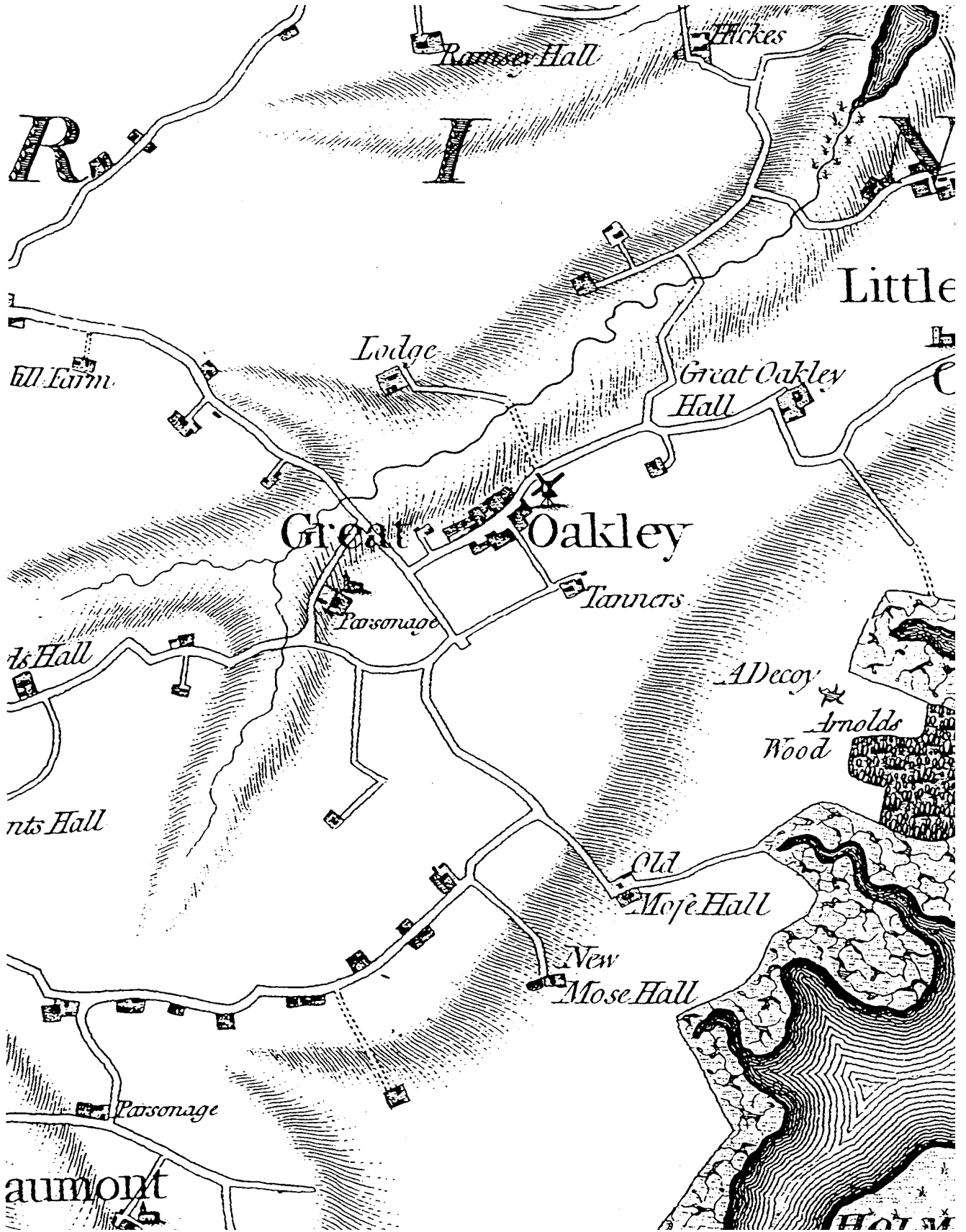




# Great Oakley Conservation Area



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This Conservation Area Character Appraisal has been produced by the District Council but is based on earlier work by consultants Smith Stuart Reynolds in 2001. These earlier documents contain the views of the consultant and did not necessarily reflect the Council's Officer's views. Although these documents have existed for some time they had no formal, planning status.

The Council subsequently agreed in 2005 to prepare Conservation Area Character Appraisals for each of its Conservation Areas and as a forerunner to updating the above consultant's documents a consultation exercise took place in late 2005/early 2006. This involved town and parish councils and certain local amenity bodies. The results of the consultation exercise were reported to the Council's Planning Portfolio Holder when the document was formally considered for adoption as Council planning policy. As a result of this consultation the Appraisal documents have been amended and updated in the light of the comments received from consultees and as a result of certain changes which have taken place since 2001. Much of the descriptive material used in the original SSR documents has been retained.

Proposals originally put forward by the Consultant involving suggested changes to Conservation Area boundaries, enhancement works or proposed Article 4 Directions have been retained in these latest documents. However, it is recognised that town or parish councils do not support some of these suggestions and this is referred to in the appropriate document. Their inclusion in the documents as suggestions only does not indicate that the District Council supports such proposals at this time. They will be subject to further consideration by the Council in due course. Indeed all such proposals for boundary changes, and any new Article 4 Directions will be required to go through quite separate, statutory processes which will also be carried out with further public consultation.

This document has been formally adopted by the Council as part of its planning policies for this conservation area under the provisions of Section 71 of the Planning [Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas] Act 1990. It will therefore be an important material consideration in relation to the assessment and determination of planning and related applications in the Conservation Area.

### **SUMMARY**

**Great Oakley Conservation Area is essentially a tightly knit pattern of vernacular houses grouped around the small scale road network developed parallel and to the south of the main road. With a few exceptions the houses rise directly from the carriageway, adding to the contrasting formal character of the two small squares that remain from the original medieval street.**

## Great Oakley Conservation Area

### **LOCATION**

Great Oakley stands astride the B1414 between Thorpe-le-Soken and Harwich. It occupies a ridge in rolling countryside between the Ramsey Creek to the north and Hamford Water to the southeast. While the village is now a considerable ribbon of development along the main road, the Conservation Area occupies the historic core of the village towards the southwestern end.

### **DEVELOPMENT HISTORY**

Chapman and Andre's Essex map of 1777 shows the village as a relatively tight nucleus around an elongated market square. A slight projection into the square on the south side may correspond with Armond House

and Larch House, substantial listed buildings. Much of the square has, however, been infilled in more recent years, and Back Lane developed in a parallel fashion to the rear. What seems at first sight to be a linear village on either side of the High Street turns out to be much more complex in development and spacial terms.

## **CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARIES**

The Area is focussed on the High Street between the surgery at the north eastern end and cottages to the south west of Essex House. It takes in Back Lane and virtually all properties on Farm Road, including the new housing development to the rear of Maltings Farm.

## **REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN POLICY CONTEXT**

The Conservation Area is centrally located and falls mainly within the defined Development Boundary. The Development Boundary is only exceeded on the north west edge where the Area expands into the surrounding countryside, and also in the north east, where the boundary projects slightly beyond that Boundary. The open countryside to the south is part of the Coastal Protection Belt.

## **AREA APPRAISAL**

### ***High Street***

The approach from the south west is lined to the south east by uninspiring houses and bungalows, and on the north west by a group of modern detached houses in vernacular style. The Area begins on the north western side with Greenacre and its neighbour, a relatively modern pair of houses finished in brick with a rendered gable. Next to this is Oakley Garage Services, a utilitarian frontage which leads to the first significant group. Forge Cottage, of two storeys with rough rendered walls, replacement windows and concrete roof tiles, stands next to an attractive pair of brick-built cottages, of two-and-a-half storeys with dormers in a steeply pitched clay tiled roof. Windows have been altered, and the dormer to No.2 (Vine Cottage) is of an unsuitable design. Boundary treatments to the narrow front gardens are varied and not particularly appealing. The greatest loss is the infilling of the ground floor window of No.1 in a way which cuts across the existing attractive segmental brick windowhead.

Opposite are Apple Tree Cottage, No.2 and Oaklands, a group of one-and-a-half storey cottages with rendered walls, part of which is thatched. The well-stocked gardens with their significant hedge frontages make an effective entrance to the Conservation Area.

The former square survives as two separate smaller square areas at either end of Back Lane. The first of these squares begins opposite Stafford House, dated 1990 in the gable, and a rather busy interpretation of East Anglian vernacular. A single storey building with an old brick chimney leads to Essex House (Listed Grade II), of which the most interesting feature is a fine Georgian shop front with a main entrance set between two bay windows. A personnel door to the side has a boldy -projecting hood on console brackets. Above this is a pebble-dashed façade with brick copings, obviously re-worked and with modern small-paned casement windows.

The former Post Office makes a rather strange group with Colley Cottage, with its re-worked rendered façade, modern windows and a gambrel roof, and Oakleigh, a late Victorian building of brick with a slate roof. Beyond this is a one-and-a-half storey weatherboarded cottage undergoing renovation at the time of survey. The frontage to the High Street was unkempt but hopefully will be sorted out as part of the proposals. A rather overgrown footpath leads northwards between grassed paddocks to open countryside with an extensive view.

Beyond again is Holly Trees, a pretty gambrel roofed two-and-a-half storey cottage with rendered and pebble-dashed walls and with small-paned windows in timber surrounds. It has an appealing modern side extension in weatherboarding with a clay tiled roof. A low rendered front wall with brick capping is topped by a holly hedge. There is a splendid variegated holly in the front garden.

To the side of Holly Trees is a Methodist Church with an associated cottage. The original church is two storeys, with rendered walls under a hipped slate roof. A forward extension with a red brick gable is the most prominent feature from the street and is rather utilitarian in appearance. The cottage is an attractive brick building, of two

storeys with small-paned casement windows and a tall central stack. All are set some distance back from the highway edge behind a grassed area with a prominent willow tree bounded by concrete posts. This frontage treatment is a disappointment in the circumstances, as is the blank vertical lapped fencing of the adjacent curtilage, particularly as they stand opposite the second and larger remnant of the former square. This contains the War Memorial and is given additional formality by cast iron bollards and decorative lamp standards.

Between the two remnants of the square stands the island block. This is only one property deep, and is bisected by a small pedestrian alleyway. At the south western end is Whispers, probably a timber-framed house recast in brick with small paned sash windows and a clay tiled roof. Its heavily-planted garden is a significant factor in the approach to the village from the south west and to the character of both the High Street and Queen Street.. Beyond the alleyway is Cambria House, its double-tile plan filling the depth of the block and finished in colour-washed render under clay tiled roofs. Part of this building, known as Oakwood, faces the pedestrian alleyway and is notable for its unhappy modern window replacements. Its relatively overgrown garden is another important contrasting element both adjacent streets. At the north eastern end is Jessica, of unusual design, with a bold quadrant outer corner which was presumably a former entrance to commercial premises.

Continuing along the High Street, beyond unkempt ground screened by the close-boarded fencing there is a new frontage development where brick, tile hanging, white render and black stained weatherboarding are used with general success. The unrelieved plain eaves detail of the frontage is a little insistent in this context. Beyond these is Three Cups, a former pub and a rather forbidding Victorian building of red brick with plain white rendered gables under a slate roof. A well stocked garden leads on to the surgery, a two-storey house of red brick with white brick dressings under a hipped slate roof with prominent original chimney stacks.

Opposite, on the south eastern side of the High Street, the edge of the Area is clearly defined by the start of nondescript post-war housing developments. Immediately inside the Area, however, is Mill House, a lovely vernacular building of two-storeys, with sash windows in timber surrounds within smooth rendered walls under a clay tiled roof. There are two attractive timber door cases, and the character of the house is enhanced by its low front brick wall with semicircular copings. A copper beech makes an important gateway feature for this end of the Area. Beyond a listed K6 telephone box stands the most consistently developed frontage in the village. Apart from No.6, a diminutive cottage with a gambrel roof, all the properties rise from the back of the pavement and have roofs parallel to the main road. The first group are Mill House Cottages, a pretty brick-built range with small-paned sash windows in arched openings, and slate roofs. Beyond No.6, there are two sets of paired cottages, all of brick with attractive details and including a newsagent and stores with a pretty window and fascia detail. The remaining group have steeply-pitched roofs clad in clay tiles, and are all older and faced in colourwashed render. Glebe Cottage is perhaps the prettiest of the group, with white rendered walls and a parapet gable. There is an intriguing view past the gable of Glebe Cottage to another vernacular cottage behind, in white pebbledash. The Red House, in a state of exterior disrepair, is pivotal in turning the corner from High Street into Farm Road.

### ***Queen Street***

Queen Street connects the two remnants of the square behind the island block. The larger square surrounding the War Memorial is dominated by Larch House, a splendid vernacular design with an imposing door and door case, small-paned sashes in timber surrounds, a rendered façade in Suffolk pink under cups a prominent gambrel roof with a decorative chimney. The plastered eaves detail is similar to that used at Oakley House in Thorpe-le-Soken. Next to this is Almond House and Petts, created out of a pair of vernacular properties with rendered and weatherboarded walls and a spreading roof of clay tiles.

Queen Street snakes narrowly past the projecting gable of Petts past a *fatsia japonica* unusually prominent in the street scene, and alongside Zigzag Cottage, another vernacular property of one-and-a-half storeys with a clay tiled roof and pebble-dashed walls. Beyond a vacant plot, 1 Queen Street is a tall house, also originally of vernacular origin though its facings and windows are now entirely modern. Plain Cottage and Romaric share a pantiled roof and picket fencing to short front gardens, but apart from that their details differ. Romaric is a fine façade, with a beautifully detailed and preserved front door and door case and small-paned sash windows in timber surrounds.

Next to the junction with Back Lane, Angel Cottage is again of one-and-a-half storeys under a gambrel roof. It has a small formal laid out small front garden with a brick paved path leading through a low frontage wall. A projecting ground floor extension to the side is rather clumsily detailed but provides a strong entrance feature to Back Lane.

### ***Back Lane***

Angel Cottage has a tall rear extension, and Back Lane is well defined by a tall brick wall, an attractive garage in dark stained weatherboarding, and the diminutive bulk of Florence Cottage, also weatherboarded with a gambrel roof. Development to the south of Florence Cottage is generally of unexceptional post-war bungalows though in mainly attractive settings.

Homeleigh, on the corner, is a bungalow of immediately post-war construction and fills the view effectively on entering Back Lane. Its white painted picket fence defines the corner with the clipped hedge of Florence Cottage, beyond which front boundaries generally disappear in a welter of varied surface treatments, some of which are poorly maintained. Small vernacular cottages such as Sumner's Cottage are either parallel to or gable end to Back Lane; modern developments share the same dispositions, but tend to be placed a little back from the road and, rather surprisingly, in this generally small-scale context, all are of two full storeys with no use being made of dormers. Farmdale is the crudest of the modern designs, with too much unrelieved cream render. Honeypot Cottage is a more recent improvement, with weather-boarded façades over a brick plinth. Wesbroom Villas is a particularly attractive modern re-working of an earlier style.

Beyond this is a relatively pinch-point formed between a renovated cottage and the buttressed rear brick garden wall of houses on the square. The slight rendered gable of Maybush Cottage on Farm Road fills the vista at this point. Back Lane emerges onto Farm Road between Kimberleigh, an unexciting bungalow set behind a frontage wall of concrete blocks, and another new property, this time with dormer windows in a gambrel roof of plain clay tiles.

### ***Farm Road***

Turning into Farm Road, the Maybush Inn is of vernacular construction though its front façade has been re-worked with panels of pink render separated by courses and vertical strips of orange bricks and tiles. On the other side of Maybush Cottage is the access drive, laid out in concrete pavers and shingle, to a distinctive modern development of detached houses with walls of brick, pebble-dash and weather-boarding, and other local features. This is next to and partly behind Maltings Farm, originally a splendid timber framed house with hall and two crosswings. The elevations are now pebble-dashed, with Victorian sashes in timber surrounds.

Beyond a splendid and preserved oak tree stands a group of three small cottages. The first, Dormer Cottage, has been entirely re-worked and has modern facings. Further along the road frontage is a small cottage clad in brown-stained weatherboarding, with a substantial central chimney stack, decorative terracotta finials and attractive barge boards. Between these, and set back at an angle from the road, is Old Scantlings which is timber framed, listed, with a thatched roof, this is currently a Building at Risk in need of repair and renovation. Rayners Cottage, the last house in the area down Farm Road, is also thatched, but is set well back behind a front garden well stocked with mature trees and fronted by a wall of rendered panels between brick piers. Farm Road continues between mature hedgerows without any real view across open countryside. Opposite these properties is the bungalow Mallards, and the yard of Deex and Sons. The yard is relatively open and paved in-situ concrete. There is a maturing walnut tree on the frontage, though the remaining part of the frontage has only wire fencing and this could be improved. Beyond this is a house and a bungalow of post-war date and of no visual or historic significance. Their front boundaries appear to be the old farm hedgerows and are attractive in this respect.

## **APPRAISAL PLAN**

The above analysis has been used to generate Maps 1 and 2, indicating the essential structure of the Conservation Area and its relative quality. Included in Map 2 are features regarded as either negative or neutral compared to the character and appearance of the Area, as follows.

### ***Negative factors***

#### **Farm Road**

There are a number of relatively modern properties on Farm Road that can be regarded as negative factors because they are in prominent positions and do not reflect the spatial qualities of the remainder of the Area. In this category come Kimberleigh on the corner with Back Lane and the two post-war houses to the south of Deex and Sons' yard.

Deex and Sons yard with the bungalow "Mallards" must strictly be considered as negative features for the same

reason. It must however be stated that it is difficult to see how some essential rural businesses might be carried on without a notional deficit in visual terms.

#### *Neutral factors*

The site of four small cottages on the north side of the High Street opposite the junction with Farm Road is a neutral feature as it remained undeveloped at the time of survey, forming an unwelcome gap in an otherwise continuous frontage.

In similar vein, the empty site on the south side of Zigzag Cottage in Queen Street needs some resolution as it is a neutral feature in the Area in its present state.

### **SUGGESTED ENHANCEMENTS: BUILDINGS**

#### General

In contrast to many other historic settlements in the District, buildings in Great Oakley have generally retained their original fenestration. It is thus worthwhile in this instance to suggest the restoration of these features where they have been lost, and to single out Oakwood and Vine Cottage with its neighbour as particular examples where this action would be a demonstrable improvement.

### **SUGGESTED ENHANCEMENTS: CURTILAGES**

#### Oakwood

The small front garden to Oakwood is an important feature of the island block between High Street and Queen Street. Its boundary treatments are in a poor state of repair, particularly the brick wall which may be affected by road salt. The small alleyway leading between High Street and Queen Street is less attractive as a result.

#### Methodist Church

The church with its associated cottage is an interesting grouping. However, its front courtyard lacks a proper boundary to High Street, and its layout is rather indeterminate. A scheme to strengthen the road frontage in visual terms and reorganise the courtyard would be an improvement.

#### Deex and Sons Yard

This yard has a relatively open frontage to Farm Road, softened by a prominent mature tree. Any additional planting or screening would enhance the Area as a whole as well as the setting of Maltings Farm and Old Scantlings as listed buildings.

### **SUGGESTED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS**

#### General

Such is the charm of the squares and the back streets of Great Oakley that it is considered feasible to suggest repaving these road surfaces in a suitable unit paving as a long term aim. Edge detailing in Back Lane and Queen Street would require particularly careful consideration to relate to buildings and open frontages.

#### High Street

The main road through the Area has been laid for some time and is now quite heavily patched. Added to the effect arising from the volume of traffic, its slightly decrepit condition further detracts from the situation of the interesting and potentially attractive buildings lining this main thoroughfare. Its layout reflects the requirements of vehicular traffic and is at odds with the character of the historic centre of the village. Reconsideration of pavement surfaces to improve the attractiveness of the street, and of kerblines on traffic calming principles, might be of benefit to the character and appearance of the Area.

## **BOUNDARY REVIEW**

As currently designated, the Area includes some properties on its fringes which are of questionable value in historic terms.

*The surgery* at the northern tip of the Area involves a specific extension of the Area past post-war houses of no historic interest on the opposite side of the road. While the surgery is an historic building of some character, its detached status visually and conceptually removed from the strong street-frontage pattern of the rest of the Area makes it something of an anomaly.

*Greenacre* and its neighbour at the other end of the High Street similarly sit in an extension of the Area. They are pleasant properties but of no great merit, and it is difficult to see why they should be specifically included in the Area.

*The southern boundary* of the Area is formed by a number of unassuming post-war houses, including those south of Deex and Sons' yard on Farm Road and the small cul-de-sac of properties reached from the south west corner of Back Lane. This makes a relatively straightforward boundary which coincides with the developed edge of the village to the west of Farm Road, while a modern property is left outside the Area on the other side. Justification might be argued for the inclusion of this location because of potential redevelopment of the yard and the extensive plots to the south. The settings of Maltings Farm and Old Scantlings must be given their due weight under existing legislation, however, and there would be nothing contentious about the demolition of any building in the areas under consideration so as to justify conservation area status.

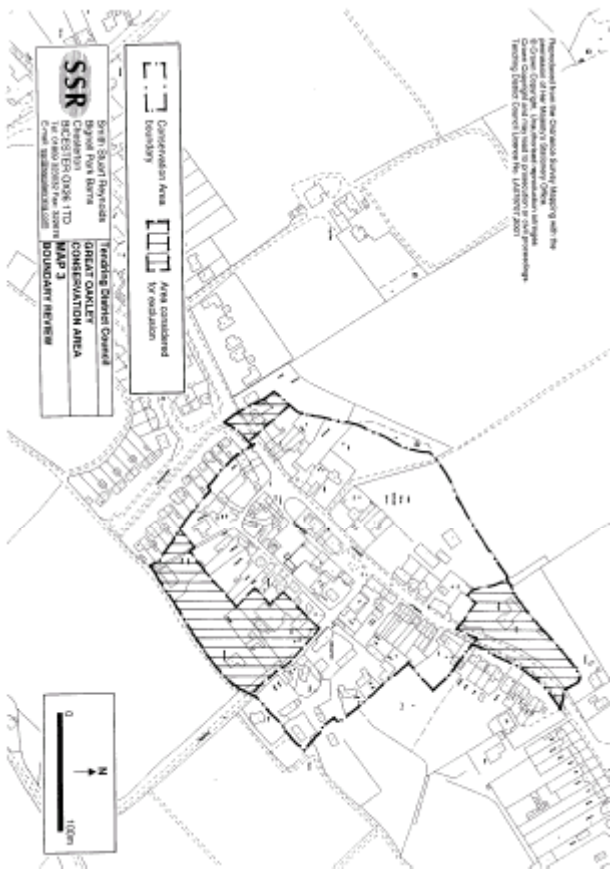
Turning to the short cul-de-sac off Back Lane, the nearer houses and their well-stocked gardens have a positive effect on the character of this end of Back Lane and are part of the setting of Florence Cottage. The southernmost house is divorced from these considerations, however, and might well be considered for exclusion.

Some suggested changes to the Conservation Area boundary were put forward by the Consultant SSR in part of this Appraisal. However, this is not supported by the Parish Council and others.

Further consideration will be given to Conservation Area boundary changes in due course in the light of comments received and further consultations being carried out.









1. The High Street looking north eastwards, with the island block on the right. The strong visual effect created by the historic buildings lining the main road is diminished by the corridor-like appearance of the High Street. Improvements could be considered to the surface both of the carriageway and the footpath.



2. The north eastern square is framed by historic buildings, most notably Larch House in the centre of the photograph. It is given additional formality by the War Memorial and the paved surround with small bollards.



3. Queen Street, looking south westwards behind the island block. Essential to the character of the Area are the vernacular houses with their attractive detailing, the narrowness and informality of the carriageway, and glimpses through to other buildings. All of these elements are softened by incidental planting.



4. The central section of Back Lane has been the subject of some redevelopment in recent years. Farmdale, pictured here, is of simple design though it lacks the character of its older neighbours. The precise boundary between public carriageway and private forecourts requires further consideration.



5. Mill House probably dates from 18<sup>th</sup> century, and forms a splendid entrance to the village from the north east. The low front boundary wall and the mature trees are important elements in the street scene.



6. Vine Cottage and its neighbour are attractive vernacular buildings at the south western end of the Area. Both have been the subject of minor alterations which affect their historic character: Readily apparent are the modern dormer to the Vine Cottage and the modern windows to No 1.



7. The former Three Cups public house provides the effective termination of the closely developed part of the High Street. This severe building is none- the- less an important relic of the development of the village of a whole.



8. This tiny cottage stands near the southern entrance to the Area along Farm Road. It is another example of the intrinsic attractiveness of vernacular architecture where facing materials are chosen from a limited palette.



9. The vacant plot in the centre of the Area, seen from Queen Street. Of significance are the simple detailing of visible buildings, and the importance of roof design and materials in this village setting.



10. The side elevation to Oakwood and its garden adjoin alleyway between High Street and Queen Street. Both the building fabric and the garden boundary require urgent consideration.



11. Mallards and the entrance to the yard of Deex and S. As they are included in the Area, they have to be assessed as detracting from its prevailing character. The gambrel-roofed house behind Mallards is a modern redevelopment at the corner of Back Lane.