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**WEST WICKHAM, CAMBRIDGESHIRE
CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

[Spring] 2018

Introduction

Please protect village character and rural nature

Additional development would change the nature of the village

Any development should be sympathetic to the general nature of our small village

These are some of the comments made by residents at a Neighbourhood Plan drop-in session in January 2017 but what exactly do people mean by ‘village character’ or ‘nature of the village? This is what a character assessment aims to answer. It describes the distinct appearance and feel of the village settlement and areas within it and what gives them their local distinctiveness and unique identity. This can then inform a Neighbourhood Plan and be used at all stages of the planning process – by architects and builders, the Parish Council through to South Cambs District Council, the Planning Authority. Understanding the local character is crucial to the conservation or enhancement of the specific qualities of the village and can ensure that any development proposals are appropriate and of a design which respects and compliments its nature.

The Neighbourhood Plan Working Group organised an initial open meeting for residents in April 2017. This identified four broad character areas in the village:

Character Area 1 (Church End/High Street West)

Character Area 2 (High Street East)

Character Area 3 (Burton End)

Character Area 4 (Streetly End)

Evening walks of these areas were arranged over four weeks in May (also open to all) to refine area boundaries if necessary and to make the assessments. A total of twelve people took part at various times.

[There will eventually need to be a bit in here about how and when the Character Assessment was approved]

Overview

West Wickham is a parish covering 1188 hectares in the undulating uplands of south-east Cambridgeshire. The land rises from about 100 metres above sea level in the west to 122 metres in the east and is bisected by shallow valleys with watercourses draining to the Granta valley. The soil is boulder clay overlying chalk and land use is predominantly agricultural. The majority is arable with limited livestock but more recently there has been a return of some land to grass in relation to the horse racing industry. There are ancient woodlands on the eastern boundaries of the parish.

The main village settlement is in the centre of the parish and is situated along a ridge running north-east/south-west with gently sloping valleys on either side. The hamlet of Streetly End lies on the sides at the head of another shallow valley about half a mile to the south. Both settlements are linear with houses on either side of a single street and are entirely surrounded by agricultural land. Trees, hedges, small fields and long gardens help to soften the edges of the settlements. The wider landscape contains active farms centred on isolated farmhouses with some single houses along approach roads to the village. The majority pre-date planning regulations (2 are Listed - Old Streetly Hall and Yen Hall - while the moated site adjacent to the latter is a Scheduled Monument). Any exceptions have agricultural justification. Most of the houses have been altered or extended over time, a few are direct replacements. There are some buildings, predominantly hangars, associated with the Second World War airfield of Wratting Common on the eastern edge of the parish which are now used as warehousing.

The village is almost entirely residential with very few people now employed locally in agriculture and most people commuting to work in Cambridge, Haverhill or further afield. There appears to be an increasing number of people working from home both self-employed or as employees. Public transport is extremely limited. There are no shops or public houses. St Mary's Church is in active use while the Village Hall, opened in 2000, provides space for a pre-school, clubs, societies and other social activities and a Post Office which is open for a couple of hours a week

The southern boundary of the parish is formed by the Roman Road (also known as Wool Street), a prehistoric trackway from Cambridge to Withersfield which now provides an important recreational amenity and wildlife corridor. The settlements of West Wickham and Streetly End have a network of much-used public rights of way which give opportunities for circular walks within the parish itself as well as provide links to neighbouring villages and beyond.

Historic development

There is archaeological evidence of prehistoric activity (Mesolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman) in the parish but this has mainly been found in areas away from the current settlement areas. The Domesday Book of 1086 recorded three estates or manors – Yen Hall, Streetly and Wickham. It is around the latter and the 14th century church (first recorded in the 13th century) that a more nucleated settlement is thought to have become established. Dwellings were mentioned in Burton End in the 14th century and cottages and a green in Streetly (End) in the mid 15th century. An ongoing community archaeology project is aiming to discover more precisely how and when the current settlement patterns came into being.

In the post-medieval period, with the parish economy based on agriculture, each manor retained its separate identity as a tenanted farm while settlement was concentrated in three areas – around the church, Burton End and Streetly End. The village was largely self-sufficient and remained so well into the 20th century with a range of tradesmen and services including a public house in each of the three settlements. The population nearly doubled over the first half of the 19th century (from 332 in 1801 to 570 in 1851) and then started to decline as people were able to move away to find better prospects of work and accommodation. 41 local authority houses were built over 50 years from the 1920s, mainly on land between the church end of the village and Burton End, and the population stabilised at around 340. During the second half of the 20th century the population became more mobile and willing and able to commute to work outside the village. Numbers began to rise again in the 1980s following the building of 13 houses in Maypole Croft along with subsequent infill development, 5 housing association dwellings and the conversion of former public, commercial and agricultural buildings to residential use. In 2011 the population was 440.

This result of the continuous occupation of South Cambridgeshire is an extensive legacy of built and natural heritage. Collectively this creates a

many layered, historic landscape of great beauty and diversity that helps establish local identity at the parish level.

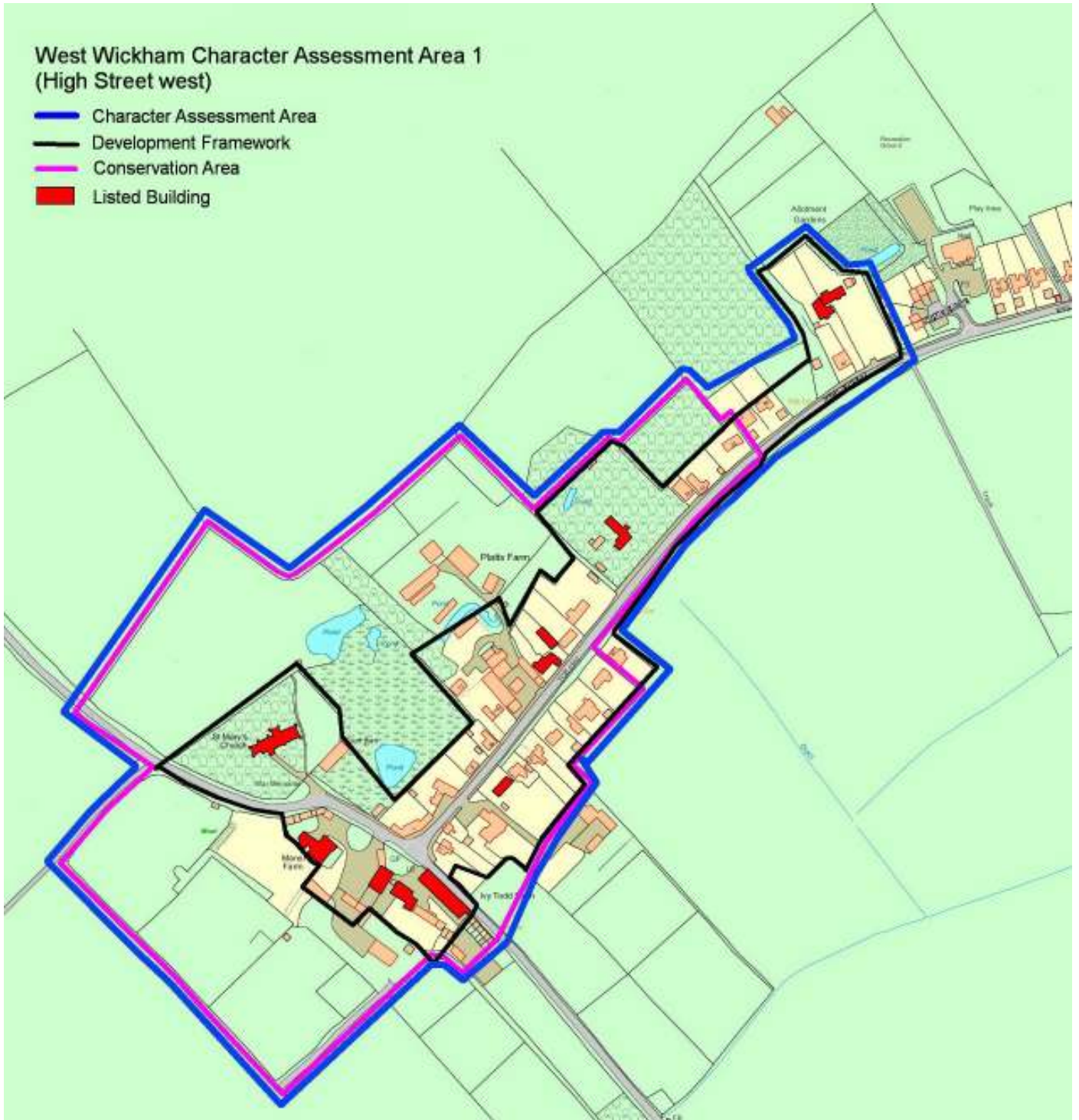
(South Cambs District Council Local Development Framework District Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Adopted 2010)

This can certainly be seen in West Wickham. There are 30 Listed Buildings, including the Grade II* St Mary's Church, the tower mill in Streetly End and agricultural buildings as well as houses and cottages (mostly listed as 17th century but several containing earlier features) while between and surrounding these historic buildings are many houses of varying sizes and differing styles spanning centuries. Many of the Listed Buildings, but by no means all, are situated in the two Conservation Areas at the Church/High Street west end and in Streetly End.

The roads also reflect a historic past. Although two-way, they are often narrow and winding in places, indicative of their origins in a time of non-mechanised transport. This can cause problems for large vehicles and modern agricultural machinery. That the latter still travel through the village together with the close proximity of cultivated fields – actually adjacent to the street in some places - emphasises the continuation of a local identity that is still very rural in nature.

West Wickham Character Assessment Area 1 (High Street west)

- Character Assessment Area
- Development Framework
- Conservation Area
- Listed Building



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CHARACTER AREA 1 Church End/High Street West

Overview

This Area is the historic core of the village and reflects its agricultural nature. The majority of it is within the Conservation Area and the 11 Listed Buildings include the oldest standing building, St Mary's Church, as well as farmhouses, barns and cottages. There is an eclectic range of buildings of varying ages; many have been converted from public, agricultural or commercial use (for example the school, schoolhouse, chapel, barn, public house, forge, shops) to residential use demonstrating an adaptation over time to changing economic and social circumstances. There are extensive views to the surrounding agricultural land. The residential settlement is below the ridge line on the north and backed on both sides by relatively small closes (enclosed pieces of land) and fields giving a very rural feel to the Area.

The Area is situated at the west end of a ridge running south-west to north-east with gently sloping gradients on either side, slightly steeper to the north. The Area is predominantly residential but has one working farm and an active Anglican Church set within the churchyard (still open for burials). It is entirely surrounded by agricultural land.

The settlement is linear, mainly along the High Street and just below and south of the ridge, but with a few buildings (mostly former farmhouses and associated agricultural buildings) around the junction with the Balsham/Horseheath road. Housing plots are irregular in size and the building line is generally inconsistent reflecting development over a long period. Almost all have garden frontages to the road, mostly bounded by hedges, walls or fences. Some have an additional grass verge. They are all backed by small closes and fields. The north side of the High Street is developed along its entire length but on the south side this only extends just under half way. The remainder is agricultural land, mitigating the effect of ribbon development, contributing to the rural character of the village and giving extensive views of the wider countryside.




The majority of the houses are detached and 1½ or 2 storeys in height. Their ages range from the 17th century (although some may have older internal features) to date. Older properties are timber-framed, either rendered and painted or fronted with the local red brick (notable

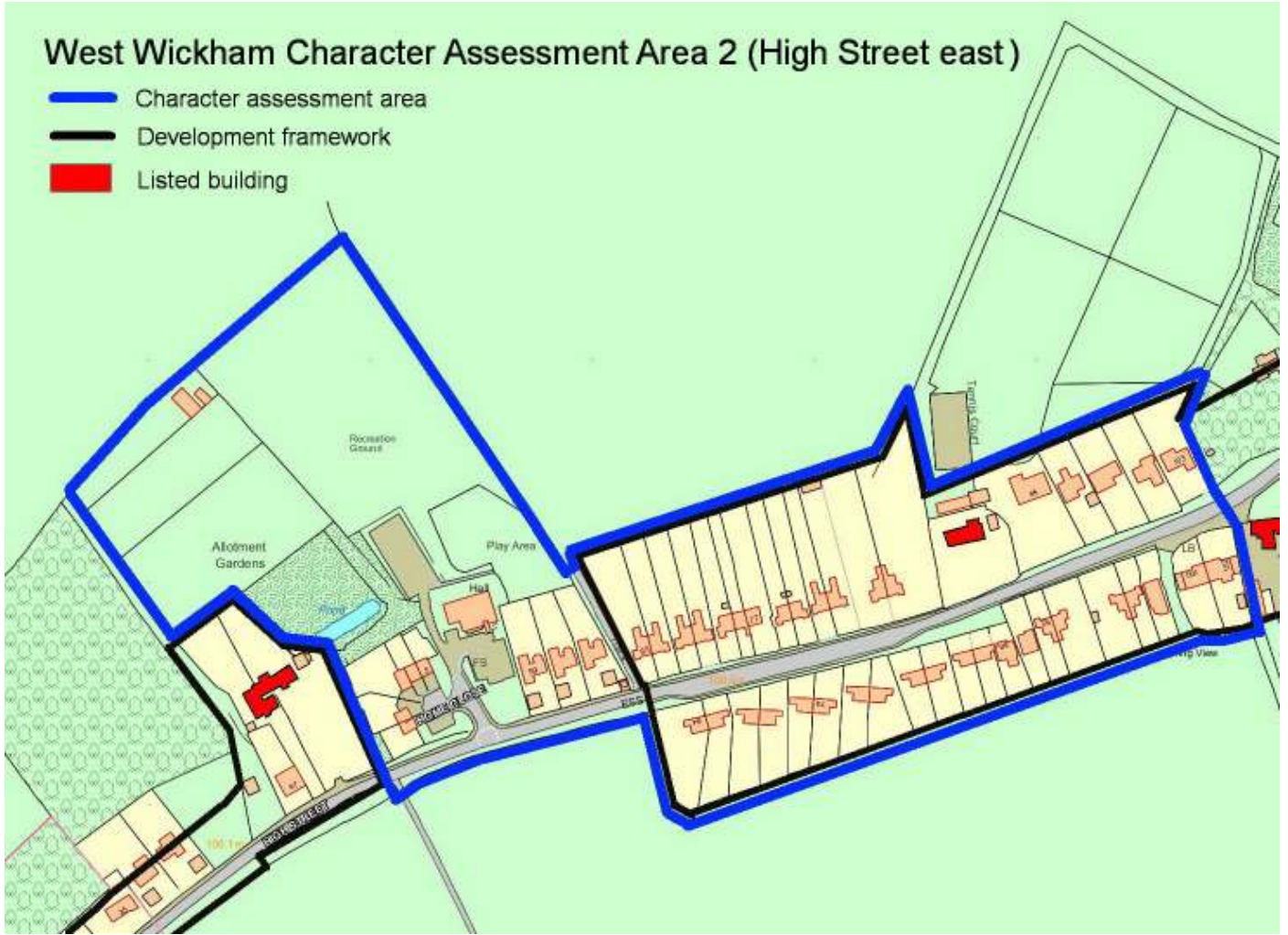
examples being Cobwebs and Ivy Todd farmhouse). Former Victorian public buildings, such as the school and school house and the Mission Hall (later a Methodist chapel) are of red brick in Gothic style and have been sympathetically converted for residential use. Houses from the same period are of Cambridgeshire yellow brick. More modern houses are a mix of a Cambridgeshire yellow brick equivalent or are rendered. Many have been extended in some way. Roofing materials are also varied, usually dependent on the age of the property, and include thatch, pantiles, peg tiles, slate and concrete tiles. Windows also vary with casement, sash and horizontal sliding sash. Properties are generally in good condition and well-maintained.

The High Street is a minor country road following the ridge line and extending eastwards in a gentle curve. It is wide enough for two-way traffic but narrower than the standard modern width in parts. There are pavements on both sides where there are residential buildings. The agricultural land is bordered by a grass verge, ditch and hedge. The pavement on the north side extends around the corner and along the Balsham/Horseheath road to the Church. This road is very narrow in parts with a sharp bend around the churchyard. There is no street lighting in the Area and there are utility poles on both sides of the road with many crossing wires. There is some public seating and litter bins of mixed design plus a George V letter box in brick pillar and a redundant red K6 telephone box which has recently been bought and re-furbished for community use. A Parish Council notice board is situated outside Platts Farm. A number of public rights of way (footpaths) lead off the High Street and the Balsham/Horseheath road (including one through the well-kept open space of the churchyard) which provide a link to other areas of the village and give easy access to the surrounding countryside.

The tower of St Mary's Church, with its surrounding lime trees, is a major landmark which can be seen for some distance around and from approach roads to the village. The village war memorial to those who died in two World wars is in the churchyard along with two official war graves. The Area has many mature and maturing trees, mostly native species but including a fine blue cedar planted by a former Parish Councillor for the benefit of villagers. There are ornamental trees in gardens. The small closes and fields which back the housing are bounded by hedges and there are two large spring-fed ponds near the church.

West Wickham Character Assessment Area 2 (High Street east)

-  Character assessment area
-  Development framework
-  Listed building



CHARACTER AREA 2 High Street East

Overview

With the exception of one cottage (Listed), all the development in this Area has been built in the last 90 years and on land which was previously in agricultural use. This has effectively bridged the gap between the Church End (Area 1) and Burton End (Area 3). The Area is residential with the majority of the housing semi-detached and originally built by the local authority. Although these were built at various times in differing styles there is a more uniform appearance and compact development than elsewhere in the village. However, there are some individually designed houses as well, particularly at the east end. The Area also contains a large open space devoted to public recreational and amenity use which includes the Village Hall. Development on both sides of the road is backed by arable fields (which results in a scarcity of mature trees behind housing) with views to the wider landscape.

This Area is at the eastern end of the ridge and the land rises slightly more steeply in an easterly direction. The land still slopes gently to shallow valleys either side of the ridge although development on the north side of the High Street is below the ridgeline and the land is appreciably higher than that to the south.




The settlement is predominantly linear along the High Street. The small housing association development in Home Close is L shaped and an exception to the normal pattern. Housing plots are fairly regular in shape, mostly long and thin, but vary in size. Housing density is greater than elsewhere in the village but the majority are set back from the road in a more consistent building line and have generous gardens, front and back. There is a wide grass verge in front of some of houses on the south side and gardens on both sides are mostly bounded by hedges, fences or walls although an increasing number of front gardens have been surfaced for car parking. A large area for recreational use at the western end contains the Village Hall and car park, playing field, children's playground, allotments and a nature reserve. This whole area is hedged and its road frontage is grassed with trees and shrubs. There is a relatively small frontage of hedged agricultural land adjoining the south side of the High Street opposite the Village Hall that is contiguous with the agricultural land on the south side of the High Street in Area 1 (see above), contributing to the rural character of the village and giving extensive views to the countryside beyond.

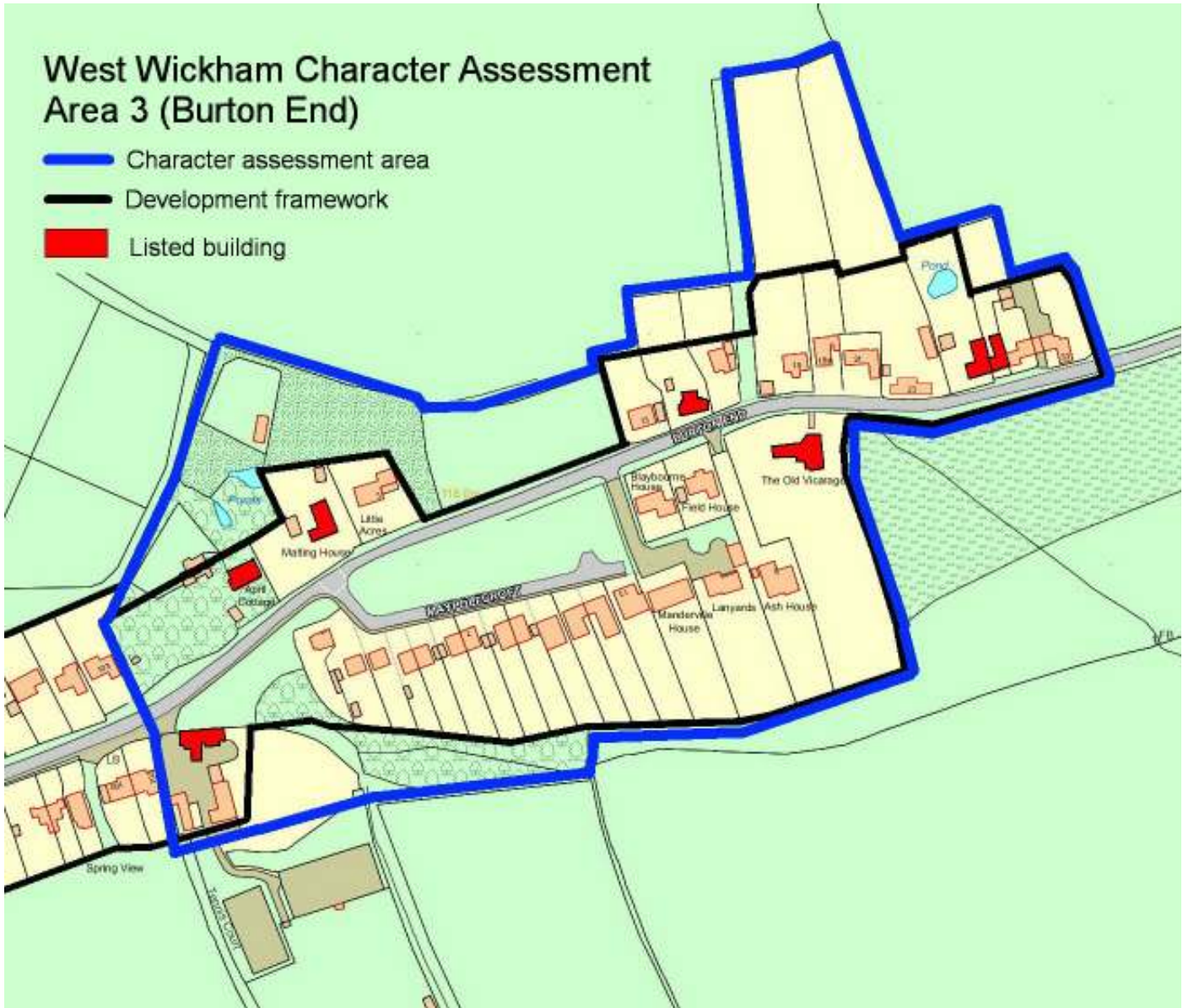
The majority of houses are 2 storey and nearly all the local authority built houses are semi-detached, the exception being a terrace of three. There is another terrace of three in Home Close with a small number of detached larger houses and a pair of semi-detached bungalows in the High Street. The first 6 local authority houses date from 1926. Those subsequently built on the north side date from the late 1930s and 1940s while those on the south side were built in the 1960s. Home Close was built in the late 1990s while individual houses range from the 1970s to date. The majority of local authority housing is now privately owned, a few have been extended and there has been some infill between plots on the south side. Houses are mainly built of brick in a variety of colours; some houses are rendered and painted. Roofs are mostly tiled or slated with one thatched cottage. Properties are in good condition and well-maintained.

The High Street extends eastwards in a curving line and then follows the ridge in a fairly straight stretch. There are pavements on both sides except for two short lengths at either end where the road is narrower and there is only room for a pavement on one side. The local authority housing was not originally provided with off-street parking space and a layby was constructed on the south side in the 1980s to help alleviate problems associated with growing car ownership. Many houses have since had front garden space converted for car parking but the topography of the land to the north and the layout of some gardens mean that this is not always adequate or even an option in some cases, so on-street parking is very much a feature of this Area. There is one litter bin, a post-mounted ER letter box and a broadband cabinet. There are utility poles on both sides of the road with a crossing wirescape. The only two streetlights in the village are in this Area, one opposite the Village Hall drive and the other on the drive opposite the entrance to Home Close. Public footpaths running alongside and through the playing field give access to the footpath network in the countryside to the north.

The Village Hall is very much a landmark building and the village sign was erected next to the road on the grass in front to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. Although there are smaller ornamental trees in gardens, the more mature trees are to be found around the playing field, allotments and nature reserve. There are also many new plantings here, mostly of native trees. The nature reserve has open wild flower areas and a small pond adjacent. It is used as a teaching resource by the pre-school.

West Wickham Character Assessment Area 3 (Burton End)

-  Character assessment area
-  Development framework
-  Listed building



CHARACTER AREA 3 Burton End

Overview

This Area is entirely residential and has a mix of old and modern houses reflecting the changing nature of the Area over time. Seven of the houses are Listed. There are two open spaces – the green in front of White Gables (formerly the White Hart PH), a registered common, and that in front of the housing development in Maypole Croft – which help to give this Area its distinct rural character. Houses back on to large agricultural fields, small paddocks or closes or, in the case of Maypole Croft, a strip of woodland.

This Area flattens out as the ridge joins the plateau to the east which is the watershed between the Granta, Stour and Colne valleys. Burton End is a continuation of the High Street and residential settlement is linear. Maypole Croft is a cul-de-sac development which runs parallel to Burton End and maintains the linear pattern. There is a mixture of regular and irregular plots although most are long and narrow and all have generous gardens. The building line to the north is inconsistent with some of the older houses being very close to the road. To the south the building line of Maypole Croft has been extended by three houses which gives an overlap with the building line of houses in Burton End and consequently an untypical appearance of backfill. The green in front of Maypole Croft with its maturing trees provides an attractive frontage to the houses as well as amenity space. Most houses have front gardens which are hedged or fenced. There is an area of open land to the north opposite Maypole Croft which breaks the building line and gives extensive views to the countryside beyond.

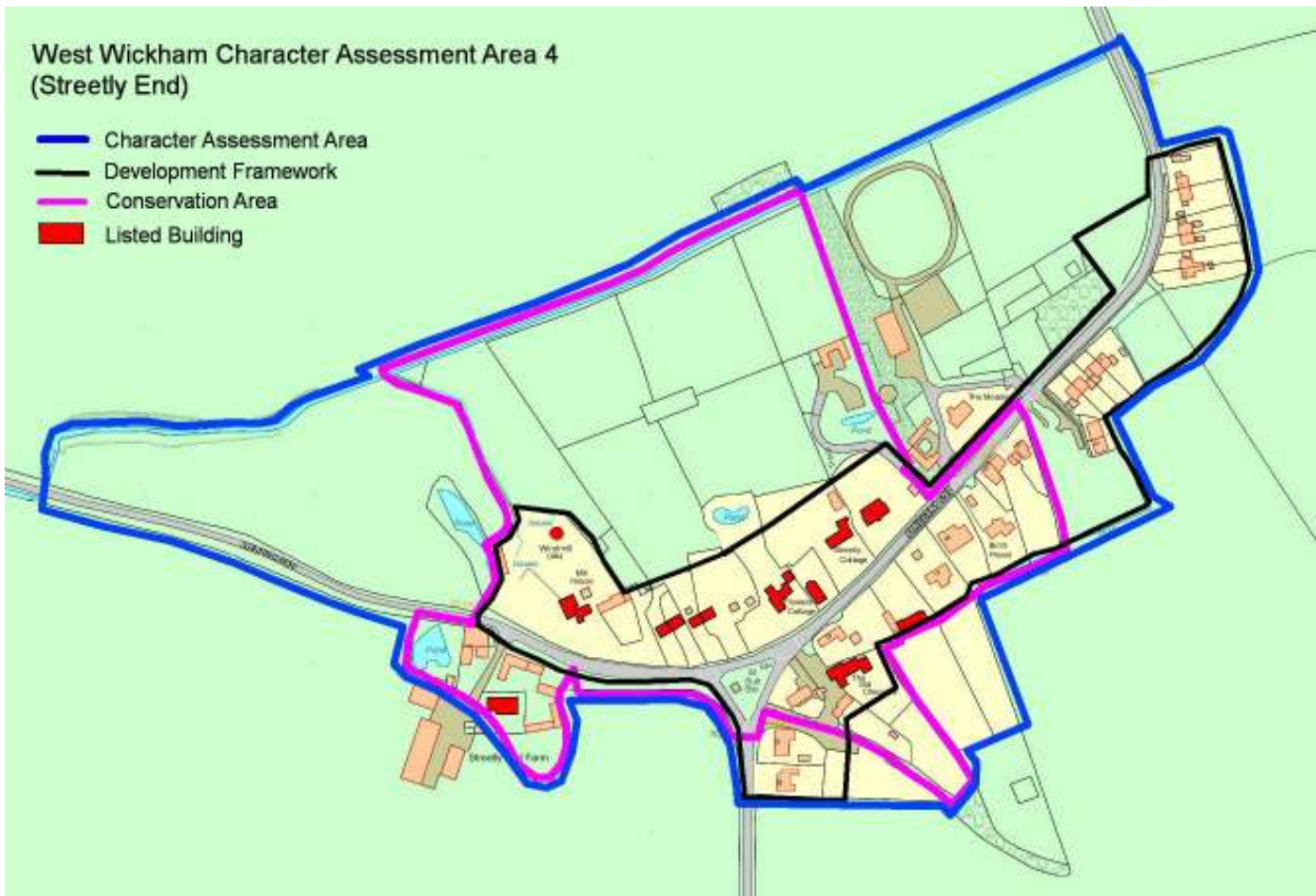
Houses are mainly 1½ or 2 storey and are a mixture of semi-detached and detached with one terrace (part Listed, part modern). There are 5 single storey detached houses (mainly in Maypole Croft), an unusually high number compared to elsewhere in the village. Houses cover a wide age range from the 17th century (possibly earlier) to date. The development of 13 houses in Maypole Croft was built in the 1970s. They and the other nearby modern houses are brick in a range of colours and with tiled roofs. Some of the houses in Maypole Croft have tile facings as well. The older houses are timber-framed, rendered and painted, with mainly thatched roofs. A significant number are situated at the eastern end of Burton End and provide a pleasing entry to the village. Window types are also a

mixture usually reflecting the age of the house. Properties are in good condition and well-maintained.

Burton End is a gentle S shape and rather narrow. Although it is a continuation of the High Street and a through route it has all the appearance of a country lane particularly as, except for a small length on the south side, there are no pavements or street lighting. There are utility poles on both sides of the road with crossing wires. Footpaths lead off both sides of the road giving access to footpath networks and the wider countryside. There are a number of mature trees and ornamental trees in gardens with native hedgerows along boundaries. Both the green in front of Maypole Croft and the green in front of White Gables have maturing trees planted as part of a public amenity scheme. The latter is registered as a common and was the site of the village fair at a time when White Gables was still a public house, so it is of historic significance. Also of historic interest is the 'Old Vicarage' at the east of Burton End which was once the home of the Reverend John R Wollaston. From here he emigrated in 1840 to the newly-established colony of Western Australia where he played a large part in establishing the Anglican church and was its first Archdeacon.

West Wickham Character Assessment Area 4 (Streetly End)

- Character Assessment Area
- Development Framework
- Conservation Area
- Listed Building



CHARACTER AREA 4 Streetly End

Overview

Streetly End is a hamlet to the south of the main village and is now residential. Nearly half the houses (12) are Listed and are within the Conservation Area which covers most of the hamlet. This makes it particularly attractive. Formerly the houses were the homes of farm workers and evidence of the agricultural past can be seen in standing farm buildings associated with Streetly End farm and in the tower mill (also Listed) and Mill House. Streetly End also had its own public house, The Chequers, now converted to residential use. The majority of housing outside the Conservation Area was built by the local authority. The settlement is backed by small paddocks with stabling for horses and fields, some of which are in the Conservation Area. There are views to the countryside beyond which adds to the rural character of the hamlet.

Streetly End is at the head of a shallow valley which drains into the Granta valley to the west. The road runs north-east/south-west with the land gently sloping to the north so that houses on the north side are higher than those to the south. The settlement is predominantly linear except for 2 local authority bungalows built at right angles to the road on open amenity land on the south side. Webbs Road leads off Streetly End at the west end creating a small triangular island, formerly part of a larger green. The majority of the housing plots are irregular in shape with no consistent building line reflecting development over time. The local authority plots are smaller, more regular in size and with a consistent building line. Density of housing is low, even though there has been some infill, and nearly all houses have large gardens bounded by hedges.

The older houses are mostly 1½ or 2 storeys and detached with just two pairs of semi-detached cottages. These are timber-framed, rendered and painted with the majority being thatched. These date from the 17th century although many have earlier internal features. The local authority housing, much of which is now in private ownership, is 2 storey and semi-detached with the exception of 2 bungalows. These are brick built in different colours and over a period of time from the 1930s to the 1970s. Other housing, mostly infill, is detached and also 1½ or 2 storey with an age range from the 1920s to date. More recent housing makes an attempt, some more successfully than others, to replicate the vernacular architecture and is rendered and painted. Apart from the thatch, roofs are

tiled, some with peg or pantiles. Windows are wood framed. Properties are in good condition and well maintained.

There is a sharp bend where Streetly End is entered from the north-east with gentler bends to the west on both Webbs Road and the Horseheath road. The road through the hamlet is two-way but narrow and only has pavements on one side, switching from the south side to the north. There is no street lighting and there are utility poles on both sides with a crossing wirescape. There is a K6 red telephone box (not in use) and a rare Victorian letter box in a brick pillar alongside the triangle to the west. The pillar box was originally in the forecourt of The Chequers public house but was moved to the present site in the 1990s when The Chequers became a private house. The triangle has an electricity sub-station sited on it which is partly screened by shrubs and mature trees. There are ornamental and native trees in gardens and hedgerows including a large elm in Webbs Road opposite the Mill House and adjacent to a pond. There are several public footpaths giving access to the countryside to the south and connecting with a wider network. A public footpath to the west provides a direct link to the Roman Road, an important recreational amenity.

The brick-built tower mill is a distinct landmark both from within and from outside Streetly End. It is dated 1802 and was in use until the sails blew off around 1895. As well as conventionally grinding corn and animal feedstuffs it also pumped water and powered bark grinding machinery for the tannery alongside. The tannery is documented from at least 1700 and ceased operations about 1830. There are no visible remains.