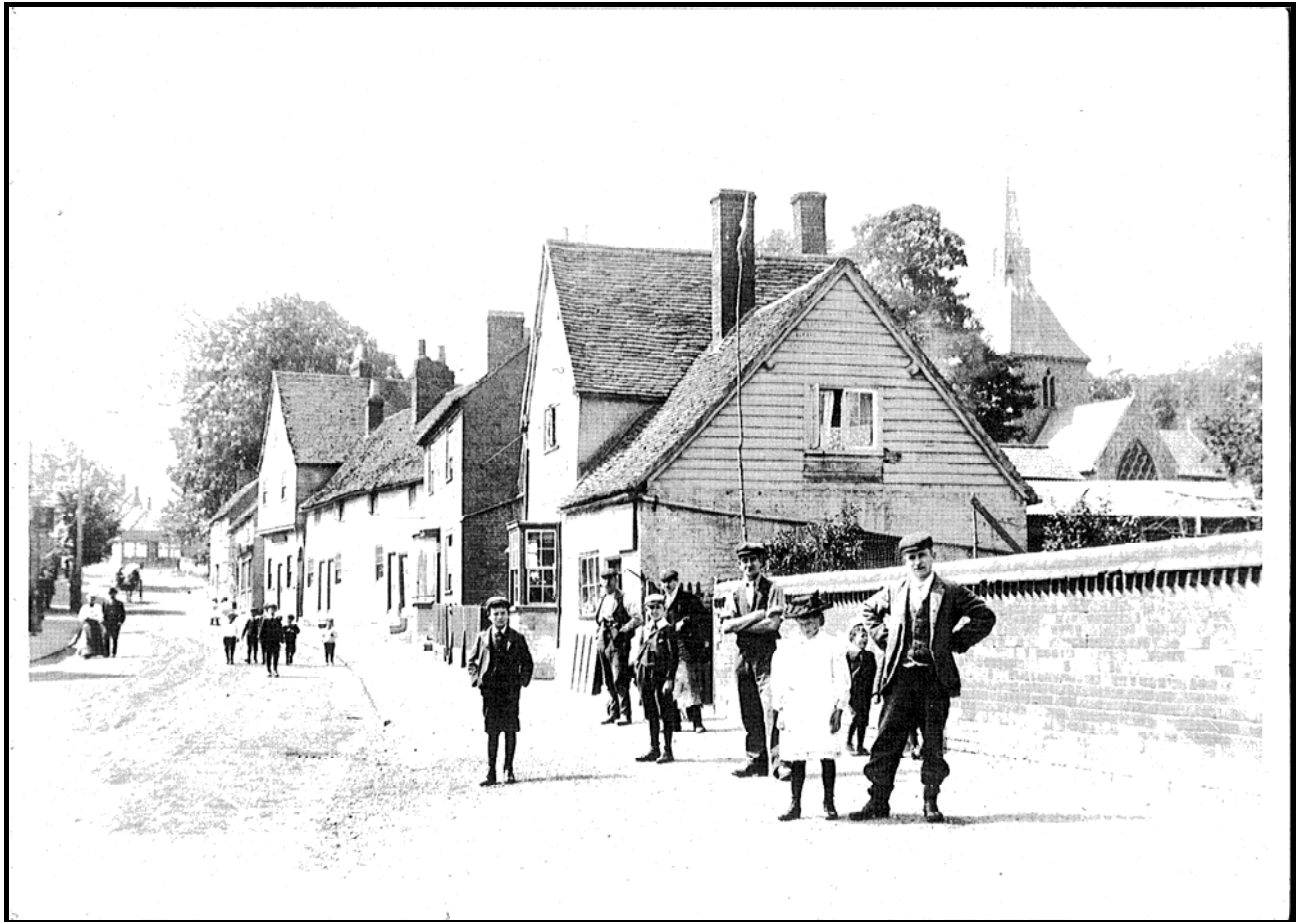


CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT FOR WHEATHAMPSTEAD



FEBRUARY 2011

Review of April 2000



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.

1.2 Conservation should not be thought of solely as a process of preservation and an impediment to change. 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 and 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’). The Local Plan is soon to be replaced by the Local Development Framework. This includes the Core Strategy which is currently being prepared by the Council.

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 and appearance; to indicate the principles to be adopted in considering planning applications in the area; and to form a framework within which any detailed proposals may be formulated.

2.0 DESIGNATIONS

2.1 CONSERVATION AREA - Wheathampstead Conservation Area was originally designated in 1969, and extended in 1977, 1987 and 1999 (see map). It was initially designated in 1969 under the Civic Amenities Act 1967 by Hertfordshire County Council. At that time the boundary was tightly drawn about the presumed Saxon and Medieval core of the village. It was extended in 1977 to include more of the 18th and 19th Century expansion of the village to the north, south, east and west. In 1987 a further northern extension included Wheathampstead House, (a 19th century mansion) its landscaped grounds and cottages and trees to the west of it. More recently, in 1999, the northern part of the Moat Factory alongside the river was included together with Bury Farm, Old Rectory Gardens and the open space to the west of the walled garden.

2.2 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. A number of buildings within the conservation area are statutory listed, other than St Helen’s Church which is a Grade I listed building, all are Grade II. These are shown on the attached map. Outbuildings within the curtilage of listed buildings are normally protected under the main listing but are not separately indicated on the map.

2.3 LOCAL LIST - These are buildings which the Council feels make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The locally listed buildings are shown on the attached map. It is not proposed to locally list any buildings which are statutorily listed or any of their outbuildings which are listed by virtue of being in their curtilage because ‘double’ designation is not felt to be necessary. English Heritage 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.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Wheathampstead is situated on the chalky, western upland area of Hertfordshire close to the shallow valley of the River Lea.

3.2 There is considerable archaeological evidence to show that the region has been extensively settled and farmed since the late Bronze Age. Evidence of occupation in Mesolithic times was discovered in St Helen's churchyard in 1970 and it is likely that the Lea Valley was utilised as a communications route in prehistoric times. The village of Wheathampstead dates back to at least Saxon times. The earliest settlement was probably around the church. Nearby is the Late Iron Age earthwork incorporating Devils Dyke and the Slad, just to the east of the present conservation area boundary. This was the site of the first capital of a Celtic tribe, the Catuvellauni, before their move to Verulamium.

3.3 In view of its proximity to Verulamium it is probable that the area was extensively farmed in Roman times and that there was settlement associated with the nearby extensive Late Iron Age occupation north of the Lea at Marford. This part of Hertfordshire including the parish of Wheathampstead, which originally incorporated Harpenden, contains a number of hamlets which incorporate End or Green in their place name. This suggests that settlement began as a series of clearings in the woodland which covered the area following the decline of Roman influence. The original core of Wheathampstead may well owe its establishment and later growth to its proximity to the nearby Roman roads, later drove roads and to the River Lea.



Wheathampstead Mill

3.4 The name Wheathampstead is probably derived from "Wheat Homestead" or Farm. The manor of Wheathampstead was given to Westminster Abbey by Edward the Confessor in 1060. The present day parish now includes part of what was once Sandridge Parish but Harpenden became an independent parish in 1859. By 1086 the Domesday Book records four mills in the parish which were a major source of income for the Abbey (although the term "mill" usually described the machinery rather than the building).

3.5 Traditionally agriculture was the most important local industry and, in the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of workers were employed on the land. Until relatively recently several farms were located close to the High Street, although regrettably, due to the loss of historic

fabric, some of the farm buildings have since been demolished or changed in use. The parish is still largely agricultural, however, and most of the recent development backs onto open farmland.

3.6 In the Middle Ages there were several mills in the parish strung out along the River Lea. Of these only the mill in the High Street survives although it has now ceased operating. It was originally owned by Westminster Abbey and provided flour four times a year. The adjacent mill sluice and footbridge form an important feature in the conservation area and one which should be retained and enhanced. The former mill owner's house has now been converted into a shop.



Mill Walk

3.7 Associated with the surrounding arable land were other local industries of note namely, brewing, and straw plaiting. There are two recorded sites for brewing in the village although neither now function. One was located to the rear of Lattimores and is now a restaurant, known as the Maltings. The other was located in Brewhouse Hill just outside the conservation area boundary.

3.8 As in most of the surrounding local villages straw plaiting was an important cottage industry (which largely employed women and children) and as such has left no significant visible traces in the village. The woven straw supplied was mainly used in the manufacture of hats in factories at nearby Luton and St Albans.

3.9 In 1860 the Great Northern Railway completed construction of a branch line from Hatfield to Dunstable which skirts Wheathampstead to the north. It ran parallel with the River Lea on a raised embankment with a high level station adjacent. The line closed in 1965 and the station buildings were demolished although most of the platform survives. The site now adjoins the large roundabout at the northern entrance to the village. The former embankment has been landscaped and planted with small trees and part of it is now used as a public footpath.

3.10 There were some other more recent local industries. Murphy's operated a chemical works on the Place Farm site from 1931 to 1980 and some recent office buildings survive although the industrial buildings have now been demolished and replaced by housing. The former Helmet Works, which produced specialist protective headgear has been relocated out of

the County and the modern factory buildings have been replaced by a new housing development adjacent to the river. Extensive former gravel workings outside the conservation area to the north east were linked to the railway branch line and subsequently used for landfill from London. This area known as Blackbridge Tip has recently been filled and landscaped.

4.0 ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

4.1 The village of Wheathampstead lies on both sides of the road from St Albans to Hitchin, principally in the valley of the River Lea and on the steep hill which descends to the river on the south side. It is well wooded and the approach from the south looking down from the top of the hill is very picturesque. The High Street still has a village character with the prominently sited church and retains a number of retail shops, public houses and restaurants.

4.2 Although a substantial number of old buildings survive in the village, approximately half of the historic core has been rebuilt since 1900. Nos. 35 and 37 High Street replaced buildings destroyed in a fire. Bank Chambers, built in 1936, occupies the site of the former workhouse. Nos. 19, 21 and the supermarket, which replaced the White Hart P.H in the 1960's, are more modern infills. Since designation in 1969 there have been some highly regrettable losses of historic fabric. The controversial demolition of Town Farm in 1971, which comprised one of a small number of medieval hall houses, was partly responsible for changing the law affecting the emergency listing of buildings. In the 1980's the large barn at Wheathampstead Place, which had been used to store chemicals and was contaminated, was replaced with a residential block of flats of similar scale on a similar footprint.

4.3 On a more positive note there have been some improvements. A by-pass to the north has taken some of the traffic out of the village, Murphy's chemical works and the modern factory buildings at Helmets have been demolished and the sewage works relocated. Further development outside the current footprint should now be contained. A new village sign and seating adjacent to the River Lea and other improvements have been made in 2010.

4.4 Much of the area to the north of the village is located in a landscape conservation area. It is very attractive and popular with walkers and could well be exploited as part of an improvement along the Lea Valley. There are a number of footpaths in the area converging on the village.

4.5 Most of the original settlement around the church would have comprised timber framed cottages probably with thatched roofs. Northern Hertfordshire was heavily wooded and there was no shortage of suitable timber and presumably straw from the agricultural land for thatching.

4.6 Today a variety of local traditional materials can be found and there is therefore no cohesive appearance. Most of the earliest surviving houses are exposed timber framed with brick or plaster infill such as Wheathampstead Place. Several of the timber framed buildings, such as No 41 High Street, were re-fronted in brick in the eighteenth century. A description of the village in 1908 recorded that several of the cottages had pargetted plaster decoration using various different patterns. Unfortunately most of these have now disappeared although traces survive on No. 2 High Street.

4.7 A variety of different brick types can be found within the conservation area. In the eighteenth century a warm red brick was common and was probably made locally. A good example of attractive brickwork is the patterned eighteenth century facade using vitrified red brick with red brick dressings and banding at No. 1 Church Street. This probably dates from 1746 as the facade has a dated plaque. A similar facade was added to No. 6 at about the same date although the building behind is much older. By the end of the nineteenth century improved transport meant that bricks from further afield could be cheaply used. No. 20 Lower Luton Road, a listed building, is constructed in yellow gault brick and dates from the 1840's. Further examples are the several houses at the north end of the High Street which are constructed from yellow stock brick, most probably from the Cambridgeshire area; this was also used at

Wheathampstead House which dates from the 1870's. In 1894/95 the mill, which had formerly been weatherboarded and the new mill owner's house in the High Street were faced in a local purple brick (Luton Grey) with blue brick dressings.

4.8 Although no thatched buildings survive in the village it is likely that it was the original roofing material for most of the timber framed buildings, most of which have been re-roofed in plain clay tiles. These tiled roofs make a major contribution to the character of the conservation area as so many of the buildings have highly visible steeply pitched roofs. Perhaps due to the surrounding trees most of the tiled roofs have a thick growth of moss and lichen which combined with the irregular slopes create a very picturesque effect. Slate roofs can be found on some of the Victorian buildings.



Former church school in Brewhouse Hill

4.9 Flint is used for a number of buildings and walls in the conservation area. St Helen's Church is largely faced in flint rubble with stone dressings. It was restored by Edward Browning in 1865 who also designed the nearby former church school in a polychrome Decorated Gothic style, using knapped flint walling with zigzag bands of yellow gault brick. It has a striking Westmoreland slate roof with blue slate banding. Browning also used Westmoreland slates on the Church aisle roofs. The unusually shaped spire on the church is covered in lead.

4.10 Flint panels, with red brick framing, are also used for the retaining walls to the grounds of Wheathampstead House which originally extended both sides of Codicote Road. The road is below the level of the adjoining grounds and the walls are an important feature. A similar retaining wall occupies the eastern side of The Hill. The statutory listed, elaborate brick frontage wall to Wheathampstead House has terracotta cresting.

5.0 CHARACTER AREAS

The conservation area falls into three main character areas.

A THE HIGH STREET AREA



St Helens Church

5.1 The High Street contains the bulk of the listed buildings and is the core of the conservation area. It is dominated by St Helen's Church set in its well treed churchyard on the west side. The churchyard is raised above the level of the High Street which adds to its prominence. The churchyard contains, apart from the usual headstones, the war memorial and several fine chest tombs indicating the importance of local families. The churchyard monuments, war memorial and lych gate contribute much to the character of the area. Nos. 32, 34 and 36 are narrow properties encroaching into the churchyard which possibly were originally workshops of some kind. Bank Chambers dates from 1936 and replaced the former workhouse. Then Nos. 12, 10, 8 and 4 comprise a run of timber framed and brick fronted buildings. At the southern end of the High Street the Swan Public House is prominently sited at the junction with Marford Road and several listed houses are situated in Church View.

5.2 The east side of the High Street also contains a number of listed buildings interspersed with later Victorian and recent development. At the southern end Nos 45 and 41 are prominently sited opposite the churchyard and comprise two early timber framed buildings with later refronting. To their north is a group of Victorian buildings of local interest and then a further group of statutory listed buildings Nos 17,23,25,27 and 29 High Street. No 27 was formerly the Bell and Crown public house. Most of this group are also early timber framed buildings dating back to the 16th century or earlier. The north end of the main road forming the High Street crosses the River Lea and continues northwards as Station Road. Here are sited several important and prominent listed buildings including the Corn Mill, Mill House, The Bull Public House and Wheathampstead Place all situated close to the river.

5.3 Most of the village shops are located in the High Street. Shopfronts and advertisements are frequently changed and can have a visual impact on the character of the conservation area. The District Council seeks to improve the quality of design of shopfronts and has published a "Guide to Shopfront and Advertisement Design", October 1985, to advise and assist designers

and building owners. Proposals for all new shopfronts and advertisements will be assessed in the light of the Council's Design Guide and Policy 90.

5.4 Most of the existing shopfronts are modest in scale and generally in keeping with the area. A few shopfronts are of interest in their own right and should be maintained or repaired as necessary. In particular 54 High Street, (which reuses part of a Victorian conservatory) and No. 2, High Street have good shopfronts of interest. No. 1 Station Road also has a good Victorian shopfront. The continued existence of small shops in the High Street and Station Road is considered to be an important factor in the preservation of Wheathampstead's village character.

5.5 Wheathampstead House, set in extensive landscaped grounds, is located to the north of the conservation area on the crossroads comprising Station Road, Lamer Lane, Codicote Road and Lower Luton Road. The impressive front boundary wall and gates are Statutory Listed and the former substantial house, subsequently Murphy's offices has now been converted into a school. Landscaping to the northern by-pass has now matured and softened the junction which retains the nearby former station platform on the southern embankment.

B BURY FARM



Bury Farm Cottages

5.6 Edward the Confessor made a gift of Wheathampsteadbury Manor to Westminster Abbey in 1060. The word "bury" is predominantly a Hertfordshire word indicating a fortified place; several old maps, including the 1841 Tithe Map, and evidence on the ground, back this up by showing the remains of a moated site. This, combined with evidence of fishponds, indicate the possible site of the Wheathampsteadbury manor house. The proximity of the River Lea would have provided a water source for the complex; various other watercourses can also be seen from historic maps, which were probably linked to the mill but have now largely disappeared on the ground. Bury Farm Cottages are the only surviving buildings from the manorial complex and date from the early sixteenth century, or possibly earlier, and probably originally comprised a meeting hall. Westminster Abbey administered the large estate until shortly after the Second World War when it was sold off for development.

5.7 Apart from Bury Farm Cottages all the houses in this extended part of the conservation area are post-war. It is, however, of additional historic interest as this area also includes the site

of the early nineteenth century rectory which was redeveloped in the early 1960's with housing when a new rectory was built to the north of the former site. Nos. 1-8 Old Rectory Gardens and the new rectory were designed in a neo-Georgian style to reflect the rectory and stables, dating from 1815, which they replaced. Several mature trees, including yews, still survive, presumably from the grounds of the former rectory. Nos. 1-6 Canons Field are more recent dating from the 1980's, and designed in a more vernacular style. Both groups are set in well landscaped and mature gardens retaining large old trees which make a contribution to the character of the area. A statutory listed wall and garden also adjoins the site but former glebe lands were also added to the rectory probably in the C19th and planted with a fernery and specimen trees of which two cedars and an oak survive which now form an attractive feature on the open space known as Rectory Field. The present mature landscaping forms an attractive setting to the western boundary of the conservation area and it strengthens the setting of the attractive and adjacent well treed churchyard. There are a number of mature trees which survive on the site. The most significant are those located on Old Rectory Gardens and along the boundary of Ash Grove. These are covered by Tree Preservation Orders.

5.8 Part of the former Helmet Works which occupied a prominent site in Wheathampstead adjacent to the river has now been replaced by housing known as King Edward Place. The former office has been retained and is a listed building. This timber framed building was the former rectory prior to its replacement on a new site in 1815. The remainder of the works site was formerly meadow land adjacent to the river, and it belonged to the mill until the mid 19th century when it was acquired by the Rector to give access to the river and its trout fishing.

C THE HILL



The Hill

5.9 Development of The Hill took place in several distinct phases. Firstly, there were a group of larger, older properties set on substantial plots at the foot of The Hill close to the High Street including the former Town Farm demolished in 1971 and replaced by housing. Further development took place when several short terraces of early to mid nineteenth century cottages and several large late Victorian and Edwardian houses filled in the remaining gaps.

5.10 Most of the properties on The Hill are listed or locally listed. The latter are vulnerable to unsympathetic alteration. The west side is less developed and more rural in character with a backdrop of trees screening more recent development to the west including St Helens School. At the top of The Hill a pair of modest single storey cottages of seventeenth century date survive on a narrow plot and possibly there were other cottages on plots cut out of the adjoining fields.

6.0 SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

6.1 Views into and within the village which are particularly important are:

- from The Hill looking north.
- from Brewhouse Hill looking towards the church.
- from the High Street looking towards the mill.

6.2 Significant landmark buildings are St Helen's Church with its distinctive lead covered spire, the former church school in Brewhouse Hill, and the mill and mill house in the High Street. The former mill house in particular occupies a very prominent position closing the vista down the High Street to the north.



River Lea

6.3 There are, however, a number of other intimate and attractive views within the conservation area partly due to the quality of the surviving buildings and partly due to the picturesque setting adjacent to the River Lea.

6.4 Descending The Hill the general impression is of a backcloth of greenery against which are arranged the church and pleasant brick houses.

7.0 TREES AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS

7.1 Trees play a major part in contributing to the character of the conservation area both individually and en masse. The Victoria County History in 1908 stressed the picturesque setting of Wheathampstead especially when approached from the south. Despite the considerable expansion which has taken place since then it is still a relevant comment. As mentioned in 6.4 trees provide an important backdrop to the buildings.

7.2 Despite the arrival of the railway, Wheathampstead did not expand as rapidly as nearby Harpenden and the survival, until relatively recently, of farmland or significant private estates such as Wheathamstead House, Brocket Hall and Lamer Park, close to the village ensured the survival of much significant planting. The churchyard of St Helens takes up a major part of the west side of the High Street and forms a green lung in the heart of the village. It contains a number of fine specimen trees of several species including conifers, yews, sycamores and horse chestnuts. Next to the churchyard is the former vicarage garden which, although partly redeveloped in the 1960's, still retains a border of mature trees and beyond that are surviving hedgerow trees from the former Bury Farm.



Lamer Lane and grounds of Wheathampstead House

7.3 Wheathampstead House, recently converted to a school, is set in well-treed grounds to the north of the village. It was laid out towards the end of the nineteenth century and contains many significant specimen trees. The former grounds and kitchen garden originally extended across Lamer Lane being reached by a bridge. The modern houses built in this area, Garden Court, are not included in the conservation area which includes only the retaining wall and significant trees. From the River Lea the ground rises again to the north towards Lamer and Gustard Wood.



Wheathampstead House

8.0 GENERAL ENHANCEMENT OBJECTIVES

- New development within the Conservation Area will have to comply with the Local Planning Policy guidelines.
- Streets should be paved in high quality materials which complement the character of the street in question and adjoining buildings.
- Policies will need to be prepared to co-ordinate and improve the provision of appropriate street furniture.
- Traditional boundary walls and pedestrian ways form an important part of the character of the area and should be retained and enhanced where necessary.

9.0 SUMMARY

9.1 It is the Council's policy to encourage the retention of those features which make the conservation area special; including historic buildings, trees, hedges, walls, fences. In addition the Council demands a high standard of design and materials for any new development in the Conservation Area.

BUILDINGS OF NOTE

LISTED BUILDINGS

All Grade II unless indicated

Ash Grove (North Side)

Bury Farm Cottages

Bury Green

1 and 2

Church Street

No 1; No 6 (Rosewood Cottage); Cunningtons Lighting Centre; Walnut Tree; Gable Cottage; The Old School.

Codicote Road

Front screen wall at Wheathampstead House

High Street (East Side)

The Bull Inn; No 17 (Jessamine Cottage); No 23; No 25; No 27 (former Bell and Crown PH); No 29; No 41; The Maltings; No 45 (Lattimores); Barn to rear of No. 45

High Street (West Side)

Corn Mill; No 2; No 4; former Helmets Registered Office; Garden walling to former Helmets Office and Moat Cottage; Nos 8 and 10; No 12; Nos 32 and 34; No 36; Lych Gate at St Helens Church; St Helens Church; (Grade I); six Chest tombs in St Helens churchyard; The Swan PH

The Hill

No 7 (The Laurels); No 11 (Dolphins); No 17 (Four Limes); Nos 19 and 19A (Hill House); Nos 76A and 76B

Lower Luton Road

20

Station Road

Wheathampstead Place (also known as Place Farm); Front garden wall at Wheathampstead Place; No 3 (former Ackroyds Bakery)

LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS

Bury Green

No 3, No 4

Church Street

No 2, No 3, No 4, No 5, Gable House

Codicote Road

Wheathampstead House, Nos 1-4 Lodge Cottages, Former station platform

High Street

Nos 16-18 (Bankside Chambers)

No 33, No 35, No 39

Lower Luton Road

No 8, No 10, No 12, No 14, No 16, No 18

The Hill

.No 21, No 31, No 33, No 37, No 41, No 45, No 47, No 49, No 51, No 53, No 55, No 57, No 59,
No 63, No 65, No 67, No 69, No 71, No 73, No 79, No 81, No 87, No 89, No 91, No 93, No 95,
No 99, No 101, 103, 105

10, No 48 (The Old Chapel), No 50, No 70

Station Road

No 1, No 83, Nos 10-12, Nos 14-20, No 22

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment, Department for Communities and Local Government

St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994

Conservation Area Practice 1995, English Heritage

Wheathampstead and District Preservation Society

Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage, March 1994

Guidance on conservation area appraisals, English Heritage, February 2006

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING

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The Manor of Wheathampstead D. & A. Godfrey Evans

Harpenden and St Albans branches of the Workers' Educational Association, About

Wheathampstead, Wheathampstead and Harpenden I-IV

Isobel Thompson Extensive Wheathampstead Urban Survey Project Assessment Report 2002 HCC

Cover illustration Wheathampstead High Street circa 1910 provided by Wheathampstead and District Local History Society

STATUS OF THE DOCUMENT

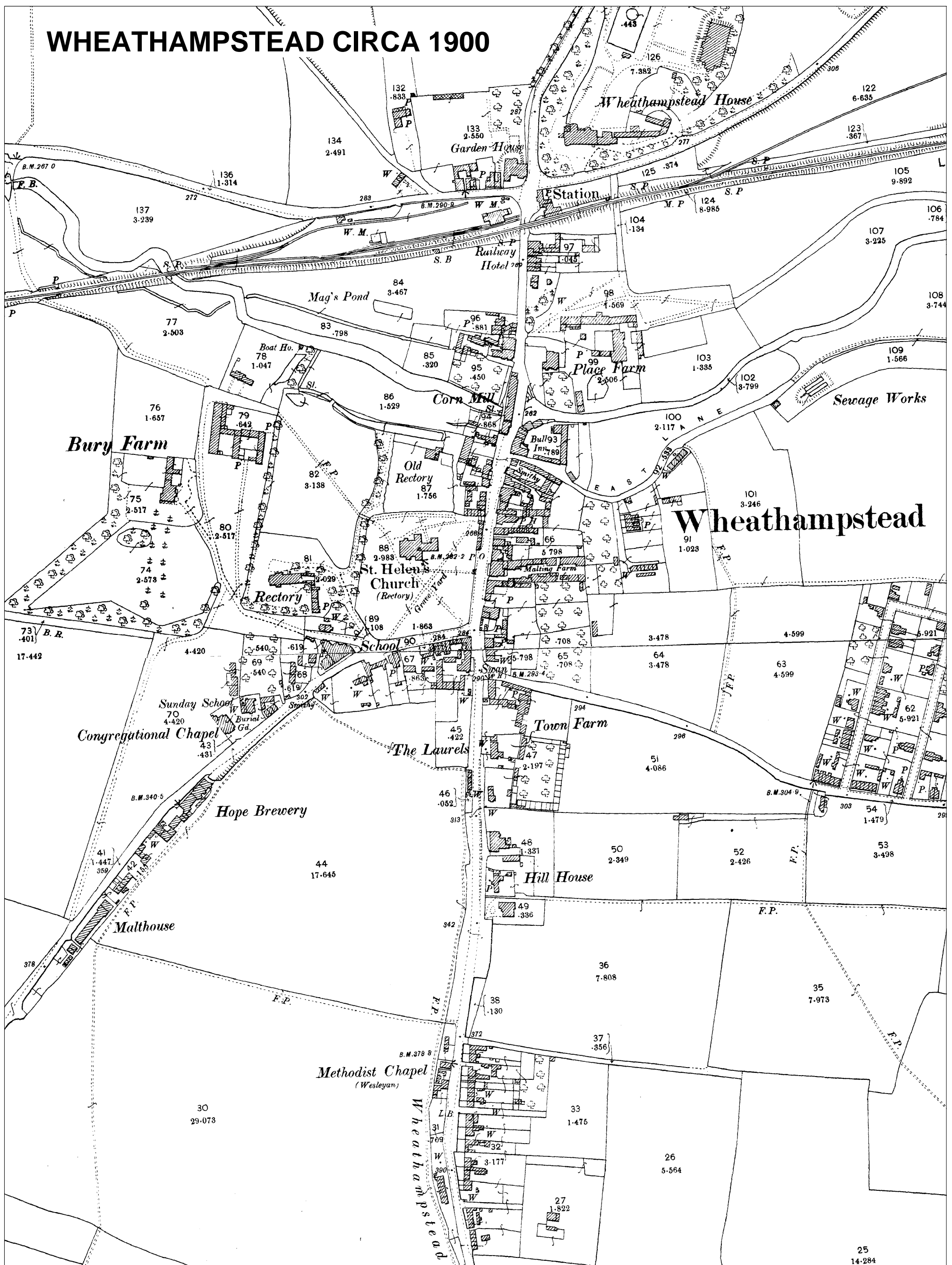
This document should be read together with saved Policy 85 of the St Albans City and District Local Plan Review 1994. It has been produced as part of DPR Project 9: Policy Statements – Conservation Areas and includes locally listed buildings.

The Planning and Conservation Portfolio Holder considered a report on the draft review of Wheathampstead Conservation Area Character Statement and resolved on 28 August 2009 that the document should go to local consultation. Consultation with key stakeholders took place in late 2009 and early 2010 following which initial amendments were made. Further consultation took place in July and August 2010 with the following stakeholders; Wheathampstead Parish Council, Ward Councillors, Planning (Development Control) Committee North, the Wheathampstead and District Preservation Society, and Wheathampstead Local History Society. Notices were also posted locally advising of its availability on the Council website and copies were placed in Wheathampstead Library.

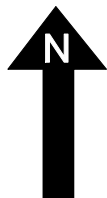
As a result of this consultation comments were received and addressed and some alterations were made to the text as agreed by the Planning and Conservation Portfolio Holder on 28 January 2011. This amended version forms the Wheathampstead Conservation Area Character Statement (Reviewed) February 2011.

If further advice or guidance is required please contact the Department of Planning and Building Control, St Albans City and District Council, Council Offices, Civic Centre, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3JE. Tel. St Albans (01727) 866100.

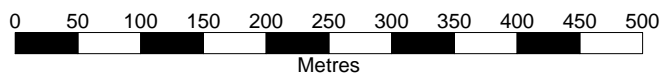
WHEATHAMPSTEAD CIRCA 1900



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