



Wereham

Conservation Area

Character Statement



WEREHAM is a pleasant village, on a gentle acclivity, 2 miles N. W. of Stoke Ferry, and 12 miles S. by E. of Lynn, including in its parish 625 inhabitants, and 2,145 acres of land, more than half of which is grass.

William White 1845

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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 ones. The quality and interest of a conservation area depends upon a combination of factors including the relationship and architectural quality of buildings, materials, spaces, trees and other landscape features, together with views into and out of the area.

Wereham Conservation Area was designated in 1977 and revised in 1992. The present statement was prepared in 2001 and revised and updated in 2009. 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 Government Advice (PPG15) and it has been adopted as supplementary planning guidance.

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

Setting and Location

Wereham is situated just north of the A134 main road connecting the towns of King's Lynn 27 kilometres (13 miles) to the north, Downham Market 7 kilometres (4½ miles) to the west and Thetford 27 kilometres (17 miles) to the south-east. The main road originally ran through the village but was diverted as a by-pass in the 1970s, much to the residents' relief. This busy road now effectively separates the original village core of Wereham with development to the south.



The village is in an agricultural setting which generated its origins. The land falls quite dramatically from north to south, from east to west and vice versa, again a major determinant of settlement pattern; the village

core centred around the pond being a natural collection point for surface water run off from the surrounding fields and roads at these higher levels. Apart from the main road, the village is located around the meeting point of other minor roads and tracks which connect the settlement to the surrounding field system and adjacent village of Boughton 2½ kilometres (1½ miles) and Barton Bendish 5½ kilometre (3½ miles) to the north. The main north/south route is Cavenham Road which leads to Fincham and Barton Bendish. Stoke Ferry lies to 3 kilometres (2 miles) the south-east. Important views of the village are gained from the main road when travelling west and from the north. The presence of the village is not readily discerned from the main road in the east-west direction however and only the larger new houses in Cavenham Road are readily visible.



Origins and Historical Development

“Wereham” was originally thought to be a Saxon settlement. The name has been translated as referring to a “homestead by the River Vigora”, the latter being a possible previous name for the River Wissey. The word Vigora is derived from the old name of a French river (now the Vière). “Wereham”

should not be confused with the similar Norfolk village name of “Warham” which refers to a homestead by a weir or dam.

In any case, the basis of the village form is one of a settlement related to a water feature of some type. These components are still in evidence today.



Clearly the original settlement was based on agriculture, the presence of water either in the form of a natural pond, weir or previous river, and the convergence of several access tracks and pathways.

The settlement pattern remained constant for several hundred years up until the 20th Century. Wereham was essentially a farming community, the farms themselves actually forming a large part of the built environment with workers’ dwellings and accommodation for associated trades and crafts forming the essential village infrastructure typical of such communities.

The nucleus of the village has always been the important enclosed open space centred on the pond and church. The village street, known as Church Road, was also an important element in the character of the settlement. It meant a continuous throughput of traffic and was a natural location for further buildings and “backland” development over

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time. All the important 'set piece' listed buildings are located along this route, an indication of its previous importance as a connecting thoroughfare. Its character is now thankfully saved by the modern by-pass.



The current settlement pattern is a result of the gradual acquisition, ownership and transfer of land for building and development which is typical of any village with origins as early as the Anglo Saxon period. As time went on and as a result of dramatic changes in agriculture and the pattern of living these groups of properties were gradually dispersed and are now almost entirely owner occupied.

The pressure of 20th Century life on such settlements has been dramatic. For Wereham, the construction of the by-pass

in the late 1970s was a major event which has enabled the character of the village core to remain relatively untarnished.

Recent years have seen the development of several infill sites with new housing. The area is still a popular one in which to live being near to both Downham Market, King's Lynn and associated major transport routes.



The 20th Century has also seen the gradual erosion of the traditional village infrastructure mentioned earlier. The school has closed, the village shop and post office also, and one pub is still open, but there is little else to prevent people needing their own transport for many tasks of everyday life. The situation has been exacerbated by the main road by-pass which has effectively severed the original community in two. The settlement south of this road is now being expanded with further new housing and is effectively cut off from Wereham Village centre itself.





In the village core the components responsible for its origin are still very much intact however and it is pleasing to still see St. Margaret's Farm, to the north of the church, in working order. In terms of historical development, several buildings contain evidence of each major architectural period as they have responded to varying ownership, fashion and life styles. These are by definition the listed buildings of intrinsic historic importance, but also several unlisted buildings which contribute greatly to the character of the locality and are shown on the map.



Character

Wereham is an attractive historic village, the special character of which is generated by a combination of built fabric, the spaces

formed between the buildings, ancient street pattern, and natural elements such as pond, mature trees, hedges, grass verges, and farming landscape both within the conservation area itself and in the surrounding landscape.



The conservation area boundary encapsulates the main village core centred on the pond and church and the associated ranges of buildings to north, east and west. The main road to the south forms a natural 'edge' to the conservation area. To the east, the boundary contains the modern housing east of St. Margaret's Farm paddock and extends southwards to contain "Orchard Leigh" at the junction of the main road. To the west, the boundary takes in the "High House" and "Vicarage", the last westernmost buildings related to the village. Finally, the northern conservation area boundary is formed by the line of built development along School Lane and the natural "edge" between farmland and village settlement.



Within the village core itself the street pattern generates a delightful sequence of varied views and vistas, the scale of which is generally modest but with enhanced grandeur around the set piece buildings of St Margaret's Church, the Manor House, White House and Vine House.

The general 'ad hoc' nature of the settlement pattern over time has also created a variety of open spaces within the core.

All these ingredients contribute to the essential quality of Wereham Conservation Area.



Spaces and Buildings

Wereham Conservation Area contains a series of distinct areas generated by the street pattern and natural topography described above.

The most important space, the village core, is created by a delightful combination of components:

- the central pond is large and prominent, surrounded to the north and west by a line of mature willows with buildings behind
- the church, churchyard and churchyard wall provide a tranquil scene
- to the south the varied building line consisting of Pitt House, the pub, and outbuildings of the Manor House provide variety and interest



Interspersed among these buildings are the five access roads/tracks converging on St. Margaret's Hill, the wide expanse of space between pond and churchyard. These routes provide an attractive array of vistas closed by the winding nature of the street pattern in a classic "townscape" manner. There are however several other important though subsidiary, areas.

Church Road goes from St Margaret's Hill eastwards and in itself provides an extremely attractive range of views and vistas as the road gently rises and bends to the south. There are two narrow tracks off this road to the south, one giving access to Malthouse Row and one, further east, a narrow alley giving access to Back Lane. These give added interest to the street and its character. The churchyard wall too gives a strong sense of enclosure as do a number of attractive cottages hard on the edge of the road.



Church Road contains four listed buildings (The Cottage, The Limes, Lime Tree Cottage, to the north and the old Vicarage House to the south), and several important unlisted buildings which add to the overall character of the street scene. A range of modern infill semi-detached houses has

been inserted along the southern side of the road which, whilst relatively undistinguished, are modest in scale and impact.



Church Road culminates to the east in another 'core' space formed by the White House, Vine House, and Tudor Lodge, all located around the four access routes which feed into it, namely Church Road itself (to east and west) Cavenham Road (to the north) and Back Lane (to the south). Again, this confluence of routes gives a range of attractive views in all directions.

The space itself is a mini square and is enhanced by Vine House (the former shop and post office), and the scale and grandeur of the buildings. The east elevation of White House is a particularly fine assembly of architectural components and climbing vegetation.

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Church Road then continues southwards back to the main road and although the townscape quality is not quite so dramatic the assembly of high screen walls, grass verges, mature trees beyond, and attractive vernacular buildings all create a pleasant unified character.



The “set back” position of the Crown House has contrived to turn a leftover expanse of grass into a further open space just north of the Nags Head (now an dwelling) and adjacent to the junction with Back Lane



The sense of enclosure and intimacy is lost at the termination of Church Road and its junction with the main road due to the need for sight lines and visibility splays.

Back Lane is a further east-west road which links the “square” with the main road. This area is in a sense ‘backland’ space to Church Road lying to the north. Older properties lie to the east and west but modern housing development has taken place on infill sites to both the north and south. In design terms the new building is of reasonable scale without being particularly exciting. It fits in well with its surroundings however, and the newest development succeeds in creating a more appropriate response to ‘context’. Interesting spaces are generated, particularly by the orientation of Cedar House at right angles to Back Lane itself. It is sad to see the demise of the butchers shop to the south, a further erosion of village infrastructure.



To the west, the presence of the main road is more uncomfortably felt even though an attempt at introducing a landscape buffer has been made.

Returning to the “square” and travelling northwards up Cavenham Road, the buildings to the south nearest the White House ‘core’ are, not surprisingly, the oldest and are all considered worthy of ‘townscape’ significance. The more modern northern dwellings are typical of the 20th Century and are best described as ‘anywhere’ housing. They do nevertheless form an important backdrop and eastern edge to the major open space of the paddock, on a high point with the paddock sloping back to the village. The subtle change in direction of Cavenham Road offers interesting and pleasant views in both directions with contrasting visual events at each end; the dramatic open space of the paddock and countryside beyond to the north; the more contained and intimate ‘square’ of the ‘White House core’ to the south.

The presence of St. Margaret’s Farm, its associated paddock to the east and the line of buildings forming the ‘edge’ of the settlement along the northern and eastern boundaries naturally delineate the northern part of the Conservation Area. Open

farmland stretches away to the north and good views are obtained, especially from Cavenham Road.



Turning left (westwards) at a small island of grass, the northern range of buildings along School Lane is again a mixture of old and new with modern infill housing interspersed with the older fabric. These houses are generally ‘face-on’ to School Lane which divides them from the farm paddock to the south. School Lane itself again provides pleasant views due to its change of direction and a general fall in level towards the main village core. The final bend in the road before it meets St. Margaret’s Hill is quite dramatic and the disposition of buildings and building plots provide interesting and varied views in both directions.

The next major defined area lies further to the west. It contains the northern and western ranges of buildings surrounding the pond, the two westernmost dwellings of the conservation area (The Vicarage and High House) the major open space of the playing field, and the village hall and “left over” space to the south of it.

The western edge of this defined area is formed by Ben’s Lane, a rough track which connects the open field system to the central

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core of the village at St. Margaret's Hill and has good views up and down it (particularly north/south towards the pond).



Whilst there are no listed buildings here, there are several dwellings of significance. Several sites have been the subject of 'infill' development (of varying age) but the overall unity of the conservation area's character has been maintained in terms of building scale. The quality of the infill buildings is undistinguished although the most recent insertions show a more sympathetic approach to vernacular design and use of appropriate materials.

Reference has been made to the buildings fronting the pond above, as they are also an essential component of the main village core. They also form an edge to the playing field, which was designated as such in relatively recent times. A children's playground lies to the east of the playing field and the village hall to the south. The latter is an undistinguished building but is no worse than countless other examples of this important

building type. It does not provide a very good visual entrance to the village and it presents an opportunity for future refurbishment.



The two dwellings to the west are both of 20th Century date and are relatively large in scale. Their presence in the conservation area is modest in that they are both surrounded by mature landscape and they are a natural 'stop' to the settlement.

To the south, the ill-defined triangle of scrub land acts as an important buffer from the main road and as a setting for the Manor House, a major listed building. This property is a fine architectural 'set-piece' and magnificent views of it are afforded from the main road when travelling west to east. The landscape 'buffer' could be improved by a landscape scheme and further planting to screen noise and fumes, and generally enhancing the setting.



In summary, the special character of the conservation area is generated by a combination of many interwoven factors which contribute to a high degree of unity and architectural interest. The impact of the built fabric, natural landscaping with many mature trees, intimate street pattern, and topography have all been referred to above. In addition, the role of screen walls, the many and varied outbuildings associated with the historic fabric, and hedges all play a crucial role in creating a sense of enclosure and intimacy. Their importance should not be forgotten in defining the essential character of the area.



Listed Buildings

There are ten listed buildings in Wereham Conservation Area. The statutory list was revised in 1985 and there was a re-issue of part of the list in 1995 for clarification.

Grade 2* Buildings

- Church of St. Margaret, Church Road. 13th Century, early 14th Century and restored in 1866. Carstone, flint and clunch with ashlar quoins. Slate roof with leaded south aisle. West tower, two stages.



Grade 2 Buildings

- The Limes, Church Road. 18th Century originally two houses now one dwelling. Restored 20th Century. Brick, carstone walling, pantile/plaintile roofs.
- Lime Tree Cottage, Church Road. Mid 18th Century house. Brick, carstone; pantile hipped roof.
- The Manor House, The Green. 18th Century, originally brick and carstone and refaced in brick; black glazed pantile roof. 2 storeys and dormer attic

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- The George and Dragon PH, The Green. Public House, early 18th Century. Colour washed brick and rubble with pantiled roof.
- Pitt Farm House, The Green. House, mid-18th Century rough cast brick and pantiled roof. 2 storeys in 3 bays.



- The White House, Cavenham Road. Early 18th Century altered mid-18th Century. Brick, flint and carstone. Black glazed pantile roof. Double pile plan. 2 storeys and attic in seven irregular bays.



- Vine House, Church Road, previously two houses. 18th Century brick, flint and carstone with pantiled roof. Double pile plan. 2 stories and dormer attic.
- The Cottage, Church Road. mid-18th Century. Brick with some carstone, pantiled hipped roof. 2 stories.
- Old Vicarage House, Church Road. Mid-18th Century. Two houses, now one. Colour washed carstone and clunch with brick dressings and pantile roof. Two storeys and dormer attic.



Important Unlisted Buildings

The character of Wereham Conservation Area benefits from a wealth of listed buildings. However a good deal of the townscape character rests on the vernacular styles of its unlisted historic buildings. Approximately 30 buildings ("ranges" counted as one, and associated outbuildings) have been designated of such townscape significance and are shown on the map.



Post War Development

Most post war development in Wereham Conservation Area comprises infill housing and small terraces such as that on the south of Church Road and on the south side of Back Lane or on the east side of Cavenham Road and the west side of School Lane.. The only non-domestic structures erected in post war years are the Village Hall and agricultural buildings of St. Margaret's Farm.



The construction of the main road by-pass in the late 1970s was a major event in the history of the settlement and, whilst some degree of life and vitality has been lost, there is an overwhelming sense of relief that the essential character of the conservation area has been saved and enhanced.



There has, at the same time, been a gradual loss of village infrastructure in terms of school, shop and post office, pubs and the industry associated with agriculture. The latter has had a dramatic impact on such settlements as Wereham, which up until now had been inextricably linked to this use. The community and historic buildings and sites are still feeling the associated effects of such changes. The village has not sprawled to north or east and the tightly knit nature of the conservation area is a major component of its character and appearance.

Traditional Materials

The character of Wereham Conservation Area owes a great deal to the use of local traditional materials in the construction of its historic buildings. These materials include:-

- Chalk (clunch)
- Random and coursed field flint nodules.
- Knapped flint.
- Dressed limestone.
- Norfolk red brick.
- Clay pantiles – both natural red and black glazed.
- Welsh slate.
- Colour washed brick, flint and render.
- Carstone and carstone galetting.



Archaeological Interest

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Wereham Conservation Area.

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. The most serious detractors in Wereham are:-

- Unsympathetic replacement windows and doors.
- Inappropriate means of enclosure - fencing/walls etc.
- Unsympathetic landscape planting – evergreen, leylandii etc.
- Unsympathetic and unbroken areas of tarmac particularly around St. Margaret's Green.
- The impact of the main road, especially along the southern conservation area boundary. Increased buffer planting is essential here.
- Unfinished repairs to building to the west of St. Margaret's Farm – previous farmhouse.

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
- 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, alteration, extensions, installations or demolition should seek advice from Development Services at an early stage. Special controls also apply to the trees sand some may be subject to Tree Preservation Orders. Anyone wishing to carry out work to trees within a Conservation Area should therefore seek advice from Development Services.

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