

## **GREAT CHESTERFORD – May 2007**

### **Introduction.**

Great Chesterford is one of the larger villages in the District and is identified as a key rural settlement. There are three distinct areas, firstly the historic core, secondly an area of 20<sup>th</sup> century development to the north east of the Conservation Area, separated in part by a buffer of open land and thirdly an extensive area of employment consisting of light industry offices and research on and adjacent to the former railway sidings. Other 20<sup>th</sup> century housing has been built to the south east of the employment area either side of the B1383. Most genuine infill plots within the built up area have been developed.

Because of its function as a large village in the north of the District, served by the national road and rail networks where services and employment opportunities are provided, it is important to study the sensitivity and capacity of Great Chesterford to ascertain whether or not the village can accommodate additional residential development without damage to its environmental qualities.

### **General Character.**

The village is about 20 kilometres south of Cambridge and a similar distance north of Stansted Airport. The economic success of both these areas exerts economic and transportation influences throughout the whole of Uttlesford. Because of its location, Great Chesterford will continue to be affected by these factors in the future.

The village lies about half a kilometre to the east of the M11 motorway where there is a major junction for south bound traffic to London and a link with the A11/A14 road network to Newmarket and Norwich. The B1383 forms the western boundary to the conservation area and is a main access road to Bishops Stortford and Stansted Mountfitchet. The London to Cambridge railway line passes close by and the railway station at Great Chesterford provides train services to Cambridge, Bishops Stortford and London. For a rural village with a population of about 1,450 there is a significant employment area, located near the railway station, and this offers a wide range of job opportunities for residents and those commuting in from elsewhere. Some employment facilities based in the village are representative of the modern electronic and communications types to be found elsewhere in the Cambridge sub region.

Great Chesterford lies in the valley of the river Cam. The village is surrounded by attractive open undulating countryside. This rolling landscape of chalky boulder clay is extensive with wide views. The farmland is mostly in intensive arable use and except for areas alongside the river, some of which is liable to flooding, is classified as being of grade 2 quality.

There are three distinct areas. The first to the southwest of the river along the B1383 consists of a mixture of modern housing, with some early 20<sup>th</sup> century

bungalows and a range of employment developments of mixed styles. This is a less attractive part of the village where the buildings are generally plain and where there is a lack of vegetation in some locations. The overall openness of the area and prominence of late 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial buildings contrasts sharply with the historic core that lies close by to the north and east of the river.

The second area lies to the north east of the conservation area and is characterised by standard 20<sup>th</sup> century residential development that extends both sides of Jackson's Lane up to the B184. This large area of housing built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whilst not displaying any great architectural merit, does not detract significantly from the nearby historic core and this in part is due to an attractive open pasture and parkland that acts as a very important environmental buffer.

The third area is the conservation area and historic part of the village and includes the whole of Carmen Street, Carmel Street, School Street, Church Street, South Street, High Street and Manor Lane.

### **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 its extent as now defined is an accurate definition of the historic core. There are about 70 individually listed buildings in Great Chesterford, 66 of which are in the designated conservation area. The majority of these (over 75%) are timber-framed and plastered. Of these, about 50% are from the 17/18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most have tiled roofs whilst a small number are thatched. Not surprisingly, buildings from this early period are principally concentrated in the centre of the historic core. Other timber-framed properties constructed later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are to be found along roads on the periphery of the historic core at locations such the northwest stretch of High Street. Additionally there are a smaller number of listed buildings also from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that are constructed of brick with slate roofs.

One distinctive architectural feature of the village is the use of boundary walls many of which are constructed of flint panels supported by brick piers and capping. The use of this material reflects the local geology and historical availability of flints found in abundance on the fields surrounding the village.

Throughout the conservation area there are trees in abundance, often located in large private grounds, many of which have already been made subject to Tree Preservation Orders and these make a significant contribution to the quality of the built form. There are a number of quality areas of open space principally in private ownership that might be susceptible to development pressures, many of which perform valuable landscape functions that are described below.

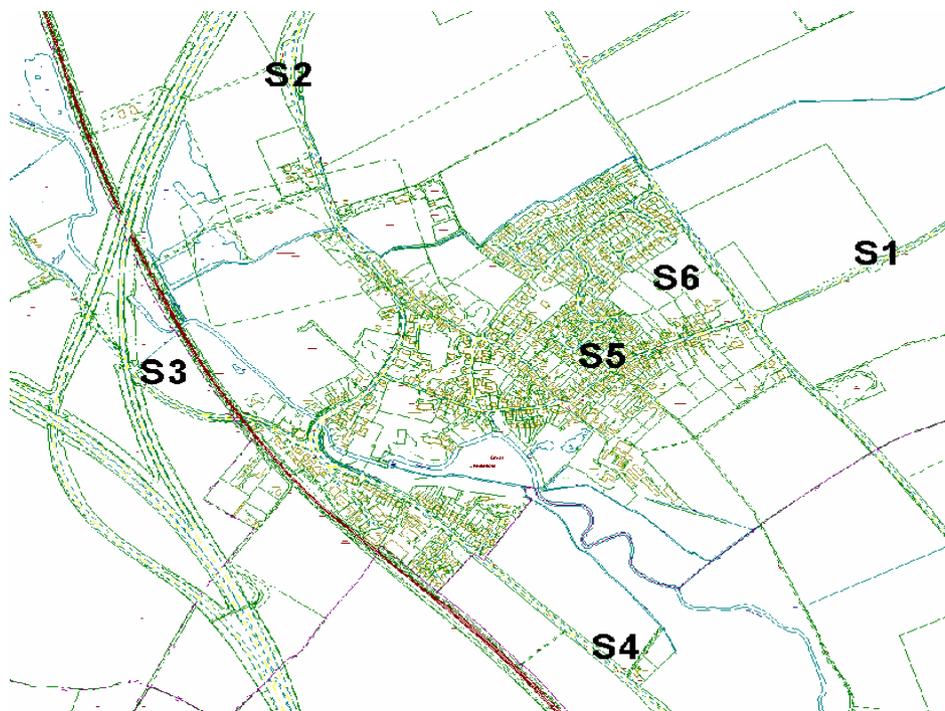
To the west of the Newmarket Road open farmland is designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments, being sites of the former Roman fort and

town, believed to have developed in the second century AD and ending in about 450AD. The desirability of preserving these monuments and settings is a material consideration where there is a presumption in favour of the preservation of such important sites and their settings.

Expressed in percentage terms the historic core defined by the conservation area and including the large open spaces that fall within it, represents about 70% of the built up part of the village.

In summary the historic core is of high environmental quality with a wide range of listed buildings of varying ages and styles and important areas of open space. To the north east the historic core is surrounded and generally visually isolated from the approach roads by modern housing residential developments that are generally neutral in character and neither seriously erode or add to the quality of its historic qualities. Extensive open land, mostly in private ownership, abuts the river Cam at the southern end of the historic core, separating the latter from the employment land and railway. The whole village is set in a large bowl of arable open countryside that descends to the edges of the built up area, generally forming sharp distinct edges between village and open countryside.

**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 Great Chesterford showing the sectors.**

**Sector 1. Land to north, south west and south east of the B184**

*Quality of Landscape.* The landscape is one of an arable farmland consisting of large fields with limited tree cover sloping down to the valley bottom and

meeting the built up edge of the village on the alignment of the B184 forming its north eastern edge. The overall characteristics are of an arable landscape of impressive scale and open character within which the village nestles in a bowl. Several public footpaths traverse part of this sector.

*General function of Landscape.* An important agricultural landscape that is accessible to the public in parts and one that contains and clearly defines the extent of the built form in this location.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development on Sector 1 land would impact on that part of the historic core at its north eastern extremity where High Street meets the B184. Elsewhere it would not, due to the presence of extensive 20<sup>th</sup> century development that separates this sector from the historic core. The principal effect of large scale development would be to extend the village beyond clearly defined landscape features thus detrimentally affecting its setting and onto open arable farmland resulting in the loss of agricultural land. It is considered that development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 1 looking west from Cow Lane**

**Sector 2. Newmarket Road approach from the B184 and the north.**

*Quality of Landscape.* This is a large arable landscape much of which is open in character but where other parts are more fragmented. The land is slightly undulating in places and generally slopes down to the edge of the village and its peripheral modern development with strong mature tree line beyond that in turn hides the historic core from view. In places there are strong field boundaries and the trees and hedgerows to the road boundary are prominent on this approach. The fields to the west contain extensive Scheduled Ancient Monument designations being sites of the former Roman fort and town

although there are no visible remains above ground. There is a public footpath linking the Newmarket Road with the B184.

*General function of Landscape.* The landscape clearly defines the edge of the settlement including a small part of its historic core and provides a pleasant rural approach to the community.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development on Sector 2 land would impact on that part of the historic core at its western extremity to the west of Newmarket Road. Elsewhere it would not. The principal effect of large scale development would be to extend the village beyond clearly defined landscape features thus detrimentally affecting its setting and this approach by intruding onto open arable farmland with its consequential loss. Additionally development would affect important Scheduled Ancient Monument sites and their settings in selected locations to the west of Newmarket Road. It is considered that development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 2 Newmarket Road approach, looking south towards the edge of the village.**

### **Sector 3. Ickleton Road approach.**

*Quality of landscape.* Most of the land on this approach is in the County of Cambridgeshire and as such is subject to a different planning administration. The farmland is arable and the approach road which is crossed by the railway and high bridges associated with the national road network results in a smaller scale agricultural landscape than elsewhere. There is a Bridleway to the west of the railway running in a south westerly direction.

*General function of landscape.* Together with the strong alignment of the railway, it defines the edge of the settlement in this location.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* . Development on Sector 3 land would not impact on the historic core because the latter is shielded from view

by the railway and the adjacent commercial development. The principal effect of large scale development would be to extend the village beyond clearly defined landscape features formed by the railway resulting in the loss of agricultural land. It is considered that development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 3 looking east from Ickleton Road towards the edge of the village.**

**Sector 4. Newmarket Road approach from the south east.**

Quality of landscape. An open arable landscape that meets a clearly defined village edge in the vicinity of Granta Close and Ash Green, an edge also defined by extensive tree cover beyond which are only glimpses of the community. A public footpath links the village with Little Chesterford and beyond, running in a south easterly direction north of the river Cam.

*General function of Landscape.* The distinction formed at the point open countryside meets the village defines a clear edge in this location.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development on Sector 4 land would not impact on the historic core to any significant degree because the latter is largely shielded from view by modern edge of village development and tree cover. The principal effect of large scale development would be to extend the village beyond its clearly defined landscape edge detrimentally affecting the setting of the village as a whole and resulting in the loss of agricultural land. It is considered that development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 4 Newmarket Road approach from the south east looking towards the edge of the village.**

**Sector 5. Open spaces within the historic core and Conservation areas as proposed to be extended April 2007.**

**(a) Chesterford House and Easby House.**

*Quality of Landscape.* These two large residential curtilages within the historic core's north eastern extremity contain significant numbers of mature trees that, together with their openness make a valuable contribution to the conservation area.

*General function of Landscape.* The trees of Chesterford House provide additional variety of form, colour, scale and shape whilst the open nature of Easby House makes a pleasant visual contrast with the more enclosed built form of the street scene to the west.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* . Development here would detrimentally impact on the historic core resulting in the loss of quality open space and trees that support an ecological system. It is considered that development in this sector would be damaging and diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 5a Chesterford House boundary to High Street.**

**(b) Land south of Meadow Road, within the curtilage of The Delles and north of Carmen Street.**

*Quality of Landscape.* The combination of undulating topography, flora and mixed deciduous with some coniferous tree cover, combined with a visual effect of both openness and enclosure make this a most visually interesting landscape. The free standing Lime trees between Meadow Road and The Delles impart parkland characteristics in this narrow gap. Mature trees in the curtilage of The Delles make a significant contribution to the overall landscape in this location, visible from a number of vantage points whilst providing a strong vertical emphasis complimenting the historic built form. Open pasture land north of Carmen Street is enclosed on the street frontage for the most part by a low wall of historic merit, is grazed by livestock, subdivided by post and rail fencing and carpeted with wildflowers in season.

*General function of Landscape.* The landscape acts as a buffer between the adjacent historic core and the modern development at Meadow Road whilst its fine landscape characteristics compliment the equally high qualities of the built form.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development here would detrimentally impact on the adjacent historic core. Another principal effect of development would be to merge distinct elements of the village causing the loss of a fine parkland and paddock setting and trees and pasture land of high quality that support a varied ecological system. It is considered that development in this sector would be highly damaging and significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 5b land south of Meadow Road looking across parkland in north west direction.**



**Sector 5b Carmon Street frontage and boundary wall to The Delles.**

**(c) Playing field to south of Carmen Street.**

*Quality of Landscape.* The landscape is flat with limited tree cover and enclosed in part by an historic wall. The field is adjacent to part of the historic core.

*General function of Landscape.* The land provides a vital role in providing playing fields for the village school and also acts as a green space that acts as a buffer between modern development off Newmarket Road and the historic core at Carmen Street and School Street.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development here would detrimentally impact on the adjacent historic core resulting in the loss of open

space and marring views of the important landmark building, All Saints church. It is considered that development in this sector would be damaging and would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 5c looking south across playing field towards church tower.

#### **(d) The churchyard and land at Bishops House.**

*Quality of Landscape.* The gentle slope of the churchyard with its extensive graveyard and wealth of stone grave markers continues more steeply with the descent of the garden within the curtilage of Bishop's House as it falls away to the river. There are significant numbers of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees of considerable environmental merit that are also of ecological importance. The churchyard is enjoyed by visitors and the general public.

*General function of Landscape.* This large open space and green lung within the historic core is important in providing an historic landscape framework for setting off the key landmark building in the village, namely the church, together with other quality buildings and walls nearby. It also acts as a buffer separating the bulk of the historic core to the north east from the commercial area to the south west.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development here would detrimentally impact on the historic core within which it lies to a serious degree and would lead to the merging of distinct elements of the village causing the loss of a fine open space and trees that support a varied ecological system. It is considered that development in this sector would be highly damaging and significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 5d looking south west through churchyard towards curtilage of Bishops House.**

**(e) The curtilages of Manor Farm and Brock House and Horse River Green .**

*Quality of Landscape.* The large gardens of these two residential properties slope down to the river but are not visible to a significant degree from public view points. The garden to Manor Farm has a large expanse of attractive lawn surrounded by fine trees and the garden to Brock House that can be glimpsed from Manor Lane, is similarly endowed with significant numbers of mature trees. The publicly owned Horse River Green is a delightful public open space with mature trees and public seating overlooking the river and countryside beyond. The occasional fair held here continues a long village tradition.

*General function of Landscape.* The trees within Manor Farm and Brock House particularly provide additional variety of form colour scale and shape to the historic street scene at Manor Lane, making a pleasant visual contrast with the more enclosed built form of the street scene and its fine historic buildings. Horse River Green provides an area of mixed recreational enjoyment for the general public and tree cover. The narrow gap separates and provides a buffer of open space between South Street and Church Street and also provides an important view across the open countryside beyond.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Development here would detrimentally impact on the historic core resulting in the loss of fine open spaces and trees that support a varied ecological system. It is considered that development in this sector would be damaging and diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 5e curtilage of Manor Farm.**



**Sector 5e Brook House garden from Manor Lane.**

### **Sector 6. Land to the south east of Stanley Road and Four Acres.**

*Quality of Landscape.* This land consists of three small parcels of flat land, two of which are unused whilst the third that is centrally located, is currently in use as a paddock. The paddock land is the more attractive and has interesting wild flora and two freestanding maturing hawthorn bushes that add to its quality. The most significant features throughout the three parcels are the mixed hedges that are of real environmental and ecological importance and which separate the individual spaces and shield the open land from

adjacent development. To the north west and south west, the land is hemmed in by modern development of neutral quality. The southern boundary defines the curtilage of Chesterford House and is the Conservation Area boundary in this location. The B184 lies beyond the north east boundary hedge. No public footpaths traverse the land.

*General function of Landscape.* The land provides a pleasant open space adjacent to modern development and whose important hedges provide visual and ecological interest close to otherwise standard 20<sup>th</sup> century developments.

*Broad statement of effect of development.* Subject to the retention of the important hedge boundaries, both peripheral and internal, and retention of some of the land for public access being made available to nearby residents for recreational purposes and subject to high quality design and respect for the adjoining Conservation area to the south, appropriate small scale residential development could be created that at worst would be neutral and at best would improve the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



**Sector 6 land to the south east of Stanley Road and Four Acres.**

### **Overall summary.**

Sector 6 land to the south east of Stanley Road and Four Acres is the only area identified where subject to retention of trees and hedges and the provision of open space the effect would at worst be neutral and at best improve the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.

It is accepted that whilst the quality of new development can be designed to reduce detrimental effect, new development in all sectors, excepting Sectors 3 and 4, would result in a detrimental impact on the historic core to varying

degrees. The effects would be greatest in respect of the individual parcels that constitute sector 5.

In relation to all sectors except 6, the conclusion reached is that development would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of Great Chesterford for the reasons expressed above.