

Sustainable Communities

# Heath and Reach

Conservation area appraisal

Final Draft  
March 2010



A conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. This document is one of a series of up-to-date conservation area character appraisals published by Central Bedfordshire Council.

The purpose of the appraisal is to define which features contribute to the special interest, what is significant and what requires preservation. Opportunities for enhancement are also identified in the appraisal.



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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Heath and Reach Conservation was designated by Bedfordshire County Council in September 1974, and was re-appraised in 1994 and extended in the 1995 South Bedfordshire Local Plan. The designated area presently covers 10.5ha in area.
- 1.2 This document assesses the setting, character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It also identifies opportunities for improving the character of the area. The appraisal is, therefore, the basis for the management of Heath and Reach Conservation Area through the Planning system.

## **2.0 SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The special interest justifies designation of the Heath and Reach Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors, including:
- Small rural village in a countryside setting;
  - Historic settlement first mentioned in the 13<sup>th</sup> century;
  - Linear plan form with main settlement core surrounding the Green, with planned 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century growth to the west along Lane's End. Dispersed settlement to the south;
  - Network of historic footpaths to the west of the settlement;
  - Surviving evidence of farms on the western side of the settlement;
  - Important historic buildings including the 16<sup>th</sup> century Heath Manor House and St Leonard's Church;
  - Distinctive mixture of construction materials including red/buff/blue-black brick, colour washed and painted brick, greensand stone, timber, thatch, plaster, render, clay tile and slate, which combine to give a strong texture to the built environment;

- Strong boundary treatments of local greensand and brick with triangular copings and domestic and agricultural hedging;
- Important groups of trees and individual tree specimens;  
Important views to fields, woodland and open countryside;
- Significant local landmarks, most notably the Heath Green pump house and clock tower.

### **3.0 LOCATION AND SETTING**

Heath and Reach lies approximately one mile north of Leighton Buzzard in rural Bedfordshire, one mile southwest of the A5 trunk road which is a former Roman road, also known as Watling Street. The village is predominately orientated along the north-south route from Leighton Buzzard to the A5 along Leighton Road, Birds Hill and Woburn Road. The settlement comprises what were originally the two separate hamlets of Reach and Heath.

The Leighton Buzzard district is within the eastern half of the drainage basin or catchment area feeding the southern end of the River Ouzel and its south eastern tributaries. Heath and Reach is at the highest point of the Leighton Buzzard district and is dominated by a part of the lower greensand ridge which crosses it. The original surface has been much dissected and easily eroded and there are two southwest to northeast dry valleys which have created an undulating topography, which are particularly prominent to the west of the settlement. The prominent feature in the centre of the parish is a ridge of gault clay running north-south. The area around Heath Green lies on a natural flattish platform cut into the western slope of the north-south gault ridge overlooking a broad dry valley to the west. The location of Heath and Reach has also been shaped by the former heath that was located to the west and north west of the settlement.

Whilst not entirely evident from the village, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen large scale quarrying around the settlement which has impacted on the setting of the village. The lower greensand ridge contains large deposits of silica rich sands which are used in water filtration and industrial applications. The sand has given rise to a large amount of commercial sand quarrying in the parish, including a number of pits still visible in the modern landscape. The prominent gault clay ridge in the centre of the parish running north-south appears more prominent in the landscape following quarrying on either of its sides.

The Conservation Area of Heath and Reach is centered around the former settlement of Heath and includes Leighton Road, from St Leonard's Church to Bird's Hill, the area around Heath Green and Lane's End.



#### **4.0 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

The name of Heath and Reach derives from the two separate settlements of 'Heath' and 'Reach', which were approximately 3/4km apart. The name Heath is first found in the Assize Rolls for Bedfordshire in 1276 as le Hethe. The name is self-explanatory, referring to the sandy heathland landscape that can be found across much of the Parish. Reach is first recorded in the Ramsey Abbey cartulary between 1216 and 1231 as Reche.

The majority of the medieval and post medieval settlement in Heath and Reach was nucleated with little dispersed settlement, laying along or near the north-south route which led from Leighton Buzzard to Watling Street, and separated from the open heathland and woodland to the west from the higher ground to the east.

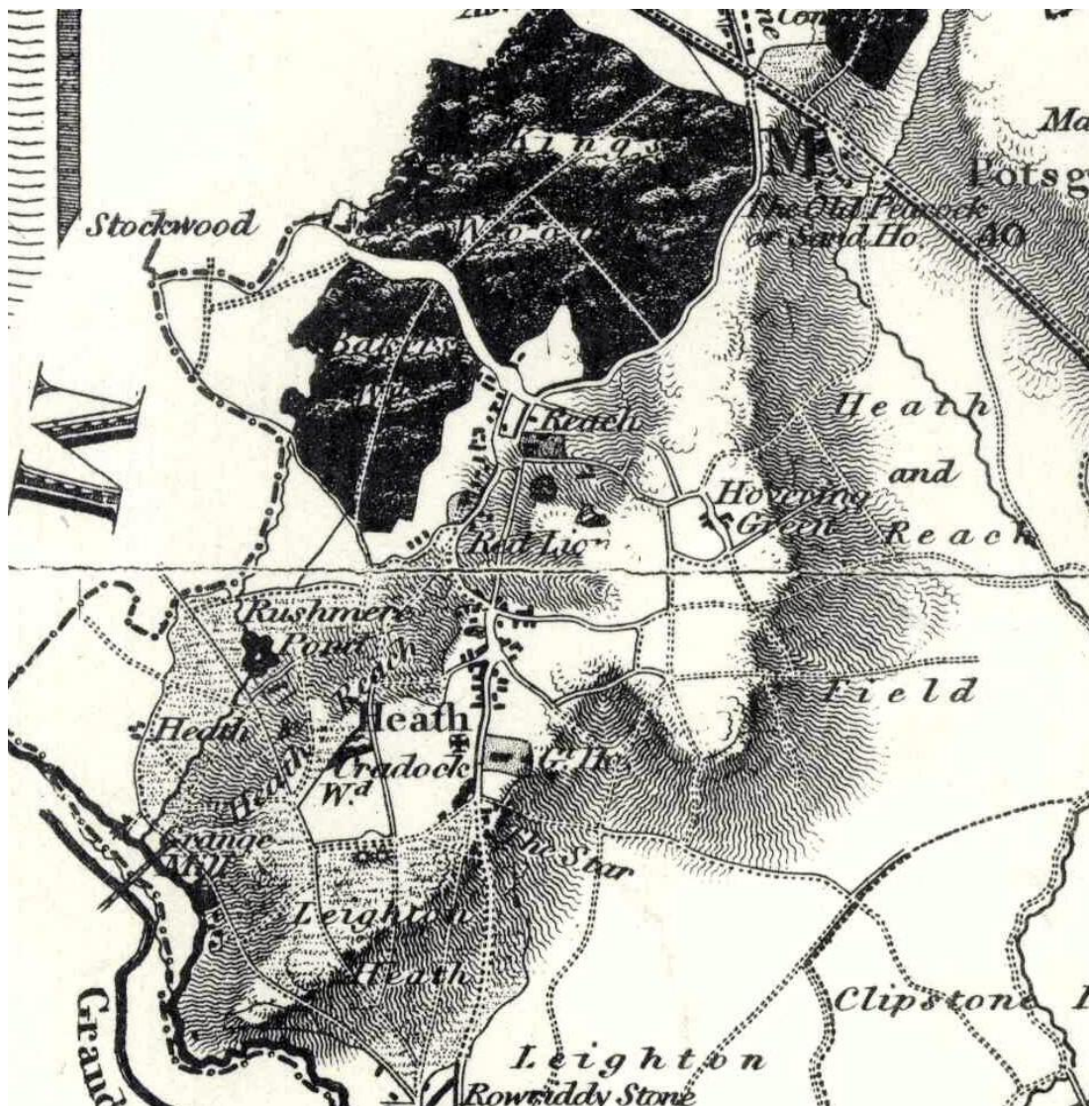
The main focus of each settlement would have been around or close to their Green. At Heath Green the oldest remaining buildings date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and include 3 Leighton Road, 3 Heath Green and 1 Lanes End. The settlement's main economy was agriculture and an open field system was located on the higher quality land to the east, where many former farmstead buildings remain today, including Heath and Reach Farm (now no's 13&15 Leighton Road and the Village Barns) and Heath Farm. Important rights such as pasturing stints were attached to a property that had a direct frontage onto the Green.

To the south of the settlement the main buildings separated from Heath Green are Heath House and St Leonard's Church, which are the oldest remaining buildings in Heath; both with late medieval origins. There was most probably a medieval chapel located to the north of Heath Green which served Heath and Reach. For reasons unknown the chapel was abandoned in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and St Leonard's was constructed. Only the tower remains of the original 16<sup>th</sup> century chapel as the rest was rebuilt in 1828-29 and the chancel added in 1866. St Leonard's was built on private land belonging to the owners of what is now known as Heath Manor House, although never actually a manor.



Although private, the chapel was used by the inhabitants of Heath and Reach. Heath Manor House is a Grade II\* Listed Building with minor 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> alterations to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century core and 17<sup>th</sup> century features.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the settlement had also extended beyond the Green and extended and stretched along the various roads nearby. The process also included encroachment on the edge of the Heath. Several references are made in documents to cottages on the Waste.



Bryant's Map of Heath and Reach 1826

Enclosure of the heath took place in 1841. The land was divided into fields, and new roads and housing plots were created. In 1893 the

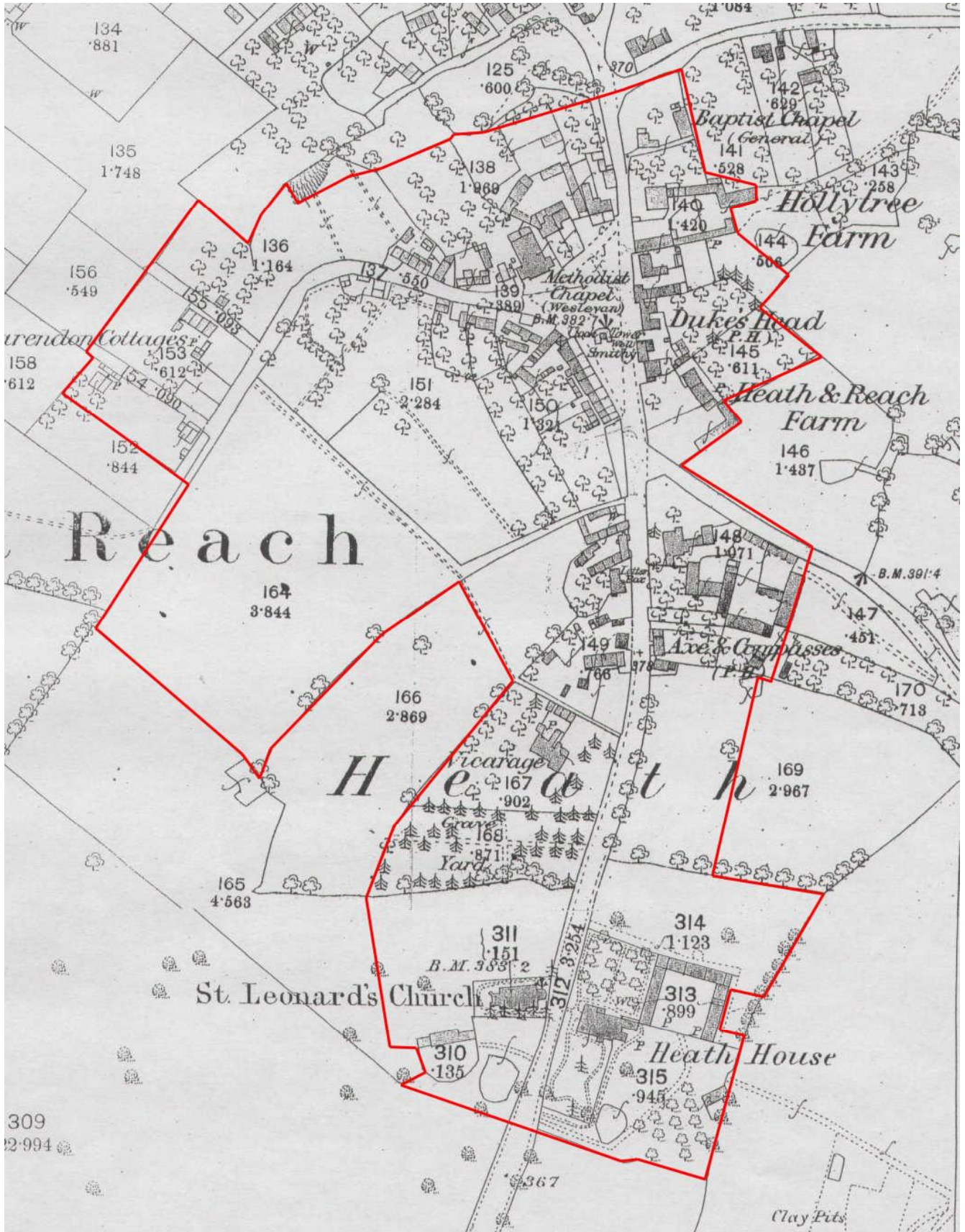
Heath Green pump house and clock tower was constructed in memory of William Abraham.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the population of Heath and Reach doubled from 541 to 1,062 and in response to this four chapels were constructed. In Heath, two Methodist chapels survive around the Green. Evidence at the rear of no.11 Leighton Road suggests that it was the first Methodist chapel built in the settlement.

Since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century there has been infilling along Leighton Road so that 'Heath' and 'Reach' appear as one settlement. At Heath there has been continued residential infilling along parts of Leighton Road and Lane's End. Around 1948 a small new housing estate, laid out formally around a green, was built to the west of Lanes End (Nos 23-67). In the last decade six new houses were constructed at Evans Yard.



### With Conservation Area Boundary



## 5.0 CHARACTER

Heath and Reach Conservation Area is characterised by a varied mix of building types, styles and periods, which range from a late medieval church through to 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century timber framed buildings to 17<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century brick, stone, render, plaster and weather boarded houses, chapels and former farmstead buildings. The Conservation Area is generally fine grained and varied with a mixture of detached and semi-detached buildings, predominantly 1-2 stories in height.

The spatial character of the Conservation Area has been formed by its simple layout and development. This is defined by Leighton Road, which forms the spine of the Conservation Area; the separation of Heath Manor house and St Leonard's Church; the main settlement core surrounding Heath Green and planned 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century growth to the west along Lane's End.

Approaching the Conservation Area from the south, Heath Manor House and St Leonard's Church are separated from the main settlement. Travelling northwards past Wellington House, the settlement proper begins at the Axe and Compass public house with a continuous built up frontage past Eastern Avenue to the Green. The Green Area is the focal point of the Conservation Area surrounded by cottages, houses and former farm buildings to the east. To the north west of the green is Lane's End which also has an active road frontage. It has its own character defined by the small, curving road with two smaller lanes running to the north. Lane's End terminates with a mid twentieth century residential development set around a rectangular green.

Activity levels in the settlement are low with the majority of buildings used for residential purposes. Although there are a number of employment uses including public house, restaurant, general store and car sales, Heath and Reach predominately serves the larger settlement of Leighton Buzzard. Traffic levels are, however, fairly high due to Leighton Road linking Leighton Buzzard to the A5 Trunk Road. Although many agricultural buildings and religious buildings remain in the village the majority of these have been converted to residential use. St Leonard's Church is the only religious building used for its original purpose.

Key views out of the Conservation Area towards the north, south and east give a sense of the rural setting of the settlement. To the north there are also important views to a wooded horizon. Key views within the Conservation Area are made up of terminated views of individual buildings, landmarks and groups of buildings.

Various tree groups play an important part in the character of the Conservation Area. Boundary walls and hedges strongly influence the character of the settlement and make an important contribution to the definition of the roads.

Footpaths also play an important part in the character of the area. Two main footpaths bisect housing on the western side of Leighton Road, converging after 40m and crossing the far end of Lane's End.

## **6.0 APPEARANCE**

Heath and Reach has a wide range of buildings dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century. The palette of materials changes over this period and we can identify distinct building types and phases.

The earliest buildings in Heath and Reach are timber framed. The availability of timber and lack of easily accessible and workable stone in the area meant that timber was predominantly the material of choice for house builders in the medieval period up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Examples of timber framing can be seen at Heath Manor House (16<sup>th</sup> century core), 3 Leighton Road, 3 Heath Green, 7 Heath Green, 1,6, 8-10 Lane's End (17<sup>th</sup> century). Many of the timber framed buildings have replaced their plaster infill panels with brick nogging. A number of dwellings and agricultural buildings are weather boarded.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century, brick took over as the dominant building material. The majority of buildings in Heath and Reach are brick faced but many have been colour washed or painted. There is evidence of brick use prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for example Heath Farm and Heath Manor which were higher status buildings. It is likely that the bricks were produced locally and there are 5 recorded brickfields (also producing clay roof tiles) within three miles of Heath and Reach. Indeed, two brickfields are recorded within Heath and Reach with one operating in 1579.

The majority of brick buildings are constructed in a red brick, with some use of blue/black vitrified brick. Yellow brick is used in the Methodist



Chapel on Heath Green, and to a lesser extent in detailing at the Clock Tower and Pump House and Holly Farm. The majority of the buildings are constructed in a Flemish bond. However, both English Garden Wall and English bond can also be found e.g. Heath Farm.

A number of buildings in the Conservation Area are plastered or rendered. Examples include St Leonard's Church, Axe and Compass, 3 Heath Green (render), 3 Leighton Road, 1 Lane's End (plaster).

The local building stone in Heath and Reach is greensand which is a green/brown stone, the brown being dependent on the amount of iron salts. The limited use of the stone in the Conservation Area is related to the inaccessibility of the workable Lower Greensand, which was not accessible until large scale quarrying started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The use of greensand stone can be seen in a number of residential buildings (Wellington House, no.30 Lane's End and Spinney Farm), the base plinth of the former blacksmiths on Leighton Road, various agricultural buildings at Heath Farm and in a large number of boundary walls.

The types of window used in Heath and Reach are generally dependent on the age and status of the building. Casement windows are generally used in earlier vernacular buildings while sliding sashes are in higher status buildings from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A variety of sash windows can be found in the Conservation area, including: top hung, side hung (Yorkshire sash), round headed and tripartite. Most houses have plain brick window and door arches although there are examples of gauged and stone headers. There are a number of buildings with replacement UPVC windows which is always detrimental to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The traditional roofing materials in Heath and Reach are thatch and plain clay tile. The type of thatch would have traditionally been wheat long straw with a plain ridge. The majority of the thatch is found on 17<sup>th</sup> century timber framed buildings which have a relatively steep pitch to throw the water off. Welsh slate is seen on a number of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, although historically its arrival would have been in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Concrete tile is found on a number of buildings to the detriment of the Conservation Area. The Village Barns are constructed with a clay pantile roof which is not a traditional roofing material in this area.

Heath and Reach also has a number of historic panelled doors, moulded doorcases, back bracketed doorhoods and the remains of

timber shopfronts. There is little street furniture in Heath and Reach which is fitting for a small rural village. There are, however, an agglomeration of telegraph poles and wires which are especially prominent on the Green, which does not help the appearance of the Conservation Area.

Long stretches of walls constructed in greensand or brick with triangular coping are found throughout the Conservation Area, particularly along Leighton Road. These walls provide enclosure and help to define the built form of the Conservation Area, giving strong definition to domestic curtilages, marking gardens, grounds and fields.

### **Settlement South**

The character of this area is one dispersed and separate from the main nucleated settlement. When approaching from the south, the Conservation Area is characterised by a row of mature beech trees through which can be glimpsed Heath Manor House, surrounded by a red brick boundary wall which abuts Leighton Road; to the east of Heath Manor House is Spinney Farm. To the west of Leighton Road is St Leonard's Church. It is obscured to the south by an area of land surrounded by leylandii. This area is overgrown and contains a pond and collapsed building. It is recommended that this area is considered for restoration and enhancement, including the removal of the leylandii hedge. Looking south from the Conservation Area there are important views across fields to open countryside.



**Leighton Road - southern entry into the Conservation Area**



**Overgrown pond area surrounded by leylandii hedgeline - to the south of St Leonard's Church**





**St Leonard's Church viewed from the north**



To the north of St Leonard's Church is its cemetery which has a low domestic style hedge and stone wall boundary, with open views across the cemetery from Leighton Road. The northern area of the cemetery and the boundary with Wellington House has an important group of trees that has some impressive tree specimens, including a cedar, chestnut and wellingtonia. On the eastern side of Leighton Road, to the north of Heath Manor House, is a field rising up to the top of the gault clay ridge. The field is concealed by an overgrown traditional hedge which bounds Leighton Road. On the western side of Leighton Road no.22 Leighton Road has a line of leylandii which in conjunction with the traditional field hedge gives an incongruous sense of enclosure. Management of the traditional hedge and leylandii tree line should therefore be encouraged.



**View of St Leonard's Church cemetery and important tree group/specimens adjacent Wellington House**



### **The Green**

In contrast to Settlement South, The Green area is characterised by a built up frontage. The first buildings to be seen travelling north from St Leonard's cemetery is the Axe and Compass public house and no.25 Leighton Road, which act as gateway buildings leading towards The Green area. From the Axe and Compass there is a modern housing infill (1-6 Evans Yard, No's 7a, 8 and 9 Leighton Road) which have little or no architectural merit. To the east is Eastern Avenue which has important open views towards open countryside and views back towards Town Farm/Village Barns and the Green.



**Heath Green viewed from the north**

Heath Green is the focal point of the Conservation Area and is surrounded by cottages, houses, former farmsteads, former chapels and a restaurant (The Dukes Head). The Heath Green pump house and clock tower is the focal point on the Green, standing alone on a flat part of the Green, drawing the eye on approach from Bird's Hill, Leighton Road and Lane's End. The other landmark is the former Methodist Chapel, which is on the northern edge of the Green and dominates views from the south of the Green

To the east and southeast of the Green there remains evidence of the former farming economy of the area with a number of former farmsteads, including Heath Farm, No's 13 and 15 Leighton Road and Village Barns (formerly Heath and Reach farm) and Holly Farm.





**No's 13 and 15 Leighton Road (formerly the farmhouse to Heath and Reach farm)**

The Green area has a strong sense of enclosure with continued use of greensand stone or brick walling. One of the most notable examples is the brick wall surrounding Heath Farm and Town Farm/Village Barns.



The Green has three buildings with their original 19<sup>th</sup> century shopfronts still attached. No.7 Evans Yard is a former butcher, no.5 Heath Green was in 1927 a general store and No. 3 Leighton Road was a shop and bakehouse. The shopfronts are an historical record of Heath's former economy and their retention is important.



**Heath Farm viewed from Leighton Road**

The Conservation Area continues north along Leighton Road and over the brow of the hill on to Bird's Hill, terminating at Gigs Lane. This part of Leighton Road was subject to a widening scheme in the 1960s, and a raised footway and retaining walls were constructed. The design and materials of the footway and retaining walls has a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It is recommended that this area is considered for enhancement



**Bird's Hill looking south towards Heath Green.**



To the west of Heath Green and south of Lane's End is a field surrounded by traditional hedging, sharing its boundary with a public footpath on its south and western sides. To the south west is another field with open views of countryside to the south. The fields are an important part of the rural character and setting of the Conservation Area.





**View to the south west from public footpath to the rear of Wellington House**

### **The Lane's End**



To the north west of the Green is Lane's End. In contrast to the relatively large Leighton Road and clustered Green, its intimate character is defined by the small road width with no pavement, and buildings set close to or abutting the road. The boundary treatment is strong with brick, stone and hedging defining the plots. As you approach the curve in the road there is a terminating view of No.18 Lane's End. In this area the boundaries begin to be dominated by domestic hedging that carries on through to the end of Lane's End.



**No's 8 and 10 Lane's End**





**View of no. 18 Lane's End**

To the north of Lane's End are two small, unmade roads, which terminate at the edge of a ridge, with land falling away to the north. The lanes appear to have been deliberately planned following enclosure in 1841 with plots laid out for residential use; a number of 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages can be found here. The higher ground of the ridge enables good views of open countryside and woods beyond (Stockgrove Country Park).



**Distant views of Stockgrove Country Park from Lane's End**



## Village West

No's 23-67 Lane's End is a fine example of postwar County Architect designed housing. The development was built circa 1948 and encompass an informal mixture of attractive detached and semi-detached neo-vernacular dwellings which are constructed in brick and clay tile, formally laid out houses around a rectangular green with four chestnut trees. This area is well designed with a pleasing uniformity of style, attractive hedgerows and generous gardens.



**View of No's 51- 57 Lane's End and green area**

## **7.0 Boundary Changes**

7.1 The following amendment of the conservation area boundaries is shown on the management map (p.23):

1. Inclusion of the field to the west of Wellington House and St Leonard's cemetery and to the southeast of Lane's End.

Reason:

The field is an incongruous gap in the Conservation Area that should have been included in the Conservation Area revision in 1994 when the western end of Lane's End was included in the Conservation Area. The field forms an important part of the rural character of the Conservation Area.

2. Inclusion of the field to the east of Town Farm Village Barns and enlargement of the field to the south of the Axe and Compass public house, to include additional land in the rear curtilage of Heath Farm and the Axe and Compass.

Reason:

The existing boundary in this location is an anomaly which fails to use the natural boundaries and topography of the area. The proposed area is an integral part of the rural character of the Conservation Area.

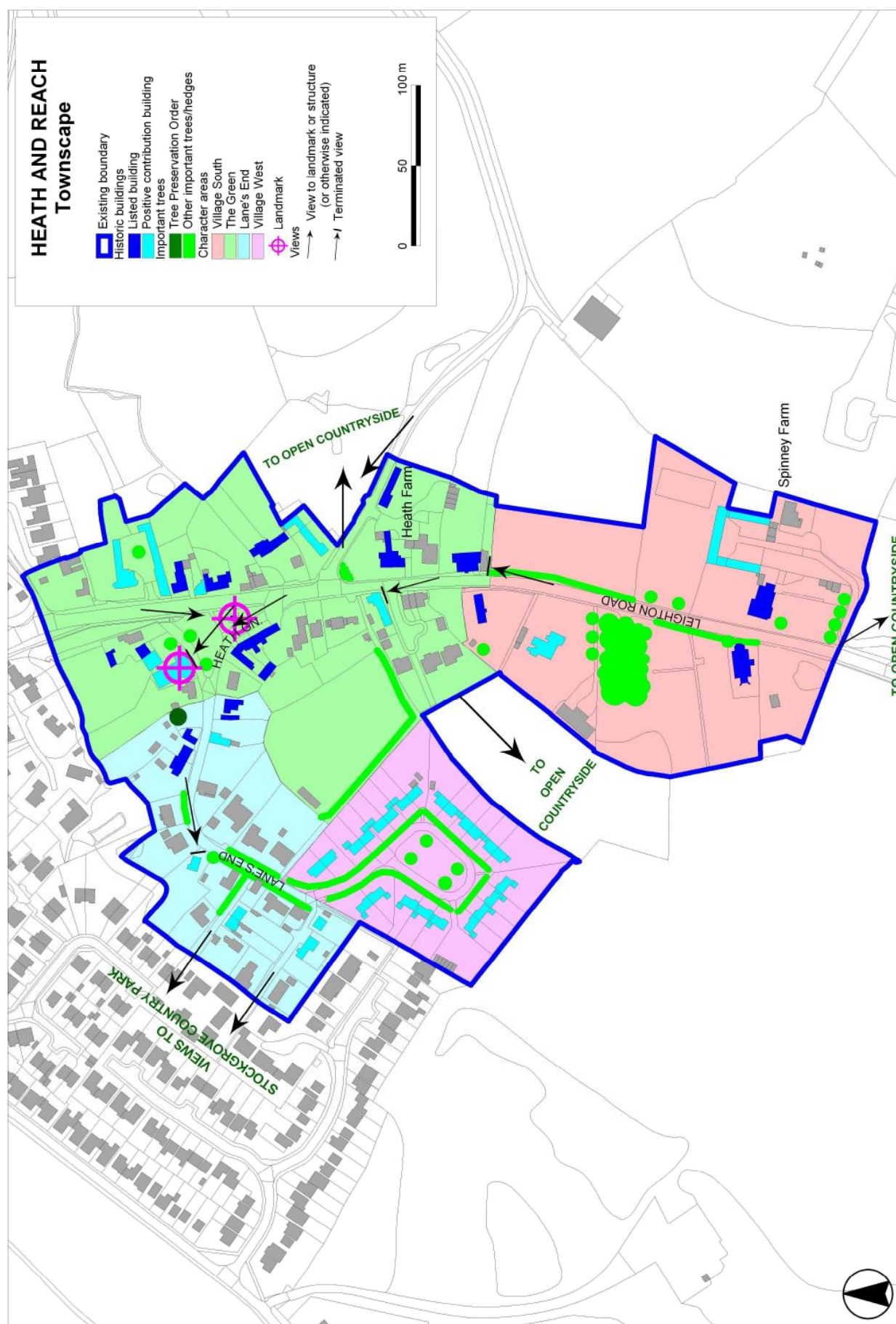
## **8.0 Opportunities for enhancement**

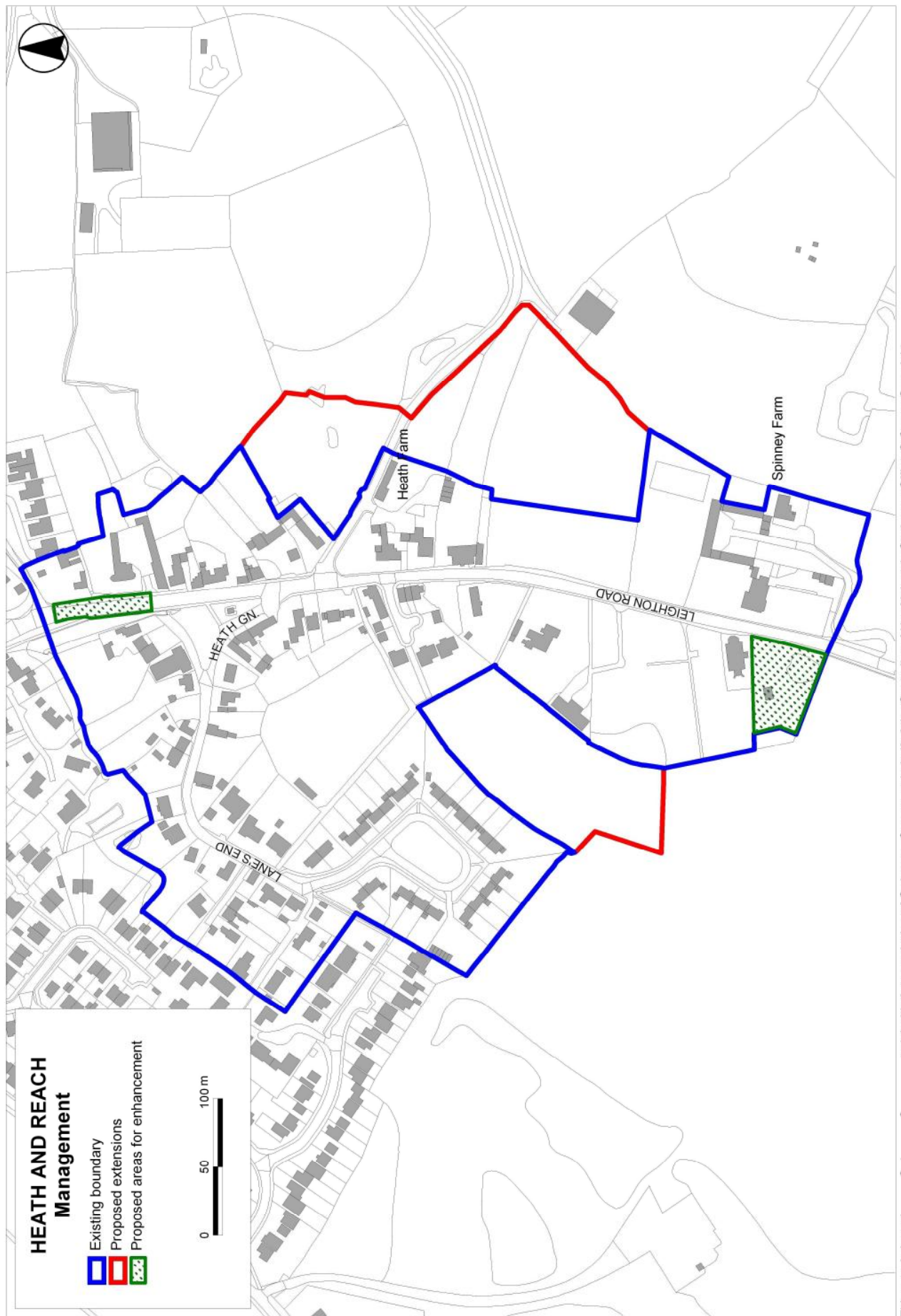
8.1 While the general condition of the Conservation Area is good, the following are considered as opportunities to enhance buildings and spaces:

- Encourage the replacement of non-traditional materials in boundary walls; Promote careful consideration of appropriate future boundary treatments including walls, fences and hedges;
- Encourage the reinstatement of traditional thatched roofs, using long straw with vernacular plain flush ridges and locally appropriate details;
- Encourage the replacement of inappropriate roofing materials such as concrete tiles and pantiles with traditional materials of clay plain tile, thatch, and natural slate;
- Promote the use of lime-based mortars, plasters and renders for older structures in place of cement-based materials;

- Encourage the reinstatement of traditional timber doors and windows;
- Encourage the removal of inappropriate boundary hedging;
- Encourage enhancements to the raised footway at Bird's Hill/Leighton Road;
- Encourage restoration and improvements to the pond and surrounding area to the south of St Leonard's Church;
- Encourage the undergrounding of overhead wires to allow the removal of wooden telegraph poles, particularly around the green;
- Ensure street furniture responds to the rural character of the area and is well-designed and coordinated.









## Appendix 1: References

- Ed. William Page – *A History of the County of Bedford: Volume 3* – Victoria County History 1912
- [www.heathandreach.com](http://www.heathandreach.com)
- [www.bedfordshire.gov.uk/community/AndLiving/ArchivesAndRecordOffice/CommunityArchives/HeathandReach/HeathAndReachIndexOfPages.aspx.gov.uk](http://www.bedfordshire.gov.uk/community/AndLiving/ArchivesAndRecordOffice/CommunityArchives/HeathandReach/HeathAndReachIndexOfPages.aspx.gov.uk)
- Stephen R. Coleman, 1981 – *Parish Surveys for Leighton-Linslade, Billington, Eggington, Heath and Reach and Stanbridge*, Conservation Section, Planning Department, Bedfordshire County Council, unpublished.

## Maps

Ordnance Survey:

- Ordnance Survey – 1879 1:2500
- Ordnance Survey – 1901 1:2500
- Ordnance Survey – 1926 1:2500

## **Appendix 2: Listed buildings**

### **Grade II\***

Heath Manor House, Leighton Road

### **Grade II**

3 Leighton Road

13&15 Leighton Road

Dukes Head, Leighton Road

Heath Farm, Leighton Road

Little Acres, 22 Leighton Road

Axe and Compass, 23 Leighton Road

St Leonard's Church, Leighton Road

Clock Tower and Pump House, Heath Green

3 Heath Green

5&6 Heath Green

7 Heath Green

1 Lane's End

6 Lane's End

8&10 Lane's End

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