Ecton

Conservation Area Appraisal

Consultation Draft
Contents List

Summary of Special Interest

1  Introduction and planning policy context
2  Location, Topography and Geology
3  History and Development
4  Spatial Analysis
5  Architectural Analysis
6  Boundary Justification
7  Management Plan
Summary of Special Interest

Ecton was identified during the Domesday survey (1084), although the current village is of Mediaeval origins, there is archaeological evidence of both Neolithic and Beaker occupation, along with further pre-historic, Anglo Saxon and Roman artefacts found in the area.

The village is situated on the slopes of the Nene valley, orientated north to south, to the east of Northampton, with the conservation area centred around the through road, High Street, surrounded by open fields and park land.

The buildings are predominantly built from local stone, a mix of limestone and ironstone, set under steep dual pitched roofs finished with a mix of natural slate and longstraw thatch.

Key characteristics

Location
Ecton is less than one mile from the eastern fringe of Northampton. The key element of the village structure is the natural topography of the parish, with the village being located at the head of interconnecting valleys, which terminate to the River Nene to the south.

The parish is dissected by the A4500, with the isolated farms and arable fields to the north and the built form of the settlement located to the south.

Settlement form
The village is a simple linear village, with limited expansion along the A4500 to the west and no expansion to the east owing to the location of Ecton Hall and associated parkland. The result being a controlled expansion of the earliest settlement pattern down the southern slope of the valley toward the River Nene.

The village remains largely one property deep away from the main through road.

The village was subject to the Enclosure Act in 1759, which has largely defined the present arrangement, however the 1703 map shows extensive enclosures across the parish.

Buildings
The parish church and Rectory House (Ecton House) and Ecton Hall are located to the east of the main through road, in an isolated location away from the central core of the village.
Built form
Local stone two and three storey houses, with front elevation facing onto through road, with little or no front gardens, under steep slate or thatched roofs, with parapetted gables.

The Conservation Area Boundary

Ecton’s Conservation Area was designated in 1975.

This document proposes the extension of the boundary to include further land to the north, including the primary school, the playground, The Worlds End public house and to the east to incorporate Ecton Hall, woodland and the old walled garden.
1 Introduction

1.1 Ecton Conservation Area was designated in 1975, with a conservation area character appraisal undertaken in 2016 to assess the conservation area and provide further analysis for any alterations to the current area. This assessment has resulted in this document, the Draft Ecton Conservation Area Appraisal.

1.2 This document identifies the specific characteristics of the conservation area that are desired to be preserved and enhanced in full accordance with the provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

1.3 When adopted it will be used to guide future developments and improvements in Ecton in conjunction with policies in the development plan.

2 Location, Topography and Geology

2.1 Ecton is a village situated approximately 5 km from Wellingborough and approximately 1 km from the edge of Northampton, located on the A4500 with the centre of the parish on the convergence of roads, to the west leading to Northampton, to the east to Wellingborough and to the north to Sywell. The village is located to the south of the A4500.

2.2 The parish land forms part of the “Ecton and Earls Barton slopes”, which is characterised by the valley slopes running parallel to the River Nene, dissected by adjacent valleys draining the uplands into the river to the south.

2.3 The parish is dissected by the A4500, with the village to the centre, the landscape is characterised by a mix of medium to large arable fields, with parcels of pasture to the periphery of the village. The broadleaved deciduous woodland forming the parkland to Ecton Hall, screen the village to the east.

2.4 The west of the village retains its 18th Century enclosure land pattern, however there is evidence of the removal of the original field boundary hedgerows as a result of the 20th Century agricultural practices.
2.5 The land pattern to the north of the A4500 is characterised by a scattering of farms and isolated dwellings, with the main feature being Sywell Reservoir, which was operated from 1906 through to 1979 to supply water to Rushden and Higham Ferrers. The Reservoir was included as the focal point of the Country Park from 1979 onwards.

2.6 The underlying geology of the area comprises of upper lias clays and terrace gravels and alluvial deposits to the valley floor of the River Nene, with the land to the north of the A4500 comprising of a bed of Northamptonshire sandstone. The combination of the bed of sandstone and the lias clay has resulted in natural ground water springs emerging to the south of the village to the valley slopes.

3 History and Development

3.1 Prior to the Norman Conquest, Ecton was a Neolithic settlement, a Beaker settlement, a Roman settlement and an Anglo Saxon Settlement, pre dating the current late mediaeval settlement.

3.2 There have been extensive archaeological excavations surrounding the village within the parish, including:

- Neolithic and Beaker settlement, including hearths, pottery and flint shards, (SP8396165).
- Iron Age trackway, and settlement, to the south of the parish.
- Roman settlement and fifty pottery kilns, with remains unearthed of coins and pottery dating from the second and third centuries.
- Anglo Saxon cemetery was discovered in the late 18th Century within the grounds of Ecton House, complete with human remains and coins dating from the reign of Ethelred II.

3.3 The village name of Ecton, dates to the Anglo Saxon, with the name deriving from a Saxon leader, Ecca, being Ecca’s ton, meaning Ecca’s farm or settlement, later becoming Ecton.

3.4 In 1086, the Domesday Book recorded Ecton, (Echentone) as having a population of 41 people, with a lord of the manor, with the manor at that time being Bondi a local land owning Saxon theyn.
3.5 Bondi, was succeeded in 1086 by Henry De Ferrers as owner of the main manor, which descended through the De Ferrers and the Duchy of Lancaster until 1575.

**Mediaeval**

3.6 The manor descended through the Duchy of Lancaster (Henry De Ferrers) to the Montgomery family in 1428, through which it descended until 1574/75, when it passed to the Catesby family.

3.7 The Catesby family appear to have made substantial alterations to the house (Ecton Hall) prior to the estate transferring by marriage to Ralph Freeman in 1699, following which further alterations were undertaken including the terraced lawns and bowling alley, remains of which are still visible.

**18th Century**

3.8 The manor descended through the Catesby family until 1712, when it passed to the Isted family.

3.9 The estate was sold in 1712 to the Isted family, it passed to Ambrose Isted in 1731 and later in 1755 he carried out further alterations, in the form of a two year renovation and redevelopment which created the form of the estate and house in its current form, including the complete re-design of the south front, built in the Gothic style, with local Mears Ashby quarried golden brown sandstone.

3.10 Ecton was subject to the Act of Inclosure in 1759, with the result being a concentration of land holdings in blocks, with over 80% of the land around Ecton owned by Ambrose Isted.

3.11 The Inclosure Act enabled land transfers, enabling Ambrose Isted to extend the park to the east with the demolition of property in Little Ecton, which was exchanged for land near The World’s End.

3.12 Ambrose Isted continued to extend his land ownership and established five new lodge farms situated away from the village. These lodges were simply called North Lodge, South Lodge, East Lodge and West Lodge, with a further located to the south of the East Lodge, called South East Lodge or The Lodge.
3.13 The formal lodges remain to the periphery of the 18th Century estate and parkland, all being listed as Grade II, with East Lodge being located on Washbrook Lane, Ecton Lodge (North Lodge) being located on the A4500, the South Lodge being located on Northampton Road and West Lodge being located on Sywell Lane.

3.14 The formal garden landscape of the park changed with the planting of tree belts, the digging of ponds and the construction of a kitchen garden, all a part of the contemporary style of natural design, a move away from the formal gardens.

3.15 These changes continued throughout the Isted family ownership, which continued until the estate passed to the Sotheby family, by marriage in 1881.

3.16 The main manor was separated into two during the 16th Century by the Catesby family.

3.17 A third manor existed in Ecton, referred to as the Warden manor, as it was originally held by the abbey of Warden in the 13th Century. There is little documentary evidence of this manor, other than it continued until 1678 when the then owner Nicholas Hackoll leased the property on a nine hundred year lease to the local bell founder Henry Bagley, at which time he also sold the main mansion house. No further records can be found beyond this date.

20th Century

3.18 Ecton Hall entered an uncertain period following the death of Colonel Sotheby in 1954, it passed to his son Commander Sotheby, who decided to sell the contents of the Hall. The Hall deteriorated over the next thirty years, only being saved from demolition by a property developer converting the Hall into luxury apartments in the late 1980s.

3.19 Historic map evidence has shown that the village has changed little between 1759 and the 20th Century, with the High Street being the focus of the village. The 20th Century brought the eastern and western expansion, with the Church View development to the east comprising largely of small scale single storey bungalows, running from the Wellingborough Road through to the boundary with Ecton Hall park.
3.20 The western expansion comprises largely of two storey semi detached houses, of a similar design and size, spreading out along the west side of West Street and along the west side of Northampton Road.

3.21 The eastern and western expansion have been carried out with little apparent regard to the local character and distinctiveness of the village, which serves to create a tranche to the north of the village of a completely different character to the High Street central core.

4 Spatial Analysis

4.1 Ecton is characterised by the simple linear nature of the High Street, running through the village, parallel to the estate lands of Ecton Hall, to the east. The High Street is orientated north to south through the village, with a notable open area to the north dominated by the war memorial and the village school and playground.

Land use

4.2 Ecton is a residential settlement, within an agricultural setting, on the edge of a once substantial estate, with Ecton Hall to the immediate east of the village, at the centre of the estate.

Settlement form, street pattern and means of enclosure

4.3 Ecton is a linear village following the natural topography of the river slopes, with the High Street, clearly at its core.

4.4 The estate house, Ecton Hall and the parish church, situated off to the east of the village core.

4.5 Townscape enclosure, indicated on the map by the “Building line” (black line) notation to the property frontages, is clearly defined and continuous throughout the settlement, defined by the property frontages and the boundary walling, with many of the properties built directly onto the pavement, thus creating a clearly defined sense of physical and visual enclosure to this linear settlement, notably the High Street.

4.6 There are notable pinch points travelling along High Street, notably between the Three Horseshoes public house and Rectory Farmhouse, where the enclosure is formed by the building frontages.
This shows the pinch point on the High Street adjacent to the Three Horseshoes public house.

4.7 The second pinch point being adjacent to the Manor House being enclosed by the high stone walls, running through to the open junction with Barton Fields off and wider road beyond.

4.8 This sense of enclosure only reduces to the southern edge of the village and the drop down into the rural valley, where the road immediately adjacent to the village is lined with mature hedges and deciduous trees.

4.9 To the northern end of the High Street the sense of enclosure is replaced with the open space of the low level walling bounding the play area, to the north of the war memorial. The views into and out of the village show a different character to this end of the village with the modern largely bungalow development to the east.
This shows the view South along High Street, note the high stone walls to the road edge and simple cottages opening directly onto the footpath.

4.10 The sense of visual and physical enclosure is restricted to the High Street, with the access roads, radiating away from High Street, opening onto the open farm land and pastural fields on the slopes of the Nene valley to the South and West and the open parkland of Ecton Hall to the East.

4.11 The character of West Street is more irregular than that of High Street, with more detached properties set in private gardens, set back from the road frontage, behind front gardens. The majority of properties to the east side of the street, have been orientated with the front elevations, at a slight angle to the road edge, which creates a more open vista to the street scene.

Trees, hedges and open space

4.12 The significant publicly accessible open and green spaces within the study area are as follows:-

1. The Churchyard of St Mary Magdalene off Church Way adjacent to the entrance drive to Ecton Hall contains a mix of mature deciduous and coniferous tree species.
2. At the junction of High Street and Barton Fields there is an avenue of lime trees and other trees, creating a visual amenity, which soften the impact of the enclosed built form of the village centre.

3. The children’s play area to the north of the village, at the junction of Northampton Road, Wellingborough Road and the High Street, is accessible to the public, it contains a mix of deciduous trees to its boundaries, contributing with the trees situated within the grounds of The Worlds End, to the visual amenity, softening the built form of the village, naturally forming breaks in the streetscape and the roof lines.

4. The immediate area around Ecton Hall comprises of a number of properties set in substantial grounds, with mature trees as boundary screening and further areas of woodland to the north and east, although not accessible to the public, they contribute to the visual amenity.
This shows the parish church, surrounded with the mature trees in the isolated open space of the churchyard and adjacent Ecton Hall.

4.13 To the southern end of the village as High Street runs down the valley slopes, the road is once again enclosed, yet this time by a mix of mature deciduous trees and shrubs to the field and road boundaries, creating a visual amenity and a clear exit from the built environment into the natural environment.

4.14 Within the study area there are two other significant open spaces, that of the allotments to the east of the High Street, and the former cricket ground to the west, both are situated away from the through road, with no clear views from the High Street, although both offer different outward views.
4.15 The former cricket ground offers outward views to the south and west across the valley slopes and the fields beyond its boundaries, with the allotments providing views to the east and demonstrate a gentle break away from the built environment through the temporary buildings to the natural environment beyond.

4.16 Although not largely accessible to the public the considered planting of bushes and mature trees across the grounds and to the periphery of Ecton Hall have formed a soft natural edge to the east of the village, framing the village, whilst highlighting the distinction between the softness of the natural environment, with that of the built environment.

Scaling and massing

4.17 Ecton is a semi rural village, which comprises residential properties, predominantly of traditional vernacular architectural design of two or two and a half storey height, rectilinear on footprint with longer front elevations facing onto the road edge.

4.18 There are a number of houses and cottages with the shorter gable elevations facing onto the road edge.

4.19 This arrangement defines the character of the village, that being largely comparable residential units, houses and cottages, with similar height roofs, ridge and eaves line, creating a sense of uniformity throughout the core of the village.

4.20 The larger properties, in terms of both their original status and overall size are located to the outer edge of the core of the village, generally to the east, clustered around the parish church and the Hall.

4.21 These properties are of two and a half and three storey, set in more substantial enclosed private grounds, away from the through road, off more private service roads.

4.22 This creates a more open character of this section of the village from the sense of enclosure created by the smaller cottages to the High Street.
Views

4.23 Ecton village is situated at the ridge of the Nene valley, with largely open fields to the south, west and east, with open views into and out of the village.

4.24 The views to the west from West Street across the open fields enhance the rural character of the village and its proximity yet isolation from the large neighbouring settlement of Northampton, clearly visible in the distance.

4.25 Views to the north are quickly terminated by the slightly rising ground beyond the A4500.

4.26 The views to the south across the open fields of the Nene valley from the western side of the village, with the views to the south from the eastern side of the village, are predominantly across the open parkland immediately adjacent to the Hall, onto the open fields down the valley slopes beyond.

4.27 Views to the east consist of the informal parkland of Ecton Hall, with its irregular shaped mounds and ponds, scattered copses and undulating natural topography. The views from this open parkland into the rear and more formal gardens of the Hall are a simple pleasure, which add to the character of the immediate area and reinforce the historic and social connection or disconnection between the village and the Hall.

4.28 The “eye” symbol indicates viewing points for important views into and out of the conservation area, including the Hall and parish church, which should be given consideration in light of planning applications for new development within or immediately surrounding the village.
This shows a glimpsed view of the 15th Century church tower, beyond the car park of the Three Horseshoes public house.

5 Architectural Analysis

Building age, type and style

5.1 The key feature of Ecton is the linear arrangement of the village, focused along the length of High Street, defined by its high local lias stone walling, with glimpsed views of deciduous trees, softening the edges. The walling creates a strong and visual sense of enclosure along High Street.

5.2 The arrangement of the properties throughout the High Street is predominantly front elevation facing onto the footpath, with no front garden space, opening directly onto the footpath, which increases the overall sense of enclosure along the road.
5.3 There are a number of larger properties set in their own grounds, such as the Manor House and the Grange, which form an integral part of the street scene owing to the high stone boundary walls, which maintain the sense of enclosure, yet feature soft landscaping in the form of mature deciduous trees overhanging or rising above the top of the walls, softening the edges, creating a welcome intrusion of vegetation into the street scene.

5.4 The examples of polite architecture within the village, Rectory House (Ecton House), Ecton Hall and the parish Church are all located in close proximity to each other to the north east of the High Street, forming a unique parcel of land within the village.

Materials

5.5 Common materials and features of special architectural or historic interest visible from the street include the following, with typical examples highlighted in brackets:-

Walling

5.6 Square or coursed lias, largely Mears Ashby stone and “Pendle” stone, distinctly cross-bedded, sandstone, ironstone, limestone, honey golden brown coloured stone.

5.7 Occasional red stock brick, smooth rendered and painted render and painted brickwork.

5.8 Features include, simple stone square lintels over window and door openings
This shows the predominant front elevation facing onto the road, along with the narrow street giving the sense of enclosure. Note simple parapetted gables and multi pane timber casement windows.

**Brick chimneys**

5.9 Predominantly the chimneys are ridge and gable constructed in brick, largely plain, some with projecting upper courses. Clay chimney pots.

**Roofing**

5.10 Longstraw thatch and natural slate, including plain and Double Roman tile. Stone coped parapet walls with kneelers.

5.11 Thatch, block cut ridges complete with decorative liggers and eyebrow dormer window detailing.

**Windows**

5.12 Painted timber flush casement windows, some with features comprising the top light sub divided into multiple panes, three over three, with lower light comprising of a single pane, such as 47 High Street.
5.13 Painted timber sliding sash windows.

5.14 Simple square section stone or painted timber lintels over, with plain tile cills.

Doors

5.15 Ledged and braced vertical plank and tongued and grooved doors, white painted.

Miscellaneous features

5.16 Gates are a feature within the central core of the village, allied with the masonry walling, defining the linear arrangement of the village. The gates being a mix of traditional wrought iron or steel, (Bakehouse cottage, High Street), which relate to the longstanding traditional skill of blacksmithing within the village, or simple vertical planked timber gates.

5.17 Dormer windows: eyebrow dormers, wallplate, to thatched cottages, flat roofed dormers to (Ecton Hall development), hipped dormers to purlin position.

5.18 Gabled dormers to purlin (Three Horseshoes)

Free standing walling

5.19 The village walling comprises of walling in excess of 1.80m around the centre of the village with lower walling approximately 1.20m to the north, adjacent to the A4500.

5.20 Largely high stone walling, (High Street) in excess of 1.80m, complete with simple semi circular domed mortar capping or dinosaur back or cock and hen vertical stone capping.
This shows the view from Ecton Hall gate piers looking west towards the High Street. Clearly showing the local stone walls and the softening impact of the mature trees.

This is a typical example of the dinosaur back stone copping to the local stone walling throughout the village. This being a low level wall to Wellingborough Road, near to the Worlds End public house.

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5.21 There is the occasional brick wall, red stock brickwork, lime mortar pointing, notably to West Street properties and the link alley between West Street and High Street.

**Significant feature**

5.22 Niches recessed into stone walls, with semi circular heads, edged with red stock bricks, indicating location of first water taps in the village. These are locally historically significant, indicating an important development in the industrial and social developments within the village.

This shows one of the brick edged niches which were the locations across the village of the first water taps.

5.23 The war memorial, locally referred to as The Shrine is situated at the head of the High Street, at the junction with Wellingborough Road. Constructed in local stone, set under a dual pitched roof, complete with iron gates, is typical of the vernacular architecture of the village. The shrine, erected in 1917, to honour the eighty four men who went to war in 1914. The Shrine is locally historically significant, an important focal point for the village to remember their contribution to the first World War.
Positive Buildings

5.24 Positive buildings are those heritage assets that have or can be considered to have a positive impact upon the conservation area, these buildings include Listed Buildings and other buildings of note.

5.25 Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area (see Map), commonly feature:

- Squared and regular coursed lias, limestone, ironstone, with ashlar dressings on the higher status buildings.
- Ashlar gable parapets, with and without kneelers.
- Chimney stacks generally brick or stone or a combination, located at ridge and gable end.
- Timber flush casement windows, multi pane lights
- Timber sliding sash to Ecton Hall

5.26 The listed buildings in Ecton are largely focussed along the central core, High Street, with the notable exceptions being the parish church St Mary Magdalene, Grade I, Ecton Hall, dated 1756, Grade II* and the Rectory (Ecton House) dated 1693, Grade II, which are situated to the east of the main High Street, clustered around the church and the Hall.

5.27 The Worlds End public house, dated 1765, Grade II, is also isolated from the remaining listed buildings, being currently outside the conservation area situated to the northern most edge of the village.

Other buildings of note

5.28 The majority of the remaining built fabric within the designated area, that fronts the street or is visible from it, have been identified as buildings of note, as shown on the map. These buildings are mainly 18th and 19th century in date, constructed of local lias stone, painted or unpainted brickwork and with slate roofing.

5.29 Although not currently capable of being considered for statutory listing, they are considered as examples of good quality vernacular architecture, which when take with the listed buildings and their settings, serve to create the strong sense of character of the conservation area and the built form of the village.

5.30 Notably the creation and formation of the high walling and narrow pinch points of the High Street, which forms a significant part of the character of this linear village.
6 Boundary Justification

6.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to designate as conservation areas any “areas of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

6.2 As such it is the quality of the area as a whole rather than the individual buildings which should be of prime consideration in identifying and protecting conservation areas. It is important that areas which lack special interest are not included, so as not to devalue the overall designated area.

6.3 The current conservation area is curtailed to its northern boundary by the open space adjacent to the war memorial, the junction of High Street and Wellingborough Road.

6.4 The proposal is to extend the northern boundary to include the children’s playground behind the war memorial, the primary school and grounds and The World’s End public house and grounds.

6.5 This extension creates and maintains the traditional entrances into the village and reinforces the quality not only of these buildings, but of their grounds and boundary treatments as a fundamental part of the character of Ecton. This ensures that any development in this area positively contributes to the village, whilst retaining the existing high quality buildings, open spaces and boundary treatments.
This shows the wider street scene to the north of the village.

**East Boundary**

6.6 The current conservation area is curtailed to its eastern boundary by the immediate surrounding to Ecton Hall.

6.7 The proposal is to extend the eastern boundary beyond Ecton Hall to include the whole of the courtyard of the Hall, the old woodland (The Wilderness) and the old walled garden, including the boundary walls.

6.8 This extension creates and maintains the traditional country estate buildings, woodland, parkland and associated grounds which positively contribute to the estate, Hall and village as a whole, which is a fundamental part of the character of Ecton.

6.9 This ensures that any development in this area, which is on the outer edge of the village, positively contributes to the village and to its social and architectural history, whilst retaining the existing high quality buildings, open spaces and boundary treatments.
7 Management Plan

7.1 Designation of a Conservation Area also necessitates the completion of a management plan, the aim of which being to maintain and improve the appearance and character of the area.

1. Sensitive new development in the conservation area.

7.2 To be successful, any new development within the conservation area needs to be considerate of the local character of the area, providing a positive and appropriate contribution to the area, whilst ensuring 21st Century living standards and sustainability.

7.3 Successful new development should:-

- Sit happily in the pattern of the existing development and routes through it.
- Relate to the local character, geography and history.
- Respect important views.
- Respect the scale and massing of existing buildings.
- Use building materials and methods to respect the existing development and immediate surroundings.
- Enhance and create new views with considered and appropriate siting and orientation of new development.

1. New development must respond sensitively and creatively to the historic environment.

Action

By the protection of surviving historic architectural forms.

7.4 The result of no protection of historic architectural forms, will be the dilution, over time, of the inherent character and aesthetic attraction of the settlement.
7.5 As an example, the replacement of traditional windows, roofing materials, with inappropriate designs and materials will have a detrimental impact on the individual buildings and the wider area. Owners of historic buildings should be encouraged to resist the use of non traditional modern materials for replacements and maintain the use of traditional materials.

7.6 Materials such as UPVC and concrete roofing tiles are out of character in a conservation area and their use will be discouraged and removal supported.

7.7 Historic buildings can be defined as those buildings within the conservation area, having a positive impact on the village, including Listed Buildings and other buildings of note.

2. Boundary walls

Action

7.8 Boundary walls are a significant factor in the sense of enclosure and character of Ecton and any new boundary walls should be constructed in suitable stone and brick, where appropriate, to be of a height, scale, mass and coursing to fit well with the existing walls.

7.9 Boundary walls which make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area will be retained. Any development in and around Ecton should take careful consideration of the boundary treatments and any new boundary treatments should be appropriate to the inherent character of the conservation area and that of the adjacent walls.

3. Development affecting the setting of the conservation area

Action

7.10 It is important that development surrounding the conservation area does not harm its setting. Any development around Ecton should take careful consideration of the views into and out of the conservation area, including the setting of the positive buildings and the overall character of the surrounding landscape.
7.11 Appropriate and considered design and materials should be used in development adjacent to the conservation area.

7.12 Positive buildings are those heritage assets that have or can be considered to have a positive impact upon the conservation area, these buildings include Listed Buildings and Other buildings of note.

This shows the open character of the northern end of the village and the current positive impact of the School House and associated walling to this area.