of the remaining village but it is important to note that the whole Court Farm site is a large Scheduled Ancient Monument and to remember that “scheduling is applied only to those archaeological sites which are nationally important....[and] restricted carefully to the most important sites and monuments of each type” 1. Its importance in the historical development and physical layout of the village must therefore be acknowledged.

1 Scheduled Monuments, English Heritage, 1996

2.1 Geology & building materials

The local building stone of Lias rubble was used traditionally with a roughcast finish under thatch, but later dressed Lias with deep beds (deeper than are available today), especially in the outlyers, took over from the late 18th-century along with local clay pantiles and the Bridgwater tile became commonplace for roofs. This was a far cry from the use of lead from the bishops’ own mines for roofs of palace and church 1. Yet photographs show that to 1900 Eastcourt Farm was thatched, to c.1914 Rose Cottage and to c.1920 one medieval farm in the High Street (Yew Tree Farm) remained under thatch. Church Farm lost its thatch in a fire in 1929.

Doulting freestone had a higher purpose, the quarry being in the possession of the Abbots of Glastonbury. At an early date the bishop had access to this fine limestone, with its good carving qualities and it was used for the finest ashlar work (viz medieval work at his Wookey palace). From the 15th-century it was available for quoinns and kneelers, not just in the parish church but in farmhouses (viz Church Farm).

The hard conglomerate from Draycott failed to figure as a building stone, save for the occasional ledger slab and gate piers. For that purpose the 19th century drafted in Pennant which overlays the coalfield. In 1759 there is a documentary reference to a local brick kiln and one wonders if this was the local source of the bricks of the putative date of about 1730 for Mellifont Abbey. Certainly in the 4th quarter of the 18th century local red bricks were synonymous with first class work (East Court). It quickly became usual practice to employ bricks over Lias rubble for window heads, eaves and stacks. But at the other end of the building spectrum cob could still be raised for boundary walls (viz former vicarage/Cerney for a good example of this precious vernacular material). In the 19th century decorative stones became fashionable and today this has devolved to the fashion for displaying poor quality stonework, by discarding roughcast finishes. The 20th century has added colourwashed cement renders and artificial Bath stone quite differently coursed for the housing stock, mostly under concrete tile, and is now seen as largely deprecating the traditional idiom.

1 These important Mendip church roof coverings are in fact at some slight and unnecessary risk because of unnecessarily high insurance premiums.

2.2 Geographic landscape

At 50-100’ above sea level the village settlement lies astride the river Axe and is bounded by the early millstream to the south, at the end of a finger of higher ground projecting down from the Mendips with local, discrete hills on the 100m contour. Of these Ben Knowle looms to the south as a dominant landscape feature.
The River Axe is swift flowing in its course and powered mills, yet still young enough for its natural twists to choke in heavy rain and flood pasture and village, until the flow was supplemented by utilising the medieval moat and tailrace and then adding automatic monitoring.

The settlements of nearby Worth, Yarley, Henton and Bleadney are strung out along the same early millstream as pearls on a necklace on the north side of a 200’ escarpment.

2.3 Medieval development

Although a probable Saxon settlement, the first documentary reference to Wookey is to St Matthew’s church in 1176. In 1224 bishop Jocelin was licensed to take oaks to ‘repair his houses at Wookey’, suggesting a manorial building predating his palace of about 1230. The palace, now Court Farm, survives as 13th & 14th century cloisters adapted and enlarged in about 1500, listed grade II* (one of 6 grade II* houses in Mendip District Council south-west of the Mendips). Perhaps any earlier episcopal buildings should be seen in the context of the bishop’s early, 12th-century deer park to the north at Westbury and to his equally early vineyard at Coxley. The sites of contemporary medieval village houses are unknown, owing to their impermanent form, save for the dean’s demense (see 2.4 below).

The 13th-century palace may well have had a strategic importance in the prosecution of the long-running dispute with the abbey of Glastonbury over their lands and control of the Glastonbury house, 1200 - 1275. This may give credence to the possibility that the site was not just moated but also walled (giving new meaning to the 1557 description of bartons ‘walled about’) 1.

By the early 14th century the bishops had constructed mills on the Axe (including Burcott Mill, in Wookey; first reference to a mill was 1302), requiring an extensive leat and which, perhaps together with the moating of Court Farm, provided a degree of water management for the manor. Such extensive works were unusually early in date and still carry water in much the same manner today.

Whatever the form of the first palace at Wookey, by 1557 Bishop Jocelin’s early 13th-century palace had taken on a gated, quadrangular form with projecting chapel and broad chamber within a moated site of some 5 acres and an outer gatehouse and farmstead (location presently uncertain) within closes totalling in all 17-21 acres (depending on the uncertain easterly extent). Remarkably much of the same land described in the 1544 lease of the manor is intact today protected by Scheduled Monument status 2, with the exception of a second, smaller moat perhaps surrounding a barn (now Abbey Close) and possibly a field named Court Gate (now Glebe Paddock) part of which, if not also farmstead, included the bishop’s rabbit warren. These features are shown on Map 1.

1 Such a fragment of wall inside the filled moat was apparently found in a drainage trench in 1971 (County Sites & Monuments Record).
2 ‘Bishops’ palaces were high status domestic residences providing luxury accommodation for the bishops and lodgings for their large retinues...’ Only some150 such medieval sites have been identified and accordingly ‘All positively identified examples are considered to be nationally importance’ (Scheduled description of Monument no. 27961).
Above: The centrepiece of Mellifont Abbey, c. 1730, sited in the middle of the village. Here brick is used with Lias. 1997.

Left & below: East Court on its prominence and its prospect of the village below. All the foreground of East Court would form part of the Proposed Conservation Area. 1998.
2.4 Late medieval development

Late-medieval houses survive on or near the village High Street: Yew Tree Farm (14/15th cent.\(^1\), listed grade II); the rectory farmstead (surviving as late medieval roofs in Mellifont Abbey, a property first given by the bishop in the 12th century, initially to the dean and then transferred to the sub-dean, out of his manorial lands for the upkeep of the sub-dean’s post); Mellifont Barn (a barn converted from the sub-dean’s farmstead); Church Farm (16th cent.\(^1\), grade II) and burgage plots running north between the High Street and North Road testify to the likelihood of a traditional, planned late medieval or earlier layout of the village as a simple affair lying between 2 roads set north of the floodplain of the river Axe. They also point to the fact that many of these standing buildings were farmsteads until the 20th century, for the most part on the south side of the High Street or north side of North Road (East Court Farm & Rose Cottage 1). To the east the roads swung south to encompass the church and yard and follow the moated manorial site to join a late medieval road on the south side (the present B3139) 2.

\(^1\) Wookey Local History Group vernacular house report by R Gilson, op cit. A New Parish History.
\(^2\) The degree to which such medieval villages were planned has been outlined by R. Leech in Medieval villages in Gloucestershire, CRAGGS, 1980.

2.5 The Georgian estates

In about 1730 Mellifont Abbey (grade II) was enlarged and transformed to a gentleman’s seat on lease as the historic rectory, perhaps by Thomas Piers acting through his cousin who enjoyed a uncertain acquaintance with the Duke of Newcastle, himself in turn being advised by Vanbrugh 1. Whatever its gestation it resulted in a powerful composition which dominates the High Street with local colour and has an architectural importance beyond its locality and list grade II. It is now a residential home for the elderly. By 1794 (datestone) the estate possessed a serpentine bounded garden out of the secondary moat and extensive pleasure ground (now Abbey Close), which can be identified by mature species trees rising in the village centre as it were, yet remaining in the private domain.

This estate was probably followed in date by East Court (Eastcott until 1835), 1773 and listed grade II, nominally out of the village, but enjoying the south slope above North Road and, screened behind by a coppice beyond, interesting appurtenances. Here Lias is consigned to fashionable red brick, with polite stucco for the rear.

Perhaps a decade later comes the third small country estate near the village, Somerleaze (grade II), a Georgian house much enlarged in the late 19th century. Although in St Cuthbert Out parish it looks towards the village behind its tree-screened miniature parkland.

The 17th century saw rebuilding within the burgage plots of the High Street (the row of cottages, now The Ring of Bells PH, and Batch Cottage, listed grade II) and this was compounded by a new vicarage (1807, enlarged 1850, un-listed), with its own estate landscape in miniature to the east of the village, and in 1828 with Church House (grade II) remodelled or built anew. A row of houses backing onto the Axe in Preywater Road, has 18th-century polite architecture alternating with nicely compiled farm-houses (Preybrook House, Preybrook Farm, grade II, and...
Preywater House, grade II). Tenements were set up in Knowle Lane between 1797 and 1827, by the Wookey Friendly Society of Tradesmen 2.

1 Mellifont Abbey, an assessment for planning purposes, 1998, the author.
2 The equivalent club for Henton with its processional regalia survived until after WWII.

2.6 19th-century Wookey

Commencing with a pair of church cottages distinguished by the gift of Gothic windows courtesy of Mellifont Abbey (Lias and brick, 1835, unlisted) and ending with a seemly enough terrace south of the churchyard (St Matthew's Terrace), the real legacy, as elsewhere, was the ability of the Victorian age to create and empower institutions, behind which lay the employment provided by local industries, milling, paper-making and clothing and of course, too, the staple employment, farming. The persistence of half a dozen farmsteads in the village centre until the 1960’s is a guide to the structure of employment and village alike. These farmsteads are now houses, and their outbuildings converted and yards infilled 1. Other local industries in the vicinity did not touch the buildings in the village centre directly.

The institutions gave rise to the present church hall, enlarged 1907 and 1973, and to the village school, established as schoolroom and house in 1840 on land conveyed from rectorial glebe. This was a National school 1844-1875 and became a Board school 1875, by which time it had developed into a well-arranged building group in traditional 19th-century idiom. A playing field was added in the 1970’s to facilitate future expansion. 2 prefabricated units were added on the original site in the 1960’s.

Car parking has been created in part of this area. A 3rd unit was added in 1993, to provide for the local playgroup.

1 According to Hasler & Luker there were some 50 farms in the parish 50 years ago and these, by consolidation of holdings, resulted in some 40 or so dwellings by conversion.

2.7 20th-century: population and housing

It was the second half of the century that had the greatest effect on the village, revealingly a period that commenced with the Town and Country Planning Act of 1948. Before WWII landholdings were only marginally influenced by ownership changes and the creation of tenancies, and development was very limited. Post-war the village has doubled in size (see aerial photo), first with council housing, then with speculative housing and most recently with affordable housing built by association housing and the occasional infill scheme.

The census figures for the whole parish are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Pop.</th>
<th>Houses</th>
<th>Av. Occ.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1042</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1129</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1139</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1322</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The area north of the A371 is excluded, but it includes gains at Fenny Castle. Obviously the figures for the people with learning disabilities at East Court and the elderly at Mellifont Abbey and Wells Nursing Home in Henton will be statistically relevant for occupancy rates and no adjustment has been attempted.

Wookey village has 284 houses/flats in the survey area (excludes the Pheasant triangle and Somerleaze) in 1998, counting East Court and Mellifont Abbey as one household each, compared with only 38 in 1947 (date of the aerial photo, there being 10 council
houses built pre-war on the south side of Knowle Lane, out of shot). A few additional houses have been formed by subdivision, 2 pairs have been made into single houses and 2 houses are barn conversions, over the period 1947-1998. Even with these adjustments this is still over sevenfold increase in house units by new construction since WWII. This is the most alarming and thought provoking statistic about modern Wookey village. Using the average occupancy rate for 1991, the village population would be nearing 800.

There are few buildings currently in commercial use; a garage workshop (Vicarage Lane); one in partial commercial use (workshops at Burcott Mill), 2 licensed premises, a pair of shop units and the post office/general store (High Street) 1.

The census figures show 10% of the parish population was over 75 in 1991, compared with 7% nationally, and 20% was under 16, matching the national figure.

Two growth points have been created; part of High Street, Henley Lane, Glebe Paddock and Church Road to the east and Knowle Lane and the Holmlea area to the west. The density of Chapmans Close and Axe Road are higher than elsewhere at 25 units per hectare, although the High Street burgage plots are this same density, showing that townscape is not dependent on density (Glebe Paddock and Abbey Close are 7 units per hectare; the early Holmlea 18 per hectare). Moreover, the Chapmans Close houses were built partly outside the village fence under the guise of affordable housing.

Was this expansion well managed and what has been the impact? These are important questions for the community given the social problems associated with low cost housing areas and because the Dept. of Transport, Environment & the Regions (DTER) have now directed that all local authorities shall prepare ‘housing strategy documents’. Amongst the consultees to this process will be the parish council. It is vital that guidance is available to them.

1 A general store in Knowle Lane closed, August this year.

2.8 Community buildings and Amenities

The existing community buildings in the study area are:

St Matthew’s parish church - seating for 183, including the Lady Chapel;

Church Hall has a stage, close seating for 110, dancing 100, seating at tables 60;

Community Room - a small room in Buxtons Close with, surprisingly, close seating capacity 60, dancing 54, at tables 24 (Fire Officer’s rating).

Enlarged facilities have been built on to the church hall. It is well patronised by local groups of all kinds most days of the week. A parish office has recently been set up within the building, open two mornings a week. There is no external public notice board and when not in use the hall is kept locked. Parking is very restricted with little more than a turning area available and the site, although central, is not prominent. The last two points are unavoidable facts.

The Community Room is an express provision for the elderly built as a group scheme in 1956 in Buxton’s Close by the former RDC (now Mendip DC). The accommodation is all in flats and single storey houses. One unit has a disabled ramp and a couple have other minor modifications for
the disabled.

This is a development of some pretensions, having been planned as a unified whole, albeit to a restricted budget. The central, 2-storey block is axial and the enclosing single storey dwellings facing the roadway have a dignified and definite character, even if they are not traditional Somerset. Only to the rear, facing the open landscape, does the group fail. The emphasis at present seems to be on further improvements to kitchens and more car spaces, although this is a low priority to the Council. 3 spaces at the rear are under-used, it is thought because of the need to open a gate. Security is considered to be adequate, with street lighting and 24 hr. monitoring.

A community playing field, in the hands of a local committee, is bereft of a pavilion, but now has some children’s play equipment, at least equal to that in a small public open space in the middle of Holmlea. The Recreation Ground Committee are anticipating making a Lottery bid for a new pavilion and two all-weather surfaced tennis courts. There are two clubs: football & hockey. The committee is busy fund-raising. No firm decision has yet been made on the inclusion of a lettable community room. The scheme will need to grasp not just the nettle of a building of distinction, but also the landscape setting if the playing field is to be anything more than backland.

A proposed village hall for the civil parish is being built in Henton, to replace a pre-war hut, despite failure to attract Lottery grant (see below, para. 6.9.5).

Other amenities include a valued post office, combined with general shop (the only post office in the parish). Other shops are a hairdresser and television shop in the High Street. The post office like so many rural post offices may in the future become at risk from rationalisation.

There is a playgroup now operating at Wookey County Primary school.

Formal village communication is by way of a notice board in the High Street (not best placed for study), besides use of the PO window and via the monthly church magazine with the usual monthly diary of events.

Provision for the community to meet in church and church hall appears adequate and works well given the proximity of the two, especially now that the church hall has an improved kitchen. The wider community options to hold meetings, entertain, train and have access to business equipment are clearly limited, with no central facility or focus in the village.

2.9 Flora

A survey has been undertaken, and details are included in appendix 8.1. Although only the product of a survey lasting a few weeks of early summer and only part of the survey area has so far been covered, the results are encouraging. The survey excluded aquatics and trees. A team might take this forward for a minimum of a full year.

A number of margins and green areas have been identified (see Map 2 and appendix 8.1).

2.10 Wildlife

Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC), who have as part of their remit the collection and retrieval of county wildlife records, have supplied details of species in the village centre. Although not well documented as a parish, it should be
noted that the long tailrace at ST54/126 is a County Wildlife Site, as is Ben Knowle Wood to the south of the study area on the slopes of Ben Knowle. The river Axe however has not been surveyed in detail, but the Environment Agency notes fish stocks at Wookey Hole and trout, stone-loach, eel and the protected bullhead (‘Miller’s thumbs’1) throughout the parish. Badger, bats, and otter are all protected species which have been recorded in the study area. Kingfisher, now also protected, is not recorded by SERC, but regular sightings have been made. Some information is considered confidential.

1 P. Hembry quoting William Worcester, 1470

2.11 Water Quality

The Environment Agency have set River Quality Objectives (RQOs). Re2 (2nd of 5 qualities) is the objective for all Wookey village watercourses.

There has been a history of water pollution from the Paper Mill on the Axe (and thus to the millstream, erroneously described as the Lower River Axe on OS maps) and this resulted in several prosecutions. The EC Freshwater Fish Directive standards were exceeded (EA Consultation Report para. 3.12). In 1996 additional water cleaning equipment was installed by the Paper Mill which has cleaned discharges.

Below the bifurcation water is of worse quality than the river. A significant failure is due to elevated levels of unionised ammonia and biochemical oxygen demand, and marginal failure due to elevated levels of total ammonia. Discharges under licence from farms also appear to exceed Re2 standards and these problem discharges are expected to be addressed by means of a containment system (Technical paper by EA is available on this subject). A waste materials recycling operation adjacent would be incompatible with the landscape and water courses and a recent planning application was appropriately refused.

2.12 Roads & Traffic

No traffic count has been attempted for this study. The present speed limits of 40 mph on the B3139 east of Burcott Mill to the Pheasant triangle and 30mph in the village are the results of overtures to County.

A survey of the B3139 was initiated by a parishioner in 1997 and this was taken up by the Parish Council afresh. As a result WS Atkins, as agents for County Highways, are assessing traffic calming measures for the B3139. The priority would appear to be low and measures will take time to arrive. Meanwhile local management of WS Atkins have been able, within existing powers, to re-line to warn drivers of particularly dangerous parts.

It is important that traffic engineers appreciate that the B3139 past the village edge should not be lit as a condition of calming. The night sky is an important character of the village after dusk and this should be appreciated if other street lighting, already in place, were replaced with fittings having less light spillage.

Traffic speeds on the B3139 regularly exceed the 40 limit. Excess speeds on the B3139 are a danger to children walking to school on the narrow pavement immediately beyond the study area, and iron bollards should be erected, with or without rails, to prevent accidental riding on the pavement by vehicles which...
Top: The mill leat looking west, with wildlife corridor to right.

Centre: Rubble stone walls in the village centre.

Right: Inappropriate works to a fine beech, formerly in Mellifont pleasure garden.
could so easily be fatal.

30mph is too high a limit within the village, save for the B3139, given the width of the village highways, their tendency to include blind corners and their use by horseriders. The walls that produce the blind corners are in fact one of the strengths of the village townscape. Compare these for instance with the straight planned roads of the post-war housing schemes, where there is no element of visual surprise.

The resolution of this is not to create a footway, which perforce must unduly narrow the roadway or take away an important boundary, but to treat the roadway as a shared vehicle/pedestrian space between the west end of the High Street and the bungalow at No. 20 Preywater Road.

Of all roads in the village only the High Street suffers from being parked up, although as yet there are no waiting restrictions. This is in fact preferred by the Parish Council, as cars are effectively slowed down.

The narrow part of Church Road still suffers the blight of a road widening line. Widening here would not be desirable for townscape reasons, it would be detrimental to the listed status of the former farmhouse, Church Farm. (see below, Enhancement Schemes 6.9.1 ; Village Green)

Walkers on Henley Lane, which is not restricted until the boundary of development, regularly experience speeding vehicles. The Parish Council has been pressing for traffic calming measures here for some time. Henley Lane may be difficult to regulate and the emphasis might usefully shift to providing a safe footway out of the verge and/or land still owned by the County (south side). It is doubtful that the faint warning strips will affect traffic speed, being a marker of the 30 limit, rather than in advance. (See also para. 6.9.3 below)

2.13 Bridleways and Footpaths

The village is not well served by bridleways. The network provided to the west, where there is an equestrian property, excluded a bridleway when housing development was in train. It is said that there is a loss northwards in Buttice Lane for horseriders (designated as a Road used as Pedestrian Path). This historic holloway may now be too well established as a wildlife habitat and corridor to revert and is very restricted as a bridleway, let alone a RUPP. Given the presence of the parallel Dummis Lane which is also wider, consideration should be given to Dummis Lane being extended eastward at its northern end to join an extended Buttice Lane northwards.

Vicarage Lane is a potential bridleway in private ownership which riders do already use without let or hindrance by the owners. This might be formalised in the future.

Footpaths are moderately well used across fields and recently new kissing gates, some with disabled access provision, have been set up by the County and Mendip DC.

The unsafe footway on B3139 has been mentioned under para. 2.12.

Interestingly, despite the elderly persons’ accommodation in Buxtons Close and the post office frequented by the elderly on foot, nowhere on this route or elsewhere in the village is there a pub-
Redundant buildings of Local Historic Interest.

Top: The c. 1840 barn at Court Farm, 1996

Left: A cider shed at the junction of High Street and North Road. More wirescape at the entry to Butts Lane, 1998