



Shillington Conservation Area

Introduction

18 October 2006

This document is one of a series of revised conservation area appraisals in Mid Bedfordshire. Shillington Conservation Area was designated in September 1973 and incorporated Apsley End. This appraisal excludes Apsley End which is now a separate conservation area. The setting, character and appearance of Shillington Conservation Area are considered separately. This will enable Development Control to determine whether proposals for Shillington preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area and/or its setting. Areas in need of enhancement are also identified. A Village Design Statement for Shillington also exists and was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in June 1999.

Setting

First mentions of Shillington are in early origins of the name; Scytlingedune 1060; Sethlindone in the Domesday Book 1086; and Scetlingedon in 1206. The name may refer to a tribe Scytlingas, perhaps derived from an unrecorded personal name Scytla or Scyttel. (Concise Oxford Dictionary of Place Names).

Shillington lies close to the southern boundary of the district in a relatively isolated location 3 miles south of Shefford in a generally low lying situation on gault clay. The Church of All Saints stands on a low scarp of a chalk outlier topped by glacial gravel which is located between the Chiltern escarpment 2 miles to the south and the Greensand Ridge 4 miles to the north.

Shillington comprises a village core surrounded by a number of 'Ends', loosely strung along a figure of eight shaped framework of minor roads. Apart from Hanscombe End to the west and Apsely End to the south, the other 'ends': Bury, Hillfoot, Woodmer, Upton and Marquis Hill are located to the north of the village core.

The village core and its related 'Ends' are connected by a remarkably dense network of footpaths running across fields and along field boundaries. The abrupt edge between the landscape and the built form of the village, especially on its western and southern sides adds to the drama of its setting and is a crucial aspect of the character of the conservation area.



Looking west from the churchyard

From this point there are extensive views towards the Chiltern scarp to the south west, to lower rolling countryside to the west, and to the Greensand Ridge to the north west. The setting of the conservation area is predominantly arable farmland and meadows bounded by substantial hedgerows, principally Hawthorn.

Character

Shillington's character is derived principally from the contrast between very distinctive sub areas such as:

- The contrast between the open landscape areas to the west and the tight knit form of back-edge-of-highway development along Church Street and

- The contrast between the network of verdant, quiet pedestrian routes and the busier character of the roads mainly fronted by buildings.

The topography of the settlement is a very distinctive part of the village's character and is emphasised by the landmark status and hilltop position of All Saints Church. The striking bulk of the tower and long nave presides over the village and the tower can be seen on the horizon on the road from Barton le Clay to the south west and from Lower Stondon to the east.



All Saints Church

The village skyline is a critical factor contributing to the image and character of the conservation area. The church was built in the 14th century onwards and reflects its significance as an outlier of Romsey Abbey Cambridgeshire, rather than the prosperity of the village. The massive brick tower dates from 1750 following the collapse of the steeple in 1701 (Village Design Statement).

Other aspects of the village's character include the heritage of rendered, timber framed, medieval buildings and their plots, either in 'burgage' alignments or as former farms. Victorian buildings are well represented in the village ranging from artisan cottages and terraced groups to larger residences such as The Old Vicarage. The Congregational Church and Methodist Church are also examples of Victorian built form. It could be said that for a relatively large village, the Georgian period is under-represented.

Whilst the village school and playing field are situated outside of the conservation area, the village hall, war memorial, The Crown Public House and a number of local business are all situated along High Road making this road a principal focus of village life.

The character of the area is also derived from the relationship of the townscape to the landscape features of hedges and hedgerows, fields, allotments, a dense network of rural footpaths, changes in level and the streams forming the south and west edges.

Appearance

Bearing in mind that there is a predominance of Victorian buildings in Shillington Conservation Area it is not surprising to find a high proportion of buildings constructed in gault brick (some with red brick detailing) and slate roofs.

Apart from gault brick, there is a consistent use of a narrow range of vernacular building materials in pre-20th century buildings including render, green sandstone, and a small number of red brick properties. Clay plain tile roofs are also much in evidence.

More recent development has generally failed to utilise this palette of materials and coupled with standard housing design and layout has created some slightly disappointing areas such as Wheelwright Close and Vicarage Close.

There are remnants of original cobbled surfaces in the vicinity of Church Street which could provide a reference for future enhancement schemes in the conservation area.

Church Street

This street has the largest concentration of listed buildings emphasising the historic core of the settlement and it has a relatively 'urban' character and a sense of enclosure.



The street has a highly satisfactory sense of progression from being level and wide, dominated by Victorian buildings to the east, and rising and gently curving as one progresses westward, revealing glimpses down side alleys and into yards, deflecting views of the ultimate goal of the Church and its tower. The westernmost end of Church Street, which has

a height and width of virtually the same dimension, becomes a 'pinch point' before finally reaching the churchyard (see photo above).

The solid bulk of the Parish Church of All Saints dominates the raised churchyard and its surroundings. The south porch is approached from Church Street via gateway steps interrupting the retaining wall of golden brown, coursed, greensand stone.



The gateway is topped by an elegant lamp set in a wrought iron overthrow. The graveyard contains some well profiled gravestones and tall mature trees, including a very old spreading yew tree on its south side (see photo opposite). The northern side of the churchyard is approached by a footpath running along the crest of the hill through extensive, well used and well managed allotment gardens.

The former school buildings define and enclose the termination of Church Street, opposite the churchyard. This group of gabled, gault brick, Victorian buildings decorated with red brick diaper patterns, with ornate bargeboards on the northern elevation, are dated 1856, creating a shared surface

yard space. These buildings have a modest skyline impact which complements the church tower and yew tree. The Old School has been converted to residential use, which has had an inevitable effect on the fenestration. The road and car parking surfaces are in poor repair and would benefit from sympathetic surface treatment.

Travelling north-east, down the hill from the church, there is a staggered terrace of 6 town houses (nos.71 to 81) set between and opposite grade II listed buildings. The staggered plan, use of red brick and repetitious, white painted, gable bargeboards of the modern townhouses makes the street scene 'fussier' than it needs to be. Although the use of red brick is rather incongruous when seen in the context of the streetscene dominated by render and gault brick, the relationship of the buildings to the back edge of the footpath is appropriate.



Curtilage listed building at no.52 Church Street

The older, timber frame buildings in this part of the conservation area are characteristically long and narrow, some with modest jetties and with rendered laths mainly mounted over the frame, although some frames have been exposed. These buildings are generally located on the back edge of the pavement or the street and glimpses down the linear plots between buildings, reveal a complex of former workshop or storage buildings grouped around yards.

Further down the hill and on the north side of the street are a number of more recent properties with open plan fronts and are considered to be out of character with the area and seriously interrupt the continuity of the street scene.

A more positive "breaking of the rules" is no.20, a 1950's vernacular revival cottage on the corner of Church Street with Hillfoot Road. Its massing turns the corner in an appropriate but relaxed way and its long axis, parallel with Church Street assures a level of enclosure. The use of gables makes a positive reference to the medieval buildings in the vicinity. Whilst not as boldly detailed as a Voysey or Baillie-Scott house, it has a well designed stone arched recessed doorway, characteristic box dormers, asymmetrically composed windows and roughcast rendered walls. Tall hedges reinforce the street frontage.



No.20 Church Street (building of local interest) in the background and no.18 Church Street (grade II listed) in the foreground

Shillington

Scale: 1:2500



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Shillington

Up to this point on the south side of the road, there is a rich heritage of Victorian buildings along the street, providing not only an architectural document of building typology, footprint and form, but also a social historical document of a community. This heritage continues through to the junction with High Road and includes artisan housing, some houses for the middle class, shops and workshops attached to some residential premises and the social infrastructure exemplified by the former school (already described), Liberal Hall and Nonconformist chapel. All these forms relate to each other in an informal and easy fashion, in terms of scale, height and form.

Whilst most buildings are constructed in Flemish bond, some smaller cottages are in 'Rat Trap' bond and have been identified as Buildings of Local Interest. Other Buildings of Local Interest include no.92 High Road which acts as an effective pivot in the townscape, being a tall two storey building turning the corner from Church Street into High Road and no.2 Church Street, a Victorian villa with its former single storey shop attached and with a yard and outbuildings to the rear. Both buildings make a positive architectural and historic contribution to the area.



No.2 Church Street (a building of local interest)



Methodist Church

To the south, the Village Hall, detrimentally altered in the post war era, still retains some features which recall its Vernacular Revival origins. The central third of High Road forms a termination to the view east from Church Street, and is a continuation of its Victorian character. The red brick shop is a valuable community resource and it is an interesting counterpoint to the Methodist Church with its robust gable front and side pinnacles.

The north side of Church Street from no.2 through to the turning into Hillfoot Road is less enclosed owing to (i) the layout and entrance to Elmhurst Gardens and (ii) that nos.14, 14A, 16 and 16A are set back. The former gives this part of the conservation areas a more suburban appearance, however, the sense of enclosure in the vicinity is, to an extent, reinforced by the use of brick front boundary walls.

High Road

Whilst this road has some buildings and spaces of interest, its overall quality has been compromised by relatively recent development especially at its northern end, where it has a more suburban character paying little regard to the local distinctiveness of the village.

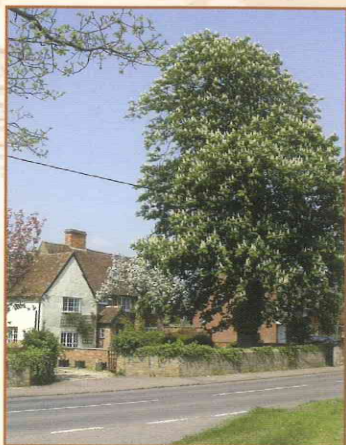
Nos.27 and 54 High Road, together with part of the garage currently known as F.C Dawes & Son Ltd, reinforce the Victorian appearance of the area. The latter is outside of the conservation area, however, it is a site where enhancement would improve the setting of the conservation area. No.33 High Road (part timber framed and regarded as a Building of Local Interest) together with Green End Farmhouse (grade II listed) ensure that this part of Shillington is deserving of conservation area status. It is unfortunate, however, that the setting to Green End Farmhouse is now dominated by new development known as Preslent Close.



No.59 High Road - the only thatched vernacular cottage in the conservation area

The vernacular cottage set back from the Methodist Church is a valuable asset to the stock of pre-Victorian buildings in Shillington and helps to enclose the less defined eastern fringe of the green. The hedges on the south side are also important to give enclosure and shelter to this space. The village nameplate, so much a feature of Bedfordshire's lasting contribution to the Festival of Britain, stands in this space.

The bus stop shelter could be of a more sympathetic, less utilitarian design when it is due for replacement. The forecourt to B.V Bowles Garage makes a negative contribution to the street scene, although it does make a contribution to the village economy and it is relatively well contained.



Chestnut Tree Farmhouse

The southern third of the road is of a scattered, rural and domestic nature with modest scaled buildings including The Crown public house and the vernacular cottage on its western boundary. The mature Horse Chestnut tree in the front garden of Chestnut Tree Farmhouse makes a positive contribution to the street scene. Generally, trees, hedges and green space, including the filtered views

of the manicured front lawn to The Old Vicarage all make a positive contribution to the area.

Hillfoot Road and northern fringe

Development along Hillfoot Road within the conservation area is limited predominantly to the western side. The form and footprint of the development is interesting in that it is in the form of two L-shaped blocks; the northernmost as two, high-density terraces with outbuildings, the southern one as a terrace including the former post office and a line of irregular outbuildings. These all date from the 19th century and are a reflection of the local sources of employment at that time. The northern wing is a planned layout of workers cottages virtually single aspect, looking south, with small gardens and former privies on the side of a pathway leading to allotment gardens which are still well used.



The north face of the wing is in a rat trap bond with red brick headers and white stretchers, making a striking pattern (see photo opposite). The terrace is considered to be a Building of Local Interest and is entered from Hillfoot Road by an intriguing narrow gap between the terraces.

Unfortunately, many houses have had unsympathetic replacement glazing installed. The name Windmill Lodge for the building at the centre of the group presumably refers to the site of a windmill on the ridge.

The fact that the significant landscape space on the east side of Hillfoot Road known locally as 'Thomson's Meadow' has remained undeveloped has had the effect of preventing the village coalescing with its northern satellite, Hillfoot End. There has been some encroachment by recent housing on its eastern side. On the northern side of this space, between it and New Walk, the pattern is quite different, being a series of quite small plots enclosed by hedgerows.

The recent scheme of chevron parking along the eastern side of Hillfoot Road, whilst no doubt serving a local need, has done little to preserve or enhance the special qualities of the conservation area, as the perceived width of the road has widened, car park markings have been used and the new field boundary neither encloses the road nor opens the field as a surrogate 'village green'.

The Twitchel and southern fringe

This is the least built up and most rural of the sub areas. Much of it lies on the southern and western slopes of the hill, fanning out from the church.



The Twitchel is an ancient footpath lane running approximately south from the south east gate of the church and the former school down to High Road, joining it via a modern understated footbridge over the drainage ditch (see photo). The lane has hedgerows on either side, replaced in part by timber close boarded fencing which is unsympathetic to the appearance of the lane.

On the eastern side of The Twitchel lies The Old Vicarage (grade II listed) set well back from the road, with lawns sweeping up from the ditch and the road to the house; a late Regency building in gault brick with deep vertically proportioned windows and a low pitched slate roof. The property is approached via a low arched, gault brick bridge. However, despite being given subsequent support, the arch appears to be in poor condition.

Whilst the housing centred on Vicarage Close is included in the designation, it is of a suburban layout and design which does not preserve or enhance the special character of the conservation area. The group of elderly persons cottages (nos.1 – 11) probably built in the early 1960's is also of little architectural merit but it has been consciously designed as an informal group round a green (recalling Thomas Sharp's designs for village extensions) and having regard to maintaining a view of the church tower as one enters Vicarage Close.

On the western side of The Twitchel lies Parsonage Farm, a grade II listed, 17th century farmhouse set in the middle of a large paddock and field, forming the south western edge of the conservation area. The group of red brick farm buildings laid out around three sides of a square are surprisingly not listed in their own right but are regarded as curtilage listed. They have considerable vernacular merit and form a coherent and strong group with the farmhouse. Some of the buildings appear to have suffered from a period of neglect and limited roofing repairs have been carried out.

Enhancement

The enhancement of the character and appearance of a conservation area can be defined as a reinforcement of the qualities providing the special interest, which warrant designation. Firstly, it may be through the sympathetic development of sites identified in the detailed analysis of the area as opportunity or neutral sites. Secondly, it may involve positive physical proposals or thirdly, by the consistent application of positive, sensitive and detailed development control over extensions and alterations. The following areas warrant special consideration for enhancement:

- Resurfacing of Church Street in character with the area, with minimal recourse to kerbs (if any).
- Resurfacing The Twitchel in character with the area. The hedgerows and boundaries require maintenance. Further use of close boarded fencing should be resisted.
- B.V. Bowles Garage
- Village Hall and car park
- Bridge at entrance to the Old Vicarage
- Street furniture and surface treatment at Hillfoot Road

General Conservation Area Guidance

To maintain the distinctive character and appearance of Shillington Conservation Area it will be necessary to:-

1. Retain Listed Buildings and Buildings of Local Interest. There will be a strong presumption against the demolition of such buildings unless there is clear justification for doing so, for instance, being beyond repair. Where possible, other buildings which make a positive contribution to the conservation area should also be retained. If any of the above buildings become vacant efforts should be made to find a beneficial reuse. Ensure that any new development positively contributes to the setting of listed buildings and/or the character and appearance of the conservation area in terms of siting, scale, design and materials used.
2. Ensure that house extensions and alterations satisfy the District Council's technical guidance entitled 'House Extensions and Alterations – a Design Guide for Householders'.
3. Seek to retain, where necessary, important views, significant landscape space, hedgerows and other important boundary treatments as identified on the conservation area plan.
4. Ensure that development proposals are resisted on sites identified as significant landscape space on the conservation area plan.
5. Retain trees within the conservation area and, where necessary, ensure that where new development is permitted, proper consideration is given to tree planting and appropriate landscape treatment.

PLANNING GUIDANCE – APPROVED FOR DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PURPOSES

This document was subject to public consultation between 15 July 2006 and 25 August 2006. Consultation included an advertised exhibition at Shillington Village Hall and entry on the District Council's website.

A full statement of the consultation process is available from the address below.

- This information can be provided in an alternative format or language on request **08458 495405**
- যদি অনুরোধ করেন তাহলে অন্য কোনও আকারে বা ভাষায় এই তথ্য আপনি পেতে পারেন। **08458 495405 (Bengali)**
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