



Clophill Conservation Area

Introduction

16 April 2008

This document is one of a series of revised conservation area appraisals in Mid Bedfordshire. Clophill conservation area was originally designated on 3 September 1973, then reviewed on 12 February 1991. No review has taken place since then. This appraisal will enable Development Control to determine whether proposals for Clophill will preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. Those areas with potential for enhancement are also identified.

Setting

The Clophill Conservation Area encompasses most of the pre-Second World War village of Clophill. The village is mid-point in a string of settlements lying along the valley of the River Flit – from Clifton and Shefford in the east to Maulden and Ampthill in the west. It is situated on the north bank of the River Flit between its water meadows to the south and the rising ground on the Greensand Ridge, running along the northern edge of the village.

Clophill has a markedly linear structure in its historic core, comprising the northeast-southwest axis of the High Street and The Green, just over one kilometre long, running parallel with the River Flit. A secondary set of routes extends to the north from Mill Lane, rising from the High Street to the lower slopes of the Greensand Ridge.



Enclosing walls and trees

The western edge of the conservation area is marked by the junction with the A6.

There are two outliers of the village dating from the medieval period; the original parish church of St Mary lying approximately one kilometre northeast of the village, on the Greensand Ridge, (now ruined) and the mounds of the motte and bailey castle mound about 0.5 kilometre to the southeast. These suggest that the original settlement may have been more dispersed than the present more compact linear one originating from the later medieval period.

Character

The conservation area covers the core of the historic village with origins dating at least to the Domesday Book, when it was identified as Clopelle. In the Book of Fees (1242) it was called Clophill. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Place Names, the term ‘Clop’ in Old English denotes lump, hillock or hill. “In some cases the element (Clop) seems to refer to a slight rise. Clophill is noteworthy.” It is almost certain that the main determinant of the original economy and character of the village was its crossroads location.

Indeed it is likely The Green was set out as a market place, which, following medieval practice, was formed by diverting both the east-west valley routes and the main north-south routes into the market place area. This would explain the triangular shape of The Green and the location of the remains of the historic stone bridge at the southeast corner of The Green, on the original alignment of the A6. Due to the relatively undeveloped nature of The Green, it is unlikely that the market prospered.

The character of the development in Clophill divides into three broad types:



North side of the High Street weathered brick walls

- a. **High Street** – relatively narrow pocket plots mainly between five and ten metres wide and considerably longer – with most extending as far as the River Flit on the south side. Buildings are usually set back by a modest amount. Some buildings, however, either as the main building or outhouse, are set at the back edge of the pavement. Exceptions are Clophill House and its neighbours, on large corner plots.



High Street looking east – varied building forms

- b. **Kiln Lane, Little Lane and Mill Lane** – These are less formal and more varied in shape, but generally smaller in area, most with buildings set within the plot.



Ironstone walls and the axial approach to the church porch

- c. **Suburbanised 20th century infilling** – This exists in small plots in area b and from nos. 24 to 32 along the High Street. Otherwise, outside the conservation area, there are substantial areas of modern suburban development on the east side of the village, north of the High Street and in pockets to the east and north. The general characteristics of wide roads and pavements, gentle curves and regularised setback front gardens are at odds with the established character of the conservation area.

The scale of the built form in the Clophill Conservation Area is predominantly domestic in terms of use, storey heights (mainly two storey), overall height and, due to the visible presence of domestic gardens, to the front and side of plots. Even the Victorian parish church is relatively low in height.

The non-residential uses within the conservation area have no doubt contracted since the A507 bypass was constructed in the 70s. The main community focal points are (i) the frontages around The Green and (ii) individual buildings including the parish church, Lower School and the Methodist Church at the eastern end of the High Street, the Village Hall outside the northern boundary of the conservation area and the pub, 'Stone Jug' on Back Street. Around The Green the two public houses are the main generators of activity; the Post Office Stores and the small hair salon also contribute to the provision of services. The bus stop on The Green also helps to enliven the area.

Appearance

Materials

The conservation area is predominantly red brick in appearance, in common with most settlements in the western half of the District. The brick is a soft orange-red type, which is weathering and decaying in places, such as the outhouses on the back edge of the footway in the High Street. Isolated examples exist of burnt header brickwork, characteristic of the early Georgian period.

White painted plaster and render is the second most common walling material; this is seen around The Green, especially the 'Flying Horse' and 'Green Man' pubs. It is seen less commonly as infill between exposed timber frames, again on The Green and in the smaller vernacular cottages.

Gault brick is used on fewer buildings, mainly Victorian, most notably the Victorian cottage terminating the view looking north up Mill Lane. This is an essay in carefully considered elevational design using polychromatic brickwork to accentuate details.



Clophill House: Formal, urbane and striking

Ironstone, the characteristic local stone of granular brown and rust colour is used, typically, for the parish church. Less typically the 'Stone Jug', a modest pub in Back Street is also built of ironstone and the old bridge, now in serious need of repair. Roofing materials are also varied. Clay plain tiles are the characteristic vernacular material and still form a main component of the village street scene. However, Welsh slate is used on Victorian buildings and for some re-roofing. Thatch roofs exist in isolated cases, usually one and a half storey cottages, notably in the Slade and Great Lane, on The Green



Eye-brow dormers and thatch, reader, peg tile, brick and ironstone

and High Street. In most cases the locally distinctive eyebrow dormer is a feature of thatch roof design.

The streetscape of the conservation area is greatly enhanced and defined by the presence of boundary walls on the back edge of the pavement or in places, the back edge of the lanes. The walls create both continuity and enclosure to streetscape, especially on the High Street and Kiln Lane, where they often link with outhouses or front garden plots and provide a setting for houses. The loss of any frontage wall would seriously detract from the character of the conservation area. The walls vary in height, style and materials, whilst retaining an overall sense of continuity. At their most formal and urbane they front Clophill House, striking wrought iron 18th-century railings. These walls are red brick, as are the majority of walls, although some more modest walls exist where gault is mixed with red brick. Significantly, there are some stretches of wall in ironstone, especially in Mill Lane, on the western edge of the village and fronting the parish church. This is a highly distinctive local resource, reflecting the fact that the material was easily and conveniently worked from the small quarries on the northern edge of the village.



A typical range of some traditional building materials

The Green

This triangular space is informal in nature, framed by trees to the south, east and west and is dominated by three tall mature trees running in a line on the Green itself. The Green is enclosed on its northern side by a semi-continuous frontage including two-storey Victorian cottages in gault and red brick, a rendered vernacular cottage of one and a half storeys – a feature of Clophill – and the slightly more formal 'Green Man' pub with sashes, again rendered, and with plain tiles. The western end of The Green narrows down to a pinch point, framed on its southern side by the wide one and a half storeys frontage of the 'Flying Horse' pub rendered, with tripartite sash windows and a slate roof. Both pubs have characteristic long ranges of outbuildings extending at right angles down the plot.

The view to the west of The Green at the extremity of the conservation area is terminated and enclosed by a group of tall mature trees providing a green backdrop to the view out of the conservation area. This group of trees requires some management and possibly some replanting, to maintain its dense character. The number and location of highway signs around the junctions with the A6 should be considered, in order to reduce their impact and clutter.



The village lock-up and a contrasting modern shelter

Most of the southern side of The Green is relatively open, but bounded by a soft red brick wall of about 1.5 metres in height. A significant feature of this boundary is the former Pound enclosed by a brick wall, and the Parish Lock-Up. These are of considerably socio-historic interest and their appropriate maintenance is essential.



The arches of the old ironstone road bridge

The remainder of this southern edge is completed by close boarded fencing and temporary security fencing, to prevent access to the Old Bridge, which is in a poor state of repair. The bridge, constructed in rough stonework and later brick infill, requires considerably repair and enhancement. The possibility of re-opening the bridge, the former southern entry into the village, to pedestrians and bicycles is advocated as it would afford views to the attractive river frontage running along the southern edge of the village.

The eastern side of The Green comprises two separate buildings, the white rendered and enlarged village stores and the range of two brick fronted cottages with eyebrow dormers in a thatched roof. The later windows would benefit from vertical glazing bars.

The Green itself suffers somewhat by a sprinkling of randomly placed street furniture. The footpaths here and along much of the High Street are largely of surface dressed fine gravel enhancing the informal appearance of the streetscape.

The High Street

This long street, by its subtle variation of alignment and building lines, changes in appearance and sense of enclosure. Whilst the street has been infilled with houses dating from between the post-war era and designation, which have a suburban character, they are included in some places, as they maintain the continuity of the street scene. The majority of High Street buildings and boundary walls make a positive contribution to the townscape of Clophill.



Visual enclosure of the High Street

The predominant material is a soft red brick, often with burnt headers. Buildings of this type usually date from the 18th and 19th centuries and may be single, freestanding buildings, such as no. 1a, somewhat compromised by the insertion of two large rooflights, and no. 45, a Victorian house on the corner of Mill Lane. Short terraces of cottages either situated parallel with the street or, such as Webb Cottage, at right angles on the back edge of the carriageway, form a narrowing of the vista along the street. There are also the urbane 'polite' houses of the 18th to early 19th century, most notably Clophill House with its elegant parapetted main elevation, and the slightly more modest no. 52, a wide fronted three bay house with an elegant scrolled bracketed canopy.

Outhouses are a feature of the village and those built in red brick fronting the pavement, make a significant contribution to the street scene, especially where they link with red brick walls. Thus the outhouses between nos. 3 and 3a boundary should be retained and refurbished in any proposed development affecting their site. Red brick walls are a valuable visual asset; their scale can be quite modest but can also increase to define and enclose part of the High Street, especially at the junction with Mill Lane.

The continuity and enclosure of the High Street is interrupted at the junction of High Street and Cainhoe Road by the land taken up in the 1960s by large radius bends and sight lines of the suburban estate road. This has resulted in the loss of enclosing buildings and the replacement with areas of grass. With recent changes in attitude to junction design, it is hoped that the junction could be narrowed and realigned with the intention of reclaiming plots with frontages enclosing the High Street. This interruption to the High Street frontage also occurs to a lesser degree with the open plan front gardens of the 1960s–70s houses nos. 24–32. Perhaps some scheme for boundary walls or hedges could be considered, in agreement with the householders.

The junction of the High Street and the Causeway is marked by the presence of the former water mill. This junction is marked by the slight widening of the High Street and patches of grass perhaps due to the need to accommodate carts collecting the products of the mill. This area and the road junction could be improved to reflect the former character of the space.

The water mill itself is a fine plain, industrial brick building, accommodating the mill race, and the mill pond in its garden which runs alongside the High Street.

At the eastern end of the High Street the pattern of development is somewhat more open and fragmented with more buildings set back from the back edge of the pavement. Good walls ensure street continuity even where there are Victorian and more recent houses behind them. The primary school and ground do not related well to the street scene.

The junction of Great Lane with the High Street is a typically informal village space enclosed by a handsome cottage on its western flank. A courtyard enclosed by former farm buildings defines the edge of the lane further along, and another vernacular cottage terminated the view at the junction of Great and Little Lanes. Another pair of these long low cottages, nos. 11 and 13 Little Lane completes this informal group.

The parish Church of St Mary is set back from the High Street and rather formally approached by a tree-lined walk, belying its Victorian origins. The brown coloured, stone walls with substantial piers complement the church, whose low profile is emphasised by its lack of clerestory windows. The view of the tower from the west (from Great Lane) is severely compromised by garages of a precast concrete design in poor repair. Although the garages are outside but abutting the conservation area, this disruptive element to the view of the church should be considered for enhancement.

Opposite the church, well set back from the High Street, is the long range of buildings, the Old Rectory and Dormer House with brick 18th and 19th century facades. The eastern end of the conservation area is marked by a fine thatched cottage with eyebrow dormers and a loose grouping of houses of different periods. Some are of local interest, and no. 124 is a plain thatched cottage.

Mill Lane and Kiln Lane

Mill Lane links the linear High Street with the network of smaller streets and lanes to the north, on rising land. The lane itself is straight and lined by a substantial length of ironstone boundary walls and a group of mature trees on its eastern side, affording glimpses of the countryside beyond. The lower courses of the wall have severely weathered in places and will require repair. At the northern end of Mill Lane, the boundary wall has been replaced by a buff brick wall, and a timber framed and red brick cottage, part thatched. The cottage, restored at various stages, is set above the lane at right angles to it, framing this end of the lane, with a hedge on the other side.

The western side of the lane is again characterised by boundary walls, in this instance it is red brick. Some outhouses, an integral part of the townscape of the lane, are in a poor state of repair, and the roof has collapsed on parts of the building. It is important that these buildings are retained and repaired.

Further north, 'The Dargle', a well-proportioned two and a half storey Victorian house faces south, behind rebuilt red brick boundary walls. Behind this house lies 'The Strand', an interesting compact group of twin terraces facing each other in a 'mews'-type arrangement at right angles to Mill Lane. Whilst every house has undergone substantial elevational alterations, including plastic



An important locally distinctive ironstone wall

windows and doors, its layout and historic interest as workers' cottages merits retention within the conservation area. The surface of 'The Strand' is poorly patched and would benefit from sympathetic shared surface treatment.

The northern end of Mill Lane is dominated by a fine polychromatic brick cottage, presiding over the junction with Kiln Lane. This junction is enclosed by hedges, with two vernacular cottages behind.

On the north side of Kiln Lane a partially hidden drive leads to three modern detached houses situated in a bowl of a site, formed by a former quarry. Quarrying has left a greensand cliff about 7–10 metres high exposing dramatically stratified golden brown stone.

Returning to the northern end of Mill Lane, the street curves and is slightly sunken in nature, largely characterised by more recent residential development. Whilst this does not contribute to the 'special' nature of the conservation area, it is included to maintain the continuity of the lane. Another 'Y' junction is formed by Mill Lane running to the north and Back Street to the west. The view from Mill Lane to the junction is terminated by a handsome Victorian wide frontage red brick cottage.

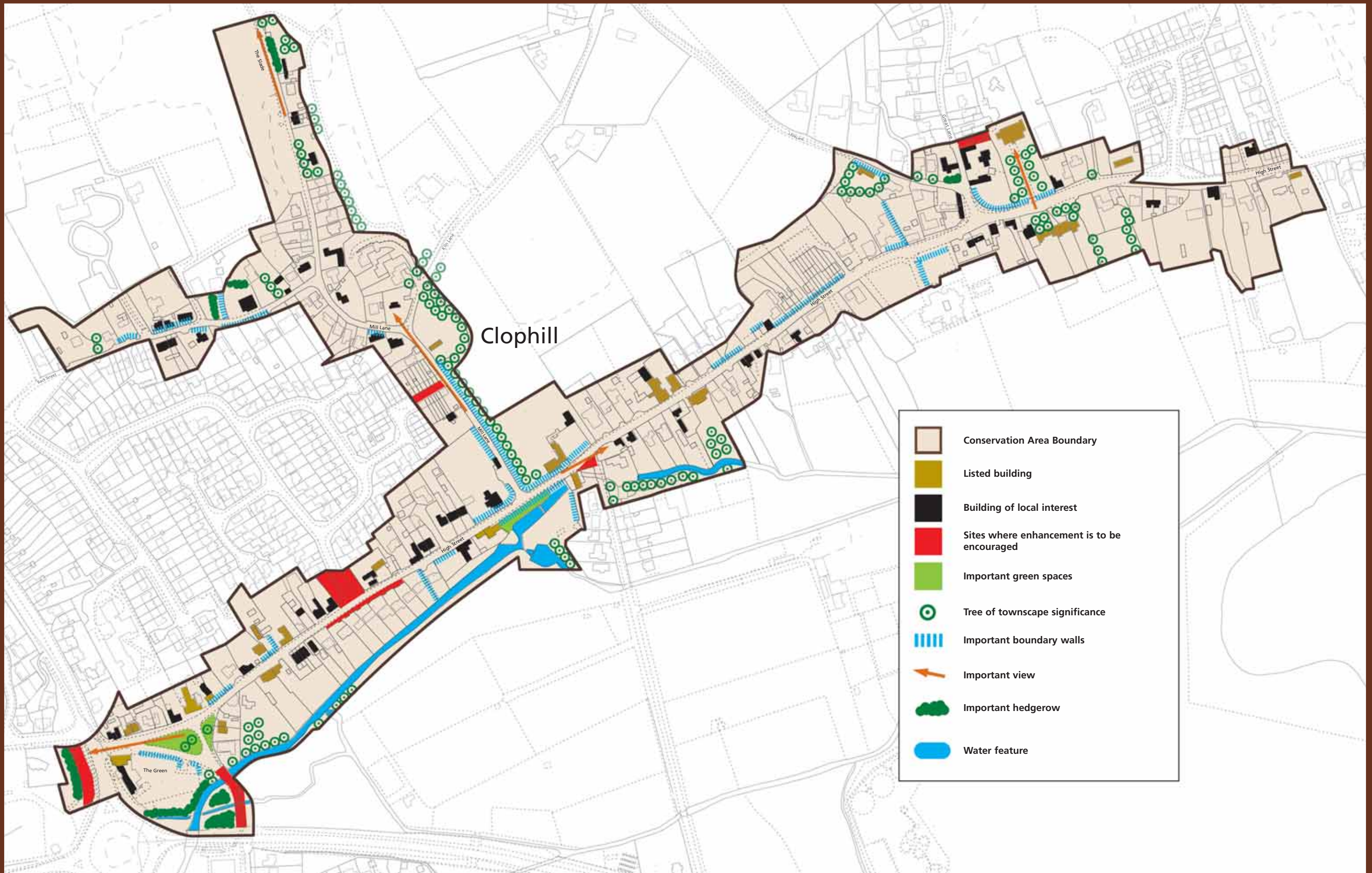
The Slade

This has a different character and appearance to the other streets and lanes in Clophill. It runs north into the rising ground of the Greensand Ridge in relatively steep-sided valley, which with the wooded nature of the terrain gives the space a strong sense of enclosure. There are some good examples of vernacular cottages at either end of The Slade and some altered Victorian artisan cottages between. Otherwise, recent residential infill predominates.

Back Street

The street has a slight double curvature and undulating levels which with the alignment of buildings creating pinch points and deflected views, especially the white painted Victorian house west of the 'Stone Jug' pub, gives it a sense of variety of enclosure on travelling through the space. The boundary of the conservation area is drawn tightly to the southern boundary of the street along two stretches of Back Street to exclude modern development.

Boundary walls play an important part in streetscape character and those should be retained in their entirety. The diminutive white outhouse at the western end of Back Street, at right angles to the street, marks the north western extremity of the conservation area.



Clophill

	Conservation Area Boundary
	Listed building
	Building of local interest
	Sites where enhancement is to be encouraged
	Important green spaces
	Tree of townscape significance
	Important boundary walls
	Important view
	Important hedgerow
	Water feature

Enhancement

The enhancement of the character and appearance of a conservation area can be defined as a reinforcement of the qualities providing the special interest which warranted designation. This may be answered through the sympathetic development or improvement of sites identified in the detailed analysis of the area as opportunity or neutral sites. It may involve positive physical proposals or enhancement could be brought about by the consistent application of positive, sensitive and detailed development control over shop fronts and alterations. Areas which call for special consideration are marked on the Conservation Area Plan:

- Tree management programme and consolidation of highway signage on west side of A6 at junction with The Green.
- The Old Bridge and its approaches.
- Junction of High Street and Cainhoe Road.
- Junction of High Street and The Causeway.
- Land between Great Lane and the west tower of the parish church.



An unfortunate key view to the church tower

General Conservation Area Guidance

To maintain the distinctive character of the Clophill 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, 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 Clophill 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 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)
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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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