

Waltham on the Wolds Conservation Area

Designated: November 1973

Designating Authority: Leicestershire County Council

Area: 21.20 hectares

Introduction

Conservation Areas are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Designation of a conservation area recognises the character of an area worthy of preservation and enhancement and ensures the safeguarding of the best of our local heritage as represented by both buildings and the ambient environment, ie: the spaces between and around buildings when viewed as a whole. Local Planning Authorities have a general duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas, consequently there are more stringent planning controls and obligations in respect of new development, demolitions, alterations, highway works and advertisements.

Conservation Area status is not just about the attractive areas of settlements. In some instances, areas, which either contribute little, or are even detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area, are included within the boundary because of their potential for enhancement. Conservation Area status does not mean that new development may not take place but must reflect the local architectural vernacular in scale, siting, massing, details and materials. Special attention should be paid to not only building form but also fenestration and materials.

A Character Appraisal is seen as the best method of defining the key elements that contribute to that special historic and architectural character of an area. It is important that all interested parties are aware of those elements that must be preserved or enhanced. It is intended that the character appraisals will guide the local planning authority in making planning decisions and, where opportunities arise, preparing enhancement schemes. It will be a material consideration when considering applications for development within the conservation area.

Location and Context

Waltham on the Wolds is an attractive limestone village situated astride the A607 Melton Mowbray to Grantham road approximately 5 miles north east of Melton Mowbray. It occupies an elevated position on the edge of the Wolds 168 metres above sea level making it the second highest village in the County. In keeping with its role as a minor service centre for surrounding villages Waltham has a reasonable range of community facilities.

The Domesday Book reveals that the village belonged to Hugh of Grandmesnil who allowed a man named Walter to hold a major part of the village, therefore the name may have derived from Walts Ham (Walters Town). However earlier records refer to the village as Wautham so another theory is that it may have derived from Weald (woody) Ham (town) Wold (hill or high place).

It was once a small market town with annual agricultural fairs established under a Charter granted by Henry Vth. In the thirteenth century due to increased prosperity created by wool production it became an important centre for the trade.

The Conservation Area Boundary

The conservation area boundary encompasses the oldest parts of the village and is centred on the historic core of the village around the Church of St Mary Magdalene together with a wealth of eighteenth and nineteenth century rural properties clustered around The Green.

Spatial Character and Townscape Quality

Waltham on the Wolds is noted as one of the most attractive villages in the Borough in terms of vernacular building materials and architectural styles. It has many stone built houses but there are also examples of brick buildings. Roofing materials are also varied and include natural slate, red or blue pantiles and thatch. Juxtaposition of roofing styles, heights and materials together with a wide variety of chimneys provides an interesting and visually attractive village roofscape. Stone boundary walls are also a strong feature linking properties along the street scene. Vernacular architectural details are also widespread throughout in particular stone drip moulds above window heads.

Melton Road

Somewhat appropriately the southernmost boundary of the conservation area is marked by Chester House, a fine stone grade II listed former farmhouse which dates from the mid/late eighteenth century. In general terms the west side of the road has predominantly older properties set at lower level whilst the majority of buildings on the east side occupy elevated positions and are of later construction although it is fair to say that the local vernacular has been respected to a degree.

Looking northward the spire of the Church dominates the skyline above the roofs and trees. Indeed roadside trees tend to frame the view and stone boundary walls and associated greenery are important elements in the street scene. The stone gable end of The Old Rectory creates a visual stop in the distance as the road bends towards the green.

The Village School built in Elizabethan style in 1844/45 and displays a handsome well balanced frontage which has changed very little and is a particularly important and dominant listed building. It is built in ashlar limestone in Tudor style H plan but has a replacement roof. The wall and gate piers fronting the school are also listed. On a smaller scale No 29, opposite has its original cast iron patterned windows, a unique feature in the village. Another unique feature is the pump shelter on the roadside fronting No 25. It is a small timber framed open sided structure with a tiled roof that houses one of three water pumps within the village.

Gale House on the east side is a grade II listed building dating from the mid/late eighteenth century in limestone with a slate roof, as is the adjacent Gale Cottage . Unfortunately adjacent is the rather stark frontage to Regent Services which is situated between two listed buildings and fronting views of the Church. Opposite is a new development on the old Church Farm site which has incorporated some of the original buildings, ie; Church Farmhouse and its former outbuildings, which were identified as being of local interest, supplemented by new build properties in local stone.

The Church of St Mary Magdelene, which stands in an elevated Churchyard at the junction with High Street, is a beautiful structure in a commanding position and its tall slender spire is visible for many miles. It looks down on the settlement and over the Vale of Belvoir to the north. Within the listed embanked churchyard wall is an iron gate to a small circular stone chamber that contains a well, fed by a spring, which was provided by The Duke of Rutland as a drinking fountain.

Fronting the Church is a small triangular grass area which may once have been the location of the village market place. It is currently the home of the listed 19th C pump shelter, listed K6 telephone kiosk a somewhat ramshackle bus shelter, several trees and a bench. This entire area marks the focal point of the village and is surrounded on all sides by a collection of listed buildings including both public houses and Moorlands Farmhouse together with a group of Buildings of Local Interest which include the recently refurbished Church Farmhouse and the former Methodist Church which was built in 1843 at a cost of £270.

The Royal Horseshoes Public House, so named because Queen Victoria and Prince Albert called there for refreshment in 1843 en route from Belvoir Castle to Melton Mowbray, is a very fine grade II listed limestone building dating from the mid 17C under a recently re-thatched roof. The Marquis of Granby Public House is located diagonally opposite at the west end of High Street. It is a grade II listed building in ironstone under a Bottesford blue pantile roof. It is noted to be a 19C building but has older origins. Moorlands Farmhouse occupies a prominent roadside position and once comprised a small shop and dwelling. It dates from the late 18C and is a fine limestone building with a half-hipped pantile roof.

Beyond the crossroads the road climbs towards Grantham with Hall Farm forming a visual stop at the top of the incline. There is a small, but well tended, Memorial Garden on the west side. It is a grassed area, enclosed behind a post and rail fence, with mature trees, the village sign, a flagpole and bench all cantered around the Memorial Stone which bears the inscription 'In memory of those of this parish who gave their lives in service of their country'. Adjacent in the former Wesleyan Chapel dated 1843, which is identified as a building of local interest.

Goadby Road

The road slopes gently downhill westward towards open countryside beyond the village. It is typified by neat stone cottages generally built close up to the back edge of the highway adding to the sense of enclosure. The variation in the roofscape defined by different materials, ridge heights and alignments together with varied chimney stacks and pots adds interest to the street scene. Likewise variation in property alignments, some gable end on others front elevation onto the highway and positioning with some set back from the road.

Somewhat unusual are the pair of cottages with timber porches and central mock timber framed gablet one set back behind a low stone boundary wall whilst the other has cast iron railings.

There are some new properties at the western end where the road widens out before continuing into open countryside and onward towards Eastwell, some are however in matching materials and reflect the local vernacular to a degree whilst others are in red brick but are set back and screened by stone boundary walls and greenery.

The Mud wall which forms the boundary to the compound enclosing the village telephone exchange is a rare survival as are the granite kerbstone lining the north side of the road.

High Street

High Street is characterised by the dominant natural stonework with larger buildings and small scale traditional cottages, linked by natural stone walls and outbuildings, with open countryside and paddocks beyond. The layout of properties is

somewhat regimented with the majority of properties built front elevation onto the highway. The Church naturally dominates the street scene overlooking the rooftops which together with its fine lych-gate and adjacent thatched Gateway Cottage, a mid/late seventeenth century grade II listed building, also elevated above street level, form a fine group. Indeed the elevated footpath fronting these properties which is set behind an inclined grass verge lined with granite kerbstones is a somewhat unusual feature that adds interest to the street scene. Furthermore the varied roofscape materials, together with fine array of ornate and simple chimney stacks and pots also present a very strong feature against the skyline.

There is somewhat of a pinch point at the crossroads with Burgins Lane and Mill Lane although the road widens out again as it continues eastwards. Stoneleigh House, a grade II listed building, together with its associated outbuildings, one of which, the barn and granary, is also listed are a particularly fine group generally unspoilt by their conversion to residential use. Indeed many of the former agricultural outbuildings in the street have been successfully restored and/or converted to residential use.

One particularly fine building on the street which is an unspoilt example of the local vernacular is Sawgate House. Built in local stone under a slate roof with tall and ornate chimney stacks the building displays many architectural details including bracketed barge boards, stone drip moulds above the double hung sash windows, a central small arched window with margin panes at high level and an eight panelled front door with narrow margin painted window adjacent. This building encompasses the local style and many of those architectural elements are replicated on other buildings throughout the village.

Beyond this point the character of the street changes to a more open feel with generally smaller properties set back behind stone boundary walls. These are generally older buildings, two of which have been converted to retail use, and are well maintained. Rather unusually in the street, Nos 48 to 54 are brick buildings displaying a diaper pattern that contrast well against the local stone. There is very little modern infill although what there is has been carefully considered to respect the local vernacular in terms of design and materials.

Towards the eastern end where the street turns to join Stonesby Road there is a more open feel with a wide grass verge fronting the properties on the south side complemented by a row of stone vernacular cottages, set back from the highway, opposite. Prior to the bend The Mount and its associated outbuildings and well treed garden area form a visual stop. Rounding the bend are a mixture of properties, some older ones interspersed with newer buildings randomly arranged.

Burgins Lane

Only the southern end of the lane from its junction with High Street is within the conservation area boundary. Northward from the junction there is a cluster of fine stone buildings on the west side whilst opposite is a stone boundary wall enclosing the garden area to Victoria House. Together they provide an intimate feel to this part of the lane. Approaching the bend, in contrast, the vista widens with generally more modern properties set back from the highway behind gardens or forecourts which gives a far more open aspect to the lane. There is a large stone building forming a visual stop and marking the limit of the conservation area boundary.

The Paddocks

This area has a different character to the rest of the conservation area. Properties on this street, which snakes through the northern part of the conservation area, leading off Burgins Lane are modern, although constructed in materials, such as bradstone, that respect the local vernacular to a degree. There is a mixture of single storey and two storey dwellings.

Church Lane

A very narrow 'cul-de-sac' lane with properties built close up on both sides giving a very intimate and tight knit feel. All properties are well maintained and are generally constructed in stone with a variation of roofing materials. Single storey and two storey buildings complement each other, the varied roofscape adding to the character.

Formerly two cottages, Nos. 2 and 3 are listed buildings which are now successfully combined to form one dwelling unit. The structures date from the 17C and 18C and are in coursed ironstone rubble with a mixture of thatch and pantile roofs

Mill Lane

Mill Lane is a relatively narrow 'cul-de-sac' lane leading to The Old Mill and open countryside beyond. The Mill is a grade II listed tower mill dating from 1868, which is now in residential use but continues to dominate the street scene. The majority of the other buildings in the lane are notified as being of local interest and include Nos 3 – 5 and 7 – 9, two blocks of simple stone and Bottesford Blue cottages with hood moulds to the ground floor windows and entrance door together with The Surgery opposite which is also in stone with red brick dressings. Elsewhere in the lane are some newer buildings and open gaps which afford views of the Church spire through the buildings. Stone boundary walls are also a prominent feature in the street scene.

Bescaby Lane

The junction with High Street springs from an acute bend and is relatively wide. There are a handful of scattered properties, some historic and others more modern, on both sides set back behind hedgerows supplemented by semi mature trees. Mansfield House is a fine Edwardian stone villa with red brick detailing that sits at the junction. Beyond the conservation area boundary the lane continues northwards towards open countryside, the former Croxton Park racecourse and the hamlet of Bescaby.

Quality and Character of Building

Waltham on the Wolds benefits from many magnificent listed buildings, the finest of which is the grade I listed thirteenth/fourteenth Century Church of St Mary Magdelene. As with many churches this is a building with a mixture of architectural styles developed over the centuries. It has Norman origins and the tower and clerestory were completed in their present form in the 15 century. It was altered and restored from 1839 and in 1850 GG Scott extended the Nave.

Including the Church, its boundary wall and lych-gate there are nineteen listed structures of various types within the conservation area boundary and these are supplemented by several more buildings that are notified as being of local interest. Several have already been referred to but other examples, which highlight the local vernacular, include:

The Old Rectory on Melton Road dates from the late seventeenth century and occupies a prominent roadside position within the historic core of the village. It is constructed in coursed limestone rubble under a pantile roof and has brick end and ridge stacks. The building was altered in the nineteenth century when the main entrance door and timber porch were added.

Thatched Farm in High Street is another fine building which once stood next to the George and Dragon public house. It dates from the eighteenth century but was altered in the twentieth century. Built of coursed squared limestone it has a thatched roof with a brick end stack. The principal entrance is approached by a flight of four stone steps.

Several buildings in the village have also been notified as being of local interest, these include Stone Cottage and Gorse Cottage together with outbuildings north of Gorse Cottage on as well as those already mentioned.

Natural Elements

Approaching the village on the A607 from the north end the roadside benefits from groupings of mature trees which enhance the entrance. Open spaces and paddocks within the village contrast with the sense of enclosure and serve to enhance the rural character. Particularly important are the churchyard together with the well treed land linking it to the south including the cemetery and allotments. Land south of the Chapel on the A607 is another example.

Fine views over attractive countryside surrounding the village are available west of the A607.

Negative factors

The use of inappropriate materials, such as upvc double glazed window units, plastic rainwater goods and modern brickwork has had a negative effect on the character of the conservation area in some instances.

For further help and advice please contact:

The Regulatory Services Section
Melton Borough Council
Parkside
Station Approach
Burton Street
Melton Mowbray
Leicestershire
LE13 1GH
Telephone: 01664 502502

The Council has also prepared a leaflet entitled 'A Guide to Conservation Areas' which gives general advice. Copies are available from the Regulatory Services Section as detailed above

The above is an appraisal of the Waltham on the Wolds Conservation Area which highlights the most significant factors which make it worthy of Conservation status. The omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to apply that it is of no interest