



## INTRODUCTION

Amersham Hill was one of the suburbs of the town of High Wycombe that developed during the town's expansion in the late 19th / early 20th century. It is characterised by large homes on generous plots, the oldest of which belonged to some of Wycombe's wealthiest residents, and the avenues of trees which screen the plots. Amersham Hill was designated as a special area in 1975 and promoted to a full conservation area in 1986. Its boundary was amended in 1994 to transfer a southern part of the area to the High Wycombe Conservation Area.

Conservation Areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, which are considered worthy of preservation or enhancement. They are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Government Guidance states that conservation areas should have an up-to-date appraisal.

Within Conservation Areas there are special controls on some alterations to buildings and their demolition or partial demolition and on works to trees. More details on the specific controls that apply can be found in the Council's guidance note on conservation areas.

Designation of a conservation area does not preclude the possibility of new development, and preservation should not be thought of as a purely negative process or as an impediment to progress. New development, where appropriate, must however be carefully designed to positively enhance the appearance and special character of the area

The designation of a conservation area imposes specific duties on local authorities to formulate and publish proposals to ensure that the special characteristics of the conservation area are preserved and enhanced. This conservation area appraisal describes the main features of the special architectural and historic interest that justifies the designation of Amersham Hill as a conservation area.



## CHAPTER 1: Planning Policy Context

National, Regional and Local Policy

## CHAPTER 2: Summary Of Special Interest

## CHAPTER 3: Assessment Of Special Interest

- 1 Location and Landscape setting
  - Location and Population
  - General Character and Plan Form
  - Landscape Context
- 2 Historic Development and Archaeology
  - History
  - Archaeology
  - Historic Maps
- 3 Spatial Analysis
  - The Character and inter-relationship of spaces within the area
  - Important Views
- 4 Character Analysis
  - Activity and Land use
  - Descriptions of Buildings
  - Key unlisted buildings
  - Local details
  - Prevalent and Traditional Building Materials
  - Contribution made by the Natural Environment
  - The Extent of Loss, Problems and Pressures

## CHAPTER 4: Recommendations

- 1 The conservation area appraisal and possible boundary amendments
- 2 Buildings which make a positive contribution to the conservation area
- 3 Enhancement

## CHAPTER 5: Next Steps & Further Information

- 1 Community Involvement
- 2 Monitoring
- 3 Design Guidance
- 4 Developing a management strategy

## APPENDICES

- A Maps
- B Listed Buildings
- C Bibliography
- D Development Management Guidelines

## CONTACT DETAILS

**Listed building consent** is required for works to the listed buildings in the conservation area, whilst planning permission is needed for all changes to their fences, gates and other means of enclosure.

There are additional **planning controls** on non-listed buildings within conservation areas, in addition to usual planning permission requirements.

### Wycombe District Council Contacts

For general planning enquiries contact the Duty Officer on 01494 421219.

For policy issues contact the Policy team on 01494 421581.

For queries regarding this appraisal contact the Conservation section on 01494 421527.

Most new development requires **Building Regulation Approval**. For further information on Building Regulations Approval. For further information on Building Regulations please contact a Building Control Surveyor on 01494 421403, or see the District Council website [www.wycombe.gov.uk](http://www.wycombe.gov.uk)

## CHAPTER 1

# PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

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The designation of a conservation area influences the way in which a Local Planning Authority applies its planning policies to the area. It ensures that any alterations or extensions to buildings within or adjacent to the conservation area respect the special characteristics identified in this document, and in local planning policies.

### National policy and guidance is contained in:

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Planning Policy Framework (published March 2012)
- English Heritage: Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals (2005)
- English Heritage: Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas (2005)

Regional guidance on design issues is contained in the Chilterns Building Design Guide. This guidance has been supplemented by Advice Notes on Flint, Brick and Roofing materials, which provide useful guidance on materials.

Local Policy: The Wycombe District Local Plan was adopted in 2004 and as a result of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act is gradually being replaced by a series of new planning documents. In 2008 the Council adopted the Core Strategy, which replaces a number of policies in the Local Plan. The Council is in the early stages of producing a new Local Plan and until this is complete the following policies relating to Conservation Areas in the Local Plan are still in place: HE 6,8,10,11,12,13, 14 and 15.

More information on the status of the Local Plan and Planning Policy is available on the Council website.

## CHAPTER 2

# SUMMARY OF SPECIAL INTEREST

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The Amersham Hill Conservation Area is a linear area to the immediate north of High Wycombe town centre, focused on the roads of Amersham Hill and Lucas Road. During the late 19th century many of the more prominent citizens of the town moved up to the hillside from their town houses in the High Street and Easton Street.

The area has two significant sections. The main hill road is characterised by large villa type houses in tree lined grounds, with some modern infill. The layout of plots has a spacious feel linked to the original development of the area as a wealthy Edwardian suburb of High Wycombe. Buildings step up the hillside as the land rises towards Wycombe Heath. The earlier buildings are Victorian and Edwardian and are of substantial size. The Royal Grammar School at the north of the conservation area is its only listed building.



### Glossary of architectural terms:

Some architectural description requires the use of specialised terms and phrases to describe particular details of a building. A useful glossary can be found in Pevsner's "The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire"

East of the main north-south road is a network of roads, made up primarily of Terry Road, Pretoria Road, Lucas Road and Rectory Avenue. These roads are characterised by slightly smaller scale and relatively more modern houses, though still distinctly middle class in nature. Again there is a degree of modern infill. While these buildings are not as early or as large as those on the Amersham Hill itself, they have a collective character that harks back to an earlier time, with streets lined with trees and few cars passing through.



## CHAPTER 3 ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST

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### 1 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

#### *Location and population*

The area is located on the hill to the north of the historic core of High Wycombe. The original development built up along two independent lines – large spacious villa type houses along the long, wide main road known as Amersham Road, and other development, typically slightly smaller and less spacious, along the network of roads to the east, centred on Rectory Avenue, Lucas Road and Terry Road. Over the years that followed the area underwent significant levels of development, both in the form of infill plots, and developments such as Maybrook Gardens and Rye View, which formed new streets out of the generous gardens to the rear of many of the existing properties.



The area covers 44 hectares and includes in excess of 100 buildings and ancillary structures.

#### *General character and plan form*

Amersham Hill is possessed of a spacious residential character for the most part, with generous plots and detached dwelling houses being the norm even with modern infill reducing the size of some of these plots. The bulk of the area is possessed of a strong sylvan character with an abundance of greenery – trees and hedges line the majority of the plots and roadsides while within the spacious gardens are numerous specimen trees that undergird this sylvan character. The character of the area is unique at such close proximity to High Wycombe itself, with some parts of the area resembling the feel of the countryside. The greenery and space that creates this feels is juxtaposed against the close-built buildings and urban character of Wycombe town, particularly Crendon and Castle Street just a short distance away.



The character of the area is always under threat from the pressure to provide homes for an ever-increasing population. Some parts of the south side of the area – particularly the south west corner bordered by Shrubbery Road and Amersham Road – have seen redevelopment as houses in multiple occupancy. An area immediately south of Shrubbery Road was cleared and redeveloped as flats in the 1960s, replacing three earlier houses with large plots which would have possessed a similar character to the Wycombe Grange opposite.

**Landscape context**

The Landscape Plan for Buckinghamshire identifies the area as an Incised Dip Slope. Amersham Hill is well treed and prior to development the area was part of the wooded back drop to the town of High Wycombe. High Wycombe is set in the valley of the River Wye, classified as a Z9 River Valley. Geologically Amersham Hill sits mostly on upper chalk and partly on pebbly clay and sand clay with flints which overlies substantial areas of the chalk Chiltern Hills.

**2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

**Origins and historic development**

For a full history of the development of the town of High Wycombe, see the separate High Wycombe Conservation Area Appraisal. This document will examine the origins and development of the Amersham Hill area.

Amersham Hill developed as a suburb of High Wycombe in the early 20th century. Prior to that there were no buildings within the present conservation area boundary (1878 and 1899 Ordnance Survey maps). High Wycombe for centuries had stopped at the top of Crendon Street (then called Crendon Lane), with Amersham Hill and Amersham Road stretching north flanked with trees and hedges. The road as it crossed Wycombe Heath at the top of the hill was infamous in earlier times for its highwaymen. The current road today follows the course of the turnpike or toll road established following the 1768 Turnpike Trust Act.

The early 20th century brought the Victorian expansion of Wycombe and the departure of many of the town’s wealthy citizens to spacious villa style houses along Amersham Hill. These earlier dwellings tended to be detached and set within spacious grounds lined with trees. Until the 1930s the area was characterized as Wycombe’s wealthiest suburb – even now it is still known locally as an upper class area. Later developments expanded the road layout eastwards, while other infill development nibbled away at the spacious larger plots, and later estate developments absorbed chunks of garden from a range of properties. After the furniture and service industries began to decline in the 1920s, many of the large mansions – such as The Grange, Walter Birch’s house – ceased to be residential. Many of these larger houses are located further south, though, so this has had less impact on the main Conservation Area.

Amersham Hill was designated a ‘Special Area’ in 1975 by Wycombe District Council with broadly similar boundaries to the later Conservation Area. In December 1986 Wycombe District Council upgraded the area to a Conservation Area with a simplification of the boundary. In May 1994 as part of a review of the town Conservation Areas an isolated lower part of Amersham Hill which ran from the railway line north as far as St Augustine’s Roman Catholic Church was transferred to High Wycombe Conservation Area.



*The view looking south down Amersham Hill in or around 1900.*



*The Royal Grammar School and its original boarding house in 1915, shortly after its opening.*



*View looking west down Rectory Avenue, 1933. The area’s strong sylvan character was already well established at this time.*

*All historic photographs courtesy of SWOP, Bucks County Council and the Bucks Free Press*

## **Archaeology**

There is significant potential for important archaeological discoveries within the conservation area. There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the Amersham Hill Conservation Area, but there was an ancient lane to the west of Amersham Hill labelled 'British Way' on old maps. This can be seen in some rear gardens as a hollow and was replaced as the main road uphill when Amersham Hill and Amersham Road were laid out as part of the turnpike road to Amersham in the 1760s. This and other areas of known archaeological potential are identified on an "archaeological notification map" which is supplied to the local planning authorities and regularly updated. Where development may affect archaeological remains the Council may request that applicants supply an archaeological evaluation report as part of their planning application, and may seek preservation in situ or impose a condition requiring archaeological investigation in accordance with national and local planning guidance and policies.

## **The Bucks Historic Towns Project**

In order to better understand the evolution of our towns and with a view to contributing towards their future management, the County Archaeological Service, in conjunction with the Milton Keynes Design and Conservation Team, is undertaking a survey of the 30 historic towns in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. This project, largely funded by English Heritage, is part of a national programme of urban characterisation which aims to examine historic towns from their earliest origins up to the present day. The project method uses archaeological data, maps, photographs and documentary sources, as well as information gathered from visits to each town. On completion, the project will have produced an easily accessible database for all the towns. There will be a series of digital maps that will characterise each townscape and its development. The project will also produce individual illustrated reports for each town.

The data for the project will be held by the Historic Environment Records (HER) for Buckinghamshire. The project covers the whole town as opposed to this appraisal which deals with the historic core conservation area.

Buckinghamshire County Council's Archaeology Service has recently completed the Bucks Historic Landscape Characterisation. The Historic Landscape Characterisation project has assessed the various components of the landscape such as fields, woodland and settlements, and maps the results into a Geographical Information System (GIS). This is a flexible, digital mapping system that enables other aspects of the landscape to be recorded and updated when necessary.

In the case of High Wycombe the landscape characterisation can add an understanding of the wider historic landscape. Some of this information has been incorporated into the appraisal text and further information can be obtained from the Archaeology pages on the Buckinghamshire County Council website - [www.buckscc.gov.uk](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk)



*View of the main Godstowe School building from Shrubbery Road including the grand main entrance. Photo is dated from 1920, before the school expanded.*



*The 1901 Godstowe School Buildings viewed from the rear, as seen in 1907. The school gradually expanded, taking it with it nearby private residences,*



*1968 aerial photo view looking south along Amersham Hill. Godstowe School and its grounds are prominent in the bottom right, toward the top of the photo, High Wycombe Station and the leafy grounds of the museum, Castle Hill House, are visible.*

### Historic maps

1925 Ordinance Survey (OS) is the earliest pre-war OS map to clearly show the development of the area, although the less accurate 1938 1:10000 scale OS also shows the early form of the area. The 1898 OS shows the pre-development form of the area and indicates the location of the British Way.

## 3 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

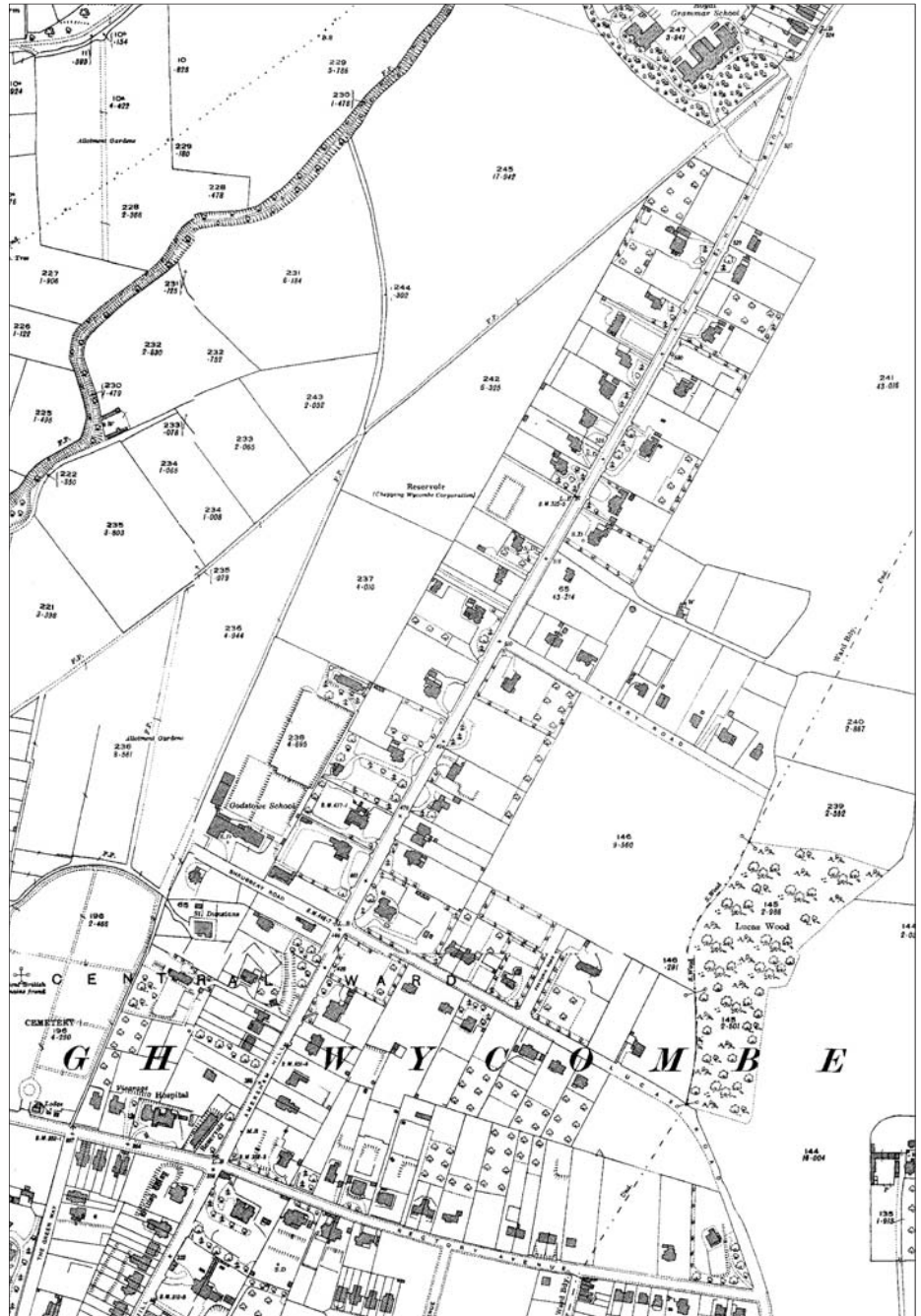
### *The character and interrelationship of spaces within the area*

In keeping with the residential character of the area, the majority of spaces are private residential gardens, screened behind trees and only occasionally glimpsed through gaps or up driveways. They emphasise the residential character of the area, through their strong ties to the houses they surround, and together with the wide and open roads, give the area a real sense of space and openness, compared to the narrower enclosed roads located to the south, outside the area.

### *Important views and vistas*

The tree lined avenues of the Conservation Area present many pleasing vistas, especially along the east side of Rectory Avenue and Lucas Road. The east side of Lucas Road moving north from its junction with Rectory Avenue is open on to Lucas Wood. This, together with the spacious tree-screened plots on the west side of the road, creates a pocket of development which echoes the original character of the area before the intensification of housing.

A key view going out of the Conservation Area is looking south down Queen Street from the top of the junction with Rectory Avenue. This view, framed by the oldest houses in the area, looks out over the valley bottom, across Totteridge and the London Road, terminating in a view of The Rye and the hills that lie beyond. From outside the conservation area, the area as a whole provides a green backdrop to the town when viewed from the Marlow Hill on the far side of the valley.



1925 OS showing the earliest stages of development within the area.

The key views on the Amersham Hill itself are primarily based on the north-south views up and down the hill – the view north from the south boundary of the conservation area terminates in a view of the larger plots further up the hill, prominent among them the Wycombe Grange. From the Shrubbery Road / Lucas Road crossroads, the northward view is of the crest of the hill, showing the full extent of the tree lined main road, with the houses behind rows of trees and fences. This part of the Amersham Road is a key part of the area’s “green corridor” into the town, the importance of the vista is as much the experience to the traveller as urban buildings give way to the softer tones of nature as it is to the stationary observer. No assessment of the views of the Amersham Hill would be complete without special mention of the southward view from the hill at a number of locations. On a clear day it is easy to see High Wycombe nestled in the valley, with the wooded hills of the other side of the Wye Valley rising up beyond the town.



*View from the junction of Queen Street and Rectory Avenue, looking across onto the Rye and the hills beyond it.*

Final mention should go to the views from the west of the area. While the west of the area is primarily lined with housing, Shrubbery Road leads to a footpath that runs north-south parallel to Amersham Hill, and also providing access to the town cemetery. The view from the west end of Shrubbery Road takes in the wider Hughenden Valley, looking out across the cemetery and the Hughenden Valley to the hills belonging to the Hughenden Manor Estate. The Disraeli Monument can be seen clearly from this vantage point. The views from this area as a whole take in some of the highly attractive landscape of the Hughenden Valley.



*A view from the south of the Amersham Hill, looking north into the area.*

#### **4 CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

##### ***Activity and land use***

The main activity of the area is a residential one, although the nature of the residential use has changed from homes for the wealthy upper classes of Wycombe to middle class homes, with some of the former large properties converting into business use, a school, houses in multiple occupancy, or guest houses. The wide main road through the area retains the earliest activity that Amersham Hill was known for – a thoroughfare from High Wycombe to Amersham – though today it is thankfully without the highwaymen of earlier times.

##### ***Architectural and historical quality of buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the area***

There is only one listed building in the Amersham Hill Conservation Area – the Royal Grammar School. The school, originally

*View from Shrubbery Road looking out across the Hughenden Valley.*





founded in 1550 and granted Royal Charter in 1562, relocated to its current site from Easton Street in 1914, and the site has been extended and added to many times over the past century. The listed portion is the original 1914 block by the noted local architect Arthur Vernon at the centre of the site, and the two wings at either sides which were slightly later additions



in the style of the main block. An impressive Queen Anne style building, dated 1914, two storeys in purple brick with red brick dressings and a Westmorland slate roof. There are large box sash windows with glazing bars under gauged flat arches, with a bay rhythm of 3:6:5:6:3 and modillion eaves cornices. The central block is in a grand Baroque/Wren style with arched windows, the upper floor ones Venetian. On either side are pilaster-flanked projecting bays with modillion cornices while the whole is topped by a deep Tuscan pediment topped by a clock tower with an ogee lead roof and ball finial. The more modern additions are of good quality but lesser architectural note; however the 1961-2 building incorporating the Queen's Hall on Amersham Road is noteworthy due to its association with HM Queen Elizabeth, whose 1962 visit to celebrate 400 years of Royal charter is commemorated with an engraving.

*The listed core of the Royal Grammar School, as seen in an old photo from 1950. Today this part of the school is largely obscured from view behind the modern blocks erected at the front and side of the site, although it is largely unchanged.*

### **Key unlisted buildings**

With over 100 buildings in varying early 20th century styles, there are many buildings of note within the Amersham Hill Conservation Area. As a reflection of the higher status of the residents of the area, the majority of the buildings are of good quality and character, even those that have seen some fairly drastic alterations.

Of the most notable unlisted buildings, the locally listed building known as Wycombe Grange, 56 Amersham Hill is one of the most prominent and impressive. Built of red brick and dated 1900, this building was built for notable local chairmaker Walter Birch whose former factory forms a key element in the Leigh Street Furniture Heritage Conservation Area. Walter Birch was a councillor from 1881, a JP, and was elected an alderman in 1901. He was Wycombe Borough's Mayor in 1909-10, Director of the High Wycombe Electric and Power Company, and Chairman of the Boards of Guardians of Saunderton Workhouse. This brief history demonstrates the kinds of wealthy people who moved to the new properties on Amersham Hill during the first decade of the 20th century, and not surprisingly his house is one of the most prominent buildings within the conservation area. Wycombe Grange is an impressive red brick building of undeniable quality and architectural appeal, of 2 storeys and attic, with half dormers to the top floor. To either side of the frontage 2 castellated projecting bays with swags and classical decoration in terracotta. The windows have rubbed brick headers and there is an imposing porch with classical detailing in terracotta. A plaque to the front gives the date of construction. By 1933 the Grange was a nursing home, and by the 1950s the HQ for the District Nurses. It is



*The striking Wycombe Grange, dated 1900 and built by eminent local architect Arthur Vernon for the equally eminent William Birch.*

thought to have been used for evacuees during the War. Presently it is used as a special school in the ownership of the County Council.

On the opposite side of the hill and slightly further up past Shrubbery Road is the Godstowe School. This private school's foundation stone was laid in 1901 by the Countess Carrington. It became England's first all-girls prep school with 12 pupils on the roll at the time of opening. The name is taken from Godstow Abbey near Oxford, whose nuns had cared for and educated girls from Wycombe centuries before. While it is largely concealed from view behind fences and trees, glimpses of the buildings through driveways show a series of fascinating buildings of good character. The original school building to the south west of the site, currently used as the main school building, is two storeys with dormer windows, red brick to the ground floor and pebble dash render to the upper storeys. It features an ornate arch entrance below a set forward Dutch gable. The original wing proceeding east according to historic photos was three windows broad, terminating with a bay window at ground floor. A later extension, probably from the 1920s, in the same style as this original core extends this further with a two storey extension with dormer windows and adds further Dutch gables above the entrance to the new extension and on the end of the new wing.



*A view of the Shrubbery Road elevation of Godstowe School. The original 1901 building is to the left of the picture, with a more modern - but in keeping - addition prominent to the right.*

As Godstowe School grew it bought up some substantial private houses built early in the 20th century and fronting Amersham Hill itself, now named Highlands House, Walker House and The Lodge, which were shown on the 1925 OS map as private houses in gardens. Elsewhere and located at the back of the site is the more recent Turner House. Highlands can be glimpsed in a 1905 aerial photo, indicating that these buildings date from approximately the same time as the original building. All three were bought to serve as boarding houses, with The Lodge now serving as a pre-prep school division for ages 5-7. All share the character of the school building and the surrounding properties of the same period and are of good character. All three are of broadly the same materials as the main school building, being of red brick with stone framed bay windows, slate roofs and some pebble dash rendered elements. Highlands, the southernmost of the three buildings, features a turret on the Shrubbery Road side and a set forward gable to the right side of the building frontage. This is mirrored by a set forward gable to the left side of the frontage of The Lodge. The site as a whole has a cohesive character and value as a group. The site is mostly obscured from public view by fencing and foliage, but the occasional glimpses of the site afforded by driveways and gaps in the line of trees reveal a site of pleasing architectural details in character with the neighbouring residential properties of the same period. Alongside the cemetery footpath on the west side of the site is a music school and classroom block by the noted modern architects Aldington, Craig and Collinge that received the Council's Malcolm Dean Design Award in 1996.



*The Countess Carrington laying the foundation stone of Godstowe School, 1901.*

Near to the Royal Grammar School is a former boarding house block, 35 Amersham Road. This block, still in the ownership of the Grammar School, was known as Uplyme and gave its name to the school playing fields at the rear. The main building on the site is of red brick and dates to a similar period as the main Grammar School building – given similarities in style with The Grange and the period, it is likely that this too was by Arthur Vernon. The building is two storeys in height with an attic, rubbed brick door arch and rubbed brick window headers. String courses are present between storeys.



*35 Amersham Road, the Royal Grammar School boarding house, of unknown date and architect but suspected to date from the same period as the main school and be by Arthur Vernon.*

The oldest buildings within the Conservation Area are 1-3 Westview Cottages, which sit at the top of Queen Street on the junction with Rectory Avenue. This terrace of three small houses is quite unlike anything else within the area with colourwashed elevations and a slate roof. Their front walls are at the back of the pavement with their front doors opening directly onto the street. None of the original windows survive. These three buildings, together with their immediate neighbours 32 and 34 Queen Street form a group of earlier artisan housing of the period immediately prior to the development of the Amersham Hill Conservation Area. Their siting in this area indicates that there were earlier ideas for development related more to the Queen Street / Totteridge Road working class housing than what by 1900 had become a prosperous and overwhelmingly upper and upper-middle class expansion onto Amersham Hill.



*1-3 West View Cottages, the oldest buildings in the area, are an interesting juxtaposition against the rest of the buildings in the locality.*

In addition to these specific buildings highlighted, the majority of the buildings within the area have their own unique qualities. The Amersham Hill portion of the area still remains home to many larger domestic dwellings within spacious plots, the older ones of which such as 1 Lucas Road being of a substantial Arts and Crafts Style influenced character. A variety of materials are employed in these buildings but they are primarily of red brick, with slate or tiled roofs. Many have interesting features such as projecting bays or stone-framed windows. Most also feature colourwashed rendered or roughcast upper storeys and are either three stories in height, or two storeys with basements. The majority of these properties sit within well treed grounds, screened from the traffic passing outside on its way to and from Wycombe along the Amersham Road. Those properties which have lost their tree lined grounds – most notably those on parts of the Amersham Hill south of The Wycombe Grange – are more readily visible and this loss of green setting has caused a significant loss of character. This is most evident at 47-49, 51 and 53A Amersham Hill where the front grounds were cleared of trees to provide for parking. Their appearance within the street scene is quite jarring, illustrating why the retention of greenery is especially preferable in this area.



*1 Lucas Road, an example of the Arts and Crafts Style developments within the area.*

The buildings of the eastern portion of the Conservation Area - those located on Rectory Avenue, Lucas Road, Pretoria Road and Terry Road - are generally of good quality. Rectory Avenue, Lucas Road and Terry Road are generally characterised with similar building types to those seen on Amersham Hill, but smaller in footprint and height – they are typically two storey buildings and lacking basements. They mainly date from the 1920s onwards and their sub-Arts and Crafts styles

chosen continued into the 1950s. Once again, these developments are interspersed with more modern additions, which generally are sympathetic to the surrounding buildings, an assimilation process aided by the innate variety of the earlier building types. Once again the plots are lined with trees and greenery, although not to the same extent as on Amersham Hill, particularly to the south side of Rectory Avenue. The earliest developments on these roads date from the same time period as the main expansion up the Amersham Hill, with the main development continuing eastwards as the middle class suburb continued to grow.

Pretoria Road exhibits a somewhat different character within the Conservation Area, with plots that are more open. The change in style can be attributed to the time of development – Pretoria Road is present on the 1925 OS, but only the southernmost part is developed. Pretoria Road grew up in the intervening period between 1925 and 1938, and the contrast between this later stage of development and the earlier development is obvious. In addition to the more open plots, buildings are of a different style, using different types of materials and generally using comparatively modern styles to their post-Victorian neighbours.

**Local details**

**Prevalent and traditional building materials**

There is a wide variety of different material types and building techniques used throughout the area, reflecting its long history of development and the individual designs for each plot. The primary brick type however is a red multi brick, with tiled or slate roofs. Local yellow brick is relatively uncommon due to the preference for red brick in Arts and Crafts influenced designs, yellow brick being seen as urban and more appropriate in London.

**Contribution made by the natural environment**

The trees and hedges that line the plots and roads throughout the area make perhaps the single most significant contribution to the Amersham Hill Conservation Area. The area gains a large amount of its charm and character from its green, tree-lined roads. The side roads in particular gain a calmer, almost village-like feel thanks to reduced traffic and abundant trees. The Lucas Wood, located to the east side of the area off the Lucas Road, is of special significance. It represents a rare survival of the woodland that once lined the hills north of Wycombe, and is a precious piece of unspoilt woodland within Wycombe’s immediate suburbs.

There are many trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders throughout the area, in particular many of those lining the Amersham Road, granting protection to this green corridor into High Wycombe. Other TPOs have been introduced to ensure that the character of the area is not lost through cumulative minor works to many trees throughout the area. All trees are protected in conservation areas and TPOs will continue to be served by the Council where trees are threatened or to ensure sympathetic redevelopment where appropriate in order to protect this sylvan environment.



*Elvaston on Rectory Avenue is a commanding building. A plaque on the side gives the date of construction as 1902 and the initials “C.E.S”.*



*42-44 Amersham Hill is an original semi-detached pair, with its first floor level balconies being a particularly appealing feature.*



*An example of the more open development on Pretoria Road - the green character of the area is still very much present with hedges being the main boundary treatment, but the overall character of the area is less insular and more open and communal.*

***The extent of loss, problems and pressures***

There is significant potential for loss within the area from redevelopment and a need to meet the ever-rising demand for housing. The demolition in the 1960's of the former numbers 57, 59 and 61 to make way for flats demonstrates the incredible pressure that the early developments in the area with their large plots are under. Other losses in the area include St Dunstons, later the Shrubbery Maternity Home, and to the south outside the Conservation Area losses include a vicarage, the former Borough hospital and the former Borough reservoir and waterworks. Such losses are to be regretted, and further losses should be avoided wherever possible. A preferable alternative would be to seek reuse and renovation in a manner sympathetic to the original character of the buildings and the overriding character of the area. Fortunately at this time the vast bulk of losses are confined to the south west corner of the area, bounded by Shrubbery Road and Amersham Hill.

A further pressure on the area is the potential for the removal of trees. Trees play an important role in the area and should be retained where possible, as the removal of too many trees from the street scene has a highly detrimental effect.



*An example of a modern flat development to the south-west of the area. While the scale of the development is in keeping with the size of the earlier manor style houses of the area, the modern design is less compatible with the local character.*



*An example of the loss of trees from plots can erode character - while it exposes the architecture of the buildings, the setting is damaged by removing the trees. The fact that the loss of trees is often accompanied by an increase in cars does not help much either!*

## CHAPTER 4

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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#### **1     *The Conservation Area Appraisal and possible boundary amendments***

The current boundaries of the conservation area should be maintained in order to preserve the character of the area, in particular to ensure the protection of the trees within the area and the unique sylvan character they contribute.

#### **2     *Buildings that make a positive contribution to the conservation area***

A number of buildings have been identified on the conservation area map in appendix A that contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area, by virtue of their age, design, massing, scale, and enclosure. Special care should be taken in the retention and enhancement of these buildings.

#### **3     *Proposals for the enhancement of the Conservation Area***

Large scale developments should be discouraged, and where possible existing properties should be renovated. If new buildings are constructed it is suggested that care is taken to match them to the overall style of properties within the immediate area. Where possible, new development should look to provide family dwellings with gardens appropriate in size to the conservation area and that achieve good separation between plots. This is to ensure that development reflects the character of the conservation area which is overwhelmingly one of substantial detached houses in generous grounds. Development, where acceptable, should preserve and enhance the residential character of the area. Felling of trees visible from the public highway should also be resisted, unless the reasons for removal on grounds of public health and safety outweigh the desire for retention. Likewise trees which contribute to the general environment of the area and the green backdrop presented in views from the far side of the Wye valley (for example from Marlow Hill) should also be retained where possible.

## CHAPTER 5

### NEXT STEPS / FURTHER INFORMATION

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#### **1     *Public Consultation and Community Involvement***

The draft Amersham Hill Conservation Area Appraisal was published in April 2012 with six weeks given for public consultation. Following the public consultation comments received have been assessed and appropriate revisions made to the appraisal. This appraisal was formally adopted in November 2012 as a material planning consideration.

#### **2     *Monitoring***

Changes in the appearance and condition of the Amersham Hill Conservation Area should be monitored regularly. A photographic survey was undertaken at the time of the appraisal work, and this could be updated in the future.

#### **3     *Design Guidance***

The policies and proposals of the Wycombe Development Framework (WDF) are the primary source of reference for development management advice. In addition the Council's approved Conservation Areas guidance note is seen as a supporting document to the plan.

The Chilterns Conference first published the Chilterns Building Design Guide in 1999, and this guidance was fully revised and re-issued in February 2010. The Chilterns Conservation Board, which superseded the Conference, has published Supplementary Technical Notes concerned with the use of flint and brick and, more recently, roofing materials. These all provide guidance aimed at conserving the outstanding qualities which make the Chilterns a landscape of national importance. Copies can be inspected at the District Council Offices. It is used as a supplementary planning document.

Appended to this document is a series of development guidelines (Planning), covering both new development and the protection of existing character, and identifying sites for improvement. This forms the base of a management plan for the conservation area.

Most new development requires Building Regulations Approval. For further information on Building Regulations please contact a Building Control Surveyor on 01494 421403, or see the District Council Website [www.wycombe.gov.uk](http://www.wycombe.gov.uk)

## **APPENDICES**

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### **Appendix A Conservation Area Map**

The Appraisal map defines the extent of the area which is regarded as possessing those qualities of townscape, character or historic interest which designation is intended to protect. It identifies particular areas, vistas, views, buildings, etc, that are considered essential to character.

It has not been possible to gain access to all areas within the conservation area boundary. There may be individual structures, features, trees or views of importance which are not visible from the public domain and which have therefore not been annotated on the conservation area map or referred to in the text. However these may also warrant protection in the evaluation of individual development proposals. The listed buildings are shown on the designations map.

As it has not been possible to gain rear access to the properties there may be inaccuracies in the recording or the extent of their curtilage. Where buildings are shown on the conservation area map as being of local importance, they are considered to make an especially positive contribution to the historic interest or architectural character of the conservation area. Other buildings within the conservation area also play a key role in the character of the settlements, and although they are not individually identified on the map, this does not necessarily mean that they are not of interest.

### **Appendix B Listed Buildings**

There is one listed building within the conservation area: the Royal Grammar School's 1914 building as indicated on the conservation area map. Further information on listed buildings can be obtained from the English Heritage website [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

### **Appendix C Bibliography**

|                  |   |                         |
|------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Andrew, Martin   | High Wycombe: A History & Celebration     | Frith 2005              |
| Pevsner, Niklaus | The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire | Penguin 2000            |
| Rattue, James    | High Wycombe Past<br>Images of England    | Phillimore 2002<br>2012 |

## **Appendix D Local Generic Guidance**

The following guidelines have been drawn up for the management of change in the Amersham Hill Conservation Area to allow for development and alterations that keep the conservation area vital, without losing the characteristics that make it special.

In conservation areas, the Council has a duty to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area. Many seemingly minor alterations, if insensitively carried out, can have a cumulative and highly damaging effect on the overall appearance of the area. Such alterations not only damage appearance, but reduce the value of houses as historic features and attractive areas, all of which are highly desirable in today's property market.

### **Preservation of existing character**

#### *The maintenance of historic buildings in Amersham Hill Conservation Area*

- The use of traditional materials and detailing can have a considerable positive effect in enhancing the conservation area. The owners of historic and prominent properties should be encouraged to remove unsympathetic modern materials, such as concrete tiles and plastic rainwater goods, and to reinstate traditional materials such as plain clay tiles, local Bucks brick, painted timber windows and cast iron guttering.
- Repointing should only be carried out when absolutely necessary, and kept to a minimum. Variations in colour and the application of excessive amounts of mortar in a non-traditional manner detracts from brickwork and obscures it. Inappropriately hard mixes cause brickwork to deteriorate rapidly.
- Modern window materials, such as PVCu and aluminium usually appear out of place and unsympathetic, particularly if surrounded by more traditional types. Dark staining of timber is a modern technique which does little to enhance windows.
- The conservation area has a mix of modern machine made plain clay roof tiles and traditional handmade tiles with many roofs also in natural slate. Where roofs are renewed this palette of natural roofing materials should be used and concrete or artificial slate avoided as these materials are visually detrimental.

#### *The maintenance of trees and green spaces*

- Trees make an unusually significant contribution to this conservation area and property owners should manage existing trees sensitively. Within the conservation area, consent is required to fell, lop or top trees. Consideration should be given to important views into and out of the conservation area when planting or undertaking tree works, as should the setting of historic and significant buildings.
- The green spaces in the conservation area consist of the Lucas Wood and Godstowe School's playing fields, as well as smaller incidental areas such as those outside the Royal Grammar School on the junction of Amersham Road and Hamilton Hill. Private gardens play a highly significant role in the character of the area throughout the whole conservation area.



## **Design Guidance for new development**

In the conservation area higher standards of design are required, as it is the function of the planning authority to consider all applications as to whether they preserve or enhance the special character as identified in this appraisal.

### *Contextual design*

- The majority of planning applications made within the conservation area are required to have Design and Access Statements accompanying them, in order for local authorities to evaluate the impact of the scheme on the wider locality, and understand the design process behind the proposal. These should specifically address the impact of any proposal on the conservation area's special character as a heritage asset. Applications for listed building consent also require a Design and Access Statement.
- Within Amersham Hill Conservation Area new development or proposals should respect the character of the area and respond to the immediate environment, particularly in terms of scale, density, form, materials and detailing. Building works such as extensions must be designed not as a separate entity but relate to the original building.
- Listed and other significant buildings are identified on the area appraisal survey maps and their specific qualities as heritage assets are described in the accompanying text. Care should be taken to ensure that any new development does not harm these buildings or their settings or any special architectural or historic features that they may contain. It should be recognised that new development may not always be acceptable.
- Development opportunities in Amersham Hill Conservation Area are limited, unless sites come up for redevelopment. Any infill development where permissible should respect the special character of the conservation area which can be summarised as substantial houses in large gardens. Proposals for new development within the conservation area should include a detailed analysis of the locality, and show how this has developed (see Design and Access Statements above).

### *Scale and density*

- Scale is the combination of a building's height and bulk when related to its surroundings. The scale of any new buildings should respect surrounding development. Some modest changes of scale may be appropriate as this reflects the variety of form in the area, where buildings have developed over time. Applicants should provide accurate elevations of surrounding buildings showing how new development will relate to them. Density is the amount of development related to the site area. National and local guidance states that high density development can make good use of land, provided it is carefully chosen and sensitively sited. In a conservation area the historic environment will be considered as a positive defining characteristic. The Wycombe Housing Intensification SPD (Update 2011) requires that any scheme brought forward in this context improves or reinforces the special qualities of the area. Developers should be aware that high intensity urbanised forms of development may not be able to satisfactorily improve or enhance the special qualities of a conservation area, and would therefore be unacceptable as being out of character with the surrounding heritage assets.
- Applications for development adjoining but outside the conservation area will be assessed for their effect upon its character, appearance and setting, and may be refused permission if this is considered adverse. Regard must also be given to the particular distant views of the conservation area from the south where its well-treed sylvan nature of houses amid tress is a striking characteristic.

### *Height and massing*

- Within the conservation area there are a number of buildings that are already prominent because of their height or location within the street scene. Smaller houses are historically of lesser importance within the streetscape and new development should reflect this hierarchy. Generally the height of new development should match that of adjoining buildings – in Amersham Hill this is usually two storeys.
- Where extensions to existing buildings are proposed, the extension should be subservient to the main buildings, with a lower roofline.

### *Appearance, materials and detailing*

- The emphasis in conservation areas is to provide high quality design. Conservation area status does not preclude good modern design provided that it takes account of the prevailing form of existing development, scale, density, height and massing. Innovative modern design can be successfully integrated into historic areas and can provide vitality and interest to the street scene. Natural materials and high quality detailing should be incorporated into any proposals.
- Where a more traditional approach is appropriate buildings should be designed in a traditional form (including plan form, roof spans etc) and include pitched roofs. Dormers and rooflights should be modestly sized and situated on rear facing roof slopes. Use of historic detailing such as stringcourses, eaves details, fenestration pattern etc, will be acceptable if they are appropriate to the design of the new building. Such detailing, or a modern interpretation of it, can do much to break up facades of buildings. Chimneys are essential in roofscapes and should be incorporated into all designs.
- Materials for any new building works must be sympathetic to those prevailing in the area. Where possible local traditional material should be used – good quality traditional orange-red multi brick for walling and sand faced clay roof tiles or natural slate as appropriate. Although some of the buildings within the conservation area are rendered or have painted brickwork, the modern interpretation and techniques are not always visually successful and should thus be used with care. Where traditional materials survive they should be retained. The Chiltern Buildings Design Guide gives general information on Chiltern building materials.
- Inappropriate replacement windows and doors can damage the character of the conservation area. Traditional natural materials should be used in order to safeguard the special character of the conservation area. Windows should be timber (painted, not stained) and their design should reflect local styles, usually sliding sashes or side hung casements. If windows are to be double glazed these must be carefully designed to reduce the bulkiness of glazing bars. Joinery details should be submitted with planning applications. Top hung lights and modern materials such as PVCu and aluminium are inappropriate in the conservation area. Doors vary throughout the conservation area, but where they survive in original form tend to be wooden, sometimes embellished, and in keeping with the formerly domestic buildings.

### *Extensions to existing buildings*

- Extensions to existing buildings require the same approach as to new build in that they must take into account the prevailing forms of development and complement the form and character of the original house. This is of particular importance when designing extensions to listed buildings. Design should be of high quality, and take account of rooflines and shape, eaves details, fenestration patterns, architectural detailing and the creation of new chimneys. Extensions should not dominate the original buildings or result in the loss of historic plots.

### *Boundary treatments*

- Traditionally properties throughout the conservation area have hedging or trees on their front boundaries, or rarely brick walling and this usually as a low wall with hedging or fencing above. Where new boundaries are proposed in the public realm in these more open areas, they should be in keeping, and the use of panelled fencing should be avoided. Several houses have had vehicular access gates installed of an inappropriately ornate style in an area so dominated by the Arts and Crafts style. Many houses have had no vehicular access gates historically but simple timber types with vertical boarded lower sections and open upper halves with vertical slats or studs should be preferred. Traditional five bar field gates are also considered appropriate.
- In the conservation area the hedgerows indicated on the survey maps are an important element of the area's character, and should be retained and where possible enhanced.

### *Public realm*

- Street furniture, lampposts, CCTV camera mountings and posts, telephone boxes and other public works which are beyond planning control can have a disproportionate impact on the streetscape and character of the conservation area and those responsible need to bear in mind the advice in the English Heritage publication "Streets for All" (2005). Traffic signs, road markings and street lamps can potentially add to clutter and consideration should be given to the overall effect when installing such items.
- Solar panels where possible should be positioned to minimise the effect on the appearance of the building and the amenity of the area. Where possible they should be sited in back gardens or on elevations that do not face the street. Within the conservation area solar panels are not allowed on frontage elevations. Permission will be required for solar installations for listed buildings including non-listed buildings within their grounds, generally they will not be acceptable in publicly visible locations.
- Satellite dishes and other antennae where possible should be positioned as inobtrusively as possible and be of a modest size. Care should be taken to ensure that the dish or antenna is not affixed to a chimney, wall or roof slope that is visible from the road unless express permission is first granted by the local Planning authority. Satellite dishes are generally not acceptable affixed to listed buildings in publicly visible locations.