

# Woburn Sands Conservation Area Review

March 2010



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# 1 . General Context

## 1 General Context

### Introduction

**1.1** Conservation areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance<sup>(1)</sup>. See also section 1.24 'Planning Framework'.

**1.2** The Woburn Sands conservation area boundary (revised 23 March 2010) is shown in Map 1. The revisions to the boundary follow an eight week public consultation period which took place between 18 November 2009 and 23 January 2010.

**1.3** To protect the character and appearance of the conservation area a character statement is written that identifies and describes those features that are of special interest or which contribute to local character (see section 2 'The Character Assessment'). By doing this, the character statement and supporting information provides the knowledge and understanding against which proposals that require planning permission can be assessed.

**Picture 1** elegantly composed doorways add to the special character of the conservation area



**1.4** Proposals that fail to demonstrate an understanding of their context will not normally be supported by the council. This is because a lack of understanding often leads to applications that fail to respect or reinforce local distinctiveness. Sometimes failure to understand and appreciate value can lead to a building being lost without due regard to its individual value or wider contribution to the character and appearance of a place.

**1.5** The contents of the review document should be used by developers and the council as a guide to ensure that development proposals have been mindful of their context and to submit or approve only those schemes that preserve or enhance, rather than harm, the character of the conservation area.

**1.6** A much briefer character statement was produced by Milton Keynes Council when the conservation area was first designated in 2003. Since then new government guidance has made it a requirement that conservation areas and their character statements are reviewed every five years to ensure relevance and effectiveness. This review document replaces and expands upon the 2003 character statement for the Woburn Sands conservation area.

**1.7** As part of this review a photographic survey has been made of buildings and spaces in the conservation area. This process creates a 'point in time' record so that the effect and value of conservation area designation can be more closely assessed in the future.

**1.8** The town of Woburn Sands is unusual because it forms part of a collection of settlements that include Wavendon and Cross End to the north, within the Milton Keynes administrative boundary, and Aspley Guise and Aspley Heath which lie in Bedfordshire (see Picture 9 'Woburn Sands: Local Context').

**1.9** Whilst these settlements have their own strong, individual identity, many local facilities are shared, thereby creating significant and complex inter-relationships. For example, Woburn Sands provides a shopping street (similar to a small town centre) and, it would seem, a school, but whilst the shops are wholly part of Woburn Sands, the school is located on the other side of the administrative boundary in Bedfordshire. Aspley Guise is a quiet dormitory settlement with a historic core, but relatively

1 Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 available to view at: [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1990/Ukpga\\_19900009\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1990/Ukpga_19900009_en_1.htm)

few practical facilities, and is therefore dependent on Woburn Sands for convenience shopping at the small and specialist shops found there. Aspley Heath seems to be a continuation of Woburn Sands southwards and, whilst almost wholly residential, shares important recreational spaces on the Greensand Ridge<sup>(2)</sup> with its more workaday neighbour.

**1.10** Lending Woburn Sands further identity, particularly when compared to its close neighbours, is the predominance of late Victorian buildings to the near exclusion of anything earlier in date. This reflects the town's sudden growth at the end of the 19th century after the railway was built and the area was promoted as an inland resort (see 'Historic Development').

**Picture 2** A characterful canted bay window on Station Road



**1.11** A good deal of Woburn Sands lies north of the conservation area in a ribbon of development stretching beyond the station up to the commercial retail garden nurseries located there, and almost to the edge of Wavendon. The body of Woburn Sands, however, lies in and around the High Street. It is this area that the review is focused upon, and around which the conservation area boundary is drawn.

**1.12** The line of the boundary prior to the review and the location of extensions subsequently included are shown in section 3 'Revisions to the Conservation Area'. The maps in section 2 'The Character Assessment' also show the conservation area boundary as it was when designated in 2003. This is because the conservation area boundary *as it existed* formed the

basis of the review and the maps used to illustrate fieldwork findings remain unchanged from the consultation document. Map 1 describes the adjusted conservation area boundary effective from 23 March 2010 and the conservation area boundary shown on other maps has been superseded.

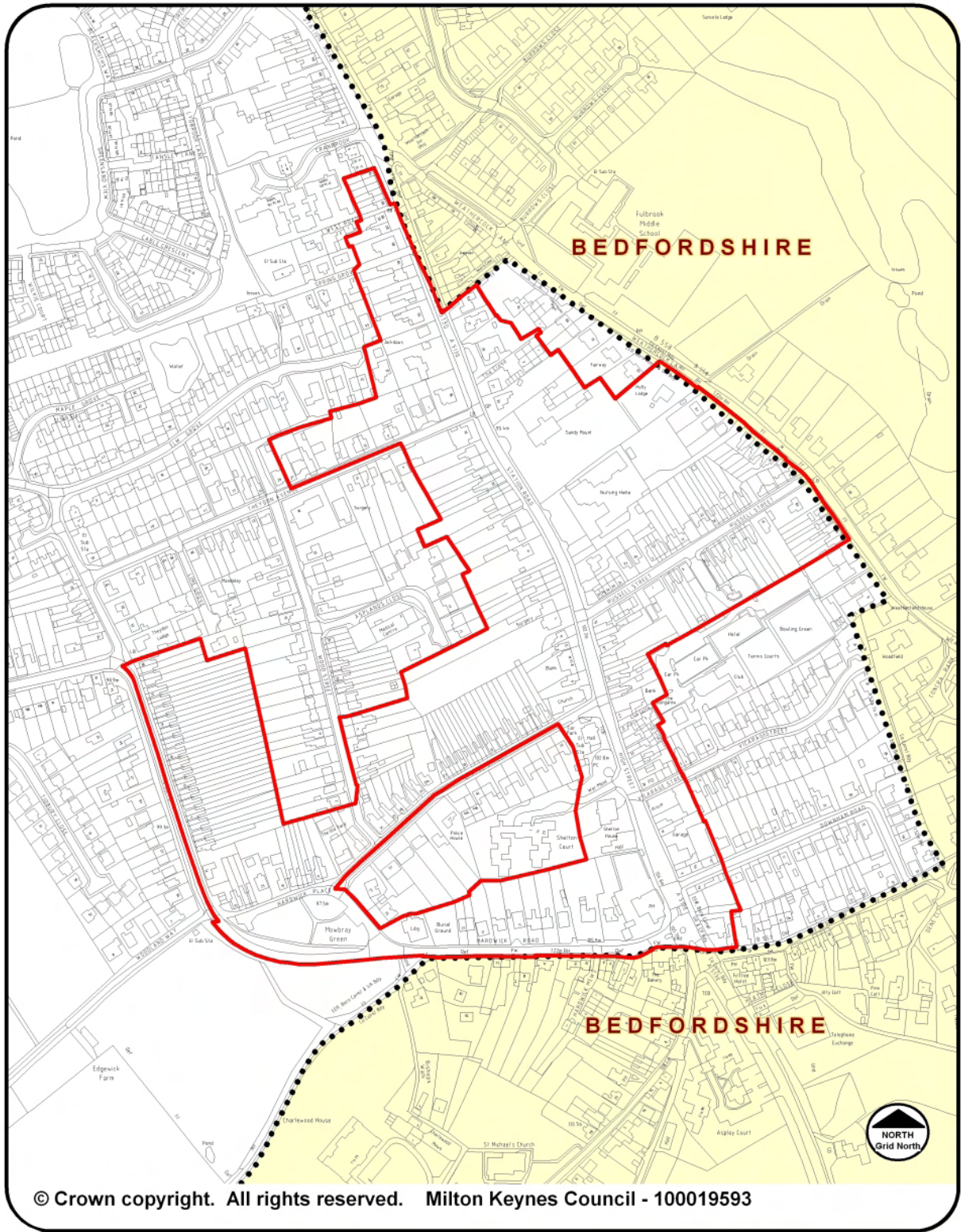
**Picture 3** Town sign which includes the name Hogsty End, see Section 1.31: Historic Development



2 The Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge: Natural England. Available to view at : [http://www.english-nature.org.uk/science/natural/NA\\_Details.asp?R=4&NA\\_Id=53](http://www.english-nature.org.uk/science/natural/NA_Details.asp?R=4&NA_Id=53)

# 1. General Context

Map 1 Woburn Sands: Revised Conservation Area Boundary



## Map Key



**Location**

**1.13** Woburn Sands lies in open countryside beyond and to the south east of the Milton Keynes City development boundary (see Picture 9 'Woburn Sands: Local Context'). The body of the town fits into a pocket of land that juts into the neighbouring county of Bedfordshire. From Milton Keynes, Woburn Sands is reached by taking the A5130 Newport Road south, via Wavendon, from its junction with the A421 at Kingston. The town centre and attendant conservation area lie some three kilometres from the Kingston roundabout. Continuing south out of Woburn Sands the A5130 leads to the settlement of Woburn village and Woburn Park estate.

**1.14** To the east, via Aspley Guise, lies junction 13 of the M1 and beyond that Ampthill and Flitwick. The town's railway station gives access to a passenger service that connects Bletchley and Bedford.

**1.15** Woburn Sands town centre is positioned on a shallow ridge-like promontory which is reached by a gentle upward gradient that commences about a quarter of a mile south of the station. Above the town centre to the south is the crest of the imposing and thickly wooded Greensand escarpment that provides a verdant backdrop to the conservation area (see Section 1.23 onwards: 'Geology and Topography'). The town's position on a shallow promontory of the higher Greensand scarp allow views out from the main street over to significant areas of mature trees on lower ground; distant views are surprisingly absent however.

**Picture 4 Woburn Sands seen from the west. The numerous trees create the effect of a town set in woodland.**



**1.16** Taken in combination with the trees that stand on the ridge, as well as those that line the northern approach to the town centre, the effect created is one of a town in a woodland setting.

**Town Environs**

**1.17** To the west of the original conservation area boundary lay small areas of late Victorian housing, of which some has now been included in the revised boundary ( see Section 3 'Revisions to the Conservation Area'). Beyond these, as far as the modern settlement boundary, lie standardised, late 20th century housing developments that create a buffer between the conservation area and the surrounding open countryside.

**1.18** Between the northern reach of the conservation area and the station, there are some mostly plain and rather denuded collections of late Victorian housing and a recent large apartment type development of indifferent quality.

**Picture 5 Broad swathes of tarmac, intrusive white lining and anonymous housing development create a bleak environment between the station and Weathercock Lane.**



**1.19** The ribbon of housing that extends northward, beyond the station, is mostly made up of modest but occasionally imposing inter-war housing. However, remoteness from the conservation area effectively rules out an extension in this direction and there is nothing of sufficient architectural or historic merit in this northward ribbon of development to warrant the consideration of a separate conservation area designation.

## 1 . General Context

**Picture 6 A larger house in its own grounds at the northern end of Woburn Sands**



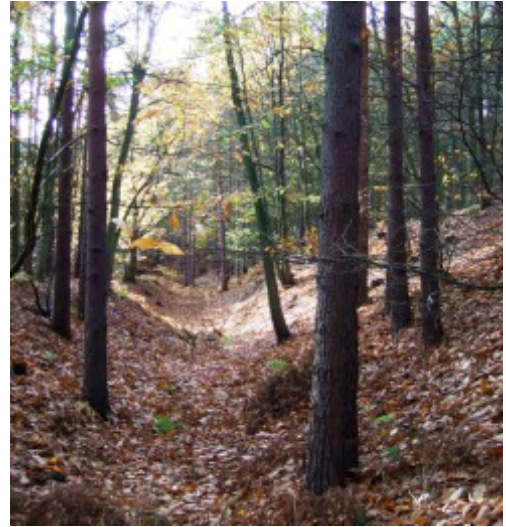
**1.20** The number and variety of mature garden trees and roadside grass verges lend the northern reaches something of the feeling of a leafy suburb, softening the sometimes austere roadside environment and helping to establish an appropriately leafy approach to the conservation area from this direction.

**Picture 7 The leafy northern approach to Woburn Sands**



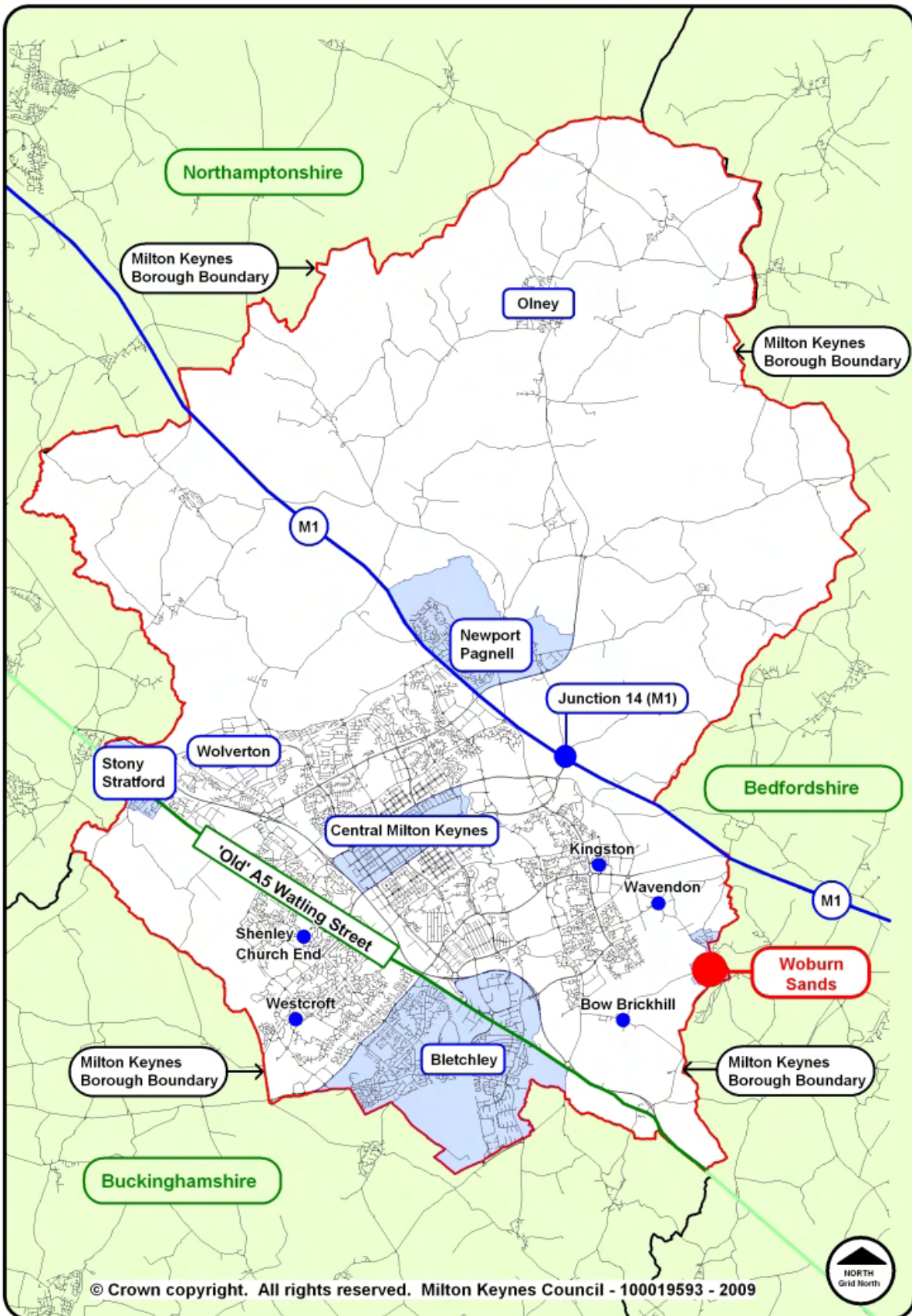
**1.21** The area around Woburn Sands provides some interesting vantage points from which to see the wooded Greensand Ridge. Woburn Sands itself is mostly lost amongst the trees and, lacking a spire or other principal landmark, can be hard to locate. The fields around Woburn Sands are permeated by bridleways and footpaths and access is readily available to recreational spaces around Aspley Heath and westward, in the Milton Keynes area, into some splendid woodland within which are located the iron age earthworks of Danesborough Camp.

**Picture 8 Ancient earthworks at Danesborough Camp**



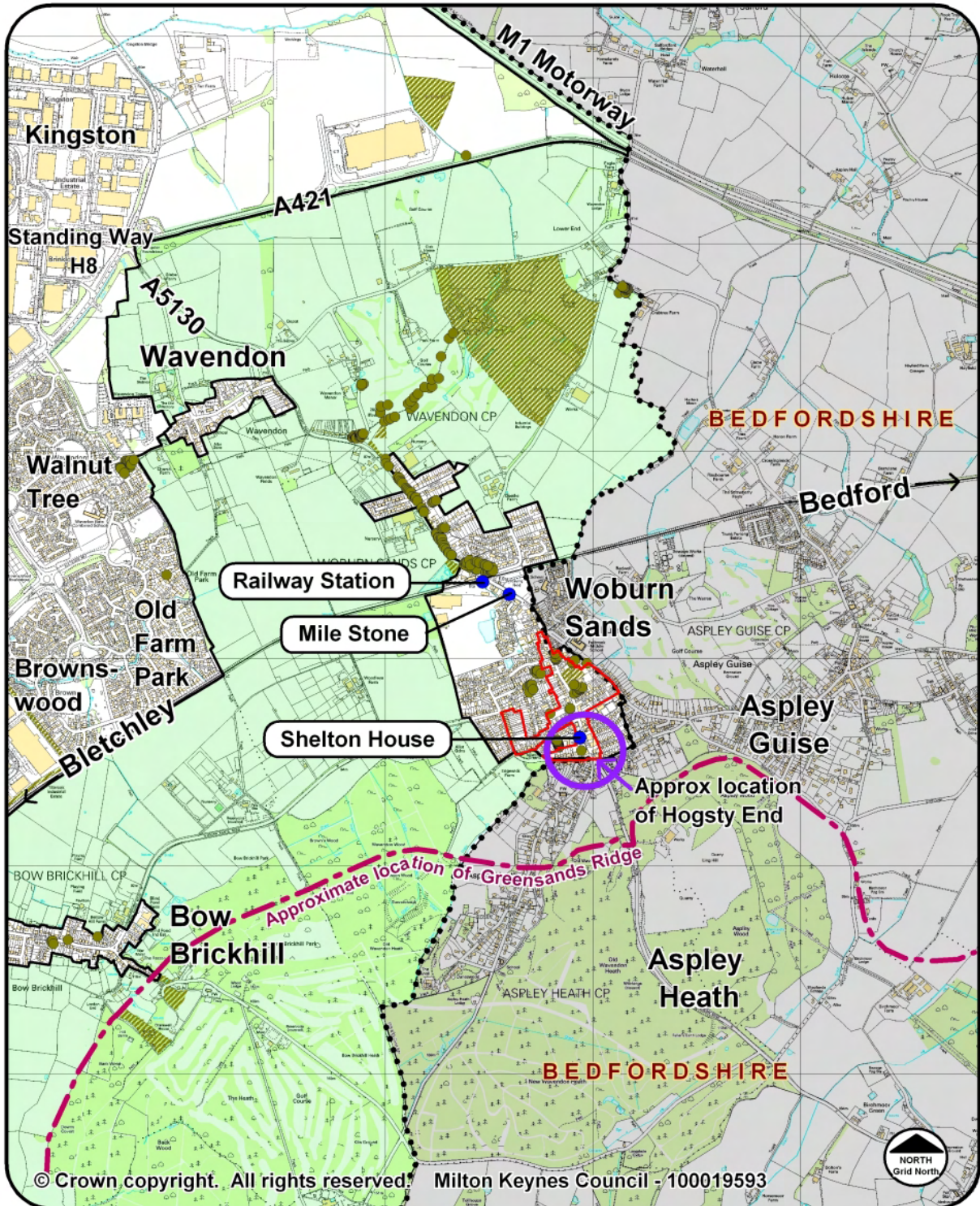


Map 2 Woburn Sands: Area Context



# 1. General Context

Picture 9 Woburn Sands: Local Context



## Map Key

	Conservation Area Boundary		Settlement Development Boundary		TPO's administered by MKC
	Milton Keynes Borough Boundary		Open Countryside		Listed Buildings within the Woburn Sands development boundary

## Geology and Topography

**1.22** Geologically Woburn Sands straddles the transition between the eponymous sandstone strata that comprise this section of the Greensand Ridge and the rolling bisected Oxford Clay plateau which defines the area of Milton Keynes new town to the north.

**1.23** Historically both the Oxford Clay and Woburn Sands formations have been of economic significance, with a number of brickworks being present to the north-west of the town, in addition to fuller's earth quarries along the scarp at Aspley Heath and Aspley Wood.

**1.24** In terms of topography the settlement is defined by the slight northwards spur along which the High Street runs. This obvious natural routeway rises in elevation from 88m at the northern edge of the conservation area to 105m at the crossroads. This considerable change in relief, which continues to the wooded ridge and heathland beyond, provides a dramatic setting to the settlement and a vivid contrast to the rolling clayland to the north.

**Picture 10** Sandy soil on the Greensand Ridge



## Planning Framework

**1.25** Planning applications within conservation areas are determined in accordance with national, regional and local policy. Section 69 of The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990<sup>(3)</sup> establishes the council's duty to identify those places within its administrative area that are of special architectural or historic character or appearance and designate those places as conservation areas. Once designated, section 72 of the Act cited above establishes the council's duty to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of its conservation areas.

**1.26** Government guidance on the implementation of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG 15).

**1.27** The council's responsibility and intention to meet national legislation and implement government guidance is confirmed under saved Policy HE6 of The Milton Keynes Local Plan 2001-2011, adopted December 2005<sup>(4)</sup>.

**1.28** Further information on supporting guidance and local policy can be found by following the link to conservation areas on the Conservation and Archaeology Team webpage<sup>(5)</sup>

**1.29** The relationship of the planning framework to the practical management of the conservation area is set out in section 4 'Management Proposals'.

## Historic Development

**1.30** Although the history of Woburn Sands as a place in its own right is a comparatively short one, it is unusual and needs to be understood as a process if the circumstances of the town are to be properly appreciated.

**1.31** Four primary sources have been used for writing the town's historic development; these are the web pages from The Woburn Sands Collection - General History<sup>(6)</sup>, The Woburn Sands Heritage Trail<sup>(7)</sup>, the

3 Available to view at [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1990/Ukpga\\_19900009\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1990/Ukpga_19900009_en_1.htm)

4 Available to view at <http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-policy/DisplayArticle.asp?ID=61299>

5 <http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/conservation-archaeology>

6 Available to view at <http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/wsc/>

7 2007, Woburn Sands Town Council

## 1. General Context

conservation area reviews for Aspley Heath and Aspley Guise<sup>(8)</sup> and various sources and papers at Woburn Sands Library and Milton Keynes Council Historic Environment Record.

**1.32** Written evidence suggests that Woburn Sands did not exist as a name until some point in the 18th century. Instead, the land hereabouts formed part of the parish of Wavendon which consisted of a number of 'Ends'. Amongst these were Cross End, Church End and Lower End (Woburn Sands Collection: General History). The name for the area now taken up in part by Woburn Sands, was previously known as Hogsty End after reputed historic associations with pig farming.

**1.33** The road through Hogsty End had been made a turnpike route by 1727 and ran from Hockliffe, on the A5 east of Leighton Buzzard, via Woburn to Newport Pagnell and, in turn, to Northampton, forming an important, alternative north south route. Running east to west was a track from Aspley Guise to Bow Brickhill which crossed the turnpike at Fir Tree Farm creating a crossroads at the hamlet's southern end.

**Picture 11** The Line of the Hockliffe to Newport turnpike approaching southern Woburn Sands (formerly Hogsty End)



**1.34** By 1675 The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) had established a meeting house in the locality, followed by a methodist chapel which was probably built in the late 18th century. During the 18th century, a number of inns also sprang up to service passing road traffic. These included the Swan Inn and the Fir Tree Inn, both of which overlooked the crossroads, and, by 1700, another on the site of The Weathercock.

**Picture 12** The appropriately named Fir Tree Inn built close to the site of the old Fir Tree Farm (now demolished)



**Picture 13** The Swan. Named after the emblem of the County Of Buckinghamshire and strategically located to overlook the crossroads at the county's border with Bedfordshire.



**Picture 14** The Weathercock Inn, Bedfordshire. Note the clay tile roof.



8 19 March 2008 Mid Beds District Council (now Central Bedfordshire Council). Available to view at: <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/conservation/areas/appraisals/reviews/default.aspx>

**Picture 15 Woburn Sands station**



**1.35** As well as the more traditional aspects of a rural economy, there were local deposits of sand that yielded fuller's earth (in the C19th used principally for cleaning or 'fulling' woollen cloth<sup>(9)</sup>) and clay for suitable for brick making.

**1.36** The name 'Woburn Sands' had begun to appear in the records of travellers as early as 1785. The circumstances which brought the name into being are not known in detail but, understandably, anyone at the time wishing to promote the benefits of the locality would not be helped by such a literal sounding name as Hogsty End.

**1.37** Taking the name of the nearby, aristocratic, estate village of Woburn, and adding the descriptive and distinctive attribute of the Greensand escarpment's soil (to establish a differentiation between the two places), assisted the local economy by improving its appeal to a higher class of patron. Both names were in simultaneous use for a considerable period of time, from the late 18th century until as late as the mid 20th century.

**1.38** The obstacle presented by the Greensand escarpment that was crucial to the transformation of Hogsty End into Woburn Sands. The presence of higher ground led to a northward diversion of the east west railway line away from Woburn, the seat of the Dukes of Bedford.

**1.39** The opening of the railway line which ultimately linked Oxford and Cambridge was a decisive moment for the area. In 1846 Hogsty End stood on the turnpike road between the new railway station and the Duke of Bedford's estate centred on Woburn.

**1.40** Embryonic local industries around Hogsty End and Aspley Guise now had access to regional and national markets and began to flourish. Unlike its Bedfordshire neighbour, circumstances allowed Hogsty End to seize the opportunities offered by the railway, making up much more than was lost through the decline in passing road traffic.

**1.41** Locally made bricks were used to cater for the expanding town as well as being exported for use regionally. Extraction of fuller's earth, with its varied industrial applications, grew to be an international industry, and only ceased in 2004.

**1.42** Just as fortuitously, the heaths and wooded escarpment presented an opportunity for enterprising investors to develop Woburn Sands as an inland resort. Proximity to the more genteel Aspley Guise and Woburn provided much a needed cachet and so a new fashion for tourism, engendered by the railway and some genuinely attractive walks on the ridge, further enhanced by supposed health benefits, combined to trigger successful resort based developments from the 1850's onwards.

9 Fuller's Earth - Mineral Planning Factsheet (January 2006) Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and The British Geological Survey. Available to view at: <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/downloads/>

## 1 . General Context

**Picture 16** The predominantly coniferous / pine woodland of the Greensand Ridge attracted Victorian daytrippers



**1.43** Into this mix came visitors to the Duke of Bedford's estate who disembarked at the new station and then took the road south to Woburn over the Greensand Ridge. The influential Duke, keen to ensure good first impressions for his guests, encouraged a certain minimum standard of fit and finish for development along this route.

**1.44** A commercial centre grew up around the cross roads at the town's southern end with some houses built nearby on the eastern side of the emerging High Street. Development on the west side of High Street was delayed by the division of land ownership between two principal families with local farming interests until the turn of the twentieth century. Even then the land on High Street was not sold to commercial interests, but became, instead, the site of the vicarage and two rather fine public halls.

**1.45** The houses built on the east side of High Street were short lived and soon turned into shops in response to continued commercial opportunities. Shop frontages were built over the gardens, giving rise to a shopping row along just one side of High Street.

**1.46** Housing developed further north on both sides of Station Road with the most imposing premises on the crest of the promontory. The majority survive and consist of one or two principal houses in grounds but, more frequently, as two or two and a half storey pairs

or rows of villas, generally declining in stature and poise as the incline is descended and the station and (formerly) semi industrial northern quarter of the town are reached.

**1.47** Adding to the finished town, a large methodist chapel was built on the west side of High Street in 1879 and a library, on the site of the friends meeting house, was built in the early 20th century. However, Woburn Sands still lacked a principal church and a school. The explanation for this is provided by Woburn Sands complicated historic inter-relationship with its near neighbours, Aspley Guise, Wavendon (in whose parish the town still lay) and the growth of Aspley Heath.

**Picture 17** Methodist Chapel, High Street, Woburn Sands



**1.48** As Aspley Heath developed, open land which displaced peasants had taken as their own was cleared to allow the construction of villas financed by wealthy Victorians looking to settle in the newly fashionable area.

**1.49** Woburn Sands' good fortune perhaps proved difficult for the dignitaries of Wavendon to accept, as they witnessed the parish's historic administrative centre being eclipsed by Hogsty End. To ease the situation the ecclesiastical parish of Woburn Sands was established in 1867, comprising parts of Aspley Guise (the heaths) and Wavendon parishes. A new church, St Michael's, was built in Aspley Heath, specifically to serve the new parish. In 1868, a week before the opening of the church, Aspley Heath school also opened. Both were generously financed by The Duke of Bedford.

**Picture 18 St Michael's Church, Aspley Heath**



**1.50** Whilst it would now be possible for the inhabitants of Wavendon to attend church without confronting the newly prosperous brickmakers, clay diggers, publicans and shopkeepers of Woburn Sands, the civic parishes remained unchanged. This allowed continued interference, for the potential benefit of the older centres, in the affairs of Woburn Sands and Aspley Heath. It was in 1907, that the Hogsty End of Wavendon Parish finally became a civic parish in its own right.

**1.51** Since its civic establishment, the subsequent administrative changes that have occurred include the replacement of the Newport Rural District Council by Milton Keynes Borough Council and the granting of Town Council status to Woburn Sands in 1974. As Milton Keynes grew, the unitary administrative body of Milton Keynes Council was established in 1997, thus becoming independent from Buckinghamshire.

**1.52** This is the historic account of Woburn Sands and, whilst the town is now an administrative entity in its own right, and still economically successful, it is useful to have in the back of one's mind the benign local allegiances and rivalries that, it would seem, continue to exist.

## 2. The Character Assessment

### 2 The Character Assessment

#### Defining Special Interest and the Management of Conservation Areas

**2.1** The definition of special interest is a succinct summary of the reasons for designating a conservation area. The definition, in combination with adopted local plan policies, forms the basis of the management strategy for the Woburn Sands conservation area and guides the decision-making process on applications for planning permission in the conservation area received by the Local Planning Authority (Milton Keynes Council).

#### **Conservation Area Review: Local Exhibition**

**2.2** Prior to drafting the review, a local exhibition was held for two weeks at the town's library and the Ellen Pettit Memorial Hall. Officers were in attendance for one Thursday evening and for one Saturday morning. Display stands describing the town's character were placed at both locations. Information about Article 4(2) directions was also included as part of the display.

**Picture 19** Exhibition boards for the conservation area review on display at Woburn Sands library.



**2.3** The local exhibition took place before the Woburn Sands Conservation Area Review (Consultation Draft) document was written and was not part of the formal consultation based on the Woburn Sands Conservation Area Review (Consultation Draft) document which took place some weeks later. Although written responses received from the local exhibition were very limited in number some themes, such as the need for local guidance on the constraints

affecting people living in the conservation area, were raised. These responses were taken into account when the consultation documents and the associated management strategy were written.



### Definition of Special Interest for Woburn Sands Conservation Area

Woburn Sands is characterised by brick Victorian buildings dating from the mid 19th Century when the town grew rapidly as a commercial centre and fashionable inland resort. Many of the features of the resort town remain and still lend the town a discernible air of Victorian gentility. Adding to this is the proximity of the Woodland to the south which rises above the town.

Neighbouring the town, and now effectively forming extensions to it, are much older centres, including Wavendon and Aspley Guise. Aspley Heath to the south grew in the 19th century as an extension of Woburn Sands but with a stronger focus as a country retreat for rest and recuperative stays. Although each settlement is distinct from the other there is a significant historic interdependence.

Whilst High Street and its bustling row of shops form the core of the conservation area, there are, to the north, a number of distinctive late-Victorian villas. Most of these stand as imposing collections of two, three or four houses of shared architectural language, set back behind front gardens on either side of Station Road. Amongst these there are also a small number of large individual houses set in their own grounds.

The northern approach along Station Road is enhanced by the collections of trees and shrubs that enclose views along its length. These diminish in number around the town centre and are rare in the side streets, but increase again on entering Aspley Heath. The degree of foliage is a striking feature of the conservation area. It obscures, or adds privacy to some of the larger houses' roadside frontages, whilst also evoking an early sense of the wooded spaces found on the ridge to the south.

A second enclave of large detached and semi detached houses stands along Hardwick Road. This distribution of larger housing continues southward into Aspley Heath, beyond the conservation area boundary, into Bedfordshire.

Leading off High Street are more modestly scaled domestic brick terraces set behind small front gardens. Although there is a regularity and uniformity to their overall scale and appearance, there is a wide variation in the built forms and detailing. This variety lends these more modest houses significant character and visual interest.

The arrangement of higher status houses overlooking the town's important leafy approach road from the station conveys an important image of a prosperous suburb. Quite noticeably, the lower status housing is pushed back to the less conspicuous side streets.

Woburn Sands should not be considered wholly in isolation as it amalgamates with neighbouring Aspley Heath where the church stands and school (now demolished) was located. The Aspley Heath conservation area is contiguous with that of Woburn Sands. For the purposes of the conservation area review, Woburn Sands is that part of the settlement that falls within the jurisdiction of Milton Keynes Council and, in itself, retains a quaint and captivating sense of a Victorian retreat which fully warrants its conservation area designation.

## 2. The Character Assessment

### Individual Character Areas

**2.4** Within Woburn Sands there are discernible areas with their own character. This character is in the main established by the prevailing function of each area and the type of buildings found there. Map 3 'Woburn Sands: Character Areas Based on Predominant Use' illustrates how the High Street is the focus for shops, restaurants and commercial and professional services, but also how there is a significant area of non-residential community buildings too. The prevailing character of the area is, nonetheless, that of a busy shopping street.

**2.5** For the purposes of this review three types of character area have been identified, these are:

A: Large Victorian Villas

B: Smaller Victorian Terraces

C: Commercial Centre

These character areas are described in more detail as follows:

#### A: Large Victorian Villas

**2.6** Standing both sides of Station Road, as it rises up the gentle incline from the junction with Weathercock Lane, stand large, brick built, ornamental Victorian houses. On the east side of Station Road the houses are mostly large detached properties set back from the road behind small front gardens, although often partially screened by a rich variety of garden trees and shrubs.

**Picture 20** A well preserved house at 25 Station Road



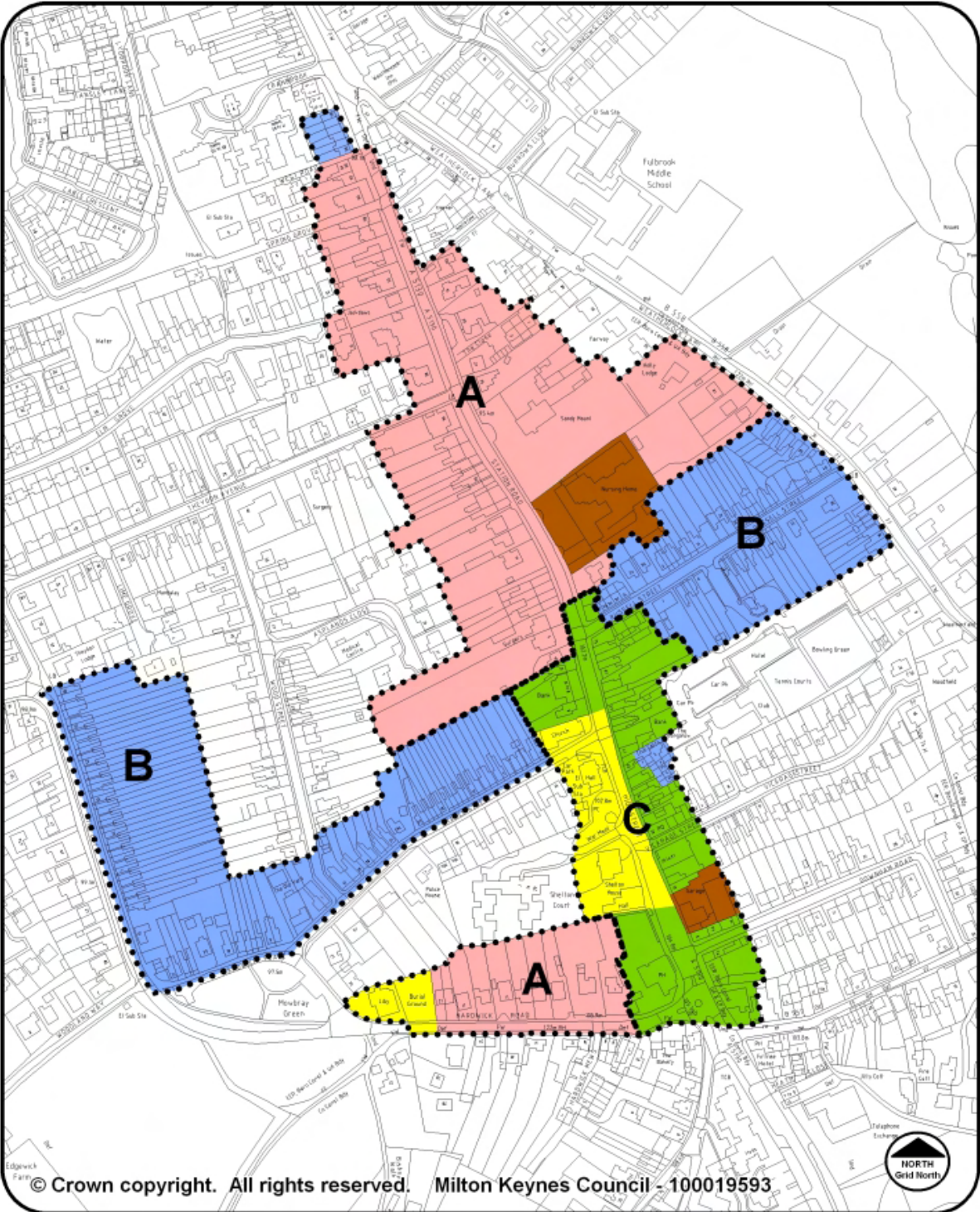
**2.7** Amongst this collection of houses there is Sandymount (a reference to the Greensand scarp), a very large, neatly proportioned, stuccoed house in its own grounds, built circa 1867 and now in use as offices. Although appearing a little hemmed in by subsequent development, the size of the garden space that remains effectively conveys the once gracious setting of this important building. Notably, the formal classical architecture of Sandymount has dictated that the house's principal facades are missing the ornamental canted bay windows that are an ubiquitous feature throughout the rest of the conservation area.

**Picture 21** Sandymount, Station Road frontage



**2.8** To the south of Sandymount stands the broad, if resolutely functional, frontage (barring the absurd portico) of the nursing home that lacks any apparent architectural reference to the context provided by the rather more elegant late Victorian and Edwardian buildings located nearby. That there is some screening by mature trees is scant consolation for the indifferent, inactive frontage that lies beyond.

Map 3 Woburn Sands: Character Areas Based on Predominant Use

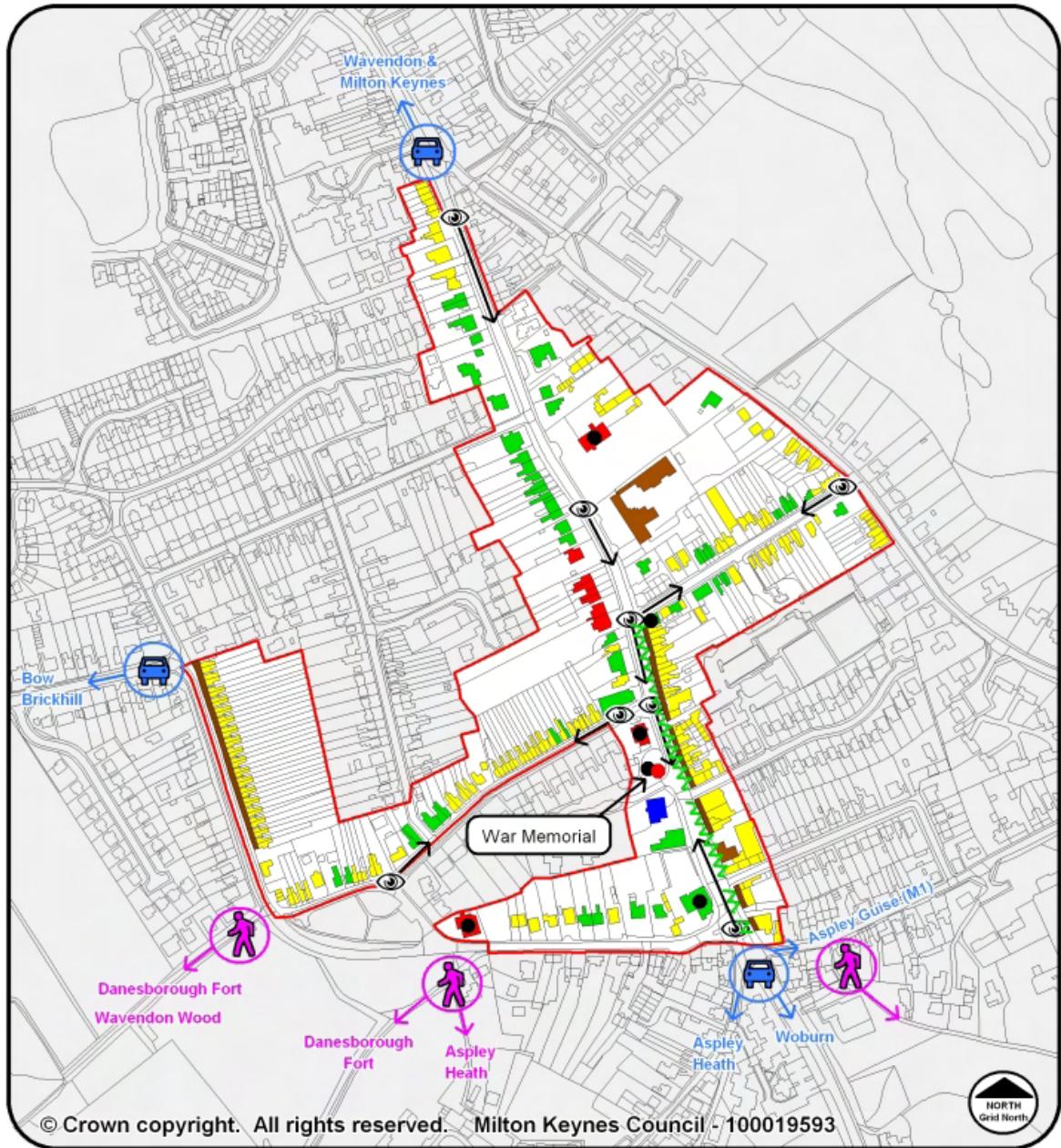


Map Key










	Character Areas		Large Victorian Villas		C20th imposed development
	Commercial		Smaller Victorian Terraces / Older Cottages		Public / Community

## 2. The Character Assessment

Map 4 Woburn Sands Conservation Area: Location of Principal Buildings and Features.



### Map Key

	Conservation Area Boundary		Buildings of cumulative interest. Mostly Victorian with occasional 20th Century infill.
	Listed Buildings		Buildings or development which harms the character of the conservation area
	Positive building that survives with most or all details and materials intact		Local (Streetscene) landmark
	Positive building with original character and appearance easily perceivable		Significant Views
			Active Frontage

## 2 . The Character Assessment

**2.9** On the other side of Station Road are some very good examples of detached late Victorian properties set in their own grounds and, again, displaying a high level of ornament. Their quality eclipses those on the eastern side of Station Road, with the exception of Sandymount. Also here are pairs and 'terraced fours' of imposing two storey town houses, with half storeys in the attics denoted by dormer windows.

**Picture 22 Station Road, numbers 6 - 8**



**2.10** Most of the houses are positioned to create a consistent line rather than being placed arbitrarily within their plots.

**Picture 23 The roadside frontage of 14 Station Road survives seemingly unmolested and is perhaps the best example of a large single Victorian Villa left on Station Road**



**2.11** The mature trees contained in the gardens create the feeling of a leafy avenue as one approaches the northern end of High Street. This mixture of housing amongst trees is a particularly important theme in the conservation area.

**Picture 24 Garden trees on the west side of Station Road**



**2.12** Being located on the main approach road from Milton Keynes brings a significant disadvantage in the form of noisy and visually intrusive vehicle traffic. The road urbanises the immediate environment altering its character to one very different from that when the houses here were first built. Fortunately the usual plethora of street furniture which frequently comes with a busy road is surprisingly absent along this section.

**2.13** For most of the day there are relatively few pedestrians to be found walking between the station and the High Street, the exception being the periods at the start and end of the school day when dozens of school children populate the area for an hour or so. There is also a noticeable peak in vehicle traffic at these times.

**Picture 25 The approach to the conservation area from the north**



## 2. The Character Assessment

**2.14** To the south of the town, along the north side of Hardwick Road, there are four late Victorian town houses (numbers 1, 3, 7 and 9; number 5 is a modern bungalow). The first two are large but well proportioned double bay fronted properties. Numbers 7 and 9 are a pair which, although joined, are built in a similar idiom to 1 and 3.

**Picture 26 House on Hardwick Road**



**2.15** The gardens of the pair have been split to form two separate plots. Neither of the subsequent developments add to the character of the conservation area.

**Picture 27 The former Wesleyan Chapel at 17 Hardwick Road**



**2.16** The modern housing continues until the more presentable public library overlooking Mowbray Green is reached. The exception is number 17, Chapel House once the Wesleyan Chapel.

**2.17** Despite the sustained interruption by 20th century housing, the collection of villas at the top end of Hardwick Road, in combination with the library at the bottom, establish a 'type A' character area overall.

**Picture 28 The Library**



### B: Smaller Victorian Houses and Terraces

**2.18** The terraced rows of the existing conservation area are located chiefly along Chapel Street, but also with pairs of houses or short terraces made up of three or four houses on Russell Street and Hardwick Place.

**2.19** The layout tends to be one of houses arranged along a consistent line with frontages overlooking the street, albeit frequently set back behind small gardens. The plot divisions are significantly smaller than those of the larger villas, but the actual block plan still lacks permeability despite being a finer urban grain. Some smaller individual houses overlook Hardwick Place, but overall, the density of development is high and used exclusively for domestic dwellings.

## 2 . The Character Assessment

**Picture 29 Terraced pairs and rows on the north side of Chapel Street**



**2.20** At the east end of Chapel Street the terraces have a good consistency of appearance, despite being arranged as pairs or threes stepping down the hill, but this consistency peters out by the time Hardwick Place is reached.

**Picture 30 Newer housing on the south side of Chapel Street contrasts strongly with the characterful Victorian housing opposite**



**2.21** On the south side of Chapel Street stand some austere examples of post Second World War social housing. Although they have neatly kept gardens as foreground, the stolid, bulky nature of their construction creates an awkward contrast with the terraces opposite. Also here, and down the hill towards

Hardwick Place, are a collection of newer bungalows from circa 1960 to 1970 and, again, in terms of height, materials and external form (particularly the distinctive large hipped roofs) the contrast with the Victorian row opposite is marked. All these later houses lie beyond the conservation area boundary but form part of the setting.

**2.22** A few short steps around the corner from Hardwick Place lies The Leys. Built as housing for workers in the local brickyards, this lengthy terraced row was built as an architectural set piece. As such, the shared window, door and other details created a consistency of appearance that, by repetition, emphasised the stature of the row as a single, unified entity.

**2.23** Sadly, road improvements have elevated the height of the road in relation to the terrace, thereby reducing its intended visual presence. Even more calamitous have been the individual ad hoc alterations to the principal roadside frontages of The Leys. The impetus for the filling in the porches would seem to be front door arrangement that opens directly into the front room, the practical solution to which has been the construction of an enclosed lobby under the porch to prevent warm air from leaving the house. Whatever the cause, the effect has been to obscure the once shared architectural vocabulary of the row.

**Picture 31 Mismatched doors and windows at The Leys**



## 2. The Character Assessment

**2.24** On the other side of the High Street is Russell Street where there is a greater diversity of houses in terms of type, age and appearance. Once again, the least satisfactory architecture belongs to the individual houses built on gap sites in the 20th century. However, putting the 20th century developments to one side, Russell Street contains an intriguing variety of late Victorian and Edwardian low and middle order housing, some of which is of very good quality and with a good level of detail surviving. Again, excepting the modern impositions, there is a consistent line to the frontages, all of which are set back slightly from the pavement, behind small front gardens. When viewed from a distance, the general composition is an attractive one, not unduly harmed by the insensitive later additions. A stroll along Russell Street is enriched by the subtle nuances of Victorian and Edwardian domestic architecture to be found there. Apart from some commercial encroachment at the High Street end of Russell Street, there is a similar level in the consistency of use and character as there is on Chapel Street.

**Picture 32** Low key details combine to enrich the appearance of this row in Russell Street. Note the half round copers on the wall top.



**2.25** Despite the deterioration of The Leys there remains a general consistency of appearance and quality that justifies the identification of the type B character areas.

### C: Commercial Centre

**2.26** The commercial centre chiefly consists of a tightly-knit brick-built row of retail outlets, restaurants and professional services located on the east side of High Street. Unfortunately the majority of shop fronts have degenerated into a jumble of glossy, cheap,

modern materials exacerbated by indiscriminate glazing and signing arrangements. Only the occasional surviving timber or tiled frontage provides some relief from the improvised short-term alterations and the untidy and tired appearance that varied uses have given rise to. An examination of the historic pictures of High Street illustrates the dramatic visual decline from Victorian refinement to today's impoverished exteriors.

**2.27** Much of this decline took place prior to the conservation area being designated. Unfortunately, powers to control further deterioration do not come about through designation of a conservation area. Instead the establishment of an Article 4(2) direction, which removes permitted development rights, would be the means by which the council could attempt to prevent further harmful erosion of local character. For the time being there is no Article 4(2) direction bringing permitted development under control.

**Picture 33** Gibson and Andrews' tiled shopfront has survived indiscriminate replacement



**2.28** High Street remains bustling, nevertheless, and the shops are clearly an important asset for the local community. The striking green and yellow glazed tile shop front of Gibson and Andrews Ltd (a hardware store that stands on the corner of High Street and Russell street) survives, seemingly unaltered. This frontage which, by virtue of its corner location is a focal point as one progresses along the Station Road approach, provides an important visual reference on the northern entrance to High Street. Of all the shop fronts in the town this older (although not original) example is the most visually memorable and of most worth.



## 2 . The Character Assessment

**Picture 34 High Street bustles with activity during the day**



**2.29** The quality of shop fronts declines from this point onward and, with the occasional exception, none merit further discussion other than to say that most at least respect the width of the building above. Where they do not, the visual dysfunction is heightened.

**Picture 35 Prince of Wales fleur-de-lis on a shop console. The rest of the frontage has been replaced**



**2.30** Number 31 High Street is distinguished by the Prince of Wales' fleur-de-lis details which adorn the consoles of an earlier shop front. These were placed here in the early 20th century following a reputed visit to the shop by the prince whilst staying with friends in Aspley Heath. The shops are arranged on a consistent line, although it is evident that some ground floors have been extended out to achieve this.

**2.31** Gibson and Andrews' shop and neighbouring outlets take up the ground floor of an ornate row that has unusual pointed stone window surrounds, timber bracketed eaves and substantial chimneys. A number of shops were reputedly houses before being converted

to retail. Whether this row was adapted from a domestic terrace is now very difficult to discern from external evidence alone. A postcard illustration in 'The Woburn Sands Heritage Trail' (2007) appears to show a domestic bay window still in situ beyond what is now Gibson and Andrews' premises, whose existing ornamental shop front is missing in this picture. This could indicate that the row was actually built as houses with an integral corner shop. Subsequent economic opportunity dictated that these houses would all be converted into shops.

**2.32** Some businesses occupy the west side of the road, notably a bank and The Swan Public House and the offices in Shelton House, formerly the vicarage for St Michael's church. However, this side of the road is notable for the absence of commercial premises. Instead, on the west side, are The Institute which is used for concerts, dances and parish events and the Ellen Pettit Memorial Hall which houses the Town Council offices and provides further space for public meetings and events. Here, too, stands the war memorial on a small green, which it shares with a large, mature copper beech tree and a number of younger trees. At the top of Chapel Street, too, there is the imposing and appropriately austere brick built Methodist chapel of 1879.

**Picture 36 The Institute building, High Street. From an oblique angle the architectural reference to England's great aisled (and buttressed) barns is evident.**



**2.33** This unevenness in use and appearance came about because of the unusual nature of the town's late Victorian development, the west side of the street being prevented from development by an influential local farming family who owned the land. The end result is a lop-sided street, one side being built up with

## 2. The Character Assessment

frequent plot subdivisions and the other side made up with large single buildings and a more open, green aspect. Although idiosyncratic, the overall effect is quite pleasing, and is an intriguing and memorable feature of the town.

**Picture 37 Russell Street seen from High Street. The trees in the background stand on nearby golf links.**



**2.34** Giving a subtle emphasis to High Street is its slightly elevated position in relation to the streets that lead from it. This gives views out over roof tops to collections of trees that lie beyond the town. This change in height is further accentuated by the rising scarp slope of the Greensand Ridge so that one is vaguely aware of a distant presence looming over the High Street.

**Picture 38 Stands of trees rise above the southern end of High Street**



**2.35** Also distinguishing High Street is the volume of traffic and the bustle of pedestrians. The narrowness of the pavement and the parked cars gives an

impression of proximity between pedestrians and the traffic. At the southern end the intrusion of vehicles is at its highest with strident white lining for the traffic islands on the Hardwick Road and Aspley Hill junctions.

**Picture 39 The roundabouts at the southern end of High Street. The town's war memorial was originally sited on a small square here**



**2.36** There is an accumulation of street furniture here too, emphasising the standardised and urban to the detriment of the parochial and distinctive. Particularly (and unapologetically) at odds with the pitched roofs of the Victorian town is the conspicuously thick, flat canopy of the petrol station finished in a glossy, heavy, black and red corporate livery, heightening its visual emphasis and the attendant conflict with its surroundings.

**Picture 40 The petrol station canopy**



**2.37** High Street and the town end abruptly at the former cross roads overlooked by The Fir Tree Hotel. This sudden termination may seem odd but this

location marks the line of the County boundary and the historic centre of Hogsty End hamlet. The subsequent emphasis for development was not southwards to Woburn but up, onto the Greensand Ridge, and north towards the railway station and beyond toward Wavendon.

**Picture 41 High Street terminates abruptly at its southern (Bedfordshire) end**



**2.38** Although the commercial centre is the most visually and functionally diverse part of the town, there is sufficient cohesion to create a discernible third character area.

**Picture 42 Decorative ornamental consoles on the Co-op frontage**



### Individual Buildings

**2.39** Almost all the buildings in the conservation area contribute to its special architectural or historic character. The only exceptions to this are the discordant shop fronts and petrol station canopy on High Street and the nondescript Burlington Hall complex on the east side of Station Road. Elsewhere there are smaller, isolated examples of 20th century development but none of these blight the conservation area to the same degree. Even the row of shops eases the negative aspects of its appearance by remaining busy and being a key element of the conservation area.

**2.40** Many older buildings make a neutral contribution individually, but it must be borne in mind that even minor development can cause harm to a frontage and in turn the wider appearance of a positive row or street. There are a number of instances of this process of the authentic and individual being replaced by mass-produced modern alternatives. The most frequent and possibly best example of this effect is the replacement of antique doors and sash or casement windows with modern equivalents, often in plastic. Other alterations that can damage outward appearance include coating masonry with render or paint and replacing Welsh slate with concrete tile. This process of decay is in its late stages along The Leys and the row of shops on High Street. Elsewhere this process is underway but not yet to the point of complete disintegration of the basic underlying quality.

## 2. The Character Assessment

**Picture 43** Neatly ornamented doorways add visual interest and character to the conservation area. These arches have not been painted and so the full effect of differing colours of stone still survives.



**2.41** Fortunately, there are numerous buildings both individually and as groups that contribute positively and establish a distinctive and valuable local character. In some instances, a number of buildings contained within a row or group will have suffered loss of features, but the intended overall effect is still easily discernible. Some larger individual buildings have also sustained similar damage, but the strength and quality of the architectural composition is so strong overall that insensitive changes remain subordinate to their architectural context.

**Picture 44** Shelton House



**2.42** Woburn Sands Conservation Area only contains one listed building: Shelton House, built in the early 19th century by the Denison family who were lords of the Manor of Wavendon and who lived there until the house was handed over to be the vicarage following the construction of St Michael's Church in Aspley Heath. Latterly the house has been in commercial use as offices.

**2.43** Other notable buildings and structures in the conservation area include:

The Institute

The Ellen Pettit Memorial Hall

The War Memorial

The Swan Hotel

Woburn Sands Library

The Methodist Chapel

The Victorian Villas, (Station Road and Hardwick Road)

The Ropeworks (rear of 16 High Street)

The Leys (now severely compromised)

Sandymount and grounds

29 Station Road - Haydon House

Gibson and Andrews Hardware and Iron-mongers

Former Down and Needham Maltings

1 Russell Street

The Down and Needham Almshouses, 68 - 78 Station Road

The means by which the contribution of these buildings can be safeguarded most effectively is discussed in Section 4 'Management Proposals'.

### Building Materials Guide

**2.44** An appreciation of materials (in terms of both variety and methods of use) and their role in establishing the character and appearance of Woburn Sands is critical to a successful development project, whether a domestic house extension or a larger scale site redevelopment.

## 2 . The Character Assessment

**2.45** Materials such as brick and slate help to create 'blocks' of colour, while the subtle variations in timber windows add visual detail and can provide important dating evidence.

**2.46** Such an understanding often prevents loss of character through ill advised, poorly specified alterations or just unnecessary and counter-productive work; for example, applying modern cement render to good quality traditional brickwork, or the loss of characterful original windows. Using traditional materials also encourages the retention of craft skills which are important for repair and maintenance in the future and the avoidance of premature replacement. Below are examples of features commonly found in Woburn Sands with a brief description of the traditional materials from which they are built:

- **Walls:** imperial size brick, red / orange in colour, unpainted, for house and boundary walls. Occasionally dark and pale varieties are used to create patterns. A selection of triangular and half-round brick boundary wall copers (used to finish wall tops) are also evident. Flemish and English bond is typical whilst modern, metric, stretcher bond is absent. There is little historic precedent for the use of paint or render on the exterior of Victorian buildings in the town, most having been applied in recent times. Render and paint will normally be discouraged by officers when asked for advice because it masks authentic historic materials. Cement render also tends to create maintenance problems by trapping moisture behind it and because of the need to repaint it regularly. A case may be made for porous lime renders where it can be demonstrated that the property was intended to be coated with this material. There is little precedent for this in Woburn Sands, however.

**Picture 45** A superb deployment of brick, tile, stone (now painted), timber and glass on a house on the Bedfordshire length of Station Road



- **Pointing:** Lime mortar. Until the 19th and early 20th century building mortars were cement free. The use of lime-based sandy or earth mortars created a true sacrificial pointing which allowed moisture in masonry to evaporate from between individual bricks or stones. The mortar decayed slowly as a result of this process and would be repointed at intervals of about 35 to 50 years. Indeed there are examples of Victorian houses that have never been repointed since construction but the masonry is still in very good condition. Pointing an old building requires skill and understanding. Pointing with cement often creates a mortar that is stronger than the surrounding masonry, thereby creating the risk that the body of the wall will become the sacrificial element as moisture is forced into, and then evaporates from, the surface of the actual bricks or stone. There are numerous examples of buildings with blown outer skins of brick or stone caused by dampness, whilst hard mortar protrudes obstinately, indicating the original line of an outer face. For the most part, in Woburn sands, the high quality of brick has prevented this from happening but, nonetheless, repointing soft lime mortars with a cement-based alternative is

## 2. The Character Assessment

usually poor practice. Decay and discolouration arising from poor pointing also undermines the character of the conservation area.

**Picture 46** Lime mortar in patterned brickwork. The bond is Flemish diaper-work, made complex by the interleaving of queen closers at the line of connection between two houses.



Modern bricks are able to withstand harder pointing materials and so the use of lime in new construction is not so critical. However, an understanding of finish is still important. The picture above shows flush or marginally recessed pointing which accentuates the qualities of the brick and the bond. Ribbon pointing (where the mortar stands proud of the brickwork) and dark or otherwise mismatched pointing mortars are unlikely to lead to a satisfactory finish.

- **Roofing (1):** plain clay tiles add a mottled and darker orange hue to the blocks of colour found in the conservation area. Concrete tile replacement varies significantly from clay in terms of colour, texture, finish and size. Clay tile is often used in conjunction with lead. Often crowned by fancy ridge tiles (see Picture 28 'The Library') though frequently missing now.
- **Roofing (2):** Welsh slate has a uniform grey finish rather than the uneven finish of imported lower quality replacements. Welsh slate also tends to be more robust and lends itself to recycling with typically 70% being reused on roof refurbishment work. Often used in conjunction with lead.

**Picture 47** Grey slate roofs and orange brick walls and chimneys create blocks of colour in the conservation area



When selecting material for a new development it is worth taking time to find matches so that inadvertent and potentially jarring mismatches between old and new materials do not occur.

**Picture 48** An imposing house on Station Road. Note the lead topped canted bays either side of the front door which itself is set behind ornate open work in wrought iron. The downpipes are in iron.



- **Decorative detailing (1):** gutters and down pipes: originals in wrought or cast iron, often hand made or bespoke. Iron guttering is more substantial and has greater longevity than plastic replacements. Officers will encourage retention of iron detailing whenever possible.

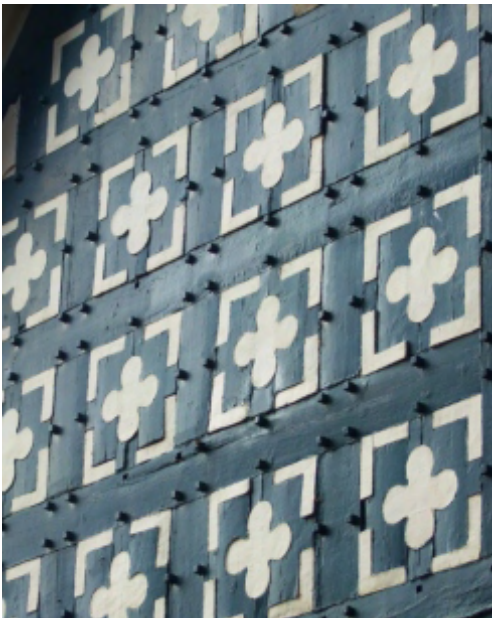
## 2 . The Character Assessment

**Picture 49** Simple combinations of materials and forms lend expression and dignity to this small pair of cottages.



- **Decorative Detailing (2):** applied decoration in timber and roughcast or similar to evoke a rustic finish, often as a mock timber frame effect.

**Picture 50** Timber and render combined as an Arts and Crafts inspired decorative finish on The Institute



- **Decorative Detailing (3):** Door and window surrounds are often given heightened expression through the use of brick dressing, sometimes using rubbed brick for segmental arches. Stone lintols and cills add emphasis and visual substance to the tops and bottoms of many door and window openings. Contrasting stone is used in blocks to create arches above entrances but has frequently been painted out in Woburn Sands.

This use of stone to create patterns (known as permanent polychrome) is typical of many fine Victorian architectural set pieces, Northampton's town hall being a supreme example. Where it survives in local conservation areas the council will discourage painting out. (see picture 43).

- **Doors, windows, some gates, fascias (bargeboards):** timber, frequently painted in white but the option exists to vary colours (this is normally encouraged in conservation areas providing the final finish does not draw the eye away from the overall composition of a building). Failed parts can usually be replaced and, if attention is paid to repair and maintenance, timber items can survive for many years.

**Picture 51** Victorian joinery is important to the historic character of the conservation area



- **Windows:** timber with glass. Being handmade rather than mass produced, timber windows feature slight irregularities and imperfections which add to the individuality of the properties where they survive. The combination of longevity and quality of construction provides dating evidence and insights into the status of buildings in the conservation area. Officers will not normally support their replacement. In particular, uPVC windows and doors rarely, if ever, reproduce the look of timber with regard to profiles of glazing bars and other aspects of finish. The structural elements of uPVC windows are frequently flatter and broader in profile with

## 2. The Character Assessment

protruding rather than flush casements which are further differentiated by mitred corners. UPVC windows (and doors) supplied in a white finish are also susceptible to staining and discolouring and are difficult to repair (thus necessitating wasteful premature replacement of whole units). Installing uPVC exterior details often leads to a shabby, tired look to a property and causes awkward mismatches between neighbouring properties, particularly where these were intended to form a row with shared features.

**Picture 52 A 'three over three' pair of sashes. Note the narrowness of the glazing bars and how the windows are set back in the openings (the depth of reveal). The ornamental trim (unpainted contrasting bricks) gives further expression to the windows.**



**Picture 53 Patterned brickwork and a rubbed brick flat 'arch' above a window on Shelton House**



**2.47** This relatively limited yet harmonious palette of historic materials is central to understanding and maintaining the special character and appearance of the conservation area. It is important that the process of small incremental change arising from modern replacement is prevented or mitigated against whenever possible so that the historic character of the conservation area is not undermined. Appreciating the contribution of authentic materials and the traditional combinations and manner of use when repairs and new development are being specified helps to prevent loss of local character.

**2.48** Further comments on new design can be found at paragraph 4.21 of the Management Plan onwards.



### Further Afield - Buildings and Structures Beyond The Conservation Area Boundary

**2.49** Beyond the conservation area are more buildings which add to the wider character of Woburn Sands , These include:

Milepost 150metres (164 yards) approximately south of Woburn Sands Station - Listed Grade II

Woburn Sands Station - Listed Grade II

The Station Hotel

The Old Presbytery (Wood Street)

**Picture 54** The milepost stands about 150m from the station



Standing in Bedfordshire yet feeling integral to Woburn Sands are:

The Fir Tree Hotel

The Weathercock Public House

Victorian / Edwardian villas on the east side of Station Road

**2.50** Also within Bedfordshire is St Michael's church, Aspley Heath. Although Aspley Heath is a settlement with its own strong identity, the parish church is shared with Woburn Sands.

**2.51** The Grade II listed Sandpit Cottage is also in Aspley Heath but looks over Hardwick Road. Like the other houses on the southern side of the road, the cottage contributes to the character of Woburn Sands.

**2.52** Finally, the houses and school on Weathercock Lane feel part of the town and yet are within Bedfordshire. Whilst most of the dwellings along Weathercock Lane are of little consequence, there are one or two that draw the eye. There is, however, little to be done with regard to lending direct protection to them. The council cannot extend the conservation area to include the buildings that lie in Bedfordshire and there is insufficient quality, and hence need, to warrant designation and control by a neighbouring authority.

**2.53** The contribution that these buildings make to the character of the town (despite being located in Bedfordshire) is acknowledged, however, and the council would not wish to see harmful alterations made to them.

**Picture 55** The Old Presbytery survives well, although the painted roughcast is unlikely to have been part of the original finish



## 2. The Character Assessment

### Trees

**2.54** Crucial to the character of Woburn Sands are the trees that stand within and around the conservation area (see Map 5 'Woburn Sands: Trees and Woodland').

**Picture 56 Autumn trees on Mowbray Green**



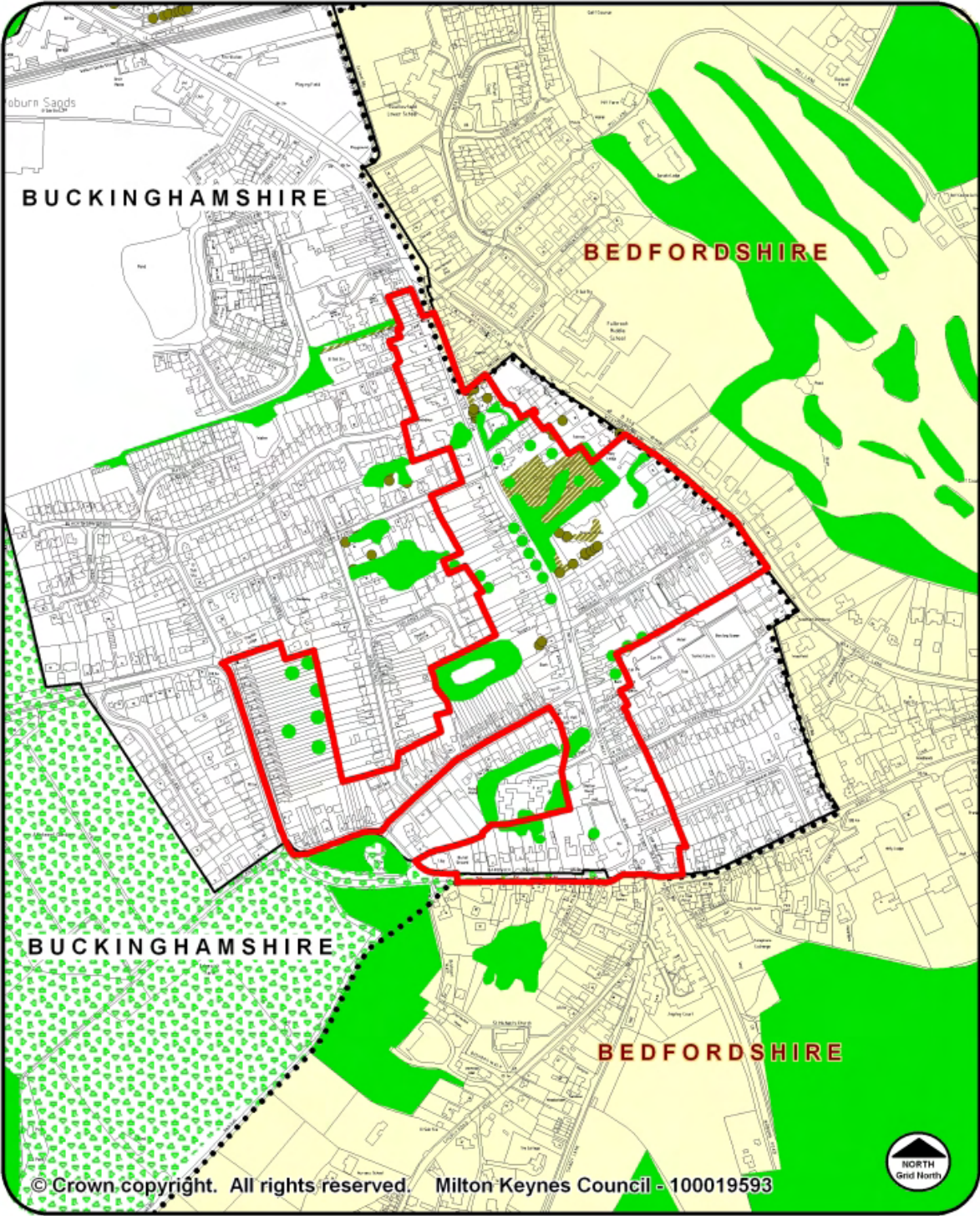
**Picture 57 A winter tree reflected in the windows of Shelton House**









**2.55** High Street, Chapel Street and Russell Street have few mature trees on their roadside frontages, but there are surprising numbers in the town's private gardens. These combine with the woodlands to the south that rise above the town on the Greensand escarpment and the trees of the Aspley Guise and Woburn Sands Golf Club to create the impression of a town set amongst woodland.

**2.56** The contribution of the trees to the setting and appearance of the conservation area is an important, distinguishing characteristic of the town. Further information about the provisions that exist to protect trees in the conservation area can be found in Section 4: Management Proposals.

Map 5 Woburn Sands: Trees and Woodland



Map Key

 Conservation Area Boundary	 Woburn Sands Development Boundary	 TPO's administered by MKC
 Milton Keynes Borough Boundary	 Significant stands of trees and wooded areas	 Open Countryside

## 2. The Character Assessment

### The Setting Of The Conservation Area

**2.57** Clearly the manner in which trees seem to surround and infiltrate the town is essential to its setting. Whilst providing important backdrop, there are no vistas out of the conservation area despite its slightly raised position above surrounding land. Similarly the trees mask the presence of the town for much of the year with views toward the town comprising woods with the town lost somewhere within. This is exacerbated by the lack of a prominent landmark, such as a church spire.

**2.58** The exception to this are the views from the north and west of the town. On the approach over the fields from Wavendon, shallow pitched roofs of a 1970's edge of town development are discernible along with occasional older town centre buildings set on the higher land.

**Picture 58** The view towards Woburn Sands from Wavendon



**2.59** Although seemingly shrouded by 20th century housing (the town's industrial, commercial and resort functions having seemingly supplanted the town's rural links) numerous attractive countryside walks are, in fact, easily available. For example, starting from the Swan Hotel, the walk to Danesborough fort and the walk to the station are about the same in length.

**2.60** Within and around the town sit neighbouring settlements located in Bedfordshire. This aspect of setting is perhaps the most curious with what amounts to integral parts of the town actually being located in a neighbouring county. Aspley Heath and Aspley Guise merge with the town, but have their own distinct character and history. However, in combination they give the impression, particularly to the first time visitor, of a more extensive and diverse settlement than the settlement boundaries seem to suggest.

**2.61** The most important element of setting, however, is the Greensand Ridge that looks out over the town and the rise that leads up to it, via Aspley Heath from the station. The ridge is an imposing yet intriguing and inviting presence.

### Conclusions

**2.62** This section has examined and interpreted the different features and circumstances that combine to create the special architectural and historic character and appearance of the conservation area. In reality the town is not experienced as a series of constituent parts or elements, but as a subtle blend of them all, with a changing emphasis depending on which part of the conservation area one finds oneself in.

**2.63** This subtlety of architectural character and appearance is extremely vulnerable to careless alterations that collectively erode the intended uniformity of a row or mask the appearance of a once elegant individual house. Large scale development too can harm local character by ignoring the subtleties of context and, as a result, looking imposed and at odds with its surroundings.

**2.64** In line with local plan policy and national legislation and guidance, the council will normally seek to discourage unsympathetic larger scale development in the conservation area. However, permitted development rights for single dwelling houses mean that the council cannot intervene on small scale development such as the replacement of windows and doors, roofing materials and so on, even in designated conservation areas.

**2.65** The result of this lack of controls is illustrated by the ad hoc 'remodelling' of The Leys' roadside frontages with the result that the row's original appearance has declined to such an extent that its continued inclusion in the conservation area has become marginal.

**2.66** As a response to this lack of controls the Cabinet approved a recommendation to establish an Article 4(2) direction on 23 March 2010. An Article 4(2) direction is a statutory mechanism that allows the council to step in to prevent ill-judged minor alterations from causing incremental harm to the character of the town's streets and spaces. The additional controls arising from the implementation of the Article 4(2) direction are set out in a separate document which is available on line and from the council offices.

**2.67** As part of its examination of the town for the review, the council appraised places currently beyond the existing conservation area boundary that might warrant inclusion in it. A revised boundary was approved which includes buildings and spaces that lay beyond the original conservation area designation.

## 3. Revisions to the Conservation Area

### 3 Revisions to the Conservation Area

**3.1** Map 6 'The Proposed Revisions to the Conservation Area Boundary' is taken from the review consultation document and shows the three areas, A, B, and C which were added to the conservation area with the approval of the council's Cabinet on 23 March 2010.

**3.2** The consultation discussed the three areas identified on Map 6 and sought local opinion on the extensions. From those who replied there was a strongly positive response and suggestions for further extensions. Officers returned to site to re-assess Theydon Avenue and Wood Street in particular but the fragmented and inconsistent quality of dwellings found there led officers to conclude that only the extensions proposed in the review were warranted.

**3.3** Opinion was sought about the removal of Area D, The Leys, but again strong support for retention in responses to the review led officers to revise their conclusions. The Leys has been retained in the conservation area notwithstanding the wording in the key of map 6.

**3.4** Areas A and B form part of Theydon Avenue and Wood Street respectively. Each contains house types that broadly accord with the character derived from smaller terraces shown in blue on map Map 3 'Woburn Sands: Character Areas Based on Predominant Use'. Area C, Mowbray Green, is a public space but its strong visual association with the houses that overlook it gives it an urban context and character in line with the areas shaded blue on map 3.

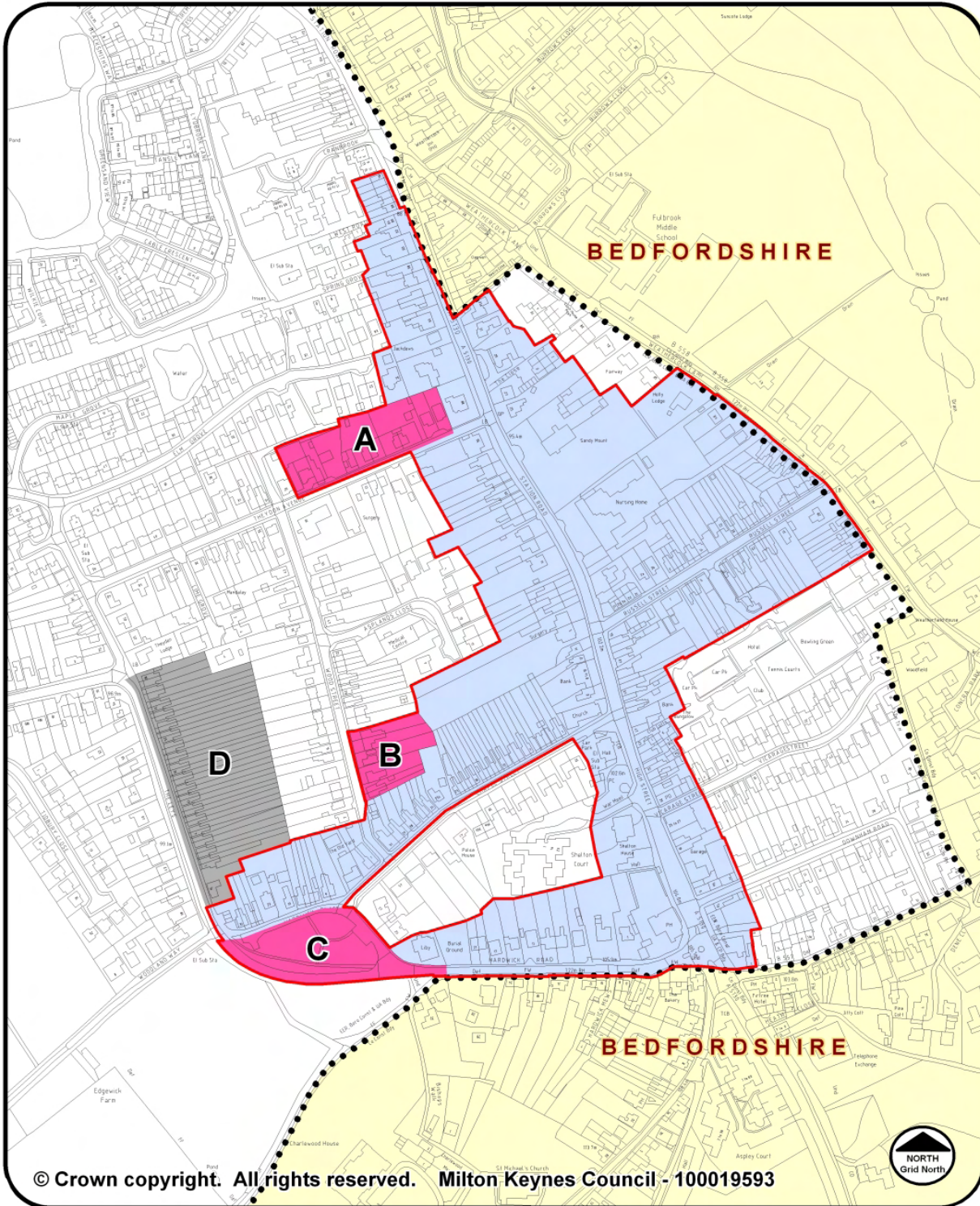
**Picture 59** From certain vantage points the north eastern end of Theydon Avenue appears predominantly Victorian in character








**3.5** The Victorian and late Edwardian houses now included in the conservation area are positive buildings. The modern houses, chiefly those included in the Theydon Avenue extension, tend to contradict their older neighbours in respect of materials, detailing, roof pitch, height and position within the plot.

### 3 . Revisions to the Conservation Area

Map 6 The Proposed Revisions to the Conservation Area Boundary



#### Map Key

	Boundary as proposed in the Consultation Draft, see paragraphs 3.1 - 3.5		Areas to be included in revised boundary		Areas considered for exclusion in the review, see paragraph 3.3
	Milton Keynes Borough Boundary		Bedfordshire		

## 4 . Management Proposals

### 4 Management Proposals

#### **Planning Guidance**

**4.1** The presence of the conservation area is essential for influencing the design of new development and protecting trees in Woburn Sands. The conservation area review acknowledges this and reaffirms and expands upon the special historic interest of the town and the need to protect the historic character and appearance that was identified when first designated in 2003.

**4.2** To help counter the possible harmful effects of ill-judged new development, the provisions of the existing planning framework (see Section 1) will be taken fully into account.

**4.3** Since 2003 two key provisions have been introduced to help improve design standards, particularly in sensitive environments. These are:

Planning Policy Statement 1<sup>(10)</sup>: This document asserts that the design of new development should actively seek to improve the character and quality of an area (paragraph 34 PPS1).

Design and Access Statements: A statement must now be submitted with all applications for planning permission to develop within conservation areas. The statement should inform all those involved in making decisions on the suitability of development about the reasoning behind the proposals and the design approach that has been taken.

**4.4** These new provisions and the wider policy framework set out in Section 1 have been taken into account in producing the Management Proposals for Woburn Sands conservation area.

#### **Demolitions**

**4.5** Demolitions will not normally be permitted in the conservation area.

#### **Alterations**

**4.6** The historic buildings and the mature trees found in the Woburn Sands conservation area are its primary asset. Shelton House is the only building in the conservation area that is statutorily listed as being

nationally important in respect of its special architectural or historic interest. Other buildings that are not of merit in the national context still make an important contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area, however, and should be protected from alterations that harm their character or appearance.

**4.7** Few of the older buildings in the conservation area fail to make a positive contribution to the town's character or appearance.

**4.8** Those more modestly sized and simply built dwellings play an equally important role in establishing the character or appearance of Woburn Sands as the larger or more architecturally accomplished houses. Indeed, all are examples of particular types of domestic accommodation to be found in a mid to late Victorian town and their presence has a cumulative effect in establishing the distinctive grain, character and appearance of the settlement.

**4.9** Proposals to alter buildings in ways that diminish their special character or appearance pose the greatest threat to the integrity of the conservation area. In line with national and local policy there will be a presumption against permitting alterations to buildings that adversely affect their individual character and appearance or that of the wider conservation area.

#### **Article 4(2) Directions**

**4.10** At the cabinet meeting dated 23 March 2010 approval was given to establish an Article 4(2) direction in Woburn Sands conservation area in line with recommendations seeking closer control of development in the conservation area. The recommendation to introduce an Article 4(2) direction received broad support during the consultation.

**4.11** Individuals may normally carry out certain minor works to unlisted dwelling houses without the need for planning permission from the council. This is called 'permitted development' and the rights relating to them are defined in the Town and Country Planning (Permitted Development) Order 1995<sup>(11)</sup>. Under Article 4(2) of the Order a council may make directions to remove such rights if it feels that the development permitted would be harmful to the character of a

10 Available to view at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/ppscclimatechange.pdf>

11 Available to view at: [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1995/Uksi\\_19950418\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1995/Uksi_19950418_en_1.htm)



conservation area. Where an Article 4(2) direction is in force planning permission must be sought for work that is no longer deemed to be permitted.

**4.12** An Article 4(2) direction may include all dwelling houses within the conservation area, but only those elevations that front onto a road (including side elevations of corner properties). New building work at the back of a dwelling is likely to require planning permission under existing provisions. Commercial properties, public buildings and flats do not have the same permitted development rights and so have to apply for planning permission to make alterations considered to be permitted development on a dwelling house.

**4.13** The type of development that might in future require planning permission includes:

- The enlargement, improvement or other alteration of a dwelling house. In other words changes to windows, doors, door surrounds and terracotta mouldings.
- Changes to roof coverings and demolition of, or alterations to, chimneys.
- The addition or alteration of a porch on the front elevation.
- Installation, alteration or replacement of a satellite antenna.
- Erection or demolition of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure within the front garden.
- Painting previously unpainted brick or stonework of a dwelling house or a building or enclosure within the grounds of a principal building.

**4.14** Planning applications for alterations that would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area will normally be recommended for refusal. There would be no planning fees for applications arising from the Article 4(2) direction.

**4.15** The precise details of the Article 4(2) direction for Woburn Sands will be set out in an advice note published separately by the council.

### **Local Lists**

**4.16** The council intends to produce a local list for the Milton Keynes Area. Such a list will consist of locally significant buildings taking into account their age, intactness, rarity, architectural quality, and so on, in a similar way to listed buildings. The level of protection

would not be as far reaching as for listed buildings but the status of the building (as one of local significance) would be a consideration when determining applications for planning permission. There would be a presumption against causing harm to the exterior of a locally listed building or undermining its contribution to the character of the conservation area.

### **Design of New Development**

**4.17** Permission for new development will only be granted where it respects and reinforces the special architectural or historic character of the conservation area. In particular:

- The council will require new buildings to respect the height and mass of traditional or other positive buildings within the locality.
- The council will require the plan form, elevation and materials to complement the historic and architectural character of the conservation area.
- The council will require new development to follow the hierarchy of the historic street pattern.

**4.18** The presence of existing buildings and details that contradict or undermine the historic character or appearance of the conservation area will not be deemed grounds for similar development. Where inappropriate development has been permitted in the past, every effort will be made to avoid repetition as far as the constraints of the existing planning framework permit.

**4.19** The picture below shows a good attempt to develop a plot using a style which emulates that of the Victorian and Edwardian idioms found in the conservation area. The choice of materials, the finish (pointing), choice of windows and the level of detailing is very good. The composition is slightly flawed, however, by the lack of a lintel above the ground floor canted bay window thereby creating a visual frailty in that part of the composition. This is because it appears that the masonry and windows above are supported only by the frame of the timber windows below. This is not actually the case of course, but this arrangement does provide an example of the attention to detail that is needed to emulate Victorian and Edwardian designs successfully.

## 4 . Management Proposals

**Picture 60 Sympathetically designed development on Station Road**



The council will not always insist on designs that replicate Victorian and Edwardian forms and details, despite the overwhelming presence of buildings from this era in the conservation area. Lively and imaginative new designs and re-interpretations of historic forms are welcome. The test will be whether the character of the conservation area is preserved or enhanced by the proposals. It is quite possible for good quality new design to achieve this. Over-assertive, standardised or otherwise poorly specified designs that undermine local distinctiveness risk being rejected, however. Guidance on design in the conservation area is available from the Conservation and Archaeology Team on 01908 252599.

### **Repair and Maintenance**

**4.20** The council will provide guidance on materials, techniques and finishes appropriate for the repair and maintenance of buildings within its designated conservation areas.

### **Change of Use**

**4.21** The council will not normally permit changes of use to a building or land where the new use would adversely affect its character or the wider historic character or appearance of the conservation area.

### **Links and views**

**4.22** Woburn Sands has important links to surrounding countryside which greatly enhance the quality of life in the town. Links by foot and car are shown on Map 4 'Woburn Sands Conservation Area: Location of Principal Buildings and Features.'. Within

the town there are important views along the length of, and out from, High Street. There are also important views along the residential streets in the town.

**4.23** The council will seek to protect or enhance the views and links that contribute to the special character of Woburn Sands.

### **Shop Fronts**

**4.24** Shopfronts and advertisements play a central part in creating local character and distinctiveness, particularly when grouped together to form a row as in Woburn Sands. A high standard of shopfronts and advertisements creates an enjoyable environment for visitors and shoppers which is good for the vitality and commercial success of the town.

**4.25** Recent trends in retailing methods have created pressure for modern shopfronts and advertisements to provide much more aggressive visual competition. This has resulted in poorly proportioned shopfronts, overly large fascias and garish signs. Such installations frequently fail to respect any wider sense of place or the individual building on which they are located.

**Picture 61 Shopfronts on High Street**



**4.26** Familiar examples of this are corporate styles or franchise liveries used without regard to local character or the architectural composition of an individual building. A formulaic approach to shopfront design, whether a local chain of shops or a nationally known brand, can be very harmful to local character and distinctiveness. In turn this can undermine the enjoyment of such areas and ultimately lead to a loss of economic vitality.

**4.27** Woburn Sands is characterised by its Victorian buildings and this has led to its designation as a conservation area. This designation was made despite the growth of unsympathetic shopfronts on High Street. The council is concerned that the lack of quality could result in a loss of interest in Woburn Sands as a shopping destination. For the time being, however, High Street maintains a bustling atmosphere during the day and, of course, the hope is that this continues.

**4.28** In development control terms, planning permission is normally required for significant alteration and replacement of a shopfront or the installation of blind, canopy, shutter or grilles.

**4.29** The display of advertisements and signs is controlled by The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007. The law relating to advertisements is complex. It is therefore advisable to check with Milton Keynes Council Planning Department to see if advertisement consent is required before proceeding. The two considerations for advertisement consent are visual amenity and highway safety.

**4.30** The council will encourage a high standard of design for new shopfronts and advertisements with the intention of ensuring that they relate well to the widths and heights of the buildings and places to which they form part. Whilst there will be no requirement to recreate Victorian shopfronts visually, intrusive shapes and colours and corporate liveries will be discouraged in the interests of preserving local character and appearance.

**Picture 62 Woburn Sands High Street viewed from the south**



## 4. Management Proposals

### **The Street Scene**

**4.31** The council will pay special attention to the street scene and its contribution to the character and appearance of the area and also to the preservation or enhancement of any historic items or features that it contains. The town green, war memorial and the trees make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and the clear preference is for its continued good management and retention.

**4.32** Special attention will be given to ensuring new features are sympathetic to the historic character or appearance of the conservation area including any proposed schemes for surface treatments, traffic signs, white lining etc. Highway schemes and new features within the public realm shall have regard to the council's duty to preserve or enhance the special historic character or appearance of the conservation area.

**Picture 63** Worn paving, service trenches and the predominance of tarmac combine to create a barren environment



**4.33** The council will also place an emphasis on the need to retain and keep in good repair boundary treatments, and avoid the loss of front gardens for hard standing for motor vehicles.

### **Trees**

**4.34** Trees make an important contribution to the character of the conservation area and a number of examples are protected by individual tree preservation orders (see Map 5 'Woburn Sands: Trees and Woodland'). In addition the council has a general duty

to make adequate provision for the preservation and planting of trees when granting planning permission for the development of land. This is done by attaching conditions to the permission to develop or through making tree preservation orders.

**Picture 64** The Copper Beech and war memorial share an important open space on High Street



**4.35** If a tree is subject to a tree preservation order the council's consent must be obtained before the tree can be cut down, lopped or topped. In addition to these controls, and in view of the particular contribution that trees can make to the character and appearance of a conservation area, special provisions exist for trees in conservation areas that are not protected by a tree preservation order. With the exception of small trees and ones that are dead, dying or dangerous, anyone proposing to fell, lop or top a tree in a conservation area must give six weeks notice to the council. This gives the council an opportunity to consider bringing the tree under general protection through a tree preservation order. In conservation areas, the council can require trees that are removed without permission to be replaced, whether they are protected by an order or not<sup>(12)</sup>. Further advice about works to trees can be obtained from the Conservation and Archaeology Team on 01908 252599.

### **Buildings at Risk**

**4.36** No buildings at risk were noted in the course of the review.

### **Archaeology and Historical Research**

**4.37** The potential impact on archaeological remains is integral to any development proposal. In certain cases the council may require evaluative works to be undertaken prior to the granting of planning

permission and with this in mind developers are encouraged to consult with the council's archaeological officers at the earliest opportunity.

### **Guidance Notes**

In line with feedback received during the review the council will, resources permitting, publish guidelines and updates on the constraints affecting the residents living in the conservation areas under its jurisdiction.

## 5 . Bibliography

### 5 Bibliography

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The Aspley Guise Conservation Area Review (March 2008) Mid Beds District Council

The Aspley Heath Conservation Area Review (March 2008) Mid Beds District Council

Milton Keynes Council Historic Environment Record: Various Texts

**Note: If any of the links in the document no longer function please contact the Conservation and Archaeology Team on 01908 252599 or email [conservation@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:conservation@milton-keynes.gov.uk) and an officer will assist you.**

13 Available to view at: [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1990/Ukpga\\_19900009\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1990/Ukpga_19900009_en_1.htm)

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