Milton Keynes City Council

Stony Stratford Conservation Area Review

March 2020

Conservation & Archaeology

This document is to be read in conjunction with the General Information Document

Stony Stratford High Street

Historical Development

The town stands at the point where the Roman Watling Street (first century AD) crosses the River Great Ouse. At this time a small settlement stood on the north bank at Old Stratford, its raised position and better drained land preferable to that found nearer the river. Its tactical position overlooking the river was further enhanced by virtue of lying an equal distance from Magiovinium (Fenny Stratford) and Lactodorum (Towcester).

Stony Stratford was the Saxon name for The Ford on Stone Street. During the Saxon Period, both Calverton and Wolverton were established settlements, and Watling Street was adopted as the boundary between the two. Stony Stratford therefore evolved as a linear settlement to service the needs of travellers on Watling Street. In 1194 a charter was granted to hold a weekly market at Stony Stratford and a bridge is known to have existed by 1200. Despite effectively being a settlement divided by an administrative boundary at this time Stony Stratford displays the typical layout of a cohesive medieval settlement with a characteristic pattern of burgage plot tenure. The exception is the Market Square on the west side of the road, the presence of which curtails the rear plots of a number of properties that overlook the road. This suggests the land was a planned development imposed on the town in the 14th or 15th century, perhaps by the Earl of Oxford who held the westward manor of Calverton. It may be that the impetus for its creation was the inconvenient location of a market held at the north end of the town, despite the attraction of being by the bridge, and the obstacle a market would create to efficient progress at the bridges approach. A number of kings are known to have used the road, indeed the capture of Edward V at age 13 took place in the town in 1483 (ref Woodfield), and so a further benefit would be to push an unseemly market to a position out of general view. The presence of two small flourishing communities each with their own chapels of ease at roadside ends in the Old Parishes inevitably meant there would be a joining under one parochial incumbent. Perhaps surprisingly, however, this did not happen until 1661.

Already prosperous from passing trade it was about this time that the coaching trade burgeoned,

increasing the service requirements of travellers and the prosperity of local service and trades people. Both roads and vehicles improved to the point where Stony Stratford became the first overnight stop on journeys to the north out of London. The first turnpike road in England was made between Stony Stratford and Hockliffe to the south circa 1725.

Fires in the 18th century gave rise to much rebuilding giving the town its characteristic Georgian facades but these stone and brick frontages often mask timber frame structures to the rear.

In 1834 one of the arches of the mediaeval bridge collapsed and the existing bridge was built to replace it. However, it was the opening of the London to Birmingham Railway in 1838 that proved to be the event that brought about the rapid demise of the coaching trade. Twenty years later the expanding railway works at Wolverton created a demand for new houses. During the mid to late 19th century Stony Stratford developed eastward and southward along the Wolverton and London Roads away from the river that was prone to flooding the north and eastern side of the town. In the process the historic linear plan became less pronounced although the High Street still maintains a strong straight line through the town's centre. A tramway was installed to link the town with the works at Wolverton. A tram shed is known to still stand on the east side of Stony Stratford in the Victorian suburb.

With the arrival of personal transport the town once more benefited from a growing passing trade based around the motor car during the mid20th century. Now designated the A5, the route linked London to Holyhead. In 1980 a dual carriageway bypass to the east opened to ease the pressure on the town and as part of the new town expansion Queen Eleanor Street was built to ease congestion for local traffic along the line of 'V4' (Watling Street).

Following inclusion within the boundary of the newly designated new town boundary several investments were made in new buildings, principally Cofferidge Close, a new health centre (which, unfortunately, is regarded as destroying one of the town's finer houses for a rather unimpressive replacement) and the Library. The other major impact of the late 20th Century has been to rub away the defining burgage plot layout forcar parking, the town losing something of its essence in the process.

Overwhelmingly however, the town imparts a Georgian and early Victorian character and it is this that most strongly defines the architectural and historic character of the town.

Stony Stratford was divided by the road and only became a unified town in 1661

Statement of Special Interest

Stony Stratford's character is derived from the ordered rows of Georgian and Victorian buildings that stand each side of Watling Street, the thoroughfare along which the town is gathered. The straightness of the Roman road through the town survives undiminished and, in combination with the flat, low lying land of the area, permits striking views along its length. Enclosing these views is a large and hugely diverse collection of houses, shops, inns and commercial premises.

Many have undergone several adaptations, leaving tantalising clues about their evolution to be unpicked. Documents reveal that the construction phase for the town's buildings lies chiefly between the late 17th century and mid to late 19th century, giving rise to a great variety of building types and subsequent modifications. The majority of buildings are of local brick but significant numbers are rendered thereby obscuring the principal building materials. Despite an outwardly limited variation in principal construction materials the ornamental finishes and details are diverse. In addition, some brick and rendered frontages mask earlier timber framed buildings.

The road remains busy with traffic and, at the junction with Church Street in particular, parking and turning vehicles as well as numerous pedestrians, add to the sense of a bustling market town. Although aspects of traffic management might be thought intrusive in places, oblique views along High Street reduce its impact. Some facades, such as the Cock Hotel's, are so imposing, that the eye is automatically drawn to them rather than to items standing in their foreground.

At intervals along High Street are thoroughfares, carriage arches and narrow passages that lead to quieter streets, market spaces, courtyards, shopping arcades, and gardens. These frequently provide welcome relief and contrast to the relentlessly built up, confined and often busy atmosphere of High Street during the day. From vantage points behind High Street's frontages the more haphazard, pragmatic and sequential nature of plot development can be seen. This remains so despite comparatively recent losses of the historic settlement pattern to areas of car parking. The remaining pattern of historic linear plots reaching back from High Street, some for a distance of 70m or more on the south side, are still sufficient to convey an impression of the town's true historic character.

These linear plots have survived little altered over the course of several hundred years. They are frequently

defined by brick or stone walls of varying height and type. Individually and collectively these spaces and the walls that define them add much to the town's character and interest.

Two later, yet still historic, market squares are superimposed on the street pattern of High Street's southern side. Georgian inns and houses stand around Market Square itself, whilst Horsefair Green is now characterised by an area of mown grass and tall lime trees. Victorian and older houses overlook the pleasing open space of the green.

Also evident from numerous vantage points are the town's church towers. These are important landmarks and points of interest for visitors to the town.

Further out from the town and well beyond the current conservation area boundary are the River Great Ouse on the towns western flank and playing fields to the north. These are accessible by foot thus providing important attractive recreational space and, in respect of the river, limiting the town boundary. From the recreational spaces to the north and west and the meadows to the south there are views back toward the town, of its variety of buildings and of the attractive, cumulative built profiles and silhouettes that they create.

Characterful courtyards lie to the rear of High Street.

Management Plan

Proposals for new development should be particularly mindful of the provisions of national and local policies set out in the General Information Document. The appearance and character of the conservation area as it is set out in this review should be demonstrably understood in proposal for new development. Milton Keynes Council (The Council) will expect application to demonstrate how proposals will sensitively respond to and reinforce local character and distinctiveness

The Council will normally refuse applications for development that are deemed to be inconsistent with national and local plan policies intended to protect designated conservation areas from insensitive change.

The council will encourage the preservation of historic boundaries within the conservation area. Proposals that interrupt existing open views of properties in the conservation area from across fields, sports pitches, parkland or gardens will be resisted.

The council will encourage new development to respect and preserve existing building lines in order to ensure that existing buildings that contribute positively to local character remain prominent in the street scene.

Surviving historic plot boundaries are often defined by brick or stone walls. The bricks bear hallmarks of being handmade locally. They range in colour from dark brown/ black to orange. A variety of coursing bonds are used in tandem with a cream or white lime mortar for bedding and pointing mortars. Stone is of a local Blisworth type with rubble core and a soft lime / earth bedding and pointing mortar. The council will discourage the loss (in part or entirely) of traditionally built walls or walls that define a historic plot boundary. New or replacement walls and wall repairs will be encouraged to respond and reinforce traditional walling methods, including materials, finishes (including coping details), the depth of wall and height of wall.

Chimney stacks and pots make an important contribution to the character of Stony Stratford Conservation Area.

The council will encourage boundary treatments that follow those of adjacent buildings where they reinforce local character. The use of close boarded fencing and metal railings will normally be discouraged.

Extensions should be unobtrusive and clearly defer to the principal building in order to preserve historic plan forms and built scale (height and massing) and will respect the character of the different types of housing within the village. The spaces between houses provide views of planting behind the houses so side extensions and increases in roof volume should be resisted.

The proliferation of visual clutter, including lighting, street markings and signing, will be discouraged. Redundant/ obsolete street furniture will be removed in order to maintain an uncluttered public realm.

The council will encourage proposals or initiatives that would improve sites or buildings that detract from the character of the conservation area.

There is limited evidence of loft conversions within the conservation area. However, an Article 4 Direction should be considered to ensure the front planes of roofs of domestic dwellings remain clear of dormers or roof lights.

Where deemed appropriate to do so, the LPA may withdraw permitted development rights as part of granting new planning permissions for proposals to develop within the conservation area.

Schemes that result in the loss of chimneys to unlisted buildings within the conservation area should be resisted.

Stony Stratford Materials and Details

Stone and Brick

A tall boundary wall in stone with clay tile copings

48 High Street (Shell House) Grade II*. The stone frontage hides a partly timber framed rear range.

Tall boundary walls in brick

Pre-standardised bricks contain a wide range of colours. Darker brick indicates that it was closer to or exposed to the core of the kiln in which it was fired. Note how some course of brick are laid on edge so that the wall needs fewer bricks to gain height. The lime mortar is creamy white and contains grit to help the curing process.

To overcome a lack of uniformity in locally made bricks and create the impression of higher quality brickwork, pointing mortar would be dyed with brick dust and a perfectly regular pattern painstakingly traced over the joints in white sand free lime mortar. This technigue is called tuck pointing and is survives in part on several brick houses in the town.

Doors and Windows

Timber sash windows with counterbalanced vertically sliding movement predominate on High Street and throughout the conservation area, adding to local distinctiveness.

Unusual 24 over 24 sash windows at the Bull Hotel (late C18th Grade II* listed). The individual panes are a similar size to those at The Old George indicating the limited dimensions for glass at this time.

Late 18th Century (6 over 6 pane) sash windows set in rectangular bays at the Old George, High Street (Grade II listed).

Early 19th Century Georgian windows with larger panes at the Cock Hotel.

Mid 19th Century shop with 2 over 2 sashes and a confident richly embellished shop surround but plainer upper part (Grade II listed).

Odell's shop, High St (Grade II listed) with a 6 panel door to living quarters, a transom light with margin glazing above and ornamental cast iron railings lend distinctiveness and character to the shop front.

Dormer window of two 6 pane timber flush fitting casements with 'witch's eye' apotropaic detail (good luck charm) at the apex on a house in Market Square. These details are increasingly rare as window repairs / upgrades often fail to reinstate these features unless required to do so. This dormer window has slender cheeks suggesting no interventions to upgrade insulation as part of any reroofing.

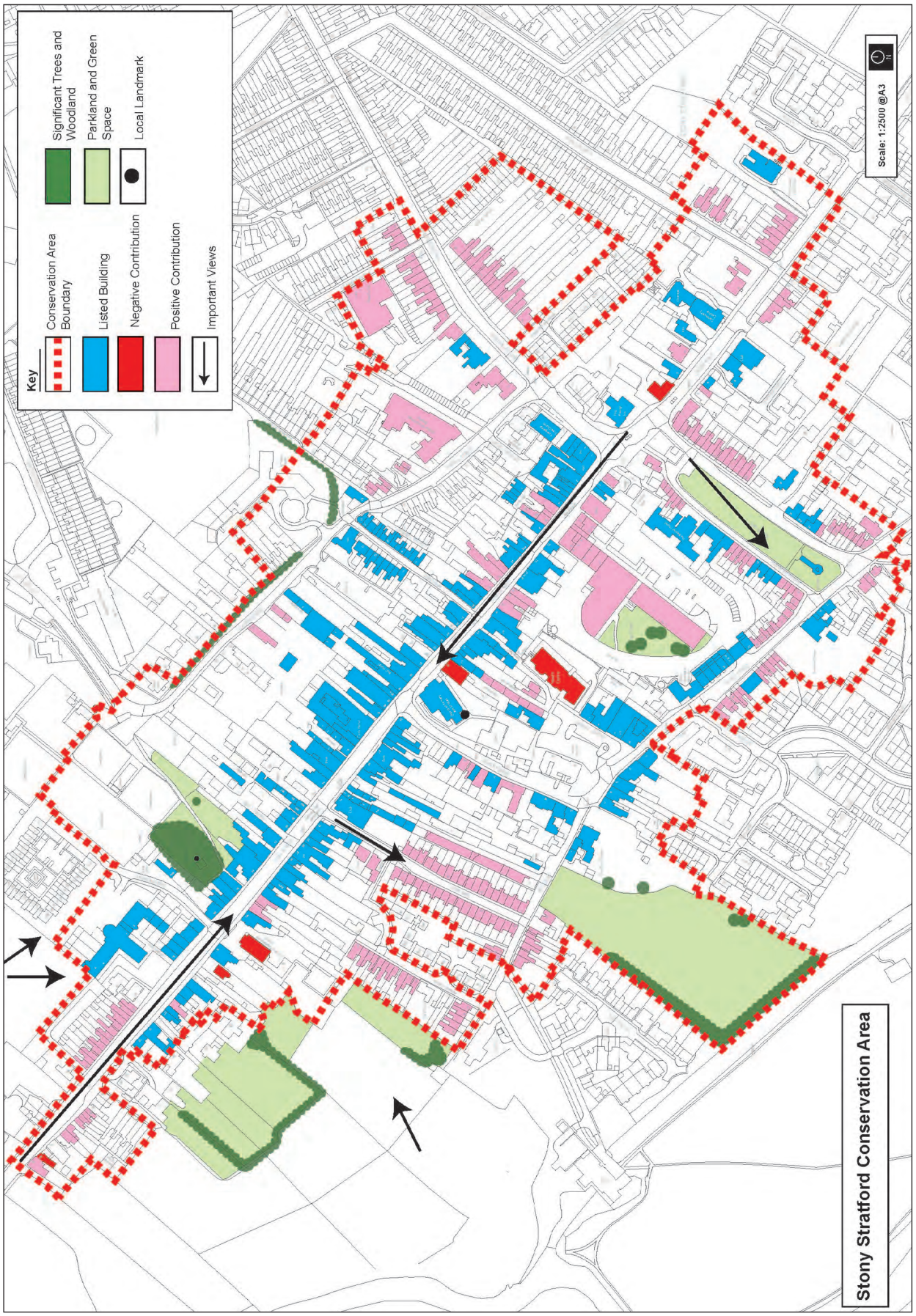
Clay tile and slate

The difference between older handmade tiles and newer machine made tiles is clear when seen side by side. The modern slates lie flatter and have less texture and warmth than the older tiles.

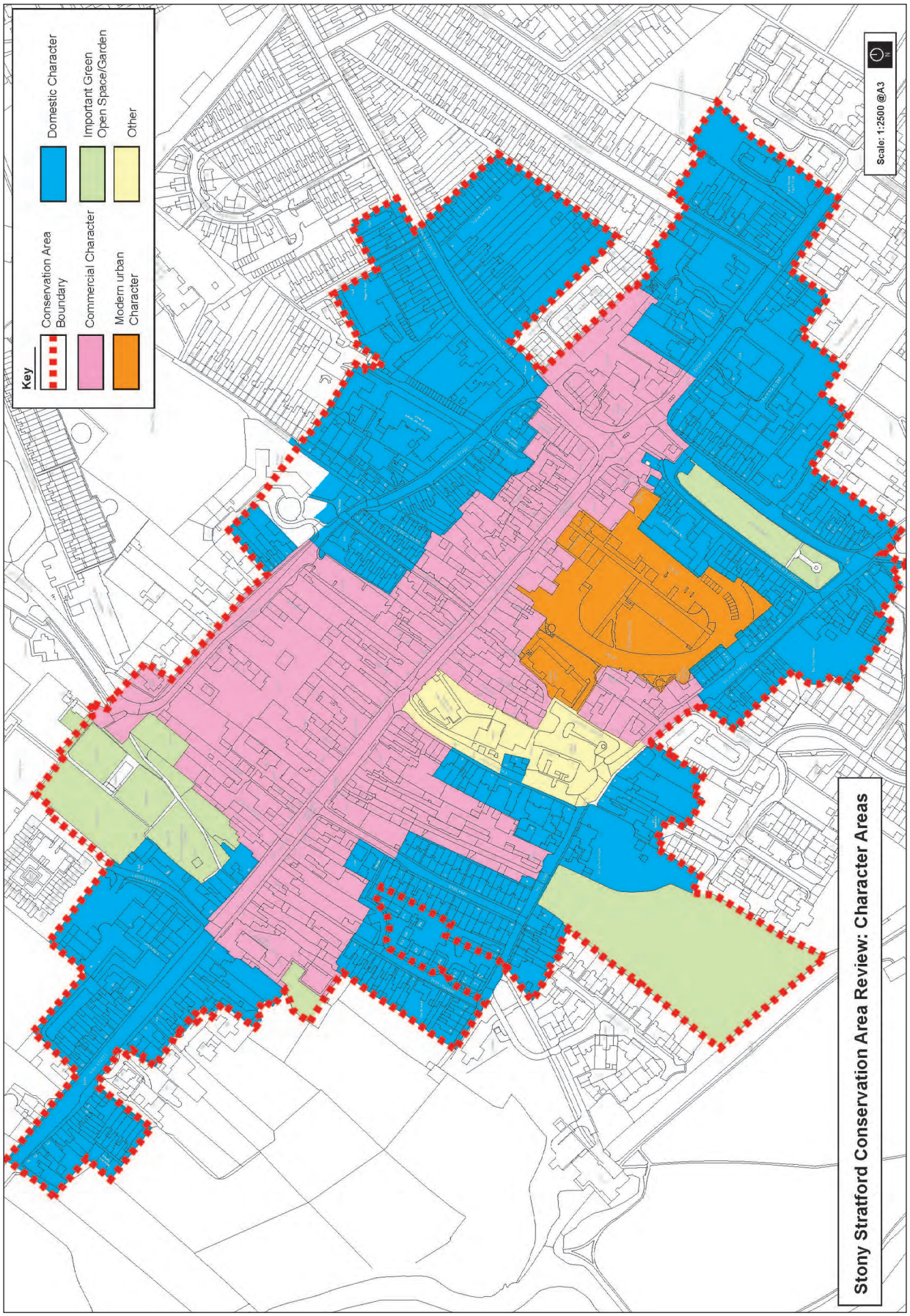
Neatly laid late 19th Century steeply pitched clay tile roof with ornamental ridge tiles and terracotta finial at The Retreat Almshouses off High Street. Note the witch's eye detail at the apex.

A variety of slate roofs cascading down the varying heights of outbuildings to the rear of commercial premises on High Street.

Map 1: Principal Features



Map 2: Character Areas



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