



Ampthill Conservation Area

Introduction

27 April 2005

A conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. This document is one of a series of revised conservation area appraisals in Mid Bedfordshire. Ampthill Conservation Area was designated on 4th November 1970 and reviewed on 26th August 1977. The character, appearance and setting of Ampthill Conservation Area are considered separately. This will enable Development Control to determine whether proposals preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. Areas in need of enhancement are also identified

Setting

Amphill Conservation Area centres around the Market Place which lies in a natural hollow where Church Street, Dunstable Street, Bedford Street and Woburn Street converge and probably accounts for the way in which Amphill developed around the Market Place as opposed to around the Parish Church of St Andrew's. To arrive at the town centre it is therefore necessary to pass over natural high points in the landscape.

The setting to this conservation area is primarily defined by the 'parkland' character as seen from Bedford Street and Woburn Street. The trees occupying these routes into Amphill give the conservation area a landscape setting on these approaches.

The entrance from the north is most dramatic as the conservation area is reached following a steep climb up the greensand ridge and the view from the brow of the hill down into the town is extremely striking. When approaching from Maulden to the east, the setting is almost as dramatic with a view of the parish church on the horizon across an area of rough grazing land. From the west, the combination of parkland trees and picturesque roadside estate cottages gives a strong pastoral character remarkable considering the proximity to the town centre. Whilst this is diminished slightly by the development on the south side of Woburn Street, the focussed vista along the straight road remains strong.

Only from the south is the setting less clearly defined. From this direction the ground gradually rises and C20, then C19 buildings are passed on the way towards the more historic buildings in the centre.

Character

Amphill has a high quality townscape owing significantly to the concentration of many fine historic buildings. The limited palette of building materials, and particularly the dominance of red brick as a walling material and clay tiles for roofs helps bind the character of the town together.

The character of its conservation area may be described as having a number of constituent parts which range from the commercial heart of the town to Amphill Park and the Victorian/Edwardian properties which are located on routes into the town. Hence, Amphill is not simply a 'Georgian market town'.

The most distinctive aspect of the town's character is the contrast between the open landscape and the compact nature of the historic core. The latter serves not only to funnel pedestrian and vehicular traffic down towards Market Place but also channels views towards the centre including the clock tower. Two pinch points (shown on the map overleaf) restrict movement and views and contribute to the historic character. The topography means that long vistas are achieved from the brow of a number high points and large mature parkland trees give a backcloth to many parts of the town. In addition, trees on Church Hill and Rectory Lane contribute to important long views across the town, whilst trees behind properties on Dunstable Street and Church Street are viewed through carriage arches and gaps between buildings.

At either end of Church Street there are two well defined areas: the Market Place and the 'close' in front of the Parish Church. These, together with, the properties between these points contribute to the town's historic core. The influence of the market is noted by the quality and scale of the town's oldest buildings which surround it. Along the streets, especially on the south side of the market, there remain a number of carriage arches, which lead to rear yards which are still being actively used (see map) and are an essential part of the town's character.

Appearance

Bedford Street

Bedford Street runs in a northerly direction from the Market Place towards Bedford. The buildings lining the road become less frequent as the ground rises and gives way to woodland within Amphill Park and on Church Hill.



Clock Tower - No.2 Bedford Street

At its south end, the street is neatly introduced by a fine building of 1852 in Jacobean style which incorporates the wooden town clock of c1700. The majority of buildings at the south end of the street are either C18 or C19. The red brick walls and clay tiled roofs, together with the modest scale of the buildings set the tone for much of the traditional buildings along the street.

Notable exceptions are: i) Ingles Butchers on the east side which has painted brickwork, slate roof and a very good C18 shopfront replete with meat-hooks and ii) the appropriately-named Emporium which is three storeys, C19 and of gault brick. Looking back towards Market Place, the vista is enclosed by two and a half and three-storey buildings at the end of Church Street.

Continuing north along the west side of Bedford Street is the Old Fire Engine House of 1902 which is gable-end onto the street adjacent to which is a modern housing development with archway through to a parking area. The rest of the west side is neatly lined by groups of predominantly two storey C18 and C19 houses with clay tiled roofs. The Prince of Wales PH is of similar age and is L-shaped. The main range is at right angles to the road and is viewed across an open car park with terraced garden beyond. North of the pub is a good C19 row of eight cottages in gault brick with red brick dressings, and beyond this a single C17 house of refaced timber frame then two very attractive groups of three and seven 1840s Duke of Bedford cottages with prominent gables and diamond-paned casement windows. The latter are beyond the entrance to Swaffield Close, a modern development of detached houses. Beyond this entrance are converted Victorian school buildings.

These are set against the fine backcloth of mature trees on the hill beyond.

The east side of the street lacks the architectural and townscape quality of the west and includes a supermarket, converted cinema, car parking and a petrol filling station. There is potential for significant enhancement of this area. Behind the supermarket, a large wall to the demolished brewery and a belt of trees beyond adds some interest. The traditional narrow plot widths and the tight, enclosed nature of the street are missing. Heading up the hill is a mixture of houses including a barn-style dwelling, modern house, late C19 houses and interwar houses and chalet bungalows. These sit behind front gardens and although not of the architectural quality of the west side of the street, the materials used in their construction help them sit happily with their neighbours.

The views through to grazing land and trees on Church Hill and along the footpath to Rectory Lane provide a pleasing backcloth. Just north of these is a cottage ornee with painted brick walls and a thatched roof (Holly Walk Cottage). This cottage and its attractive setting contribute positively to the appearance of the conservation area.

Brewery Lane

This steep, narrow lane rises from Bedford Street onto Park Hill. Houses form the south side of the lane whilst the north side has a modern brick wall low enough to allow views over and towards the Prince of Wales PH, car park and gardens.

The houses on the south side are a mix of C17-19 cottages mostly red brick but with some rendered and painted and with tiled and slate roofs. Nos.2 and 3 have some timber framing and the cottages follow the incline of the hill forming an interesting townscape. Some of the cottages are gable end onto the street whilst nos.4 and 5 are a pair of early C19 cottages on a spur off the lane.

Outside no.1, pebble paving survives and this should be retained bearing in mind that the main part of the lane is covered in tarmac. A more appropriate surface treatment would enhance the appearance of the Lane.

Park Street

Just like Brewery Lane, Park Street rises from Bedford Street onto Park Hill. Whilst it lacks the historic buildings of the former, and is wide enough to allow parked cars, it is still an intimate and interesting street. The buildings are a mixture of mostly late C19 and early C20 short rows of houses. Many have been affected by minor alterations, though nos.25 and 27 are an unaltered pair of C19 houses with chequerboard red and gault brick walls and a pyramidal slate roof with large central chimney stack. Each house has a latticework porch. Unlike most parts of the town, the walling materials are quite varied with a mixture of red brick, gault brick, render and painted brickwork whilst the roofs are a mixture of clay tiles, slate and modern concrete tiles. The yard and buildings next to no.14 offer an opportunity for enhancement

Looking west, the view up the street is poorly terminated by a dishevelled traffic island with a lantern-type streetlight and a series of garages beyond. The view east is more appealing with a fine prospect over the rooftops of the



Nos.25 and 27 Park Street

town. Foulislea, the Old Court House and the fine trees in the garden of no.20 Church Street stand out as positive landmarks, however, the angular roof and overall design of the Budgens Supermarket is less noteworthy in the foreground and is included in an area where enhancement is to be encouraged.

Park Hill

Park Hill is more an area than a street. It includes the hill from Woburn Street to Brewery Lane and incorporates an area of housing sandwiched between central Ampthill and Ampthill Park. The backcloth of trees together with the rising ground and haphazard spacing of houses along narrow paths gives the area great charm.

The majority of the buildings are two storey C19 houses usually in pairs or small rows. Red or gault brick or painted brickwork or rendered walls with slate or clay tiled roofs are the predominant building materials. Nos.38-45 are the main exception which is a staggered group of 1970s brick and timber clad houses with concrete tiled roofs. The finest building is the Old Police House which is a big three-bay house with a central door and a good red brick garden wall which sits prominently on the hill and is regarded as a Building of Local Interest.

Although several of the properties have suffered incremental changes, this is less noticeable here than in more formal streets and adds to the eclectic character of this part of the conservation area. There are several paths into the woodlands from which there interesting views over the area and town beyond. The traffic island in front of the old police station and the garage block and adjacent small industrial buildings offer the major scope for enhancement in the area. Chapel Lane runs from Park Hill onto Woburn Street. Right on the corner, no.1 is C18 and has good iron railings around the front (both the house and railings are grade II listed)

Woburn Street

The western part of the street is very straight with large mature parkland trees on its north side. The fencing that forms the southern boundary of Ampthill Park is identified as an area of enhancement. The south side of the street is outside the conservation area and largely comprises modern houses and civic buildings set back on flat, relatively low-lying ground.

Moving towards the centre of town, the first house on the north side (no.57) is an unusual C18 cottage with a large segmental dormer in a clay tiled roof. Beyond a set-back 1950s house is a group of attractive thatched, timber framed cottages all built in the second decade of the C19. Most have red brick nogging and semi-circular dormers and were built as estate cottages for the Earl of Ossory. This is a very fine and picturesque group which sits behind picket fences and hedges.



Properties on Woburn Street

At the bottom of Park Hill is a Bedford Estate house of 1850 in brick and with a tiled roof set back from the road. A single storey former estate building forms an L-shape with this building and meets Woburn Street gable end on. Beyond this stands a weatherboarded barn, a house of similar character to no 57 and then a C17 / C18 thatched row, with a large external chimney stack on the east gable. These all sit on the footpath edge.



Vista towards War Memorial

From this point the character becomes more intimate with historic buildings on the footpath edge on both sides of the street. The ground rises to the brow of the hill with C18 buildings on both sides. Those on the north are of red and gault brick and render, those to the south are predominately rendered.

On the brow, on the north side, is no.23 (grade II listed and formerly the Old George Inn) which is C17 and timber framed and of two storeys and attics with a single storey wing. Opposite stands The Queen's Head PH (late C18 and also grade II listed). Down the hill, towards Market Place, the majority of other buildings, on both sides of the street are C18. Most are of red or painted brick though some have stucco render lined like ashlar (no.6) or with imitation quoins (no.11). With the exception of the 19th century buildings, all have tiled roofs. Nos.8 and 10 have carriage arches, whilst no.9 and nos.17 and 19 are of the late C19.

Closer to Market Place are some older buildings of particular interest. No.4 is a C17 building reduced in height, whilst no.2 is also C17 and has two storeys and a semi-basement with a set of steps up to the door. On the opposite side of the road, no.3 (formerly The Old King's Head PH) has some vitrified headers in the brickwork and an old lamp and large wrought-iron bracket for a hanging sign.

The stepping up of the buildings of slightly different scale and style adds great interest and the angled plinths emphasise the slope of the street. To the west the view is of chimneys, gables and dormers adding to the richness of the street. A particular feature of interest outside no.3 are the hooks used previously for tethering sheep on market days. The resin-bound gravel pavements give a suitably soft appearance to the footways. Looking east the taller buildings on the end of Church Street and Dunstable Street enclose the vista with tall trees beyond.

Church Street

Church Street is a street of great quality lined on both sides by a wealth of historic buildings between Market Place and the parish church. The appearance changes at the 'close' in front of the church and further to the east the street runs out into open countryside.

Before entering the conservation area from the east, there is a panoramic view of the church nestled within its well-treed setting. This scene is viewed over the top of St Andrew's Close (built in the 1960's). On entering the conservation area, C18 houses occupy both sides of the road. The north side is marked by nos.38 & 40 and are of painted render and red brick with vitrified headers and a slate roof, whilst no.41 on the south side, is a C19 property of stucco render and a plain tiled roof.



Dynevor house and St Andrews Church

Just before the summit of the hill, on the north side a 'close' leads off Church Street in front of St Andrew's Church. The church is quite modest in scale with ironstone walls and a fine west tower. Its setting however is more than just the attractive churchyard and is enhanced by a pair of quality houses; Dynevor House and Brandreth House and the adjacent Feoffee Almshouses. The restrained but imposing east front of Dynevor House faces the mid C18 façade of Brandreth House, both with fine quality entrance doors. The almshouses form an interesting group of buildings dating from at least the C16 but with a C19 arched entrance. The trees within the garden of Dynevor House spill over the red brick boundary wall and together with the hedge outside no.30 add some greenery to the streetscene. Furthermore, the trees in the vicinity of the church contribute positively to this building's setting. It is noted that the outbuildings previously belonging to nos.20 and 37 Church Street and Dynevor House have been converted to residential. All of these buildings together with the trees contribute to the excellent townscape.

Rectory Lane continues to the north of the church and is an attractive tree-lined lane which leads to the C19 and C20 rectories. On the way is Little Dynevor, a residential conversion of the stable range of Dynevor House, and a very attractive red brick and tiled cottage orne with a miniature dormer.

From the brow of the Church Street hill, there is a striking view towards Market Place and a landmark building in the form of the highly distinctive clock tower to no.2 Bedford Street which encloses this attractive vista.

Generally, the buildings on Church Street around the Market Place are three storey and a number have fine shop windows. Richardson's jewellers occupies the only single storey building in the area and was constructed in 1788-9. This building was previously the Market House and was used primarily by butchers. A number of two storey buildings are located to the east and beyond no.20 on the north side and beyond no.17 on the south side.

Whilst a number of the three storey buildings are constructed in soft orange/red brick there are exceptions including nos.2, 4 and 9 (painted brickwork), no.7 (tile hanging) and Court House (gault brick). Nos.5 & 7, like many of the properties in Church Street have carriage arches and in this particular case the arch entrance leads through to an impressive range of buildings formerly the Honour of Ampthill offices and with the date plaque 1677. Other properties with carriage arches are nos.17 (The Post Office), 20, 25 and 27.

The frontage widths of buildings vary greatly; nos.7 and 11 are single bay, whilst a number of other buildings have multiple bays. Nos.13-15 are a disappointing modern infill whilst no.17 has applied timber framing.

As the ground rises, the buildings become a mixture of one and a half and two storey C17 and C18 properties set on the footpath edge contrasting with grand, mostly C18 houses occasionally of three stories (no 37 and Dynevor House). A number of building are located behind railings (nos 20, 28, 30 and 37) all of which are highly impressive houses built in red brick with fine classical detailing. No.20 is worth noting as the house where Sir Albert Richardson lived between 1919 and 1964. Equally grand is Court

House with its contrasting style (main arcade stood on rusticated basement) and gault brick construction.



No.20 Church Street

Where properties are colour-washed rendered the choice of colour is subdued with grey, cream, pale olive green being used. More strident colours would be out of place in this part and indeed in other parts of the conservation area.

Dunstable Street

Dunstable Street runs almost due south from the Market Square before seamlessly becoming Flitwick Road near the former Workhouse (The Cedars). Until the late 1890s, this marked the southern extent of the built up area of the town.



No.110 Dunstable Street

The majority of the most historic buildings are not surprisingly at the northern end of the street. The first building on the west side of the street with its imposing doorway of Ionic columns sets a suitably grand tone (see photo above). The White Hart Hotel opposite is equally imposing, being three storey with tall, closely spaced sash windows. The tallest buildings are also closest to the market, but none exceed three storeys.

Enhancement

Generally, Ampthill 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 of the area as opportunity or neutral sites. Secondly, it 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 within the conservation area are marked in red on the conservation area plan and are:

- Buildings within and southern boundary to Ampthill Park
- East side of Bedford Street
- Boundary treatment to no.17 Park Hill
- Yards adjoining no.47 Park Hill and adjacent public realm
- Yard adjoining no.14 Park Street
- Resurfacing part of Brewery Lane
- Resurfacing part of Ashburnham Road
- Parking area on north side of Baker Street
- Car park on south side of Woburn Street and resurfacing of Alameda

The following area outside the conservation area also warrants special consideration and is marked in red hatching on the conservation area plan:

- Resurfacing part of Ashburnham Road

General Conservation Area Guidance

To maintain the distinctive character of Ampthill 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 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 the design of new development positively contributes to the setting of listed buildings the character and appearance of the conservation area in terms of siting, mass, scale and materials used.
3. Ensure that house extensions and alterations satisfy the District Council's technical guidance entitled 'House Extensions and Alterations'.
4. Seek to retain important boundary treatments identified within the Conservation Area Appraisal.
5. Ensure that there is a consistent, sensitive approach to the control of shop front design, alterations and signage.
6. 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.
7. Ensure the protection of Ampthill Park and locally important green spaces with a presumption against new development (other than the buildings marked red in Ampthill Park).
8. Seek to ensure appropriate parking is provided in Ampthill.

PLANNING GUIDANCE – APPROVED FOR DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PURPOSES

This document was subject to public consultation between 12 February 2005 and 14 March 2005. Consultation included an advertised exhibition at District Council Offices, Ampthill and entry on the District Council's website.

A full statement of the consultation process is available from the address below.

- This information can be provided in an alternative format or language on request **01767 602493**
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