

Woughton on the Green Conservation Area Review

March 2022

Conservation & Archaeology

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

Apple Tree Cottage, Woughton on the Green



Historical Development

Woughton is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086, when two manors are mentioned. One was in the ownership of the Longville family for about 400 years until the mid 18th century, at which point the manors were united under the Troutbeck family. The lands of the parish were enclosed by Act of Parliament in 1768, when various charitable provisions were made for those people affected by the enclosures. At this stage the strip farming around the village ceased. Surviving earthworks suggest that in medieval times the village followed a route from a mill on the River Ouzel, crossed The Green, and extended some way beyond the canal. Much of this is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It appears that the village consisted of a loose scattering of domestic and farm buildings strung out along this route, as suggested on the three modern information panels displayed around the site.

The only building remaining from this period is the parish church of St Mary's which probably survived by virtue of its high social / religious value and from being built in stone with comparatively regular

maintenance. The rest of the medieval village has disappeared and neither the reason for this, nor the date when it happened, is known. However, it is known that the frequent recurrence of the plague in Europe generally, and in Britain from 1349 until the great plague of London in 1665, caused significant loss of life both in towns and in the countryside. Even those settlements that overcome population loss still suffered a downturn in the demand for, and the maintenance of, rural land and property, sometimes leading to dramatic changes in settlement layout or even location.



St Mary's church, west tower



Late C19th 'Tudorbethan' white render and machine tiles at Pear Tree House. Note the Tudor inspired chimney. The line of the canal is marked by the trees beyond



Timber frame under handmade tiles. The casement windows are painted black and sit flush with the exterior

It appears that Woughton, with a much reduced population, regrew on the edges of the original settlement, to the west of the church. The original village buildings and enclosures were probably left to decay and eventually became grassed over in the form of the earth mounds that are still visible. It was presumably at this stage that the village became known as Woughton on the Green, an apt description of its new form. Some archaeological evidence for the earlier village is supported by the excavation of a farmstead that took place near the site of the marina in 1973. However, most of the remainder of the extensive archaeological site has never been investigated. The earliest cottages around the green, and the Old Swan Inn, date from the late 16th and early 17th centuries. These structures have been built using local timberframing methods, handmade bricks, plain clay tiles and thatch. There were a number of farmhouses, at least three of which are still lived in, and one of which (Green Farm) collapsed about 40 years ago. The arrival of the canal in 1800 separated the Rectory from the village, and it was later replaced when a new rectory was built south of the village in the mid19th century. Woughton House was also built in the mid19th century and is now a hotel. Its parkland, containing some of the medieval earthworks, is now in the Ouzel Valley Country Park.

With the coming of the new city of Milton Keynes in the 1970s, farming in Woughton on the Green gradually ceased as farmland was acquired for development or was turned into public open space. What was once a farming village has now become a tranquil suburban residential area located some

1.5miles to the south east of Central Milton Keynes. The restful quietness enjoyed by Woughton on the Green is intentional and formed part of the new town planning for all the villages that lay within the designated boundary. Woughton on the Green now sits centrally within the grid square that bears its name shielded on all sides from traffic noise. On three of those sides the village is protected by generous green spaces and trees, incorporating the Country Park, that still evoke Woughton on the Green's historic rural setting. The disconnected line of Newport Road, formerly the B488, still follows its original line through the conservation area but no longer connects the village to Newport Pagnell and Bletchley as it once did, having been downgraded to local distributor road. The road still provides the route to old Woughton through the grid square for buses, however.



St Mary's Church lych gate with views over The Green beyond

Dominant building styles, materials and details

The Ordnance Survey Six Inch, 18881913 map illustrates the once isolated and rural context of the village. By this time Woughton on the Green existed as a dispersed arrangement of cottages, farmhouses and outbuildings, Inn, church and rectory with the green at their core. The Principal Features map shows several properties which have been listed or have been identified as making a positive contribution to local character. Until comparatively recent times the historic rural circumstances of the village were wholly reflected in the kind of buildings found there. Latterly a number of late C20th developments, mostly dwellings, have been built and some existing buildings have been heavily altered or extended. Whilst this has inevitably had an impact on the character or appearance of Woughton on the Green the sense of a rural settlement set amongst fields has survived to a surprising degree.



Open green spaces and loosely gathered houses characterise Woughton on the Green. The Lodge lies in the foreground, right, with St Mary's tower visible beyond

Whilst there is a limited range of historic building types, materials, construction methods and built forms in Woughton on the Green they still impart a strong and characterful sense of place. As is usual in North Buckinghamshire, St Mary's parish church, as well as being the oldest building, is the only one with walls of limestone. Of the houses there is a small but valuable collection of timberframed buildings, some thatched and some with clay tile, dating from the late 16th and 17th centuries which, despite their lack of number, still forms the largest group of timber framed buildings within the new city of Milton Keynes. The infill panels of the timber frames are usually of brick rather than wooden wattle coated in clay daub. Later houses and boundary walls (typically mid / late C18th onward) are invariably constructed entirely of a coarsely made local red brick in which straw marks, thumb prints and other fascinating imperfections can be found. The infill panels and a large proportion of the brick houses are painted or rendered and finished in white or pale cream. Sometimes this is a traditional limebased finish, but more often a modern finishing material has been used. These rural dwellings are usually free from any kind of architectural embellishment or considered door and window size and location.



A small but characterful collection of brick and timber frame houses lies along the south side of The Green

In contrast to the modest domestic dwellings are the Old Rectory and the Manor House. They are both C18th in origin, larger and both built of brick. At Manor House the headers (the smallest face of the brick) are a burnt blue black, the over burnt brick having been placed close to the centre of the kiln during firing. These bricks were then placed to form a chequer pattern incorporated into the brick bond.



Precise symmetry at the Manor House with central door and timber surround. The fan (or transom) light is set above the door and not in it. The bay windows are a Victorian addition and use larger panes of glass. They are lead topped whereas the main roof is of old plain clay tile. The fashionable frontage hides an older dwelling behind it

There are similar bricks in the Old Rectory, but they are not used to form a regular pattern. The front bay windows and gabled forward projection at the Manor House are Victorian additions. Both houses have tiled roofs but at the Old Rectory they are modern machine made and contrast with the pleasingly uneven tiles made in conjunction with the local bricks.

Newer Housing development has mostly been designed or positioned sensitively in peripheral locations meaning that its presence is not strongly felt in the village. Three schemes of particular note are Bellis Grove, Lucas Place and Pinkard Court, all of which are new town era housing developments. These schemes demonstrate different approaches to accommodating contemporary housing in a historically sensitive location.



Houses on Bellis Grove seen from The Green

Bellis Grove's houses adopt stylised barn forms that echo the scale, volumes and materials found in rural farmsteads in the locality. The design utilises a slightly reduced build height, with the main body of the dwelling at the back of the plot, some then using smaller intermediate structures to the front to provide variety but, just as importantly, mitigate their visual presence when viewed from The Green.



An outbuilding echoing the appearance of those found on local rural farmsteads placed in the foreground of a house in Bellis Grove



Lucas Place has a regular and undemonstrative north facing roadside frontage

Lucas place uses a bolder modern architectural idiom but is of unadorned, muted buff brickwork, typical of the earlier phase of the wider new town. It is of a respectful scale and aligned in such a way that its presence from vantage points on the main route through the village is minimised. The scheme also makes clever use of the fall in land to create views southward over green open space from its three level height whilst only presenting two storeys to Lucas Place.

The houses on Pinkard Court, have a barn like scale and utilise weatherboarding and clay tile, both of which are found on vernacular rural buildings in the area. However, their scale, arrangement, position in plot, layout and sometimes arbitrary detailing imparts a visual incongruity that is at variance with the more harmonious buildings of the conservation area, particularly when viewed from or across The Green.

These three schemes are important examples that demonstrate how the new town, the largest single event in the area's history, felt a need to respond to the presence of existing historic villages and adapt their design approach to suit context. The varied relationship between new and old is an important part of the history, character and appearance of the village as it is now.

However, in terms of contribution to village character, it is the scheme at Bellis Grove that most demonstrates an architectural approach that is explicitly sympathetic to its rural context and therefore warrants inclusion in the revised boundary. The line of the old boundary which already partly

included the Bellis Grove development was modified so that the houses and plots were entirely brought within the conservation area boundary.

In contrast, Lucas Place, whilst an exceptional development of the new-town era, possesses its own, more urban, identity which is distinct from that of the conservation area. Its location beyond Turpyn Court, further limits the degree to which the scheme interacts with the historic village core. Lucas Place was therefore not included in the conservation area but was subject to consideration for inclusion on the New Town Heritage Register (local list).

Pinkard Court's individuality was considered not to integrate or respond to the conservation areas historic context successfully. On this basis the decision was also made not to include it within the conservation area.



North Cottage has a simple plan form with a single storey extension at the rear. Note the side opening casements, old tile roof and half storey in the attic

With the exception of The Old Rectory, Woughton House, Pear Tree House and The Manor, older houses usually have a simple elongated rectangular plan form and are of a modest size appropriate for rural cottages.

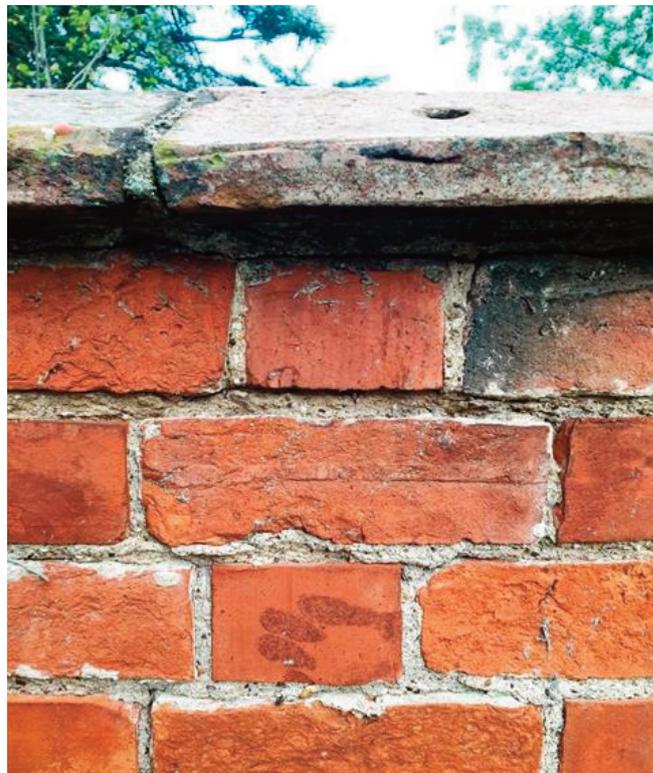
In some cases there are signs of incremental growth, the more recent of which is normally concealed at the back of the house. Most houses are of two storeys. The earlier ones have steeply pitched roofs covered either in thatch, or more often in hand-made clay tiles, possibly replacing earlier thatch. Later houses have roofs of a shallower pitch, sometimes hipped and usually covered in 19th century blue/black Welsh slate. In a few cases modern concrete tiles have replaced the original roof covering to the detriment of the character of the conservation area. Earlier roofs sometimes have half-hipped gables

to improve head height in attic spaces, otherwise roofs usually have plain gables. The ridges of houses are often surmounted by brick chimneys some of which still retain their pots. Chimneys are obsolete on modern domestic houses and thus increasingly absent as a feature. Their presence on older properties in Woughton lends a further element of individual character through their variety of height and general dimension.

Window frames are usually of timber. The earlier examples have timber side-hung casements, usually with glazing bars. Sometimes metal opening casements with leaded lights have survived. Later windows are mostly side-hung casements, although there are examples of vertical sliding sash windows on larger houses. On the whole the windows in the timber framed buildings are painted black to match the framing, while the windows in both the red brick and the painted brick buildings are usually finished in white. Regrettably there are a few examples of plastic replacement windows which, by the visual weight of their construction and their general configuration, conflicts with the contribution to historic local character made by traditional window carpentry.

Doors come in a variety of designs from basic plank doors to ornate Victorian and Edwardian designs. In Woughton on the Green some Victorian or Edwardian era doors survive. They typically comprise vertical stile and horizontal rail frames further divided vertically by a muntin into which wood panels or glazing is placed. Fanlights, where present, are invariably placed above doors and only very rarely incorporated into them. Polished brass knobs, rather than lever handles, were used to open doors. Timber doors, like windows, are painted smooth and a woodgrain finish is absent. Georgian and Victorian doors, particularly on higher status dwellings, often have a door and hood supported by brackets. These can be plain to highly decorated and sometimes accompanied by an ornamental door surround.

Iron too would have been in evidence for incidental features and details around the village but not for major structural elements. The presence of iron boot scrapes, bollards and railings is very rare in Woughton now. Historic cobbles and kerbs are also now largely absent from the village replaced by modern granite sets.



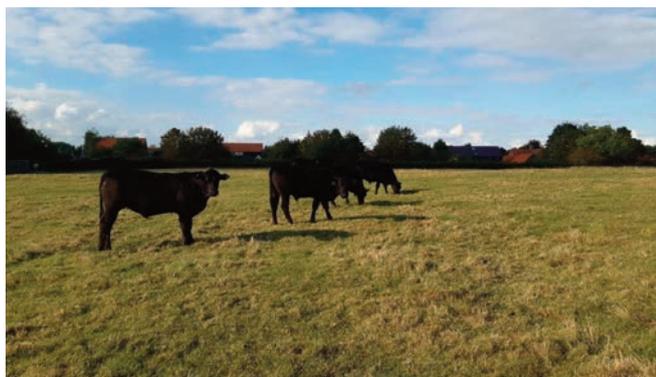
Fingerprints on a handmade brick in the church yard wall

Improvements in transport, DIY, fashions, and short-term cheap fixes over the course of the 20th century have cumulatively caused a great deal of harm to characterful buildings but the variety of designs and quality of materials means that significant numbers of original features still survive nonetheless.

Whilst not every building is of sufficient merit to warrant statutory listing there are still those of local interest which either individually or cumulatively contribute to the character or appearance of the conservation area. Failure to mention a specific building, structure or open space in the review does not necessarily mean that it has no part in reinforcing local identity. Where historic materials survive, they usually impart a strong sense of character and individuality to the buildings and areas in which they are located.

Statement of Special Interest

Woughton is characterised by loosely gathered groups of houses set amongst quiet, green open spaces, trees and hedgerows. The dispersed nature of settlement, sometimes with grazing cattle on the green, with the village church and occasional whitewashed house as distant focal points, preserves a strong sense of rural character that belies the settlement's location amongst the encircling grid roads and housing estates of Milton Keynes.



Cows grazing on Woughton's green. Bellis Grove is in the background

Whether arriving from the north or south on the old Newport Road, Woughton on the Green comes as a pleasant surprise. The approaches are hedge and tree lined with low density housing creeping into view intermittently. Walking from Baskerfield Grove southward toward the church in particular provides forward views into the line of the old lane that the passage of time has had little impact upon. Where the hedging and trees break on the east side, metal estate fencing begins with expansive and attractive views over publicly accessible grazed open pastures which are lent heightened interest from depressions in the ground denoting lost buildings and enclosures.

From the south the greenery of the roadside hedges is reinforced to the west by the presence of diligently kept allotments. The dwellings that stand around the east side of the southern approach to the village are mid to late twentieth century in origin, they are built of brick with shallow pitched tile roofs, some of which are hipped. Although unremarkable in themselves, they are still set behind hedges and have a back drop of trees.

Standing between St Mary's church and the Old Swan Inn, the character of the settlement begins to assert itself. The church, lychgate, the white stone war

memorial and a characterful brick wall that wraps itself sinuously around the church yard form a highly distinctive and memorable composition by themselves.



A timeless view of the church and inn overlooking the line of the Old Newport Road

However, from a slightly raised view southward the area is lent yet more idiosyncratic distinction by the large oak tree, planted in 1887 to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, which stands on a small grassed triangular island at the junction of The Green with Newport Road and, beyond that, the quaintly eye catching, half-timbered Swan Inn. Regrettably, the late C20th buildings of Turpyn court opposite the Swan make few meaningful concessions for their sensitive location. They are placed conspicuously but the architecture is conventional and thus contrasts unfavourably with the characterful older buildings hereabouts.

Heading westward past the Jubilee Oak and The Swan into the lane known as 'The Green' the way is lined by hedges, those on the left partly concealing a series of attractive, timber framed and brick cottages, a farmhouse and other attractive buildings, most of which are finished in white with black paint picking out elements of timber framing when they occur.



Looking south to the old cottages overlooking The Green. It is interesting to compare this view with the northward views of Bellis Grove (above)

To the right and ahead are the first views of the open green into which the lane soon opens at a point marked by two white painted fences to each side of the road. Standing in isolation as impassive gatekeeper to the green is The Lodge, a house of white painted brick and shallow hipped Welsh slate roof probably of nineteenth century origin. This is the only building standing on the green, all others standing on the periphery. From The Lodge northward the green is divided by a metal estate fence that allows grazing to continue on the east side whilst providing access to those properties accessed from the green's west side.

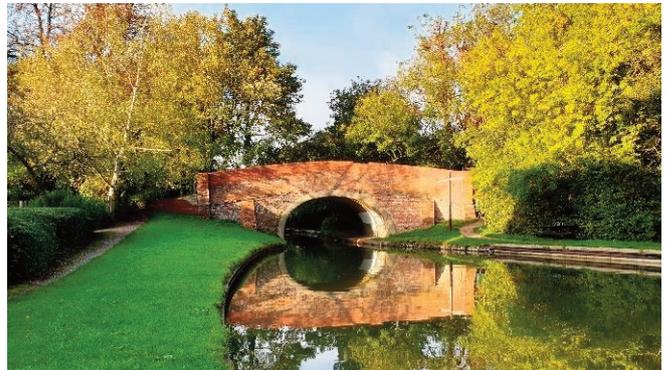


The lane to Peartree Bridge. Looking northwest from The Lodge to North Cottage and Pear Tree House in the far distance. The trees both denote and shroud the line of the canal

From here there are a number of choices of metalled track and footpath to the properties on either side or back eastward to the church which stands as a conspicuous landmark hereabouts.

The green once extended further west but was curtailed when the canal was built, cutting off the original rectory that now stands the other side of the workmanlike but nonetheless picturesque Peartree bridge. The line of the Grand Union Canal was superimposed on the landscape in the late C18th but now integrates with it, adding much to its picturesque charm and providing quiet amenity space.

A peppering of indifferent modern dwellings weakens the quality of the green's south western periphery but this is mitigated by trees and some judicious hedge planting. To the north mishandled barn conversions and extensions have a similar impact on the north side but the listed buildings remain the strong focal points easing the harm and creating a sense of timeless charm.



The eponymous Peartree Bridge (Bridge 88) lends its evocative name to the local area east of the V8 grid road

The Green is a remarkable place, and unique in Milton Keynes. Despite the presence of the new city it preserves a rural quality that is further enhanced by the ongoing presence of grazing livestock. Standing in the middle the sense of an encircling new town almost completely falls away. (Whilst St Mary's church, The Lodge, Manor Farm and North Cottage remain visible they sit easily in the landscape whilst less harmonious, latter-day additions are successfully shielded from sight and hearing by trees and hedgerows.)



The Old Rectory built of brick with an offset wooden front door and door surround, here comprising a lintel supported by two half columns. The wooden windows are multipaned in an 'eight over eight' configuration set back into the opening. The shadow line this creates lends them visual weight and expression. The roof is of modern tile in two pitches, the square plan of the house necessitating a deep valley gutter. Rainwater is collected and dispersed by iron gutters and down pipes

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 proposals for new development. Milton Keynes Council (the Council) will expect applications 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.

New or replacement buildings within these developments should remain subordinate in scale (height and massing) to the street frontage properties to preserve a sense of hierarchy within the plot.

Planning applications will be required for material alterations to the exteriors of buildings in non domestic use in the conservation area. For example changes to windows, doors, roofing material will normally be held to be a material change to buildings in nondomestic use that would require planning permission.

There is no article 4 direction withdrawing permitted development rights in Woughton on the Green Conservation Area preventing the loss of original features on unlisted buildings in domestic use and there are no proposals to alter the existing levels of control. However, where deemed appropriate to do so, the council may withdraw permitted development rights as part of granting planning permissions for proposals to develop within the conservation area.

New development within the conservation area should consider the extent of spacing and rhythm between buildings and placement within the plot. Parking spaces should be provided in a way which minimises impacts to landscaping to the front of houses or the loss of verges beside the road.

Proposals for development should seek to avoid disruption or loss of historic boundaries unless there are clear and convincing reasons for so doing.

Boundaries within the conservation area are generally formed by hedges, brick walls or estate railings. The use of timber fencing will normally be resisted.

In line with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 six week's notice must be given to the Local Planning Authority before undertaking works to trees.

New development will be expected to employ good quality materials that are consistent with the historic materials used in the conservation area.

The Council shall give careful consideration to the positive contribution made by the open spaces in the conservation area when considering proposals for development within or adjacent to them.

The village's public house is an important community facility. Although the conservation area is covered by special advertising controls the Council will be supportive of the need to advertise sympathetically, operate and undertake events that contribute to village life.

The Council shall continue to offer preapplication advice to occupiers of unlisted property in the conservation area in order to avoid unsympathetic, ad hoc choices for replacement or repair of properties and features such as windows or boundary walls.

Accumulations of street furniture or visually intrusive individual items of street furniture will be discouraged. Traffic orders should take account of the sensitive historic environment and use muted colours and minimise applied road surface lines and signing. The Council will seek to encourage utility companies to co ordinate works and reinstate disturbed road and pavement surfaces sympathetically. Road improvements should avoid 'urbanising' the rural character of the conservation area.



The graceful, elliptical, skewed arch of Green Bridge (Bridge 89) replaced an earlier, plainer bridge in the 1920's. The railway perfected design allows improved forward views for navigation and provides a straighter crossing line. Although the line of the canal is a man-made, superimposed feature on the landscape, dividing the Old Rectory from the village, it has become a valuable asset providing a series of accessible and attractive recreational spaces

Woughton on the Green Conservation area - Principal Features





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