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# 1. Introduction

1.1 The Civic Amenities Act 1967 first 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. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is the current legislation that provides for the designation of conservation areas. Section 72 of this act sets out the general duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of a conservation area.

1.2 Government policy is now contained in The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG). The Sleafshyde Conservation Area was designated in 1993.

1.3 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 City and District Local Plan Review (DLPR) - adopted November 1994 - sets out the general principles which will be observed when dealing with applications for new development and redevelopment.

1.4 The aims of this Conservation Area 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.

Figure 1: Map of the Sleafshyde Conservation Area



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## 2. Designations

### Conservation Area

2.1 The Sleepshyde Conservation Area was originally designated on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1993. The boundary of the conservation area has not been subsequently altered.

### Statutory List (Listed Buildings)

2.2 'Listed buildings' are buildings included on a list of "Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest" compiled by central Government. They are classed as 'designated heritage assets'. Listed buildings within the Conservation Area are given in the Appendix. All parts of the buildings are normally protected under the main listing, this may include outbuildings within the curtilage of the listed building, dependant on certain criteria. Listed buildings should not be confused with 'locally listed buildings', which are designated by the local planning authority (St Albans City and District Council), in consultation with the public, local amenity societies.

### Local Listing

2.3 The Council considers those buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area should be designated 'locally listed'. The NPPF classes locally listed buildings as one type of 'non-designated heritage assets'. Whilst it encourages local authorities to draw up local lists, the NPPF allows for any building the Council considers a 'non-designated heritage asset' to have its significance taken into account in planning decisions, whether or not it is on a local list. At local level, Saved Policy 87 of the DLPR (1994) is relevant. Saved Policy 87 provides protection for buildings the Council considers 'worthy of local listing' at any time, whether or not a formal list has been drawn up.

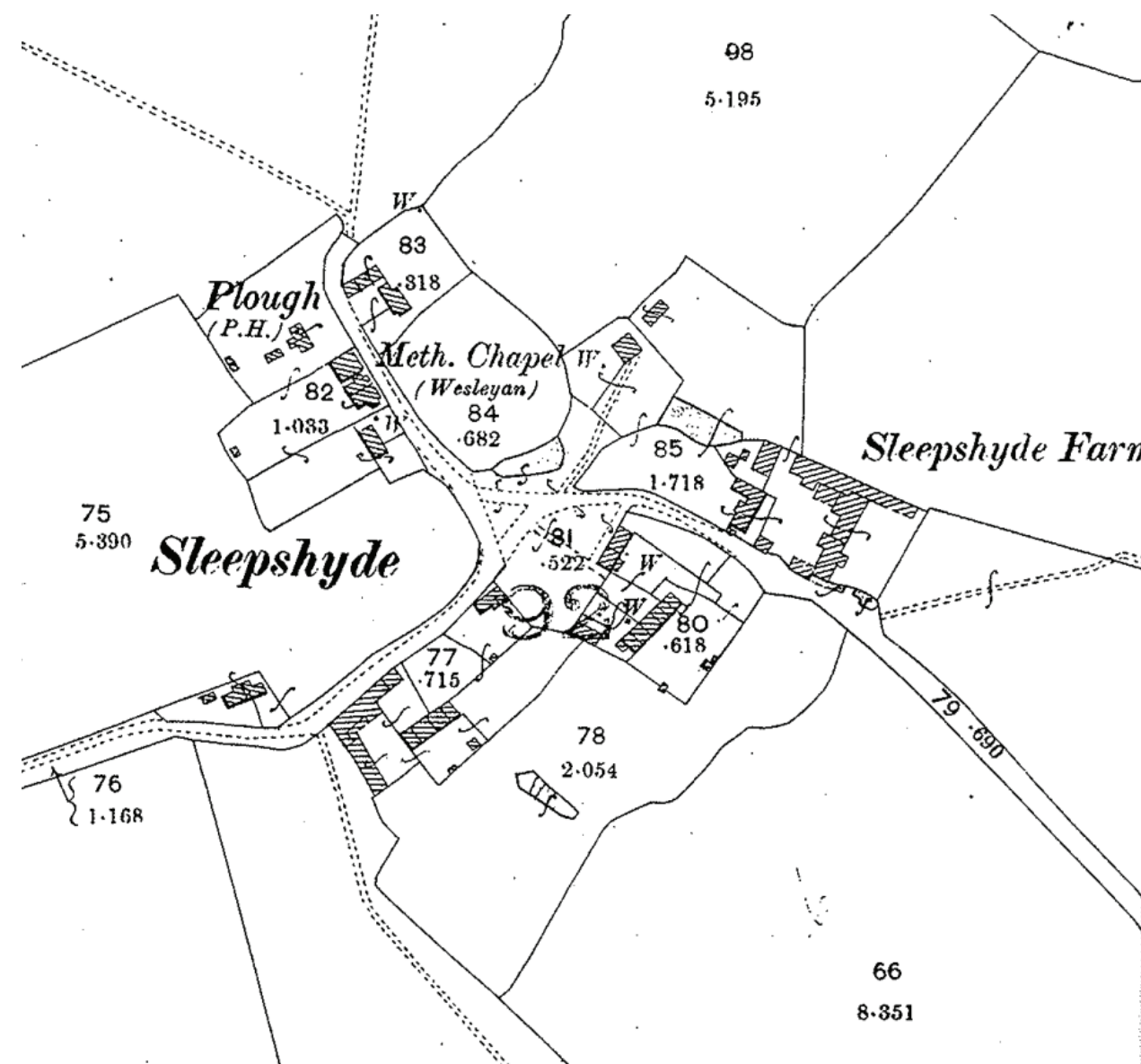
2.4 Advice on assessing a building's 'significance' is laid out in the NPPF; Historic England's document 'Conservation Principles' (based on an asset's evidential, historical, aesthetic or communal value); and most recently in Historic England's 'Local Heritage Listing – Advice Note 7' published May 2016. This document emphasises the need for public consultation of the local list. It also states that *"the absence of any particular heritage asset from the local list does not necessarily mean that it has no heritage value, simply that it does not currently meet the selection criteria or that it has yet to be identified"*.

2.5 Within the St Albans District, 'local lists' have been mainly drawn up in conjunction with Conservation Area Character Statements, which are reviewed from time to time.

2.8 The existing locally listed buildings are given in the Appendices, along with those added through this Appraisal. It should be noted that any building or structure can be locally listed, e.g. a wall, post box, gate or railing. However, a structure physically attached to; or, within the curtilage, ancillary to, and dated pre 1 July 1948, of a statutory listed building is already protected by virtue of that listing, and would not normally be locally listed in its own right. Exceptions to this may be, for example outbuildings, where 'double' designation may occur. The statutory listing will always override a local listing in this instance.

### Metropolitan Green Belt

2.9 Sleepshyde is defined as a Green Belt Settlement, because it is set wholly within the Green Belt. As such any new development must meet national planning guidelines designed to protect the Green Belt.



The 1896 ordnance survey map indicates the limited change that has occurred in the conservation area



### 3. Location and Setting

3.1 Sleafshyde lies between St Albans and Hatfield, immediately north of the A414 dual carriageway and close to the district boundary. To the north lies the Alban Way, the former railway line between St Albans and Hatfield.

3.2 The conservation area covers the eastern, historic core of the hamlet which is arranged along three lanes radiating from a central green. The former chapel and public house, formerly the only public buildings in the hamlet are located on the northern lane, set away from the central green. To the west of the conservation area boundary lies some mid-C20 housing, which is more suburban in character.

3.3 The wider setting of the conservation area is dominated by farmland to the north and east. Views of the Conservation Area's agricultural setting are intermittent from the streetscene, which is relatively enclosed.

3.4 To the north and east of the conservation area there are large, flat fields flanked by hedgerows and trees, and there are some views out across the fields in this direction, particularly from the Plough, from where the District boundary which runs along a leafy byway is visible across the fields. The north-western part of the conservation area is visible from Smallford Lane to the west, from where properties can be seen set behind mature gardens. The western part of the conservation area is separated from the residential area to the west by a playing field.

3.5 The setting of Sleafshyde contributes substantially to the conservations areas significance. It contributes to the hamlet's rural character and is an important part of its agricultural history. The surrounding farmland is also considered to be part of the setting for most of the designated and non-designated heritage assets within the conservation area.

3.6 The North Orbital Road lies to the immediate south of the Conservation Area. The woodland in the south of the Conservation Area plays an important role in characterising the area providing a green setting to the south and helps reduce the impact of the road noise and inter-visibility between the two.

3.7 The map analysis considered open space inside the conservation area boundary and where it formed its immediate context. Open space is defined as common land, farmland, countryside and recreational spaces (including school grounds, churchyards and cemeteries). Publicly accessible woodland is included within this definition. Private gardens and private car parks are excluded.

Figure 2: Open space analysis map



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## 4. Origins and development of the settlement

4.1 Sleaf is the old English for slippery or watery place and Hyde was a late Saxon word for the size of land farmed by one peasant family which was usually 120 acres. It is probable that the 'hyde' in this area is associated with the Abbey policy of the late C11 and C12. This policy allowed clearings of 120 acres or more of formally forested land. The settlement is not mentioned in the doomsday book and therefore it is likely to originate from the 12th century.

4.2 In the Middle Ages, Sleafshyde was a small hamlet in the large manorial estate of Park, belonging to St Albans Abbey. The first reference to Sleaf is in the Abbots of St Albans Court Book which recorded the Abbots official dealings with tenants including marriages, inheritances and fines. The first reference refers to Reginald of Sleaf exchanging land in the C13 and makes reference to Roger and Agnes Sleaf's family from 1273 through to the late C14.

4.3 To the west of Sleafshyde, beyond Smallford Lane, the Abbey owned the fishing rights in Smallfordwater and there were occasional fines for poaching fish. One grandson of Robert Sleaf, Alexander, was frequently in court for felling trees and grinding his own corn, rather than using the Abbeys mills. In the C15 the Abbott granted land in Sleaf to the hospital of St Anthony, London. From the C15 to the end of the C17 there are other documents which refer to members of the Sleaf family and other inhabitants of Sleaf or Sleaf.

4.4 After the reformation the former monastery land were given by the crown to the Denny family. Nineteenth century census data for Sleaf shows the main occupation of the population was in agriculture. Two farmers were listed but most occupants are categorised as agricultural labourers and a number of women and children made straw plait and hats. There is no mention of the surname Sleaf by this time.

4.5 The nineteenth century also saw the construction of the Methodists chapel in the hamlet in 1840. It is one of the earliest purpose built Methodist chapels in Hertfordshire. The chapel cost £210 to build and was designed to seat 108, enough for the whole population as the nearest parish church was St Peter, 4 miles away in St Albans. Though the local congregation fell when the church at Colney Heath was built, Methodists from Hatfield travelled to the church which allowed it to stay open until the C21.

4.6 During the C20 some of the old farmers' cottages were demolished and mostly replaced with bungalows. A number small of dwellings were built in the early part of the century from temporary materials and there has been some limited in filling in the hamlet centre.



The 1821 map of Sleafshyde, by T. Godman shows Sleafshyde Farm, and the surrounding buildings, including the Plough, Farm Cottage and some other buildings. Courtesy of HALS, 36068)



## 5. Architectural Character

5.1 The conservation area is formed of Sleafshyde farm, a public house, the former chapel, now converted, and a small number of dwellings. There is no record of buildings surviving from the medieval period and most of the listed buildings date to the C16-17. Several of the houses in the conservation area date to the C20 and are not of any particular historic or architectural interest. Except for a couple of notable exceptions the most of the C20 houses are bungalows and this allows the historic buildings and landscaping to be more visually predominant.

5.2 There is a mix of building materials within the conservation area, though the predominant materials are plain clay roof tiles and natural slate, red/orange brick, dark stained weatherboarding and white and natural coloured render.

5.3 The hamlet is scattered, radiating out from the central semi-circular green. The density of development is low with no consistent building line, giving the hamlet an informal character. The buildings are principally set back with no footpaths so streetscene is dominated by hedgerows, punctuated with small, mainly un-gated driveways.

5.4 Although the historic buildings are scattered informally around the hamlet, they are visually bound together and enhanced by the network of greenery: the open spaces, the hedges, the trees and gardens which overall provide an attractive countryside feel which is an appropriate setting for the buildings.

5.5 The only remaining public building in the hamlet is the Plough Public House. It forms an important landmark building, marking the northern entrance from the footpaths to the Alban Way and Wilkins Green. The Plough dates originally to the late C17, and its thatched roof with dormers and large red brick external chimney stack distinguish it from the rest of the buildings in the Conservation Area. In the C19 there was a shop attached which has since been incorporated into the public house. The rear modern extensions are fortunately subservient in height, despite their incongruous footprint and design.

5.6 The Plough is visible from the paddock and the pond to the west of the central green which gives the public house an open setting. The publican used to farm the adjacent field until the C19 and this strengthens the association between the public house and the adjacent land. The paddock and pond are surrounded by hedging and trees including the road frontage. These open spaces are important elements which contribute to the rural character of the hamlet.



*The Plough is a prominent building due to its thatched roof and more isolated location as the only building on the east side of the northern lane.*



*The paddock runs adjacent to the north lane and provides greenery in the centre of the conservation area and was historically known as the collect*



## 5. Architectural Character

5.7 Opposite the Plough is one of the two other formerly public buildings, the former Methodist chapel. The chapel is a prominent, but simple building. The front facing gable, taller rear gable, chimney and slender piers to the front elevation emphasises its verticality, differentiating it from the rest of the conservation area. The form of the building with the front facing gable, double timber doors, attractive, well detailed porch and railings have been retained making its former function clearly legible. Unfortunately the historic paving to the front elevation was lost in the conversion. The construction and use of the chapel in the C19 is an important part of the historic interest of the hamlet. In 1907 the church extended to the rear to create a club room, as an alternative venue for the Plough PH opposite.

5.8 The central green itself is small and is surrounded by the road and curbed in granite. On the green is the former village water pump, (minus its handle) and the small oval village sign on a fluted column, which was previously the light column. The recently installed modern streetlight and telephone mast are unfortunately prominent additions which clutter the small green and draw attention away from the historic street furniture.

5.9 Farm cottage is hidden behind the pond and central green, up a long gravelled driveway. The building is a late C17 timber framed cottage, re-fronted in the late C19 to early C20. The Cottage has open views out towards the Plough, Sleafshyde farm and the surrounding agricultural landscape. Now in a relatively isolated position, the building used to sit on the north-eastern end of the central green, as shown in the 1820s map on page 5.



*Farm cottage*



*The former Methodist Chapel retains its simple but distinctive elongated form indicative of its former use*



*The central green retains some historic street furniture. Unfortunately the fluted column to the former C19 light post has been used for attaching other signs at a high level which detracts from its appearance.*



## 5. Architectural Character

5.10 To the south of the green lies Sleapshyde farm, which marks the entrance to the hamlet from the south. Sleapshyde Farm is visible above the hedgerow and forms an important part of the streetscene. Opposite lies a curved brick wall to the rear of Rose cottage. South lane is narrow and lined with high hedges which, combined with the farmyard, gives the south lane an enclosed and very rural character.

5.11 Sleapshyde Farm formed of the Farmhouse, three barns, stables and a granary arranged around a traditional farmyard. The Farmhouse is a former hall house and thought to date to the early 1500s, and is the oldest surviving building in the hamlet. The large C17 barns and late C17-18 granary are timber weather boarded with clay plain tiles and have a traditional and attractive appearance. The buildings contribute to the rural character of the hamlet emphasise its historic agricultural origins.

5.12 Rose cottage and Little Rose Cottage sits opposite Sleapshyde Farm and comprise of one long range, a pair C17 cottages. The building has a typical vernacular appearance with weatherboard, small features and a clay plain tile roof. Despite being set back and at an angle to the central green, Rose cottage is the most prominent building in the centre of the hamlet. This is due, in part to its dominant central chimney stack of two tall square shafts.



*Although a little too tall, the 1980s side extension to Rose Cottage relates well to the original building by using similar weatherboarding and clay roof tiles.*



*Sleapshyde Farm is a historic farmstead dating to the 1500s and the clay tiles and weatherboarding unify these buildings. Sleapshyde Farmhouse is one of the most prominent buildings.*



## 5. Architectural Character

5.13 The character of the lane to the west of the central green acts as a transition between the C20 housing development and the historic centre of the hamlet. The transition is defined by the both the buildings and the streetscene, as the suburban form of grass verges and pavements changes to a narrow lane with no footpath and un-kerbed, front boundaries.

5.14 Angel Cottage, a former beer house, marks the start of the conservation area. The buildings white render, welsh slate roof and well-proportioned Victorian features make it a conspicuous and attractive feature on the streetscene.

5.15 Opposite, the start of the scrub land to the south of the hamlet marks the southern boundary of the conservation area and encloses Ye Olde House, framing its attractive four gabled frontage. The mid-C17 timber framed house is now three cottages. Its predominant external features are its plain clay tiled roof, weather boarded upper floor and the large mid seventeenth century red brick chimney stack. When it was restored in residential use in the late 1980's, a barn like garage, in traditional materials was erected within a gravel driveway.

5.16 Most of the other buildings in the conservation area are interwar and later in date. This development is no particular architectural or historic interest. The housing is generally considered to have a neutral impact because for the most part they are reticent as they are set quite low, only 1-1.5 storeys in height. The low height of the new development allows the more historic and architecturally interesting buildings to be more prominent.



*Ye Olde House has a striking row of gable ends which mark the start of the historic hamlet.*

## 6. Landscape Characteristics

6.1 Although the buildings are scattered informally around the hamlet, they are visually bound together by the network of greenery which provides a consistency to the streetscene. The open spaces, hedges, trees and gardens creates an attractive countryside feel, providing an appropriate setting for the buildings. This green character is an essential element of the conservation area and the hedgerow and trees gives the lanes an enclosed atmosphere.

6.2 Although the trees within the conservation area are not generally large, most properties have substantial boundary hedges which include privet, beech, holly, and elm species.

6.3 All trees within a Conservation Area above a certain size have automatic protection, whether or not they are covered by a TPO, and permission must be sought from the Trees and Woodlands section of St Albans City and District Council before the lopping, topping, pruning or felling of any trees other than fruit trees.



*Angel Cottage's form and proximity to the street is reflective of its former use as a beer house.*



## 7. Significant Views

Sleapshyde is characterised by the relationship between the village, the street and the surrounding rural landscape. The significant views, discussed in detail below, illustrate aspects of the character and appearance of Sleapshyde which are considered to be of special architectural and historic interest.

Views can be static or dynamic, and of certain specific features or of wider town or landscapes. Due to the enclosed nature of the streets on the conservation area and pattern of settlement, many of the views in Sleapshyde are of points, framed by the trees and hedgerows. The map to the right is annotated to describe the type of view and its location.



### View 1: Sleapshyde Farm

This is the first view of the conservation area when entering from the south. Sleapshyde Farm comes into view between the high hedgerows. The Farmhouse was one of the higher status buildings in the area. Most of the buildings pre-date the 19C and the view has changed little in the past couple of centuries.



Figure 3: Significant views map

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## 7. Significant Views

### View 2: North entrance to Sleafshyde

The Plough and the Methodist Church mark the north entrance to the Hamlet, accessed from the footpath which links to the Alban Way and the former Smallford Station. The view has changed little since the mid-C19 when the Methodist Church was built and shows the characteristic materials boundaries and building layout of these two former public buildings.



### View 3: The Central Green

The green forms the centre of the historic hamlet. The view demonstrates some of the key characteristics of the conservation area. The view shows informally scattered historic buildings around the green, visually bound by the network of greenery: the open spaces, the hedges, the trees and gardens which overall provide an attractive countryside feel which is an appropriate setting for the buildings.



## 8. Enhancement proposals & guidance

8.1 To preserve or enhance the hamlet's historic character and appearance, 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, its form should have regard to the surroundings and the existing balance of buildings and landscape, and should be of good quality, normally traditional and natural materials.

8.2 The form of development in Sleafshyde is informal, with buildings scattered along lines radiating out from the central small green. The inconsistent, but set back building lines are an essential part of the rural character of the hamlet. The main exceptions to the setback building line are the Plough and the other former public buildings: the former Methodist Church, and Angel Cottage, the former beer house. Future development should maintain the setback building lines to preserve the rural character of the conservation area and the important distinction in building types.

8.3 The height of new development needs to respond to views in the conservation area in order to preserve the prominence of the designated and non-designated heritage assets.

8.4 The green and rural character of the hamlet is an essential part of the character and appearance of the conservation area. The hedgerow, trees and gardens visually connect the otherwise dispersed development and the existing balance between built form and the landscape should be maintained.

8.5 Sleafshyde has a variety of materials, though most are traditional. The predominant traditional roofing material in the area is plain clay roof tiles for the high pitched timber framed buildings and natural slate for the lower pitches of the nineteenth century buildings. Walling is predominantly dark stained weatherboarding for some cottages and agricultural buildings. Some have natural render/external plaster, although some render has been painted white. Historically, brickwork has been used for chimneys and as plinths or ground floors.

8.6 Some of the recent buildings have natural or painted rendered walls which creates some unity with the historic buildings, but some are brick faced with modern roofing materials including some profiled sheeting and plain or profiled concrete tiles, on generally low pitched roofs. A proliferation of non-unifying materials should be avoided.

Key:  
Original building use

- Public
- Residential
- Agricultural
- Road
- Public frontages
- Residential frontages



Figure 4: The map shows the historic, original building uses within the Conservation Area and their relationship to the street



Compilation of traditional building materials located throughout the conservation area



## 8. Enhancement proposals & guidance

8.7 The traditional windows are timber, with a painted finish, normally white. Most are casements and many are multi-paned. Angel Cottage has more typically nineteenth century sash windows. Dormer windows are found at the Plough but are not a characteristic of the hamlet. uPVC windows and doors lack the details of traditional joinery, have a more reflective finish and are generally not as long lasting as traditional timber windows. They should be avoided and will not be acceptable for listed buildings and new development. Replacement windows in an unlisted existing dwelling may constitute permitted development, but their use is discouraged in order to preserve the traditional appearance of the hamlet.

8.8 The boundary treatments are generally informal in appearance and hedges, scattered trees, and post and rail fencing and gardens are predominant. The hard un-kerbed road edge with no footpath is also an important characteristic of the streetscene and this helps differentiate the conservation area from the mid-C20 more suburban development to the west.

8.8 Development should follow these characteristic boundary treatments and avoid over formal or aggrandising entrances, fences and sub-urban and overly ornamental forms of planting and landscaping. It is important to avoid introduction of highway kerbing wherever possible, and the hard surfacing of driveways, which are currently mostly loose gravel, to help maintain the rural character of the hamlet.

## 9. Summary

9.1 It is the Council's aim to encourage retention of those features which make the Conservation Area special – not just historic buildings and their architectural features, but their settings and boundary features – historic walls, fencing, and hedges. Every effort should be made to maintain important landscape features and the existing balance of buildings and landscape



*Typical hedgerow and un-kerbed road in Sleepshyde*



*The area of woodland to the south-east of the conservation area reduces the noise impact and invisibility of the North Orbital on the Conservation Area*



*Tree and hedgerow lined footpaths and roads give the hamlet a rural and enclosed character*



## 10.0 Appendices

### STATUTORY LISTED BUILDINGS

The list descriptions can be found on [www.historicengland.org.uk](http://www.historicengland.org.uk) or through the St Albans District Mapping Service. Names and spellings are as per the list descriptions:

#### Grade II

- The Plough Inn, Sleapshyde Lane
- Farm Cottage, Sleapshyde Lane
- Sleapshyde Farmhouse, Sleapshyde Lane
- Granary to South East of Sleapshyde Farmhouse, Sleapshyde Lane
- Range of Two Barns and Adjoining Stable, South East of Sleapshyde Farmhouse, Sleapshyde Lane
- Rose Cottage and Little Rose Cottage, Sleapshyde Lane
- Ye Olde House, 1, 2 and 3 Sleapshyde Lane

### LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS

The following buildings are included on the local list and are non-designated heritage assets:

- Methodist Chapel, Sleapshyde Lane
- Angel Cottage, Sleapshyde Lane

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Historic Map references are contained within the image caption



## **STATUS OF THIS DOCUMENT**

This Conservation Area Character Statement was adopted on 03/08/2021. Public consultation took place on this document between 18 January 2021 to 01 March 2021. Consultation responses have been considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into the final document.

This document should be read together with saved Policy of 85, 86 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

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