

SOUTHILL CONSERVATION AREA

CONSULTATION DRAFT ONE

February. 1974

BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT, 1971

This report introduces a Conservation Area which it is proposed to designate under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1971. It describes the important characteristics of the area and attempts to show how its attractive nature can be safeguarded and improved. An explanatory map illustrates the main points made in the text in a diagrammatic form.

The aims of the conservation area procedure can only be fully realised with the willing co-operation of the local councils concerned and other bodies and individuals with an interest in the area, and all are invited to make known their views to the County Council. When all appropriate consultations are completed the County Council will make any necessary amendments and then notify the Secretary of State for the Environment of the designation of the Conservation Area.

THE CONSERVATION AREA

Southill is a large Parish situated on the Eastern edge of the green sand hills, where they die away to the clays and gravels of the Ivel Valley plain. There are three small villages in the Parish: Southill, Broom and Stanford. Southill village is a basically linear settlement of about 420 people, situated on a network of minor roads between the A.600 Bedford-Hitchin road (2 miles to the West) and the A.1 Trunk Road (3 miles to the East).

Southill is a typical 'estate' village. It mostly dates from the last decade of the 18th Century when Samuel Whitbread, the brewer, bought Southill Park, the grounds of which had been landscaped by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in 1777. In 1795 Whitbread engaged Henry Holland to carry out improvements, and by 1801 the mid-eighteenth century mansion had been remodelled, and the estate cottages built, well to the East of the park and church (the original village was probably much closer to the church, on land enclosed for the Park). These early cottages are rendered in honey colour, are tiled or thatched, and carry dated motifs: (e.g. S.W. 1797)

Additions to the estate were made at intervals during the 19th century. A second distinctive building style appears in the 2-storey red-brick and tiled houses, often with twin gabled ends towards the road, of the late-Victorian period. The harmony of the 2 styles, which are interspersed throughout the village, is the essence of the village character.

The village is roughly Y-shaped, with the arms at the Western end enclosing a large 'island' of open land which rises to a low ridge capped by a tree belt along the Eastern edge of Southill Park. The Park and all land east of the road to Old Warden lies within an area defined on the approved County map as of high landscape value. The plan of the village is very open, with no defined centre. The stem of the "Y" forms the main village street, which is openly developed with buildings generally set back and separated by gaps which afford good views of the countryside. In the Western half of the village in particular, there are substantial undeveloped frontages which contribute greatly to the sense of spaciousness and rural atmosphere.

The Conservation Area covers the whole village, excepting the ribbon of local authority housing along Stanford Road, and includes the Parish Church and other important buildings on the West side of the road to Old Warden.

Ten buildings in the Conservation Area are on the Statutory List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest made by the Department of the Environment. Those included because of intrinsic merit are the Parish Church, Glebe House, No's 17 and 18, and Gracious Farm House. Also included, because of their group value, are no's 19, 20 and 21 and no's 32, 63, 64 and 66-68. About a dozen other buildings are on the Supplementary List. All these are among the buildings marked 'important' on the map, which means that they make an important contribution to the village scene because of their architectural merit or group value or simply because of their position or building line. It is likely that a number of buildings would be afforded Statutory protection if the Department of the Environment's current standards of revision were applied.

Designation as a Conservation Area does not mean a blanket restriction on new development but the amount, siting and design will need very careful consideration to allow the area to remain alive and prosperous while ensuring that any new development accords with its special architectural and visual qualities.

Approaching from the East the Conservation Area is entered at the junction of Stanford Road and the village street. Set well back on the Northern side of the junction, No's 47-51 form a superb low terrace of late 18th century cottages, restored in 1850 by Samuel Whitbread. Proceeding Westwards, buildings of all the styles represented in the village are encountered in the next 300 yards. An interesting group is formed by the Baptist Chapel and the adjoining Chapel House, enhanced by fine poplar trees in the graveyard in front of the chapel, and 2 yellow colour washed cottages (no's 53/54 and 55) on the opposite side of the road. From this point the Eastward view out of the village is important, as is the slight kink in the road.

Further along on the South side, set well back behind allotment gardens, is an unusual block of dwellings (no's 56-59), a tall 2 storey building with a steep mansard roof, 5 bays, pilasters, gabled porches, box dormers, and motif: 'W.H.W. 1856'.

No's 63, 64 and 66-68 on the South side of the road, and No. 32 opposite, are statutory listed buildings by virtue of their value as a group. All are estate cottages rendered in yellow colour wash and, with the exception of No's 66-68, have thatched roofs.

Beyond this group extensive views of the attractive landscape to the North and the West open out. To the South, the farmhouse and out-buildings of Gracious Farm cling to a slight outward curve in the road. The farmhouse is a particularly fine building dating from the 17th century, timber framed, yellow washed, and tiled; the front has 2 gable wings with projecting upper storey. The building is now in urgent need of repair.

After Gracious Farm the road forks, one branch continuing in a roughly Westerly direction, rising into open countryside and turning sharply after the White Horse P.H. to climb steeply round the Southern edge of Southill Park. The other road heads Northwards for a short distance; on the West side, facing the playing field, are fine examples of estate cottages from the earlier period. By the entrance to Yew Tree Farm, the road bends sharply towards the West, past the yellow brick Victorian School, and late 18th century thatched cottages (no's 19 and 20/21) rendered in pale yellow colour wash that have group as well as individual merit. In a key position on the North side of the junction with the road that skirts the Park and opposite the Church entrance, No's 17 and 18 form a picturesque group of different styles and materials, contrasting yet harmonious: they date from the 17th and 18th centuries. To the South, the imposing early Victorian Vicarage is set among some fine trees.

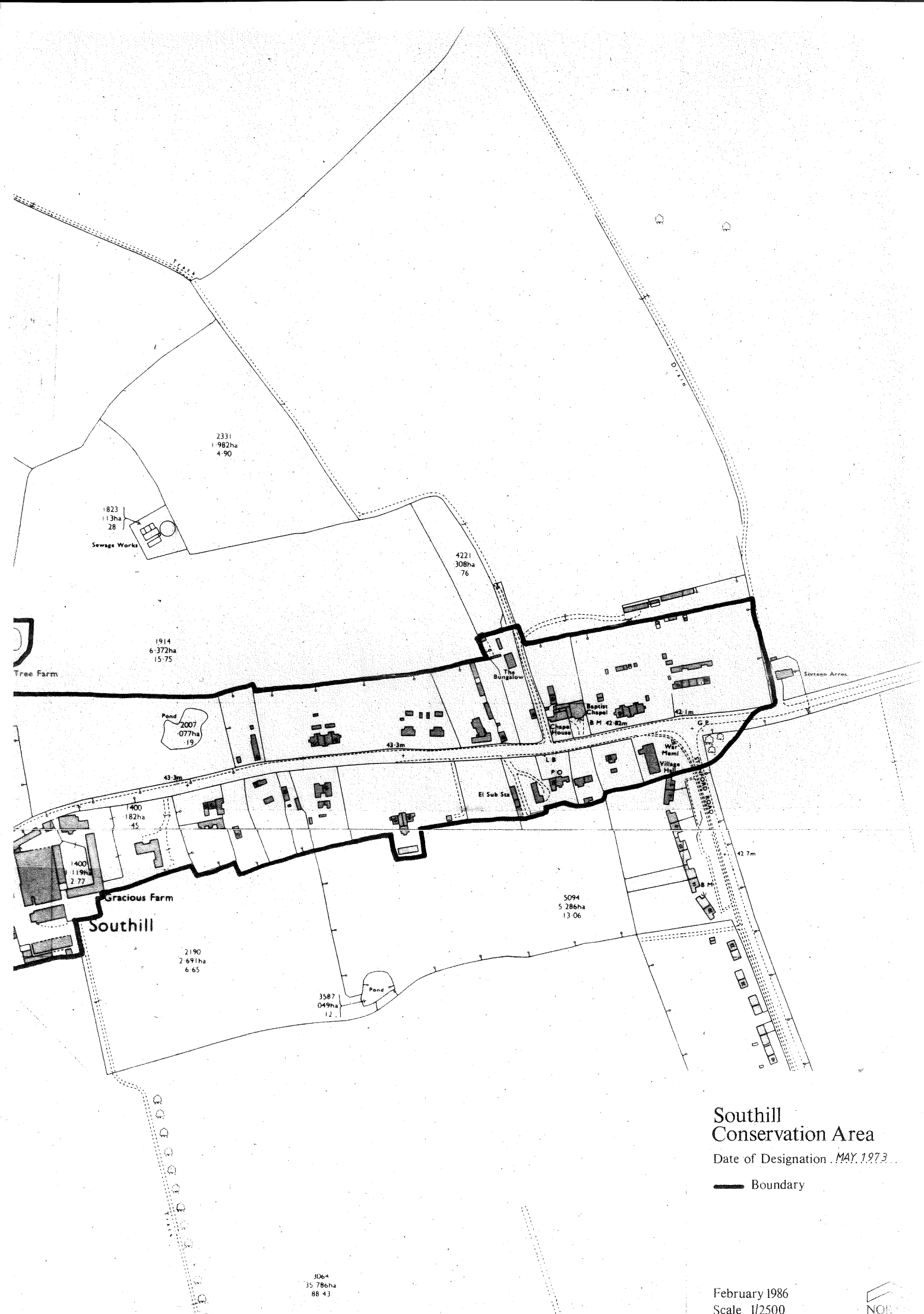
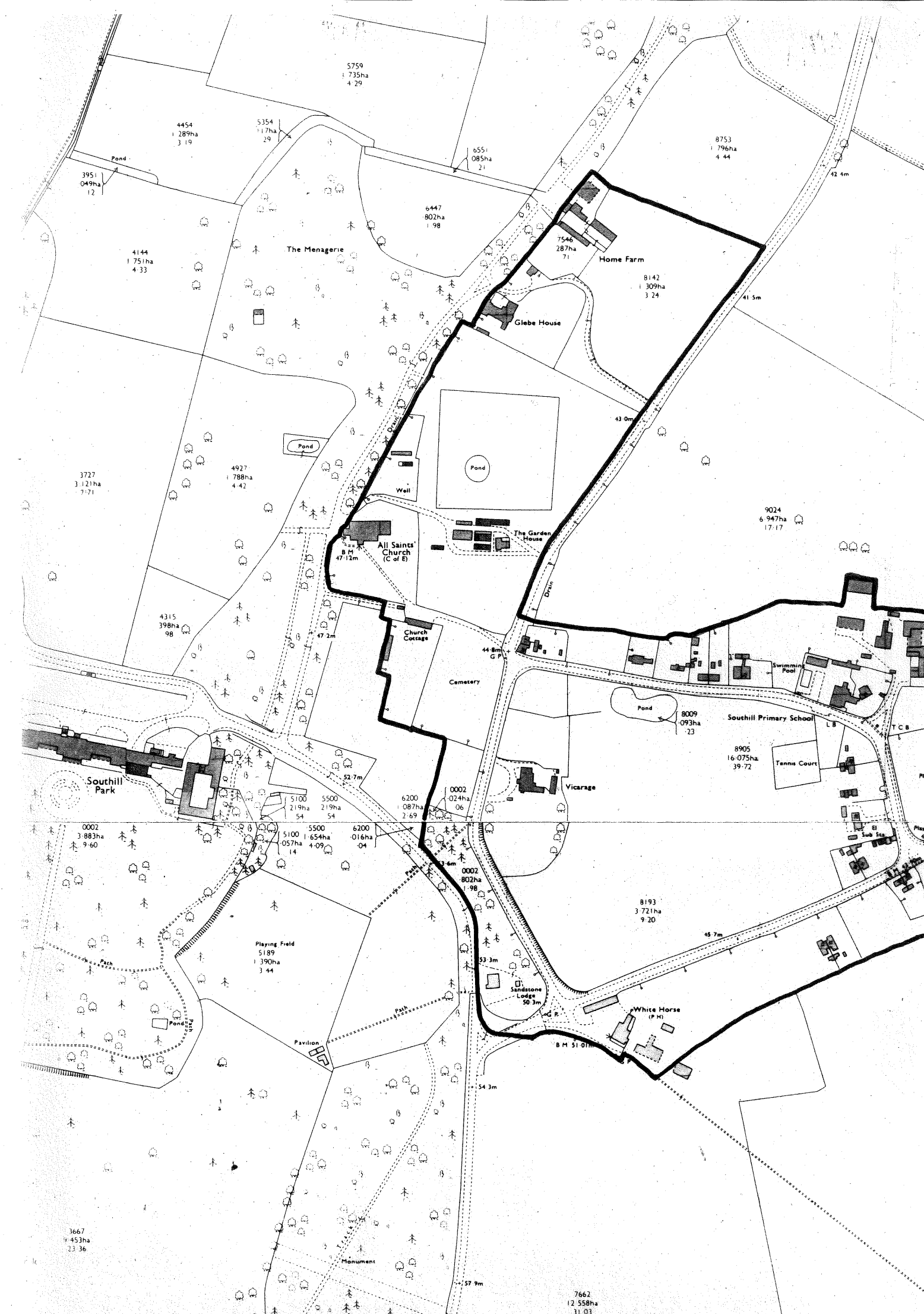
On the West side of the junction is the entrance to the church of All Saints, which dates from the 14th and 15th centuries but was largely rebuilt in 1814. The path to the Church passes Church Cottage, part of which dates from the 17th century. Other attractive features embedded in this edge of the Park are a square walled garden and the interesting Glebe House, now used as the Estate Office for the Whitbread family. The latter is a two storey 18th/19th century red brick house with ground floor Venetian windows and central door with small veranda; it has a fine setting with trees to the West and extensive views to the East across the village and the surrounding countryside.

GENERAL POLICY

In order to safeguard the character and appearance of the Conservation Area it will be necessary to:

- (1) Retain important buildings and walls and encourage their improvement rather than redevelopment. Consideration will be given to the addition of some buildings to the Statutory List and the Secretary of State for the Environment will be advised of these.
- (2) Ensure that new development does not weaken the close inter-relationship between the loosely-knit structure of the village and the landscape setting, and that the many attractive views of open countryside are not spoilt. In particular, the open nature of the ~~triangular~~ 'island' at the western end of the village should be respected.
- (3) Though Southill is an openly developed village, some buildings are close to the roadside and alternate pleasantly with those set further back, whilst hedges are very important in defining the lines of the lanes. Both features should be remembered when considering any redevelopment or road widening proposals and the existing lines of hedges and buildings should only be abandoned where there is an overriding safety reason.
- (4) Ensure that any development or re-development makes a positive contribution to the area and that it is entirely appropriate in terms of siting, design and materials. In particular, any new building should be designed as part of the group in which it is situated and in relation to surrounding trees and landscape, and not as an isolated structure. Applications for development unsupported by details will not normally be acceptable.
- (5) Retain trees and hedges wherever possible, try to see that they are properly maintained and replaced when necessary, and encourage new planting where this would improve the village scene. There are no Tree Preservation Orders in the Conservation Area at present. All trees will need to be identified in greater detail and their protection secured by agreements with the land owners concerned or by making Tree Preservation Orders. To achieve this, the help of the Parish Council will be necessary. Trees lying outside the Conservation Area should also be taken into account if they form an essential background to the area.

- (6) Investigate the possibilities of replacing overhead poles and wires with underground services and ensure that new installations do not spoil the appearance of the area. Eastern Electricity have recently replaced the poles in the centre of the village with underground lines.
- (7) Continue to use gravel surface dressings wherever possible on carriageways and footpaths, as it blends well with the building materials. The extension of hard edges to the carriageways should be avoided where possible - certainly, granite setts should be used in preference to concrete kerbs should any edging be found necessary.



South Hill Conservation Area

Date of Designation MAY 1973

— Boundary

February 1986
Scale 1/2500

