

# MILLBROOK

## CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL DRAFT

DECEMBER 2009



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.

**Central  
Bedfordshire**

## CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction	2
2.0 Summary	2
3.0 Location and Setting	2
4.0 Historical Development	3
5.0 Character	6
6.0 Appearance	8
7.0 Boundary Changes	21
8.0 Opportunities for enhancement	21

## APPENDICES

- 1 References
- 2 Listed Buildings



## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Millbrook Conservation Area was designated by Bedfordshire County Council on 25 May 1973. 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 the Millbrook Conservation Area through the planning system.

## **2.0 SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The special interest that justifies designation of the Millbrook Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors, including:

- Church in elevated position providing local landmark;
- Linear settlement developed along valley sides;
- Planned farmstead at Warren Farm with house and associated farm buildings constructed circa 1850;
- Victorian estate cottages constructed in 1848, 1849, 1858, 1860 and 1861;
- Old School House dated 1840;
- Thatched former village hall.

## **3.0 LOCATION AND SETTING**

- 3.1 Millbrook Village is situated about 9 miles SSW of Bedford, 5 miles NE of Woburn village and 2.5 miles North West of Ampthill.
- 3.2 The village is essentially a linear settlement strung along the eastern side of a narrow winding valley running from south to north. The area of settlement also extends to the north and east along the south side of the road to Houghton Conquest known as Sandhill Close and then southward again, along Russell Grove, which lies in a little valley running parallel to and east of the main settlement. On the highest spur of land which divides these valleys stands the church. The southern part of the conservation area fronts Woburn Road which is aligned east-west.



View along main road through village towards church

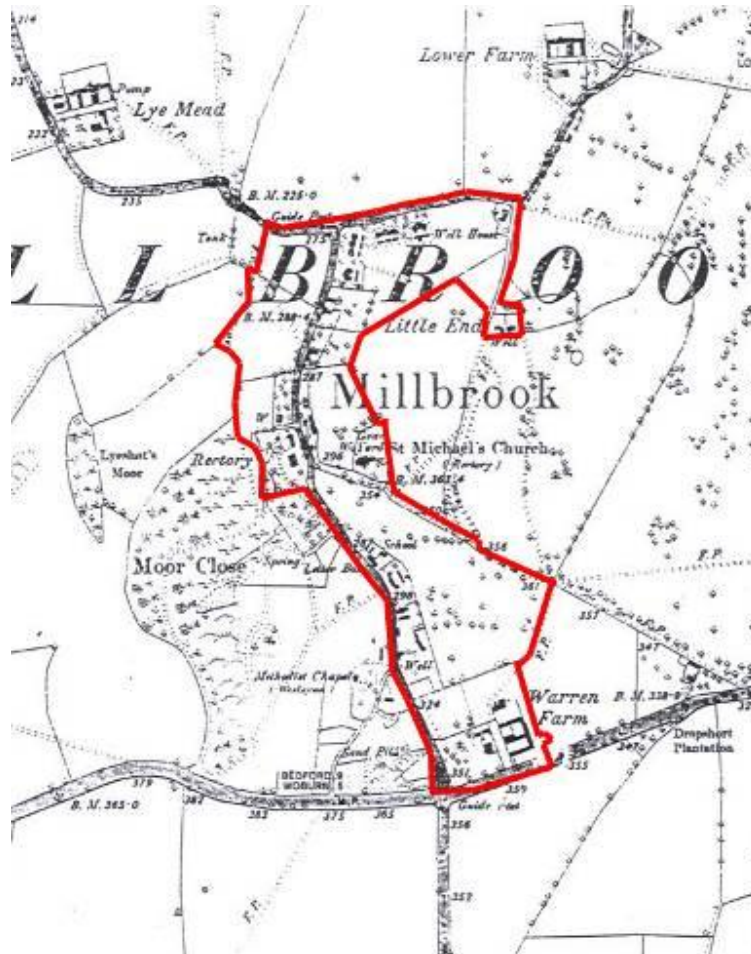
- 3.3 The one lasting image of Millbrook Conservation Area is Laurence Meynell in his book entitled 'Bedfordshire' and published in 1950 states that: "...there is not a more beautifully placed village in the whole of Bedfordshire than Millbrook, which stands on the edge of the Greensand Belt, sufficiently high to overlook all the vale of Bedford and yet with all the benefits of the typical Greensand woodlands..."

#### **4.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

- 4.1 The Church stands on high ground near the neck of a spur of the Greensand escarpment overlooking the village. It stands in an irregular, four sided churchyard which was extended slightly on its northern side in the last century. Although the church was considerably restored in the 19th century by Butterfield and completely refaced, some medieval features are still visible. The tower dates to the 15th century.
- 4.2 The name Millbrook needs no explanation. There are numerous documentary references to mills and the brook is clearly the one which rises at TL012838839 and flows northward past the village. A mill at Millbrook is first mentioned in the year 931a.

- 4.3 The earliest reference to Millbrook is Domesday when the manors of Millbrook and Ampthill were held by the d'Albini family. The first owners of the Manor of Millbrook were the Norman Barons of Cainhoe Castle, the De Albinis, later known as D'Albini and Daubeney. They were followed by a St. Croix and after him came the St Amands, great Crusaders. The Beauchamps who followed, sold the manor to the renowned Knight of Agincourt fame, Sir John Cornwall, who married the sister of King Henry IV, and became Lord Fanhope, Baron Millbrook, held the Order of the Garter, and built Ampthill Castle in the 15th century. The Earls of Kent of Wrest Park followed, and eventually the Manor passed into the possession of King Henry VIII, and was annexed to the Royal Honour of Ampthill. The Bruce family, Earls of Elgin and of Ailesbury, were Seneschals of the Honour in the 17th century and Lords of the Manor until the time of the Earl of Upper Ossory in late 18th and early 19th centuries. In 1818 Lord Holland succeeded his uncle, Lord Upper Ossory. The manor was purchased by the Duke of Bedford after the death of Lord Holland in 1840 and the lordship of the manor has remained in his family since then.
- 4.4 No major changes were made to the roads at the time of Enclosure and since 1795 three of the five public carriage roads awarded in 1795 have remained essentially unchanged. These being the Woburn Road, Houghton Conquest Road and the Steppingley Road.
- 4.5 The population of the village through the centuries has varied. In 1831 its highest figure of 601 was reached. This increase is explained by the greater productivity achieved by new methods of agriculture and the significant expansion of the area under cultivation. After 1831 the population went into a steady decline as people drifted to the industrial towns, a process that was no doubt hastened by the "collapse" of British agriculture in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. By 1869 the population had fallen to 430 by 1931 its inhabitants had dwindled to 179 and a population of 92 was recorded in 1981. The most recent estimates for 2007 are 140.
- 4.6 Although many cottages pre 1840 cottages have been demolished there are good examples of post 1840 estate cottages remaining.

## ORDNANCE SURVEY With Conservation Area Boundary



## 5.0 CHARACTER

- 5.1 The linear character of the village is derived from the topography with the 'road' cutting through the Greensand Ridge. The village is essentially a linear settlement strung along the eastern side of a narrow winding valley running from south to north.



- 5.2 As the village is approached the sense of enclosure is derived from the wooded valley sides and the road undulating and snaking its way through the valley creating an air of expectation as to what lies beyond. It is observed that on a bright sunny day the tree cover in this valley casts a shadow over large areas of the conservation area. A distinctive change in character occurs when travelling north between The Old Cottage and The Chequers Public House. The character changes from enclosure and shadow of the valley to openness and sunlight where the land falls away to the western side of the road opposite The Chequers Public House. The western side of the conservation area is characterised by land sloping away from the road which has been divided up neatly into paddock land separated by post and rail fencing. This is land in association with the Equitation Centre. There are views across to the wooded slope to the west of the conservation area and the Millbrook Proving Ground. There are distinct changes in ground levels. Generally land to east of the "road" is either at road level or above whilst properties to the west of the "road" are at road level or below.
- 5.3 Sandhill Close and Russell Grove are characterised as rural lanes with residential development strung along one side of the lane, set behind deep front gardens. The properties face hedgerows on the opposite side of the lane with open countryside and fields beyond. Woburn Road is characterised by Warren Farmhouse and farm buildings which front the main A507 classified road and are set back from the road behind a hedgerow.
- 5.4 St Michael's Church is a dominant landmark in the village occupying an elevated position above the village being sited on the spur of a hill above the valley. The church lies in an isolated position in the centre of the village within its churchyard with only public footpaths leading to it.





St Michael's Church eastern elevation



- 5.5 The conservation area is characterised by public footpaths linking the village to the parish church. The church is approached from the village by a steep, narrow, sunken trench called Church Lane opposite The Old Rectory. There are also footpaths leading to the church from the Woburn Road past Warren Farm (footpaths 9 and 8). Footpath 8 leads to the church 8 and is lined by trees and hedgerows. The footpath is narrow and unmade and this rural approach to the church reinforces the sense that the church lies in an isolated location which although linked to the village by other footpaths is physically detached from the rest of the village.





Public footpath No. 8 leading to St Michael's Church

- 5.6 The conservation area is predominately residential with properties grouped in small clusters with areas of open space between them. Dwellings are set back from the pavement edge by front gardens. Boundary treatment to the pavement edge is an important feature with a mixture of hedging, low walls and picket fencing. There are very few driveways to properties and little off street parking in front gardens. The winding road through the village is busy and there few places for residents or visitors to the village to park.
- 5.7 Trees and hedgerows are important to the character of the conservation area. The valley is wooded. All the trees contribute to the wooded character of the conservation area.
- 5.8 Views of the conservation area from outside its boundaries are minimal this is due to its position within the valley. The southern end with the buildings at Warren Farm fronting the main A507 is particularly visible. The northern end of the conservation area is visible in the wider landscape. Being elevated above the vale that lies beyond, the rows of cottages fronting Sandhill Close are seen against the backdrop of the escarpment with the church atop the hill from the Marston Road to the North West. Although the church occupies a central position in the conservation area where there are at times limited views of it, its

elevated position above the rest of the conservation area makes it a dominant feature which is highly visible from a distance especially to the north.

## 6.0 APPEARANCE

- 6.1 The dominant building style is best described as Victorian estate-cottage architecture with rows of buildings being more common than detached buildings. Buildings are generally aligned with eaves parallel to the road and with gable facing the road.
- 6.2 The buildings are predominately constructed in red brick with clay plain roof tiles. The estate cottages all have two storey gable projections to the front elevation with casement windows with cast iron lattice window panes and were constructed by the Duke of Bedford. The widespread use of red and mottled pink bricks and clay tiles and building constructed in a similar architectural form gives continuity to the appearance of the conservation area.
- 6.3 There are only a few examples of alternative external finishes which include some thatch and some rendered properties. Natural slate is not a material used in the conservation area
- 6.4 At the southern end of the Conservation Area are Warren Farmhouse and its associated farm buildings set behind a hedgerow. The buildings are not listed but provide a prominent rural feature fronting the southern edge of the conservation area and Woburn Road. (A507). The farm house is constructed in similar materials to the estate cottages with two storey gables and tall chimneys.





Warren Farmhouse, Woburn Road

- 6.5 The first two dwellings within the conservation area as you approach from the A507 are modern detached dwellings. These are considered to be neutral buildings, neither harming nor enhancing the conservation area.
- 6.6 The next two groups of dwellings are estate cottages constructed in red brick with numbers 53 to 55 Millbrook built in 1849 and numbers 49-52 Millbrook built in 1848. Both groups are Grade II Listed.



Cottages at 53-54 in the foreground, 49-52 beyond

- 6.7 The cottages at 53-54 are aligned with their eaves parallel to the road whilst the cottages at 49-52 are orientated at right angles to the road with the gable end of the row facing the road. These cottages are positioned also at right angles in relation to the other row of cottages which they face.
- 6.8 The alignment of these two rows of cottages creates an important gap between these properties. This coincides with a dip in the eastern side of the valley and allows views out of the valley up towards the eastern edge of the conservation area marked by the route of Footpath No.9. This gap in the valley also allows views back through it to the rear of these properties and the wooded western slope of the valley beyond from the public footpath No 9.



View of village from Footpath No.9



- 6.9 Immediately to the north stands the Old School and attached School House constructed in a red brick laid in an English bond. This property now a residential dwelling is set behind a brick wall which fronts the pavement and houses the post box. A plaque on the front of the building reads 1840. This property positively contributes to the conservation area.





The Old School House



The Old School House



- 6.10 The main route through the conservation area is characterised by scattered residential development at the foot of the eastern slope with a wooded slope on the opposite side of the road and valley.
- 6.11 Towards the centre of the conservation area the land rises steeply to the east side of the “road” and a cluster of dwellings is located. The first building on the western side of the road is The Old Rectory. This Victorian building is constructed in red brick and shares the characteristic two storey gable to the front. Next to it lays the detached property at Mulberry Cottage which is also constructed in red brick. These buildings are considered to enhance the conservation area.



The Old Rectory

- 6.12 Opposite The Old Rectory a public footpath (FP8) leads steeply up towards the Parish Church alongside the former thatched village hall which is now a residential property. This building is considered to enhance the appearance of the conservation area. There are views past this building of the northern and western elevations of the church on the higher ground behind this building.



Former Village Hall now residential dwelling



View of church from village

- 6.13 The Old Cottage is Grade II Listed building and is situated on the western side of the road. It has rendered walls and pitched tiled roof. There are limited views of this property as it is set down from the level of the road behind a close boarded fence and planted shrubs. In particular the roof and chimney of the property is seen whilst the property is only fully seen across the entrance to the property through the gap in the fence.



The Old Cottage

- 6.14 To the rear of and further down the slope from The Old Cottage is Brook House and the Equitation Centre and the associated paddocks. This dwelling and the equestrian buildings are considered neutral to the conservation area but the associated paddocks contribute to the open character of this part of the conservation area.
- 6.15 This cluster of dwellings in the middle of the conservation area does not have any uniformity of materials with white painted render, white painted brick and red brick used for walling and plain tile and thatch used for the roofs. The properties are all detached and vary in their size and style.
- 6.16 The Chequers Public House is an important local building and the village hall opposite provides a focus for the village. The Chequers is a detached building



and is the only property fronting the “road” that occupies a back edge of pavement position.



The Chequers Public House

- 6.17 The village hall is sited below the line of the road behind an area of open space used as a recreation ground and does not impact on views within the conservation area or out of the village to the Millbrook Proving Ground beyond.
- 6.18 To the north of The Chequers Public House stands a further two rows of estate cottages which front the main route through the village, 28-31 Sandhill Close and 22-27 Sandhill Close. The cottages are set well back from the road behind large front gardens and picket fences and hedges. This allows the views to open up when the T junction is approached at the northern end of the village. The cottages have the distinctive gables and half dormer gables.



28-31 Sandhill Close



22-27 Sandhill Close

- 6.19 The view at the junction at the northern end of the village is not terminated by a building or structure instead views open up to allow views of the wider

landscape to the north of the village. Beyond the hedgerow marking the northern edge of the conservation area the land falls away to the broad expanse of the Marston Vale and allows distant views of Bedfordshire's built heritage including the listed chimney stacks at Stewartby brickworks, the Cardington Airship Hangars (both are Grade II\* Listed), Park House (a Grade II\* mansion built in 1694) and the ruins of Houghton House<sup>4</sup> (Scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade I Listed ruins of great house built in 1615).



View northwards across Marston Vale from Sandhill Close



- 6.20 Turning east at the junction towards Houghton Conquest, the section of road between the T-junction and Russell Grove is also known as Sandhill Close and is marked by a hedgerow on the north side on the road. Sandhill Close wraps around the northern part of the conservation area. A further two rows of estate cottages look out across the valley from their elevated position on the end of the spur of land. Again they are set back from the pavement edge and have large front gardens behind picket fencing and hedges. The spaces between these rows of cottages are important as they allow glimpses of the hillside beyond.





18-21 Sandhill Close

- 6.21 Situated on the west side of Russell Grove is a group of twentieth century housing comprising three pairs of semi-detached dwellings of a plain architectural style set back from the road by large front gardens and behind a hedge. These properties built in 1951 were the first houses to be built in the village for almost 100 years. Beyond this on the same side is a detached bungalow. These properties neither harm nor enhance the appearance of the conservation area. On the eastern side of Russell Grove opposite the lane and boundary of the conservation area is marked by an indigenous hedgerow with undulating farmland beyond.



- 6.22 The view along Russell Grove from the junction with Sandhill Close is partially terminated by the medium distance view of the detached property at 10 Russell Grove which is on the southern and this building is considered to contribute positively to the appearance of the conservation area.



View along Russell Grove and Footpath no. 9

## 7:00 BOUNDARY CHANGES

7.1 Consideration should be given to the following proposed amendments of the conservation area boundaries as shown on the management map:

1. Extension of the conservation area to include the additional garden area at the bungalow at 8 Russell Grove and to encompass the whole of the building at the Equitation Centre.

Reason:

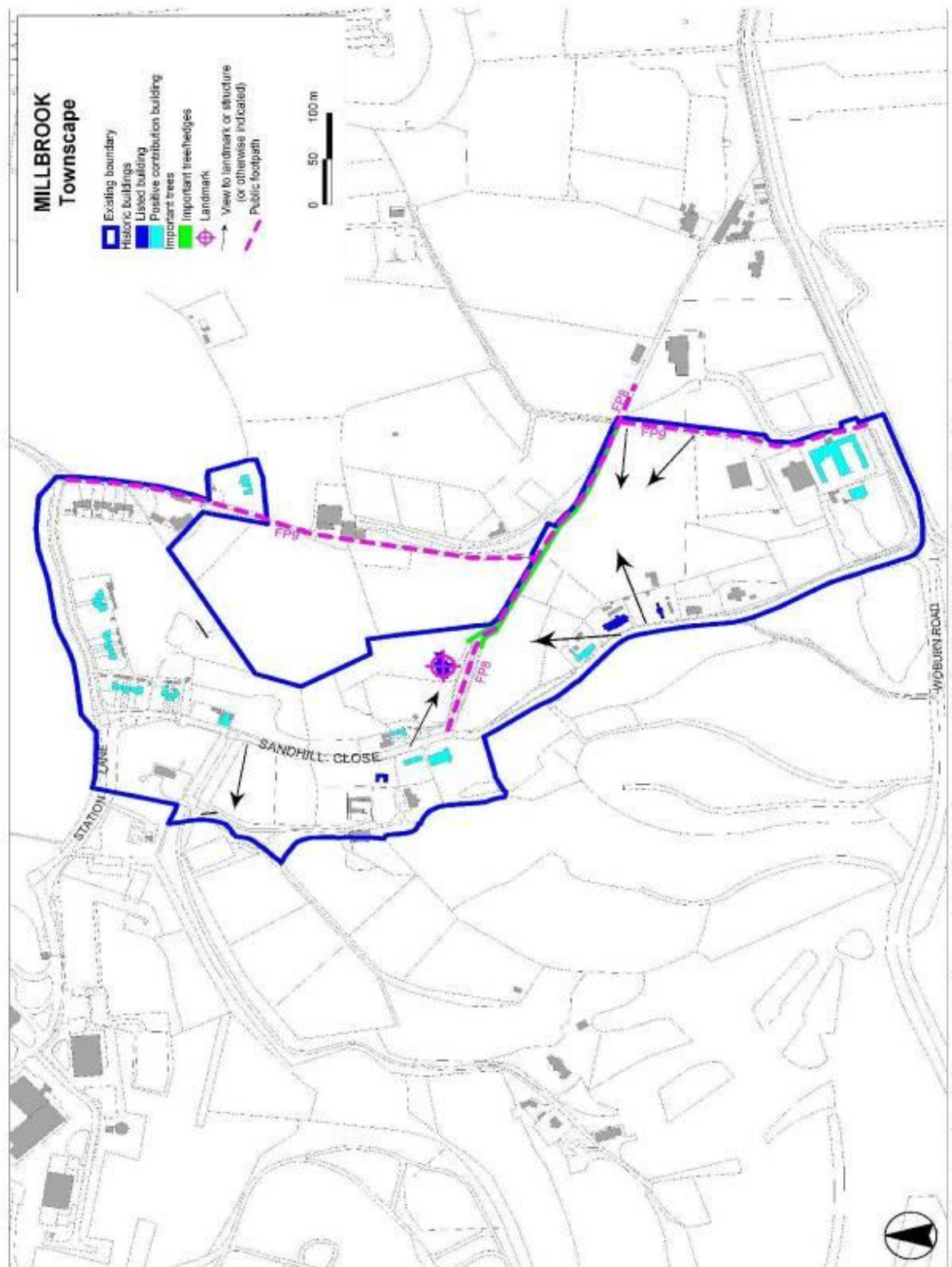
The proposed extension regularises a previous anomaly and follows best practice of including all of the domestic gardens of properties within a conservation area designation rather than truncating these areas as is presently the case.



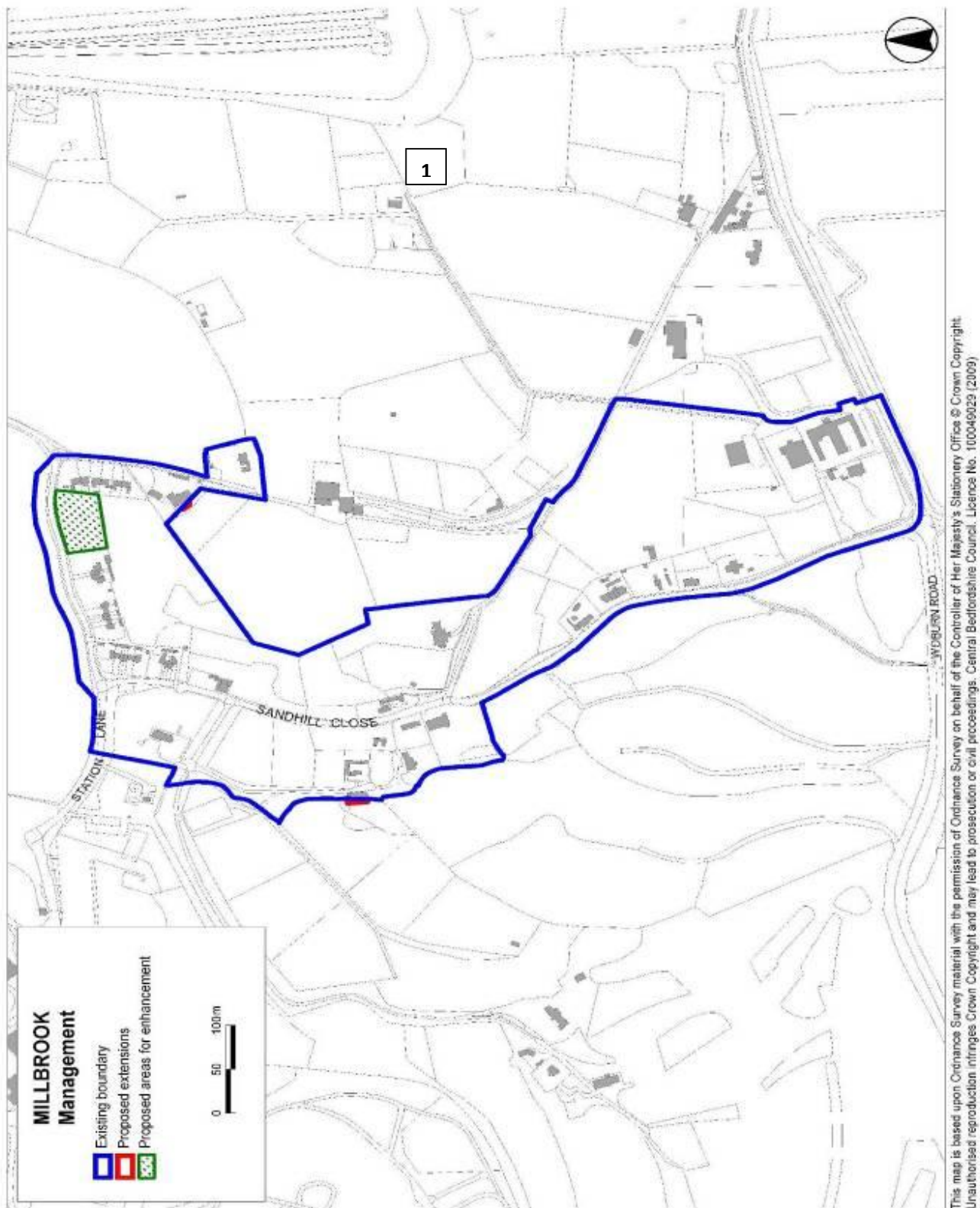
## **8.0 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT**

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

- Encouragement to be given to the use of traditional timber windows instead of uPVC plastic replacement windows
- Additional car parking to be made available to encourage restoration of traditional front gardens to estate cottages.
- Land between 12 Sandhill Close and no. 1 Russell Grove is relatively unkempt ground covered with nettles and brambles and is regarded as a site where enhancement is to be encouraged.







## APPENDIX 1: REFERENCES

Millbrook Extracted from The Bedfordshire Magazine Vol. 1, No1, Summer 1947

Millbrook: Village in the Hills by Mary S.F. George

<http://www.yourtotaevent.com/places/Bedfordshire/millbrook.html>

### **Maps:**

Historic OS Map



## APPENDIX 2: LISTED BUILDINGS

GRADE II\*

CHURCH OF SAINT MICHAEL

GRADE II

43 (THE OLD COTTAGE)

49-52 (CONSECUTIVE) MILLBROOK

53-55 (CONSECUTIVE) MILLBROOK

**Positive buildings:**

10 Russell Grove

The Old Rectory

Mulberry Cottage

Old School and Old School House (circa 1840)

Groups of estate cottages constructed in 1858, 1860 and 1861

Warren Farmhouse and associated farm buildings