

Higham on the Hill

Conservation Area Appraisal

October 2009

- 1 The name Higham on the Hill is derived from High Ham', a Farm or manor above the surrounding countryside. Although not mentioned in the Doms Day Book of 1086, it is believed that it was included in an adjacent Lordship. The origin of the ending in ham suggests it is of Anglo-Saxon origins.
- 1.1 Dedicated to St Peter, the parish church has the only complete Norman tower in South Leicestershire. Its peal of bells includes the Armada bell cast by Thomas Newcombe of Leicester in 1589. The advowson was in the hands of the Fisher family, five of whom have been rectors in Higham and some are buried in the churchyard. The most notable of these was Dr Geoffrey Francis Fisher who became the Archbishop of Canterbury and officiated at the coronation in 1953 of Queen Elizabeth II.
- 1.2 Agriculture was the main occupation in the village until the turn of the twentieth century although there were bakers, a wheelwright, a miller, carpenters, shoemakers, a blacksmith and a tailor. A typically self-sufficient community, the men grew vegetables, kept chickens and occasionally a pig. Women worked in the fields, made clothes and looked after the family. If the breadwinner was ill there was poverty. Mr Tom Rowley started a branch of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows which assisted if the family could afford the contributions.

Character of the village

2. Despite recent changes to the nature of the population of the village which has become a dormitory for Nuneaton and Hinckley, the village farms still ensure that the prevailing image is that of an agricultural settlement. The retention of farm houses, their associated buildings and yards are essential to the preservation of the character of the conservation area.

3.0 The Village Approaches

- 3.1 *From Stoke Golding:* Due to its location on a slight plateau, from a distance, the village and particularly its church, is easily seen from the neighbouring countryside. Moving closer, however, these glimpses are concealed by the twisting road pattern and mature tree planting.
- 3.2 *From Wykin:* Higham's prominent location is easily visible from this approach reinforced by an occasional glimpse of the high brick wall surrounding Higham Hall and Victorian farm buildings. The narrowness of the road, the high walls which on the western side stand above an embankment and the mature planting combine to give this route a strong sense of enclosure.
- 3.3 *From Nuneaton:* This village entrance is distinctively different. Although the approach climbs up the hill from Watling Street, the road is relatively straight and the adjacent fields have limited planting which gives an open feel. The settlement itself is entered through an avenue of two rows of early twentieth century detached and semi-detached houses of the classic 1930's appearance. These complement this open image, having long front gardens with almost no mature vegetation or trees.
- 3.4 *From the West:* This entrance has similar characteristics to the above. Although bounded by hedges, it runs straight through open countryside with limited vegetation. Buildings along the south of this entrance route are set on a slight rise which is separated from the road by an area of informal parking with grassed boundaries. They form the edge of a 1950's Council estate which again has a uniform appearance. To the north, is the settlement's park set behind a row of low Victorian cottages which themselves stand behind low hedges close to the road.

4 Townscape

- 4.1 Although a ridge top linear village, the Main Street of Higham is not straight. It consists of a series of subtle bends and gentle curves which are reinforced by key buildings and the new road layout introduced recently by Leicestershire County Council. Thus

a sense of progression is experienced as the visitor passes through a series of linked spaces from one end to the other.

- 4.2 *Space A:* The eastern entrance to the village is defined by the forked road intersection of Stoke Lane and Hinckley Lane, thick mature vegetation and high brick walls. These walls form the original boundaries of Higham Hall and the former Rectory, now Canterbury House. The land behind them, however, is now in separate ownership. On the north side, the wall conceals a large modern bungalow and to the south, a modern two storey property. Both are well set back and have no impact on the public space
- 4.3 *Space B:* The eastern entrance flows into the next space which extends as far as the intersection with Barr Lane. Again this is tightly defined by the continuing high walls of the Hall to the south and houses and garden walls close to the back edge of pavement to the north which emphasise the sense of enclosure. Rising above the southern walls are the clay tiled roofs of the former stable buildings, now converted into residential use. They have prominent flat roofed dormer windows and high elaborate chimneys which act as landmark features. The walls of the Hall extend along Barr Lane and together with strips of thick trees on both sides of the road, to a large extent conceal from public view the properties behind.
- 4.4 *Space C:* As Main Street enters the village proper, the streetscape opens up. To the south the building fabric extends with a strong edge as the mixture of dwellings, modern and old, and walls of brick and stone. The properties are tightly spaced and set relatively close to the pavement in contrast with the Victorian school building to the north which is isolated and set far back. This gives a sense of openness to this side of the road which is complemented by the long view westwards along Main Street terminating in the gable of no. 79 Main Street. .
- 4.5 *Space D:* Main Street continues as a gentle curve which terminates in a sharp bend and the street frontages of the former post office and the three storeys Ravenstone Farm. Its farm yard beyond has recently been converted into residential use but adds

considerable interest and reflects the villages close links to the countryside. The streetscape is tightly enclosed by long terraces of cottages and further farm houses. These buildings lie almost parallel to the road, have flat facades and steeply pitched roofs covered with Staffordshire Blue tiles. Important features are the ridge top chimneys, the red post box and the telephone kiosk. Unfortunately some facades have recently been changed from their traditional brick appearance by the addition of rendering and flat window heads in place of segmental arches.

- 4.6 *Space E*: The next space is formed by the intersection of Main Street and Nuneaton Lane. Here, a small green parcel of land with two trees provides a contrast to the confined space of the remainder of this area. Properties generally stand behind short front gardens with low or occasionally high brick walls. They have flat facades of render or brickwork; steep roofs with prominent chimneys and with one exception have retained natural materials for roof coverings. This, despite unfortunate changes to windows, has given the area a unified appearance. Recent development has mainly followed traditional design and details, however there are exceptions. In particular, single storey buildings by their scale, orientation, detail and open frontages, have had a detrimental impact on the character.
- 4.7 Westwards, beyond this intersection, the street again forms a tight enclosure of two storey cottages of traditional design, but contrasting orientations, a further partly grassed parking area marks the end of the conservation area. Here long distant views of the countryside and hedge boundaries reinforce the rural character of the settlement.

5 Important views:

- 5.1 The village's prominent ridge top location enables good views out into the countryside, especially towards Nuneaton, Atherstone, the Ashby Canal and Stoke Golding which are important to protect. Its historic core however is generally screened from the surrounding area by modern development or thick vegetation.

6. Building Materials:

- 6.1 Traditionally plain tiled roofs and red brick walls with occasional stone plinths are dominant. However, there are some slate roofs and many brick frontages have been rendered. Windows were traditionally Yorkshire sliding sash windows or casement although again many have been changed for plastic which is out of keeping with the traditional qualities of the village.

7. Important Spaces:

- 7.1 If the smaller back gardens of properties are included, then green spaces make a large contribution to the character of the village.
- A) *The field to the north of the Old Rectory.* This is kept as pasture and includes an old village pond. It is defined by trees and hedges on some boundaries.
 - B) *Grounds of the Old Rectory.* This is an extensive parkland garden with some attractive tree cover.
 - C) *Glebecroft.* This is a large walled garden associated with a 1930's built house.
 - D) *Higham Hall Grounds.* This is an Edwardian country house walled garden with good tree cover.
 - E) *Orchard House.* This 1950's neo-classical property has large spacious grounds
 - F) *Fields to the rear of properties to the south of Main Street.* This is attractive semi-agricultural land with limited tree cover but good views to the south.
 - G) *Rear gardens and allotments to the north of Main Street.* This land is also semi- agricultural with good views to the north
 - H) *Land adjacent to Ivy House Farm.* This site behind a random stone wall adds considerable character to Main Street.

- J) *St Peter's churchyard*: This is a very attractive tree lined area.
- K) *School playground and playing fields*: These are important open areas associated with the school which provide good views of the countryside and strongly contrast to the sense of enclosure in the remainder of Main Street adding greatly to the character of the village.
- L) *Field between the Old Rectory and the Church*: The area of land is significant adding to the rural image of the village.
- M) *Playing fields*: Although not directly connected to the village, this green space also adds significantly to the rural nature of the village.
- N) *Small grassed amenity area adjacent to intersection of Main St and Nuneaton Lane*: Open fronted to both streets, this small green area is located at the commercial heart of the village.

8. Buildings of poor visual quality

- 8.1 Overall the village appears to have lost few buildings through demolition although many buildings have been severely altered. Most cottages have been changed through the replacement of timber windows with plastic and natural roof coverings with concrete. This is continuing and is having a detrimental impact on its character. It is important that residents appreciate the importance of retaining historic features and using traditional materials to repair the built fabric. Through the continuing encouragement of the Parish Council, satellite dishes are being restricted to none public facades.

9. Important Local Buildings

The Oddfellows Arms was built in 1791 as two cottages but in 1862 was converted into one property. It was subsequently purchased by William Webb in 1874 and became a public house. It is thought that the name of Oddfellows is associated with

Manchester Unity Oddfellows Club, a Friendly Society whose members contributed when employed and were helped when in need.

The Methodist Chapel (Grade II Listed) occupies a building previously known as the house that Jack built. The deeds of this property go back to 1838 when Jack Brown built it with bricks he brought by hand cart from Wilnecote, 10 miles away. The cast iron window frames were carried on his back 42 miles from Birmingham. He worked on the house for 14 years but never finished it, the roof being added by the parish. Although the building appears to be two houses with two front doors, two rear doors and two internal staircases, it has always been one house. It was purchased in 1959 and converted into the Methodist Chapel.

Higham Hall (Grade II listed). The present building was constructed 1900 – 02 by Harry Quick, replacing an earlier building. It is red brick with sand stone dressings and plain tiled roof. Key features are the prominent triple and quadruple ridge stacks. It was built for Mr C H Morris, a pit owner, although subsequently it was used during the late 20,s and early 30's as a preparatory school. It is now in private ownership. Between the Hall and Main Street is a group of associated former stable buildings, now converted into residential use.

The Primary School on Main Street was constructed in 1864 and although recently extended, the original building is an attractive single storey structure set in large playing fields. It is a single storey building of character constructed in the gothic style with large pointed windows steeply pitched slated roof and occasional polychromatic brickwork.

The Reading Room was erected by voluntary subscription in 1881 and intended to be a reading and recreation room for men over 16 years old in the village. There rules insisted that there was to be no drunkenness, no gambling or bad language and the newspaper could only be retained by a man for 10 minutes maximum. Between 1958 and 1990 it was used as a surgery but

has subsequently been converted to residential use and its appearance radically changed.

The Parish Church of St Peter (Grade II* listed) has a C12 tower with the nave dated 1790 by H Couchman. It was refenestrated in 1854 and a south aisle and porch added by Ewan Christian. The single bay chancel of 1870 by R Jennings of Atherstone replaced Couchman's earlier apsidal sanctuary. Externally, the Lych-gate was built in 1939. Closely associated with the church and Canterbury House nearby are the Fisher family. These played an important part in the religious life of the village and the parish from the 18th to the 20th centuries. Geoffrey Fisher became the Archbishop of Canterbury and officiated at the crowning of Queen Elizabeth 2nd in 1953.

Canterbury House was built as a rectory in 1771 and was the home of the Fisher family. It was the birth place of Geoffrey Fisher a former Archbishop of Canterbury.

Post Office Cottage, on Main Street, was built around 1760. Before becoming the post office in 1950, it had previously been a bakery and a butcher's shop. It closed in 2000 and has been returned to residential accommodation although the post box is retained in its external wall.

Pump Row originally was a complex of properties set in three terraces. There were 12 terraced cottages although now there are only five. Their name derives from the village pump which previously was sited in the road margin at the front of the cottages. These narrow one room up, one room down properties, also had open sided but roofed terraces for washing attached at the rear. Although now enclosed, these structures are important features which can still be seen. To the rear and set at right angles is a further row of attached buildings which, although now in a dilapidated condition, were also formerly residential properties. Each unit consists of two ground floor rooms, with brick floors, lath and plaster ceilings and a fireplace which can still be seen. Now known as bungalow row, each house together with those in Pump Row has the use of a garden in a large plot of land extending to

the north. In the past the northern most unit is believed to have been the village lock-up.

The village Farms

Ravenstone farm, 60 Main Street (Grade II Listed): Recent research has suggested that this farm complex was originally in the ownership of the owners of The Hall in Ravenstone village some miles to the north of Higham. Although still presenting an agricultural appearance, both the house and the outbuildings are being converted into residential use. The farmhouse itself is late C18 and red brick with a slate roof and brick end stacks. It has a regular 3 window street frontage with a central flush panel door. It is one of the few three story buildings in the village and together with its yard and ancillary agricultural buildings is a key landmark feature.

Elms Farm, 70 Main Street, (Grade II Listed) also two storeys, has been recently improved to modern standards although like the former, it retains a rural appearance. Standing on a Charnwood rubble stone plinth, its red brick elevations probably conceal the residue of earlier timber framed buildings. It has a tiled roof with a distinctive toothed brick eaves band and a brick stack to the left of centre. The timber windows on the ground floor street elevation have segmental heads. It is thought to date from the early to mid C18. These former farms add considerable to the character of the village and views from the street of the former farm yard and barns are particularly important.

68 Main Street (Grade II listed) was probably formerly a pair of cottages and has been dated C18. It has painted roughcast elevations with a plain tiled roof and a tall brick stack at its left hand end. It is two stories with irregular fenestration on both floors facing the street.

10 Enhancement

The enhancement of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area can be defined as the reinforcement of the qualities providing the special interest, which warranted

designation. It may involve physical proposals or the application of sensitive, detailed development control over extensions and alterations. Areas which warrant special attention for enhancement are marked on the Conservation Area plan.

11 GENERAL CONSERVATION AREA GUIDANCE, PLANNING CONTROLS AND POLICIES

To maintain the distinctive character and appearance of the Higham on the Hill Conservation Area, it will be necessary to:

- Retain listed buildings and buildings of local interest.
- Ensure new development contributes positively to the character or appearance of the conservation area in terms of siting, scale, design and materials used.
- Ensure house extensions comply with the Borough Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- Resist development proposals in key areas, which have been identified on the map.
- Ensure the consistent application of positive, sensitive and detailed development control over proposals to alter former farm buildings, yards and estate cottages.
- Ensure important views of the Hall and out into the countryside are protected.

Special attention is given to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the appearance of the Conservation Area. Planning Applications in Conservation Areas are separately advertised. The principal effects of the designation of a Conservation Area are summarised as follows:

- Consent is required for the total or substantial demolition of any building exceeding 115 cu metres.
- Applications for Outline Planning permission are not normally acceptable. Full planning applications are likely to be required.

Planning permission is required for:

1. The external cladding of any building with stone, artificial stone, pebble dash, render, timber, plastic or tiles.
2. Extensions beyond a wall forming a side elevation of the original dwelling
3. Extensions of more than one storey which extend beyond the rear wall of the original dwelling.
4. The enlargement of a dwelling consisting of an addition or alteration to its roof forming the principal or side elevation of a dwelling.
5. A satellite dish on chimney, wall or roof fronting a highway.
6. Solar PV or solar thermal equipment on a wall or roof slope forming the principal or side elevation of a dwelling
7. Stand alone solar equipment
8. Installation, alteration or replacement of a chimney, flue or soil vent pipe on a wall or roof slope which fronts a highway and forms either the principal or side elevation of a dwelling.

Anyone proposing works to a tree in a Conservation Area must give six weeks prior written notice to the local planning authority.

These requirements do not cover all aspects of control in Conservation Areas and you are advised to contact the Local Planning Authority for further advice.