

CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT FOR SHAFFORD MILL



January 2019



1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Civic Amenities Act 1967 empowered local planning authorities to make provision for the preservation and enhancement of areas of architectural and historic interest by designating them as conservation areas. Shafford Mill conservation area was designated on 31st July 1980.

1.2 Conservation should not be thought of solely as a process of preservation and an impediment to change. The designation of a conservation area represents an opportunity to formulate positive policies to improve and enhance its environmental quality and to ensure the successful integration of any development or redevelopment necessary for its continued success as a living and working community. The St Albans District Local Plan Review (adopted November 1994) sets out the general principles which will be observed when dealing with applications for new development and redevelopment (Policy 85 – “Development in Conservation Areas”).

1.3 The aims of this Character Statement are to show the way in which the form of the conservation area has evolved and to assess its present character; to indicate the principles to be adopted in considering planning applications in the area; and to form a framework within which more detailed proposals may be formulated.

2.0 Location and Setting

2.1 Shafford Mill Conservation Area is situated two miles north of St Albans and three miles south of Redbourn. The conservation area runs north to south and parallel to the Redbourn Road which connects the two towns. Shafford is situated in St Michael's Parish.

3.0 Origins and Development of the Settlement

3.1 Shafford Mill lies on the chalky, western upland area of Hertfordshire in the shallow, glaciated valley of the River Ver on the Chiltern Dip slope. The earliest suspected settlement of the area was in late prehistoric times. The existence of a late prehistoric farmstead is suspected 750m west of Childwickbury Manor where part of an embanked enclosure is visible on air photographs. This was succeeded by a Romano-British villa which is clearly visible on air photographs and which seems to be remarkably well-preserved, although no visible monuments remain relating to this or other periods within the conservation area. A trackway leading to the south-west presumably connected the villa to Watling Street, a key Roman road within the District. The surrounding area contains evidence for a widespread late prehistoric and later Roman landscape.

3.2 There is considerable archaeological evidence to show that this part of the south Chilterns, based on the river valleys of the Colne, Ver and Lea, has been extensively settled and farmed since the late Bronze Age *at least*. It is probable that the area continued in agricultural use throughout the Roman period in view of its close proximity to Verulamium.

3.3 Shafford is situated close to the point where Back Lane crossed the River Ver and joined Watling Street. The river is crossed by Bow Bridge which probably dates from the construction of the Redbourn Road in 1826. The fields immediately north-west of Shafford Farm are interesting as they are shown on a 1799 map when they appear to be remnants of two open fields divided into strips. The existing field boundaries therefore probably date back to the Middle Ages if not earlier.

3.4 The River Ver, prior to the extraction of water, was quite a considerable river and several water mills were situated on the stretch south of Redbourn before reaching St Albans including Shafford Mill. The present building dates from the early nineteenth century. It stopped operating in 1880.

3.5 Most people in the hamlet were employed in agriculture or were estate workers although recently the estate was broken up and the cottages sold. Watercress was grown locally in quantity in the later part of the nineteenth century and watercress can still be seen in the river.

3.6 Shafford Mill has formed part of the manorial lands of Childwickbury and previously Gorhambury and Redbournbury. There is reference to a Shafford Green situated beside the river Ver in 1627 although it has disappeared today.

3.7 There are various references to a mill at Shafford both in the medieval and Post-medieval periods. In the thirteenth century it was known as Childwick Mill and lay opposite Shafford Farm. The current Shafford Mill is a handsome building dating from the 1840s. There was an earlier mill on this site from at least 1669. Shafford, Do-Little and Redbournbury mills were at one time owned by the Speaker of the Restoration Parliament, Sir Harbottle Grimston who lived at Gorhambury.

3.8 Sir John Blundell Maple was responsible for the construction of the estate cottages at Shafford close to the main road. He acquired the manor of Childwickbury in 1883 and he was also responsible for the present form of the late nineteenth century estate village of Childwick Green, and the stud to the north. At the time, Childwickbury Stud was the largest stud farm in the country, with over 150 racehorses. The estate was conveniently located close to the horse racing track on Harpenden Common which was in use until 1914.

4.0 Architectural Character and Historic Quality of Buildings

4.1 There are two principal groups of buildings in the conservation area. The first is Shafford Farmhouse and adjoining barns which comprise a group dating back to at least the seventeenth century with later alterations and Shafford Mill which dates from the early nineteenth century. The mill, farmhouse and two barns are statutory listed buildings. The farmyard group also includes a number of attractive walls and outbuildings which are considered to be of local interest and contribute to the character of the area. The mill and one of the barns are now in residential use. The mill pond and mill race form a very attractive setting to the former mill.



Mill pond and race

4.2 The other group comprises estate cottages built originally for the Childwick Estate. These are of late nineteenth century date and comprise six semi-detached pairs, arranged in an L-shape, close to the main road. The cottages are elaborate in style, with prominent gables, set back side bays, porches and rendered first floors with smooth rendered "half-timbering". The brickwork is Luton grey with clay tiled roofs. Similar cottages, picking up the same materials and styles can be found on the Childwick Estate. Most of the cottages have

now been extended at the side and rear although over a period of time. Detached garages have been added to the rear but all the cottages retain their original weather-boarded rear sheds. More recent side extensions have copied the gables of the existing side bays. Attractive painted metal park railing runs in front of the group.



Estate Cottages

4.3 Two further cottages are situated on either side of the road to within the estate (Stud Cottage and Shafford House). They are considered to be of local interest which positively contribute to the character of the area.

4.4 All of the buildings within the conservation area are described in more detail below.

5.0 Materials

5.1 Red-Brick and plain clay tiles are the predominant materials used in the conservation area. Some of the later farm buildings have slated roofs and the main barn is weatherboarded. There are also a few examples of mock timber framing and render infill panels, most notably on the estate cottages and some of the buildings have arts and crafts details, including timber porches.

6.0 Essential Characteristics

6.1 One of Shafford Mill's most attractive attributes is its spacious location surrounded by open countryside, which rises away from the River Ver. Despite being located close to a main road, the estate cottages and farm group still retain a rural character. The conservation area boundary as designated in 1980 included most of the former mill race which is an important wildlife habitat for migrating birds.

6.2 A unifying feature of the two groups of buildings is their modest scale and use of similar materials, mainly brick and clay tiles.



The bridge near the entrance to the conservation area; despite the proximity of the road the green character of the area is dominant.

7.0 Significant Views

7.1 Although not included within the boundaries of the conservation area, the surrounding countryside is important in views both out from and into the conservation area.

7.2 Views which are particularly important are:

- Views of the meadow and farm buildings from the Redbourn Road
- Views of the estate cottages southbound from the Redbourn Road.

8.0 Trees and Landscape Characteristics

8.1 The significant mature trees and surviving hedges and the verdant appearance of the River Ver are major attributes of the visual and historic qualities of the conservation area. Some of the original hedges and tree areas which marked former field boundaries can still be discerned. There are also a number of important tree groups and individual specimens within and adjoining the conservation area.

8.2 Most trees located in conservation areas are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Six weeks prior written notice must be given to the local authority of any proposed surgery or felling. This period enables the Council to make a tree preservation order if it considers that the proposal is unacceptable.

8.3 The meadow and mill race with its reed beds and willow forms an important wildlife habitat.



Verdant character of the conservation area

9.0 Proposals for Enhancement

9.1 To preserve or enhance the historic character and appearance of the conservation area, it is important that any development is of a high standard of design, sympathetic to its surroundings and the conservation area as a whole. It should not detract from the setting of nearby existing buildings and its form should have regard to the surroundings and the existing balance of buildings and landscape, and should be of good quality, normally built with traditional and natural materials.

9.2 Traditional boundary walls, such as those brick and flint wall in Shafford Farm and metal estate fencing including the railings in front of Shafford Cottages form an important part of the character of the area and should be retained and enhanced where necessary.

10.0 Summary

It is the Council's policy to encourage the retention of those features that make the conservation area special; including historic buildings, trees, hedges, walls and fences. In addition the Council demands a high standard of design and materials for any new development in the conservation area. Any new development or change of use should respect the grain, setting, scale, character, materials and use of existing development or land. Any alterations or extensions to existing properties, listed or unlisted, should respect the existing form and pattern of building and as each historic building has its own characteristics and these should be respected when proposals for alterations are put forward. Extensions and new development should utilise traditional materials, detailing and construction techniques, so as to not detract from the high quality of local buildings.

DESIGNATIONS

CONSERVATION AREA - The settlement of Shafford Mill was designated as a conservation area on 31 July 1980. It is tightly drawn around the historic core of the settlement.

METROPOLITAN GREEN BELT – The whole of the Shafford Mill Conservation Area is covered by the Metropolitan Green Belt, which is subject to Policy 1 of the District Local Plan. This states that only very specific types of development will be acceptable, and that it should integrate with the existing landscape. Siting, design and external appearance are particularly important and additional landscaping will normally be required. Significant harm to the ecological value of the countryside must be avoided.

STATUTORY LIST – Listed buildings are buildings included on a list of “Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest” compiled by central government. The Council is required by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, when considering any application for listed building consent or planning permission which affects a listed building or its setting, “to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting”. Applications will be assessed against District Plan historic buildings policies and government advice. There are several properties within the conservation area which are statutory listed buildings. These are shown on the attached map and described from their list descriptions below. Outbuildings within the curtilage of listed buildings are normally protected under the main listing and are not separately indicated on the plan or list.

LOCAL LISTING - These are buildings which the Council feels make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of this conservation area. The locally listed buildings are shown on the attached map. Buildings which are statutorily listed or any of their outbuildings which are listed by virtue of being in their curtilage are not locally listed as it is considered that such buildings do contribute positively to the character, and that ‘double’ designation is not necessary. Historic England offer guidance on what qualities unlisted buildings may possess for them to make a positive contribution to the special architectural or historic interest of a conservation area, and these have been borne in mind when drawing up the local list. Most of the remaining buildings in the conservation area are locally listed and these are described below.

Statutory Listed Buildings

Shafford Farmhouse (Grade II)

Farmhouse. C17 timber frame, partly exposed at rear. Recased in red brick circa 1800. Slate hipped roof. L plan. 2 storeys. 2 segmental headed casements either side of slightly projecting central bay. Door set in gauged brick relieving arch. 2 floor bands to centre. Shallow piers to ends of elevation. Dentilled brick eaves. Low 2-storey projection on E side with C17 timber frame internally. On rear centre is a brick-cased C17 projection enclosing a lateral chimney stack. Adjoining this to the W is a C17 stair turret with stuccoed upper floor. Another lateral stack of late C17 origin to W of this. Interior is 4-5 bays with partitions removed. Later C17 on W end.



Shafford Farmhouse and main weatherboarded barn behind

Main barn 20m east of Shafford Farmhouse (Grade II)

Barn. C16 or earlier aisled barn, altered in C19, when it is said to have been moved a short distance to its present position. Weatherboarding. Corrugated iron roof. Painted brick base. C19 gabled cart entrance on W side, raised on tall brick base. 5 bays. Aisle remains on E side; W aisle removed in C19. Passing braces from wall posts to tie beams. Curved braces from the principals to the tie beams and wall plates. C16-17 red brick on S wall. Enclosing the N and NW sides is a late C19 stable wing; similar wing on S side, both not of special interest.

Small barn 15m south of Shafford Farmhouse (Grade II)

Barn, probably built as a granary. Mid-late C17. Dark red brick. Steep pitched corrugated iron roof. 2 storeys over cellar. Plinth and floor bands. Altered in late C19, when stable range was added on E side (not of special interest). N front has 2-storey sack hoist with a weatherboarded gable. Glazing bar casement on right.



Small barn right hand side (also known as the Old Granary). The left hand side is locally listed (see The Old Granary below).

Shafford Mill (Grade II)

Mill, converted to house c.1980. Mid-late C19. Brown stock brick. Plain tile steeply pitched roof. 3 storeys and attics. 3 glazing bar casements. Central plank door, above which is a replacement sack hoist and a bracketed oriel. Single storey late C19 lean-to on W. Included for group value.



Rear of Shafford Mill

Locally Listed Buildings

1-12 Shafford Cottages, Redbourn Road, Redbourn Road

Six semi-detached pairs of cottages. They have prominent gables, set back side bays, timber corner porches and rendered first floors with “half-timbering” and Luton grey brick ground floors, with window detailing separated by a brick dentil course.

Shafford House, Redbourn Road

The building has similar characteristics to Shafford Cottages, although it has been more heavily altered.



Shafford House

Stud Cottage, Redbourn Road

A brick built cottage with central chimney stack and two tile hung dormer windows and timber fret work porch. The clay tiled roof has decorative slate detailing.



Stud Cottage and its green setting

Shafford Stud, Redbourn Road (including The Clock House, Shafford Stud, Shafford Barn and Shafford Stud House)

A single storey part rendered and part brick range with clay tiled roof. It has been partially converted and so displays a mixture of elevational details, but the clock tower and gabled porches are historic details.

Stable House

A two storey structure with a slate roof, it consists of a brick lean-to section with openings and a high level boarded element with small openings.

Shafford Farm outbuildings, Redbourn Road

These are similar in terms of architectural style and materials as the Stable House.

The Old Granary

A single storey stable range attached to the small barn/former granary (listed – see above), it is constructed of brick with clay tiled roof with roof vent details.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The National Planning Policy Framework 2012

St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994

Conservation Area designation, appraisal and management 2016 Historic England

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING

Victoria County History Hertfordshire, Volume 2, 1908

Hertfordshire, Pevsner

Watermills of the London Countryside, Kenneth Reid, 1989

Childwickbury Conservation Area Character Statement, St Albans District Council

STATUS OF THE DOCUMENT

This document should be read together with saved Policy 85 and 87 of the St Albans City and District Local Plan Review 1994. It has been produced as part of DPR Project 9: Policy Statements – Conservation Areas and includes locally listed buildings.

Public consultation on this document took place between the 8th June 2018 and 25th July 2018. Consultation responses were considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into the final Shafford Mill Conservation Area Character Statement which was adopted on 07th January 2019.

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