

SHEFFORD

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

DRAFT

JANUARY 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.

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 Shefford Conservation Area was designated by Bedfordshire County Council on 2 January 1971 and was reviewed by Mid Bedfordshire Council and adopted in July 2001. 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 Shefford Conservation Area through the planning system

2.0 SUMMARY

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

- Important historic buildings including St Michaels and All Angels Church, Roman Catholic Church of St Francis of Assisi and the associated Presbytery and St Francis Home.
- Linear settlement developed along main routes
- High sense of enclosure formed by continuous building line on back edge of pavement
- Concentration of listed buildings and positive buildings such as Jubilee Fire Station
- Good examples of traditional shop fronts
- Old and new carriage entrances

3.0 LOCATION AND SETTING

3.1 Shefford is situated 8 miles to the south of Bedford and lies close to the border with Hertfordshire to the east. It is 6 miles from Hitchin, 7 miles from Baldock and 11 miles from Stevenage. Biggleswade is 5 miles to the North East and Ampthill 7 miles to the west.

3.2 Shefford lies between the river Flit and the River Hit (or Hiz) both tributaries of the River Ivel. It is located in the Upper Ivel Valley Clay character area, which follows the course of the River Ivel flowing from north to south with the River Hiz from east to west. It is a level wide river valley founded on underlying Gault Clay with Chalk to the south east. The River Flit flows from the west forming a

medium scale valley cutting through the band of Greensand which runs South West to North East through Bedfordshire to the north of Shefford. Alluvium marks the course of the three water bodies. The Upper Ivel Clay Valley contains fairly dense settlement of large villages and the market town of Shefford.

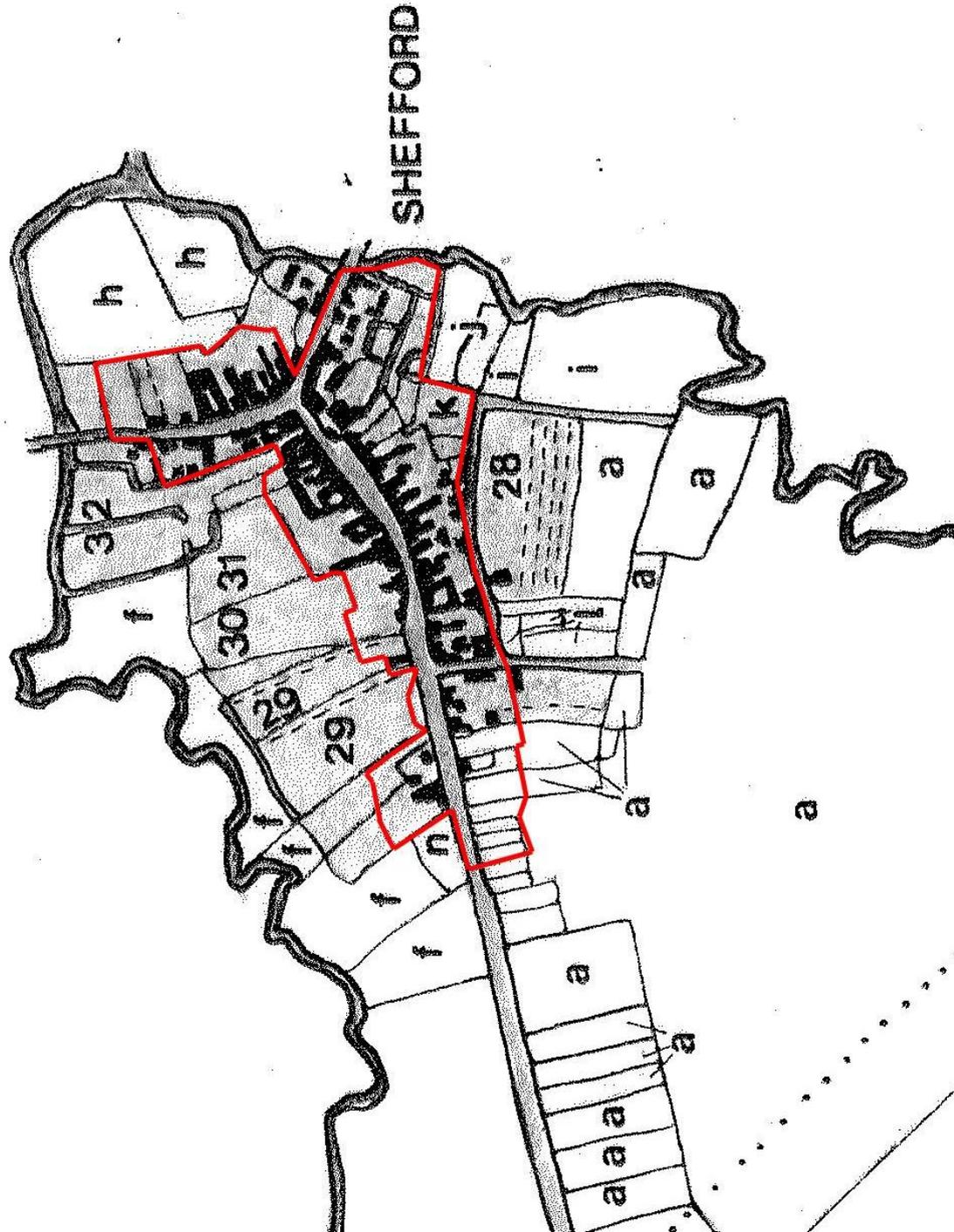
- 3.3 The conservation area includes the linear historic core of the town along the main routes through it.

4.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The township of Shefford grew between two bridges at the point where the Bedford to Hitchin Road crosses the River Ivel. The name derived from Sheep Ford the name by which the crossing was known in 1000 AD.
- 4.2 It appears to have been a thriving commercial centre, possibly influenced by the nearby Gilbertine Priory of Chicksands, founded in 1154.
- 4.3 A weekly market existed by 1225 and an annual fair was held from 1312. By 1713 there were three annual fairs, all of which continued into the early 19th century. As late as 1877 the annual market was held mainly for the sale of straw plait.
- 4.4 Old maps indicate that the street plan in the town centre has remained essentially the same since 1736. The section of the Bedford to Hitchin Road that lies within the town was a toll road and this provided trade to the town. During the 17th century it became a base for carriers' wagons and the surviving carriage entrances are evidence of the town's status.
- 4.5 The foundation of the town came from its position at the crossing point of the river and from its waterways. The river Ivel had been navigable to Biggleswade. In 1822, Shefford was linked to Kings Lynn by a navigable waterway, an extension of the Ivel Navigation. This gave a direct trading route to the east. Corn and coal were the main commodities carried and a commercial wharf opened up in Northbridge Street.
- 4.6 In 1857 the Midland Railway Company opened the railway and the wharf's importance declined. A railway bridge carried the Midland Railway over the High Street towards the western part of the Shefford Conservation Area to the west of The Bridge PH. The branch line closed in 1962 and the bridge was demolished in 1976. This made a considerable change to the character of the High Street.

Evidence of the former line remains in the form of an embankment to the north of the Conservation area and of the town itself.

- 4.7 Unlike High Street and Northbridge Street, there are no remaining buildings in Southbridge Street earlier than the 18th century. This suggests that a significant widening or realignment of the road has taken place in recent times.
- 4.8 Shefford was part of Campton Civil Parish until 1866, and the church of St Michael and All Angels was a chapel of ease until the formation of the new ecclesiastical parish in 1903. The church has 15th century origins, parts of which still survive however the building was extensively restored in 1822, the south aisle added in 1850 and altered again in 1907.
- 4.9 In 1801 Shefford had 474 inhabitants and probably no more than one hundred buildings. The Ivel Navigation and the arrival of the railway produced a steady growth throughout the century so that the population stood at 990 in 1891. Development continued along the main routes and with new side roads such as New Street and Ivel Road.
- 4.10 The most dramatic changes have taken place in the 20th century with the construction of housing estates and the opening of the Shefford by-pass in 1990 strongly influenced the town's economy. Development in the conservation area has consisted of the conversion of the 19th century maltings building to the rear of 40 High Street and the development of outbuildings to the rear of Northbridge Street with new build consisting of the shop, flats and library next to the church and the flats on the corner of High Street and Old Bridge Court. The most recent estimate for 2007 is of a population of 5,770.



Coloured transcript of the Enclosure Map for Campton with Shefford 1799.

5.0 CHARACTER



- 5.1 The town developed along the main routes through it. The character stems from the visual relationship between the individual buildings and the spaces between them.
- 5.2 The general character of the conservation area is of a continuous frontage of buildings with few spaces between them forming a strong sense of enclosure. The majority of the buildings in the conservation area are commercial but there are residential dwellings and flats within it.
- 5.3 Views into the conservation area are along the main routes into and through the conservation area - Amptill Road, High Street, Northbridge Street and Southbridge Street. There are also public views into the conservation area particularly from the public car park in Town Meadow Drive where the rear of the properties on the west side of Northbridge Street are visible. The conservation area is enclosed by a wall to the rear of these properties and marks the boundary of the conservation area. The wall allows views over it to the rear of these properties and outbuildings. There is a good view of the pantiled roof to an outbuilding behind 11 Northbridge Street. There are also public views of the rear of the buildings to the south side of the High Street from Old Bridge Way where a two metre high wall marks the boundary.
- 5.4 Whereas the railway bridge once provided a sense of enclosure at the western end of the High Street, views are now wider from this end and extend into Amptill Road. However views from Amptill Road due to the curvature of the road are minimal providing a sense of expectation as to what is around the corner.
- 5.5 The High Street is wide with parking bays laid out on each side of the carriageway in brick sets. The carriageway narrows as the junction is approached but broadens out and becomes visually wider between the church and Duck Lane opposite. However as the traffic lights are approached the combination of two storey buildings on the pavement edge of the junction with their gables facing the junction and the narrowing of the road creates a pinch point and high sense of enclosure. The view along High Street is terminated by the T junction and the traffic lights and the White Hart Hotel, a three storey red brick building with a parapet front which faces up the High Street.



View along High Street terminated by White Hart PH

- 5.6 Views along Northbridge Street into Southbridge Street are closed down by the two fold effect of the curved road alignment and the built up frontages.
- 5.7 St Michaels and All Angels Church is a predominant landmark in the High Street. Two yew trees to the front of the church on an area of green fronting the High Street contribute to the street scene and conservation area.
- 5.8 There are few areas of public open space within the conservation area. Where open space is created for example by the wider footpaths, the war memorial and a town pump are to be found. There is a large area of open space to the front of the shop unit next to the church and this is used for the market held weekly on Fridays.
- 5.9 Trees and soft landscaped areas make a limited contribution to the appearance of the Conservation Area. Trees are not a common feature due to the urban character of the conservation area where there is little space between buildings or between the street and the buildings. However the trees in front of the church and to the front of 12 Northbridge Street are valuable in the street scene.
- 5.10 Detached buildings are rare in the Conservation Area as are buildings set back from the pavement edge. Exceptions are the Community Hall and later residential properties such as 12 Northbridge Street, 8 Southbridge Street and 3 Amptill Road which are set behind traditional low walls and railings. Due to the

lack of spacing between buildings and the back edge of pavement location, boundary walls and enclosures are not a common feature to the fronts of properties in the conservation area.

6.0 APPEARANCE

- 6.1 In the middle ages, the local material for most buildings was timber. Evidence of timber framing can be seen at 6/8 Northbridge Street and The Tudor House at 36/ 38 High Street which date back to the 16th and 17th centuries. Further framing survives but is less apparent as properties have been re-fronted in brick such as the White Hart PH or rendered over such as 10 Northbridge Street.
- 6.2 Stone was used for higher status buildings such as The Church of St Michael and All Angels. Much of the church is built in coursed ironstone. This is iron-bearing sandstone that weathers to a rusty brown colour as the iron salts oxidise.
- 6.3 From the 18th century, brick takes over as the dominant building material. There are good examples of early red brick to The White Hart PH and later to the Jubilee Fire Station and especially to the southern side of the High Street. Bricks are generally laid in Flemish bond – alternating stretchers and headers. The use of contrasting brick is not commonly seen. Fishscale tile hangings are seen on many listed buildings especially in the High Street.
- 6.4 The Gault clays of the Ivel valley are particularly suited to the production of cream and pale yellow bricks. The use of these bricks is seen with examples at the Victorian detached villas at 8 Southbridge Street and 3 Ampthill Road, the Community Hall and the Brewery Tap PH.
- 6.5 There is a high survival of timber windows and a variety of window styles particularly to the buildings on the southern side of the High Street which exhibit oriel windows and two storey canted bays. With most properties on the back edge of the pavement windows are generally sash type at ground floor although there are examples of ground floor bays. There is an oriel window to 28 High Street. Dormer windows are not a common feature but examples are seen in the High Street and A. 15 High Street reputed to have been designed by Mr Williams of Southill and each window on its front elevation is different. Leaded mullion and transom windows are seen on the older timber framed buildings at 6/8 Northbridge Street and 34/36 High Street.

- 6.6 The traditional roofing materials are clay plain tile. There are no surviving thatched properties although the steeper roof pitches seen are indicative that thatch was once used. Welsh slate is seen on a number of the 18th and 19th century buildings although historically its arrival would have been in the 19th century. Concrete tile is found on a number of buildings to the detriment of the conservation area.
- 6.7 There are a number of historic panelled doors, moulded door cases and back bracketed door hoods. There are good timber shop fronts surviving especially to the north side of the High Street and to the east side of Northbridge Street. A particular good example is the shop front at 2/4 High Street with shop windows on two side facing Duck Lane and the High Street .

High Street

- 6.8 The Church of St Michael and All Angels is built in coursed ironstone with ashlar dressings with a slate roof. It is a prominent feature in the High Street with the full extent of the tower being visible when approached from the west due to the set back of the adjacent shop unit and flats behind the war memorial. The church is separated from the pavement by a grassed area planted with two yew trees. The church does not have a graveyard and there is no boundary treatment enclosing the church such as railing or walls although a short section of wall to the rear remains. The surrounding hard surfacing makes no distinction between the thoroughfare and the church precinct. The pedestrian route from the High Street alongside the church to the supermarket to the rear of the conservation area known as Church Walk. There are few areas of recreational open space within the conservation area. An area of Important Open Space exists off Church Walk between the supermarket and the rear of the Church. This area is used a children's play area with play equipment. The boundary treatment separating the play area from Church Walk is metal chain link fencing and this detracts from the Conservation Area. A more visually sensitive form of enclosure is required or this area could be incorporated more into the broader area.



6.9 The southern side of the High Street is dominated by the Grade II* Roman Catholic Church of St Francis of Assisi and the associated Grade II Presbytery and St Francis Home, the former orphanage and seminary all designed by J Nicholl in 1869. The building replaced an earlier church, dated 1780, dedicated to St George the Martyr.



6.10 The front elevation of the presbytery has windows of varying sizes and styles. The building has references on its front elevation to Saint George including a plaque "St George for England", a niche to the left hand side of the building containing a statue of Saint George and a decorative carved panel showing a shield with a St. George cross.

6.11 The top of the Catholic Church punctuates the building line with its gable with the crucifix finial and the bell-cote and its profile is clearly visible against the skyline. There is a central niche with a statue of St Francis to the front elevation.



6.12 Attached to the church is the former orphanage and seminary. The style of these buildings is influenced by the Gothic revival. They are characterised by large through-eaves gables finished with white render and mock timber framing which bear the dates 1879 and 1884. These buildings are ornate with decorative ridges, bargeboards, anted oriel windows, two storey canted bays and Tudor arched carriageway.



6.13 The buildings on this side of the street are predominately 19th century and this side has a higher proportion of 20th century buildings such as the three storey blocks of flats with the shops below at Richard Daniels House and the three storey block of flats on the corner at Old Bridge Court on the corner of the High Street and Old Bridge Way. The south side of the High Street contains most of the taller buildings within the Conservation Area in particular the Anglican and Catholic churches. This side of the High Street is dominated by the three storey and two and a half storey nature of these buildings.

6.14 The scale of the buildings on the south side is juxtaposed with the lower and comparatively plainer architectural style of the buildings on the opposite side of the High Street. The properties on the north side of the High Street are generally older and of 18th century and many coach entrances survive. Coach entrances punctuate the frontage providing glimpses to the yards behind. Vehicle entrances over the footpaths are marked by granite blocks creating a contrast in surfaces.

- 6.15 The buildings on the north side of the High Street have a more comfortable “human” scale. Properties are generally two storeys of varying widths with simple pitched roofs with eaves parallel to the pavement edge. Windows are generally vertical sliding sash windows. There is a mixture of clay plain tiles and slate. There is a concentration of rendered properties on this side of the street.
- 6.16 The Tudor House at 36/ 38 High Street is one of the oldest surviving buildings on the north side and is exceptional having a hipped clay tile roof. The building is 17th century in origin and timber framed with mullion and transom windows.



- 6.17 On the corner of Old Bridge Way and High Street is the former Shefford Laundry Building, a large flat roofed white rendered building. This site is vacant and in a poor state of repair. It was identified as a site where enhancement is to be encouraged on the previous conservation area appraisal. The site is in a poor state of maintenance, the building does not contribute to the appearance of the conservation area.
- 6.18 There are views into New Street from the High Street. There are two flat roof garage blocks which could be screened by landscaping.

Amphill Road

- 6.19 To the west of the High Street junction with New Street lays Amphill Road which is characterised by detached dwellings with eaves parallel to the road



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with all but one built on the pavement edge. This is the detached property at 3 Amphill Road, a Victorian villa which is set behind a brick wall and garden.

- 6.20 The side wall of 5 Amphill Road presents a feature to the western edge of the conservation area and is particularly visible as it is seen across the front of the adjacent Methodist church which is set back from the pavement edge. The Grade II listed church is currently outside of the conservation area. Being listed this building contributes to the setting of the conservation area and it is considered that this building should be included within the Conservation Area.



Methodist Church

Northbridge Street



- 6.21 The buildings increase in height towards the meeting point of Northbridge Street, Southbridge Street and the High Street.
- 6.22 To the west side the buildings form a continuous frontage with their roof ridges of varying heights and eaves aligned parallel with the pavement. The buildings from 3 to 11 are all listed. The frontage and two storey roofline is broken by the modern single storey detached public conveniences. The skyline is then punctuated by the Jubilee Fire Station. The visual space either side of the Jubilee Fire Station created by the single storey buildings either side of it enables the profile of the building with its gable and bell-cote facing the street roof to be

clearly seen against the sky and as a prominent building in the street scene.



Jubilee Fire Station erected 1897

- 6.23 The continuous building line starts again from 17 to 25 Northbridge Street with buildings in red brick and with rendered finishes. Bloomfield House is a red brick property which was the home of the poet Robert Bloomfield. A plaque to the front of Bloomfield House reads “Robert Bloomfield, The Pastoral Poet died here, August 19th 1823. Erected by Constance Isherwood, Meppershall Rectory 1904”. This building is considered to be of local importance and positively enhance the conservation area.



- 6.24 This side of the road is predominately residential and is set further back from the road being separated by parking bays. A traditional shop front remains to the listed property at 21 Northbridge Street. This property appears to be vacant.
- 6.25 To the north side there is not the same uniformity of the building line created by the similar alignment of the rooflines and seen on the opposite side of the street. The building line is broken up by buildings with varying roof types, styles and building heights. Many of the buildings are detached providing visual space between them and preventing continuity. The building line is also broken by vehicular accesses serving Coach House Mews and Byrnes Mews to the rear.

- 6.26 The White Hart Hotel is three storeys with a parapet roof and is faced in red brick. It forms a visual stop at the end of the High Street. It is separated from its neighbour by the plainer rendered two storey section to its side.



White Hart Hotel

- 6.27 The detached property at 4 Northbridge Street is two storeys with a pitched roof with a central gable with the words W Caton and Sons painted on it. To the rear of this property is Coach House Mews.



- 6.28 There is only one example in the conservation area of a building which overhangs the pavement, the bank premises at 6 Northbridge Street. This building is timber framed and presents a gable to the street. It is one of the oldest secular buildings within the conservation area. It has a half timbered with brick infill and is jettied at first floor over the pavement.



- 6.29 8 Northbridge Street is a three storey building with a gambrel roof attached to 6 Northbridge Street and presents a gable to the street and 10 Northbridge Street is detached rendered property. The spacing between the buildings at 8 and 10 Northbridge Street provides views across the entrance to Byrnes Mews of the entire side elevation of 8 Northbridge Street and of the side wall of 10 Northbridge Street. Chimneys stacks are particularly prominent in this part of the conservation area. This is due to the fact that they are chunkier and the ridge levels are lower. The stack to the side wall of 10 High Street is particularly prominent being seen across the entrance to Byrnes Mews.

- 6.30 12 Northbridge Street is set back from the pavement by a small front garden and walls. Next to it is The Brewery Tap Public House is in cream brick with a slate roof and is wide providing a horizontal emphasis to the building. The final buildings within the conservation area a pair of cottages with a rendered finish.



The Brewery Tap

Southbridge Street

- 6.31 The eastern boundary of the conservation area is marked by the south bridge and the River Ivel. The conservation area includes only buildings on the south western side of this street. Crossing the river the first property on the right is the detached Victorian dwelling at 8 Southbridge Street. The property is set back from the pavement edge behind a low boundary wall and formal clipped hedge. The dwelling has two storey gables to both its front and side elevations and contributes to the appearance of the area as it faces both the street and up the street.
- 6.32 A parade of shops on the left hand side as you approach the town centre from the east hug the pavement and lead the eye towards the junction. Views from this direction into Northbridge Street are deflected by the buildings in Northbridge Street.
- 6.33 Although numbers 1 and 3 Southbridge Street lie outside of the conservation area their position adjoining and opposite the conservation area boundary mean

that their design and form are visually detrimental to the appearance of the conservation area by impairing views into and out of the conservation area.

Duck Lane



- 6.34 Duck Lane is a pedestrian access connecting High Street with the Town Meadow Car Park at the rear of the north side of the High Street. The lane is formed between the three storey high building at 2/4 High Street which fronts it and the Shefford Scout Hut which presents a side wall to it. To the rear of the scout hut is another building that lines this lane and reinforces the enclosure of the lane. It is a detached single storey in red brick laid in a Flemish bond with a plain tiled roof and timber framing visible to its gable facing the lane. To the rear wall is a plaque F dated 1835. The F is likely to represent Feoffee, the local name for the charitable trust which Robert Lucas established in the 16th century.



Duck Lane looking towards High Street

7.0 BOUNDARY CHANGES

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

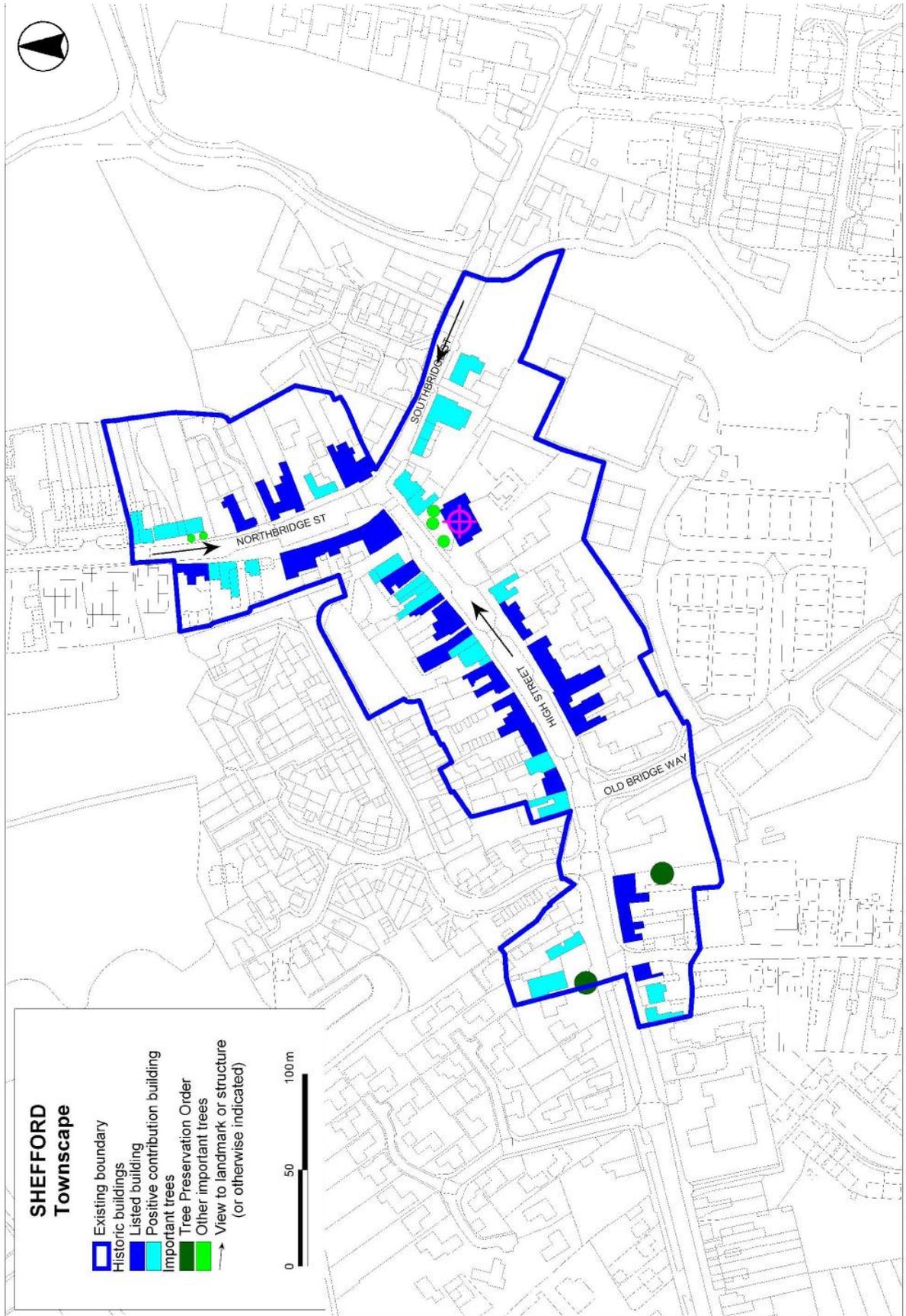
Extension of the conservation area to include the Shefford Methodist Church in Amphill Road.

Reason: The church is of architectural and historic importance and is Grade II Listed. It is next to the conservation area and it is considered it should be included as it contributes to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

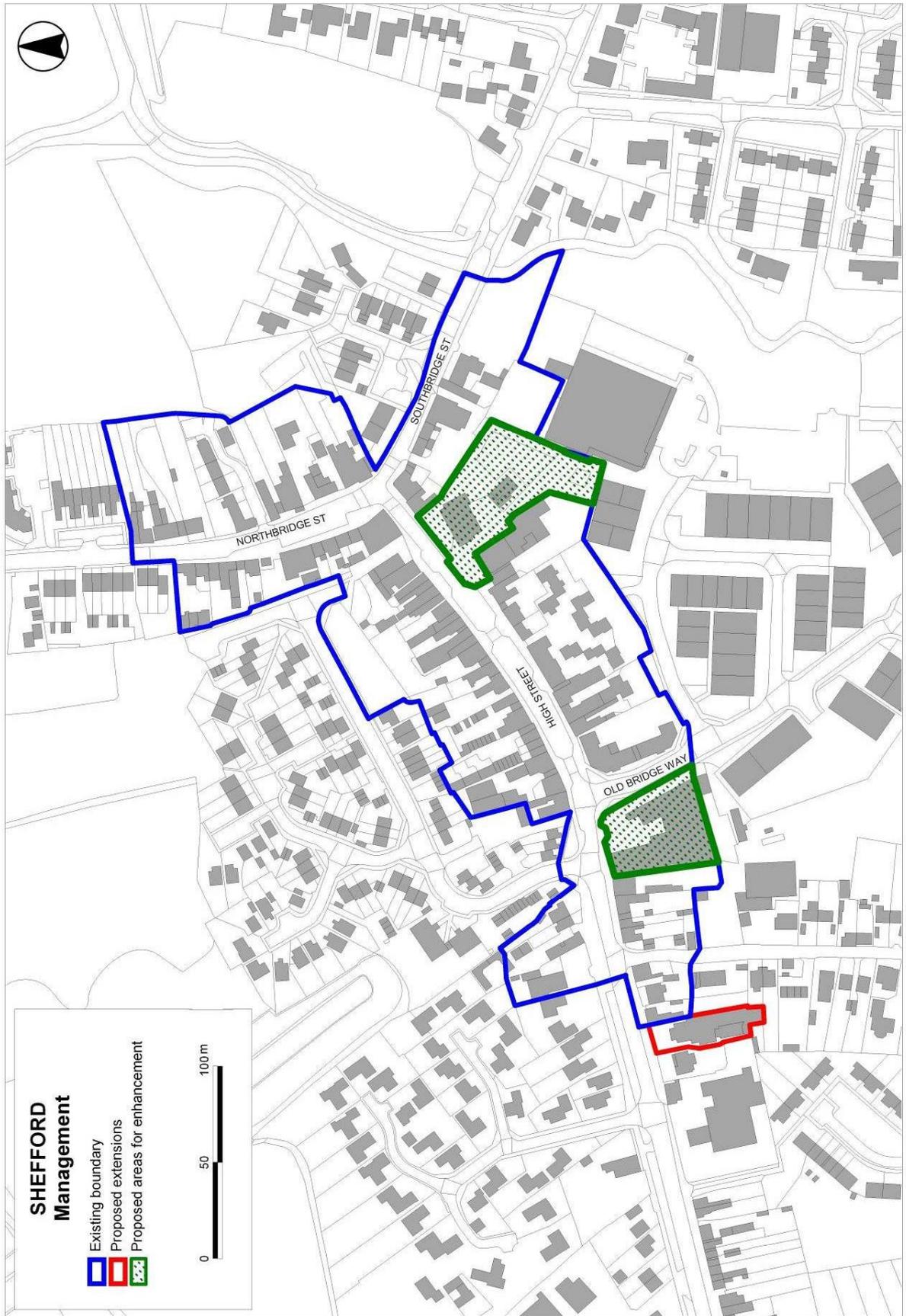
8.0 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

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

- Encouragement to be given to the reinstatement of traditional roofing materials in place of concrete roof tiles
- Ensure that there is only the limited introduction of trees, if any into the street scene in order to safeguard the urban character and building dominated appearance of the Conservation Area.
- Encourage enhancement/redevelopment of Old Laundry site.
- Although numbers 1 and 3 Southbridge Street lie outside of the conservation area their position adjoining the conservation area boundary mean that their design and form area visually detrimental to the appearance of the conservation area by impairing views into and out of the conservation area.
- Encourage enhancement to the perimeter of St Michaels and All Angels Church and the boundary of the play area with Church Walk.



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APPENDIX 1: REFERENCES

Peter Harwood - *The Story of Shefford (Illustrated)*

<http://www.sheffordtown.co.uk/shefford-history.html>

http://www.galaxy.bedfordshire.gov.uk/webingres/bedfordshire/vlib/0.digitised_resources/shefford_digitalisation.htm

Mid Bedfordshire District Landscape Character Assessment August 2007

Maps:

Coloured transcript of the Enclosure Map for Campton with Shefford dated 1799.

APPENDIX 2: LISTED BUILDINGS

GRADE II*

Catholic Church of St Francis of Assisi, High Street

GRADE II

1 Ampthill Road

High Street, North side

2 and 4 High Street

8

16-22

24 and 26

32

34

36 and 38 (The Tudor House)

40 and 40a

46 and 48

High Street, South side

Parish church of St Michael and All Angels

19 and 21 23

St Francis' Home

25 Presbytery adjacent to Catholic Church or St. Francis 35 (Avondale House)

37

39 and 43

Northbridge Street

3 and 5

7 and 9

11 (Bloomfield House)

21 and 23

The White Hart PH

6 Barclays Bank

8 Lemon Tree

10

Positive buildings:

Amphill Road

5

Northbridge Street

12

Banks and Taylor

Southbridge Street

2 The Paper Shop

4 Cafe

6 Post Office

Ivel House, 8 Southbridge Street

High Street

3

15

44