

FELSHAM



CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

INTRODUCTION

The conservation area in Felsham was originally designated by Mid Suffolk District Council in 1996.

The Council has a duty to review its conservation area designations from time to time, and this appraisal examines Felsham under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Felsham's built environment in conservation terms.

This document is neither prescriptive nor overly descriptive, but more a demonstration of 'quality of place', sufficient for the briefing of the Planning Officer when assessing proposed works in the area. The photographs and maps are thus intended to contribute as much as the text itself.

As the English Heritage guidelines point out, the appraisal is to be read as a general overview, rather than as a comprehensive listing, and the omission of any particular building, feature or space does not imply that it is of no interest in conservation terms.

Text, photographs and map overlays by Patrick Taylor, Conservation Architect, Mid Suffolk District Council 2011.



Pump Wheel



Vintage Transport

TOPOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Felsham is situated in central Suffolk about eight miles south-east of Bury St Edmunds. It lies on the boulder clay of 'High Suffolk', a recent glacial deposit over chalk at greater depth. The village lies on gently sloping ground between 75 and 85 metres above OD, very much on a watershed, standing near the beginnings of many local waterways.

The Rattlesden River, a tributary of the Gipping, rises about a mile south of the village, passes about a quarter mile to the east and then proceeds eastwards towards Stowmarket and eventually Ipswich and the Orwell.

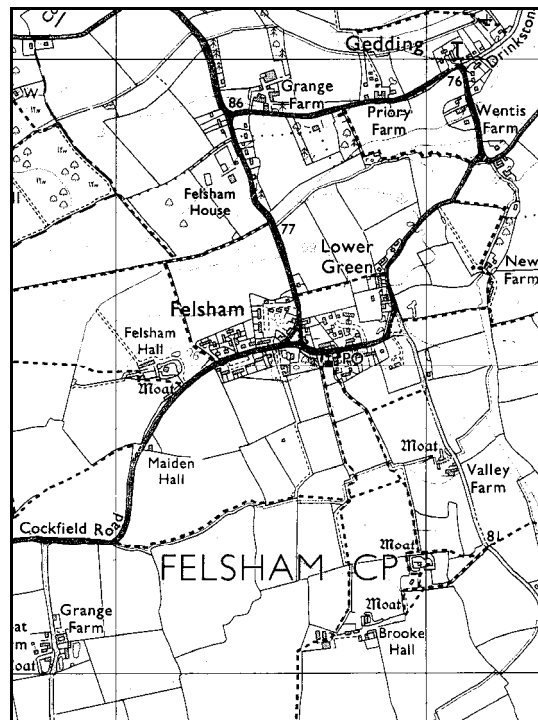
Tributaries of the Brett rise about two miles south around the neighbouring village of Thorpe Morieux and flow from there southwards towards Hadleigh and eventually the Stour estuary. About a mile and a half south-west of the village there rises a further tributary which eventually joins the Brett at Lavenham.

A similar distance to the north-west sees the rise of a river that flows northwards, joining the Black Bourn and eventually discharging into the Wash via the Little Ouse.

The village consists of the meeting of four roads by way of two separate triangular greens. The short central Church Road, which runs for a quarter mile through the village, links Upper Green in the west with Lower Green in the east. From the former, roads go to Bury St Edmunds in the north-west and Cockfield in the south-west, whilst from the latter Rattlesden is to the north-east and Brettenham to the south-east.



Aerial Photograph



OS Extract

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The area around Felsham is relatively unexplored in archaeological terms and therefore holds considerable potential for the future. Felsham was listed in the Domesday survey of 1086 as 'Fealfha', part of the lands belonging to St Edmunds, with mention of a church, but not any manors or mills.

Suffolk's County Historic Environment Record lists a couple of dozen sites in the parish, of which nine are Medieval moated sites, now mostly outlying farmhouses. Within the village boundary the Churchyard is recognized as important for future investigation and is surrounded by a scatter of other sites where there have been odd Neolithic or Bronze Age finds.

Also listed is Mausoleum House at the west end of the village, a Post Medieval site with gardens and a mausoleum. This last is situated in a field about three hundred yards south of the house and was already shown as 'in ruins' on the 1904 second edition OS map. It was originally built in the mid-eighteenth century following a dispute between the then owner of the house and the incumbent Rector.

The tithe map of 1839 shows most of the fields around the west end of the village in the ownership of Mausoleum Farmhouse (the present Felsham Hall a little further west is a more recent addition on an older moated site), whilst those around the east end were mostly in the hands of Lower Green Farm. These two major landholdings sharing a single central church may explain the existence of the two greens.



St Peter's Church Tower

In fealfhā . xx. v. libi homines de . iiii. caſ tſe . i. uith . & . v. bord . Adelund . i. car . 7 dim tſax . 7 . viii . libi homines ten . iiii . cir . & ualſe . l . fol . Semp inf eos . viii . caſ . & . v . ac pſi . Hi tſas fuas dare & uende . rem ſco . & ualſe . Tē . xxx . fol . m . lx . Eccleia . de . x . ac libe . tſe . in elem . Hi in loſi . viii . qf . 7 in laſ . vi . Ad gel . v . d .

58 In FELSHAM 25 free men with 3 carucates of land. 1 villager; 5 smallholders. Adelund (holds) 1½ carucates of land. 8 free men hold 4 carucates; value 50s. Always 8 ploughs between them all. Meadow, 5 acres.

These (free men) could grant and sell their lands, ... still belonged to St. (Edmund's). Value then 30s; now 60[s].

A church with 10 acres of free land in alms. It has 8 furlongs in length and 6 in width; 5d in tax.

Domesday Extract

QUALITY OF BUILDINGS

Felsham's buildings are mainly domestic in nature, a typical village cluster with a big house, church, school, pub and rectory.

The medieval Church of St Peter is listed grade II* and described by Pevsner as mainly Decorated in style, with no aisles and the chancel having been rebuilt by the Victorians (his only other entry for the village is the mausoleum which he notes had previously achieved an entry in Wesley's 'Journal'). Adjoining the Church is the unlisted Victorian former school, which has now been converted and extended to form a village hall, making the most of its central situation.

Other listed buildings, grade II, occur in two main historic clusters. One, around Upper Green in the west, includes a three cell sixteenth century house, plaintiled, timber-framed and rendered with a crownpost roof, now three separate dwellings. South of here is Mausoleum House in Suffolk white brick and nearby the Six Bells public house in knapped flint with white brick detailing, both dating from the early nineteenth century.

Also of this date but with an older core, now part rendered and part clad in white clay mathematical tiles, is the Old Rectory. This is part of the other cluster, near Lower Green in the east, with a string of buildings northwards along the road from Lower Green Farm.

More recent buildings make up the infill between these, the final connection between the two ends of the village not having been made until the twentieth century, with a row of post-war council houses to the south of Church Road and a more recent estate opposite.



Former School



Six Bells



Render and Thatch



Rat-trap Bond and Slate



Flint and Brick, Pantile and Slate



Render and Black Pantile

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The village's buildings are very demonstrative of Suffolk's mixed palette of vernacular materials.

The older domestic buildings are generally of timber-framed construction with applied lime render finish, occasionally with exposed timbers. Several of these occur as terraces of two or three dwellings that were each formerly a single three bay hall and parlour type house, dating from around 1600.

In contrast the Church is of flint and limestone, whilst the two barns, now converted, retain their black feather-edged weather-boarding.

The boundary wall fronting Mausoleum House is listed grade II in its own right and throughout the village there are several other interesting walls of brick and flint.

More recent buildings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries generally employ brick, either soft Suffolk Reds, or more prevalent here only four miles from Woolpit, the harder Suffolk White. One pair of cottages is built in Rat-trap bond, whilst others can be found in flint with brick dressings.

A similar mixture of materials can be found on roofs. The oldest buildings have straw thatch or clay plaintiles and the later ones generally slates or pantiles, some of the latter the black glazed variety.

The more recent post-war infill is generally less appropriately built using mass produced bricks, cement render finishes and concrete roof tiles.



Render and Plaintile



Black Weather-boarding and Pantile



HIERARCHY OF SPACES

The village is very much focused on its two greens and their conjoining road. These greens are both grassed triangular open spaces affording interesting cross vistas.

The view across Upper Green to the west is admirably closed by the listed buildings opposite, as is the view to the east from Cockfield Road closed by the cottages adjoining the pub.

Both greens when approached from the north present a large body of mature trees opposite, whilst the view back northwards from Lower Green is again pleasantly closed off by the thatched cottages on the bend in the road.

Outside the village boundary, there are open field areas adjoining both greens, which have been included in the conservation area to afford protection to the setting of the greens themselves. These include an area north-east of Upper Green, which has some amenity value as a footpath link, and across which long views can be gained of Lower Green Farm.

More significantly several other areas of field to the east of Lower Green have been included, up to a boundary suggested by a line of existing boundaries and ponds.

With each green providing such focus in the village, a trip along Church Road away from one green leaves one with a feeling of having passed the centre, so that the second green comes as a pleasant surprise.



Upper Green



Lower Green



TREES AND PLANTING

The village is situated within a Special Landscape Area as designated in Mid Suffolk District Council's Local Plan.

Bradfield Woods, one of Suffolk's most celebrated ancient woodlands and still managed on a coppice cycle, is to be found half a mile north-east of the village, just over the boundary in St Edmundsbury District.

Two areas of trees in the village, one to the north-west of Lower Green (TPO 73) and the other south-east of Upper Green around Mausoleum House (TPO 68), have been sufficiently at risk to warrant Tree Preservation Orders. These both include areas of fairly mixed planting.

Significant areas of trees occur outside the village boundary at the copse adjoining the former site of The Bungalow and around the Old Rectory, as well as inside around the Church and Mausoleum House. These include fine specimens of Small Leaved Lime, White Poplar, Norway Maple, False Acacia and Scots Pine, all within the conservation area boundary.

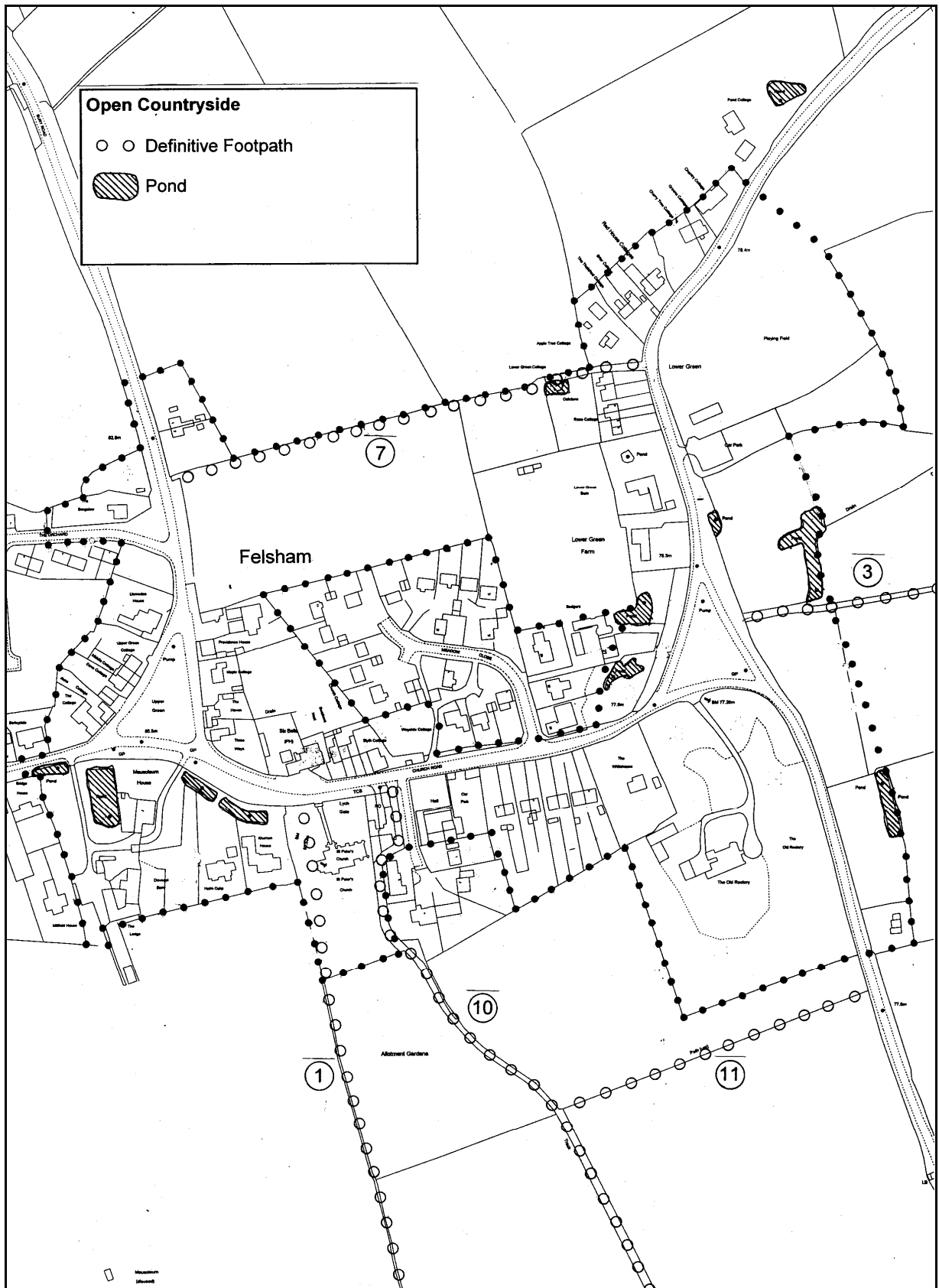
A small grassed area with amenity planting is tucked away on the north side of Church Road adjoining the Meadow Close housing, whilst opposite the Village Hall site has its own small piece of greenery. Together these two spaces have the potential to form a further green space providing a more central focus to the village, a suitable site perhaps for a village sign or relocated pump.



Churchyard Trees



Old Rectory Garden



COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

From anywhere within Felsham the countryside is not far away. Open fields can be viewed from both greens and sections of these, as well as the village's playing field, are included within the conservation area to provide a buffer around the more central greens.

The fields at Lower Green provide perhaps the best views, dropping away to the east into the valley where the Rattlesden River starts.

At various locations within the village, there are stretches of remnant hedge, still fairly rich with species such as Hawthorn and Field Maple.

Apart from the four minor roads that fan out into the countryside from the village, there are a number of footpath links both to the south and the east, as well as Definitive Footpath 7 across the north of the village linking the Bury and Rattlesden roads. This last forms the northern boundary of the conservation area.

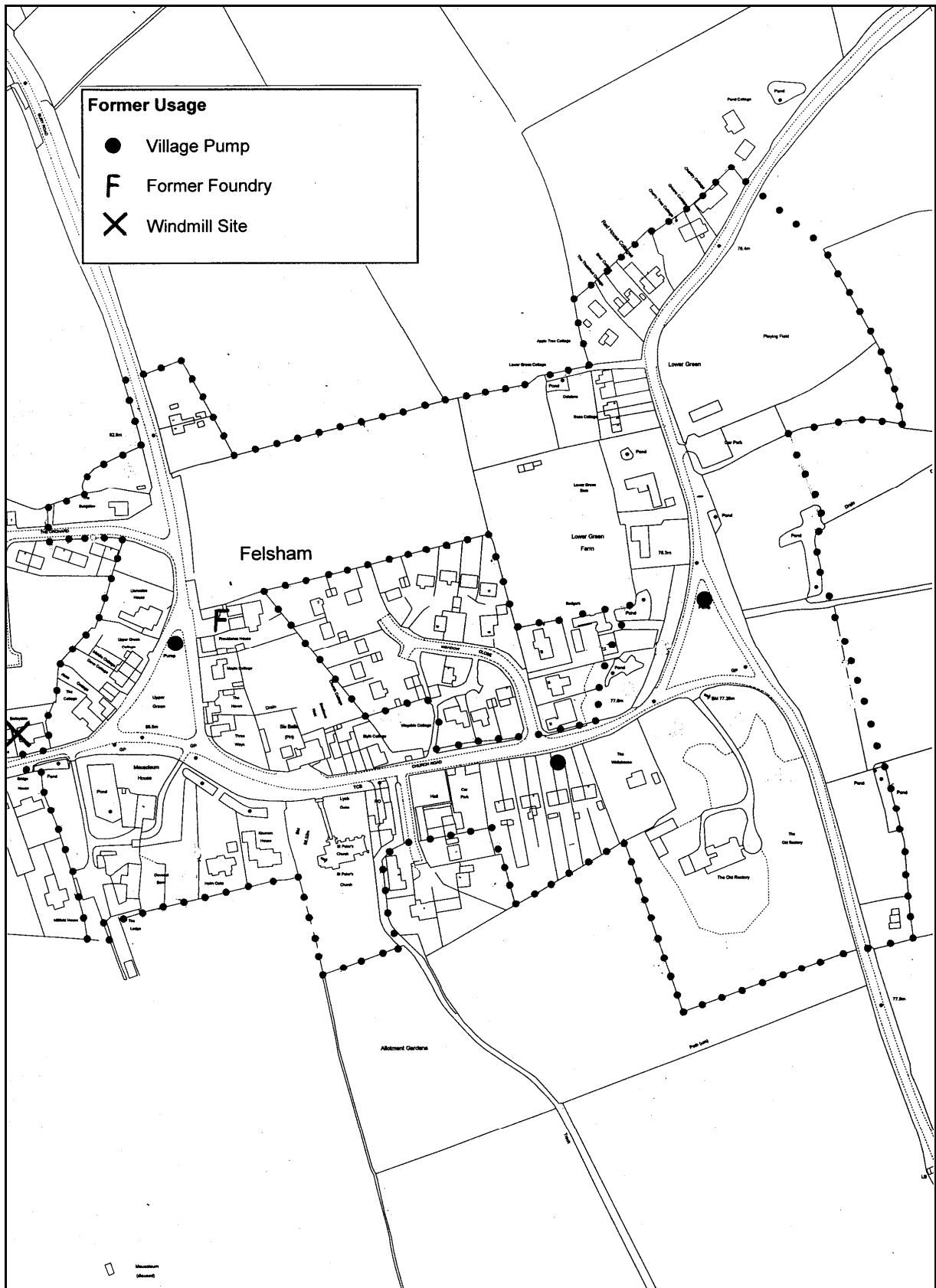
The Church with its tower is perhaps the only significant landmark in the area, although the groupings of trees adjoining both greens do provide an interesting contrast with the surrounding open arable farmland.



Mature Screen Hedge



Start of Footpath 7



PREVAILING AND FORMER USAGE

The major land uses in the vicinity are agriculturally based and seem to have always been so. The village's position on the watershed has made water provision something of a priority. A number of village pumps remain to this day, four of which are within the village boundary built up area, and there is also a wealth of old ponds still to be seen.

The winning of woodland produce from Bradfield Woods is but a recent revival of ancient practices. A sawpit was formerly located near Upper Green where today we find the garage and nearby there was a blacksmith's forge. Both these ventures appeared in the 1837 tithe apportionment, which mentions 'Great Sawpit Field' and 'Blacksmith's Shop' along with 'Wheelwright's Shop', 'Winding Field' and 'Malting Ley' indicative of other activities in the village.

Just off Upper Green on the Cockfield road there once stood the village windmill. Described as a timber windmill and removed to nearby Gedding before its eventual demolition, this was presumably a post type mill.

The village also had its own bakery at Appletree Cottage on Lower Green and apart from the 'Six Bells' public house there were two others: the 'Live and Let Live' at Upper Green near the mill and the 'Banbury Arms' at Oakdene near Lower Green.

Apart from the garage and pub already mentioned, the village's other surviving commercial venture is the Post Office and Village Stores on Church Road.



Pump on Church Road



Pump on Lower Green



Village Shop



Meadow Close



Village Hall Car Park



uPVC Windows

LOSSES AND POSSIBLE GAINS

The major negative factors in conservation terms affecting the village centre are the newer housing developments. Yewlands Grove, adjoining the churchyard, is conveniently tucked away behind the Village Hall site, whilst Meadow Close, immediately the other side of Church Road, is less hidden but fortunately well concealed behind screen hedging and planting.

Both these areas are excluded from the conservation area, as is the majority of other new development, predominantly the west part of the village beyond Mausoleum House.

Elsewhere the area adjoining the garage is untidy with the usual signs and advertisements that accompany the automotive industry. The car park area adjoining the Village Hall is also unattractive and would benefit greatly from better quality surfacing and further screening with hedges. Nextdoor the village shop has a lot of signs and clutter in its forecourt.

Nearby along Church Road the view is marred by unsightly overhead wiring which would benefit from 'undergrounding'.

Otherwise the village is generally positive in its appeal. An article 4 direction made shortly after designation has helped limit some unwelcome changes on the unlisted buildings, although some uPVC windows appear to have slipped through. Even the central council housing, which now unfortunately retains few of its original windows and does sport some replacement roofing, contributes en masse to the overall picture.



Garage Site



Overhead Wiring

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

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by Mid Suffolk District Council
Environment Policy Panel
19 June 2012