



Northhill Conservation Area

Introduction

19 May 2004

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 revised conservation area appraisals in Mid Bedfordshire. Northhill Conservation Area was designated on 29 June 1971 and no review has been undertaken since. The setting, character and appearance of Northhill Conservation Area are considered separately. This will enable Development Control to determine whether proposals for Northhill 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 parish of Northill encompasses Ickwell, Lower and Upper Caldecote, Hatch and Northill, all in the heart of market garden country.

A stream separates Northill at the south from the nearby settlement of Ickwell. The southern approach is over a low bridge in the short countryside gap between the two settlements. The southern edge of the village is semi-wooded and forms an important non developed buffer feature between the built form of the village and the neighbouring Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). The approaches in to the village from the west and north are via tree and hedgerow-lined lanes. The western approach affords glimpses of the church tower from the brow of the hill. The north approach offers intriguing glimpses of the church from gaps in the hedgerow, a fine range of 1½ storey listed cottages herald the arrival to the village.

Northill was originally known as North Givell, meaning the northern territory of the River Ivel. It is known that the manor house of the Lords of Northill stood not far from the west of the church where today associated historic garden remains form part of the area within the landscape buffer.

Character

Northill is a small nucleated village situated at a T junction in open low lying land on the west side of the Ivel valley at the point where the Greensand Ridge starts rising to the west. The focus of the village is the church and churchyard, standing at the junction of the two roads that give the morphological structure to this settlement.



Importance of landscape at the heart of the village.

Northill contains no more than about 30-35 buildings dating prior to 1920. Subsequent development has taken place in several phases, the first being a series of 1950's council housing; this was followed in the 1960's/1970's by typical suburban houses, some of which are of a chalet type; later development includes a pocket of housing on the eastern end of Sand Lane (Queens Close and Chantry Place) and various infill plots.

The Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin is built in the local green sandstone and is a dominant, fine, late medieval structure reflecting its status as a collegiate church housing a college of priests between 1404 and 1547. Its distinguished tower is glimpsed from each of the approach roads and dominates the core of the village.

Much restored, the church contains some of the finest 17th-century painted glass in the county and its flamboyant tracery is a good example of the Decorated style.



Northill Parish Church and lych gate.

Northill has assumed the character of a freestanding residential area with most village life centring around the church, The Crown Public House, the school and the village hall. There is little evidence of farms or other rural activity within the core of the village.

Appearance

The village can be divided into 4 distinct sub-areas, each with their own identity yet which together form the character and appearance of Northill:

Ickwell Road

The approach to the village core from the south on Ickwell Road is contained on the eastern side by two well proportioned distinct vernacular cottages, Nos 17 and 19 (Ickwell Road), situated on the back edge of the footpath following the alignment of the street.

On arrival in the village core, all the elements are apparent that one expects in a typical quintessential English village. The Church of St. Mary dating from the 14th-century, stands within its own churchyard surrounded by a low wall of mixed greensand, limestone and brick and individual trees. The 19th-century lychgate completes the scene. Near by the village pond and associated green is enclosed by a semi-circle of three Lombardy poplars and a yew tree. An attractive single storey thatched cottage ornee with eyebrow dormers found elsewhere in the District is adjacent. The Crown Public House links the church and the village green and provides some visual enclosure to this ensemble. The pub garden at the rear of The Crown has fairly dense tree planting both within its curtilage and on the boundary with the AGLV. The wooded area stretches in a westerly direction and eventually links to the medieval fishery complex and rabbit warren at Home Wood (which are located outside of the conservation area).



Visual ensemble: the Parish Church, The Crown P.H. and the village green.

Whilst the Ickwell Road frontage on the eastern side above Sand Lane does form some enclosure, it is of a disappointingly mediocre suburban character which does not contribute to the special qualities of the designated conservation area. The only exception is the former post office building which, although has undergone numerous extensions and alterations, could be returned to its original appearance.

Bedford Road

On entering the conservation area, the road gently descends into the village, via a bend celebrated by a close ring of mature oak trees in front of properties No.7 (Little Acorns) and No. 9 (Northoaks) Bedford Road. The first property on the right hand side in the conservation area is the 'Barracks', so called because an artillery troop raised against Napoleon was based there. An adjacent group of listed buildings also contribute to the transition between the open countryside and the more enclosed built environment of the village.



The approach from the west of the village with "The Barracks" at the right.

The buttressed brick boundary walls in this area are important in terms of containing the views. The well detailed Victorian wall to the cemetery on the north side of Bedford Road makes an important contribution to the enclosure of the village scene; its ironstone panels reflect the ironstone of the church wall and the church itself. The low boundary fence enclosing part of the school, is a discordant feature compared with nearby brick boundary walls and hedgerows. Opposite, the three-storey 18th century rectory of red brick can be glimpsed within its well landscaped garden. The early Georgian façade of Northhill Grange terminates the western approach to the village and contributes to the sense of arrival. The other important boundary in this sub area is the hedge on the northern side of the road where it joins Thorncote Road.



The impressive façade of Northhill Grange

Thorncote Road

The entrance to Northhill from this direction is somewhat compromised by recent development on the west side, which does not add to the special character of the conservation area. The east side of the entrance to the conservation area is marked by a gault-brick Victorian farmhouse and a vernacular timber-framed property, Manor Cottage. The boundary then returns to the back edge of the road where some recent infill adds little to the vernacular character of the village. It should be noted that the road has soft verge edging and there is an absence of kerbs. The low 1½ storey 'almshouse' range, Nos 10-12 (Thorncote Road), provides a visual pinch-point at the entrance to the village core.



One and a half storey cottages, typical of Northhill.

Sand Lane

The properties within the side lane south from Sand Lane (also known as Sand Lane) create an intriguing tight knit built environment that contrasts particularly with the open area round the village pond and church yard. Nans Cottage, dated 1663 terminates the enclosed view down the lane. Together with the Nonconformist chapel and No 3 (Sand Lane), it is of significant local interest. The building form in this area is mainly low 1½ storeys but accent is given by individual taller buildings (e.g. Nos. 5-7).

Building materials – Apart from the rectory and Northhill Grange, the remainder of the listed secular buildings in the conservation area are predominately rendered of which the majority are thatched, the exceptions being The Barracks, Bedford Road and No. 19 Ickwell Road.



Visual enclosure in Sand Lane.

Enhancement

The enhancement of the character and appearance of a conservation area can be defined as the reinforcement of the qualities providing the special interest, which warrant designation. Firstly it may be through the sympathetic improvement 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. There are three areas, which warrant special consideration for enhancement. These are:

- Land to the west of Nos 13 –17 Bedford Road
- The repair of the west garden wall at The Crown Public House



Land off Bedford Road.



Inappropriate Boundary treatment at Northhill Primary School.

- Front boundary treatment at Northhill Primary School

General Conservation Area Guidance

To maintain the distinctive character and appearance of Northhill Conservation Area it will be necessary to:

1. Retain Listed Buildings and Buildings of Local Interest. There will be a presumption against the demolition of unlisted buildings, such proposals will only be considered appropriate where the building does not make a positive contribution to the conservation area.
2. Ensure that new development positively contributes to the setting of listed buildings and/or the character and appearance of the conservation area in terms of siting, scale, design and materials used.
3. Where necessary, seek to retain important walls and hedgerows as identified on the Northhill Conservation Area plan.
4. Ensure that development proposals are resisted on sites identified as important green spaces on the Northhill Conservation Area plan.

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

This document was subject to public consultation between 7 February 2004 and 8 March 2004. Consultation included an advertised exhibition at Northhill Village Hall and entry on the District Council's website. A full statement of the consultation process is available from the address below.



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