Appendix I: The character of Wheatley

Wheatley 2019

1   Introduction

1.1   This appendix will attempt to describe the history and essential characteristics of the village of Wheatley together with Holton and thereby assist planning decisions with regard to the style of development that would complement the existing buildings.

2   Wheatley history and character

An Oxfordshire Village   *'Wheatley in the valley, Cuddesdon on the hill ...'* [1].

2.1   Seen from the east, a canopy of trees covers Shotover Hill. It is Wheatley's backcloth, but it seems also to shroud the village, leaving St Mary's spire standing proud as Wheatley's only visible landmark. A closer inspection from the north shows the windmill clearly visible on The Howe. Ladder Hill, the highest village vantage point, leads south to Cuddesdon along the former coffin road, through a skyline parade of poplars. The disused medieval road to Oxford across Shotover is hidden under the canopy of larches lining the road.

2.2   In Saxon times a ford crossed the Thame. A bridge bypassed the ford in the 12th century. One pointed arch of the medieval eight was preserved in the rebuilding of today's Wheatley Bridge in 1809. The river powered the mills at Cuddesdon and Holton until 1939. Eels were bred for Abingdon Abbey and later for Oxford's Covered Market. John Taylor, the 'Water Poet', noted in 1625 [2] how.........

'Under Wheatley Bridge Thame creeps, like a pilgrim all alone....

To hurl himself, Thame into Thames's arms, [at Dorchester]

The Thame river has been a moat and its bridge a barricade, at least twice. In 1642, Wheatley medieval bridge was provisionally agreed as a boundary point between the King in his Oxford capital and Parliament in London. One arch was cut, replaced by a drawbridge and the area heavily patrolled. The guard quartered on Wheatley. In 1940, during the Invasion Alert, the Bridge, part of the London-Birmingham road, was again guarded and blocked.

Figure 2.1 Wheatley Bridge, the remaining pointed arch of the medieval bridge can still be seen inside the reconstruction of 1809

Wheatley Bridge (just in Great Milton parish), brings the London Road across the Thame towards Shotover via the final 'Shortcut' of a 1920s' scheme to straighten the A40. Wheatley Urban District Council lined the southern side with "tudorbethan" style houses, neighbourly shared fronts and hoppers proud to record WUDC, 1927. A side-avenue of lime trees takes the housing project south. Lloyd George's promise of decent homes on prime land kept pace with Wheatley's increase in population from 966 prior to WW1 [3].

Figure 2.2 "Tudorbethan" style
house in The Avenue

Figure 2.3 Hopper used
for WUDC houses

2.3   London Road rises from its 'Cut' to Park Hill, passing the *King's Arms* fork where Church Road commenced the medieval route to Oxford, later turnpiked in 1719, over Shotover Hill. Upper London Rd took on the turnpike in 1789 paving a way to Oxford through Shotover Valley, which is now the A40. On Park Hill, Holloway Road crosses from Holton down the steep northern side of Wheatley valley. It is Wheatley's only north-south road. Old London Road, London Road, Crown Road, High Street and Church Road, not to mention the A40 and the M40, run E-W, all with eyes ultimately on London thereby shaping the linear village. Holloway Road connected the two ancient parishes of Holton and Cuddesdon long before Wheatley became a parish. At the bottom of the Wheatley valley, just where Air Quality is measured, Holloway Road crosses the High Street to climb the south side of the valley via Station Road and Ladder Hill along the old coffin-road past Coombe Wood to Cuddesdon, the former mother parish.

2.4   The railway, with its horseless carriages towed 'in train', extinguished the toll roads, conveyed the Mail and channelled the new telegraph cabling on poles. The railway also brought status. However, a century later, car ownership and the Beeching Act [4] closed it down, leaving broken bridges, severed embankments and Wheatley's dry, silent tunnel to shelter the bats.

2.5   There has been continuous habitation in the area since Roman times as overlapping Roman and Saxon estates with related burials attest. Stone and Iron Age settlements left their traces too. By the 10th century, Wheatley had long been part of a royal Saxon estate centred on Cuddesdon. [5, 6, 7]. King Edwy gave it to the Abingdon Benedictine Abbey which remained the local landlord for almost 600 years. Cuddesdon parish and its Wheatley chapelry grew up in that period and a thousand years of ridge-and-furrow management still shows clearly in Wheatley's meadow land.

Figure 2.4 View of ridge and furrow from
Wheatley Bridge looking south

2.6   Two 17th century parks adjoin Wheatley, as does an ancient warren and the village of Cuddesdon. Shotover Park, once part of the Royal Forest, lies to the northwest, and Holton

Park, famous for its Civil War role, to the north. The ancient woodland of Coombe Wood (a 'Park' in 1362), to the south, was given out of Shotover Forest by Henry I to Abingdon Abbey as a Warren. Its outline plan has not changed since. Cuddesdon, whose parish church once served Wheatley, has been home to an Anglican training college (now Ripon College) since 1856. Nearby is the site of the Bishop of Oxford's ill-fated palace, burned down in 1644 and again in 1969. Gaps between Wheatley buildings reveal the landmarks of an 18th century tower windmill and the spire of a 19th century parish church. The agricultural downland of Castle Hill and Bullsdown together with the fields west to Ladder Hill form the southern slope of *'Wheatley in the valley'*.

2.7   *'Cuddesdon on the hill'* tops the next valley south, where Cuddesdon Brook runs from Coombe Wood to the Thame. In AD 956, a Saxon king presented Cuddesdon royal estate (including Wheatley) to Abingdon Abbey and cited boundary marks still relevant to Holton, Wheatley and Cuddesdon parishes. Wheatley gardeners often find fossilised shellfish in their soil. Millions of years of moving water sculpted 'Wheatley valley'. Common Brook falls from Shotover, down Old Road and carves almost a "canyon" for the High Street (culverted in 1858). From High Street it crosses north-east under London Road and along a lesser "canyon" (Old London Road) to the Thame.

2.8   Wheatley was never a market town. It became a parish only in 1856. Just one owner-resident family, the Archdales, lived at the Manor House (1568 – 1648), long before the Hassalls settled in 1939 for sixty years. Lord Camoys, one of the three generals at Agincourt (1415) and the House's best known owner, recruited here, but never resided. The Archdales embellished it as their wider family grew wealthy in London and in the Ulster Plantation. After the Elizabethan religious settlement, the Archdales, the Bromes of Holton (and the Cursons of Waterperry) were noted for recusancy and for harbouring outlawed priests. St. Mary's church was completed in 1856, the spire being added twelve years afterwards, and with a new village designation of Wheatley Urban District (1894) Wheatley eventually grew out of its Cuddesdon shadow.

Figure 1.4 Cuddesdon on the Hill

Figure 2.5 Wheatley in the Valley

Holton

2.9   Holton Park, which the SODC's STRAT14 [8] designates as a strategic development site, was a medieval deer park with a moated keep that later became a house (named "Halleplace"). In 1646 the Parliamentarian general, Fairfax, conducted the final siege of Oxford from his requisitioned billet there. It was the home of Jane Whorwood, King Charles' secret agent. She did however give Fairfax and his wife hospitality when they were sick. Bridget Cromwell, daughter of Oliver, who was Fairfax's second in command at the time [9], married in Holton House on the first anniversary of the Battle of Naseby. The family of John Milton, poet and Parliamentarian, also lived locally around the mid-1500's when at least one member served at Holton Park. Between 1944-61 Holton Park hosted a US and then a British, Military Hospital. It was named *BMH Wheatley* lest service drivers mistake Holton for RAF <u>Halton</u> Hospital in Aylesbury. Holton Park has hosted a senior school for 70 years. Its many trees are remarkable for range, condition and age.

Holton affords a view of the Chilterns, despite the tower block of Oxford Brookes University. Vistas from Shotover and Cuddesdon include Brill, Aylesbury Vale, the Chilterns ridge, west Oxfordshire, north Bedfordshire and the north Wessex Downs. When the height of the ancient Holton Park Wall was threatened by a developer in 2017, local opinion rallied to its defence. It was valued in the same way as the ridge-and-furrow on the downland and by the Bridge, the sunset silhouettes of St Mary's spire, the King's Arms or poplars parading on Cuddesdon ridge (see Figure 2.4).

The Character of Wheatley

2.10   Wheatley's character is its landscape, its history and its community. It has welcomed and been enriched by newcomers who have quadrupled the population of the village since 1918. Like many villages in England its rural character has been diluted to some extent during the 20th century by changes in the population, community activities and proximity to the A40-M40 corridor. From medieval times the village focused on agriculture and quarrying which survived well into the beginning of the 20th century. Most of the houses were built from local stone giving the village a characteristic "feel". Mechanisation of farming practices coupled with the growth of the car based industrialisation in nearby Cowley resulted in the skills of the tradesmen changing and the population expanding to meet the needs of the burgeoning car production. As a result the village saw several stages of modern housing development not all of which can be seen, with hindsight, to have been well planned. Wheatley still retains an enviable Green Belt setting for a thriving community where the trees often soften and colour the lines of stone and brick buildings, like the lime trees along The Avenue's pavements, or the overhanging trees which camouflage the western ending of High Street.

2.11   Wheatley is situated where a geological fault brings an outcrop of coralline stone into close juxtaposition with heavy clay. Wheatley has grown on the dry stone and has avoided the neighbouring Kimmeridge   clay, a classical example of geological control. This unusual combination is reflected in the association of dry-stone walls and quickset hedges alongside the local architecture of stone walls and red tiled roofs and in sister industries of quarries and kilns. These have provided the stones notably for Merton College, Windsor Castle and houses

in Abingdon together with other colleges, castles and ecclesiastical buildings; and also bricks for North Oxford and Didcot.

3   Architectural Character

3.1   The special character of buildings in Wheatley Conservation Area [10] arises from the harmoniously balanced mixture of local limestone and locally produced warm red brick and tile. Welsh slates were introduced in the 19th century with the advent of the railway. Roofs are generally traditionally pitched. There are small cottages, terraces and individual larger dwellings in brick and/or stone reflecting the structure of society in the past.

3.2   The Wheatley conservation area (see Figure 3.1) was established on 12 December, 1989. It includes all the dwellings built in stone in the valley that form the spine of the village.
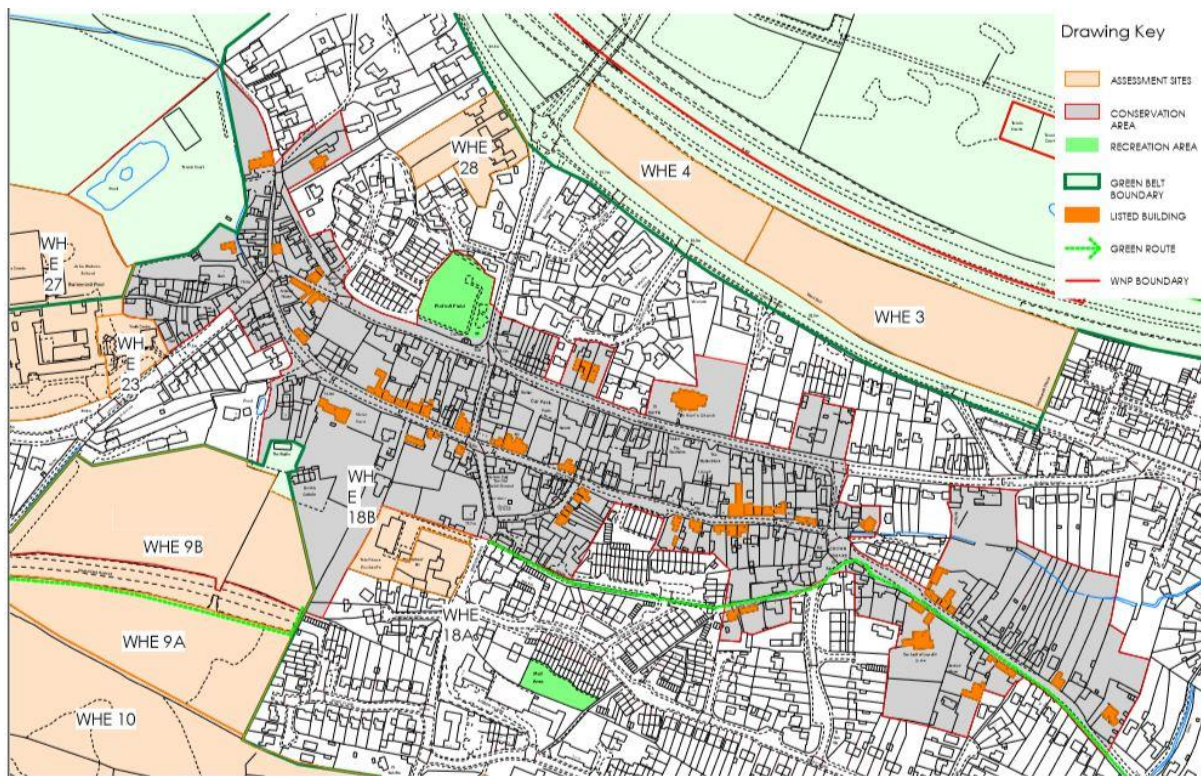

Figure 3.1 Wheatley conservation area [11]

3.3   With the history of the area it is not surprising that the villages of Wheatley and Holton have several Listed Buildings and buildings of historical significance. These are listed in Table 3.1.

Category of Listed Building	Wheatley	Holton
Grade I	Shotover House	St. Bartholomew's Church
Grade II*	The Manor House St. Mary's Church Rectory House	
Grade II	61 buildings	26 buildings
Listed in Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record [12]	22 buildings	19 buildings

Table 3.1 Listed buildings in Wheatley and Holton

3.4   As the village has expanded over the years the buildings have reflected the times in which they were built. Individual infill and replacement dwellings, although different, have added interest and variety without overwhelming the essential character of the place. More recently estate building has detracted from this character. For example the 1960 developments by the Pye Group, based on long uniform height terraces with white cladding, now seem completely out of place close to the centre of the village; the development at Howe Close with its low pitched roofs and buff brick somehow clashes with the surroundings as viewed from the top of Holloway Road and the development at Barlow Close with mono-pitch roofs seems to sit uncomfortably beside the road leading up to Shotover Park.

3.5   All new development should be designed to preserve or enhance the special character of Wheatley village, as described in paragraph 3.1, to prevent any further erosion of this character and to reinforce the identity of Wheatley as a place. This can be achieved by making appropriate choices for materials, mixing dwelling heights and configurations and using appropriate roof pitches, without being prescriptive about the style of dwellings.

4   Glossary

Conservation Area: An area designated by the District Council under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act 1990 [13]) as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. There are additional controls over demolition, minor developments and the felling of trees. The emphasis will be on careful control, positive management of change and positive enhancement, to enable the area to remain alive and prosperous, but at the same time to ensure that any new development accords with the area's special architectural or historic interest. Designation as a Conservation Area puts an onus on prospective developers to produce a very high standard of design which respects or enhances the particular qualities of the area in question.

5   References

1   Oxford Record Society, Wheatley Records 956 -1956, <u>35</u>, 5 (1956)
2   The Water Poet, J. Taylor (1632)
3   The National Census (2001, 2011), www.ons.gov.uk/census/census2011
4   Richard Beeching "The Reshaping of British Railways" HMSO.(1963)
5   Brit. Arch. Reports, "Cuddesdon and Dorchester", Tanya Dickinsin (1974)
6   "One More Millennium" see reference 12
7   "Roman and Saxon Wheatley", J. Fox (1995)
8   SODC Local Plan 2011 – 2034 Final Publication 2nd (2019), www.southoxon.gov.uk
9   "The King's Smuggler, Jane Whorwood, Charles I's Secret Agent", J.Fox, (2010)
10   Wheatley Conservation Area, http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/conservation-and-design/conservation-areas
11   Anderson Orr Architects, Church Road, Wheatley, OX33 1LZ
12   Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record, https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/historic-environment-record
13   Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act 1990, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990

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