Flitton Conservation Area

Introduction

This document is one of a series of revised conservation area appraisals in Mid Bedfordshire. Flitton Conservation Area was designated in March 1972 and no review has been undertaken since. The setting, character and appearance of Flitton are considered separately. This will enable Development Control to determine whether proposals for Flitton preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area and/or its setting. Areas in need of enhancement are also identified.
Setting

The village of Flitton lies on the southern bank of the River Flit, between Flitwick, 2 miles to the west, and Silsoe, approximately 1.5 miles to the east. This small freestanding settlement is located on the road running along the wide and shallow valley of the Flit, situated just above the flood plain, where the greensand measures meet the alluvium of the valley.

Looking south from the churchyard with the landscape setting beyond the Church Hall

The landscape setting of the river valley directly abuts the conservation area on its western and northern sides. This direct relationship of the valley side village and its landscape is an essential characteristic of its setting.

Character

Flitton has evolved from being a hamlet centred on the compact but substantial medieval Church of St John the Baptist, a cluster of vernacular cottages and an inn, and a handful of scattered cottages at its extremities. It is mentioned in the Domesday Book as being owned by the De Grey family.

The Church of St John the Baptist

Brook Lane and Church Lane meet on the north side of the churchyard whilst the doglegged Cobbett Lane joins the southern arm of the High Street.

The golden brown sandstone church with its striking tower acts as a pivot to the routes within the village, and the termination of views within the conservation area and from points along the river valley.

The conservation area is largely homogenous in character and encompasses the historic core of the village, including the High Street, which makes a right angled bend at the church.

Appearance

The dominant material at the centre of the conservation area is the iron stone of the church and the retaining wall of the churchyard. Some vernacular cottages are timber framed, with rendered finish, frames sometimes expressed and roofs thatched, with eyebrow dormers in some cases. In isolated cases ancillary buildings are timber framed, clad in weather-boarding. Two local bricks—soft mellow cream/red and a harder gault brick—are employed on later buildings.
Brook Lane including the church

This is the traditional focal point of the village; it is also the focus of the community with the parish church; the former White Hart Inn, dating from the 17th century, possibly with earlier origins. Adjacent to the White Hart is the Church Hall with a gault brick front. These focal buildings are supplemented by the telephone box (K6 type), pedestal letter box and community notice board. A bus stop is situated outside the church in the High Street and the modest war memorial faces the intersection from its elevated position in the churchyard.

Undoubtedly the most significant building in the village is the Parish Church of St John the Baptist. This building dating primarily from the 15th century is constructed in golden brown sandstone in irregular courses of rubble. The battlemented tower is a significant landmark viewed from many points in the conservation area, the Flit valley and selected points in the village. The De Grey Mausoleum is a rendered battlemented extension to the east end. The churchyard is elevated above Brook Lane and is retained by a sandstone wall. There are a number of gravestones, especially on the southern side dating from the 17th century onwards.

Brook Lane viewed from churchyard

Brook Lane opens at the intersection with the High Street, and could be enhanced with surface improvements and management. The lane has no separate pavement along most of its length, giving it an informal shared surface character. The former White Hart Inn, whilst being compromised by unsympathetic additions to the side and rear, nevertheless plays an important role in the townscapes of this part of the village. The gable end of the inn forms a termination of the view from the southern approach along the High Street. The building also forms a pinch point in Brook Lane with the wall of the churchyard, framing views from north and south.

The gable end of the Church Hall provides a termination of the view along the High Street from the east. The street elevation along Brook Lane northwards to ‘The Barn’, encloses the churchyard from the west and is an attractive ensemble of long, low, narrow thatched buildings typical of the timber frame vernacular.

Church Lane

Church Lane is enclosed by tall hedges on the back edge of the narrow carriageway, for most of its length, as it descends gently towards Church Farm. These hedges give the lane a soft green character, allowing glimpses of houses mostly set back in their plots.

At its westernmost end, Church Lane forms the northern boundary of the elevated churchyard, but even at this point the hedges extend to the junction with Brook Lane. The substantial form of the mainly 17th century White House stands at right angles to the lane and hence acts as a pivotal building enclosing the corner of the churchyard and creating a pinch point.

On the northern side of Church Lane stand four houses dating from the 1960’s or 70’s, with low pitched pyramidal roofs and central chimneys. Similarly, on the south side of the lane, other recent houses of the 1990’s in a more neo vernacular style, provide street continuity and do not detract from the character of the lane.

There is also a short terrace of Victorian cottages in gault brick with low pitched slate roofs. The former post office further east, now rendered on its front and with replacement windows also dates from this period.

Church Lane terminates at the gates of Church Farm, again a group of Victorian buildings in gault brick along the alignment of the lane.
Opposite the former post office are two modern bungalows. Whilst these do not preserve or enhance the conservation area, they are included within the conservation area boundary to safeguard the hedge frontage.

Looking westward on ascending Church Lane, the thatch roof with eyebrow dormers of the cottage known as 'The Barn' effectively terminates the view.

**High Street south of the Church**

The sharp corner of the High Street is enclosed by the tall hedgerow enclosing the land on the western side of the Old Vicarage. The hedge is in poor condition but is crucial in enclosing the southern boundary centred on the churchyard. A mature pine tree within the hedgerow terminates the view south along Brook Lane and looking north up the High Street, where it frames the view of the church tower. Although this key corner site is neglected at present, it is essential that the verdant boundary is preserved and maintained.

The western side of the High Street consists of a hedgerow and fields offering wide views of the Flit Valley. On the opposite side of the road, the two sets of 'chelten' style houses do not contribute positively to the character of the conservation area, nevertheless their boundary treatment consists of local ironstone rubble and some hedge screening.

![The view along the southern approach to the village is terminated by the Church Tower](image)

South of the junction with Cobbett Lane, the conservation area extends to include the elegant Victorian double-fronted Orchard House, retaining its original window frames. The fine oak tree adjacent to the south west corner of this property makes a significant contribution to the streetscape and appearance of the conservation area. The substantial neo-classical house recently completed on the northern side of Orchard House compliments it in scale and footprint.

Cobbett Lane is an interesting cranked back lane. The view from the High Street is terminated by a low, timber framed thatched cottage with characteristic Bedfordshire eyebrow dormers. One side of the lane has a utilitarian character with a former coach-house or barn supplemented by garages. The other side of the lane has been infilled recently with houses, some standing on the back edge of the lane. Beyond the southernmost building, (a Victorian cottage), the lane is terminated by a gate beyond which is a track across open fields, bounded by a hedgerow and trees.

**High Street east of the Church**

This section of the High Street is more densely developed than the southern arm, it has a greater variety of buildings from the late medieval period to the present, and is more enclosed. The street has a slightly sinuous curving alignment deflecting and revealing views as one moves along. Trees, hedges and boundary walls maintain continuity and punctuate the street scene. Directly south of the church, is the Old Vicarage. This long building has been subdivided and extended over time. It stands above a metre above street level and back from the High Street, behind a well detailed red brick wall and a hedgerow enhanced by Hornbeam and five Yew trees.

Opposite the building is the eastern end of the church with the De Grey Mausoleum as a slightly awkward addition. The eastern boundary of the churchyard is marked by a narrow sunken path, with brick retaining walls at either side.

![High Street from the east with the view terminated by the Church Hall](image)

Immediately to the east of the church and Mausoleum, lying well back from the road is no.23, a rendered, early 19th century house which does not detract from the appearance of the conservation area.

As in Brook Lane and Church Lane, the High Street has a handful of Victorian artisan cottages in gault brick with low pitched slate roofs. A more substantial Victorian house is noted at no.29 which proudly announces its date of construction 1868, on its gable. This is also of gault brick but with a steeper pitched roof. The range of outhouses on the angled side boundary, reflect those on the opposite side of the road. These utilitarian structures contribute to the character of the street, providing a pinch point and a contrast to the set backs of many of the houses. The plot alignments being diagonal to the line of the street are a feature of this part of the High Street.

Opposite these houses is no.44, a 1½ storey cottage, rendered, with eyebrow dormers. The alignment again follows the diagonal property lines. This, and the next two cottages, form a group of vernacular buildings: no.42 is a two storey cottage, rendered, with its gable end on the back edge of the street, forming a pinch point in the High Street. The third of this ensemble is of modest scale with its long axis parallel with the street.

On the north side of the High Street, two cottages frame the entrance to the conservation area and the view to the church tower. no.37 has been altered and extended at various times, using the local palette of materials. The elegant wrought iron railings on the corner of the property is a valuable asset. no.41 is a timber framed thatched cottage, single storey with rooms in the roofspace.
Enhancement

Generally, Flitton Conservation Area is well maintained, the enhancement of the character and appearance of a conservation area can be defined as a reinforcement of the qualities providing the special interest which warranted designation. Firstly, it may be through the sympathetic development of sites identified in the detailed analysis as opportunity or neutral sites. Secondly, enhancement may involve positive physical proposals or thirdly, by the consistent application of positive, sensitive and detailed development control over extensions and alterations.

Areas which warrant special consideration are marked on the conservation area plan and are:

- The forecourt of the former White Hart Inn and the adjacent forecourt of the Church Hall, including the area around the telephone box.

The forecourts of the former inn and the Church Hall require enhancement in this key location

- The sensitive reuse of the former White Hart Inn, including the demolition of inappropriate single storey extensions and sympathetic reinstatement of the elevations.

General Conservation Area Guidance

To maintain the distinctive character of Flitton Conservation Area it will be necessary to:

1. Retain Listed Buildings and Buildings of Local Interest. There will be a strong presumption against the demolition of such buildings unless there is a clear justification for doing so, for instance being beyond repair. Where possible other buildings which make a positive contribution to the conservation area should also be retained. If any of the above buildings become vacant efforts should be made to find a beneficial reuse.

2. Ensure that new development positively contributes to the setting of Listed Buildings and the character and appearance of the conservation area in terms of siting, footprint, mass, scale, design and materials used.


4. Seek to retain important boundary walls and hedgerows where they positively contribute to the character and appearance of the area particularly in terms of frontage boundary treatments.

5. Where necessary, retain trees within the conservation area and ensure that where new development is permitted, proper consideration is given to tree planting and appropriate landscape treatment.

6. Ensure the protection of significant landscape spaces with a presumption against new development.