

# Cressing Conservation Area Appraisal

Prepared for Braintree  
District Council



February 2009

## Revision Schedule

### Cressing Conservation Area Appraisal

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 What is a conservation area?

- 1.1.1 Conservation areas are designated in recognition of the 'special architectural and historic interest' of an area, and the desirability of preserving or enhancing that interest. The planning process recognises that the benefit derived from areas with architectural and historic interest depends on more than the preservation of individual buildings of importance, and that a mix of factors, including green spaces, relationship of buildings to the street, commercial activity, street furniture and traffic flow, all impact on the perception of an area.
- 1.1.2 The Cressing Conservation Area (figure 1, appendix 1) was designated on the 22 October 1981 by Braintree District in recognition of the special architectural and historic interest of the area. Designation of a conservation area is not intended to prevent new development in the area, but introduces an additional level of control for the quality of design through the planning process. This should be undertaken in accordance with policies for the built environment set out in the Braintree District Local Plan Review (July 2005).
- 1.1.3 Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment, paragraph 4.1 places the emphasis on preserving or enhancing the 'character' of the designated area and, therefore, encompasses the entire area, rather than individual buildings. The spatial arrangement of buildings and open spaces, including green spaces, are of equal importance to the character of the designated area. Special consideration is also given to the context or 'setting' of the site, including views into, and out of it.

## 1.2 Background to Appraisal

- 1.2.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on Local Authorities to designate areas of special architectural or historic interest. Section 69(2) of the Act places a duty on the Council to review and appraise its conservation areas on a regular basis. This obligation is monitored through a series of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI 219a, b and c). Although BVPI 219c was removed recently, there remains a requirement for Councils to undertake Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans in order to monitor change and inform decision making.
- 1.2.2 This Appraisal has been prepared in accordance with English Heritage guidance on conservation areas contained within Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals (2006) and Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas (2006), and in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994 as amended 2007) (PPG15).
- 1.2.3 A combination of on site analysis and documentary research has been undertaken to provide an assessment of:
- existing activity and prevailing or former uses, and their influence on the conservation area and its buildings;

- the architectural and historic qualities of the buildings and the contribution that these make to the conservation area;
- local building details and materials, and
- the quality of the public realm and the contribution made to the conservation area by green spaces.

1.2.4 Guidance will also be provided on the future management of the conservation area through the adoption of a management strategy, with specific reference to:

- the extent of intrusion, damage of individual elements and the presence of neutral areas;
- the general condition of the conservation area and problems, pressures and scope for change within it; and
- the scope for boundary changes to the conservation area.

1.2.5 It is intended that this Appraisal will be used by the Council as guidance for assessing development proposals that affect the area and by residents, developers and the public to understand its significance in order that its special interest and character will be preserved and enhanced for future generations. It is not intended to be comprehensive and the omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

## 1.3 Planning Policy Context

1.3.1 Local authorities have a statutory duty to preserve and enhance a conservation area, through the planning system. Within a conservation area, additional protection is afforded to unlisted buildings and trees, allowing greater control over the impact of development. The national, regional and local policy regarding conservation areas is detailed below.

### National Policy

1.3.2 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on Braintree District Council to designate as conservation areas any “*areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”. Section 71 of the Act imposes a duty on the Council to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas with Section 72 requiring that “*special attention shall be paid in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. This requirement extends to all powers under the Planning Acts, not only those which relate directly to historic buildings*” as set out in PPG15, paragraph 4.14.

1.3.3 PPG15 paragraph 4.1 states that conservation area designation “*provides the basis for policies designed to preserve or enhance all aspects of character and appearance that define an area’s special interest*” and enables the application of conservation policies for a particular neighbourhood or area.

- 1.3.4 PPG15, paragraphs 4.2 and 4.4, emphasise the importance of considering the quality and interest of areas, rather than that of individual buildings, in identifying conservation areas.
- 1.3.5 PPG15, paragraph 4.3, states that the Council “*should seek to establish consistent local standards for their designations and should periodically review existing conservation areas and their boundaries against those standards*”. Designations should be negated “*where an areas or part of an area is no longer considered to possess the special interest which led to its original designation*”.

### Regional Policy

- 1.3.6 The East of England Plan, Policy ENV6: The Historic Environment and paragraph 8.20, advocate that local planning authorities should “*identify, protect and conserve, where appropriate, enhance the historic environment of the region*”. Conservation areas and listed buildings, their settings, and significant designed landscapes are considered of particular significance within the region.

### Local Policy

- 1.3.7 A number of local policies are applicable to the Conservation Area under the Braintree District Local Plan Review (July 2005) (Local Plan). Policy RLP 95, states that:

*“the Council will preserve, and encourage the enhancement of, the character and appearance of designated Conservation Areas and their settings, including the buildings, open spaces and areas, landscape and historic features and views into and within the constituent parts of designated areas. Built or other development, within or adjacent to a Conservation Area and affecting its setting, will only be permitted provided that:*

*(a) The proposal does not detract from the character, appearance and essential features of the Conservation Area;*

*(b) Any new development is situated in harmony with the existing street scene and building line, and is sympathetic in size, scale and proportions with its surroundings;*

*(c) Architectural details on buildings of value are retained*

*(d) Building materials are authentic and complementary to the building's character”.*

- 1.3.8 In addition Local Plan Policy RLP 79 states that “*development likely to cause permanent loss or damage to the traditional rural qualities of the countryside, or its essential landscape character will be refused, especially in Special Landscape Areas.*”

## 1.4 Summary of Special Interest

- 1.4.1 The special interest that Cressing Conservation Area has can be found in its retention of the character of many of the listed buildings, original historic street layout and plan form and the interaction between the built and natural environments. There have been a number of modern developments in the Conservation Area, which have been sensitively designed; however, there have been a number of alterations and the overall quality and condition of the area is eroded.

- 1.4.2 Cressing Conservation Area is located along a linear route the plan form of which has remained relatively unchanged since its original inception. The predominant building type within the Conservation Area is detached timber structures with clay tile roofs and two to three bays with a strong horizontal emphasis. Some interesting local features include external chimney stacks, panelled pargetting detailing to the facades, weatherboarding and flint stone walls. Numerous landmark buildings also add an extra dimension to the aesthetic appeal of the area. These include the grade I listed All Saints Church, and numerous 15th to 17th century farm buildings including the Rook Hall Farmhouse complex and the Horse Shoes former public house. There are also several buildings of historic interest throughout the Conservation Area that have lost much of their original character due to incremental erosion.
- 1.4.3 Many of the historic buildings within the Conservation Area have been significantly altered over the course of time, some detrimentally and some more sympathetically. Those that retain much of their historic fabric and integrity include the Horse Shoes and All Saints Church to the south, the Rook Hall complex and 'Old Barn' to the west and the Old Post Office to the north. The majority of the modern development is located in the north of the Conservation Area, although these have a very limited impact upon it.

## 2 Assessing Special Interest

### 2.1 Location and Setting

#### Location

- 2.1.1 The quiet village of Cressing is located 3.5 miles south east of Braintree off the B1018. It has important historical associations with the Knights Templar who constructed two medieval timber barns in the 12th century. These barns are located to the south of the Conservation Area. Cressing Conservation Area itself is located to the east of Cressing village and has developed along Church Road and The Street (fig.2). It is a feature of the northern Essex and Suffolk landscape that settlement is dispersed in this way, generally clustered around either a green area ('Tye') or the parish church.



**Figure 2 The Street looking north**

- 2.1.2 The geology formed after the most recent ice age is characterised by thick deposits of boulder clays, made fertile by chalk, known as Essex Till (Bettley & Pevsner, 2007). The soils mean that the area has a great importance for agriculture, preserving the rural character of the village. The geology also means that there is little local building stone; flint, clunch and septaria are generally reserved for important buildings such as the local church with the predominant building materials being timber with plaster and brick.
- 2.1.3 A Landscape Character Assessment was produced in 2006 for five authority areas in Essex, of which Braintree is one. Cressing is situated in two character areas, the Brain River Valley and the Silver End Farmland Plateau an area described as being characterised by gently rolling farmland. Cressing is located close to the Brain River Valley, a narrow valley noted for its moderate to steep sloping sides.

- 2.1.4 The parish of Cressing has a population of 1,538 (2001 Census). There are a high number of adults aged 30-59 and over 65. There are comparatively few children, although the under fives and 10-14s dominate.

### Setting

- 2.1.5 A strong sense of enclosure is formed by a defined building line and a distinct edge to the road boundary formed by hedges and property boundaries. Views out into the surrounding landscape are limited except for the approaches to the Conservation Area along Church Road, Polecat Road and the road which forms the junction off Church Road.
- 2.1.6 There are three main approaches into the Cressing Conservation Area. Approaching the Conservation Area along Church Road the road is defined by a strong hedge line which creates a sense of enclosure, characteristic of the Conservation Area (fig. 3). Gaps in this hedge line do however allow views out of the Conservation Area and onto the surrounding landscape. Development along this approach into the Conservation Area is largely widespread and, initially, visually restricted by the line of the road and the strong group of trees within the grounds of All Saints' Church.



**Figure 3 Church Road looking north**

- 2.1.7 Travelling into the Conservation Area along Polecat Road views of the surrounding landscape are possible, although views into the Conservation Area itself are restricted by a strong hedge and tree line. The road is marked by a series of large properties situated within spacious grounds, although views of these properties are also restricted (fig. 4).



**Figure 4 Polecat Road looking north east**

- 2.1.8 Although the wider landscape is characterised by gently rolling land, the immediate surrounding topography is flat. The Conservation Area itself is flat this and enhances its enclosed nature and prevents long distance views into it. Long distance views within the Conservation Area are restricted by the winding nature of the roads and the strong hedge and tree lines. The latter is characteristic of the Conservation Area.

## 2.2 Historic Development and Archaeology

- 2.2.1 The name Cressing is said to have developed from the fields of water cress that were abundant in the area, suggesting early management of the landscape. Evidence of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age human occupation has been found in the vicinity of Cressing. From the late Iron Age an agricultural economy develops. A number of crop marks in the fields surrounding the Conservation Area are indicative of earlier settlement patterns, with field boundaries and square and circular enclosures evident, although the date of many of these is as yet undetermined. The areas around the Church have, however, been investigated and suggest evidence of a settlement dating back to 4000BC.
- 2.2.2 Cressing Brook, which broadly runs parallel to the north south alignment of B1018, on its western side, forms a pond by Bird's Barn. The Brook flows through a channel along the road's eastern boundary with the Vicarage and runs to the east of the properties at the southern end of the Conservation Area. The proximity of the Brook to the oldest properties is unlikely to be accidental, with the Brook being a valuable source of water.
- 2.2.3 The presence of reused Roman brick in the building of the chancel of the church suggests that the area was occupied at this time. 'Zigzag work' above the northern doorway indicates that the nave is Norman or a later rebuild including this Norman work. Further work to the church in the 13th, 14th and 15th century indicates continuous settlement of the area for over a thousand years.

- 2.2.4 The Knights Templar was granted land at Cressing in 1137, by Queen Matilda, the first of its kind. Lord states in his book (page 65), that the Templars built their preceptory (or community) at Cressing away from the existing village. The 'advowson' or 'living of the church' was also given to the Knights, tying the village clearly with the Templars and later the Knights of the Order of Hospital of St John the Baptist of Jerusalem. These lands reverted to the crown at suppression of the Knights (British History Online). A more detailed history of Cressing Temple is contained in the Essex County Council guide.
- 2.2.5 In the following centuries a number of farms and small holdings were established, in the Cressing area, including Horse Shoes (from 15<sup>th</sup> century) the house (circa 1500) which has been subdivided to form the cottages of Tithings and Springwaters, Rook Hall which probably dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the Willows public house (16<sup>th</sup> century). These vernacular buildings were characterised by the use of steeply pitched tiled roofs, with side hung casement windows, although alteration of roof pitches, additions and the changing of windows to double hung vertical sliding sashes may disguise the original building style.
- 2.2.6 The 18<sup>th</sup> century sees enlargement of village, with a number of additional houses built including the Old Post Office. Buildings of this date tend to have less steeply pitched tiles or slated roofs and typically the influence of polite architecture can be seen, this increases as the century progresses.
- 2.2.7 Most properties in the village date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards and typically follow the architectural styles of the era, with pitched tiled roofs over rendered or brick elevations, with a variety of window styles. The mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century sees a number of buildings converted from agricultural, commercial or community use to residential, such as Birds Barn and the Old Church Hall along with infilling. The building form and materials continues to vary, but uses the historic palate of materials.

## 2.3 Spatial Analysis

- 2.3.1 The Conservation Area has a very shallow gradient rising subtly from south to north. The surrounding agricultural fields are important to the landscape setting of the Conservation Area. Due to the flatness of the topography many important views in and out of the Conservation Area are to be glimpsed through openings in the hedgerows that line many of the roads.
- 2.3.2 The Conservation Area preserves its medieval street plan, being predominately linear with sections broken up by the two small greens which create a visual focus. To the north 'The Street' features numerous detached and semi detached properties, the majority of which are slightly set back from the street. The western edge of the Conservation Area, along Polecat Road, features more agricultural complexes with the main buildings being significantly set back from the road and outbuildings scattered within their grounds.
- 2.3.3 Along Church Road to the south, there is little in the way of uniformity in the layout of the buildings, reflecting the piecemeal development of the Conservation Area. Here the buildings are a mixture of detached and semi detached and are relatively set back from the road with the exception of All Saints' Church which is set far back from the road and situated behind an ample church yard.

- 2.3.4 Unfortunately the majority of original plots within the Conservation Area have been eroded over time, with the exception of the western section where the majority of original plots are still extant. It is important that these original plots, which are likely to date to the 16th or 17th centuries, are protected so that the buildings remain in their original contexts, which is especially important with regard to the listed buildings.
- 2.3.5 Due to its location within a rural district, green spaces and countryside are a dominant and essential characteristic of a village location. Within the Conservation Area itself public green spaces are limited to the two small greens, which are a fairly neutral aspect of the Conservation Area although do provide a visual focus. Greenery is essential to many of the boundary treatments in the form of grass verges, dense hedgerows and the general vegetation that adorns the Conservation Area. The main significant green spaces are located outside the Conservation Area to the east, west and south in the form of relatively level, open agricultural land. These provide attractive views into and out of the Conservation Area.
- 2.3.6 The southern entrance to the Conservation Area is characterised by a long straight approach road flanked either side by dense hedgerows and narrow grass verges, giving an enclosed, 'tunnel like' approach. Although the streetscape opens up on entering the Conservation Area, with brief glimpses into the surrounding open agricultural fields to the east and west, a sense of enclosure is continued via the numerous trees that abound within the churchyard to the east and the vegetation that lines the car park to the west. The boundary treatment to the Church consists of a low lying red brick and flint wall interspersed with brick piers, which provides an attractive built edge to the church yard. Views of the Church are also restricted behind the collection of trees within the Church grounds which adds to the secluded nature of the building (fig. 5).



**Figure 5 All Saints' Church**

- 2.3.7 Moving north along Church Road, the streetscape becomes slightly more open and residential to the east with a continuation of vegetation to the west. This location of boundary treatments along the edge of the road to the east is continued outside 'Horse Shoes' where a modern picket timber fence with timber ball finials surrounds the property skirting round to the east. Original boundary treatments further north along this stretch of Church Road have

unfortunately been lost and now combine a mixture of brick and railings, picket fences and trimmed hedgerows. Although these boundaries do not reflect the character of the old buildings along this road, they are reasonably sympathetic being subtle in their scale and not overbearing.

- 2.3.8 Towards the first junction (unnamed road) buildings completely disappear and the street is dominated by tall dense hedgerows, Cressing Brook culvert to the west and the occasional item of street furniture. Progressing along 'The Street' the density of vegetation is more or less maintained with occasional openings to the east providing attractive views of the surrounding landscape.
- 2.3.9 Heading to the western side of the Conservation Area, the feel completely changes with the area becoming less linear and its focus centred around the green. A sense of continuity is also achieved in this area with the familiar brick and flint low rise walls outside Birds Barn (fig. 6) fronting onto Polecat Road. Adjacent to these are less sympathetic concrete and steel safety railing.



**Figure 6 Birds Barn boundary wall**

- 2.3.10 The village green is a small area at the junction of Polecat and Church Roads and The Street. It is characterised by non-native decorative vegetation, set in raised beds, alien to the naturalistic character of the Conservation Area. It also contains a number of uncoordinated items of street furniture ranging from a glass and steel telephone kiosk and concrete bollards to a wooden village notice board and a variety of signs.
- 2.3.11 The boundary materials to the north are similar to that of the rest of the Conservation Area, with picket fences, short box hedges and a mixture of low iron railings and stone walls. Although these treatments are not of historic value, like the majority of boundary treatments they are sympathetic to their surroundings in both their scale and material.

## 2.4 Character Analysis

- 2.4.1 The general character and plan form of Cressing Conservation Area has remained relatively static over time, which can be explained by the lack of development pressure on the settlement due to its agricultural nature. This is reflected in both visual and physical terms with a high retention of traditional views and built form. Despite the relatively small size of the Conservation Area, there is a central focus to it through the main green which dates back to the earliest Ordnance Survey (OS) maps if not earlier. However the main focus and interest of the Conservation Area is of the vernacular historic structures that dominate much of the Conservation Area's built form despite extensive alterations.
- 2.4.2 The Conservation Area is broadly linear in form, following the line of Church Road and 'The Street'. There is no retail activity within the area and the predominant character is residential with occasional agricultural and ecclesiastical structures punctuating the built form. The structures to the west are agricultural in form being set in generous plots and large in scale. The northern section is more densely packed with detached structures set slightly back from the road edge. To the south a variety of buildings exist from 20th century infills to 15th century cottages, to the dominant All Saints' church.
- 2.4.3 All the properties located along Church Road within the Conservation Area are situated on the eastern side of the road. The western side is dominated by dense vegetation with limited views to the surrounding countryside. The first structure viewed on the approach to the Conservation Area from the south is All Saints' Church, constructed of brick and flint with a two tiered pitched roof. The tree lined avenue to the entrance of the Church and the natural vegetation that abounds in the Church grounds also re-emphasises the rural nature of the Conservation Area.
- 2.4.4 The Horse Shoes is listed grade II, a two storey rendered and clay tiled house, formerly a public house, dates from the 15th century, with later 16th and 17th century alterations (fig. 7). It forms an important group with the Church and Tithings (fig. 8) and Springwaters (fig. 9). The two cottages were built circa 1500, with much of their historic fabric having been lost to incremental erosion and at first glance it is difficult to ascertain their historic significance. However, the rooflines and materials are of great importance here, retaining original clay tiles which is a typical attractive feature throughout the Conservation Area.



**Figure 7 The Horse Shoes**



**Figure 8 Tithings**



**Figure 9 Springwaters**

- 2.4.5 With the new build further north along Church Road, some effort has been made to respect the historic environment in their scale and massing. Shardloes Lodge (fig. 10) for example does not architecturally fit into its surrounding although, as a single storey, its negative impact visually on the Conservation Area is reduced, and merely adds to the interest in the development of the townscape. The buildings themselves have also been set back from the road. The majority of the Church Road area is characterised by a strong horizontal emphasis.



**Figure 10 Shardloes Lodge**

- 2.4.6 After the first small green, the rural qualities of the Conservation Area are reasserted with high hedgerows lining each side of the road before opening up to the east providing sweeping vistas of the surrounding countryside. Further north, the Conservation Area opens up and, heading west, the eye is drawn to a collection of buildings that are arguably the most interesting and well preserved structures within the whole Conservation Area.

- 2.4.7 Unlike the historic structures in the south of the Conservation Area, the 16th century buildings here have retained much of their original features and character with the retention of original facades, clay roofing tiles and weather boarding. These structures provide a hint as to what the area would have been like in the 17th century and earlier. The predominance of steeply pitched roofs in this area provides a distinctive roofscape and the clay tiles create a prominent visual impact.
- 2.4.8 Rook Hall farmhouse (fig. 11) is the centrepiece of these buildings and can be dated to the 16th or 17th century in line with the surrounding farms and cottage buildings although it has been altered overtime with the addition of sash windows, pedimented doorway and coupled rebuilt central chimney stack. The surrounding buildings would once have had a strong functional relationship with the main house and contribute to the visual aesthetic quality of the complex. There is a mixture of emphasis with regard to horizontal and vertical elements, with the form of the buildings being long, but dominated by pitched gables.



**Figure 11 Rook Hall farmhouse**

- 2.4.9 Finally, the northern section is distinctively different to the rest of the Conservation Area, with the majority of development being either 20th century or late 19th century with the exception of the 16th century 'The Willow' public house, which has been significantly altered over time with new roofing tiles and cat slide roof and dormers. The buildings in this area have a distinctive feel about them with pargetting being a dominant feature throughout.
- 2.4.10 This area is the only section in the Conservation Area where buildings have suffered from neglect and are now not necessarily visually appealing. Falcon House (fig. 12) for example requires a number of repairs.



**Figure 12 Falcon House**

- 2.4.11 The majority of other structures within this area are of neutral interest, neither detracting from the Conservation Area or enhancing it. The buildings are typically uniform and sympathetic in their design, with a strong two storey emphasis, slate roofs, central projecting porch entrances, pargetted facades and timber sash windows. Where buildings have been less sympathetically designed, in their scale and massing, such as 'Chestnuts', their impact on the Conservation Area has been partially mitigated by being set back from the street. Although this building is not located within the Conservation Area, it has an impact on the streetscape.

## 2.5 Local Materials

- 2.5.1 Flint was used in early buildings, such as the Church, as a status symbol. It is difficult to use in construction and in many cases is used with other materials to form openings and corners, which take structural stress. The structural stone of the Church is Clunch, a hardened form of chalk, and can be found within the Essex Till where it was eroded from the bedrock during the ice age.
- 2.5.2 Buildings of the 15th to 18th century are generally timber framed, due to the shortage of local stone and high cost of brick production at that date. These timbers were commonly rendered over with plaster or occasionally in this area boarded with horizontal timber planks.
- 2.5.3 Decorative moulded render to the exterior of a building, known as parget, is a feature of Essex and Suffolk. Original examples date from the 17th century; that to the Ferns is relatively modern. Render and decorative render continues to dominate the elevations of buildings in Cressing.
- 2.5.4 Brick was in use in Suffolk and Essex as early as the 15th century, although it was not until the 19th century that it became widely used. In Cressing the earliest bricks are used on chimneys, otherwise brick was not widely used until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in properties such as at the Vicarage.

## 3 Community Involvement

- 3.1.1 Braintree District Council wrote to parish councils, the general public and where available local history groups. Prior to the public consultation parish councils were contacted asking for details of local history or amenity groups who may have wished to be involved. All draft consultations were made available for download by the public on Braintree District Councils website.
- 3.1.2 The public consultation took place between 19<sup>th</sup> December 2008 and 16<sup>th</sup> January 2009.
- 3.1.3 In total 30 responses were received for Cressing. Comments were analysed by Braintree District Council and where further advice, information or clarification was required the Council consulted Essex County Council Historic Buildings Section, Parish Councils and our consultants.
- 3.1.4 The Draft Conservation Area Appraisal was taken to Braintree District Local Committee for consideration on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

## 4 Suggested Boundary Changes

### 4.1 Boundary Changes

- 4.1.1 It is proposed to amend the Conservation Area to extend the boundary to include the curtilage of Bird's Barn and the Old Post Office. This will mean that the boundary will concur with good practice guidance for conservation area boundaries to follow existing property or natural features in the landscape, rather than to cut across these. It also reduces confusion as to which part of a property lies within a conservation area.

## 5 Management Proposals

### 5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 Management proposals set out a future plan of action for the preservation or enhancement of a conservation area. Many of the proposals are relevant across the Braintree District, but others are specific to the Cressing Conservation Area.
- 5.1.2 Proposals may relate to matters of policy or control of development, or physical enhancement.

### 5.2 Summary of issues

- 5.2.1 The Conservation Area is suffering from a gradual erosion of its character through lack of sustained repair and maintenance of the buildings, the streets and street furniture. The alien landscape and townscape elements (although many may have been in place prior to the designation of the Conservation Area) and lack of control over minor development have also added to this erosion.

### 5.3 Local Generic Guidance

#### Planning Policy

- 5.3.1 Current policies in the Braintree District Plan 2005 cover layout and design of development, preservation and enhancement of conservation areas, demolition in conservation areas, changes of use in conservation areas, environmental enhancement in conservation areas fascias and illuminated and non-illuminated signs in conservation areas, and shopfronts in conservation areas.
- 5.3.2 Braintree District Council is in the process of reviewing their forward plan, or local development framework (LDF). This new forward plan works from a strategic level down to the detailed policy level, each of these levels have a different name and varying amount of detail. Good design, conservation and heritage should be a central theme in the Core Strategy, Development Control Policies and Supplementary Planning Documents. More information on the current position and the process can be found on [www.braintree.gov.uk](http://www.braintree.gov.uk).
- 5.3.3 The current Government guidance will be reviewed and a new Planning Policy Statement on the historic environment produced shortly. This will guide future policy formulation as well as development control. Detailed policies and management should cover colour of buildings, window and door replacement, boundary treatment, signage, hanging baskets, satellite dishes and trees in conservation areas and the placing and materials of street furniture.
- 5.3.4 New buildings and/or building alterations and additions will also need to be considered in detail. The Essex County Council's Design Guide addresses a number of relevant issues, but care must be taken to ensure that where this guidance is followed, the design is still appropriate for the particular local style of buildings, which varies from settlement to settlement.

## Historic Buildings

- 5.3.5 Many of the buildings within a conservation area will be historic, where traditional architectural detailing and breathable natural materials were used. These details and materials contribute to the overall feel of the area and the health of the buildings. A strategy which sets out Braintree's approach to the use and retention of traditional architectural details and materials should be developed. This strategy will ensure that the appropriate approach is taken to preserve not only the conservation area but may also be applied to listed buildings within the district.
- 5.3.6 Specialist advice is provided by Essex County Council, who has produced guidance on pargetting, limewashing, pointing with lime mortars, conservatories and renewal of timber window frames. However this needs to be backed up with supporting strategies to ensure their use. This is particularly important where buildings are in need of significant repair.
- 5.3.7 In addition to the retention of traditional materials, a strategy for buildings at risk should be developed. The County Council currently maintains the register for Essex of listed buildings within the Conservation Area which could be considered as 'buildings at risk' either because they are in poor repair, slowly decaying and either disused or underused. The situation needs to be monitored and a process put in place for dealing with problem buildings should they arise, leading to further prevention of decay.

## Restriction of Permitted Development Rights

- 5.3.8 'Article 4 Directions' enable the Council to ensure that minor alterations and development within the Conservation Area are carried out in an appropriate manner, through the planning process. Following changes to the planning system on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008, via an amendment to the General Permitted Development Order, a number of additional alterations may be made to dwellings without the need for planning permission (via 'permitted development rights').
- 5.3.9 These Rights may be removed following a strict procedure, which includes separate public consultation, the implementation of an Article 4(2) Direction means that a number of alterations and additions may be controlled. In these additional cases there is no fee to make the planning application.
- 5.3.10 It is recommended that where it is identified that the character and appearance of the conservation area has been diminished through permitted development, the following classes of permitted development rights for dwelling houses be removed from land within the Conservation Area, in the form of an Article 4(2) Direction, these are detailed in Appendix 3:
- Schedule 2, part 1, classes A to H;
  - Schedule 2, part 2, classes A and C; and,
  - Schedule 2, part 31, class B.

## 5.4 Management Plan

- 5.4.1 A management plan sets out steps to maintain and enhance the character of the Conservation Area, which are in addition to the local generic guidance suggested above.

## **Review of the conservation area appraisal**

- 5.4.2 Conservation area appraisals need to be reviewed from time to time. Policy changes can also mean that an appraisal requires updating. The conservation area appraisal should be reviewed when such changes take place, subject to available resources.

## **Monitoring and enforcement**

- 5.4.3 Under Section 215 of Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Braintree District Council can tackle sites or buildings which are untidy character or appearance and/or in poor repair may be tackled by. This allows the Council to improve the amenity of an area, including land or buildings within a conservation area. English Heritage has produced a good practice guide which demonstrates effective use of Section 215 Notices. These notices can be used to ensure sites and buildings are repaired and maintained.
- 5.4.4 Care needs to be taken with the approval of minor alterations and additions to buildings within the conservation area and with any new development; incremental change where not carefully considered can lead to alteration of the conservation area over time. Periodic monitoring for changes and regular photographing of the conservation area including individual buildings should be undertaken to monitor for incremental change. This should be undertaken no less than once every three years, and may form part of the conservation area appraisal process.
- 5.4.5 Periodic monitoring will alert Braintree District Council to unauthorised works and enable the relevant action to be taken.

## **Environmental enhancement and maintenance**

- 5.4.6 This section contains a number of recommendations for environmental enhancements in the conservation area.

### **Boundary Treatments**

- 5.4.7 A number of native vegetation hedges and trees exist in the conservation area, which form the boundary of many properties with the road. In other places low or medium height brick or brick and flint walls are common.
- 5.4.8 However the boundaries to Falcon House, Inglenook and the Old Church Hall detract from the area due to their alien forms. The use of suitable materials for the treatment of boundaries should be encouraged, seeking wherever possible the replacement of existing negative boundary treatments.



**Figure 13 All Saints Church boundary wall and hedge to western side of Church Road Services**

- 5.4.9 A number of electrical and telephone wires on telegraph poles are visible in the street, which detract from the character of the area. A programme of under-grounding of cabling should be considered.

#### **Traffic Management and Streets**

- 5.4.10 A number of the streets within the Conservation Area are showing signs of wear and tear with eroded verges, pot holes, poorly maintained kerbs and lack of maintenance of hedgerows.
- 5.4.11 The installation of a traditional kerb to stop the erosion of verges will create a hard edge to the roadside which would be alien to the existing natural edge. Reinstatement of the soft verge and a programme of public awareness to stop parking on the verge is likely to be sufficient to avoid further erosion. However, a further measure would be the installation of oak bollards (on sheer plates) at key locations, where erosion continues to prove an issue.
- 5.4.12 Parking on the road rather than the verge will also reduce traffic speeds.
- 5.4.13 An enhancement scheme for the large area of eroded verge opposite the Church would improve this entrance to the village and the Conservation Area. The use of a soil stabilising substructure which allows vegetation to be reseeded is recommended, allowing occasional use of this area for parking.
- 5.4.14 A number of driveways and parking areas have been constructed of tarmac and concrete blocks, where these form wide uninterrupted areas, such as at the Old Church Hall and the Willows public house; this has a detrimental effect on the character of the Conservation Area. The establishment of a palette of materials that would be suitable for use in the conservation area for driveways, parking areas and for the top dressing of paths and roads to reduce their impact on the character of the area is recommended.

## The Green

- 5.4.15 Despite being an essential part of the Conservation Area, the village green harms the rural character. An environmental enhancement scheme which restores the area to a natural green area would significantly enhance the conservation area.



**Figure 14 The Green**

- 5.4.16 The following items are recommended for the enhancement of the green:
- The removal of the large ornamental tree, and ornamental garden bed and vegetation and a return to grass
  - Relocation of the telegraph pole and associated equipment, village notice board to one of the verges of Church Road;
  - The removal of extraneous signage and consolidation of signage as white painted timber signs, a white painted timber pole, and an additional finger with white on brown (Cressing Temple);
  - The removal of the concrete bollards;
  - Replacement of the concrete and timber bench with a timber one;
  - Reinstatement of the verges of the green and around the green;
  - Replacement oak posts to the road name signs;
  - Replacement of the litter bin with one made of timber;
  - Removing the white lining around the green and resurfacing of the road to incorporate a neutral coloured stone in the wearing/top course.

## 6 Useful Information

### Bibliography

Bettley, J and Pevsner, N. (2007) Essex: The Buildings of England. Yale University Press: London.

Essex County Council (1997) Cressing Temple: A guide, Essex: Essex County Council

Lord, E. 2004. *The Knights Templar in Britain*. Pearson Education Limited: Harlow.

Royal Commission of Historic Monuments (1922) Vol 3. Essex North East

Vesey, B. 2004. *Guide to Rural England: East Anglia* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Travel Publishing: Berks

Victoria County History of Essex

### Web site information

LCA - Section 3.0 Landscape Character Assessment of Braintree District:

[http://www.braintree.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C556317B-DBD2-46D7-A2F3-7DC22E3CED85/0/11100101Section30\\_270906.pdf](http://www.braintree.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C556317B-DBD2-46D7-A2F3-7DC22E3CED85/0/11100101Section30_270906.pdf)

British History Online:

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=50904&strquery=cressing> 29/10/08 16:00

## 7 Contact Details

For further information regarding this Conservation Area Appraisal or regarding properties within the Bulmer Conservation Area please contact:

Braintree District Council  
Development Services  
Causeway House  
Braintree  
Essex  
CM7 9HB

Tel: 01376 5525

## Appendix 1

### Figure 1 Map of the Cressing Conservation Area

# Appendix One

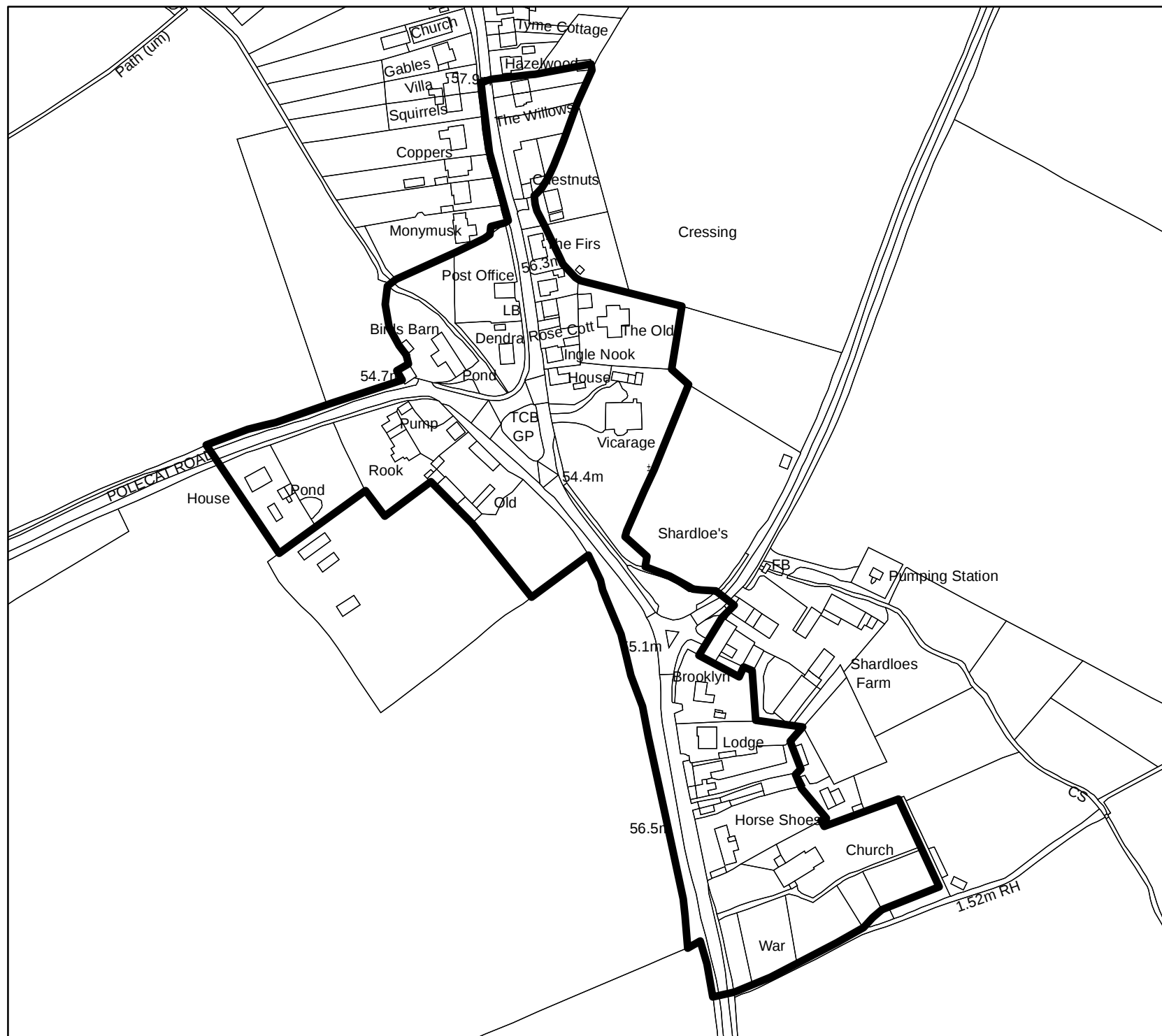
## Figure One

### Map of

### Cressing

### Conservation

### Area



1:2500

#### Key

 Conservation Area

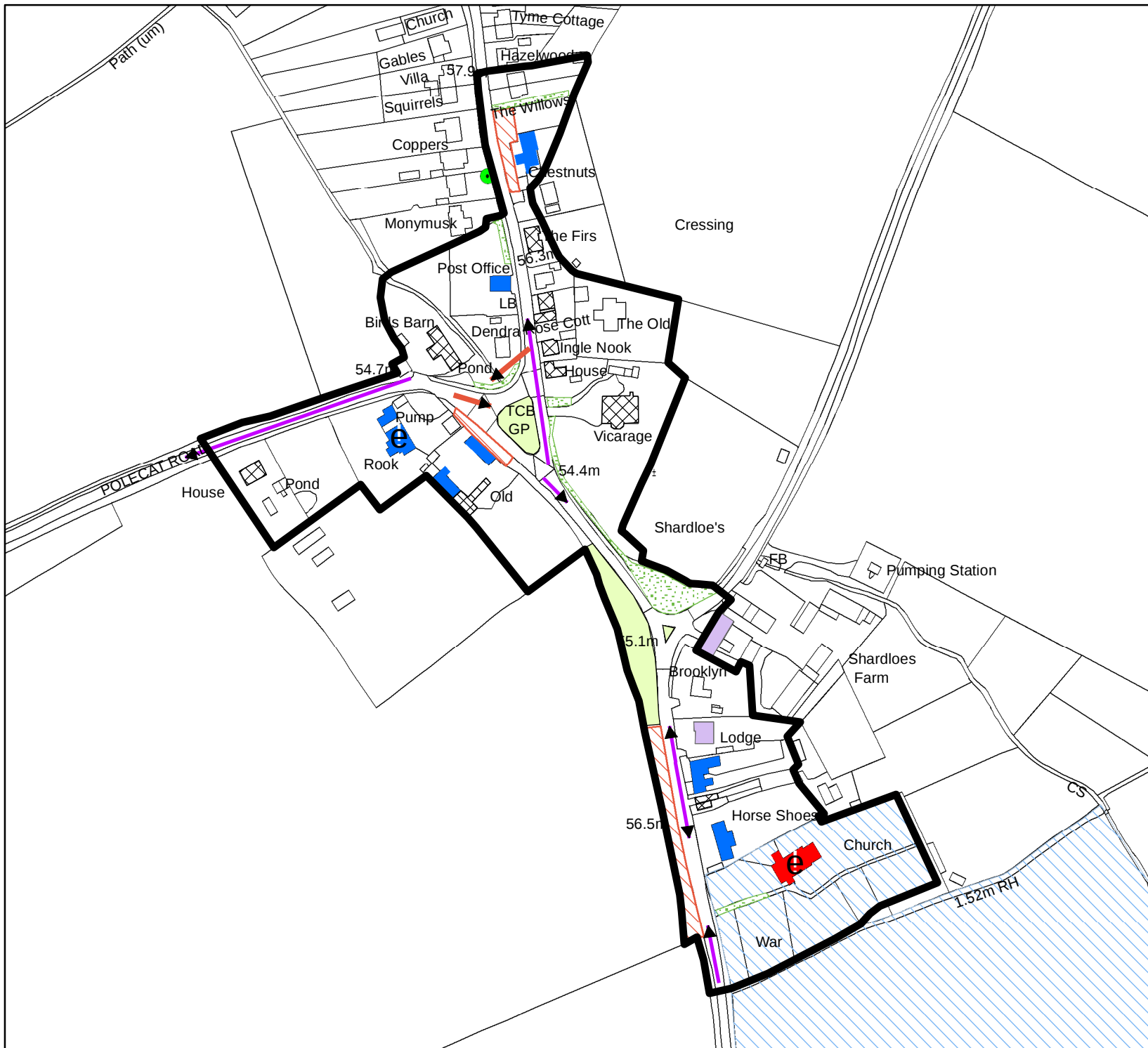
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## Appendix 2

### Figure 2 Townscape Analysis Map

# Appendix Two Figure Two Crossing Townscape Analysis Map

1:2500



- Key**
- Proposed Extent of Conservation Area
  - Buildings of Townscape Merit
  - Landmark Buildings
  - Negative Views
  - Positive Views
  - Negative Buildings
  - Important Green Space
  - Important Hedges and Trees
  - Negative Floorscape
  - Tree Preservation Order
  - Grade 1 Listed Building
  - Grade 2 Listed Building
  - Archaeological Sites

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## Appendix 3

### Article 4 Directions

Permitted development rights allow certain minor works to be undertaken to dwelling houses without the need to apply for planning permission; these were most recently amended on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008. Rights may be removed following a strict procedure, which includes separate public consultation.

Directions under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 allow the removal of permitted development rights in conservation areas. The implementation of an Article 4(2) Direction means that in certain additional cases a planning application is required, in these additional cases there is no fee to make the application.

The following rights may be removed on dwelling houses, which will add to the protection of the character of the conservation area:

|            |        |         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------|--------|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Schedule 2 | Part 1 | Class A | The enlargement , improvement or other alteration of a dwelling house                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|            |        | Class B | The an enlargement of a dwelling house consisting of an addition or alteration to its roof                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|            |        | Class C | Any other alteration to the roof of a dwelling house                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|            |        | Class D | The erection of construction of a porch outside any external door of a dwelling house                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|            |        | Class E | The provision within the curtilage of the dwelling house of any building or enclosure, swimming or other pool for a purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling house as such, or the maintenance, improvement or other alteration of such a building or enclosure; or a container used for domestic heating purposes for the storage of oil or liquid petroleum gas. |
|            |        | Class F | Hardstanding within the curtilage of a dwelling house                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|            |        | Class G | The installation or replacement of a chimney, flue, or soil vent pipe on a dwelling house                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|            |        | Class H | The installation or replacement of a microwave antenna on a dwelling house                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

|         |         |                                                                                                                                   |
|---------|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Part 2  | Class A | The erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence or wall or other means of enclosure           |
|         | Class C | The painting of the exterior of any building or work                                                                              |
| Part 31 | Class B | Any building operation consisting of the demolition of the whole or any part of any gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure |