

# GREAT DODDINGTON CONSERVATION AREA

## CHARACTER APPRAISAL

### 1. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

- 1.1 Great Doddington is situated on the north western side of the Nene Valley roughly equidistant (at about 2 ½ miles) from the centre of Wellingborough to the north east and Earls Barton to the south west. In common with several other villages in the locality around the valley sides, the settlement lies between the 80 and 90 metre contours (AOD) and this is thought to relate to the availability of springs. Unusually, however, Great Doddington is generally spread out along the contour lines maintaining a fairly consistent level throughout its length.
- 1.2 Known variously as Dodingtone (“Dodda’s Stockaded homestead or Farm”) and Great Dudyngton in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries the village’s economic base was entirely agrarian in nature up to at least the time of the parish inclosure in 1766. By 1849 Whellan’s Directory lists a local blacksmith, bailiff, shoemaker, beer retailer/maltster, shopkeeper (2), carpenter, grocer, butcher and wheelwright as well as several farmers, graziers, a yeoman and a miller. Victoria County History of 1937 records the local employment as agriculture and boot and shoe manufacture.
- 1.3 The nature of Great Doddington’s socio-economic development from early times has therefore inevitably lead to a modern-day built form in its historic core and designated conservation area based on and characterised by its five farms together with the church and manor house (the present day “Old Vicarage”). Only two of these holdings, Manor Farm to the north and The Farm to the west, are currently working farms, whilst the remainder are in residential use, two (Top Farm to the east and Glebe Farm south west of the church) incorporating refurbishment/conversion of constituent buildings, and the remaining unit, Grove Farm, south west of Top Farm, taking the form of a domestic courtyard described by the listed farmhouse and associated barns.
- 1.4 The remainder of the village beyond the designated conservation area is comprised almost entirely of 20<sup>th</sup> century “ribbon” development along the north east-south west axis from Wellingborough to Earls Barton. It is interesting to note, in fact, that the 1900 Ordnance Survey coverage shows a boundary of development which very closely relates to the present defined conservation area.

### 2. KEY ELEMENTS OF STRUCTURE

- 2.1 With the exception of the area comprising St Nicholas’ Church and Manor Farm to the north, the form of the historic core of the village is essentially linear, running north east to south west along the contour lines of the valley side. Its height above the valley floor therefore creates dramatic views both *from* the village looking in a south/south-easterly direction towards Grendon and Wollaston, and *of* the village from vantage points in the valley floor and on the opposite side of the valley.
- 2.2 Whilst the medieval and later development of the village is improperly understood at present, it is suggested that Manor Farm, the parish church and the original Manor House would have formed the nucleus of the original medieval settlement and that the

other farm holdings were later developments as the village expanded. Significantly, however, it appears that once the second manor at Top Farm had been established to the east and The Farm to the west, with the various individual cottages and plots of the inhabitants being laid out along the connecting streets, the village remained in this form until the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The structure of the historic settlement, therefore, may perhaps be said to be defined primarily by the configuration of these three key farmsteads together with the original church and manor.

- 2.3 A further structural item of note is the system of internal public footpaths which run parallel to the High Street on its northern side and provide an alternative pedestrian route through the historic core of the village from Wilby Lane to the Stag's Head Public House, linking with the High Street itself in two places. It is no doubt of historical significance that these paths mostly lead to and traverse the churchyard, being convenient routes for people to reach the church from outlying areas. Footpath TB009 which meets the village on the east side of The Farm from across open land to the south is, incidentally, aligned fairly closely with the church itself suggesting perhaps that its local routeing is connected with middle-distance sighting of the church tower.

### 3. ARCHITECTURAL & HISTORIC QUALITY OF BUILDINGS

- 3.1 Common features in listed buildings in the conservation area are ashlar gable parapets and kneelers, regular coursed limestone with lias/ironstone dressings, stone mullioned or wooden casement windows with wood lintels, brick and stone chimney stacks at ridge and/or end and pantile roofs. Apart from the parish church of St. Nicholas, the earliest fabric of which is Saxon, and two mid-18<sup>th</sup> century barns at Top Farm and Grove Farm, the listed buildings are mainly Grade II domestic late 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the notable exception of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Grade I Old Vicarage (the former Manor House). These houses are typically two storeys in height with or without an attic, although there are three examples of single storey with attic form one of which is the Stag's Head Public House.
- 3.2 Unlike the listed buildings which tend to be located in Church Lane and the High Street west of Church Lane, "other buildings of note", shown on the accompanying Appraisal Map, are distributed quite evenly around the conservation area. These represent good quality vernacular architecture and, taken together with the listed buildings, are an important element in the area's intrinsic coherence and continuity. The majority of the buildings of this type date from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and are generally of stone with natural clay roofing tiles, although several attractive brick buildings are included, notably the ancillary barns at The Farm and Top Farm.
- 3.3 An equally important factor in the aesthetic coherence of the conservation area is the stone walling on back edge of footway. This is a ubiquitous but not entirely continuous feature, as can be seen from the dotted notation on the Appraisal Map. Of substantial construction, these walls appear to date from the period between the late-17<sup>th</sup> to the late-19<sup>th</sup> centuries and although mainly 1 metre in height vary from the short plinth-type to 2 metre screening as seen in Lower Street (garden of 47 High Street).

### 4. SPACES: TOWNSCAPE ENCLOSURE AND GREEN SPACE

- 4.1 A pattern of advancement and recession is evident in the street scene in parts of the High Street, notably at 80-96 and 20-24, whereby traditional cottages built hard up to back-edge-of-highway are attractively juxtaposed with cottages and other buildings set back to a greater or a lesser degree from the footway edge. This interesting configuration is considered to positively contribute to the character and appearance of

the conservation area. Again the High Street itself widens out near the shops in the form of a raised grass verge segregating the footway from the road proper, introducing a pleasing sense of space at this central point of the village. The effect is further enhanced by the fine sycamore tree in the raised grass verge opposite St. Nicholas Court. Other trees or treed areas with particular townscape value are located at the churchyard (notably the old yew near the south door of the church), the adjacent area known as "The Rookery", The Old Vicarage, the cedar, scots pine and false acacia at 22 High Street and the yew at the Stag's Head Public House.

- 4.2 The small cultivated area in the key location at the eastern confluence of High Street and Lower Street in perhaps the most significant piece of open space in the village fabric. This amenity land is attractively maintained by the parish council, and incorporates a village sign, seat, raised flower beds and a local directional sign.

## 5. BUILDING MATERIALS

- 5.1 Common materials of special architectural or historic interest visible from the streets and other public places include the following:

- Walling.  
Mostly regular coursed limestone, often with ironstone detailing on copings and kneelers, and either limestone/ironstone mix or occasional ironstone inserts in limestone; ironstone; red brick; render.
- Roofing.  
Orange/red clay pantiles; Welsh slate; plain tiles; thatch (long straw); Castle Ashby orange/red clay specials, produced historically on Lord Northampton's estate based at Castle Ashby and seen through the village on agricultural and domestic buildings (a replica source of this material was identified recently for re-roofing at the residential scheme for the redundant barns at Top Farm).
- Free-standing Stone Walling.  
Mainly regular coursed limestone, but some ironstone including random occasional pieces of ironstone within primarily limestone structures; capping is generally "cock and hen" style, but also pantile and plain stone on edge; occasional limestone plinth walling with picket fencing on top.
- Chimneys.  
Stone and brick mix most common, with brick on upper part; wholly built of brick, often red/brown in colour.
- Dormers.  
Gabled; hipped; Lincolnshire with wood-clad cheeks.

Also, blue bull-nosed engineering bricks are used as edging for raised footways on the north side of High Street between Top Farm and number 26, and outside 2 Church Lane and 62 High Street.

## 6. EXTENT OF LOSS, INTRUSION OR DAMAGE TO BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- 6.1 There are very few cases of intrusive development or land within the defined conservation area, but it is suggested that the large corrugated iron barn on the road frontage at The Farm is one such example. Given that the range of small barns and cartsheds behind it are themselves shown on the Appraisal Map as "notable buildings"

constructed of stone and brick with Castle Ashby roofing tiles, the frontage barn is seen as an element in the street scene which is not locally distinctive.

- 6.2 Again the working men's club off Lower Street is a rather utilitarian 20<sup>th</sup> century structure and is considered to be aesthetically retrograde, given its setting amongst one listed and several notable buildings on the street frontage. Although the problem is slightly lessened by its backland position as viewed within the village, it remains a prominent and somewhat discordant feature when seen from footpaths TB008 and TB009.

## 7. EXTENT OF "NEUTRAL" AREAS

- 7.1 Several residential plots in the conservation area have been developed/redeveloped over the last 50 years or so. Fortunately the materials used in most instances have been the traditional limestone walling and clay roofing tiles, as seen at 28, 36 and 38 Lower Street, 5 Doctors Lane and 30/32 High Street. In these cases, whilst the opportunity for use of the traditional form of development has perhaps not been fully realised, they remain partially successful in *maintaining* (as opposed to actually *enhancing*) the appearance of the conservation area, and are generally viewed as having a "neutral" effect.

## 8. NON-RESIDENTIAL LAND USES

- 8.1 The Stag's Head Public House is shown as an Inn on the 1900 Ordnance Survey map suggesting that the current use has endured for at least a hundred years. It appears, however, that it was originally constructed (in 1686) as a dwellinghouse and used as such for some time, as there is no record of any inn or ale house providing guest bedrooms or stabling in the village in the War Office surveys of 1686, 1756 or 1800.
- 8.2 Top Farm Livery Stables. No longer strictly a working farm, Top Farm does operate livery stables as shown on the Appraisal Map at Top Farm Lane. The equine activities which therefore arise add life and colour to the village as horses can occasionally be seen from and on adjoining streets.
- 8.3 The Working Farms: Manor Farm and The Farm. These are both mixed farming enterprises, i.e. arable with sheep (Manor Farm) and with cattle (The Farm). As indicated elsewhere in the appraisal the farm holdings appear to have had a major influence on the plan form of the historic village, their farmhouses and barns basically defining its outer edge for several hundred years.
- 8.4 Shops. The three shops comprising a post office, general store and hairdressers are located in the High Street in a small enclave where Chapel Lane meets the footpath TB 014 leading to the parish church. In terms of a building type these seem to simply be converted cottages and it is likely that the land use is of 20<sup>th</sup> century date. Nevertheless the specific location is possibly of significance as this is clearly the psychological centre of the village (known locally as "The Square") associated with the stretch of widened highway/footway and in proximity to the parish church and parish amenity space opposite.
- 8.5 As the oldest building in the village, The Parish Church of St. Nicholas (formerly known as St. Luke's) is obviously a pivotal structure and land use in the broadest possible sense. The church and churchyard have already been mentioned in this Appraisal in relation to the medieval foundation of Great Doddington, the church's historic significance as a Saxo/Norman Transitional/Gothic structure and its status as a

destination point for local and sub-local worshippers. Nevertheless with regard to the historic village's plan form the church is set apart from the main modern street system. The connecting street, Church Lane, though, is likely to be of great significance structurally, linking the (original) manor, church and manor farm.

- 8.6 Chapel Lane Church. Originally a 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodist chapel which, as a non-conformist style of worship, was located a respectful distance away from the parish church in the eponymous Chapel Lane. This is an extremely characteristic structure, built of smooth red bricks and Welsh roofing slates, but appears to have no obvious influence on the developing village plan form.

## 9. SPATIAL SEQUENCE

See sequence of numbers, 1 to 7, shown on the accompanying Appraisal Map, starting at the Stag's Head Public House.

### 9.1 Zone 1-2.

At the point of entry into the north eastern end of the conservation area views to the left into the distant Nene Valley are possible whilst on the right the movement of horses associated with the livery stables at Top Farm Lane may occasionally be experienced. The beginnings of the attractive limestone walling on the road frontage which permeates the village centre is apparent initially on the Stag's Head Public House side and a little further on on the right hand side in rear of a grass verge and joining onto the first barn forming part of the recent residential refurbishment scheme at Top Farm. This barn creates a "pinch point" with the westernmost corner of the public house opposite, thereby emphasising the sense of entering a special historic area. A second view of the valley to the south east is obtained at the point at which the road turns sharply right between number 2 Goodens Lane and the new stone house at the start of the High Street proper. Although the stone walling in front of this property has been taken down and rebuilt on a new alignment to create a public footway, it is nevertheless still shown as "historic" on the Appraisal Map for purposes of continuity. The remainder of the Top Farm barn refurbishment scheme can be seen on the right at this point with its traditional admixture of stone and red brick.

### 9.2 Zone 2-3.

From point No. 2 traditional stone boundary walling at about waist-to-shoulder height begins to appear on either side of the road creating a strong sense of linkage and cohesion between the domestic plots, and this is enhanced by a sequence of three separate and quite striking views out to the open countryside to the left. Actual access to the valley is obtained here via footpaths TB015 and TB006, the latter of which emanates from near the Stag's Head as shown on the Appraisal Map and the northernmost 120 metres or so of the former following the line of the old road (Mirey Lane) linking the east end of the village to Doddington Mill.. For the next 100 metres or so a series of 6 separate plots on the right hand side of the relatively straight High Street form a block of basically unspoilt properties in the vernacular style, from the substantial and imposing farmhouse at Top Farm to the picturesque pair of thatched cottages at numbers 24 and 26, enhanced by the pattern of advancement and recession mentioned in Section 4, above (Townscape Enclosure) and including the large cedar tree in front of number 22. Number 33 to 37 High Street, opposite, are of course outside the defined conservation area, but in terms of the general street scene clearly lack local distinctiveness.

- 9.3 At Grove Farm on the left an almost complete façade of built up frontage on back-edge-of-footway, (punctuated only by the arched entrance to the farm courtyard), strongly

defines the three-dimensional street space as a result of the imposing height of the stone barns. The buildings opposite are of fairly recent date, although as a result of the use of traditional materials and apparent construction on an earlier historic footprint should fit well into the general backdrop of properties in the street scene as they continue to weather. This zone ends at the small piece of amenity land at the eastern confluence of High Street and Lower Street, which with its well-maintained seating and signage facilities forms an attractive “visual stop”.

#### 9.4 Zone 3-4.

Dropping down fairly steeply from the level of the amenity space, Lower Street’s south side is mostly comprised of single-property depths and has an appearance not unlike that of the previous zone between numbers 23 and 33 High Street with occasional dramatic views of the adjacent countryside, including unbroken (except for accesses) linking waist-height stone walls. However, on the north side of Lower Street to the rear of numbers 45 and 47 High Street and the side of number 5 Doctors Lane the stone walling is much higher (approximately 2.2 metres) thereby creating a strong contrasting sense of enclosure.

9.5 The continuous line of stone walling on either side of Lower Street is clearly one of its most significant characteristics and again on its north side the walling carries on unbroken up Doctors Lane to link with the listed 1 Doctors Lane on the right and number 16 Doctors Lane on the left. The fleeting glance or “glimpse” at this point as shown on the Appraisal Map is a subtle but no less significant aspect of the townscape.

#### 9.6 Zone 5-6.

At point 5 a final valley view is obtained looking over the small amenity area before proceeding round the gently left-hand curving High Street. Whilst initially the formula of attractive pavement-edge walling and vernacular cottages is maintained with the traditional listed numbers 36 and 47 on opposite sides of the street, the sense of continuity is momentarily lost a little way along with the rather mundane 1960s/1970s development on the right in the form of the small bungalow scheme at numbers 44-54. Although this group of buildings has been left out of the conservation area they of course remain a factor in the total street scene. Significantly the continuity of the stone walling is interrupted at this point as well as on the south side of High Street at the modern house at number 51. However, the imposing Old Vicarage in Church Lane is by now coming into view to the west as is eventually the parish church in the colder months when the various attractive deciduous trees around the church, The Old Vicarage and The Coach House have shed their leaves.

9.7 By the time the crossroads of High Street and Church Lane/Doctors Lane is reached the “sense of place” has been substantially recaptured. Interesting glimpses down Doctors Lane and up Church Lane can be obtained and the “pinch point” in the latter is included to suggest that 1 Church Lane and numbers 62 High Street with 2 Church Lane provide a “framing” effect in each direction similar in nature to that mentioned above at the Stag’s Head.

#### 9.8 Zone 6-7.

Although the St. Nicholas Court development is modern it is not particularly problematic aesthetically and it is relieved by the re-commencement of historic stone walling at edge-of-footway. The corresponding stretch of raised footway on the opposite side of High Street here near the imposing sycamore tree is of particular note as the walling forms both the boundary of The Old Vicarage as well as a retaining structure on edge-of-carriageway. The raised footway area and the sycamore were originally part of The

Old Vicarage and were given by the Church as then owners of the property to the County Council to improve pedestrian facilities.

9.9 There is an interesting “glimpse” down Chapel Lane between the shop premises and indeed this area commonly has a distinct sense of activity occasioned mainly by patronage of the shops themselves. The footpath TB014 leads up to the churchyard past a small parish amenity area incorporating a significant sycamore tree (again originally part of the Old Vicarage), and this land use has a clear “area identity” for the manifest reasons of mature landscaping, seclusion and the appreciation of both the architecture and history of the parish church. The remainder of the High Street curves to the left and as the raised footway reaches grade near number 86 High Street the characteristic stone walling begins again on the property frontages between 86 and 96 High Street as it does on the south side from the post office down to number 38, albeit at a rather lower level in the latter case. Mention has already been made of the pattern of advancement and recession evident between numbers 80 and 96 High Street in Section 4 of this Appraisal.

9.10 Zone 4-7.

Lower Street’s west end from point No.4 on the Map features additional vistas across the Nene Valley between numbers 31 and 37 and between the listed number 39 and the Club building. The area around the Chapel Lane/Lower Street junction is of particular interest as the United Reform Church, the cottages facing it to the south and west and the abundance of stone boundary walling create a pleasing vernacular ensemble, and again a passing glimpse is presented looking north up Chapel Street. The final section of the street incorporates unbroken stretches of traditional walling on both sides, but the pair of modern dwellinghouses on the north side, (mentioned in Section 7.1, above), whilst built in sympathetic natural materials are not entirely traditional in form.

9.11 Zone 7-8.

The final zone incorporates the last of the stone walling running as far as number 2 Wilby Lane on the north side and as far as the first road-edge barn at The Farm. A fairly wide gap between number 59 Lower Street and the easternmost barn at the farm allows a striking southerly vista. Apart from the large unsightly corrugated iron barn at the front of the farmyard the complex of buildings is of high vernacular quality in terms of layout, design and materials with the stone farmhouse surrounded by various brick and stone outbuildings and barns, and forms a fitting western edge to the conservation area. From the extreme western end a final vista view south can be obtained, whilst looking back eastwards number 2 Earls Barton Road and the roadside farm barns form a “pinch point” further emphasising the entrance to an area of special architectural and historic interest.

**ADOPTED AS SPG 26/11/2002**