HOUGHTON

CONSERVATION AREA DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



HOUGHTON, (NEW) or Houghton-in-the-Brake, a parish and village, 13 miles N.E. by E. of Lynn, and 10 miles W. of Fakenham, contains 1,521 acres of land, of which 800 are in the park of Houghton Hall. Sir Robert Walpole K.G., the celebrated prime minister was born here in 1676.

WILLIAM WHITE 1845

DESIGNATED: OCTOBER 1978 REVISED: FEBRUARY 1989

Borough Council of KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

PLANNING POLICY Ŧ

INTRODUCTION

A Conservation Area – "An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".

The conservation of the historic environment is part of our quality of life, helping to foster economic prosperity and providing an attractive environment in which to live or work. The Borough Council is committed to the protection and enhancement of West Norfolk's historic built environment and significant parts of it are designated as conservation areas.

Conservation areas were introduced by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act. Local Authorities were required to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest, whose character or appearance it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and to designate them as conservation areas. This duty is now part of the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act which also requires the review of existing conservation areas and, where appropriate, the designation of new The quality and, interest of a ones depends conservation area upon а of factors including the combination relationship and architectural quality of buildings, materials, spaces, trees and other landscape features, together with views into and out of the area.

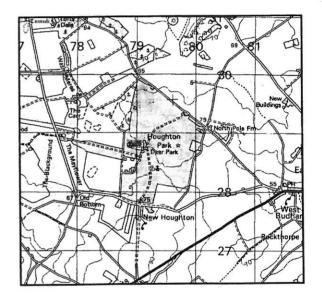
New Houghton Conservation Area was designated in October 1978 and extended in 1989. This document highlights the special qualities which underpin the character of the conservation area, justifying its designation. It also seeks to increase awareness of those qualities so that where changes to the environment occur, they do so in a sympathetic way without harm to the essential character of the area. This type of assessment has been encouraged by recent Government Advice (PPG15) and it will eventually form supplementary planning guidance to those policies in the King's Lynn & West Norfolk Local Plan aimed at protecting the overall character of conservation areas. In particular, the guidance will supplement the Local Plan policies which deal with demolition and new development within the conservation area and new development on land adjoining the conservation area which might affect its setting or the views in or out of the area.

This character statement does not address enhancement proposals. Community led enhancement schemes will be considered as part of a separate process.

SETTING AND LOCATION

The Saxon place name for Houghton was 'hoh-tun' suggesting a settlement on the spur of a hill, a rather more dramatic description than is the case. Houghton Park and the village of New Houghton are situated in the undulating chalky uplands of North West Norfolk, a dry, open landscape of light soils and tree belts that became known as the 'Good Sands' region in the 19th Century. The immediate topography of the park is almost flat, varying between 65 and 75M (approx. 200 feet) above sea level with a slight fall from east to west.

The estate which extends over the whole 600 hectares (1500 acres) of Houghton Parish and northwards to include much of Bircham and Bagthorpe, occupies a watershed position between the Wensum river that drains east to Norwich and the much shorter Heacham and Babingly rivers that flow west into the Wash.



Houghton lies in a block of countryside bounded on the south by the A148, on the west by Peddar's Way, on the north west by the B1153/55 and on the north east by the B1454. The village is 13 ¹/₂ kilometers (8 ¹/₂ miles) west of Fakenham, 20 kilometers (12 ³/₄ miles) east of King's Lynn and 19 ³/₄ kilometers (12 ¹/₂ miles) north of Swaffham.

The village is approached along straight, minor roads with wide grass verges from the surrounding villages; but because the landscape is almost flat and there are no landmarks rising from within the park to break the skyline, the thick perimeter belts are the first features to suggest the proximity of a large, enclosed parkland. The exception is the grand avenue from Harpley to the south.

ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

At the western corner of the Conservation Area where the Anmer to Harpley Road crosses Peddar's Way one gets a strong sense of two very different landscapes: a regular pattern of large 18th Century enclosure fields, wide straight roads and thick perimeter belts of planting superimposed on a much earlier landscape of small isolated villages separated by huge tracts of heath scattered with prehistoric burial mounds.



The Roman road follows the line of an ancient trade route known as the lcknield Way that ran south from the coast. Here on Harpley Common and elsewhere along its margins lie the Bronze Age tumuli that are a feature of these light sandy soils. By the time of the Norman Conquest the network of settlement and trackway had already been well established by Saxon immigrants. Whereas the lightly wooded terrain made colonization relatively easy, the soil was poor quality and some smaller hamlets were alreadv disappearing. The roadside village of Houghton was originally Houghton-in-the-Brake (Brake refers to land intermittently cultivated), an outlying estate of William de Warenne's Manor of Rudham, but its survival was due largely to the efforts of the Walpole family. Originally from the Fenland village of that name, Sir Henry de Walpole held land in Houghton by the late 13th century and the family gradually transferred its power base to North West Norfolk throughout the Middle Ages.

The estate escaped the ravages of the Civil War and continued to prosper throughout the 17th Century. This prosperity was sustained by a new, progressive agriculture; early enclosure of the commons, large scale sheep grazing and new arable crops such as turnips grown as a field crop. The architectural history of Houghton Hall, a complicated

mixture of enlargement and rebuilding, reflects this new wealth and the growing aspirations of the Walpole family. The exact position of the original Elizabethan Hall, complete with its great barn and stable range, is not clear but it probably lay just west of the present building. Robert Walpole, who was to become Prime Minister, began to modernise the old house in 1700, but despite his best efforts the building was overrun with vermin and in 1720 he decided to build a new mansion.

In the previous year Thomas Brideslade had been commissioned to survey the Walpole Estate and his map provides a unique record of the relationship between the old hall, its new parkland setting and the village of Houghton before its destruction. The medieval settlement had grown along the Anmer to Rudham road with St Martin's Church at the eastern end. North of the village lay the hall that Robert Walpole decided to landscape soon after 1700. The deer park of approximately 90 hectares (225 acres) with its perimeter belts and radial pattern of tree-lined avenues was clearly intended to provide a formal setting for the building he was busy attempting to modernise. When he abandoned the project and commissioned a new mansion in the Palladian style, his decision rebuild it immediately east and on the same axis was probably determined by the landscaping already established rather than chose the more elevated site to the north west advocated by his building surveyor, Thomas Ridley.



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This decision ushered in a period of frenzied activity during the next two decades. hectares (16 acres) of formal garden to the west of the new house were replaced by a grass parterre lined with topiary and closed by dense plantations cut through by walkways. An estate map of c.1723-9 shows a deer park of hectares (600 acres) greatly enlarged to the south-west and east and enclosed by a pale fence. By this time the village had been

its series of geometric avenues has been associated, with the garden architect Charles Bridgeman, but the garden itself is more likely to have been the work of Fulke Harold, a man held in high regard by Sir Robert.

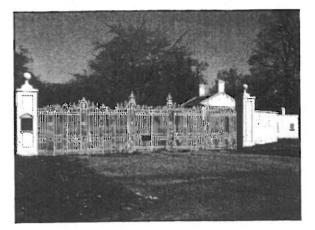
The development of the park to the south was now obstructed by the village. The original plan involved the destruction of tenements on the north side only to provide room for a large new stable block that was to terminate the south view from the house. The stables were built in the 1720's but these in turn, together with the rest of the village, stood in the way of Walpole's more expansive vision and were soon swept away. The planned village of New Houghton with its regular pairs of plain brick cottages lining the village street was laid out at the northern end of a wide avenue running from Harpley. The design is usually attributed to William Kent who designed the interior of the hall, but it seems more logical that, as Architect in charge at Houghton, Ripley should have designed the new village.

With the removal of the old village work proceeded quickly on Walpole's new mansion and a grand quadrangular stable block (1733-5) set back to provide uninterrupted views south along another tree-lined avenue. The



New Inn (now Hall Farm), completed in 1736 with pedimented facade, lay just west of the village opposite two small lodges at the main entrance to the park. North west of the hall the Earl of Pembroke's handsome pedimented water tower was built c.1738 as a focal point for one of Bridgeman's avenues and the ice house to the east was completed in the 1740's; by which time Walpole had also rebuilt the Church tower as a Gothick eyecatcher in the Park.

One of Walpole's last projects was to cut through a shallow hill to the east of the hall in 1742 so that from its piano nobile he could look out towards Raynham Hall. Little more was done after his death and by the late 18th Century the house and estate were in poor condition. The idea of creating a lake to the west from the Wash Meres, a marshy area of pools in Great Bircham, was revived but the clay beneath the park proved too thin. Only James' Pond at the southern tip of the Meres was ever incorporated into the park. The main entrance to the park was repositioned in 1793 when Lord Cholmondeley to whom the estate had recently passed, had new entrance lodges built at the northern end of the village street, adorned with a pair of elaborate gates removed from his ancestral home in Cheshire. The west and north lodges built in 1830 completed the layout of the park marking the various approaches to the Hall.



CHARACTER OVERVIEW

Houghton is synonymous with the Walpole family. It remains a classic expression of 18th Century wealth and power and its dramatic effect on the landscapes. Apart from the Church, almost nothing survives above ground of the medieval village. Swept away by Robert Walpole in the early 18th Century to make way for his new mansion it became one of the likely contenders for Goldsmith's poem "The Deserted Village". New Houghton was repositioned at the southern entrance to the park; rows of neat brick and tile cottages that constitute one of the earliest and best preserved examples of Georgian planned development.

The park was laid out in the early 18th Century according to the latest principles of landscape design as a radial pattern of grand vistas and formal avenues surrounded by thick perimeter belts of planting. Colen Campbell's Palladian mansion in pale ashlared sandstone stands as the centrepiece of this grand design flanked by pavillions and to the south by a huge quadrangular stable block faced in rich brown carrstone and by the walled garden.

The whole composition of village, park and hall set in the gently rolling countryside of North West Norfolk remains true in essence to Robert Walpole's original plan. This



achievement and the beauty of Houghton today owes much to successive generations of both the Walpole and Cholmondeley families.

The Hall and Park

Sir Robert was Chancellor of the Exchequer when he decided to rebuild Houghton in 1720 and was soon to reach the pinnacle of his career as England's first Prime Minister. On completion twelve years later the hall was one of the most ambitious country houses of its day, a perfect expression of his political power, great wealth and personal taste. It was built in the Palladian style to a design by James Gibbs and the work was supervised by Thomas Ripley who organised the shipment of sandstone blocks from Whitby used to clad the brick structure. Colen Campbell, who superseded Gibbs, revised the plans and added the piano nobile but the corner domes, such a dramatic feature of the design, are part of Gibb's original work.

Rectangular in plan with single storey pavilions to north and south linked to the main block by colonnades, the hall is divided into a "base or rustic storey (for) hunters and hospitality, dirt and business" and a piano nobile above for "taste, expense, state and parade". The main entrance is at the more sober east front, although its double flights of steps are missing, while the pedimented and porticoed west front was originally intended to overlook an elaborate parterre.

The stable block in a more restrained Palladian style consistent with its function is faced in local carrstone and ranged around a large quadrangle. Chosen for its rich brown colour as a foil to the fine grey sandstone employed on the hall, the Snettisham stone also emphasises the massive scale and severity of The Square. Each side with rows of lunette windows at ground floor, is punctuated by a monumental central pedimented archway and finished at the corners with polygonal turrets, a crude reference to the "pepperpot" domes of the hall. The internal elevations are faced in warm orange brick; the courtyard paved with dark blue Staffordshire stable bricks and an apron of thin yellow bricks laid to a herringbone pattern, the whole sloping to a central point now occupied by a fountain. The Square is now linked to the hall's southern pavilion by a walkway through a rectangular plantation of pleached limes laid out just after the last war.

Beyond the parterre the hall looks out across open Parkland with woodland on a slight rise cut through by west view. To the east the park is more closely planted and here the main north and south approaches, laid out by the first Marquis of Cholmondeley, wind informally to the hall in contrast to the original straight driveway from West Lodge. The east view is much shorter, defined by a double beech avenue on slightly rising ground, while the south view, framed by an avenue of oaks, is continued beyond the pale fence by thick tree belts and terminated by Town Plantation.

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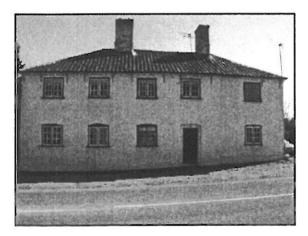
Unlike Holkham Park, designed a little later by Capability Brown, the main formal vistas at Houghton have no architectural features or terminal landmarks. The only exception is the Earl of Pembroke's water tower and this is situated in a secondary avenue aligned on the Otherwise the absence of focal parterre. points or any scheme of garden design to relate the hall more clearly to its setting, leaves the noble edifice a little stranded in such an expanse of flat grassland. The walled garden south west of the stables, now restored and well-stocked, provides the colour and texture missing from the parterre. The main framework of Bridgeman's design for the park with its formal views and perimeter belts remains unchanged and where necessary, is being reinforced by new planting. Elsewhere the creation of new elements such as the double avenue of sweet chestnuts opposite Home Farm continues to reshape the original layout.

Situated about ¹/₂ kilometer (¹/₄ miles) south east of the hall, St Martin's Church stands rather isolated in the park, unrelated to the great house by any element of design and in danger of being completely obscured by recent planting. Approached through an arboretum of young deciduous trees, the building is medieval in origin but much restored and reclad in knapped and squared flint in the 19th Century. Sir Robert's tower, heavily buttressed and pinnacled, rises delicately from between two large yew trees beside the west doorway, but once inside there are none of the family monuments normally associated with an estate church even though Sir Robert and subsequent Earls of Orford are all buried here. The only tomb is medieval, a fine effigy from nearby Coxford Priory brought here at the Dissolution and a reminder that the Church was given to the Priory in 1203.

Apart from the church the only evidence of the old village is in the form of some earthworks to the north west marking the course of the main street, the village pond beside the main driveway and, now looking faintly absurd in its open parkland setting, the remains of a medieval cross that once stood in the centre of old Houghton.

The Village

The grand driveway that runs due north from Harpley for almost a mile along a magnificent avenue of beech trees signals the main approach to one of the nation's great country houses. At the far end the road sweeps down through the estate village of New Houghton to Lord Cholmondeley's elaborate wrought iron gates at the entrance to the park. The village, built between 1724 and 1729, is one of the earliest and best preserved examples of Georgian planning and a fitting prelude to the architectural splendour of the house itself. The village is attractive not just because it remains essentially unchanged but because in terms of its position as well as its disposition hidden by the avenue of spreading trees until the last moment - it is so unexpected.

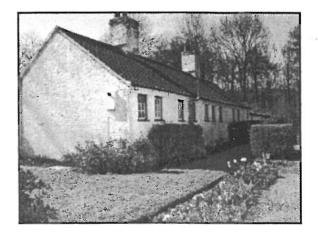


At first glance Walpole's village appears to be entirely symmetrical. Pairs of regularly spaced cottages on a common building line set behind a wide cobble verge, face each other across the street. The position of the cottages, linked together by diagonal paling fences, and the absence of raised pavements, gives the street a simplicity and spaciousness that draws the eye down to the dazzling white park gates where, after a short distance, the driveway curves to the right and is lost among the trees.

While the architectural character of New Houghton owes much to its regular plan form, this unity of purpose is expressed just as clearly in the consistent use of materials colourwashed brick and black glazed pantiles on hipped roofs - and a limited range of simple details - the brick dentil course and bracketed cast iron gutters, heavy plank doors set in gable ends and two light casements. This attention to detail can be traced to the gravel drives, the adoption of a single colour scheme for all external paintwork and the hedges of privet or box that separate each well-stocked garden.



The abiding sense of uniformity is, on closer inspection, relieved by some subtle but important variations in both layout and detail, most noticeable at either end of the short village street. To the south the old school is set well back on the west side with no corresponding building opposite. Its position, single storey scale, cross casements and slate roof identify an institutional building away from the estate cottages for whose use it was



originally intended. This is true also of the Almshouses nearby; again single storey and gable end to the road but this time mirrored by the cottages opposite. At the other end the most northerly cottages on either side are short terraces and beyond them, almost hidden behind boundary walls, are an identical pair of diminutive gatehouses. Unlike the single isolated lodges at the northern and western approaches, they are still of the village but, set immediately inside the park and architecturally a little more sophisticated, they are clearly transitional between the functional estate cottages and the great house.

Elsewhere the variations are the result of subsequent change, the most obvious examples being the telephone kiosk and post box halfway down the west side of the street. More recent alterations are restricted largely to cottage windows. Here some of the original small pane metal frame casements survive but most have been replaced by simpler six or four pane wooden openings. More disruptive to the street scene are where ground floor windows have been replaced by fully glazed front doors. Despite this the general effect is one of well ordered continuity enhanced by the absence of clutter, both public (overhead wires and signs) and private (ranch fencing and planters) that character of most detract from the Conservation Areas.



The balanced composition of New Houghton is completed by the two farm units a short distance from the village street that formed part of the same building programme. Separated from the village by the wide formal avenue that frames the southerly view of the hall, Home Farm is the more imposing of the two situated opposite what was originally the main entrance to the park. With its raised central bay, brick quoins and lunette window below the pediment it is similar in style to the stable block at the hall and probably also by William Kent. Village Farm immediately to the east is a little later, more modest in scale and as its name suggests, more obviously part of the settlement. Both farm houses have large groups of traditional brick and tile outbuildings to the rear including spacious threshing barns; again those at Home Farm are on a grander scale.

LISTED BUILDINGS



There are 28 Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area as a result of revising the Statutory List in 1978 and one more recent addition, the K6 telephone kiosk listed in 1993.

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Listed Grade I

Houghton Hall 1722-35 for Sir Robert 0 Walpole the first Prime Minister. A house of State and Convenience to house Walpole's picture collection. Designed by Colen Campbell, modified by James Gibbs and executed by Thomas Ripley, interior by William Kent. Built of Whitby stone ashlar with pantile roofs in the Palladian style. Three storey central block with angle domed towers and single storey colonnaded wings. East front has rusticated basement, piano nobile below segmental pediment. West front has central ionic portico with rich pediment armorial sculpture.

• The Square, Houghton Park Stable courtyard c1730 attributed to William Kent, for Sir Robert Walpole in the Palladian Style. Largely faced in coursed carrstone, brick with carrstone dressings to interior courtyard. Smut pantiles and slate. Angle towers. Some 18th Century stalls with Doric columns remain.

• Church of St Martin, Mainly 14th Century with 18th Century and 19th Century alterations. Squared and knapped flint, stone and carrstone dressings, galleting, slate roofs. West tower 1726, nave with side aisles, north porch and chancel. Windows mainly perpendicular, 17th Century stalls, box pens and benches. Early 19th Century Gothic pulpit. Table tomb monument 1307 to a Prior of Cockesford. Sir Robert Walpole and three successors, including Horace Walpole, buried here.

• The Water Tower, Houghton Park, Designed by Henry Lord Herbert before 1733. Lime washed stucco render on brick. Whitby stone dressings, slate roof. Two storey rectangular plan; Palladian style. Ground floor has recessed blank arches, first floor has Tuscan Doric portico with pilasters. Open balcony pedimented.

Listed Grade II*

• South Lodges with gates, gate Lodges with gate piers, gates and walls attached at south entrance to Houghton Hall, c1730 attributed to William Kent. Whitewashed brick, slate roofs, elaborate wrought iron gates, 2 central carriage and 2 outer pedestrian gates, by Jean Tijou c1710 brought from Cholmondeley Castle (Cheshire) in 1798.

Listed Grade II

• North Lodge - early 19th Century, whitewashed and stucco render. Single storey. 3 surviving equilateral gables with simple Tuscan pediments.

• The Icehouse – 18th Century. Brick, tunnel, outer chamber used as game larder in 19th Century. Domed inner chamber.

● 36-38 Park Farm Cottages. Row of cottages c1700 with 18th Century additions. Red brick with red pantile roof. 2 storey with attic. Picturesque Gothic details. 2 light wooden casements with metal Gothic tracery. Trellis porches. Crow-stepped gable.

• Carpenters Yard Barn - mid 18th Century in William Kent style. Red brick and smut pantiles. 2 storey Greek cross plan with single storey infilling wings. Each facade has some details; pedimented gables and segmental arched openings.

• **Kitchen Garden Walls** – 18th Century red brick, Flemish bond to north, English bond to other three sides.

• **Monument**, Houghton Park. Cross base and shaft 13th Century. Carrstone base, firestone plinth and shaft. Supposed to mark site of village, removed when Houghton Park enclosed in 1729.

● Hall Farmhouse. Mid 18th Century. Perhaps by William Kent. Whitewashed brick, smut pantiles. 2 storeys with attics, symmetrical double pile plan. 5 bays with central pedimented gable. Sashes, central 6 panel door. Distinctive Palladian plan. Balanced by Village Farmhouse.



• Hall Farm Barn - mid 18th Century. Attributed to William Kent. Red brick with red pantiles. North facade has central pedimented gable ranges to east and west forming courtyards.

• Village Farmhouse - late 18th Century. English bond brick, black glazed pantiles. Sashes. Central doorcase with half columns and pedimented hood and sunburst fanlight. Balanced by Hall Farmhouse on west side of New Houghton.

• Village Farm Barn - late 18th Century. English bond red brick, red pantiles. 2 no. 3stead threshing barns built end to end with outshuts. 10 bay interior.

• 4/5 The Street. Pair of cottages, 18th Century, whitewashed brick, black glazed pantiles. 2 storeys, 2 light casements. Hipped roof with central stack.

• 6/9 The Street - Row of 4 cottages, 18th Century, whitewashed brick, black glazed pantiles. 2 storeys, 2 light casements. Hipped roof.

• 1/3 The Street - 3 cottages, 18th Century, whitewashed brick, black glazed pantiles, 2 light casements. Hipped roof.

• 10/11, 12/13, The Street. Pairs of cottages, 18th Century, whitewashed brick, black glazed pantiles, 2 light casements. Hipped roofs.

• 14/17 and 20/22 The Street. 2 rows of almshouses, 18th Century, whitewashed brick, black glazed pantiles, 2 light casements, single storey.

• 23/24, 25/26, 27/28, 29/30, 32/33 The Street. 18th Century whitewashed brick, black glazed pantiles, 2 light casements, hipped roofs.

• K6 Telephone Kiosk. 1935 designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. Cast iron, margin glazing bars. Painted Red.

IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

Houghton Conservation Area is unusual in that virtually all the buildings in both the village and the park are Listed Buildings. Only minor outbuildings behind estate cottages and the two farmhouses that contribute to the overall character of the village are not separately listed but fall within the curtilage of other listed properties and are therefore subject to the same controls. The only unlisted dwellings are the late Victorian estate cottages near Carpenter's Yard visible to the public only when the Hall and Park are open to visitors.

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The character of most Conservation Areas is due in part to the ingenious mixture of local, vernacular materials, but in New Houghton the planned nature of the village is reinforced by the predominance of a few distinctive building materials.



- Red brick made by the estate brickworks at Gt. Bircham, is the main walling material, either colourwashed (cottages, lodges and Home Farmhouse), or not (Village Farmhouse, barns, stable courtyard and walled garden).
- Pantiles are the most common roofing material, black glazed on more prominent roof slopes in the village, smut grey on the stables and Home Farmhouse, and orange on the rear cottage roof slopes.
- Welsh slate introduced late in the 19th century was used on the lodges, the school, Church roof and water tower.
- Carstone from Snettisham on the external face of the stables.
- Whitby sandstone ashlar for the hall and water tower.
- Knapped and squared light grey flint by the Victorian's on the Church.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are - Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Houghton Conservation Area but there are sites where archaeological finds have been recorded as part of the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record.

DETRACTORS

The special quality of Conservation Areas can easily be eroded by seemingly minor alterations such as unsuitable replacement windows and doors, inappropriate materials or unsympathetic paintwork, removal of walls, railings, trees and hedges.

Apart from the occasional fully glazed door on some cottages, there are no features in Houghton Conservation Area which detract significantly from its intrinsic character. This is due almost entirely to the high standard of estate management and the decision to allow no new residential development or commercial activity in the village.

The attention to detail that has resulted in neatly trimmed grass verges, weed-free cobble surfaces and gleaming paintwork, is spoilt only by some badly eroded brick chimney stacks.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The overall conservation objective is to protect and reinforce the established special character of Conservation Areas and their setting.

This will be achieved by:

- encouraging the retention and maintenance of buildings which contribute to the overall character of each conservation area, whether listed or not
- ensuring that new development is sympathetic to the special qualities and character of each conservation area
- protecting the setting of the conservation area from development which adversely affects views into or out of the area
- the retention, maintenance and locally appropriate new planting of trees
- maintaining and enhancing local features and details which contribute towards an area's local distinctiveness
- working with the community to prepare schemes of enhancement
- encouraging the removal of detractors to the special character of each conservation area

CONTACTS AND ADVICE

Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alterations, extensions, installations, demolition or work to trees should seek advice from Planning Policy at an early stage. A leaflet summarising these issues and including general information on conservation areas can be obtained from Planning Policy free of charge.



PLANNING POLICY

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