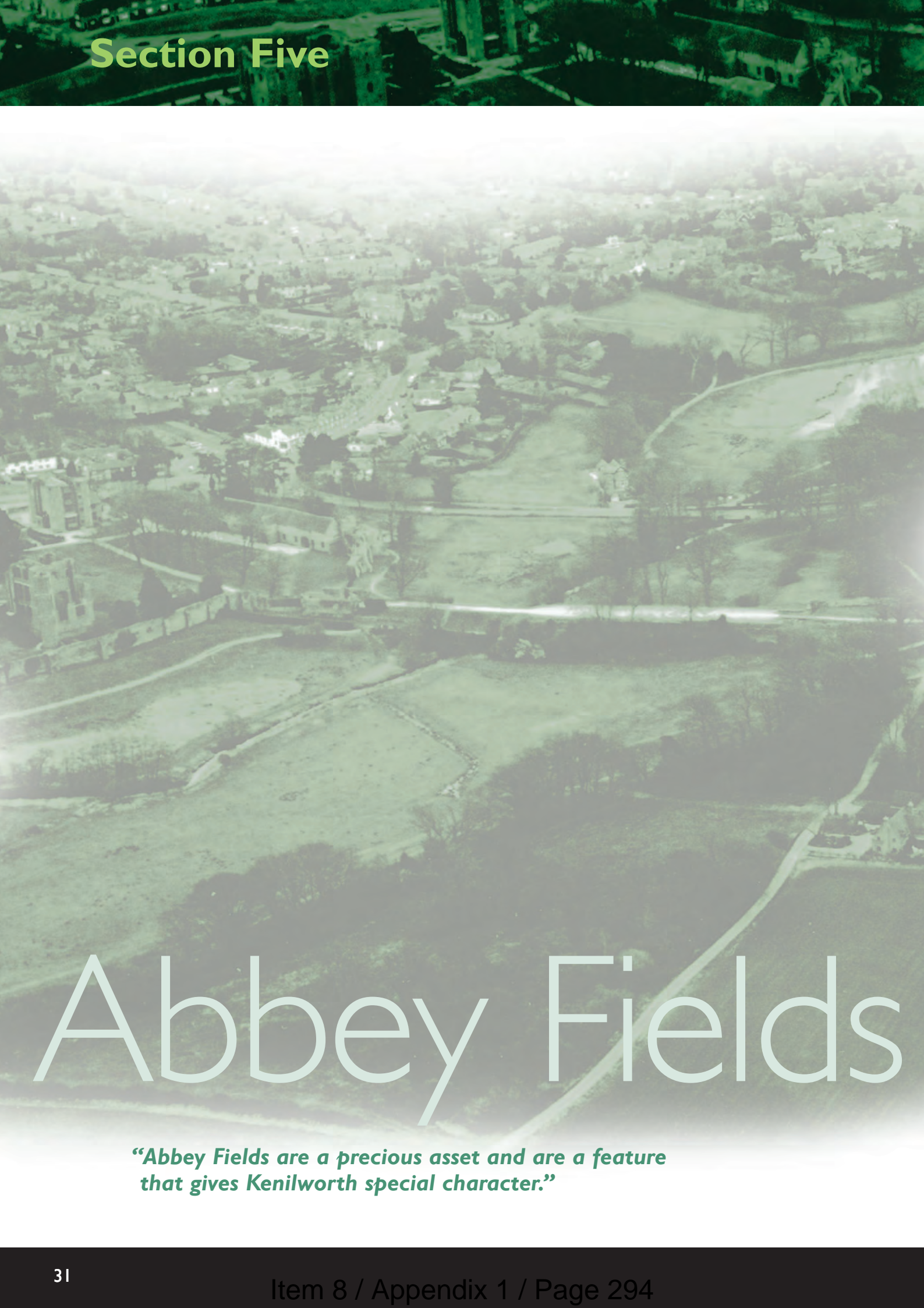
This could be done as follows:

- Voluntary contributions from individual visitors to the Barn
- Charges for conducted parties
- Public appeals, with needs to be advertised through an Internet site
- Maintenance of Abbey Fields, and repair and conservation of the ruins, by Warwick District Council as at present, but preferably under a dedicated budget
- Application to Charitable Trusts for specific projects
- Adoption of the Abbey Ruins by English Heritage



Abbey Fields

“Our vision is one of increased awareness of the heritage value of the site, among people both local and from further afield.”



Abbey Fields

“Abbey Fields are a precious asset and are a feature that gives Kenilworth special character.”

Implementation and Review

5.1. STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee (K.A.A.C.) embodies wide representation of interested parties in Kenilworth, particularly Friends of Abbey Fields who are very much involved in this Plan. Implementation of the Plan by this existing Committee would obviate the duplication and dilution of effort which would be inevitable if an additional separate organisation were to be set up. Although conceived in response to a need to protect the built remains of the Abbey, the K.A.A.C.'s constitution naturally embraces the whole Abbey site, now acknowledged as including the Abbey Fields by the scheduling of the whole area as an Ancient Monument. The constitution, as shown below, also has the flexibility to allow the responsibility of implementation to be undertaken effectively.

After endorsement by interested parties, the K.A.A.C. would assess the priorities for action and identify projects and potential funding.

Extract from the Constitution of the K.A.A.C.

Aims. To advance Kenilworth Abbey as a tourist attraction, with emphasis on the general setting; to cultivate Kenilworth Abbey as an educational facility; to encourage and assist Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society (K.H.A.S) in promoting the use of The Barn and Gatehouse as a public asset; to promote the maintenance of the fabric of the Gatehouse, The Barn and the Abbey ruins to an appropriate standard; to manage such funding as becomes available through grants and other sources.

Composition. W.D.C. two Officers; Kenilworth Town Council two Members; Parochial Church Council two Members; K.H.A.S. two Members; The Kenilworth Society two Members; Friends of Abbey Fields two Members; Kenilworth Schools, or other local educational institutions, two members; the Member of Parliament, an ex-officio member. The composition may from time to time be reviewed, introducing representatives from other organisations and co-opting Members to meet particular requirements.

Funding. The Committee may raise funds in any way appropriate.

Annual Meeting. An Annual Meeting will be held in January or February: it shall be open to anyone who wishes to attend, a notice being placed in such places where the Town Council advertises its meetings.

5.2. REVIEW

This Plan will remain under review by the K.A.A.C. at its regular meetings and reconsidered in the light of its use, or of unforeseen changes occurring to the site. Interested parties or individuals in Kenilworth are invited to contribute new ideas at any time to the K.A.A.C.

Section Six

6.1 PLANS AND POLICIES

Legal Status

The site of the whole of Abbey Fields, including the Abbey ruins, has now been designated as Scheduled Ancient Monument 35115. The law imposes severe restrictions on what the owners, or other person or organisation, can do to a Scheduled Ancient Monument without specific permission. Any change to the fabric and grounds requires Scheduled Monument Consent, unless it is urgently needed in the interests of health and safety. It is an offence to carry out works without consent or to use a metal detector without prior approval. It is also an offence to cause damage to a protected monument. English Heritage act as advisers to the Department of Culture, Media and sport on matters relating to scheduled ancient monuments. In effect their approval is necessary before works can be carried out on the Abbey ruins.

The Finham Brook, which flows west to east across Abbey Fields, has main river status and comes under the jurisdiction of the Environment Agency. Warwick District Council, as riparian owner, is responsible for the maintenance of Finham Brook and the Luzley Brook which joins it in the middle of Abbey Fields.

Local Plans

Warwick District Council has responsibilities as the Planning Authority for the area. In planning terms, the Abbey Fields is extremely sensitive because it is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and is surrounded by listed buildings. At the same time it provides leisure facilities and tourist attractions. To quote the Kenilworth Inset Plan of 1989, "The Abbey Fields are a central and attractive feature of the Kenilworth Conservation Area. They are subject to pressures for recreational use." All the Warwick District Council's Local Plans have therefore included proposals to manage the use of Abbey Fields and to preserve and enhance the best features.

Policy OS1 of the 1989 Inset Plan provided a framework for future development. It defined the area of Abbey Fields shown on the Proposals Map as part of the Area of Restraint along Finham Brook and divided it into sections, each with its own sub-policy, as follows:

- Area 1: to be retained for informal recreation
- Area 2: to be the only area within Abbey Fields for formal recreation; the existing facilities (swimming pool, tennis courts, bowling green) to be retained; further development to be limited to additional play equipment.
- Area 3: to be subject to a project to restore and preserve those ruins of the Churchyard and Abbey which remain above ground.
- Area 4: to be flooded permanently and retained as a landscape feature only, with no active use.
- Area 5: to be retained as a permanent car park and re-laid and landscaped in a manner appropriate to its sensitive location.

Under Policy OS3 the Council would ensure that a landscaped footpath link was developed from Abbey Fields to the Common.

Policy OS2 sought to promote information and understanding of Abbey Fields as a whole. It stated that an Interpretation Plan would be drawn up, and that this would include provision for interpretation panels and specially designed pedestrian signposts.

The Kenilworth Local Plan replaced the 1989 Inset Plan in 1995. It differs very little from the Inset Plan with regard to Abbey Fields, but Policy (K) RLI contains a commitment to protecting the open character of the area.

For the Abbey Fields, the above plans have been effective in the sense that they have preserved its natural character. Progress on plans for enhancements has been patchy. The car park has not been re-laid because of the constraints imposed by English Heritage, who have a duty to protect the archaeological remains that lie beneath the surface. On the positive side, the permanent lake is now a well-established and much valued feature of Abbey Fields, and the footpath link to the Common is in place. There are plans to extend this in due course to form a "greenway" from the Castle to Berkswell via the disused Kenilworth/Berkswell railway line.

Consultation Exercise and Draft Management Plan

In 1994 Warwick District carried out a major consultation exercise on Abbey Fields with a view to compiling a long-term policy for its future. Members of the public were invited to complete a questionnaire, and 600 people responded. The results showed that walking was the most popular activity, followed by special events held in Abbey Fields. Swimming was also popular. The best loved features were the brooks, followed by the landscape (including trees and the lake), and the historic ruins. The vast majority of respondents wanted no change, except for the creation of a permanent lake. The survey showed that people appreciated the natural character of Abbey Fields and did not want to see changes that would make it more like a formal park.

Following the consultation exercise the District Council's Amenities Officer submitted a draft plan to the Recreation and Amenities Committee in September 1994. This was underpinned by four main principles:

- Abbey Fields should be maintained and enhanced as a setting for historic Kenilworth
- Abbey Fields should have a natural character
- The history and archaeology of the area should be more evident, and should be the Council's primary concern
- Recreational uses and features should be an important but secondary concern

6.2 OWNERSHIP

History

The Abbey of St Mary owned the "Abbey Fields" from its foundation as a priory in 1119 until its dissolution in 1538. After the Dissolution the Abbey buildings and surrounding land passed into private hands. In 1884 the Kenilworth Local Board purchased the greater part of the present day Abbey Fields for £6000 from the Earl of Clarendon, Frederick Arthur Stanley, and the Earl of Latham. In the same year, "Henry Street, George Marshall Turner and others" gave the land abutting Bridge Street, Rosemary Hill and Abbey Hill to the Churchwardens of the parish of Kenilworth as trustees. Five years later the Kenilworth Local Board bought the site of the Abbey ruins at a cost of £400 from Joseph Holland Burberry (the owner of Montague House in Rosemary Hill), William Evans, John Bagshaw, and George Marshall Turner. In 1894 the Kenilworth Urban District Council replaced the Local Board, and the above mentioned Henry Street became its first Chairman. By 1939 the Council owned almost the whole of the present day Abbey Fields, thanks to two gifts from Gertrude Emily Evans. These were of land adjacent to Forrest Road (made in 1917), and land abutting High Street (made in 1938). The final acquisitions occurred in 1974. In that year Councillor and Mrs H.W. Whiteman donated a small area adjoining their house, Abbotsfield, to Kenilworth Urban District Council. Shortly afterwards, the new Warwick District Council purchased the field next to Little Virginia.

In 1964 the Urban District Council asked the Ministry of Works to accept guardianship of the whole of the Abbey ruins, but the Ministry refused.

Section Six

Current Position

On 1st April 1974 Warwick District Council became the successor authority to the Kenilworth Urban District Council and assumed ownership of the Abbey Fields. Legally the Kenilworth Town Council has no special standing in the matter, except as a statutory consultee on planning applications for Abbey Fields. As the owner Warwick District Council has the prime legal responsibility and duty to maintain the place. Its Property Services business unit is responsible for the upkeep of the Abbey ruins, and its Leisure and Amenities business unit is responsible for managing the open space and landscape. The Planning business unit of Warwick District Council deals with the planning aspects of Abbey Fields.

Most of Abbey Fields is subject to restrictive covenants. In essence they limit its use to "recreational walks and pleasure grounds" and specify that certain areas have to be preserved as natural grassland.

Warwick District Council's by-laws impose further limitations on the use of Abbey Fields. For example, they forbid cycling and the use of motor vehicles.

6.3. THE BARN DEVELOPMENTS (1933-2001)

A Case History of Purposeful Conservation

Very little is known of the early history of the Barn except that in a survey after the Dissolution it was regarded as a suitable place to let to a farmer¹ (.. and the house there meyt and convenent lest for a farmer) and that in the 19th century it was used for housing cattle². It was acquired by the Local Board in 1884 and used for storage.

The last excavations of the Abbey, 1890 and 1922, produced a wealth of stone-work. In 1933, under the patronage of Sir John Siddeley, the future first Lord Kenilworth, the Friends of Kenilworth Abbey were inaugurated. The aim was for an annual subscription income of £250 to protect the Abbey ruins, improve the churchyard, collect together the scattered fragments of masonry,

and preserve the Norman west door of St Nicholas' Church. By 1935 only £5 remained, so an exhibition of Abbey Material was opened in the Old Barn on Saturdays and Sundays, with a small entry charge. By March 1940, there was a shortfall of £27, and the committee seemed to have discharged itself as there were no more minutes beyond that point³: no doubt the war was partly responsible.

The Barn reverted to a Council lumber-store, and it was not until 1970 that the Kenilworth History & Archaeology Society (KHAS) was invited by the KUDC, in its last days, to investigate the building and to catalogue its contents. The KHAS prepared a report for the Council⁴, offering to open the Barn on Sunday afternoons in the summer. As well as many splendid pieces of stone-work, there were some of little immediate interest, and to make room in the Barn it was suggested their burial might be a solution (fortunately not implemented). There was now (1973) reorganisation of local government, and the new owners were the Warwick District Council (WDC): permission to open the building to the public was given, and in 1979 the Barn had a modest electricity supply. With the addition of the KHAS collection of local artefacts representing the tannery, comb and farming industries, the Barn became a casual attraction for visitors to the Abbey Fields over the course of the next 20 years, manned by members of the Society and open free of charge. Wooden replicas of medieval floor tiles were made for the entertainment of younger visitors.

A set-back occurred in 1990 when vandals broke into the Barn and set fire to the door and a chest containing KHAS records, and in 1992 the Barn was accessed through one of the small windows, and six carved sandstone heads were stolen⁵. To encourage school visits, in the early 1990s, the Society made up work-sheets for the artefacts in the Barn, and a number of visits took place until the demands of the National Curriculum curtailed them.

Meanwhile, the Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee was reconstituted, with an immediate objective of re-instating the first floor, lost some centuries previously: installation was completed in October 1994 at a cost of £7,265. The KAAC continued, with the aims of promoting the maintenance of the Abbey remains and their use as a public asset.

The opportunity was now ripe to record the Abbey stone-work that had been held in the Barn, and under Dr Richard Morris (then at Warwick University), a small team of KHAS members started this painstaking recording process. The WDC provided racking in the inner room of the Gatehouse, and gradually the artefacts were recorded and re-housed.

Meanwhile, the WDC Heritage & Arts Manager had been considering the use of the ground floor as an interpretation centre for the Abbey.

A Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) project was planned and submitted by the WDC, involving a partnership between the WDC, the KHAS, and Warwick University. The objectives included raising public awareness of the history of the Abbey, improving public access to the Abbey remains and its collections of materials, and developing a new exhibition and meeting centre at the Barn. The budget cost for the interpretation and visitor centre (The Barn) was £62,800, of a total project cost of £98,980. This was submitted to the HLF in March 1998, and approval was given in that December. Structural defects caused delays to the programme; a small part of the east wall had to be rebuilt, and Warwick University carried out an excavation of the north central floor paving, prior to re-setting, finding the remains of post-holes beneath. New shelving for holding a limited number of better stone sculptures and mouldings has been installed above informative panels adjacent to the walls. Romanesque vaulting ribs have been assembled to form impressive arches and there are also two rebuilt arches of a Romanesque arcade. With a grant from the Warwickshire County Council, the lighting in the upper floor has been improved, and new display boards and cabinets have been acquired.

The arrangement is such that this area can still be used for meetings and receptions.

The new exhibition, manned by the KHAS, was opened just after Easter 2001 on alternate Sunday afternoons. The success of the combined exhibitions has led to volunteers from other local organisations joining the team of stewards, making the Barn more of a community project, and allowing opening every Sunday afternoon from April to September in 2002. Marion Spendlove, a PhD student of Warwick University, has prepared a report⁶ on the public attitude to the Barn during 2001. Her conclusions have been noted for future development. Overall, due partly to the enthusiasm of the Society's stewards, the exhibitions were well received.

H. Sunley, February 2002

References for 6.3:

- 1 Holliday, J.R. 1876, Survey of Kenilworth Castle in the time of Henry VIII, Birmingham Archaeology Society Transactions, 1880, p70.
- 2 Draper, W.H. 1890, On St Mary's Abbey, Kenilworth. Rugby School Natural History Society Report.
- 3 Sunley, H., 1991, The Friends of Kenilworth Abbey and its Surroundings. Kenilworth History, 1991, KHAS.
- 4 Kenilworth History & Archaeology Society, 1975, Kenilworth Abbey, Proposals for the Future of the Barn & its Contents.
- 5 Sunley, H. and Stevens, N. 1995. Kenilworth: the Story of the Abbey. The Pleasaunce Press, London.
- 6 Spendlove, M, 2001. Reaction of the public to visitor attractions in Warwickshire. PhD thesis.

Section Six

6.4 .WARWICKSHIRE HISTORIC BUILDINGS, SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

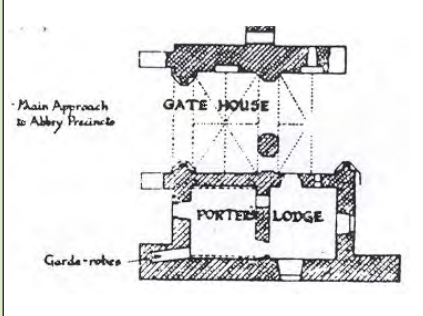

Entries for Abbey Fields

No evidence of pre-Norman archaeology.

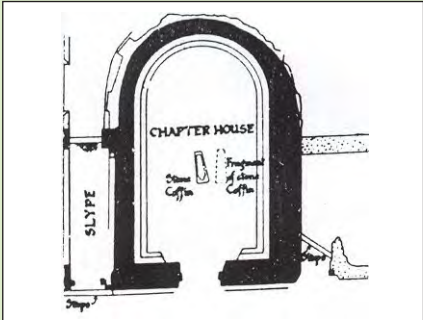

- MWA 3201 St Mary's Abbey: monastery church, bell tower, chapter house, cloister, gatehouse and hospital, precinct wall. GR 28547239
- 3207 Priory mill at site of swimming pool. GR 28507219
- 3219 Church of St Nicholas, with possible precinct wall. GR 28577245
- 3220 Abbey pool, mill, mill pond, watermill. GR 28327228
- 3223 Mound. GR 28287222
- 3268 Little Virginia, Castle Hill. GR 28257230
- 3289 Bakehouse pool, possible mill pond, site of tennis courts. GR 28697229
- 3293 Packsaddle bridge, west of iron footbridge. GR 28467219
- 5384 Site of Abbey church, monastery bell tower, burial, church. GR 28597229
- 5385 Chapter house and cloister. GR 28597229
- 5386 Hospital (infirmary). GR 28597229
- 6007 Abbey Gatehouse. GR 28477236
- 6008 Abbey Guest house (The Barn). GR 28487232
- 8108 Air raid shelter at Rosemary Hill. GR28807209
- 8111 Air raid shelter at Forrest Road. GR 28377198
- 8404 Quarry or building, west of Abbey Gatehouse. GR 28437238
- 9181 Mediaeval buildings (south of baths). GR 28497212
- 9745 Access shaft for Abbey culvert. GR 28307240



Abbey Fields

“Abbey Fields are a precious asset and are a feature that gives Kenilworth special character.”

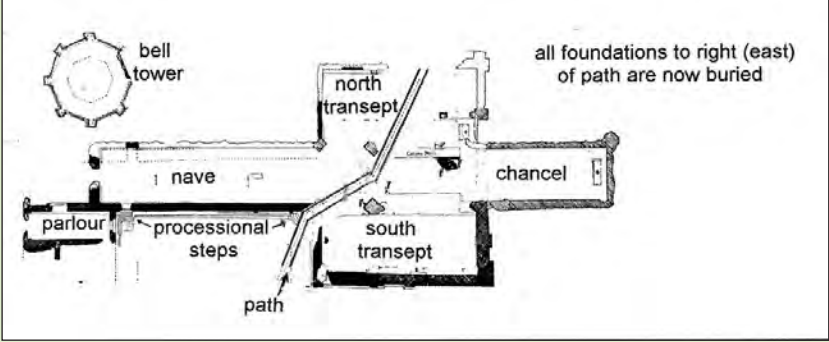
Abbey Fields Conservation Plan: Gazetteer		Gazetteer No. 1
Name: Abbey Gatehouse	Type: Building (incomplete structure)	
Period: Main structure mediaeval, Victorian buttresses, 20th century roof-capping of concrete and pitch		
<p>Plan and Photograph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Right is a plan of the Gatehouse. ● Far right is a view of the south side of the Gatehouse. 		
 		
<p>Current use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The only remains giving a powerful image of the scale and beauty of the Abbey. ● Valuable secure storage for loose stonework from excavations and decaying buildings. ● Open access to the exterior: a plaque gives information to the public. 		
<p>Summary history:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gatehouse in the Abbey walls, formerly restricting access to the monastery. ● Built mid-14th century, product of the turbulence which led many monasteries to look to defences. ● Called Tantarow (1692), now Tantara, said to be noise of bugle call announcing visitors. ● After the Dissolution was used as a dwelling, and during World War I for drying herbs. Now a stone store. 		
<p>Summary description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Entrance formed of two vaulted bays, divided by a wall with separate entrances for carriages and pedestrians. ● Recesses in east wall, with seating. ● To the west is a two-roomed porter's lodge, the inner formerly having an upper floor, with latrines at both levels. ● There may have been a turret for access to a room over the arch, but this room, and the protective pitched roof, no longer exist. ● The present height is 6 metres. ● There is evidence of further buildings on all sides. 		
<p>Significance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Very high. The only ornamented surviving ruin of this Abbey with enough structure and height to show the wealth and magnificence of the monastery to which it belonged. ● Decorative vaulting, rooms, windows, and niches enable its function and history to be deduced by thorough inspection: this is of particular educational significance. 		
<p>Vulnerability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The building lacks a pitched roof and guttering, so the stonework is inevitably damp and spalls, both inside and outside. ● The Victorian buttresses provide climbing ramps for adventurous people, who cause damage by loosening stones. ● The rooms are damp and unsuitable for their storage function. There is no electricity supply and the public cannot safely be admitted to view the interior. Research on the stones stored is hampered by these conditions. 		
<p>Designation: Grade I listed building on site of SAM 35113, Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record 6007.</p>		
<p>Ownership: Warwick District Council</p>		
<p>Management: Warwick District Council</p>		



Section Six

Abbey Fields Conservation Plan: Gazetteer		Gazetteer No. 2
Name: Abbey Chapter House	Type: Building (incomplete structure)	
Period: Mediaeval		
<p>Plan and Photograph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Below is a plan of the Chapter House. Right is a photograph of the south face of the Chapter House ruins, showing the railings installed in 2003. 		
		
<p>Current use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only a length of south wall remains above ground, rising to a height of 4m. The facing is now rubble-work, formerly blind arcading. The arcading has been partly reconstructed, with vaulting ribs, in The Barn Museum, where there is a display of its similarity to Bristol Cathedral Chapter House, formerly an Augustinian (Victorine) Abbey. Its footprint has been marked by lines of scorched grass. 		
<p>Summary history:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Norman structure, with an apsidal east end, changed to five-sided in the 13th century. Tombs of the Founders were located here and in 1417 were recorded by John Strecche as being restored and painted. 		
<p>Summary description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excavation showed it to be 15m long, 8.5m wide. Fallen vaulting rib voussoirs were chevron moulded and painted, mainly red and white. Blind arcading, with pointed arches, decorated the walls, as at Bristol Cathedral. 		
<p>Significance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site of Founders' tombs, and others, one of which is displayed in The Barn Museum. Significant meaning to the ruined wall has been given by the information plaque in the ground and the displays and reconstructions in The Barn. 		
<p>Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The stonework is unimpressive, likely to have lost most of the calcium carbonate in its mortar and be liable to collapse. Warning notices are unsightly. Fencing has deterred climbers and given the ruined wall an aura of importance. 		
<p>Designation: Part of Scheduled Ancient Monument 35113, Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record 5385.</p>		
<p>Ownership: Warwick District Council.</p>		
<p>Management: Warwick District Council</p>		



Abbey Fields Conservation Plan: Gazetteer		Gazetteer No. 3
Name: The Barn	Type: Building in use	
Period: Mediaeval		
<p>Plan and Photograph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Far right, a photograph showing the south aspect of the Barn. ● Right, a photograph showing the arch in the interior west wall. 		
 		
<p>Current use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ground floor used for the Abbey Interpretation Project exhibition, with display of carved and reconstructed stonework from the 1920's excavations, and illustrated information. ● Upper floor used for the local history museum. ● Both floors open during the summer, staffed by volunteers. 		
<p>Summary history:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Said to be Abbey guest house: other possibilities include a workshop for masons. ● Nominally 14th century and essentially complete in its monastic form, but subsequently re-roofed with timbers which have been dated by dendrochronology to the 17th century. ● After the Dissolution it was used as a barn, the upper floor being removed, then as a stone store. ● The upper floor was replaced in 1994 		
<p>Summary description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Built from sandstone ashlar, rectangular and aligned east-west. ● There was an external stairway to a doorway, now blocked, and string courses indicate that this was roofed and ran from an annexe to the south front. ● There is a scratch (mass) dial on the south face and some 300 masons' marks and incised designs. ● The external surfaces of the walls are peppered with shot marks, possibly from a Civil War skirmish. 		
<p>Significance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A rare example at a national level of a medieval monastic building, relatively intact, although adapted to secular use. ● Archaeological research has made it possible to follow its history from construction to modern times and there is potential for further research into the masons' marks, surrounding buried structures and historical records. ● The information board mounted outside and the displays and reconstructions inside, make this a focal point for the interpretation of the Abbey ruins. ● The building also houses the local history museum on the upper floor, which extends visitors' understanding of the area before and after the monastic era. 		
<p>Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spoil from the 1920's excavations has resulted in the ground level on the north side being about a metre higher than that on the south, causing dampness and spalling of the sandstone blocks. ● The restricted electricity supply limits public opening to the summer season. 		
Designation: Grade I listed building on site of SAM 35113, Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record 6008.		
Ownership: Warwick District Council.		
Management: Warwick District Council		

Section Six

Abbey Fields Conservation Plan: Gazetteer		Gazetteer No. 4
Name: The Abbey Church of St Mary	Type: Ruined Buildings	
Period: Mediaeval, with Victorian modifications		
<p>Plan and Photograph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan on the right shows the layout of the Abbey Church of St Mary. 		
		
<p>Current use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A memorial Garden of Rest for St Nicholas' Church and a green area for recreation. 		
<p>Summary history:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built in Norman times, the Church was extended, particularly during the 13th century, as described in the 1422 manuscript by John Strecche, and discovered during excavations. It became ruined after the Dissolution, new walls being constructed within the nave and north transept during the Victorian era 		
<p>Summary description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The aisleless nave is entered through the remains of a 13th century arch reduced to restacked lower jambs. Its north wall was reburied after the 1890 excavation and a new retaining wall built 2m. inside it. Its south wall survives to a height of 2.5m. in the western corner, as far as the processional steps to the cloister. The rest of the south wall has been rebuilt as a modern lapidary wall, ending with the quadrantal eastern processional steps. The north transept has rebuilt walls but represents the area of the Norman transept, with the bases of two columns, and an effigy now identified as Prior Robert Salle. The south transept, choir and chancel are now buried and crossed by paths. To the north west is the base of a bell tower, depicted on the Priory Seal of ca. 1235. 		
<p>Significance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ruins are evidence of a building twice as long as neighbouring St Nicholas' Church and demonstrate the importance of the Abbey church to a community of a maximum of 26 canons. The surviving processional steps are evidence of mediaeval liturgical practice. Six marker plaques have been placed to interpret the structures, whose former magnificence is graphically described in the exhibition now in The Barn. The remaining area of the nave and north transept was appropriately used as a Garden of Rest for the parish church, receiving ashes and memorial slabs until recently. 		
<p>Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The original walls in the south-west corner, bearing some plaster work, are in poor condition and subject to damage by illicit climbing. Some form of enclosure to protect them is essential. 		
<p>Designation: Part of SAM 35113, Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Records 3201 and 5384.</p>		
<p>Ownership: Warwick District Council.</p>		
<p>Management: Warwick District Council</p>		

Abbey Fields Conservation Plan: Gazetteer		Gazetteer No. 5
Name: The Priory Aqueduct and Access Shaft	Type: Buried construction	
Period: Mediaeval		
<p>Plan and Photograph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Right, a map showing supposed line of culvert from Castle Green to the Abbey. ● Far right, a photograph of access shaft. 		
 		
Current use:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● None. Empty of water. 		
Summary history:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A charter of Henry III confirmed that Kenilworth Priory had the right to take water from a source in the vicinity of the Castle and conduct it by any route to the Priory. ● In the early 20th century there were many reports of a secret tunnel between the Castle and the Abbey. Some Kenilworth boys entered this tunnel by lifting a grille covering an access shaft in St Nicholas' churchyard and crawling along for unspecified distances. The shaft was filled with grass mowings and turf has now grown over the grille. ● Fortuitously, in May 2000 a metre deep depression appeared in Abbey Fields 200m west-north-west of the Gatehouse. This was excavated by Dr Stephen Hill of Warwick University and subsequently filled with gravel by Warwick District Council and capped with a patress and manhole cover, which is visible from the path up the hill to High Street. ● In 2001 the Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society commissioned two surveys by Stratascan using ground-penetrating radar: these have identified possible routes for the culvert. 		
Summary description:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The stone-lined unmortared access shaft in Abbey Fields is 4m deep. ● At the bottom is an arched culvert, 1.4m high by 1m wide, running to the east and the west but blocked by debris. ● The shaft could have been for clearing silt from the culvert, or collecting additional water supplies from springs in the hillside. ● It is thought that the water supply would not have been sufficient for a continuous flow through the culvert and that a collecting tank at source, with a sluice for intermittent flow, would have been necessary. 		
Significance:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High. The clean water supply for this Priory has not previously been identified and the construction revealed may contribute to understanding water supply in other monasteries. 		
Vulnerability:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Low. None of the stonework is above ground and the access shaft is capped. 		
Issues:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Searches in the stream adjacent to the Queen and Castle car park may reveal evidence for the collecting tank and sluice gate. Further geophysical surveys are desirable and also excavations along or across the route. Any road works in Castle Hill should be observed closely. 		
Designation: Part of Scheduled Ancient Monument, 35113, Warwickshire Sites & Monuments Record 9745.		
Ownership: Warwick District Council.		
Management: Warwick District Council		

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Abbey Fields Conservation Plan: Gazetteer		Gazetteer No. 6
Name: The Lake	Type: Landscape Feature	
Period: Twentieth century on site of mediaeval original		
Plan and Photograph: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Right, a photograph showing a view of the lake looking west towards Kenilworth Castle. ● Far right, a photograph shows a view of the lake and part of Abbey Fields from the High Street. 		
Current use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leisure and recreational: lakeside walks and skating in winter ● Wildlife habitat for water-loving plants and birds 		
Summary history: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Origins date back to around 1200. Priory is known to have owned a mill in 1210. Lake would have served as a mill pool as well as a source of fish. ● Dam was in the area of modern swimming pool. Original lake extended as far as Castle Farm Sports Centre to the west. Was reduced in size in the middle ages, probably in the thirteenth century, but was still significantly larger than the modern lake. ● Abbey Pool was drained after the Dissolution. It is not shown on the Harding Map of 1628. ● Site of the modern lake is marked as "The Abby Meadow" on the Fish Map of 1692. ● Abbey Meadow became known as the Oxpen Meadow and for virtually all of the twentieth century operated as a water meadow. The land was deliberately flooded in winter, then drained and allowed to revert to damp grassland in summer. ● Flooding/drainage mechanism failed in the 1990s, resulting in Oxpen Meadow remaining under water all year. Warwick District Council undertook a project to create a proper permanent lake. The work was complete by 1997. 		
Summary description: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 300m by 90m artificial lake. Located west of swimming pool and north of Finham Brook. On site "Abbey Pool" as shown on OS map 1925, but smaller than mediaeval pools, both of which extended south of Finham Brook. ● Oval shaped. Shallow with flat bottomed bed and gently sloping edges. ● Fed via sluice and pipe from Finham Brook; through current prevents stagnation. Mechanisms, past and present, that fill and drain the lake are visible along Finham Brook. ● Lake has a natural appearance, with few artificial features. There are very attractive views of it from higher parts of Abbey Fields. In winter Kenilworth Castle can be seen across the lake. ● Marginal aquatics and bog plants grow on the southern, western and northern fringes. ● Tarmac path along southern edge gives the public easy access to the lake at all times of year. 		
Significance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Very high. Lake greatly increases the visual appeal of Abbey Fields. Enhances their importance as a venue for leisure and tourism ● High environmental value. Lake provides wildlife habitats that are uncommon in Warwickshire. 		
Vulnerability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Medium. The lake is vulnerable to pressures to diversify and intensify usage, eg to allow fishing. 		
Designation: On site of SAM 35113, Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record MWA3220		
Ownership: Warwick District Council.		
Management: Warwick District Council		

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Section Six

GLOSSARY OF TERMS, AS USED IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS SITE

Term	Description
Arcade	A line of arches carried on columns.
Augmentation	Court awarding possessions of the Abbey, hence that part of Kenilworth formerly owned by the Abbey.
Ashlar	Stone blocks cut to an even face and square edges.
Blind arcading	Wall arches with no open space beneath.
ca. (circa)	About, referring to an approximate date, e.g. ca. 1500.
Calvary base	Two steps at the base of a cross.
Canons	Ordained priests living in a community.
Chapter house	Room for the daily meeting of canons to discuss business and enforce discipline.
Crossing	Part of church between transepts, nave and chancel, often under a tower.
Dendrochronology	Dating timbers by counting and measuring the annual growth rings of the tree from which they came.
Devensian	The last Ice Age, with cool interludes.
Dissolution	Closure of the Abbey, with confiscation of its property, leading to its destruction.
Fillets	Narrow, flat, moulding, dividing two other forms of moulding.
Floriated	Ornamented with leaf-like and flower-like carving.
Lapidary wall	Wall with an inbuilt collection of ornamented stones from the excavations.
Liassic	Clays, and limestones good for carving, laid down ca. 160 million years ago.
Moulding	Contoured decorative outline to projecting stonework.
Nave	Longest, western arm of the cruciform church.
Ogee	Moulding above a window in a double curve, concave above and convex below.
Order	(of doorway or window). One of its arches, which may be recessed from a main arch.
Parlour	A room, possibly with a fire, in which canons could talk informally.
Permian	Rocks laid down ca. 250 million years ago, including desert sandstones good for building.
Resistivity	Method of detecting buried features by measuring the electrical resistance of soil between two shallow probes.
Restacked with mis-matching profiles	Fallen stones replaced incorrectly, with their mouldings out of alignment.
Ridge and furrow	Method of ploughing land which results in humps separated by troughs allowing drainage (not necessarily mediaeval, or associated with land tenure).
Roll	Cylindrical or convex form of moulding.
Romanesque	Style of Norman building with round arches and characteristic ornamentation.
Scheduled Ancient Monument	Place, or building, of antiquity, on a list prepared by English Heritage, and to which no change can be made without permission of the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport.
Springer	Block of stone from which arises the curve of an arch or vaulting rib.
Tantara	Possibly a gatehouse from which (or to which) the arrival of visitors can be proclaimed by trumpet.
Three-centred arch	Three arcs needed to scribe shape of arch.
Transepts	North and south arms of the crossing in a cruciform church.
Vaulting	An arched stone roof strengthened by ribs converging on a central boss or keystone.
Vousoir	One of several wedge-shaped stone blocks forming an arch.



Fig 6. The Abbey Fields, 1692. (Source Castle Estate Map by James Fish).

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FROM CONCEPT TO PRINT



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