



# Aspley Guise Conservation Area

Introduction

19 March 2008

Aspley Guise Conservation Area was designated in April 1971. This conservation area appraisal assesses the setting, character and appearance of the conservation area. Areas where enhancement opportunities exist are also identified.

# Summary

The special interest that justifies designation of the Aspley Guise Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors, including:

- Small settlement with Saxon origins, which developed around a spring;
- Village developed as part of the Manor of Aepslea, which was let to Anselm de Gyse in the late 13th century;
- Rural setting surrounded by woodland and open fields;
- An area containing many buildings of architectural and historic interest, a high proportion of which are listed buildings (four grade II\*, 25 grade II) and many others which make a positive contribution to the area's historic character and appearance;
- Settlement arranged along linear routes which meet at a crossroads, The Square;
- Important ensemble of historic buildings grouped around The Square;
- Church of St Botolph (grade II\*); The Old House (grade II\*); Aspley House (grade II\*); and Guise House (grade II\*) are important landmark buildings;
- Building stock predominantly of 18th and early 19th century date, with some refronting of earlier buildings;
- Predominance of high quality red brickwork, laid in a variety of bonds and with vitrified headers and yellow bricks used to create patterns;
- Some substantial timber-framed buildings, such as The Old House (grade II\*), and some timber-framed cottages – and also limited use of locally distinctive ironstone;
- Importance of native hedgerows enclosing the lanes;
- Survival of historic granite kerbs;
- Network of footpaths and bridleways connect the village to the surrounding countryside.



The Square

# Location and setting

## *Location, landscape setting and geology*

The village of Aspley Guise lies on the Bedfordshire / Buckinghamshire border, 13km south-east of central Milton Keynes and 19.5km south-west of the county town of Bedford. South of Aspley Guise is the market town of Woburn, 3.5km away on the historic London road; London is 77km away on the M1. The current principal route through the settlement is Bedford Road / West Hill, connecting the A507 (to Bedford) to the A5130 (to Milton Keynes).

Aspley Guise lies on the edge of the Greensand Ridge escarpment. The land slopes down from the north to the south giving the village views to the north and east over the valley of the Great Ouse. To the south west of the village lies Aspley Heath and Aspley Wood, areas characterised by sandy soils, heathland and pine trees. The conservation area is located within the South Bedfordshire Green Belt.



Bedford Road

Traditional building materials reflect the underlying geology. The sandstone was quarried for building stone and a number of examples of the use of this ironstone are seen within the conservation area, such as at the Church of St Botolph (grade II\*). However, bricks from the local Oxford clays are the predominant building material.

The conservation area comprises the core of the historic village of Aspley Guise, extending to the south and east to encompass more scattered development and some attractive areas of open green space. The rural setting is most apparent on the eastern side of the village, where thoroughfares are undeveloped and clear views are afforded across the fields. The western part of the conservation area is the most 'urban' in character, with more intensive development along West Hill and with built-up areas surrounding the boundary.



View west along Bedford Road

## Historic development

### *History of the conservation area*

The first record of Aspley occurs in a document of 969 in which King Edgar grants Aspley to his *thegn Alfwold*; part of the boundary was *up to the little knoll, thence to the apple tree where three land boundaries meet, of the men of Woburn, and of the men of Wavendon, and of the men of Aspley...*

The entry for Aepslea in the Domesday Book of 1086 records 25 families living there.

By 1286, the Manor of Aepslea was let to Anselm de Gyse, and the long association with that family completed the village name, and it became known as Aspley Guise. The de Guise family exchanged Aspley with Henry VIII for lands in Gloucestershire in 1540, ending the tradition of a resident lord of the manor. The village has contained a high number of resident gentry over the centuries. The village also had close links with the Woburn Estate, the Duke owning the woods and a few cottages and the right of patronage to the Rectory. These associations have made Aspley Guise a respectable residential settlement since at least the 17th century.

Until the early 19th century Aspley was predominantly a farming community, with some industry, such as lace making, but during the first half of the 19th century the village became principally residential and industrial. The settlement had deposits of fuller's earth, which had been being exploited since at least the 16th century. As the population expanded, the village developed along lanes leading east to the Bedford to Woburn road, and west towards the Bedford to Newport road. By the mid 19th century there were four outlying hamlets: Water Hall; the 'Sands' at Hogsty End (now Woburn Sands); some cottages by the Weathercock Inn; and a squatter development on the heath. The Bedford-Bletchley Railway arrived in the village in 1846.

## Character

Buildings in the conservation area are predominantly in residential use. Grouped around The Square are local businesses, together with a hotel accommodated in an imposing former house of circa 1786, The Holt, formerly Moore Place. The Bell Public House, set at the junction of The Square and Bedford Road is now a restaurant and bar, and located close by, is The Anchor Inn, at the southern end of Church Street. This cluster of leisure uses contribute to a lively village centre, which extends through the day and into the evening. The Church of St Botolph (grade II\*), the Courtney Memorial Hall, the Village Hall and Aspley Guise Lower School are all important gathering places for the village community. An engineering and toolmaking works occupy the former National School constructed 1847-50 on Woburn Lane.

The churchyard of St Botolph's is a rare area of public open space within the conservation area. There is a timber pavilion located on an island at the centre of The Square, however the continual busy movement of traffic along Bedford Road and West Hill has a negative impact on this sheltered seating area. A large number of heavy goods vehicles pass through the village. These can feel particularly threatening in the locations where the pavements are narrowest or are non-existent, such as part of the south side of West Hill. Away from this thoroughfare, Aspley Guise has a quiet, rural atmosphere. A number of public footpaths and bridleways traverse the conservation area, providing 'green corridors' through the settlement and a link with the surrounding countryside, into which they extend.



View north from Woburn Lane to The Square

The conservation area has an enclosed character, created by tight-knit built development at the centre of the village and many high hedgerows bordering the lanes. Many of the buildings lining the streets which converge at the crossroads of The Square are ranged at back-of-pavement line. Where buildings are set back

within gardens, high brick boundary walls maintain the 'hard' line of the street. This is particularly the case on the east side of Church Lane, where the impressive, tall garden walls of Aspley House (grade II\*) enclose this large corner site.

This sense of enclosure is maintained moving away from the village core; high hedgerows bound the lanes and in some cases formal tree planting or woodland enfold buildings and plots. These boundary treatments confine views through the area. Long views along the streets are restricted by the meandering course of the historic thoroughfares and instead the streetscene is characterised by short views terminated by single structures, groups of buildings or trees.



Church Street – The Avenue

There are a number of instances where enclosed space opens up and attractive panoramic views of the surrounding countryside are afforded. The contrast between enclosed and open space is an important part of the character of the village and contributes a pleasing sense of variety to the streetscene. For example, on Church Street a long view extends northwards from the brow of the hill by St Botolph's, which is otherwise concealed from within the village. Bedford Road has the most exposed character of the thoroughfares, with clear views across fields and gardens to the north and south.

## Appearance

Buildings in the conservation area principally date from the 17th and 18th centuries. The oldest domestic buildings are The Old House (grade II\*) of circa 1575 and no. 18 West Hill (Easter Cottage) also 16th century. A number of the 17th century buildings were remodelled in the 18th or early 19th centuries and there are clusters of 19th century houses, particularly on West Hill.

Red brick is the prevalent visible historic building material, although many of the 18th century and earlier structures are of timber-framed construction. Some buildings retain a visible timber-frame with brick infill, such as The Old House, but more commonly the road elevation has often been rebuilt in brick. Some of the timber-framed buildings are rendered.

There are many examples of high quality brickwork in the village; Flemish bond is prevalent, with vitrified headers used on some buildings to add decorative interest, while there are also examples of English bond and the costly display of header bond, such as Hollydale on Woburn Lane which displays header bond brickwork, with vitrified bricks used to create a diaper pattern. Fine rubbed and gauged brickwork is visible above many of the window heads of the brick buildings. Yellow brick, often laid with red brick to create a chequerboard pattern is visible on some of the early 19th century buildings, such as no. 2 The Square. An interesting use of flawed bricks is visible on the eastern boundary wall to The Holt; distorted vitrified headers have been arranged in a herringbone pattern. The use of brick creates a harmonious unified appearance to much of the village streetscene.

Roofs are predominantly of plain clay tiles, although these have been all too often lost to replacement concrete tiles. The use of the clay tiles to create patterns, such as a fishscale design, on the roofs is a device employed to add decorative interest. A few examples of thatched roofs survive throughout the village. Local clays were also used for the ornamental chimney pots displayed on some of the village buildings.



Ivy Cottage, West Hill

Locally quarried ironstone is visible at the Church of St Botolph and the former National School on Woburn Lane. St Botolph's, the parish church, has medieval origins, but was extensively reworked in the 19th century. It is constructed of coursed ironstone, with ashlar dressings employed to add crisp detail. The tower is of coursed limestone rubble. The use of stone for the

church helps to reinforce the presence of the structure as an important focal building within the village. The former National School, 1847-50, is also of coursed ironstone with ashlar dressings. The building has unusual ornamental hexagonal diamond and lozenge pattern cast iron casement windows.

Surfaces of the public realm comprise a palette of historic and modern materials. Pavements are often of tarmac, bordered with granite kerbs throughout much of the village, although concrete kerbs are increasingly found at the periphery. Church Street, Woburn Lane and the back lanes have a single pavement or none at all, thereby retaining the character of the rural lanes bound by grass verges and hedges. The scarcity of road markings also contributes to the rural appearance of the village.

Seating areas are provided by the timber pavilion in the centre of The Square and the timber bus shelter on Bedford Road. A traditional-style cylindrical pillar post box, stands at the southern end of Church Street.



The Holt, The Square

## *The Square*

The Square lies at the crossroads junction of Church Street, Bedford Road, Woburn Lane and West Hill.

The Square is roughly triangular in shape with buildings ranged along its three sides: south, north-east and north-west. It is an extensive area of open space, largely defined as public highway. A triangular island has been attractively landscaped for pedestrians, and features a timber pavilion. This was the site of the village stocks, which were replaced by the first gas lamp in the village in 1868. The open space is tightly enclosed by built development, much of which is set at back-of-pavement line. Of varying construction dates and eclectic styles, these buildings form an attractive group within the streetscape. These buildings frame the views along the thoroughfares which radiate out from this village core.

The Holt on the south side of The Square is an important landmark building within the village, with its strategic village centre location and significant visual status, in both scale and architectural language. This former house, now a hotel was formerly called Moore Place, having been built by Francis Moore circa 1786. The three-storey building presides over the surrounding two-storey buildings. The façade is articulated with a sequence of Venetian and Diocletian sash windows, set in a fine display of header bond brickwork; most of the bricks are vitrified and dressings are of red brick. This impressive use of the Classical style raises this building above its less-grand neighbours and this status is furthered by the positioning of the building back from the plot frontage, giving an appropriate garden setting to the structure.

To the east of The Holt, on the opposite side of the entrance to Woburn Lane, lies the former Bell Public House, now a restaurant and bar, with its distinctive use of red and yellow brick to create a chequerboard pattern. The square-headed carriage arch permits views through to the garden beyond. The front of the building is angled to correspond to the kink in the road at this point. The Blue Orchid and no. 2 The Square tightly frame a pinch point where Bedford Road enters The Square, concealing any views eastwards from the village centre. No. 2 The Square also displays early 19th century red and yellow brick in a chequerboard pattern.

The use of brick as the dominant building material creates a harmonious appearance between the buildings of different dates and styles within The Square. The architectural and historic interest of the historic centre of the village is demonstrated by the fact that almost every building is listed.

St Christopher and How Cottage line the north-west side of The Square. This pair of 17th century cottages are distinguished by their low two-storey five-bay façade; the street front is rendered over a timber frame. Unfortunately this landmark building has a 20th century concrete tile roof, which undermines its historic appearance.



View east to The Square

To the north of St Christopher and How Cottage lies the Courtney Memorial Hall, which with its distinctive gable end to the street, establishes a dialogue with the dwellings opposite which are also presented gable end to the street. The Hall was constructed in 1842 as the Evangelical Free Church, and the façade displays a plaque which reads: “COURTNEY MEMORIAL HALL – THIS TABLET IS ERECTED IN MEMORY OF MISS EMMA COURTNEY, WHO FROM 1868 TO 1906 PREACHED THE GOSPEL OF GOD’S GRACE IN THIS HALL”. The building is attractively detailed with a carved bargeboard and terracotta crested ridge tiles and fleur-de-lis finials. The placement of the buildings to follow the line of The Square as it narrows toward Church Street creates a multi-layered composition of structures which contributes visual interest to the streetscape.



The Manor, Church Street



Village Hall, Woburn Lane

## *Church Street*

Church Street runs northwards from The Square; it is widest at the south end, with buildings angled to the splay in the road as it broadens onto The Square.

The road curves and begins to climb gently uphill from The Square to Church Street. The contrast between the hard landscaping of The Square and the character of the rural lane is immediately apparent. A strong established hedgerow and mature tree-line frame the west side of the street and are balanced by the mature trees visible beyond the brick boundary wall of Guise House. While a row of three buildings, including Chain House are set at back-of-pavement line on the east side of the street, a sense of movement and contrast is created by surrounding buildings being set back from the street frontage, such as The Anchor Inn and Guise House; there are views into intimate courtyards through carriage arches and gateways. Guise House (grade II\*) is an early 18th century country house, which housed the Classical Academy from the early 18th century until 1845. This private boarding school generated local employment and helped to enhance Aspley Guise’s reputation as a residential, rather than agricultural, village.

Further north, the impressive, tall mid 18th century garden walls to Aspley House (grade II\*) has a central bay with a round-headed arched gateway flanked by round-headed arched openings; glimpses through the arches reveal far-reaching views across manicured lawns to the west elevation of the country house.

The Church of St Botolph (grade II\*) is an important focal building on Church Street. Its presence within the streetscene is heightened by the slight curve in the road; the church projects forward, set on a spur of ground, into the principal sightline along the street. St Botolph’s is the parish church. While it has medieval origins, it was extensively reworked in two phases during the 19th century. The tower of coursed limestone rubble is a rare example of this material in the area, where the principal building stone is the distinctive local ironstone, as used for the main body of the church. The church and surrounding churchyard are strategically placed on a high plateau, raising the church above the road. The cemetery opposite is also on ground set above the road; the high banks line the road, which together with unbroken dense hedgerows and mature trees contribute to the enclosed rural character of the thoroughfare. Views to the north of the church encompass the extended views across the valley as the land falls dramatically away. Public footpaths and bridleways run from the street, and these tree-lined trackways contribute to the permeability of the settlement, as they link between the principal routes and the outlying countryside.

Church Street divides into two sections immediately to the north of the walled garden of Aspley House: the road itself continues on past the Church of St Botolph’s; the secondary spur, known as The Avenue, runs in a north-eastwards direction, providing access to a significant group of buildings of architectural and historic interest. These buildings are The Old House (grade II\*); Red House; Dove House Cottage; and Avenue House. The Old House was built circa 1575 by Edmund Harding and displays a substantial timber frame, erected on an

ironstone plinth and with red brick infill. Dove House Cottage was the former dovecote to The Old House, of late 18th century date and constructed from red brick. Located between these two important structures lies the Red House, a large 18th century red brick house incorporating a 17th century building. The buildings are all set back a distance from the lane, behind forecourts and mature gardens; clear views through to the west elevations of these buildings are obscured, and the intimate glimpses which are afforded through gateways and breaks in the tree line make an important contribution to the character of the area. The lane is bordered on each side by high holly hedges and lined with an avenue of mature pine trees, which form an overarching canopy, sheltering the route.

### *Bedford Road, Spinney Lane and Woburn Lane*

Bedford Road and Woburn Lane frame the south-eastern quarter of the conservation area, with Spinney Lane bisecting the land in between. The three routes comprise the most rural part of Aspley Guise, with fragmented built development and extensive stretches of open green space.



Aspley House

Bedford Road proceeds eastwards from The Square. The road is initially bordered by built development, set close to, or immediately at back-of-pavement line. The buildings are predominantly 19th century brick buildings arranged as single dwellings and as terraces. No. 1 Bedford Road is particularly decorative, with canted bays and an attractive roofscape featuring dormer windows, imposing chimney stacks and terracotta crested ridge tiles and finials. No. 15 Bedford Road forms the most easterly building of this group, beyond which the road is bordered by the gardens of Aspley House and open fields. These green spaces are contained from the public realm by holly hedges and estate railings. Clear views are available to the east elevation of Aspley House and

across the fields which rise gentle to the south taking in the distinct black and white timber-framing of Glade House on Spinney Lane in the distance.

Aspley House (grade II\*) is a small country house built circa 1690 for William Norcliffe on the site of an earlier structure. It was reworked before 1749 and in 1902 Aspley House was extended by R. Blomfield; these extensions were replaced by smaller ranges in the late 20th century. A mid to late 18th century coach house block extends from the south elevation. The building sits proud on high ground, with attractive gardens sloping up to the east front.



Garden walls to Aspley House

The Aspley Guise War Memorial, to soldiers of the First and Second World Wars, is located on the north side of the Bedford Road, sheltered in a hedge-lined recess set back from the pavement. The monument depicts a bronze sculpture of a crucified Christ mounted on a timber cross; the cross is raised on a stepped base of brick and ashlar. The memorial makes an important contribution to the historic interest of the settlement.

While Bedford Road has open views across the fields which surround the village, the rural atmosphere is disturbed by the continual busy traffic movement passing through the village. The 'buffer' of these open fields is encroached upon at the eastern boundary of the conservation area by the outlying hamlet of Mount Pleasant; within which a group of historic buildings and Aspley Guise Lower School are located. Mount Pleasant has previously had greater connectivity to Aspley Guise; in the 18th century there were cottages in small enclosures all the way along Tiggs End Lane (the original name of Bedford Road) and Mount Pleasant itself ran southwards to connect to the Woburn to Bedford turnpike road. A timber bus shelter, litter bin and village noticeboard on Bedford Road serve Mount Pleasant, and modern bollards denote a traffic island for pedestrians crossing the road. Two listed buildings indicate the historic origins of the hamlet, prior to much of the late

19th and 20th century development: Valentine Cottage, a 17th century timber-framed cottage; and Park Cottage, an 18th century timber-framed cottage.

Spinney Lane is an unmade road which traverses an area of open fields and woodland lying between Mount Pleasant and Woburn Lane. Set on a hillside which rises in a southerly direction up from Bedford Road, Spinney Lane affords clear views northwards encompassing parts of the village, and views south to the outlying countryside. It has a rural character, particularly in the woodland area which surrounds Glade Cottage. The lane becomes increasingly developed toward the western junction with Woburn Lane; two groups of late 20th century houses flank the lane. The Village Hall car park introduces a large hard-landscaped area.



Glade Cottage, Spinney Lane

Woburn Lane meanders up the hill which rises northwards from The Square. High holly hedges shelter the route; the hedges are particularly high bordering the stretch of the lane between The Square and Spinney Lane creating a dark tunnel of foliage. This green corridor tightly frames a view through to The Square beyond, of the pavilion, the Courtney Memorial Hall and St Christopher and How Cottage and the wooded hillside which forms a backdrop behind them. A number of large detached houses are ranged along the lane, but are set back at distance from the lane and hidden from view by the holly hedge and mature trees.

An eclectic group of buildings closely ranged along an eastern stretch of the lane interrupt the near-continuous hedge line. These include a cluster of buildings at the junction with Spinney Lane comprising: Spinney Cottage, an 18th century cottage, rendered over a timber frame and set beneath a thatched roof; a pair of 19th century brick and stone cottages characterised by Jacobethan detailing; and the Aspley Guise Village Hall of 1902. The Village Hall is in a distinctive Arts and Crafts style. Further buildings to the south of these are glimpsed over the hedgerow. Hollydale catches the eye through the prominent chimney stacks, clay tile roof with fish scale patterning and the high-quality brickwork laid in header bond and featuring vitrified headers laid in diaper pattern.

Immediately to the south is located the former National School, 1847-50 by Richard Sheppard, now an engineering works; the building is a distinctive local landmark, both because of the use of coursed ironstone with ashlar dressings, and the particularly elaborate Tudor-inspired architectural style. The building features clay fishscale tile roofs, elaborate chimney pots and cast iron casement windows of hexagonal pattern.

## *West Hill*

West Hill, previously named West Street, runs in a south-western direction out of The Square. It is characterised by buildings of 18th and early-mid 19th century date; the oldest buildings are located most centrally to the core of the village and are predominantly listed structures. Built development increased westwards along this main road through the 19th century. There are groups of 20th century residential infill. While the buildings are of various ages and styles, they are tightly arranged facing the road and form a coherent building line. Small front gardens and boundary hedges soften the streetscape.

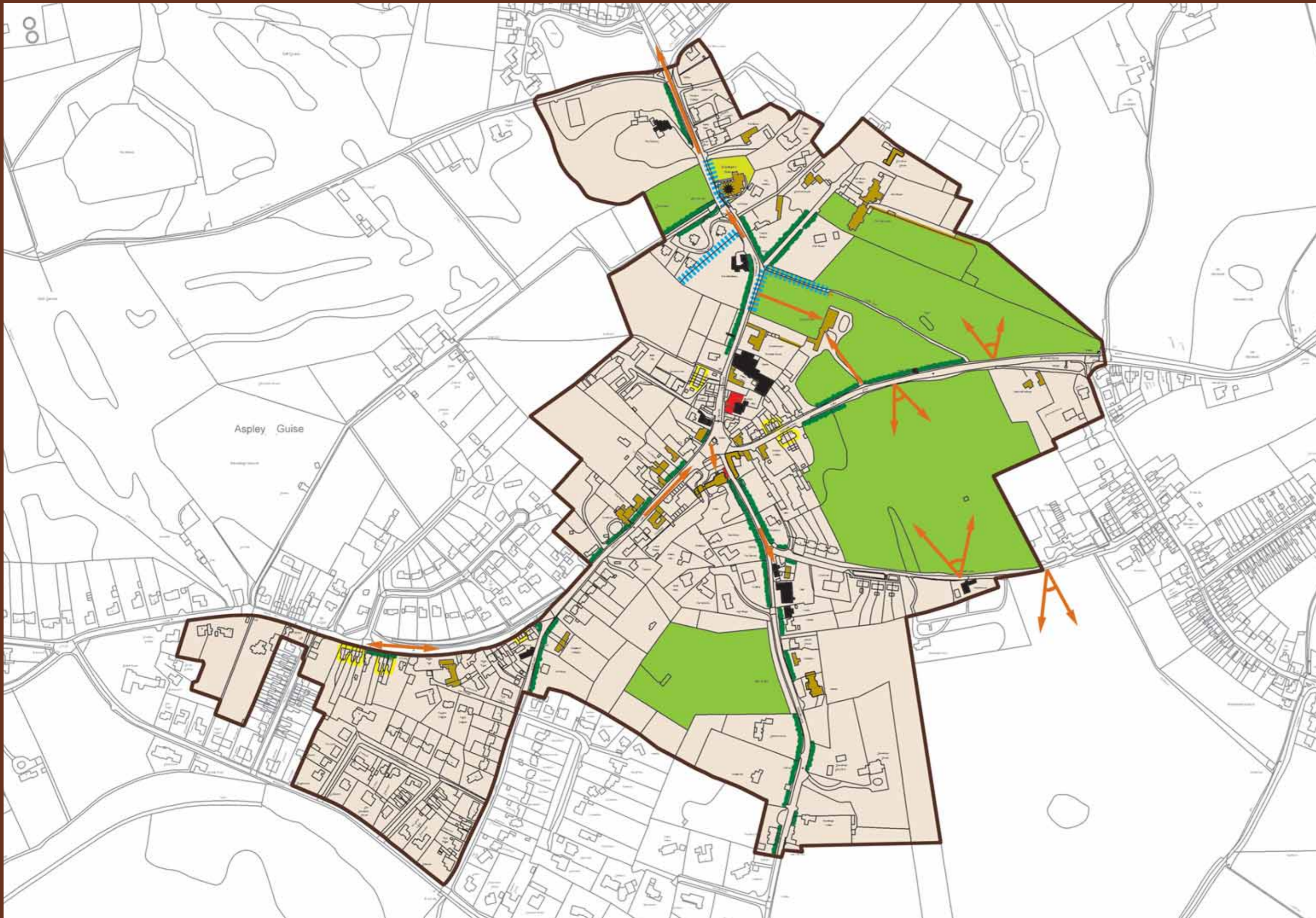
An important group of listed buildings comprise Tilcocks, Ivy Cottage and Lime Cottage. This detached cottage and pair of cottages are of late 18th century date and complementary design, variously displaying high quality brickwork laid in Flemish bond and with vitrified headers employed for decorative effect to create chequerboard and diaper patterns. The use of brickwork for impressive display is also visible at Nether Hall. This three-storey 18th century dwelling is constructed from red brick with vitrified headers set in a chequerboard pattern.

West Hill rises to the south-west and curves into a gentle bend. The historic roadway is bordered by brick boundary walls and garden hedgerows, clearly separating the public and the private realm. Wood Lane diverges from the south side of Wood Lane; this narrow rural lane is bounded by high banks and dense hedgerow. Wood Lane climbs up the hillside, leading to an area of heathland to the south of the conservation area.



Lime Cottage, West Hill





The War Memorial



The Lodge, West Hill



Woburn Lane



Former Powage Press building, Church Street



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# Opportunities for enhancement

Whilst the general condition of conservation area is good, there are a number of buildings or other elements which detract from the area's special character. These opportunities for enhancement are as follows:

- The temporary pavilion in the front garden of the Anchor Inn Public House does not enhance the setting of this historic building and partially obscures views of the front elevation from the public highway. The tarmac car park could be enhanced through an appropriate landscape treatment.
- Two small wooden sheds have been constructed immediately to the north east of Moore Place. These structures are seen within views of the principal elevation of this significant listed building and detract from its setting.
- Bedford Road and West Hill are extremely busy traffic routes through the village. The narrow pavements, and in some places lack of pavement, make this route both dangerous and noisy and detrimental to the otherwise rural character of the village.
- Re-introduction of plain clay tiles and natural slate in place of replacement concrete roof tiles; cast iron rainwater goods in place of plastic; lime mortars in place of cement mortar re-pointing; York stone or clay brick paviors in place of concrete paving.

# General Conservation Area Guidance

To maintain the distinctive character of the Aspley Guise Conservation Area it will be necessary to:

1. Retain listed buildings and buildings of local interest. There will be a presumption against the demolition of unlisted buildings, such proposals will only be considered appropriate where the building does not make a positive contribution to the conservation area.
2. Ensure that all new development is sympathetic to the settings of listed buildings and/or the character and appearance of the conservation area in terms of siting, scale, design, materials and detail.
3. Ensure that there is a consistent application of sympathetic, sensitive and detailed development control over shop fronts, alterations to buildings and walls, highway works, kerbs, surfaces, paving and lighting schemes.
4. Where necessary, seek to retain important boundary treatments (such as ironstone walls or good hedges) as identified on the Aspley Guise Conservation Area Plan.
5. Where necessary, retain and preserve trees, important hedgerows and important green spaces within the conservation area. Where new development is permitted, proper consideration is given to tree planting and appropriate landscape treatment.
6. Where necessary, seek to repair important stone and brick boundary walls, and to retain and reuse brick outbuildings fronting onto the street.

## PLANNING GUIDANCE – APPROVED FOR DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PURPOSES

■ This information can be provided in an alternative language or format on request	08452 304040
■ যদি অনুরোধ করেন তাহলে অন্য কোনও আকারে বা ভাষায় এই তথ্য আপনি পেতে পারেন।	08452 304040 (Bengali)
■ 你可以要求以另一種格式或語言提供這些訊息	08452 304040 (Chinese)
■ ਸਿੱਖ ਨਾਨਕਾਵਾਰੀ ਬੈਠਤੀ ਕੀਤੇ ਨਾਨਕ 'ਤੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਸ਼ਕਲ ਨਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿਚ ਮਿਲ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ।	08452 304040 (Punjabi)
■ یہ معلومات آپ کے درخواست کرنے پر متبادل ڈیزائن یا زبان میں مہیا کی جاسکتی ہیں۔	08452 304040 (Urdu)
■ Questa informazione puo' essere fornita su richiesta in un altro formato o un'altra lingua telefonando al numero	08452 304040 (Italian)
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## Planning Division

[www.midbeds.gov.uk/services/planning](http://www.midbeds.gov.uk/services/planning)  
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