

Sustainable Communities

# Toddington

Conservation area appraisal

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 Toddington Conservation Area was created in 1971 with additional 'Article 4 Direction' protection endorsed by the Secretary of State in November 1975, requiring householders within the conservation area to obtain planning permission for normally 'permitted development' potentially damaging to its character, such as the construction of front porches, outbuildings and extensions.
- 1.2 The conservation area was reviewed in 1993 and its boundaries amended in the 1995 South Bedfordshire Local Plan. The designated area covers 17.555ha and includes 61 listed buildings, and one Scheduled Monument.
- 1.3 To the west of the conservation area boundary in Park Road, an area of 2.051ha on the north side of Park Road has a South Bedfordshire Local Plan designation as an area of special character in which development is restricted.
- 1.4 In 2003, Albion Archaeology was commissioned to produce an archaeological assessment of Toddington as part of an Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) for Bedfordshire initiated by English Heritage, with the partnership of Bedfordshire County Council. The final report, edited in 2005, provides a history of the town, and relates this to its known archaeological finds and features, and also to its archaeological potential.
- 1.5 This conservation area appraisal 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 of the future management of the conservation area through the planning system.



## **2.0 Summary**

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

- The historical character of Toddington as a small, rural, market town spanning 700 years, reflected in its layout and the type and character of its historic buildings
- The enduring 'landmark' predominance of the Church of St George
- The significance of the former market square to the historic layout, and as a key focal element and important green open space
- Key elements of historic development preserved in the present townscape (Church, market square, Conger Hill motte and bailey, Red Lion and Bell coaching inns, nonconformist chapels)
- Strong visual enclosure and frontage unity conveyed by building lines set forward to the edges of the streets, creating an intimate but 'bustling' townscape
- A picturesque 'jumble' of building forms and rooflines
- The high-quality of brick building, and the distinctive use of local brick, into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century
- An enduring tradition of town Charitable Institutions (Feoffee Yard, Church Square)
- The survival and picturesque adaptation of the Town Pond
- Important individual and groups of trees

## **3.0 Location and setting**

3.1 Toddington lies 4.5 miles north of Dunstable, 6 miles north-east of Leighton Buzzard, and 6 miles south of Ampthill on the old London to Bedford road. It is a hilltop settlement at the point of convergence of five historic roads. The importance of these routes has continued to influence the fortunes, and resulting character, of Toddington from its medieval origins.

- 3.2 The underlying geology is gault and boulder clay capped with glacial gravels, which has favoured a local, and historic, agricultural land-use of both arable and pasture.
- 3.3 Toddington was historically embedded within the agricultural landscape which sustained its local prosperity. A remarkable surviving land survey produced in 1581 by the professional surveyor, Radulph Agas, (now preserved in the British Museum) shows Toddington surrounded by its medieval open-fields.
- 3.4 Agricultural land continued to meet the very edges of the historic built settlement at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as shown by the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1882 (p. 7), but has been pushed back by twentieth century village expansion to an extent where the historic link between settlement and countryside is no longer apparent, apart from a glimpsed view of open countryside beyond the rooftops of Wentworth Gardens, and the presence of farmbuildings associated with Griffin Farm in the present townscape.
- 3.5 The principal through-route, now the A5120, was the historic focus of settlement secondary to the market square, and became important to the economy of the historic town as a coach road in the eighteenth century, when the market was in decline.
- 3.6 Through-traffic is a feature of the present village, but the heaviness of this traffic, swelled by M1 Junction 12 immediately to the north-east, now has a negative impact on village character.



**Nos. 40 & 42 High Street (west side) with the Wesleyan Chapel beyond**

## 4.0 Historical development



**Conger Hill motte with Griffin Farmhouse and Church beyond**

4.1 Toddington has probable Anglo-Saxon origins, its name appearing to originate in Old English as 'Hill of Tuda's people'. Specific mention of settlement appears in the Domesday Book of 1086.



4.2 The establishment of Norman overlordship is represented by the Conger Hill motte and bailey castle. It is generally not believed to be the site of the remarkable 13<sup>th</sup> century manor house known to have been built by Paulinus Pever, also believed to be the original builder of the present Church.

4.3 The market town has its origins in a grant of an annual market and fair in 1218, reconfirmed in 1315. The vitality of the town in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century is illustrated with remarkable clarity in the Radulph Agas survey of the manor in 1581. This clearly shows the market place with its Town Hall and Market House (demolished in 1799), and Butcher's Row or 'Shambles'.

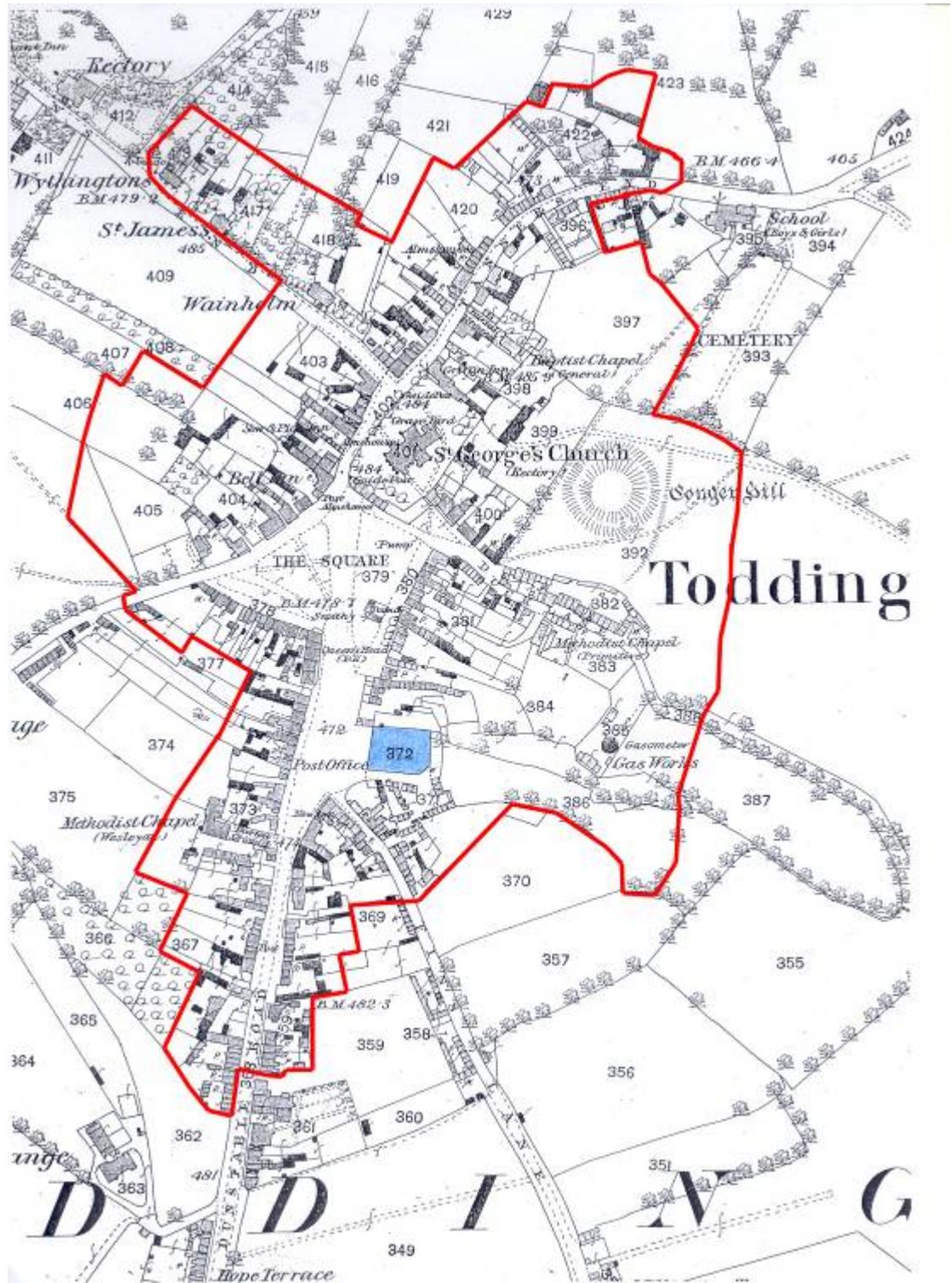
4.4 Decline of the town began in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a result of competition from other local market centres, and was hastened when the railway system bypassed the town altogether in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

4.5 This decline actually favoured the preservation of the town's historic character, its 'air of ancient dignity' apparent to the compiler of its entry in the Victoria County History around 1912.

The market place (outlined) in 1581, from a survey by Radulph Agas.



Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1:2500 map (1882)  
With Conservation Area Boundary



## 5.0 Character



- 5.1 Although Toddington now has the feel of, and is locally considered as, a large and vibrant village, it's historic status as a small, but bustling, market town spanning 700 years is reflected in its layout and the character of its historic buildings.
- 5.2 The historic market square, shown in such detail on the Radulph Agas survey of 1581, although acknowledged in present street naming, has for a considerable time functioned as a village green, and as such is a key focal element and green open space - a transformation which has been complimented by the unfortunate anonymity of the surviving 16<sup>th</sup> century Town Hall, subdued by a substantive cloaking of paint.
- 5.3 The scale and magnificence of the Church of St George, overlooking the present green to the north is, however, out of key in a purely village context, as is the sheer density of the buildings that line the sides of the green itself. Both convey medieval 'urban' qualities.



**Market Square and Town Hall (centre) from the west**

- 5.4 In addition to the historic townscape 'tell-tales' which signpost Toddington's former status, the present townscape incorporates key elements of its historic development as a community.
- 5.5 These include the Conger Hill motte and bailey castle, representing the establishment of post-Conquest overlordship (and thus the earliest surviving embodiment of social organisation), the Church, with its enduring, and deliberate, townscape predominance, the nonconformist chapels of the nineteenth century, and the sheltered accommodation of Feoffee Yard, Church Square representing an enduring tradition of town Charitable Institutions and social care.



- 5.6 The conservation area encompasses Toddington's historic core, along with some high-quality and vernacular nineteenth century expansion and redevelopment, as mapped by the Ordnance Survey in 1882, before significant twentieth century village expansion to the south and west.
- 5.7 The conservation area includes important individual and groups of trees. They have both particular townscape significance, such as those surrounding the former Town Pond (now Memorial Garden), and particular historic significance, such as those marking historic boundaries at the settlement margins (and coinciding with the conservation area boundaries on the east sides and north-west corner), many of which are depicted on the Agas survey of 1581.



- 5.8 Village expansion has continued since conservation area designation in 1971, with the result that the conservation area now incorporates the modern housing developments of St George's Close, to the west (1975-76), and Wentworth Gardens to the south-east (1996-97). There has also been some incongruous housing infill along Conger Lane, which has impacted upon its particular character.
- 5.9 In Toddington, historical change, continuity and adaptation combine to form a varied and complex townscape, and overall understanding has been aided by the identification of distinct 'character areas'.

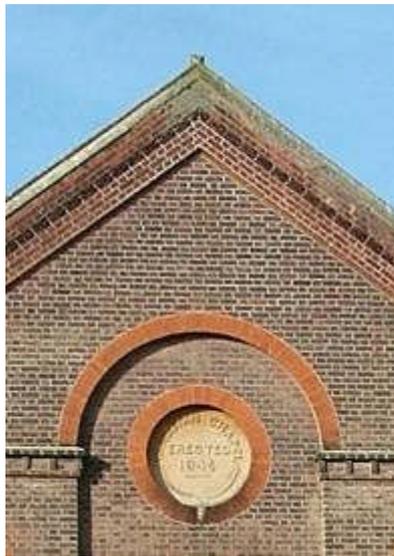
- 5.10 Five 'character areas' are used in this conservation area appraisal, and are individually described in the next section.
- 5.11 The present A5120 village 'gateways' formed by the southern end of the High Street and, to the north, by Station Road (with Tanner's End) are recognized in two character areas.
- 5.12 The historic road convergence and focus of settlement, with Church, market place and town pond, have been termed the Village Core, but also includes the distinctly rural 'backwater' of Conger Lane.
- 5.13 The distinct built character of the north side of Park Road is recognized as another character area, as is the spatial relationship of the Conger Hill motte and bailey castle to the present townscape.

## 6.0 Appearance

- 6.1 The present village is a picturesque mix of building forms, styles and traditional constructional materials, with surviving examples of thatch, timber-framing, old clay rooftiles, 19<sup>th</sup> century roof slate, and a tradition of high-quality brick building into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



- 6.2 In the case of brick, the widespread use of fine gauged arches and dentilated eaves cornices, and the distinctive use of local plum-red brick are particularly notable.



- 6.3 There are some good surviving examples of traditional sash and casement timber windows, panelled exterior doors and doorcases.
- 6.4 Together, this distinctive architectural 'vocabulary' defines both historic development (particularly in the use of brick) and local character, but is increasingly vulnerable to current trends of 'home improvement'.
- 6.5 The loss of traditional materials and detailing, and the use of cheap modern replacements is apparent throughout the conservation area, particularly in the case of windows and doors (where uPVC is becoming predominant) and also in the replacement of roof coverings.



- 6.6 The painting-over of exterior brickwork is a particular threat to the appearance of the conservation area. The effects of this work are decisive in terms of the loss of architectural character (and consequently of the historic 'record' that the buildings provide), and is not easily, or often completely, reversible.



**The Town Hall, Market Square, part-painted prior to listing in 1970**

- 6.7 In terms of general layout, enclosed front gardens are not a particular characteristic of the historic core of the conservation area (i.e. excluding the modern housing developments). Where they occur, notably as part of the layout of mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces at the south end of the High Street, their associated boundary walls have been reduced but not completely demolished. There is only one example (in Conger Lane) of demolition associated with hardstanding provision, and is partial in this instance.



**Nos. 45-53 High Street (east side)**

- 6.8 The public realm is dominated by the presence of both local and through-traffic and the concomitant requirement of road signage and street lighting. The conservation area would undoubtedly benefit from a coordinated approach to street lighting and signage provision, reducing unnecessary clutter wherever possible, should the opportunity for this arise in the future. Overhead wires and associated poles are an intrusive feature around Market Square, Conger Lane and Conger Hill.



- 6.9 The war memorial, village pump and red K6 telephone kiosk (Market Square), and the Victorian wall posting box outside No.42 High Street (west side), are notable public realm features.

### **High Street (south)**

- 6.10 Although Toddington's historic boundaries have been subsumed by extensive twentieth century housing development, the historic core 'gateway' is strongly defined, to the south, by 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces set forward to the pavement edges.



**High Street – looking north towards the Bedford Arms**

- 6.11 This strong building line, which frames distant views of the Town Hall and Church tower, is broken on the west side by two notable timber-framed buildings – the Bedford Arms and Nos. 40-42, High Street – which may have originated as farmsteads on the margins of the medieval town.
- 6.12 Also set back from the street on its west side is the striking Wesleyan (Methodist) Chapel, c. 1846, one of three nonconformist chapel groups which were established in the town in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- 6.13 Of the terraces, Nos. 45-53 High Street (east side) are notable for their fine panelled doorcases and elaborate window surrounds. Further north, on the west side, Nos. 48-52 incorporate a group of former 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘showcase’ shopfronts, although they are barely recognisable through residential conversion (now complete with satellite dish installation). Of the three, No. 52 is the least altered, and also retains a fine 19<sup>th</sup> century doorcase.



**High Street, view north to Market Square**

### **Tanner's End and Station Road**

- 6.14 In contrast to its southern equivalent, the northern 'gateway' has weaker definition.
- 6.15 The conservation area is entered at a pronounced curve in the road, with good buildings and visual enclosure on either side - the historic farmstead of Tanner's End on one hand, and the interesting, if stranded, group of Nos. 30-34 Station Road on the other. Nos. 32-34 are of particular note. They are timber-framed and of 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier origin, and suggest the northern extent, and building line, of historic ribbon settlement.
- 6.16 Beyond the current 'gap site' currently occupied by Miletree Cars, enclosure and frontage unity is maintained on the north-west side of the street by 19<sup>th</sup> century and later terraces. Modern residential redevelopment on the opposite side of the street imposes a strongly contrasting, and unbalancing, visual order only partly rectified by 'anchor' views of the Church tower further down the street towards the village core.



**(Foreground) Nos.32-34 Station Road and view south**



- 6.17 Notable buildings are the Baptist Church, c.1884, and to the north-west, on the opposite side of the street, Nos.25-33 Station Road, which are former almshouses.

### **Village Core**

- 6.18 The village core comprises the historic core of market square and Church, and the convergence of roads within it. It includes the present village shops, which remain a prominent townscape feature (although much let-down by unsympathetic modern shopfront and signage solutions), and the former town pond, now reduced in size but created into a haven of peace as a Memorial Garden.



**The Town Pond, now Memorial Garden**

- 6.19 Overlooked by the Church, buildings line the former market square in a picturesque jostle, particularly on the south side, occupying narrow plots of a typical medieval 'urban' footprint, with outbuilding ranges behind. The majority of the Market Square buildings are listed, in recognition of their historic and townscape significance, but notable non-listed buildings are The Old Manse (west side) and The Old Forge (east side), now the 'Filling Station' Dental Surgery, its name an allusion to its subsequent historic association with the motor car.
- 6.20 Buildings of particular note are Wentworth House, to the north of the town pond, the Bell public house (west side), once an important coaching inn, and Conger House and Conger Villa (north side), part of a picturesque group at the top of Conger Lane. The Library (east side) is a refreshing example of a modern interpretation of traditional architectural forms.
- 6.21 Luton Road enters the former the market square at its southern end. This approach still retains something of a 'rural' feel here, as the road perceptibly narrows and threads through some interesting, but heavily altered, vernacular buildings.



**Luton Road, view towards High Street**

- 6.22 The west (Leighton Road) approach to Market Square has been spoiled by the layout of modern housing infill. On the south side, Nos.7-11 Leighton Road maintain a strong building line, but are isolated, while on the north side, visual enclosure is reliant on a tree line.
- 6.23 Joining the east side of Market Square, Conger Lane has a distinctly intimate and 'rural' feel, winding its way out of the village and petering out as a footpath entering open countryside. Although it retains some interesting vernacular buildings, its character has been greatly spoiled by modern housing infill, and it is now normally choked with parked cars. Something of its former quality, however, is still evident at its north (Market Square) end.



**Conger Lane (north end)**

- 6.24 The busy townscape of the former market square continues north into Church Square, where the Feoffee Yard almshouses (west side) is a building group of particular note. Further north, No.23, with its carriage arch and good, but redundant, shopfront, forms an interesting group with Nos. 21 & 25 adjoining. No.25, the former Red Lion inn, with its associated thatched outbuilding to the rear (The Old Barn, Park Road), is also part of a strong group of corner buildings defining the Park Road/Station Road junction.



**Nos. 23 & 25 Church Square (west side)**

### **Conger Hill**

- 6.25 To the north of Conger Lane, an area of open grassland containing the earthwork remains of Conger Hill motte and bailey castle provides interesting alternative views of the Church tower and rich roofscape of the village. The site is designated a Scheduled Monument.



- 6.26 Footpaths here, running north and east, are historic; the path heading north-east and skirting the motte to the south can clearly be seen on the Agas survey of 1581 (p.6). An old brick boundary wall, forming the distinctive rear boundary of several properties on the north side of Conger Lane may perpetuate the westward line of the former bailey bank.



### **Park Road**

- 6.27 The north side of Park Road is characterized by a handful of significant buildings fronting the street.
- 6.28 Wainholm and St James are listed. At the Long Lane junction, and at the conservation area edge, important boundary trees and the gabled charm of Glengarriff, with St Elizabeth's Roman Catholic Church beyond, combine to form an important group.



**Glengarriff, Park Road, from the south east**

## **7.0 Boundary changes**

- 7.1 No boundary changes have been made as a result of this conservation area review, but it is a recommendation of the review that future consideration should be given to the following proposed amendment of the conservation area boundaries, as shown on the conservation area Management map (p.22):



1. Extension of the conservation area to the south to include the old workhouse and its grounds ('The Grange', Nos. 1-4 Workhouse Lane), the adjacent green open space at the Grange Road/High Street junction (including Nos. 94-104 High Street inclusive), and 19<sup>th</sup> century housing in High Street and Dunstable Road (Nos. 61-69 High Street inclusive, and Nos.2-32 Dunstable Road inclusive).

#### **Reason:**

The area and buildings recommended for inclusion, have both historic and architectural interest and also a particular townscape value, comprising strong (terraced) building lines and a 'green lung' open space. It is therefore an area which contributes to the special interest of Toddington conservation area.

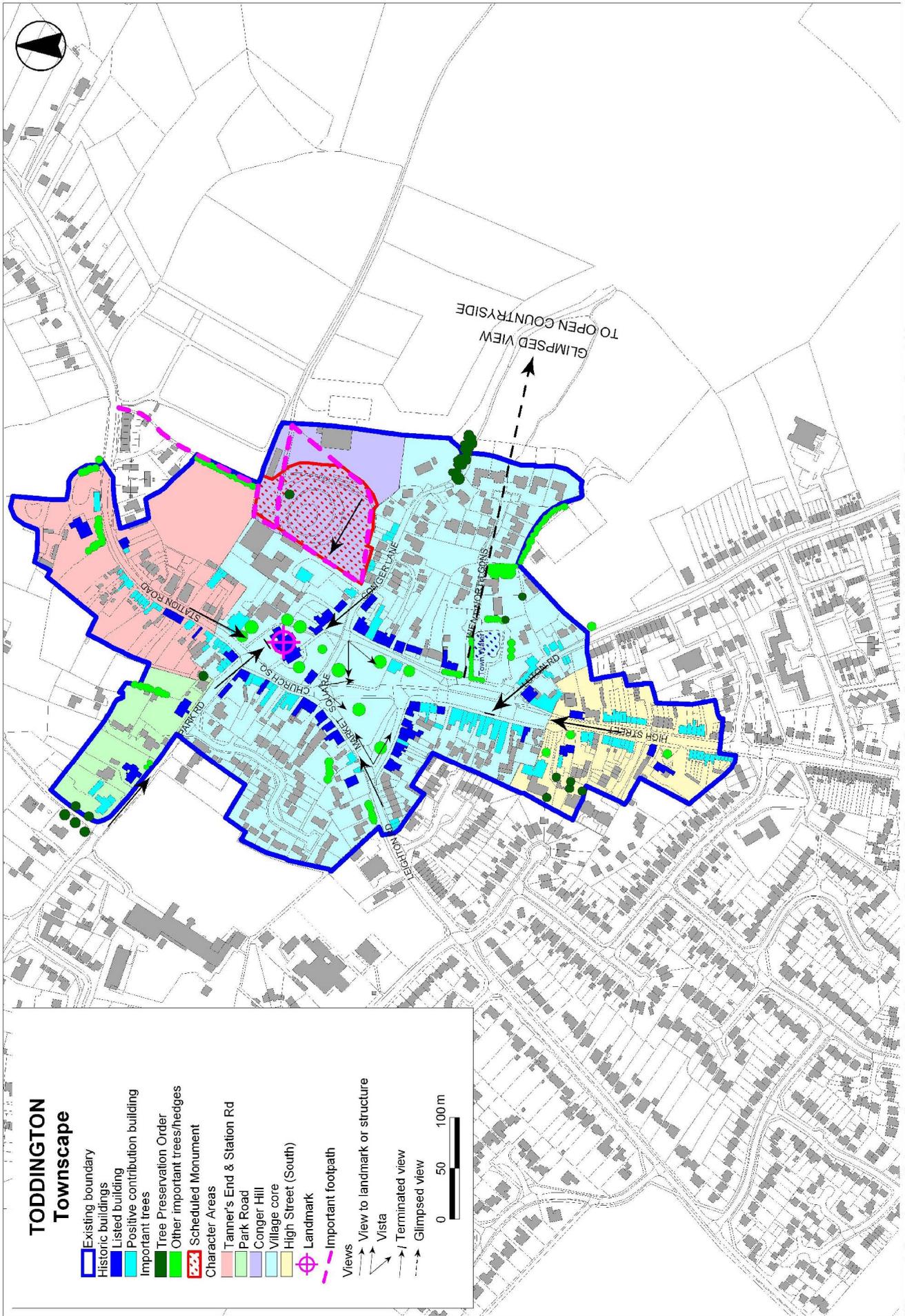
## **8.0 Opportunities for enhancement**

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

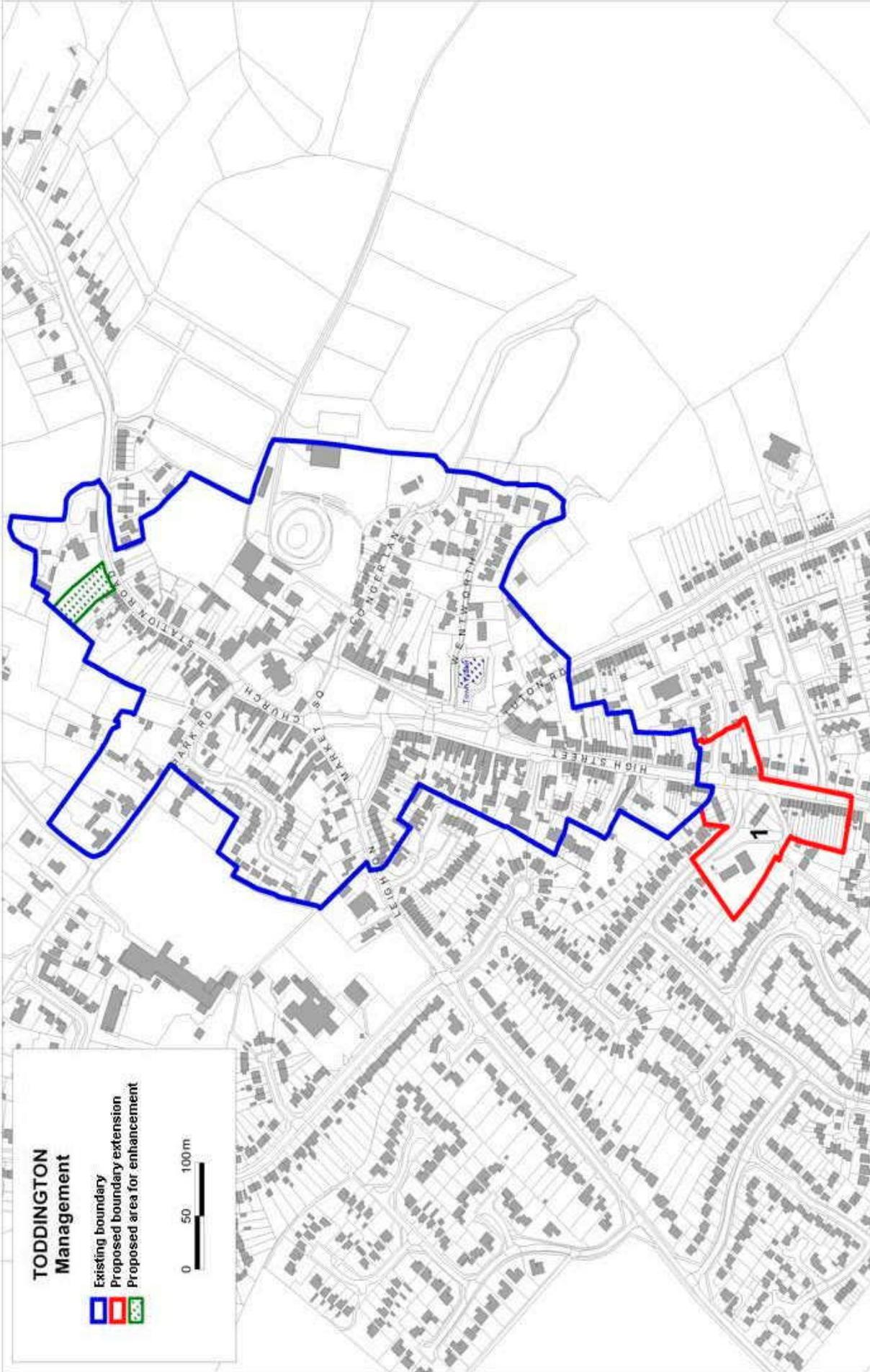
- The undergrounding of overhead wires, allowing the removal of obtrusive telegraph poles (Market Square, Conger Hill, Conger Lane)
- The reduction and coordination of traffic signage, where practical
- The coordination of street furniture and lighting design
- Measures for traffic calming to accord with 'best practice' approaches to traffic management in historic areas
- Encouragement to be given to the reinstatement of traditional wooden doors and windows throughout the conservation area
- Encouragement to be given to the reinstatement of locally traditional long-straw thatched roofs with plain flush ridges
- Encouragement to be given to the reinstatement of removed front boundary walls, railings and gates
- Encourage appropriate and high-quality shopfront and shop signage design
- Ensure that any redevelopment of the key site at the north end of Station Road (currently occupied by Miletree Cars) introduces an appropriate form of enclosure to the street frontage

### **Additional recommendations**

Consideration to be given to the proposed amendment of the conservation area boundaries as set out in Section 7 of this document (p.19), and indicated on the conservation area Management map (p.22).



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## Appendix 1: References

- A History of the County of Bedford: Volume 3 - Victoria County History (ed. W. Page) 1912  
<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42462>
- Extensive Urban Survey for Bedfordshire: Toddington Archaeological Assessment, Albion Archaeology, 2003 (edited 2005)  
[http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/projArch/EUS/bedsluton\\_eus\\_2006/downloads.cfm?CFID=3778022&CFTOKEN=44139956&town=Toddington](http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/projArch/EUS/bedsluton_eus_2006/downloads.cfm?CFID=3778022&CFTOKEN=44139956&town=Toddington)
- Beresford, M.W. and Viner, J. *History on the Ground* 1997
- Viner, J. *A stroll through Old Toddington* (Toddington Historical Society, 1997)

## Maps

- Radulph Agas Survey of the Manor of Toddington ('Tuddington') 1581 (B.M., Add. MSS. 38065)
- Ordnance Survey – 1882 1:2500 map (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)

## **Appendix 2: Listed buildings and scheduled monuments**

### **Listed buildings**

#### **Grade I**

Church of St George, Church Square (east side)

#### **Grade II**

##### **Church Square**

###### **(South-east side)**

Boundary wall to churchyard, St George's Parish Church

###### **(West side)**

No. 21 (Saddler's Cottage)

No. 25 and thatched barn to rear [The Old Barn, Park Road]

No. 27 [listed as No.1 Station Road]

##### **Conger Lane**

###### **(North side)**

No.1

###### **(South side)**

Nos. 4, 6 and 8

##### **High Street**

###### **(East Side)**

No.15

No.19

###### **(West side)**

Nos. 2 and 4

No.10

No.28

Nos. 40 and 42

Bedford Arms

Toddington Florists, 62 High Street

##### **Market Square**

Village Pump

### **Market Square (North side)**

K6 Telephone Kiosk at A5120 junction  
Town Hall  
Conger Cottage  
Conger House and Conger Villa

### **(East side)**

The Oddfellows Arms  
Nos. 11 to 15 (odd)  
Nos. 17 and 19  
Nos. 21, 23 and 25  
Wentworth House

### **(West side)**

The Bell Public House  
Nos. 6 and 8  
Sundial House [listed as Sundial House]  
14 Market Square [listed as Sunny Bank] (Previously No. 2 Leighton Road)

### **(South side)**

The Red Lion Public House [No.22]  
Nos. 24 and 26  
No. 28  
No. 30  
Nos. 34 and 36  
No. 38  
Nos. 40 and 42

### **Park Road**

#### **(North Side)**

Wainholm  
St James

### **Station Road**

#### **(North west side)**

No.13 (Rhees Cottage)  
Nos. 25 to 33 (odd) [numbered 27 to 33, in error, in Statutory List]  
No. 61 (Tanner's End Farmhouse)

#### **(South east side)**

Nos. 32 and 34

### **Scheduled monuments**

Conger Hill motte and bailey castle (Monument No: SM20439)

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