



Aspley Heath Conservation Area

Introduction

19 March 2008

Aspley Heath Conservation Area was designated on 15 March 1994. 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 Heath Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors, including:

- Originally an area of unsettled heathland, Aspley Heath was reserved as common sheep pasture following the enclosure of Aspley Guise in 1761;
- Squatter settlements developed on the Heath from the late 18th century;
- Aspley Heath became a civil parish in 1883;
- Formal development of the Heath linked to the erection of the Parish Church under the patronage of the Duke of Bedford and the perceived benefits of the climate of the Heath as a health resort;
- Area characterised by cottages and villas of late 19th century date, together with 20th century houses;
- A number of large buildings converted to or erected as sanatoriums and convalescent homes;
- Buildings are typically large detached dwellings set in extensive grounds;
- Rural setting surrounded by heath and woodland;
- Lanes bounded by high holly hedges;
- An area containing a number of buildings of architectural and historic interest, two of which are listed buildings: the Church of St Michael (grade II*); and no. 30 Hardwick Road (Sandpit Cottage) (grade II);
- Imposing landmark buildings: Church of St Michael; Fernwood School; Daneswood; Charlewood House;
- Predominant building materials are red and yellow brick, with slate and some tile roofs.

Location and setting

Location, landscape setting and geology

The linear settlement of Aspley Heath lies immediately to the south of the village of Woburn Sands. Church Road, the spine of the settlement runs in a south-westerly direction from a principal road junction in Woburn Sands. Aspley Guise lies 2.3km to the east. Aspley Heath is located 3km from Woburn, 12km from Milton Keynes and 24km from the county town of Bedford.

Aspley Heath lies surrounded by an extensive area of woodland and heathland. Old Wavendon Heath lies to the east of the settlement and Brown's Wood lies to the west of the settlement. Aspley Heath is developed along a ridge of high ground, but there are, however, few long views across the countryside due to the dense tree cover.

Aspley Heath sits on the Greensand Ridge escarpment. The sandstone was quarried for building stone and the use of this ironstone can be seen within the conservation area. However, bricks from the local clays are the predominant building material. Aspley Heath is a rare location of Fuller's Earth, a clay of which there are limited deposits in the cretaceous lower greensands of Bedfordshire. Fuller's Earth was initially used to clean woollen cloth of grease after it had been woven.



The Church of St Michael (Grade II* listed building)

Historic development

History of the conservation area

Aspley Heath is a civil parish which was created in 1883 from part of the parish of Aspley Guise. The ecclesiastical parish, of which the Church of St Michael is the Parish Church, was created in 1867, and is called Woburn Sands; the parish crosses the county boundary to join Aspley Heath, in Bedfordshire, with Woburn Sands, in Buckinghamshire.

The earliest known reference to Aspley is a document of 969 in which King Edgar grants Aspley to his *thegn Alfworld*; 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...* Aepslea has Saxon origins, meaning "place of the aspen trees".

Until the 19th century the Heath was prevalently unsettled woodland. At the enclosure of Aspley Heath in 1761 the Heath was reserved as a common sheep pasture, but the Heath soon began to be inhabited by squatters who erected houses, such as those around George's Square and at the junction of Church Road and Hardwick Road. Gradually land began to be claimed and more formal settlement began.

Since the 18th century the Heath had been seen as a healthy countryside location, partly because it had a smaller fluctuation between winter cold and summer heat than almost anywhere else in the country, but also because of its elevated position and the numerous pine woods. In 1856 Dr James Williams published "The Topography and Climate of Aspley Guise, in Reference to their Influence upon Health and Disease", in which he extolled the virtues of the local climate. He mentions Aspley Heath, but regrets that it "...has fallen into the hands of a distinct colony of independent settlers, who have erected tenements of some little value upon it, and reclaimed portions of the land from barrenness. It is to be regretted, from its great natural beauty, and proximity to the road and a first class railway station, that it has not fallen into other hands, and become the site of a better class of houses; such will, I have no doubt, be the case at no very distant period." A number of medical facilities were erected on Aspley Heath as a result of the perceived health benefits of the area: Daneswood, Edgbury, Homewood and The Mount.

With the arrival of the Bedford to Bletchley railway in 1846 in Woburn Sands, the population expanded as goods, services and visitors could be more conveniently transported. The local industry of mining Fuller's Earth was expanded by these improved communications.

Character

Aspley Heath is a spacious residential settlement, characterised by large detached houses, set in extensive grounds. The houses are predominantly set back from the road behind large front gardens. At the northern end of the conservation area, where the development of the plots is contiguous with those of the village of Woburn Sands, buildings are arranged in a tightly-knit pattern and set close to the front of the plot. There are some discrete terraces which provide a reminder of the early formal settlement of the Heath in the 19th century. There is one public house in the conservation area, the Royal Oak on Church Road. The Church of St Michael is an important landmark building and centre for the village. At the southern end of Church Road is Fernwood School, occupying the former Homewood convalescent home, which, together with the Appletrees Nursery, attracts non-residents to the village.

Church Road forms the backbone of the settlement. The road climbs gently up from Woburn Sands to the plateau of the Heath; the road follows a slight ridge, with the land gradually falling away on either side. The subtle variations in topography contribute to the character of the area, allowing views through and over the settlement, and out to the surrounding countryside. The conservation area has an enclosed character, with plots predominantly surrounded by high boundary hedges and with groups of mature trees and surrounding woodland. Church Road has a near-continuous boundary of holly hedges. Roadways and lanes meander through the village, with the exception of the southern stretch of Church Road which conforms to a rigid linearity. The dense vegetation and the twists and turns in the thoroughfares obscure long views through the conservation area. Instead, short vistas are attractively framed by hedgerows of holly and an overarching tree canopy. The strong hedged boundary of Church Road fragments on the northern stretch of the road and buildings and the boundary wall of the churchyard frame the streetscene. There are good views through to the Church.



A typical interesting and well-detailed late Victorian house

Aspley Heath has a rural settlement atmosphere. The roadways are quiet as there is no route for through traffic, and there is minimal on-street vehicle parking. Church Road is surfaced with tarmac and has a pavement on either side, whereas some of the side lanes are unmetalled and terminate at a dead end. Footpaths wind through and around the conservation area, increasing the permeability of the settlement and the links between the developed areas and the surrounding countryside. The churchyard surrounding the Church of St Michael is an important public open green space. Old Wavendon Heath, which lies to the east of the conservation area, is traversed by numerous footpaths which provide opportunities for leisure. Sandy Lane is a sheltered track which marks the boundary between the village to the west and the heathland to the east. A feature of Sandy Lane is the Aspley Heath Sandpit, located immediately to the east of the conservation area boundary; the sandpit is a recreation ground for use by the local children, and administered as a charity by Aspley Heath Parish Council.

Appearance

Buildings in the conservation area date from the 19th and 20th centuries. There was an extensive period of building in the area in the second half of the 19th century, including the Church of St Michael of 1868. A large amount of residential infill was undertaken in the later 20th century.



A plain symmetrical late 19th century house

There is little stylistic cohesion between the buildings in the conservation area, with plots being developed by individual owners, rather than as part of a comprehensive scheme. The few terraces and small groups of buildings erected to a standard design are rare. An eclectic palette of materials contribute to the diversity of the built development, with examples of ironstone, brickwork, timber-framing, stucco render and plate glass, all adding texture and visual interest.

Red brick is the prevalent historic building material. The impact of this construction material on the existing streetscape has been diluted through the application of paint and render over brickwork; this is particularly noticeable within the northern part of the settlement where there is the greatest density of historic structures. There are some examples of the use of yellow brick, such as for the terrace nos. 40-52 Church Road. The bricks on this terrace are laid in Flemish bond. A number of very large

houses and convalescent homes were erected in Aspley Heath during the last decades of the 19th century and these are all characterised by the use of red brick. An important example of such a building is Fernwood School, originally Homewood. The brick is laid in Flemish Bond, and with headers used to form rowlock arches above the windows. Ashlar lintels on the canted bays and dormer windows introduce crisply highlighted detail which contrasts attractively with the brick elevations. Slate is the prevalent roofing material throughout the conservation area.

At the Church of St Michael (grade II*) coursed limestone with ashlar dressings indicate the status of the building over the surrounding environment; this presence is enhanced by the raised position of the church above the road and the imposing boundary wall. No. 22 Church Road (Stone Cottage) is a rare example of the use of the local ironstone.



A range of traditional building designs

There is a single example of a timber-framed building, set beneath a thatched roof. This is no. 30 Hardwick Road (Sandpit Cottage) (grade II). Otherwise, there are numerous examples of late 19th century houses in the Vernacular Revival style with applied timber-framing as a decorative motif.

The public realm is comprised of a palette of historic and modern materials. Pavements run up both sides of Church Road and are of tarmac, bound by heavy granite kerbs. There are no pavements on the side lanes, and the soft lines created by the bordering hedgerows enhance the rural appearance of the area. There are a number of wall-mounted and post-mounted ER lamp letter boxes. Street lamps are an understated modern interpretation of a historic-style lamp.

Church Road

Church Road is the backbone of the Aspley Heath settlement. Much of the development occurred during the last quarter of the 19th century, as the reputation grew of Aspley Heath as a health resort. The lane changes in character along its length, being most 'urban' at the northern end, closest to the Woburn Sands, and most rural at the southern end, where the lane extends into the densely wooded Heath.

The Church of St Michael is a significant landmark structure. It is one of only two listed buildings within the conservation area, recognised for their architectural and historic interest. The church

is elevated above the road on a plateau bounded by high stone retaining walls. This placement raises the visual status of the church and affords clear views through the churchyard to the impressive building. This Parish Church was erected in 1868 under the patronage of the Duke of Bedford. The architect was Henry Clutton. The church was reworked by Sir Arthur Blomfield in 1889. It is designed with reference to the Gothic and Tudor styles. The low stone spire of the church is visible in views looking northwards along Church Road. When the church was built, the road up to it was metalled. The new road led to a number of larger, grander houses being constructed.

Church Road has an enclosed character as a 'green corridor'; the road is lined by mature holly hedges. These hedges confine and direct views through the conservation area, restricting them to short stretches north and south along the road. Few buildings are visible in these views, particularly along the central and southern parts of the route, because the buildings are recessed back from the street behind large front gardens. The northern part of Church Road is the more developed, with tightly grouped arrangements of buildings set at back-of-pavement line or immediately behind a small front garden.



A variety in house types and styles

Buildings on Church Road are predominantly of individual design. Where there are terraces of small groups of buildings to a standard design, these stand out as distinct set-pieces within the streetscape. An example of this is provided by no. 63, no. 65 and no. 67 Church Road. These three adjacent houses are presented in a Vernacular Revival style of the late 19th century, and are of parallel, but not identical, design. Key features include the projecting gables with applied timber framing and finials, canted bays with applied timber framing, porches, and prominent brick chimney stacks. Each house retains its original decorative timber gateposts.

Situated at the top of Church Road are two of the structures erected as buildings associated with the perceived health benefits of the Heath: the early 20th century Fernwood School, originally Homewood; and the late 19th century Daneswood. Daneswood was built as a private house circa 1880. In 1903 it was purchased by the Bischoffscheims as a sanatorium for Jews, in which use it remained until 1956 when it was reopened as a convalescent home. The house has since been converted into flats. The large red brick building is an important landmark on the lane which links between Church Road and Heath Lane.



Sandpit Cottage – one of two listed buildings within the conservation area

Silverbirches Lane and Heath Lane

The area encompassing Silverbirches Lane and Heath Lane lies to the west of Church Road. These lanes were in existence by 1880, as part of a network of tracks which traversed the Heath, but little development had occurred along them. By the end of the 19th century many more large villas had been laid out.

Looking west along Silverbirches Lane from Church Road, there is a clear view to no. 12 Silverbirches Lane (Holly Lodge). One of the first houses to be built on the lane, the building is framed in views along the lane by hedgerows and trees. Holly Lodge is a well-detailed building, with a central projecting entrance bay. The red brickwork of the entrance bay is detailed with a floral-pattern band of tiles and a foliate pattern ashlar door surround. The lane changes course at Holly Lodge and meanders further into the surrounding woodland to the west. Within this woodland are set a group of large villas, of which Silverbirch is the oldest, dating from 1898, by the architects Brewill & Bailey. Only glimpses of these houses are obtainable along densely planted driveways and the woodland of the Heath.

Heath Lane was not laid out with the same formal linearity as the northern section of Church Road, and it continues to have an appearance of a rural lane, despite being lined with large houses. The rural appearance of the lane is created by the lack of pavements and the mature holly hedges which line the thoroughfare. The hedges and a number of mature trees conceal what is in fact predominantly 20th century residential infill in this part of the conservation area. The large late 19th century villas, such as Aldermans Place and The Mount are not visible from the public highway. By the end of the 19th century The Knoll had been constructed, with a driveway connecting to Heath Lane.

Sandy Lane, Holly Walk, Werth Drive and Narrow Path

Sandy Lane runs in a meandering course along the eastern side of the village. It forms the eastern boundary of the conservation area. The area of the lane known as Leighton Hollow was one of the first parts of the Heath to be settled by squatters during the 18th century; the squatters were involved in local industries such as cutting peat and mining fuller's earth. The area of squatters houses became known as George's Square, although the houses have since

been demolished. The quarry to the east of George's Square, now the Aspley Heath Sandpit, was the location of ironstone and sand quarrying, to provide local building materials. Sandpits were held in common by the old Wavendon parish, when all the parishioners were allowed to use the sandstone and sand for building. When the parishes of Woburn Sands and Aspley Heath were created in 1883 the sandpit was enclosed to restrict access.

Sandy Lane is predominantly a rural trackway, which ascends to the plateau of the Heath from the Woburn Sands entrance to Aspley Heath. The lane is broadest at the northern end, but retains a character of a 'back lane', with views westwards to the rear elevations of buildings on Church Road. The garages of these buildings are located on Sandy Lane. A cluster of houses, including a short terrace, link this part of the lane with the settlement of Woburn Sands with which it connects.












Progressing southwards, the lane becomes increasingly rural and enclosed. High banks border the trackway, and these are covered with hedges. The tree canopy shelters above. Breaks in the tree line permit views across the pine trees and heathland of Old Wavendon Heath which rises to the east. The occasional house set amongst the trees provides an element of surprise and interest. Quarry Cottage is a multi-phased building, incorporating early 19th century structures; the white-painted brickwork walls stand out distinctly before the woodland backdrop.

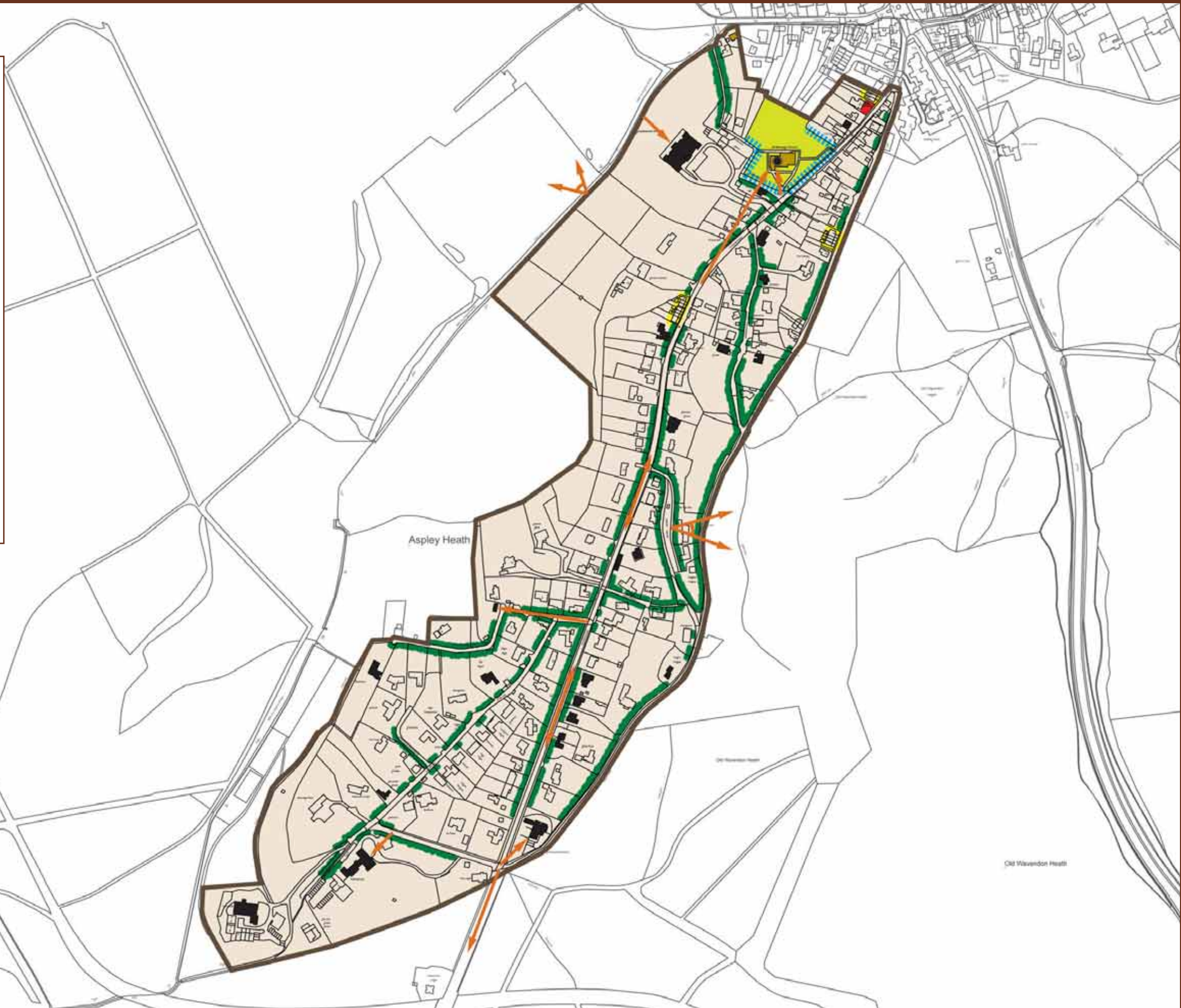
At the southern end of Sandy Lane, on the corner junction with Church Road, stands Fernwood School. This was built as a school in the early 20th century, but was not used as such, and became the Homewood Convalescent Home on acquisition by Bedford County Hospital in 1919. During the Second World War it was used as a sick bay for evacuated children.

Lanes and footpaths run through from Sandy Lane to Church Road to the west. These are Holly Walk, Werth Drive and Narrow Path. These paths climb up through the woodland from Sandy Lane and become narrow lanes providing access to scattered arrangements of houses on either side. These lanes are edged by high holly hedges. Narrow Path contains a collection of late 19th century houses, interspersed with 20th century infill. Firdale is one of the most architecturally elaborate, presented in a Vernacular Revival style, with projecting gables, dormer windows, and canted bays. Applied timber framing to the gables and bays provides an attractive contrast to the red brickwork of the walls. The roof features blue ridge tiles and finials, and the three chimneystacks are surmounted by decorative terracotta pots. The conservatory on the east side of the house is contemporary with the historic building; it has a well-detailed entrance door featuring coloured marginal glazing.



Enclosure created unusually by an oblique brick wall boundary

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed building
-  Building of local interest
-  Significant terraced group
-  Sites where enhancement is to be encouraged
-  Churchyard
-  Important boundary wall
-  Important view
-  Panoramic view
-  Important hedgerow
-  Skyline feature



Opportunities for enhancement

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

- The front garden of The Royal Oak Public House is not landscaped and comprises an area of tarmac and grass. An appropriate landscaping treatment would enhance the appearance of the setting of the public house and of the wider streetscape in this part of the conservation area.
- 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, gravel, stone setts or cobbles in place of concrete paving.



A historic building with potential for enhancement

Note: No boundary changes are proposed in the draft appraisal.

General Conservation Area Guidance

To maintain the distinctive character of the Aspley Heath 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 alterations to buildings, 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 Heath Conservation Area Plan.
5. Where necessary, retain trees, important hedgerows and important green spaces within the conservation area and ensure that, where new development is permitted, proper consideration is given to new tree planting and appropriate landscape treatment.
6. Where necessary, seek to repair important stone and brick boundary walls, and hedges and tree screens.

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)
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■ ਸਿੱਖ ਨਾਜ਼ਰਬਾਰੀ ਬੈਠਤੀ ਕੀਤੇ ਨਾਜ਼ 'ਤੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਸ਼ਕਲ ਨਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਮਿਲ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ।	08452 304040 (Punjabi)
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■ 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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