

## SUMMARY

Dr Liv Gibbs (of The Historic Environment Consultancy) was commissioned by Gladedale Homes Ltd in May 2004 to prepare a Conservation Plan for the buildings and areas on the land owned by Gladedale at the former Royal Ordnance Depot at Weedon Bec, Northamptonshire, namely the Storehouse Enclosure and the land and buildings on it immediately to its west, extending as far as but not including the Magazine Enclosure which is in separate ownership and use. A Conservation Plan seeks to understand how a site has developed through time, assesses the cultural significance of that site and its component parts and elements (in a detailed Gazetteer summarised in the Report), then identifies ways in which those significances are vulnerable to harm and recommends conservation policies to retain and recover cultural significance and character.

A Royal Ordnance Depot was constructed at Weedon Bec (on land which had hitherto been farmed) between 1804 and 1816 to designs by Captain Pilkington (Commanding Royal Engineer for the site). It comprised a Storehouse Enclosure (containing eight storehouses) and a Magazine Enclosure (with four gunpowder magazines and traverses) served by a specially constructed branch canal (Ordnance Canal) from the Grand Junction Canal as well as by road. Civil Officers' Houses, a Horse Artillery Establishment (barracks and hospital) and Residences for Workmen were also built as part of the complex. The original intention to construct a Board of Ordnance small-arms manufactory at the site was abandoned in 1807.

The Weedon Depot was a unique planned, military-industrial complex, complete with its own defensible transport system and surrounding walls, there having been no other directly comparable site. Of the Depot's original component parts, the Storehouse Enclosure, Magazine Enclosure (not in the Conservation Plan Area), their buildings and a section of the Ordnance Canal survive today. These demonstrate exceptionally well the strategic decision taken in 1802 to create the first major Board of Ordnance Establishment to be built far inland in a central location, where it was well connected by canal and road. It was intended to receive efficiently, store securely, and dispatch promptly muskets, field ordnance and gunpowder to wherever they were needed in an emergency, principally to counter an expected invasion by Napoleon but also potentially civil unrest. *As a group*, the surviving original components of the Storehouse Enclosure and its buildings and spaces have been assessed in this Conservation Plan as being of level A (exceptional) significance. So too have Storehouses B1-8 as a group and the fine vistas from the East and West Portcullis Buildings along the Ordnance Canal and canal-side within the Storehouse Enclosure. *Individually*, the surviving original component parts and elements of the Storehouse Enclosure, its buildings and the Ordnance Canal have been assessed as being of level B (considerable) significance, as have views from the gateway in the Storehouse Enclosure's end walls eastwards and westwards across the Enclosure's lower land past the fine, three-storey rear elevations of the southern row of storehouses. So too have been the views out of the Storehouse Enclosure from the walkways of the bastions, and views northwards from Farthingstone Road across the valley towards the Storehouse Enclosure. All the surviving original component parts of the Depot and their buildings are listed Grade II\*, but the site is not in a Conservation Area and it contains no Scheduled Monuments.

The Depot was completed and fully stocked with its intended complement of stores in 1816 – a year after the war with France came to an end with the defeat of Napoleon. It had already served its intended purpose in supplying weapons even whilst it was being constructed (e.g. for the expeditionary force sent to the Netherlands in 1809). Weedon continued to operate as a storage

depot for small arms for the following 150 years, with more buildings and extensions (assessed as level C (some) significance, and level D (little) significance, neutral significance or intrusive) constructed to facilitate the receiving and issuing of increasing quantities of weapons in the context of subsequent wars, but its role was never as central to national security as when it had been constructed. For a limited period the southern row of storehouses served as infantry barrack accommodation (1837 to *c.* 1853) and two storehouses were adapted to serve as a military prison (B7 contained the cells whilst B5 contained accommodation for prison staff and facilities, 1844-70), but little physical evidence survives to demonstrate these uses.

As it enters the twenty-first century the Conservation Plan Area faces two principal issues. First, some of the original highly significant component parts and elements are in poor condition and at risk of loss – the walls of the Storehouse Enclosure itself and its bastions, the walls of the Ordnance Canal and basin, and the West Portcullis Building B66 are on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register, whilst there is known to be dry rot in some of the storehouses (B3, B6 and B8) and the *portes-cochères* of Storehouses B2, 4, 6 and 8 are in poor structural condition. All the buildings in the Conservation Plan Area need to be cared for through an appropriate regime of regular inspection and survey, preventative maintenance and prompt repair following best conservation practice and paying careful attention to detail. Second, the buildings and areas within the Conservation Plan Area are in need of viable uses which satisfy the needs of the users and the requirements of building regulations whilst respecting the buildings and areas' integrity, character and significances as well as key vistas and views within, to and from the site. Adaptation of the significant historic buildings (e.g. the treatment of external openings, the need for internal subdivision) to suit an existing or proposed use will need to respect significances and character, whilst new building will need to achieve a high standard of design appropriate to its context.