



# Flitton Conservation Area

## Introduction

18 October 2006

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.

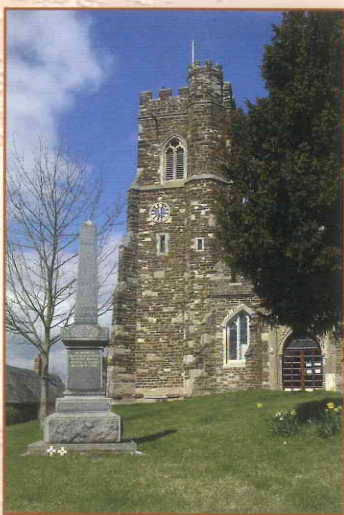


*Looking south from the churchyard with the landscape setting beyond the Church Hall*

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*

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.

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 character is expressed by the use of local materials and built form, giving it local distinctiveness and this has evolved in clear stages from the medieval period to the present day.

A few buildings of the late 17th and 18th centuries show the development from subsistence vernacular to more 'polite' architecture. The 19th century saw more substantial infilling, enlargement and replacement development in the form of one or two large houses, a model or estate farm complex to the north and short terraces of artisan cottages. The 20th century is also represented by replacement and infilling development.

Flitton can claim historical significance beyond its local context through the De Grey Mausoleum, built as an addition to the east end of the Church between 1614 and 1705. The Mausoleum is amongst the largest sepulchral chapels attached to any English church and houses a remarkable sequence of 17 effigies spanning between 1615 and 1899, dedicated to the De Grey family of Wrest Park nearby. Nikolaus Pevsner considered it to be "*one of the greatest storehouses of monuments in England*".

Hedgerows and trees also play their part in establishing the character of the conservation area and in establishing the continuity and enclosure of the streetscape. In some cases the hedges are more formal and 'domestic' in character whilst in other cases they are informal hedgerows relating to the wider countryside. In most cases, the hedges are generally substantial and above eye level. There are also a number of frontage boundary walls.

The character is also derived from the significant contrast between the movement and noise of traffic passing through the High Street and the quieter areas of Brook Lane, Church Lane and Cobbett Lane.

## 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 are thatched, with eyebrow dormers in some cases. In isolated cases ancillary buildings are timber framed, clad in weather-boarding. Two local bricks: a soft mellow cream/red and a harder gault brick are employed on later buildings.










*The High Street showing the range of local materials*





-  Conservation area boundary
-  Listed building
-  Significant curtilage – listed building
-  Building of Local Interest
-  Site where enhancement is to be encouraged
-  Important view
-  Panoramic view

-  Churchyard
-  Significant landscape space
-  Important Hedgerow
-  Important boundary walls
-  Tree of townscape significance
-  Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  Skyline feature



## 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 townscape 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.

Brook Lane from the junction with Church Lane, is more varied, with buildings representing most periods, from the 17th through to the 20th century, with a terrace of two vernacular revival cottages with white painted brickwork and exposed rafters, and a double monopitch house of the 1970's. The materials in the lane range from red and gault brick to render and weatherboarding. The relationship to the street also varies from buildings with their gable ends directly onto the back edge of the highway, to those running parallel to the street either close to the highway or set back.



*Barn conversion - Manor Farm*

sturdy sliding doors, has now been converted to residential use. Looking north up Brook Lane, this area is terminated by a group of Lime trees as the village dissolves and descends into its farmland fringe.

The western boundary of the conservation area running along the rear of properties on the western side of Brook Lane from no.17 to the White Hart Inn is fragmented with the rear of buildings alternating with property boundaries marked by hedgerows and in places by fencing.

## Church Lane



*Church Lane enclosed by hedges on either side but marred by wirescape*

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 'chalet' 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*

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 the 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 about 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*

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.
3. Ensure that house extensions and alterations satisfy the District Council's technical guidance entitled 'Extensions and Alterations: A Design Guide for Householders'.
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.

## PLANNING GUIDANCE – APPROVED FOR DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PURPOSES

This document was subject to public consultation between 10th June 2006 and 21st July 2006. Consultation included an advertised exhibition at Flitton Church Hall 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 **08458 495405**
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