

## **STANSTED MOUNTFITCHET – May 2007**

### **Introduction.**

Stansted Mountfitchet is a local service centre and the third largest settlement in the District. As such, it is therefore particularly important to assess its environmental sensitivity and capacity so as to understand the extent to which it might be able to accommodate such development.

### **General character.**

The settlement is close to Stansted Airport, the influence of which exerts economic and transportation influences throughout the region. Additionally it is close to the M11 motorway and the London to Cambridge rail network, being situated some 30 miles north of the city of London. Junction 8 of the M11 to the south also provides access to Stansted airport, Great Dunmow and Braintree via the fast and efficient dual carriageway of the recently constructed A120. Stansted Mountfitchet, because of its key location and close proximity to these major national economic factors and transportation links, will continue to be influenced by them in the future which highlight the need to provide maximum protection to its historic environment. In terms of local retailing and services, the large town of Bishop's Stortford, some 3 miles to the south, is a magnet. The community on its southern and south-eastern and south-western flanks is protected from urbanisation by the Metropolitan Green Belt. The population is currently about 5,500 but will rise significantly when the additional development at Richford Nurseries (now referred to as Forest Hall Park) has been completed.

The village lies in the Stansted Brook. The greater part is to the north of the railway line although this will shift to some extent when the urban extension at Forest Hall Park adjacent to Forest Hall Road is complete. The community is surrounded by open countryside and much of the agricultural quality of that abutting the built up area is grade 3. The grounds of Stansted Hall, laid out by Humphrey Repton, overlook the village and are particularly important when looking out from the village from Chapel Hill for example.

Stansted Mountfitchet has grown significantly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, principally due to its location in relation to proximity to good communications.

There are about 140 individually listed buildings in the extensive parish of Stansted Mountfitchet of which 52 are in the designated conservation area. The majority of these (over 40%) are from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 17<sup>th</sup> century is well represented with about 30% of listed buildings whilst there are about 20% from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The remainder are from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and earlier.

One important architectural feature of the village is the use of boundary railings dating principally from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are also some walls of quality.

Throughout the conservation area there are trees in abundance, some of which have been made subject to Tree Preservation Orders in the past.

**The historic core and its relationship with the built up area of the town as a whole.**

The existing conservation area has recently been appraised and amendments proposed that have been accepted. When Members of the Council's Development Control Committee considered the Stansted Mountfitchet Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals in April 2007, they also agreed the principle of defining an additional conservation area at Bentfield Green.

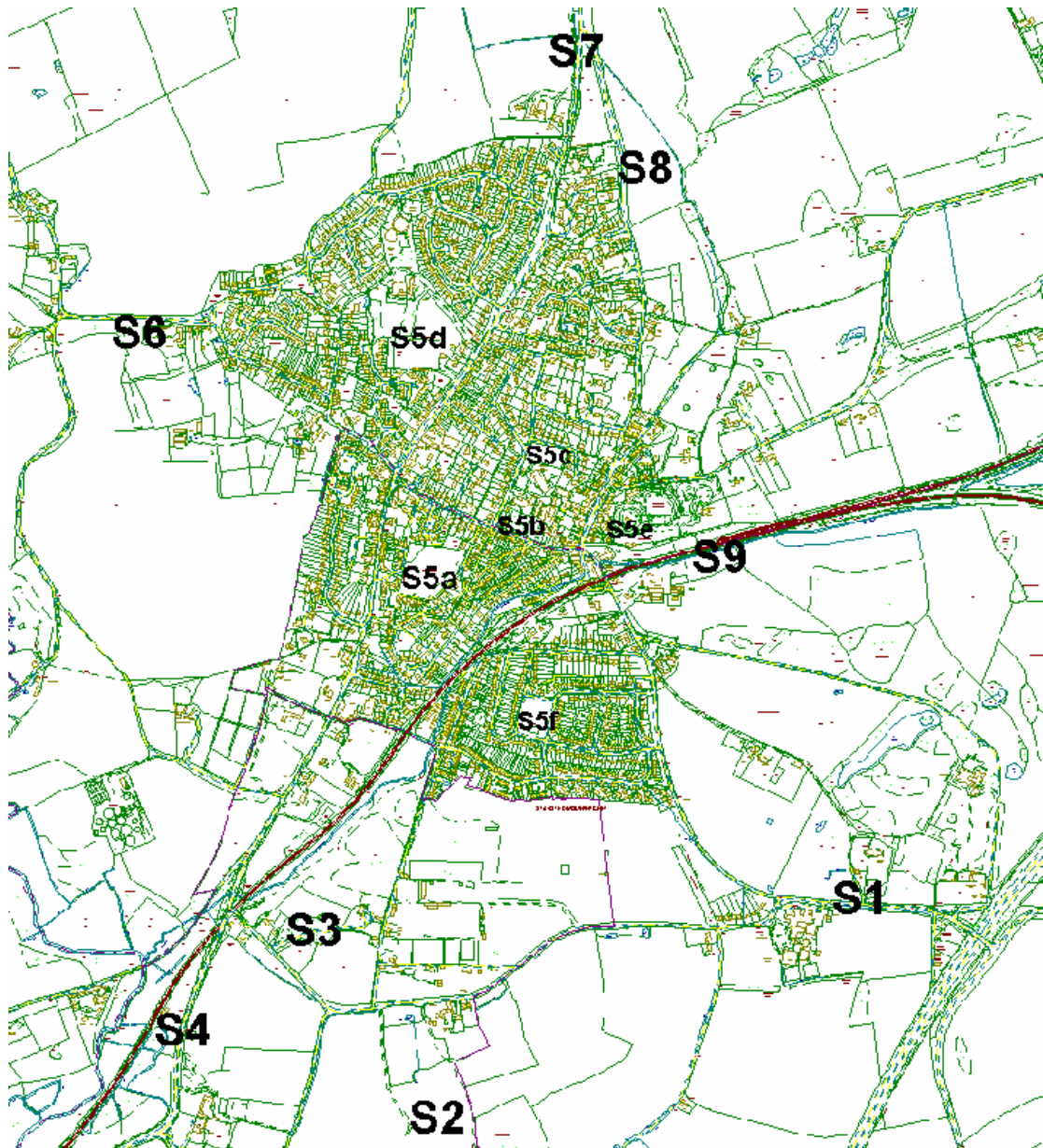
Throughout the conservation area there are trees in abundance and these make a significant contribution to the quality of the townscape. There are quality areas of open space both owned by the parish and also in private ownership.

The extent of the existing conservation area is largely a mirror reflection of the community as it existed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The community then, as the conservation area today, consists of three distinct historic areas, namely Bentfield End, Silver Street and Chapel Hill and the Lower Street area.

Although the central part of the conservation area is surrounded to the north, west and south by extensive housing development where standard mid – late 20<sup>th</sup> century types predominate, it still retains its distinctive qualities and remains visually unaffected by these large additions to a significant degree.

Expressed in percentage terms the historic core defined by the conservation area represents about 13% of the built up part of the town.

The quality and general function of landscapes in and adjacent to the town by sector and a broad statement as to the effect of development in each sector.



Map of Stansted Mountfitchet showing the sectors.

**Sector 1. Church Road and the approach from the south east from Stansted Hall and the M11.**

*Quality of Landscape.* The landscape in this location is mixed. Of greatest importance is the Repton parkland of Stansted Hall whose qualities are recognised by its designation as an historic park in the Uttlesford Local Plan adopted in 2005. This parkland is very extensive indeed and consists of arable and pasture land with grazing animals. Within the parkland there are many distinctive parkland trees, some of them being in an advanced state of maturity. Partly because of this, the parkland appears in places to be in a

state of gentle decline. It is potentially a significant environmental asset to the community and this part of the District.

Elsewhere school buildings and the Mountfitchet Romeera Leisure Centre are located adjacent to extensive playing fields. Adjacent to the motorway is the Tall Trees Mobile Home Park whose presence is announced by statues of prancing horses and seated lions. The latter is largely hidden from view whilst the former education buildings are of no great architectural merit. This is in contrast to St Mary's the Virgin's church, dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century but heavily restored by Francis Dollman in 1881, whose landmark tower set in an extensive burial ground appears prominent from some views in the local landscape. Church Road leading down into the community is tree and hedge lined.

The edge of the village to the west of Church Road is clearly defined by existing development but this demarcation will shortly extend in a southerly direction when Forest Hall Park development is built out. To the east of the road between Church Fields and the railway is Elms Farm which in addition to residential use contains a number of dilapidated agricultural buildings that detract from the quality of the landscape in this location. A section of Stansted Park to the west of Church Road is traversed by a public footpath.

*General function of landscape.* The function of the landscape on this approach is varied. For the most part it provides a quality rural approach to an expanding community. The parkland also provides a quality environment in its own right and an historic setting for Stansted Hall itself and the historic church and its burial ground.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* As a broad generalisation development in this location would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which lies to the north of the railway line. Generally speaking development would be highly damaging to this rural approach road and to its particularly high quality and extensive parkland. However attention is drawn to the poor quality environment at Elms Farm and it is noted that were this footprint redeveloped, a visual improvement could be secured and this would benefit the historic core particularly when seen from the Castle mound. It is appreciated that this site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt whose permanence and associated strategic considerations relating to control of development may be considered to be of greater importance and outweigh other benefits associated with redevelopment.

In broad summary and accepting the potential positive benefits associated with limited redevelopment of Elms Farm, it is considered development elsewhere in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 1 Church Road.**

**Sector 2. Land between the village of Birchanger and Forest Hall Road.**

*Quality of Landscape.* Rolling arable farmland that for the most part is open in character and punctuated with prominent blocks of trees woodland and spinney's. There are long views across the gap to Stansted Windmill in the distance. Footpaths and a Bridleway traverse this narrow gap between the two communities.

*General function of landscape.* The countryside in this location provides an unspoilt rural landscape in this narrow gap separating the communities of Stansted Mountfitchet (including the new development of Forest Hall Park and Birchanger) and thus maintaining the separate identities of an expanding small town and a nearby village that lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development in this location would have no direct detrimental effect on the historic core of Stansted Mountfitchet some considerable distance to the north. However it should be noted that development would detrimentally affect the long distance views of the Windmill.

Development would be highly damaging to this rural gap and result in the loss of arable farmland and high quality rolling countryside and result in the loss of an important gap that maintains the separate identity of two different communities that lie in relative close proximity to each other.

In summary it is considered development in this sector would very significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of both the settlements of Stansted Mountfitchet and Birchanger. .



**Sector 2 Birchanger looking towards Stansted.**

**Sector 3. Land to the west of Forest Hall Park and east of the railway, including land to the west of Brook View.**

*Quality of Landscape.* Undulating parcels of pasture land of considerable visual quality, partly carpeted in wild flowers when surveyed in May. The enclosed site is framed by trees except to the boundary of Forest Hall Road. Land to the west of Brook View is heavily treed and undulating pasture land of considerable visual quality rising from the valley of a brook in this location. A footpath traverses the site alongside the brook whilst another crosses nearby on the Forest Hall Park boundary.

*General function of landscape.* The site provides an important buffer and environmental and ecological gap between the new development at Forest Hall Park and the railway and .a green lung of significant environmental quality in immediate proximity to the hard edge of the settlement.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development in this location would have no direct detrimental effect on the historic core of Stansted Mountfitchet, being separated from it by the railway, by modern development and changes in levels.

Development would be highly damaging to this environmental buffer and result in the loss of particularly visually pleasing parcels of pasture land and trees.

In summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.

#### **Sector 4. The south west approach from Birchanger Lane.**

*Quality of Landscape.* The land to the west of the road in the valley bottom is heavily treed. Land to the east of the road contains the establishment of Sion Park, an area that on route to Pesterford Bridge is also heavily treed with principally deciduous specimens making a significant environmental contribution along the entrance to the town and on the rising ground to the east. There is a mixture of arable and pasture land. The Broome End Care Home and Brooklands are two large properties in extensive grounds, located in the Green Belt closer to the edge of the settlement. A footpath crosses in an east west direction north of the sewage works.

*General function of landscape.* The wider landscape in this area performs the function of separating Stansted Mountfitchet from the large urban area of Bishop's Stortford to the south west. It also provides a pleasant rural approach in this location and demarks the edge of the settlement.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development in this location would only have a direct detrimental effect on the historic core of Stansted Mountfitchet if it occurred in the far north of the sector in the vicinity of the extended conservation area. Elsewhere it would not, being separated from it by distance and development and containment by tree cover and lack of inter visibility.

Development however would be highly damaging to this environmental buffer that separates Stansted from Bishop's Stortford and would result in the loss of a rural approach characterised by heavy tree cover.

In summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.



**Sector 4 approach from Bishops Stortford.**

**Sector 5. Selected open spaces within the built up area.** Some of these sites are in public ownership where the likelihood of development is slight to non-existent. Nevertheless their qualities, functions and the effect of development have been considered so as to present a complete assessment.

**(a) The Recreation Ground.**

*Quality of Landscape.* This very pleasant open space is a green lung that lies within the historic core. There is a play area for children and trees delineate the boundary in part.

*General function of landscape.* It is actively used for recreational purposes by local residents and provides a green space of quality in the heart of the settlement and the historic core. It also sets off quality late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings on its southern and eastern flanks.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development would have a direct detrimental effect on the historic core of Stansted Mountfitchet, resulting in the loss of an open space in active use and the loss of an open setting for a number of quality non-listed buildings that frame two of its boundaries. Another serious detrimental effect would be the loss of views of the landmark listed building, the Windmill.

In summary it is considered development of this open space would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.



**Sector 5a Recreation ground.**

**(b) The War Memorial Garden.**

*Quality of Landscape.* This open space is another green lung in the heart of the historic core containing the war memorial. The Stansted Appraisal noted the site lacked overall cohesion in landscape terms and would benefit from the introduction of a landscaping scheme that provided greater dignity for the function it performs.

*General function of landscape.* It is a civic area commemorating war dead and a green lung extensively used by the general public. It also sets off St John's Church nearby and to the north.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development would have a direct detrimental effect on the historic core of Stansted Mountfitchet resulting in the loss of a civic open space in active use and the loss of the setting for St John's Church, a landmark listed building of considerable importance.

In summary it is considered development of this open space would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.

**(c) Playing Field south of Burnells Way.**

*Quality of Landscape.* Rectangular open space on slightly sloping ground adjacent to school with minimal tree cover, enclosed by fence some 3m in height.

*General function of landscape.* Playing field associated with the nearby school.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* There would be some inter visibility between development on this site and the newly extended Conservation area at St.John's Road. There would also be a loss of playing field associated with school, such loss being of limited significance if the school ceased to function as such. In summary it is considered development of this open space would be neutral and would neither diminish nor improve the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location, should the school cease to require it.

**(d) Grounds to Hargrave House and the adjacent sports field.**

*Quality of Landscape.* Hargrave House is a listed building built in 1875 and located in large grounds with extensive tree cover and now used as a residential care home. The sports field is in active use by the local football and cricket clubs and is visually enclosed by boundary trees. There is a simple football stand and shelter.

*General function of landscape.* The grounds of Hargrave House provide the setting for a large Victorian house of quality whilst the playing fields provide multi recreational activities in the centre of this expanding community.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development would not have a direct detrimental effect on the central historic core of Stansted Mountfitchet or the one at Bentfield End because modern development separates them. Large scale development within the grounds of Hargrave House would detrimentally affect its setting whilst development of the sports ground would result in the loss of an open space in active use.

In summary it is considered development would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.

**(e) The Castle Mound.**

*Quality of Landscape.* The Castle Mound is an ancient site and Scheduled Ancient Monument upon which has been built a collection of wooden properties with thatched roofs within a wooden palisade in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The site is a landmark feature in this part of the community being situated in this elevated and originally defensive position. The site is portrayed as Stansted 1066 and is unquestionably a tourist attraction, being particularly popular with young persons. In the field workers view the contraptions erected are not authentic and not representative of what originally existed although they do give a young visitor some insight into the more colourful aspects of early Norman times. They do not enhance this historic ancient monument where only a fragment of the original remains.

*General function of landscape.* The elevated mound dominates the local landscape rising above the eastern extent of the conservation area within which it lies.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* The current development is reversible without damage to the real importance of the site and what may lie beneath it. Should the current use cease it is considered a more appropriate and less intrusive form of development could be designed to improve the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.

**(f) Open space near Stoneyfield Drive and Mount Drive.**

*Quality of Landscape.* A well used flat and visually poor quality recreational area. There is limited tree cover and its broken fencing and general run down appearance makes it visually impoverished. There is boundary planting that if allowed to mature, will go a long way to make significant environmental improvements. It contains a young persons play area and football goal posts.

*General function of landscape.* It provides an important play area in the centre of an extensive 20<sup>th</sup> century housing estate.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development would not have a direct detrimental effect on the central historic core of Stansted Mountfitchet. Development would result in the loss of an open space with potential for visual improvement at minimal cost and in active use.

In summary it is considered that development on this open space, although neutral in visual considerations, would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location because of the function it performs in this dense and large area of 20<sup>th</sup> century development with a paucity of recreational open space.

**Sector 6. The approach from Manuden and Bentfield Bower.**

*Quality of Landscape.* This approach is undulating open arable farmland for the most part punctuated with groups of tree cover. Bentfield Green is an open scatter of buildings concentrated around greens, one of which contains a pond. Here the building types are representative of many periods and styles and their loose scatter and relationship with the high quality undulating landscape adjacent, make this approach most visually attractive. As stated earlier it is intended to designate Bentfield Green a conservation area. There are several footpaths in this general area.

*General function of landscape.* The landscape acts as a setting for the proposed conservation area at Bentfield Green and elsewhere to the north and east acts as a clear delineation between open countryside and edge of urban built development.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development in this location would have a direct detrimental effect on the proposed conservation area and involve the loss of a high quality arable landscape, extending built form into attractive undulating countryside of considerable visual merit.

In summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.

### **Sector 7. The northern approach along the B184.**

*Quality of Landscape.* This large landscape consists of undulating farmland characterised by large fields defined by hedgerows and trees. In the vicinity of Walpole Farm, land rises more steeply to the clearly defined edge of the community that lies on the crest of the hill in this location and defined by a strong tree boundary. Pallets and agricultural storage boxes heaped up at Walpole Farm detract to some degree when viewed from the distance and the B184.

On the edge of the town to the west of the B184 is situated a recently constructed Catholic Church, a large building set in extensive pleasantly landscaped grounds. Its northern boundary provides a clear break with the open countryside adjacent to the north which slopes down to the apex of this triangular plot defined by the B184 on its eastern boundary and High Lane to the west. For the most part these boundaries screen this site with prominent deciduous trees that form strong hedgerows.

A footpath runs east west south of Walpole Farm adjacent to urban edge. Other footpaths and bridleways traverse the countryside to the north.

*General function of landscape.* The landscape contains the settlement at its clearly defined edge on the crest of a hill.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development in this location would not have a direct detrimental effect on the historic core, being separated from it by a significant part of the modern community. Development would however result in loss of open agricultural land, spilling down steeply sloping land beyond the clearly defined northern edge of the community. Such development would be visually prominent for the most part although it would be largely hidden from view by the hedges forming the boundaries to the triangular parcel of land referred to above.

In summary it is generally considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.



**Sector 7 approach from Saffron Walden.**

### **Sector 8. Land at High Lane.**

*Quality of Landscape.* The landscape is undulating countryside with some agricultural land currently not in use. High Lane is tree lined and the wider landscape in this location is enclosed by a tree screen to the east. Closer to the edge of the historic core, the sunken Lane at Gall End is a fine environmental and ecological feature set in an altogether much smaller enclosed landscape. A footpath links Gall End Lane and Alsa Street whilst another links High Lane and the road to Elsenham.

*General function of landscape.* The landscape contains the edge of the settlement in this location and also provides a particularly interesting environmental and ecological feature at Gall end.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development at Gall Lane would have a direct detrimental effect on the historic core nearby and would involve the loss of a high quality sunken lane and a unique landscape feature in the Stansted Mountfitchet context. Elsewhere it would extend built form into attractive undulating countryside.

In summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.



**Sector 8 High Lane landscape.**

### **Sector 9. The approach from Elsenham.**

*Quality of Landscape.* This is an arable landscape with smaller fields to the south falling away, quite steeply in places, to the railway line. The approach road is tree and hedge lined for the most part. Within the landscape there are occasional properties and closer to the village there are several larger ones, including the Rural Studies centre. A bridleway crosses in a north south direction to the west of the motorway whilst a footpath runs alongside the railway in an east west direction.

*General function of landscape.* The landscape contains the edge of the settlement in this location and provides a pleasant rural approach.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development would only have a direct detrimental effect on the historic core if it occurred in proximity to the edge of the historic core at Grove Hill. Elsewhere it would extend built form into attractive undulating countryside and further reduce the already narrow gap between Stansted Mountfitchet and Elsenham.

In summary it is considered development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Stansted Mountfitchet in this location.



**Sector 9 Elsenham Road approach.**

### **Overall summary.**

The potential to develop Elms Farm and the long term potential to reduce the impact of Stansted 1066 on the Castle Mound are the only sites where it is considered coordinated development could improve the sense of place and local distinctiveness. However in relation to the former other strategic considerations relating to the Metropolitan Green Belt may be considered more important and over riding.

The degree to which development would impact on the historic core is set out above in summary form in relation to each sector. Development in some sectors, such as no.2 for example, although removed by distance from the historic core, could result in the loss of long views of landmark buildings whilst others such as development on the approach from Manuden would have a direct and seriously detrimental effect on Bentfield Green, a proposed conservation area.

Apart from the above considerations the general conclusion reached In relation to the various approach roads to Stansted Mountfitchet is that development would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement. Opportunities to expand Stansted Mountfitchet significantly are therefore limited in terms of these considerations and to breach them would result in serious environmental loss.