



Hinckley & Bosworth  
Borough Council

*A Borough to be proud of*

**Ratby**

**Conservation Area Appraisal**

**December 2013  
(Adopted February 2014)**

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Conservation Area in Ratby was declared in 1976. The principle purpose of the designation was to protect those parts of the village, which are closely associated with the village's past.
- 1.2 The designated area has been analysed in terms of its buildings of townscape merit, distinctive details, features of interest, green spaces and vegetation.

## **2.0 Historical Development**

- 2.1 Until the late 18th Century, Ratby was primarily an agricultural settlement with villagers mainly employed on the land by the principal land owners, the Stamford family. Former farm buildings including some timber framed structures from the medieval period are well represented in the Conservation Area and form an important part of its character.
- 2.2 With the Enclosure Act of 1773, many tenant farmers lost their livelihood and sought employment as Framework Knitters in the hosiery industry. The village became a major centre for this industry and within the historic core there are examples of Stockinger's cottages, 19th Century frame shops and a large early factory.
- 2.3 In 1830 Parliamentary consent was given to found the Leicester to Swannington Railway Company which was the first to be constructed south of Manchester. Robert Stephenson was its engineer and it was mainly used to transport coal. It was eventually constructed in 1846. It attracted several coal merchants to the area and the expansion of the quarries in Groby. The railway also encouraged more hosiers into the village and by 1852 there were seven hosiers working in Ratby.
- 2.4 During the Victorian period the village rapidly expanded but until 1886 most properties were clustered around the church or the railway station. Domestic properties were often built around jitties and yards, where they were constructed in tight groups, fragments of which have survived. Of particular interest is the frontage to Sills Yard. Public buildings from this period include the village school and the Church Halls.

- 2.5 Frame shops which were the forerunners of factories became established and by 1881, Ratby was a large village mainly inhabited by Framework Knitters. The largest frameshop was on the corner of Stamford Street which employed 30 workers. This was followed in 1900 by a large factory on Upper Stamford Street which eventually became the Leicestershire firm of Wolsey.
- 2.6 By the beginning of the 20th Century employment had diversified into hosiery, quarrying and agriculture. The village had its own railway station on the Midland branch line in the lower part of the village, a school and five public houses. During this century the village expanded massively. Many of the 20 farms in the village at the turn of the century were absorbed into housing developments. By the turn of the 21st Century, however, the textile factories and the railway line had closed. The rail line is now a bridleway.

### **3.0 Setting**

- 3.1 The village is relatively isolated and is surrounded by open countryside and woodland. Large areas of traditional ridge and furrow, particularly to the north-west, play an important part in the historical setting of the settlement.

### **4.0 Views**

- 4.1 Views into and out of the Conservation Area are largely dictated by local topography. There are wide panoramic views of the nearby countryside from the churchyard towards the west and south-east. Into the Conservation Area, the most extensive views are often across rooftops and between buildings. These reveal the dramatic geography of the area, the exposed position of the church, the almost universal use of slate covered roofs and the prevalence of brick chimneys.
- 4.2 The importance of framed views within streets, through gaps between buildings and the vista on to St Philip and St James Church from the M1 Motorway, Burroughs Road and beyond.

### **5.0 Gateways**

- 5.1 From the north, high stonewalls and trees give the historic core a distinctly separate rural appearance.
- 5.2 Along Station Road, the entrance is characterised by long stone walls, the Methodist chapel and the large vernacular building opposite which is the former bakery and shop of George Geary.

- 5.3 The entrance to the Conservation Area from Desford Lane is marked by the former Box Tree farm buildings which also act as a visual stop along Main Street. Although other vernacular buildings on Lower Main Street have been retained, they have unfortunately been given unsympathetic shop front treatments and house modernisations.

## **6.0 Character of Ratby**

- 6.1 The Conservation Area extends around the intersection of the roads from Markfield, Groby, Desford and Kirby Muxloe.
- 6.2 The village developed as a small hill top settlement of farms and cottages around the Parish Church. It later spread down the valley westwards where further farms were built along Main Street. The church has retained its dominant position and stands on a prominent open green space, visible from several important vantage points within and around the settlement. The impact of the hosiery industry through its characteristic Stockinger's cottages has also had a major impact on the appearance of the village.

## **7.0 Building Style Scale and Detail**

- 7.1 Traditional two storey houses on the back edge of the pavement or with small front gardens are a characteristic of the area. There is no dominant building style but buildings, in general, have simple rectangular plans, slate covered gabled roofs and flat elevations with an occasional single storey bay. In some instances, the roof space forms a third storey with gable windows, but this is not common. The use of red/orange brickwork of various tones above stone or blue brick plinths together with slate roof coverings, provide a consistent appearance to the area. Where the buildings have been given a smooth rendered finish, they retain a distinctive pleasant appearance although this often covers features which would reveal the historical development of the building.
- 7.2 Common details include tall brick chimneys, dentil eaves courses, segmental brick arched window openings with canted brick sills, stone lintels and sills, decorative tiled ridges and brick and slate external steps. Barge boards, in the main, are restricted to public buildings.

## **8.0 Traditional Building Materials**

- 8.1 The principal building materials in the Conservation Area are red/orange brick and stone. In some cases walls have been rendered but this is not a traditional material. The facing brickwork has generally been laid in a Flemish bond. The roofs of several older buildings are covered in Swithland slate laid in diminishing courses. There is also widespread use of Welsh slate particularly on the late 19th Century cottages such as those on Station Road. In order to maintain continuity, Welsh slate should be used on new development. Imported or reconstituted slates or concrete roof tiles are not part of the historic palette of materials and are not appropriate for new development or building extensions in the village.
- 8.2 Although most properties have been fitted with plastic windows, in a few cases, houses have retained their original windows. Timber vertical-sliding sash windows are characteristic of the more distinguished houses while traditional vernacular cottages have full height casements or Yorkshire sash windows. Lintels are either flat stone or segmental brick arches and sills are constructed of chamfered brick or stone. There are also good examples of panelled and planked doors, some with fanlights above.
- 8.3 Chimney stacks are also distinctive surviving features and these are particularly important in skyline views across the village.

## **9.0 Boundary treatments**

- 9.1 Stone boundary walls with angled stone copings are common although occasionally there are short brick boundary walls with saddleback copings. In most cases they terminate at entrances with brick piers with slate copings. These, particularly the stone walls, provide a strong sense of street enclosure and distinct local identity.

## **10.0 Contribution of Spaces and Natural Elements**

- 10.1 The traditional terraces on the back edge of pavements have restricted open space within the street scene and mature trees are extremely limited in the village. The exception is found within more recent development from the 1930's and post war periods where houses are set back behind front gardens often to accommodate private drives and car parking areas.

10.2 The extensive green space around the church is the principal visible open space within the Conservation Area. This extends almost as far as Main Street and Berry's Lane where it forms distinctive open breaks in the street scene, providing the contrast between enclosure and openness which contributes significantly towards the area's character. The space also provides an attractive setting to the listed church and makes a valuable contribution to the open rural character of this part of the Conservation Area ensuring long distance views of this important building from surrounding streets and countryside.

## **11.0 Factors having a negative influence on the character of the Conservation Area**

### **Buildings of poor visual quality**

11.1 Within the area, modern development, particularly at the western end of Berry's Lane and on Church Lane, detracts from the prevailing scale, form and grain of the Conservation Area. These are typically, detached houses, often bungalows, set back behind front gardens, often dominated by garages and car parking. These houses have no special historic architectural interest and make no contribution to the character or appearance of the area.

11.2 Where minor alterations have been made to historic buildings, the cumulative effect has had an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. These changes have included asymmetrical roofs, dormer windows, replacement plastic windows and doors to none traditional design, concrete roof tiles, artificial slates in place of natural slate and a proliferation of shop front signs.

## **12.0 Summary of Significance**

12.1 The designated area consists of the old village nucleus in the Main Street, Church Lane and Chapel Lane area situated on a scarpe slope rising some 200 feet above the present village Main Street. The focal point of the area is the Parish Church of St Philip and St James which dominates the skyline from the surrounding countryside. It is also clearly visible from within the settlement where occasional views can be seen between dwellings and above rooftops and trees.

- 12.2 The church, the tower of which dates back to the Norman period, is of considerable interest containing some fine examples of tracery windows and mediaeval stained glass. The churchyard is surrounded by a fine granite wall and contains good examples of Swithland slate headstones and several yew trees which may be up to 300 years old.
- 12.3 An area of particular interest is at the junction of Berry's Lane, Church Lane and Chapel Lane. The buildings around this junction form a group of considerable historic and architectural interest which span a period of approximately 200 years from 1676 to 1880. Numbers 58-68 and 63-71 Church Lane were the residences of Master Framework Knitters who established in the village during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The oldest of the group is the 17<sup>th</sup> Century cottage, "The Ramblers" with fine timber interiors. Although the building has been modernised in recent years with a tiled roof and the walls colour washed. Opposite stands a former Framework Knitters workshop which gives enclosure to this end of Chapel Lane. Numbers 34-44 Berry's Lane are of a later period than the rest of the group having been constructed around 1880. On the opposite side of Berry's Lane is the former village blacksmith's forge. Although much altered this structure occupies an important position which together with the stone wall and cottages opposite, help to enclose and channel views down Berry's Lane.
- 12.4 The pedestrian scale and character of lower Berry's Lane has almost been lost because of the construction of a block of modern town houses set back behind open garden frontages.
- 12.5 In contrast, Chapel Lane has retained much of the character of the old village with its narrow pavements and narrow carriageway. A massive stone wall extends along the length of the Lane and helps to direct views onto the Parish Church.
- 12.6 At the junction of Chapel Lane and Station Road is the visually distinctive Methodist Church and former Sunday School rooms. Opposite are the former premises of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century hosier which are now used as a café with flats above. These elevations, a mixture of brick and stone, highlight the changes made to the buildings since their construction and are an important historical record in the street. Adjacent is a group of granite and brick cottages built around 1850.
- 12.7 The junction of Burroughs Road and Main Street is an important area of the village which needs improving. The large expanse of car parking tends to dominate the junction and would benefit if broken up with landscaping.

- 12.8 The primary school, stone wall, war memorial and trees are excellent features at this junction. The library which stands opposite the school is a modern structure which, to a degree, is mitigated by the low stone wall which forms its boundary.
- 12.9 The Framework Knitters workshops at the junction of Main Street with Stanford Street were probably constructed around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when many Leicestershire manufacturers were trying to compete with powered factories.
- 12.10 The village's nationally important connection with the Leicester to Swannington Railway built by the engineer Robert Stephenson, who was, after his father, George, the most important engineer in the development of steam powered transport. The 16 mile track was the first steam hauled railway in the midlands. In 1832 the line extended from Leicester through Ratby to Bagworth. Although not within the Conservation Area, the booking office and route of the line have survived on the edge of Ratby.
- 12.11 Until the early C19 the village was a small rural community made up of farms and farmyards. At the turn of the last century there were 20 farms in the village and its immediate vicinity. Within the Conservation Area there was Box Tree Farm, Pear Tree Farm and Hollybush Farm, all on Main Street and along Church Lane there was Nook Farm, now a private dwelling, Woodley Farm also now residential having been converted into four properties and Church Farm which was demolished in the 1960's to make way for new houses. Most of the old farms were rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and were part of the Earls of Stamford's Bradgate estate until sold in 1921 by Henrietta Grey. The remaining farms form an important element of the character of the designated area.
- 12.12 With the coming of the hosiery industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the subsequent expansion, this industry set the seal for the employment of future generations of Ratby people. The knitting of hose remained a cottage industry until the mid to late C19 when it was replaced by factory production using steam power. By 1899 great changes had taken place and hosiery manufacturers were working from factories on various sites around the village. The two large workshops now converted into dwellings and dating from circa 1860 at the junction of Main Street and Stamford Street are the most important survivors of this industry.



- 12.13 According to the censuses, the number of households increased from 135 in 1841 to 218 in 1891. There was little room for housing outside the village because most of this land was in agricultural use. Consequently small cottages were built in the yards which had existed since the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century attached to farmsteads or workers cottages along the main streets of the village. The 1871 census for Ratby identified 16 separate yards, most carrying the name of the owner of the land (e.g. Cramp's Yard, Richard's Yard, Wright's Yard and Varnham's Yard, all on Church Lane). Although these cottages were very small, they housed large families in cramped conditions. Facilities such as water pumps, outside privies, wash houses and coal houses had to be shared between families. Although diluted to an extent by modern development these yards still, to a great extent, add to the character of the village.
- 12.14 Distinctive street character featuring late Georgian and Victorian working class cottages and artisan housing interspersed with landmark buildings of significant architectural importance.
- 12.15 The gentle curve of some streets adds interest and character, enticing the passer-by often enhanced by stone and slate boundary walls, e.g. Church Lane.
- 12.16 The clusters of historic two storey brick and rendered cottages with rectangular plans, plain gables, plain frontages and ridge top chimneys highlight the rural character of the area.
- 12.17 Large scale mature trees are an important element in the rural village character of the historic core of Ratby and reflect its history as a distinct village settlement within the Leicestershire countryside.
- 12.18 The importance of private greenery from return frontages in residential Streets. Green verges also contribute to the rural character of the area and its positive aesthetic value
- 12.19 Original streetscape features including granite kerbs and granite sett gullies.
- 12.20 The views between the church and its surrounding buildings allow the open space of the church yard to enhance the rural character of the area.

## 13.0 Vulnerability

- 13.1 Deterioration or loss of stone and brick boundary walls. Any damage should be carefully repaired using appropriate materials. Not only do these walls maintain the historical link with the village's history but also create a strong intimate feel as well as a unifying character of materials. However, the fragility of this element of the areas character is shown in a few areas where the walls have been broken through, to allow development or off road parking. This has had a detrimental impact on this important feature.
- 13.2 The impact of traffic on the rural village character of the Conservation Area.
- 13.3 Insensitive alterations to historic buildings and to building elevations that face the street.
- 13.4 The loss of key spaces, particularly green space between buildings and grass verges, from infill development.
- 13.5 Green initiatives such as solar panels and wind turbines will be welcomed if careful consideration is given to their siting. Street facing elevations and roof pitches are not acceptable and they should be located on rear facing roof slopes or in rear gardens.
- 13.6 The loss of mature trees impacting on the green and leafy character of parts of the village.
- 13.7 Poor maintenance of the original built fabric threatens the area's heritage value. It leads to the loss of historic architectural features and detailing, such as traditional doors and windows, roofing materials and features, or locally distinctive construction materials. This can lead to their replacement with unsympathetic styles and materials.
- 13.8 Berry's Lane in the centre of the Conservation Area is a narrow picturesque jitty along which are the remnants of historically interesting garden plots and small scale historic buildings which could easily be destroyed by large scale redevelopment.
- 13.9 The character is vulnerable to the cumulative impact of alterations to; windows, doors, roofs, painting of brickwork, the application of artificial stone facings to elevations and the loss of chimneys.
- 13.10 Inappropriate proportions of fenestration and architectural details to new development.

- 13.11 Threat of demolition of remnant industrial buildings and the loss of character that represents.
- 13.12 The loss of historic public houses, farm buildings and shop frontages.
- 13.13 Victorian architecture is now more highly valued and steps have been taken to preserve its integrity. All new development should seek to enforce this integrity rather than reduce it.
- 13.14 New development that does not reflect the established street pattern. Where infill projects are permitted, they should respond to the existing architectural scale, predominant building materials and character of the original buildings.
- 13.15 The loss of the remaining granite road kerbs as a result of highway works.

#### **14.0 Opportunities for Enhancements**

- 14.1 Conservation area designation is a planning tool to help protect and enhance areas of special architectural interest. There are elements within the Conservation Area that could be enhanced to help preserve the established character.
- 14.2 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 be through the sympathetic development of sites identified in the detailed analysis of the area as opportunity or neutral sites; 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.
- 14.3 Traffic has a significant effect on the historic environment and the quiet rural village character. A system to control or manage parking should be investigated.
- 14.4 Trees are an important characteristic of the Conservation Area. Old or dying trees should be replaced and the opportunity for further planting should be investigated.
- 14.5 The use of traditional local building materials should be encouraged to help maintain the continuity of the Conservation Area.

- 14.6 Traditional stone and brick boundary walls should be retained. Any damage should be carefully repaired using appropriate materials and traditional methods of construction.
- 14.7 Open spaces between buildings should be retained to conserve the views of greenery between buildings. They are a key feature of the character of the area.
- 14.8 The richness and diversity in architectural detailing should be conserved through the repair and, where necessary, reinstatement of traditional elements such as timber sash windows, appropriate doors, correct roofing materials, boundary walls etc. These changes not only harm the character and appearance of the property itself but the cumulative effect impacts on the visual continuity and integrity of a street and inappropriate replacements should be avoided.
- 14.9 Rationalisation of street furniture would greatly enhance the street scene. There is a tendency towards cluttering with signposts, road signs, bollards, lights, and bus stops etc that are visually detrimental to the character and appearance of the area. An audit of street furniture should be considered to determine whether all existing signs etc are necessary and that some of the clutter on the pavements can be reduced. When street furniture replacement is necessary it should be with more sensitively styled street lights and pedestrian barriers.
- 14.10 Road and pavement surfaces are patchy in places and would benefit from being resurfaced, from both a visual and safety point of view. Any remaining historic road surface should be retained.
- 14.11 Where infill projects are permitted, they should respond to the existing architectural scale, predominant building materials and character of the original buildings.
- 14.12 Encourage the reinstatement of architecturally appropriate railings. Railings were generally removed during WWII and in the majority of instances, have not been replaced. Where they have, they are often of an incorrect design and height.

## **15.0 Listed Buildings within the Conservation Area.**

- 15.1 Church of St Philip and St James, grade II\*, dating from C13 but restored in 1881 by Nicholas Joyce of Stafford. It is constructed of irregularly coursed Mountsorrel granite with ashlar dressings and Swithland slate roofs.
- 15.2 85 Main Street, grade II, This house is probably early C17 and the oldest house in the village but altered in C18 – C20. It is cruck framed with red brick and plain tiled roof and with brick ridge stacks. It stands on a rubble stone plinth.

## **16.0 Important Landmark Local Buildings**

- 16.1 Buildings which make a positive contribution to the character of the area and to the streetscene.
- 16.2 The Plough Inn is one of the oldest pubs in the village with a mention in the County Records of 1695. The land and footpath adjacent is known as the Statty from the Statute Fair held in October for the land owner in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to hire craftsmen.
- 16.3 The War Memorial outside the school which was unveiled by Earl Haig in 1920.
- 16.4 The Bull's Head public house which has undergone many changes since it was converted from a farmhouse in 1828.
- 16.5 Box Tree Farm is a fine example of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century farm house. It was converted into a nursing home which closed in 1999 when it became a private dwelling. It has unfortunately lost all three of its massive gable chimneys.
- 16.6 Geary's Bakery, founded in 1906, although now vacant, and on the edge of the Conservation Area, it is important it is retained.
- 16.7 The Methodist Church on the corner of Chapel Lane which was constructed in 1911 by local builder Benjamin Shipman.
- 16.8 Richardson's Framework Knitters workshops on Stamford Street were erected in 1860 and 1878. They have recently been converted into dwellings.
- 16.9 Hollybush Farm house on Main Street, now converted into a dwelling.
- 16.10 The Church Rooms opposite the church built in 1894 and extended in the mid 1980's.

- 16.11 Nook farm house dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and was one of the last working farms in the village.
- 16.12 Woodley Farm was also an 18<sup>th</sup> Century farm complex now converted into dwellings.
- 16.13 The former Framework Knitters workshop which became a saddlers in the 1930's at the corner of Berry's Lane and Chapel Lane.
- 16.14 The Stockinger's cottages on both sides of the street at the junction of Berry's Lane and Church Lane.
- 16.15 The original school buildings on Main Street which opened in 1873.

## **General Conservation Area Guidance, Planning Controls and Policies**

### **17.0 Development Guidance**

- 17.1 To maintain the distinctive character and appearance of the Ratby Conservation Area it will be necessary to:
- 17.2 Any new development should be of a high standard of design and must take account of the established character of the area by being of appropriate scale and density and utilising traditional materials so that the buildings will make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.
- 17.3 The proposals should retain and protect important landscape and ecological features.
- 17.4 Planning permission is required for:
- The external cladding of any building with stone, artificial stone timber, plastic or tiles.
  - Alteration of the roof which results in its enlargement or addition.
  - A satellite dish on chimney, wall or roof fronting a highway or building which exceeds 15 metres in height.

17.5 The design of all new shop front, advertisements and security grilles should be in accordance with the Council's Shopping and Shop Front Design Guide.

- Retain listed buildings and buildings of local interest
- Ensure new development contributes positively to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area regarding siting, scale, design and materials used
- Ensure house extensions satisfy the Borough Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance
- Resist development proposals in key areas, which have been identified
- Ensure the consistent application of positive, sensitive and detailed development control over proposals to alter former farm buildings, yards and jittys
- Ensure important views of the church 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
  - Anyone proposing works to a tree in a Conservation Area must give 6 weeks 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

**Barry Whirrity**  
December 2013