



Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan

Central Area Assessment

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THAXTED'S BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Undertaken by local people

2016



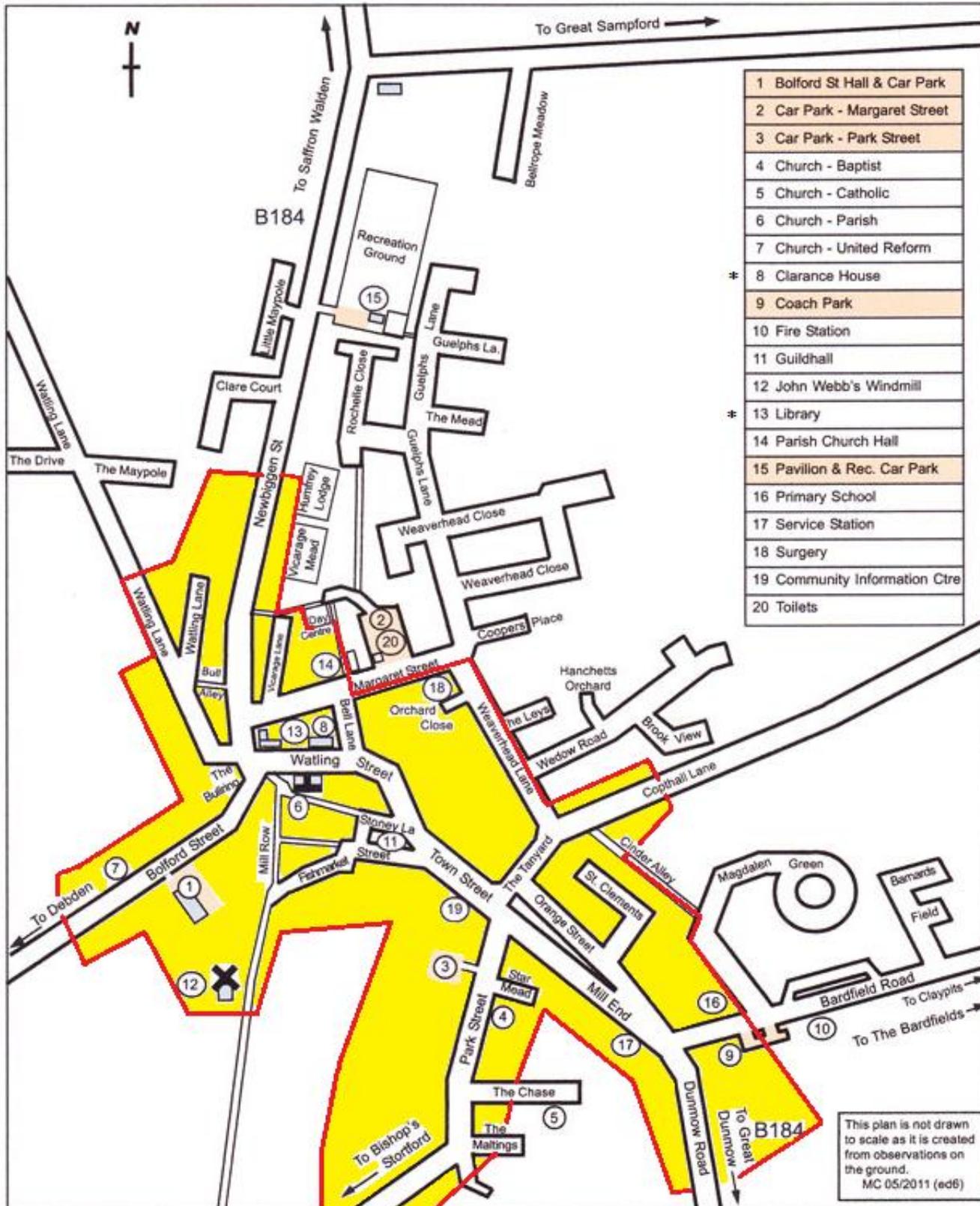
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A STREET MAP OF THAXTED

THAXTED STREET PLAN & CONSERVATION AREA

This map is not to scale and offers merely a guide to the Conservation Area. It is not to be relied upon in policy or in law.



* Since this Plan was first published, the library has moved to the Community Information Centre and Clarence House has reverted to its original use as a private residence.

INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared as a part of the evidence base for the Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan.

A neighbourhood plan is intended to establish planning policies relating to a defined area, essentially at a micro level. In the areas of Neighbourhood Plan competence, Neighbourhood Plan policies have equal weight to Local Plan policies, and indeed more so because they have been determined by local factors and set by local people with local knowledge. The Neighbourhood Plan offers guidance as to what is important to the local community and where development might be most advantageous or equally, most undesirable.

This appraisal of the centre of Thaxted has been carried out entirely by local volunteers who live in Thaxted and know it intimately. It represents a highly detailed analysis of what currently exists and seeks to highlight the features that make Thaxted, and the Conservation Area in particular, so special. It also however identifies where problems exist and where there is scope for improvement. The appraisers have been asked to identify any sites where, despite the restrictions associated with the Conservation Area and the 148 listed buildings within it, development might be possible and might, in fact, be beneficial to the local streetscape.

The appraisal deals first with the streets that fall within the Conservation Area and then considers those areas outside it which are nevertheless, part of the urban envelope. Separately commissioned reports deal with the rural hinterland and the village fringes.

All of the main streets are considered in the same general way. The nature of the street is first identified - whether it is primarily retail or residential or predominantly fulfils some other function within the day to day life of the village. Local topography is covered together with a detailed statement of the make-up of each individual street and the character associated with it. Highways matters, key features and special views are also referred to. Where there is scope for improvement (anything from highways restrictions to planters) this is covered together with the identification of any sites that might be suitable for development.

Subjective opinions expressed as to local character and what is good and what is not so good are of course the views of individual assessors but the volunteers have all met together to discuss individual issues and a consensus has been formed in relation to the principal issues. On the basis of that representative sample therefore, it can be assumed that these views are probably in line with popular opinion in the village.

To set the appraisal in context the street by street analysis is preceded by an outline of the historical development of the village. This is intended to provide a better understanding of why Thaxted looks as it does today. It has been written by local historian, Richard Till.

To complete the appraisal then and based upon the collaborative views of all of the volunteers, a summary has been provided at the end identifying common issues that are relevant to various parts of the village; the most important location-specific matters that require attention; the most historically important areas; the most significant views; and sites where there might be scope for development.

REFERENCE SOURCES

In undertaking this study, regard has been had to relevant guidance from various sources.

The notes and conclusions set out in this report were derived from working templates used by the assessors during their 'walk-round' inspections. These templates were largely based on the Character Assessment templates shown in the Planning Aid England guidance notes.

In terms of technical, town planning and historical detail the assessors had access to a number of reference documents as follows:

The adopted Uttlesford Local Plan, 2005

The Draft Historic Environment policies of the emerging Draft Local Plan

Historic Settlement Character Assessment – Thaxted, 2009, commissioned by Uttlesford District Council

Thaxted Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals, 2012

Thaxted Design Statement

The Buildings of England – Essex, Pevsner

Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), Essex North West, 1916

Thaxted – An Historical and Architectural Survey, Donald W. Insall and Partners, 1966

Evaluating the Impact of Housing Development on the Historic Environment, LUC (commissioned by English Heritage), 2014

The Setting of Heritage Assets, Historic England, 2015

National Heritage List for England (Historic England website)

THAXTED – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Little is known of Thaxted's early history. The town name comes from Anglo-Saxon times (413-1066AD). Its original form, Tachestida, translates as "the place where reeds and other plants used in thatching grow." The first solid, historical information is found in the Domesday Book (1086) which tells us that Thaxted was agricultural in nature, large by contemporary standards and one of the richest communities in Essex. There were 108 households comprising 54 villagers, 34 smallholders, 16 slaves and four freemen. The manor of Thaxted, which encompassed the town, was owned by Richard, son of Lord Gilbert. He owned 7 plough teams, each of eight oxen, implying that a large area was down to cereals and other root crops. The rest was either pasture or woodland with sheep and pigs the dominant livestock.

In 1205, Thaxted's importance was bolstered by the granting of market status, a sign of its importance and position as a local communication centre. With it came the right to hold a fair. Archaeological evidence suggests its site was to the north of Park Street, adjacent to the manor. Finds of foreign coins (mainly French) suggest it attracted interest from a wide area. The Poll Tax of 1393 adds further information and indicates a significant change in the nature of the township. The population had risen to about 250. It included 79 cutlers, 11 smiths, 4 sheathers and two goldsmiths. Most of these craftsmen were incomers, with 82 new family names being recorded. A cutlery trade had developed with assistance from the local lord and was to be an important factor in the growth and wealth of the town over the next 200 years, with a third or more of the population involved.

At the same time significant changes to land tenure took place in and around the town. The manor of Thaxted remained as the dominant element but had in part broken up, creating a number of smaller manors, a process known as subinfeudation. The estate at Yardley had increased in size to the north of the town. Horham Hall had encroached on land largely to the west, Priors Hall had emerged as the manor of the Rectory of Thaxted and held land in Newbiggen Street, whilst Richmonds, which also held land in Newbiggen Street, held former parkland to the south of the town.

The power of lordship remained. Feudalism was the dominant economic system. As late as 1348, land was given to tenants in return for labour services on the lord's estate. The five great open fields surrounding Thaxted were worked communally in the interest of the Clare family, with strips of land to the south, round Monk Street, divided amongst the smaller tenants. However, forty-five years later, in 1393, a radical change had taken place. The Clares had gone following a protracted court case. The manor was now administered by a steward and his role had changed substantially. Labour service had virtually ceased. A number of freeholds were established as farms in their own right and the manor had leased out its remaining land to tenant farmers for rent. Some uncertainty remained, the evidence being the involvement of Thaxted labourers in the Peasants Revolt of 1381.

The changing role of the manor was also evident in the emergence of a parcel of land running south from Bolford Street, encompassing Town Street, the Tanyard, Weaverhead Lane and the lower part of Park Street. This was the burgus or borough of Thaxted, an area with growing administrative independence from the manor " a sure indication that the economy of Thaxted had an important

commercial and industrial basis, apart from agriculture.” (K.C.Newton). The growing significance of the cutlers was being felt.

The trends apparent in the survey of 1393 continued into the 16th century. The manor remained but many of its outbuildings disappeared as its function changed from farming and land owning to leasing and rent collection. At the time, Thaxted manor was part of a wider lordship, by the early 16th Century, the royal demesne. The historian Lawrence Stone has shown royal leases tended to be long term and at fixed rates. In an era of inflation this worked very strongly in the interests of the lessees. Rents remained fixed but local farmers’ incomes increased with inflation and could be further improved by enclosure and more modern farming practices. Whether limited enclosure took place at this time is open to question. However, a number of substantial half-timbered farm buildings or former farm buildings can be found on the fringes of Thaxted, adding substance to the view that local farmers were, at the time, doing well.

Sadly this was not true of the cutlery trade. Other centres, such as Sheffield, were better placed in terms of resources and able to control the trade. By mid-century the cutlers had gone. Initially this was a disaster for parts of the town. A charter of Mary 1st (1556) described Thaxted as being “in great ruin and decay by reason of great poverties and necessity.” The situation was gradually retrieved. With help from the lord of the manor, a Guild of Clothiers was established in 1583, operating successfully for many years along Weaverhead Lane and Newbiggen Street. With agriculture strong and the market continuing to develop, the situation was stabilised, so much so that the antiquarian William Camden, who visited in 1609, was able to describe the town in positive terms. It was “a little [market] town seated very pleasantly on a high rising hill”.

The development of the Clothiers’ Guild was the last significant intervention by the manor. Local self-government was granted to Thaxted by a charter of Mary 1, subsequently confirmed by Queen Elizabeth. In 1562 it was challenged unsuccessfully by the lord’s steward. The court case showed that prior to that date the bailiff of the borough had attained the title of mayor and sat with the steward in the lord’s court at Thaxted. Thereafter, local government was dispensed by the mayor, and a group of aldermen. To assert their independence, the new corporation moved to the Guildhall and remained there until Quo Warranto proceedings were taken against them in the reign of James II.

William Camden’s comments referred to the town broadly as we know it. Of the 148 listed buildings, 9 stemmed from the 1400s, 20 from the 1500s and 39 from the 1600s. The position occupied by these houses tells us a great deal about Thaxted’s function in the landscape. Most of its buildings were positioned along the main Dunmow to Saffron Walden road. The width of Town Street indicated the location of the market which, at the time, extended to Mill End. Spurs of houses ran along the east-west route (Bardfield to Elsenham) and the route to the north west (Newport). There was some infill and craft workings along the back streets, most notably Watling Lane and Weaverhead Lane. Farms were located along the main roads with a further outer circle beyond the town boundaries.

THE IMPACT OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND MORE RECENT RESEARCH

Additional detail from the earliest period, late Iron Age to late Medieval (50BC-1400AD), is sketchy and difficult to come by, but archaeology is now beginning to offer some valuable clues. British Archaeology provides a list of sites in and around Thaxted but more significant have been recent systematic digs within the town itself; at Molecular Products (first assessment), Orange Street (an

important dig by the Colchester Archaeological Trust), 23 Town Street, Weaverhead Lane (the old Spring Factory site), 67 Newbiggen Street, and the developments at Wedow Road and Bellrope Meadow. Between them, they provide additional clues about the early history of Thaxted and the impact of the cutlers in the later Medieval period.

We now know that settlement in and around Thaxted occurred long before Anglo-Saxon times. There are late Bronze Age and Iron Age features near the windmill. Iron Age field boundaries have been found at Wedow Road and Bellrope Meadow. There is also a Romano-British cemetery (first to the third century AD) north of Wedow Road, a sure sign of local settlement. The settlement may be slightly to the east of Town Street as there is evidence of a Roman road running north-south close to Thaxted Primary School. If we add further field work evidence, a scatter of Roman coin finds, an amphora and the likely existence of a villa to the east of the town, we have clear evidence of a populated and productive area before and during Roman times (43-413 AD).

Moving on to the later medieval period (13th and 14th Centuries), there is now a better understanding of the size and extensive scale of the cutlery trade. At the time, knives and spoons were the only eating implements and were much in demand. Thaxted specialised in knife production and shipped out the bulk of its products to London.

The cutlery trade needed bone, wood, iron and leather to produce its wares. Water was also a necessity, particularly in the grinding and sharpening process. Bone came from local cattle, as did leather. Water came from the stream, Cripsey Brook, that runs through Thaxted. Iron needed to be imported, probably in the form of small blanks. These, it appears, came from (or more likely through) London, probably from the Weald in Kent.

Evidence of extensive cutlery working has come from the Orange Street site, leading archaeologists to think that the houses of "Middle Row" (between Mill End and Orange Street) might have been one centre of the industry. They speak of "an unusually large assemblage of bone making waste" (presumably for handles) and fragments of a stone, probably used for grinding blades. Further evidence of manufacture comes from Weaverhead Lane, while evidence of locally made knives has been found in Town Street and Newbiggen Street. The existence of the Tanyard provides another clue. It points to a history of leather working in the area which is both adjacent to the Cripsey Brook and in close proximity to the cutlers in Middle Row. Together they formed a centre for craft work in the town with further workings in the neighbouring villages, hence Cutler's Green.

Cutlery was a heavily regulated trade organised on a guild basis. It relied on a range of skills and some hard-headed business practice. Handles needed to be cut and shaped from cattle bones. Imported iron had to be worked into blades by local smithies. An assembly process was needed to produce and decorate the knives. Sheathers cut and stitched the leather covers into which the knives were fitted. Guild members then arranged for the sheathed knives to be sold, whilst wagoners or pack horse owners were required to get them to market. There was also the issue of money paid. This would have to be collected and accounted at locations possibly as far south as Kent.

The cutlers were an important group of people enjoying significant wealth and some of this, almost certainly, went into Thaxted's principal buildings. The earliest church was built on the current site in Anglo-Saxon times. Its position was, or at least became symbolic, next to the manor house, looking down on the old town. Between 1340 and 1515 an ambitious rebuilding programme took place,

creating a church out of all proportion to the town it served. The re-building bookended the cutler influence suggesting at least some of their money was involved. Other explanations exist, a link with the monastic site at Tilty, a position on the pilgrim route into Norfolk (hence the part dedication to St. Laurence) and more intriguingly the suggestion from English Heritage that it might once have been a shrine, hence a source of revenue in its own right.

The Guildhall was built on borough land to the immediate south-east of the church in about 1450. The link with the borough is significant. Its building coincided with a number of changes in the layout of the adjacent area. In the late 14th Century, the church gained borough and manor land to the south, presumably as an extension to the graveyard. A century later the building of the Guildhall led to a restructuring of the market. This had originally extended north to Mill Row but the extension was abandoned once the Guildhall had been built. It acted as the symbolic head of the market at the top of Town Street. At the same time, more borough land was cleared behind the Guildhall to allow for the development of high quality residential properties in Stoney Lane, presumably for the merchant, possibly cutler elite.

English Heritage suggests that the Guildhall was, from the first, linked to the market. There was a butter/cheese market on the open ground floor, an administrative area on the floor above and the Cutler's Guild on the third floor. An arrangement of this type would suggest a joint venture between the manor, which controlled the market, and the guild which dominated the borough.

So where does this evidence leave Thaxted's early history? We now know that a settlement existed in Thaxted from the earliest times. It grew as a result of agriculture and its marketing functions and that growth was furthered by the presence of the cutlers from the 14th to the 16th Centuries. The late medieval shaping of Town Street was crucially influenced by the cutlers. The Middle Row between Mill End and Orange Street was a centre of the cutlery trade, probably the homes of the cutlers, with the land to the north-west of Orange Street the site of its outbuildings and workings. At the other end of Town Street, the building of the Guildhall provided a symbolic head of the market, adjacent to the west was the manor and to the north-west was the church. The medieval townscape was complete, its social, political and religious centres forming an elevated and central position within the evolving town.

FURTHER READING

Historic Towns in Essex, Thaxted (English Heritage, Historic Towns Assessment Report, 1999)
K.C. Newton, Thaxted in the Fourteenth Century, (J.H.Clarke, 1960)
Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641 (OUP, 1967)
The Colchester Archaeologist, 7th December 2015. Dig at Orange Street.
Thaxted Conservation Area Appraisal & Management 2012, Uttlesford District Council.
Thaxted Design Statement, 2010.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE

For all but the last few decades, the relationship between the town of Thaxted and its surrounding countryside has been symbiotic. It was a source of wealth, work, food and festival. The imprint of the relationship can be found throughout the town in roads, buildings and outbuildings. In short, the character of the one determined the character of the other.

LATE BRONZE AGE TO NORMAN CONQUEST, 2000BC- 1086AD

The undulating landscape that surrounds Thaxted has been progressively tamed and cultivated for millennia. Its chalky boulder clay soil was deposited by the Anglian Ice Sheet and originally covered with trees. Clearance began in the late Bronze Age and proceeded apace into the Iron Age. The heavy Celtic plough pulled by oxen was perfectly capable of removing roots and exposing the fertile soil, so much so that tree cover was less in pre-Roman Britain than it was in the 18th Century.

Farming was mixed and required field boundaries to separate the pastoral from the arable. These usually took the form of ditch and mound, something typical of the area to the present day. The growing of cereals was especially important. Coins of King Cunbelinus (d. 46AD) showed sheaves of corn on the obverse. This was the dominant export and a source of great profit to the Trinovantes tribe that dominated the local area.

Successive Roman and Anglo-Saxon conquests did little to change the pattern of agriculture, though a severe decline in population in the late Roman-early Anglo-Saxon period led to the abandonment of some areas under cultivation. This was the situation that confronted the Normans post-conquest. The Domesday Book illustrated the position clearly. The land in and around Thaxted was controlled by the thegn, Wihtgar (sometimes Wisgar). Arable land extended to some 1400 acres, mainly down to wheat, with associated meadow for grazing and sufficient woodland for 1000 pigs. However, as John Hunter explains, there was a considerable amount of unclaimed land within what is now the parish boundary, despite the evident wealth of the town.

NORMANS TO TUDORS, 1066-1601

Our next glimpse of the land about Thaxted comes in 1348, the year of the Black Death. The Norman lords of Clare had established a presence in a complex of buildings to the south-east of the church. Their cultivated lands had been extended beyond Monk Street in the south, Cutlers' Green in the west and Bardfield End Green in the east. Water meadow for grazing extended down the Chelmer Valley. Two areas of parkland were in place, presumably for deer and hunting. One lay due south of Park Street (the Little Park), the other, more substantial (the Great Park) north-west of Richmond Green. Surrounding the town were five great open fields, demarked by hedges. This was the arable core of the estate, worked collectively and down to cereal crops. The arrangement was unusual for Essex. It followed the Midland pattern of strips and open fields.

From the late 14th Century the landscape began to evolve in ways that are more familiar to us. The framework of roads was already in place and had been since at least Anglo-Saxon times. The burgus or borough of Thaxted was evolving thanks to the arrival of the cutlers. However, the decisive event took place at the manor. Successive legal disputes led to a decision to lease out its lands. The impact of this decision can be seen in relation to the complex of buildings around the manor. These were

the barns and storehouses of a centralised estate. Their decay and replacement by private houses along the south-eastern side of Town Street marked the end of unified control. In its place came the farm houses of the lessees, punctuating the roads of the town and projecting outward into the countryside with a further ring of farms and the remaining manors on the periphery. Together they worked the lands of the manor and it is probable that some early consolidation of farming land took place. This was aided by the alienation of the parklands in 1587 and 1596 and their being brought into cultivation.

EIGHTEENTH TO TWENTIETH CENTURY

The 18th Century was a golden age for agriculture. The population of Britain was growing, the industrial revolution was under way and trade was flourishing. As a result the demand for food increased as did incomes from farming and its allied occupations. To meet demand, improved farming methods were needed; new systems of crop rotation, selective breeding and better agricultural machinery. Much of this passed Thaxted by, though a local resident, Thomas Knight, did develop a new and improved plough for the working of heavy soils. Drainage too was improved through the use of the "mole" plough, a plough that cut narrow drainage channels into the fields. Some rationalisation of farms also took place; the open fields around the town were enclosed by agreement. Farmers prospered. The town too became more prosperous. Many of the old houses were re-fronted in the Georgian style. But as with the farms and the fields, progress was modest.

The main reason for this state of affairs was land ownership. In 1599, Sir Edward Smyth of Horham Hall bought out the manor. For a short time he was active in its improvement buying out Armigers Farm, Blunt's Farm and a farm at Monk Street from the Maynards at Easton Lodge in 1632. However, the family was non-resident, living at Hills Hall Estate in the south of the county and leaving the administration of Thaxted to a steward. Some of its land was further sub-let to City interests from London in 1655. Priors Hall, meantime, remained in the hands of the Maynards (and with it the advowson of the church). Much of the rest was leased out by the two great charities, Hunts and Yardley's. To maximise income and minimise inconvenience most farms were let by copyhold (a form of inherited rental). Love's Farm at Cutler's Green was one such. Another was William Smith's farm, off Newbiggen Street, held part by copyhold, part by freehold. Given the uncertainties of copyhold, few of the farmers were prepared to invest in the sort of improvements that guaranteed their financial well-being. The larger farmers worked hard and made the best of their circumstances. The smaller farmers scratched an existence.

White's Directory of 1848 shows these developments clearly and in doing so tells the story of the town and its environs. There were twelve named farms, farms of some significance. A further 23 heads of family described themselves as farmers but were in fact small scale farmers or smallholders. Farming accounted for 24% of all occupations. A further 41% depended on farming, ranging through maltsters, brewers, inn and tavern keepers, via butchers, tanners, fellmongers, saddlers and boot and shoe makers (all 12 of them), millwrights, millers, corn dealers and bakers, whitesmiths, blacksmiths and farriers, wool dealers and wool merchants, to wheelwrights, carpenters and building and repair services. Thus, 65% of all named occupations relied on local agriculture and much of the economy of the town rested on it and its profits.

The fall-out came in the second half of the 19th Century. The passing of the Corn Laws, allowing foreign wheat free access to the British market, drove down prices and led to a prolonged agricultural depression. Rents stayed low and many great estates had to sell out. There was an end

to copyhold. It was abolished as a form of legal tenure and existing copyholders were allowed to lease or buy back the freehold. The cumulative effect locally was damaging. Daisy, Countess of Warwick sold off their Thaxted estates in 1912. Farms were largely unimproved and held on yearly tenancies. The Horham Hall estate and its unimproved farms and smallholdings were sold off in 1925. The agriculturally dependent local economy suffered badly and had it not been for the arrival of George Lee's sweet factory, conditions would have become very difficult.

There was a modest recovery between the wars and some of the larger farms became profitable once more. The impetus came from outside the town with farms sold off and consolidated into larger holdings. This could not have been better illustrated than in the film "Ripe Earth" (John & Roy Boulting, 1938). The film was set at Rails farm in Bolford Street and showed a traditional farm at its best. It was, however, a swan song for an isolated and self-contained town. War and the communications revolution which followed changed the character of Thaxted and the fields that surrounded it.

CONCLUSION

How did these changes affect the landscape of the parish as we now see it? From very early on the landscape was planned. The persistence of local lordship, pre-and post-invasion ensured that this would be the case. The framework was ancient; its roads and by-ways, its boundaries, even many of its field names. Centrally imposed enclosure rationalised the open fields and created new field boundaries. The divisions froze and became semi-permanent as a result of conservative estate management. Further diversification and consolidation had to await the 20th Century. Once Easton Lodge and Horham Hall sold out, farms became freeholds and many of the smallholders sold out. The move from mixed to arable farming led to the removal of hedgerows particularly to the south of the town ("the prairie") Many remaining hedgerows, including those that had traditionally underpinned the system, remained and there are signs of improvement in management of late. The old planned landscape persists with its criss-cross of path and bridleways providing access. As the UDC Landscape Character Assessment of 2006 noted, the area is still dominated by its pre-18th century fields, some "of medieval origin, some... even older, interspersed by the occasional common field which had been later enclosed by agreement." It is a rare survival.

FURTHER READING

John Hunter, *The Essex Landscape; A Study of its Form & Structure* (Essex Record Office, 1999).
K.C. Newton, *Thaxted in the Fourteenth Century*, (J.H. Clarke, 1960).
Uttlesford UDC, *Landscape Character of Uttlesford District*, 2006.
Uttlesford UDC, *Landscape Assessment of Thaxted*, 2009.
Essex County Record Office: *Deeds of the Manor & Borough of Thaxted and the Great Eastern Estate*.
Sale Posters of the Great Easton Estate (courtesy of Bruce Munro).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRE

“Thaxted is of major historical importance. It is an example of a medieval and post-medieval small market town. Its significance is largely due to the quality of its built environment.”

English Heritage, Historic Towns Assessment, 1999.

“Thaxted is not rich in houses of special quality. Yet the town as a whole is very perfect. All is in scale. Nothing is too high or ostentatious.”

Nikolaus Pevsner, The Buildings of England, Essex, 1954.

“There is no town in north Essex and very few in England to equal its beauty, compactness and juxtaposition.”

Sir John Betjeman.

“The town of Thaxted is the queen of Essex and her crown is the church. The steeple stands out over the surrounding fields. The town streets all seem to bend in its direction over ancient cobbles and past timber framed houses.”

Simon Jenkins, Country Churches (2009).

What makes Thaxted such an interesting and compelling town is its evolution. It promised much in the late Middle Ages when some of its finest buildings, including the church, were laid down. It then settled in as a rather remote and self-contained market town, far from the centres of industry and commerce. It grew very little. The plan of the town in the OS map of 1876 is almost identical to the Thaxted survey of 1597. It was never very rich. As a result, few of its houses were knocked down and replaced. Most evolved to meet the needs of the time. It was largely self-sufficient and tended to be inward looking. As late as 1966 the distinguished architect Donald Insall could write, “The relationship between people and buildings is deeply interwoven. Many of the townspeople live and work there because the environment provides what they need. But they give in return to the buildings and the town a purpose, appreciation and practical care.” This is the basis of Thaxted’s distinctive character. It is “a place that feels long settled and its history is still apparent.” (Uttlesford UDC, Character Assessment)

THE MEDIEVAL TOWN: SHAPE AND STRUCTURE

The shape and structure of historic Thaxted was determined over a relatively short period, 1350-1600. Prior to that date, settlement had taken place on the north-eastern side of Town Street through to Mill End. Opposite, at the head of the street, was the manor house, with its outbuildings running along the road towards Park Street. Town Street itself was considerably wider than today. Its frontage may have been aligned with the Star restaurant, a good 10 metres behind the current building line. Not only wider, but longer. Town Street also extended past the manor to an area south of the church and backing on to the site of the current Mill End cottages. The church itself was most probably on its existing site. It was, however, much smaller and dated back to late Anglo-Saxon times.

Thaxted took this form to accommodate a market in its main street. The market, in its turn, was possible because the town was accessible by road. The route south to Dunmow was part of an old Roman road. The roads to the Sampfords, the Bardfields, Elsenham, Newport and Saffron Walden were Anglo-Saxon in origin, possibly even earlier. Thaxted stood at the centre of the network and profited by it. Stall holders paid market fees. Market fees buttressed manorial income. Residents benefitted from the range of goods on offer.

Change came about for two reasons. First, as a result of a series of legal disputes in the mid-14th century, the manor changed the way it operated. It had been the working centre of Thaxted's agricultural life. Henceforth, it leased out its lands and became landlord to a growing group of local farmers and smallholders; the collection of rent its main purpose. Second, simultaneously, Thaxted became an important centre for the cutlery trade, something that brought with it wealth and a host of skilled merchants and workers.

The impact on the town was immediate. The agricultural outbuildings and barns of the manor, which had lined Town Street, fell into disrepair and by 1393 had been replaced by "new rents", domestic buildings and shops. Farm houses built for the manor's lessees appeared around the edges of the town and in the countryside surrounding it. A major re-building programme began. The old church was replaced by the present structure between 1340 and 1510. It was built to impress and was hugely out of scale for a town of Thaxted's size, if not its wealth. (William Cobbett in his book "Rural Rides" 1822-6, gives an alternative explanation. He says that the church had been built in the expectation of a population increase.) There was also a major re-development at the head of Town Street. This was a position of great symbolic importance, adjacent to the manor and immediately below the new church. A finely crafted guildhall / market hall was built there in about 1450, standing symbolically at the head of the market, cutting off the northern extension of Town Street which was abandoned. At the same time, the buildings of Stoney Lane were extended to accommodate a number of merchant's houses, something we might now call a "prestige development". Finally, a commercial/industrial zone was established at the junction of Town Street and Mill End. A number of houses were built, almost certainly for the cutlers. They were located in the centre of the then road, hence their name, Middle Row. Behind them, in Orange Street, lay their workshops, adjacent to the Tanyard where sheaths and leather handles were made and close to Cripsey Brook, a source of water for both trades.

The completion of the church in about 1510 also marked the completion of the medieval town, that part of Thaxted to the south east of the church. This was William Camden's "little town situated very pleasantly on a high, rising hill." The extension into Watling Street, Bolford Street and Newbiggen Street came somewhat later, possibly in a planned way (English Heritage). Watling Street may have taken its present shape when the church was re-built. Its earliest and largest buildings certainly go back to the 15th Century with infill from the 16th and 17th Centuries. Newbiggen Street and Bolford Street were developed later, at a time of economic recovery.

The collapse of the cutlery trade in the mid-16th Century had led to unemployment and distress in the southern part of the town. In an attempt to restore prosperity, weaving was introduced on a commercial scale. It is thought that this might have accounted for the infill in what had been called Vikere Street. Certainly the use of the name Newbiggen (new buildings) suggests that the character of the street changed sufficiently rapidly to warrant re-designation. It is equally possible that the long Tudor peace, population growth and increased general prosperity might also have played a role

in the developments west and north-west of the church. Either way, their completion marked the creation of a town plan that exists to this day.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The period of growth and innovation came to an end because Thaxted settled into a pattern that changed very little between 1600 and 1900. The manor was sold to the non-resident Smyth family of Horham Hall. The manor house became redundant and was pulled down in the early 18th Century. Leasing to local farmers continued as before. The market remained, though on a much reduced scale. As a result, the town stayed dependent on agriculture, the crafts that supported it and the shopkeepers who sold its products. White's Directory of 1848 makes the point clearly. Of the named occupations in the town, 24% were farmers or smallholders, 41% worked in allied or support crafts or trades, and a further 5% were reliant on locally sourced materials (carpenters, builders and brick layers). Of the rest, 8% were business or professional, with the remaining 23% local tradesmen and shopkeepers who relied to a greater or lesser extent on the outside world; tea dealers, bonnet trimmers and milliners, earthenware dealers and a watchmaker.

Because Thaxted's role changed very little, its population remained broadly constant. There was no need for additional building. Instead, the existing stock was updated, adapted and replaced only when necessity required. Listing information on the town illustrates the point but at the same time under-estimates the extent of evolutionary change. The principal buildings are discussed at length and their changing nature noted. Other, lesser buildings, are subject to limited scrutiny, hence their evolution is missed. An example of this is 67/69 Newbiggen Street. It is listed as a late 17th Century row of cottages. In reality it is an early 17th Century farmhouse, upgraded in the early 18th Century (with a chimney plaque to prove the point), which subsequently lost status, was extended and converted into cottages.

As the houses evolved, so too did their back yards and gardens. Dominantly barge-boarded sheds, barns and stores are to be found throughout the town, a reminder of occupations no longer practised. Insall wanted them listed, and with justification. Some have been pulled down, as in the Tanyard. Others remain in back streets such as Vicarage Lane.

Thaxted's principal building was the church and at first site might have seemed the sole repository of its faith and worship. This impression is strengthened by association with the fame of its early 20th Century Christian-Socialist vicar, Conrad Noel, his successor (and son-in-law) Jack Puttrell and the brand of High Anglicanism they brought to the town. But, as Arthur Burns reminds us, Thaxted was not the priority when Noel obtained the living. The Countess of Warwick gave it to provide an income from which to fund proselytising trips in the industrial north. That it turned out differently was enriching but it was also divisive. There was an older and more embedded tradition in the town, Protestant-dissent. The evidence is still there. The United Reform Church (formerly Congregational) in Bolford Street is one of the largest buildings in the town. The Baptist Church in Park Street is of 18th Century origin. There is also a former Quaker Meeting House at Mill End (currently owned by Molecular Products).

Radical dissent goes back to the Middle Ages and the Peasants' Revolt (1381). Thaxted was one of its principal recruiting grounds and a key factor was religious dissent. There was an heretical Lollard community in the town and there may even have been a Lollard vicar, William of Thaxted, in the early 15th Century. [“A local jury charged that a certain chaplain named William was a common

Lollard and had used books written in English to preach to the King's people heretically in Thaxted."] Lollards were early Protestants. They opposed the Catholic Church and the role of its priests, believing that every individual could find his or her own way to God through force of preaching and through reading the Bible in English. Persecution seems to have had little effect. The tradition remained. Two hundred and fifty years later Thaxted's radicalism re-asserted itself in support for Cromwell and the New Model Army. Later, in the 18th Century there were a number of important dissenting ministers, including John Fell. Fell was prominent nationally, a supporter of nonconformist rights and dated "his genuine Protestantism" to his experiences of Thaxted ("Gentleman's Magazine", 1770). By the 19th Century this radical impulse had become political and expressed itself in support of the Liberal Party. C.H. Strutt, the Conservative candidate for Saffron Walden, was driven out of the town amidst a hail of missiles, following a speech in which he failed to uphold agricultural labourer's rights. The tradition continues alongside Anglo-Catholicism and a revived Catholic Church.

In the 19th Century education was closely linked with these competing religious allegiances, which in their turn affected the politics of the people. It was always likely that the church and the chapels should seek to educate the young in their ways. A British School (for Nonconformists) was established to the south of Bolford Street and a National School (for the Church of England) was set up on the Dunmow Road. For whatever reason, this provision was deemed inadequate. The passing of the Forster Act (1870) resulted in the two schools being amalgamated as the current Primary School in 1881. Henceforth, religious differences were cast aside and there was an effort to provide basic skills in an era of growing industrialisation.

Improved educational opportunity coincided with a major change in the nature of employment in Thaxted. The evidence is still to be found in the old industrial area, Middle Row (the houses between Mill End and Orange Street) and the premises currently owned by Molecular Products at Mill End. In 1870 George Lee opened a sweet factory in the town, initially at the Old Organ Works in Middle Row and later in extensive premises opposite. The sweet factory rapidly became the major employer. Conrad Noel (*How Thaxted Lives*, 2) says that 200 women were employed with many other boys and girls under the age of 14 gaining part time work. The sweet factory saved Thaxted, which at the time was living through a period of acute agrarian distress. Its success also led to the town gaining a modern link to the outside world through the building of the light railway, "The Gin and Toffee Line" to Bishop's Stortford. That link has been consolidated and intensified and has changed the character of Thaxted forever.

CONCLUSION

The medieval core of Thaxted is the sum of these developments and more. The half-timbered houses that line its streets make up well over 30% of the total building stock and nearly 90% of the core. The church, the chapels and the school remain. The old industrial area has only recently changed with the closing of the Organ Works and its successful conversion to flats and the current abandonment of the Molecular Products site whose future is unclear. New housing is being built in Orange Street and sought elsewhere. This is part of an organic development, an adjustment to the modern age. It is nothing new. It is found in the gradual conversion of medieval houses to modern use. It is found in the infill of the core. Clarence House, replaced a row of cottages in the early 18th Century. The Victorian brick built terrace at Mill End replaced jettied houses from the 16th Century, interesting of itself, as the cottages are framed internally with timbers. There is a similar brick built facing on the cottages in Bolford Street, damaged by the great fire of 1881. There are 19th Century cottages at

Mill End which replaced half-timbered houses also destroyed in the great fire. Nineteenth and Twentieth century infill is found in the lower part of Town Street with the bakery, the chemists, the old Barclays Bank and the Paragon site. These replaced all but one of a gabled row of medieval houses. There is modern housing at the Tanyard (a very harmonious development), at the top of Fishmarket Street and behind Newbiggen Street. All this has happened. Some is to the benefit of the town, some to its detriment. The issue posed by this historical analysis is what of the future? What protections should be offered? What opportunities allowed? This is the task for the next section.

FURTHER READING

Arthur Burns, *Beyond the Red Vicar*, 2013

Historic Towns of Essex (English Heritage 1999)

K.C. Newton, *Thaxted in the Fourteenth Century* (1960)

L.R. Poos, *A Rural Society after the Black Death, Essex, 1350-1625* (2004)

Bibliotheca Britannia.

Essex Record Office: various.



A street by street review
Within the Conservation Area

DUNMOW ROAD

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

This is the major approach to Thaxted from Dunmow and the south and arguably the most beautiful. It also however carries a large volume of traffic including heavy lorries and buses.

Travellers approaching Thaxted by this route will have already seen the town perched on the hill in its rural setting with the windmill and church sailing majestically across the horizon.

CONSERVATION AREA

Dunmow Road enters the Conservation Area from the south.

TOPOGRAPHY

At the entrance to the town the road crests a sharp rise and descends gently in a left-hand curve towards the town. The eastern side of the road is generally wooded and the western side is generally Victorian (or older) traditional housing with one distinctly modern building, the Work Centre for the Handicapped, a functional building of little architectural or aesthetic merit.

At the end of the bend the magnificent view down Mill End to Town Street, the Guildhall and the Church beyond opens up.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **West Side (South to North):**

Totmans Farm – A Grade II listed 16th century or earlier (extensively modified in the 17th and 20th centuries) timber framed house with partly exposed exterior timbers and jettied first floor and plain tiled roof. It is generally in good condition. The south gable wall is clad in hanging tiles, not a characteristic East Anglian treatment, and is modern. There is a car parking area to the north bounded by a flint wall with engineering brick coping with some parts in a deteriorated state probably due to creeper being allowed to cover it. Most of the outbuildings have been converted sympathetically to domestic and rental use. One remaining single storey barn is in poor condition with a corrugated roof.

Chapel House – An ex-chapel, probably Victorian, with rendered walls and some pargetting and a tiled roof.

Roston House – Modern sympathetic construction with rendered walls and plain tiled roof. There is a small garden behind low walls which softens the frontage pleasantly.

Park View – Essex boarded house with brick plinth probably Victorian or early 20th century. Attractive porch but the first floor windows are out of character.

Courtlea and Courtlea Cottage – Probably Victorian or early 20th century with rendered walls and plain tiled roof in a very prominent position with a modern porch which is out of character with the rest of the building. There is a sympathetically designed modern detached annexe, Courtlea Cottage, which has been added. There is an unnamed garage with first floor accommodation set back from the road which is again sympathetically designed.

Handicapped Centre – This is a utilitarian building fronting the highway. Some attempt has been made to soften its appearance with planting and screening. It has parking space at the rear.

Molecular Products Site – The Grade II listed buildings fronting the road were originally 16th century houses and a 19th century chapel which were converted to industrial use by George Lee, sweet manufacturer. The 3 original buildings, which abut the Dunmow Road, are to be retained and converted to domestic accommodation in a new development of 29 dwellings already approved by UDC. It is proposed to replace the corrugated roof to the central building with slates, which would appear to be out of character with the plain tiles of the adjacent building. The old chapel building has good quality Victorian brickwork. The central rendered building has unusual detailing on the upper floor window casements, which have gothic style pointed arches.

There is a disused and rotting concrete bus shelter between the old chapel and the central building which is not included in the development and will therefore be retained – it has a plaque which tells that it was presented to Thaxted Parish Council by George Lee and Co to commemorate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

It is planned that the new houses fronting the road to the south of the existing buildings will abut the highway and thus the trees currently forming a partially adequate screen to the site will be removed. The design of these houses shows that some attempt has been made to maintain the character of the area.

- **East Side (From conservation area boundary to first house):**

The frontage is at first thick copse bordered by a well-tended Leylandii hedge past the tennis courts. The floodlights to the tennis courts can be intrusive at night in many parts of Thaxted and particularly in this immediate area. There is a farm style garden entrance to Claypits Farm which provides a view into the gardens.

Pleasant View – A plain tiled rendered Victorian cottage with a slate tiled and black lapboarded garage. Generally in good condition but with modern windows and doors.

Mill Hatch – An attractive rambling brick house with slate roofs and interesting out buildings on the south side fronting Bardfield Road. The house is all but obscured from view from Dunmow Road by mature yew trees and other planting all of which adds to the rural ambience here.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

- **South to North:**

The east side is initially defined by a tall hedgerow and then a dense copse which both amplify the rural nature of the town. Thaxted Tennis Club, both the courts and clubhouse, are also screened from the road by the copse as well as by a maintained Leylandii hedge. There are only two houses on this side of the road of which one, Mill Hatch, is also screened by trees. The mature trees within the curtilage of the School are vital to the rural village feel of this part of the town.

- **West:**

On the west side the first building is Totmans Farm, a 16th century Grade II listed timber framed house of great character. The remaining existing houses are detached and of mixed vintage and generally with rendered frontages facing the road. At the northern end after the Handicapped Work Centre is the Molecular Products site with the imposing brick Grade II listed buildings of the former Lee's Sweet Factory. Planning permission has already been given for housing development on this site although site clearance has only just commenced. This report therefore is based on the assumption that the site is developed and that the unsightly silos and industrial buildings currently on the site now are removed.

In the road verge in front of the existing Molecular Products buildings is one of the Thaxted town signs.

HIGHWAYS

This is a classified B road (B184) without parking restrictions. A parking area has developed on the eastern side by users of the tennis courts. Off road parking screened by existing trees would improve the situation. Once the molecular Products site has been developed it is possible that access arrangements on to Dunmow Road may need to be considered further.

The west side is kerbed with concrete kerbs from the Disabled Centre and granite kerbs elsewhere. This could be rationalised. The east side is unkerbed to the first house and granite kerbs from there to the Bardfield Road.

Footways are asphalt where there are kerbs. The west side has a grass verge of varying width between the kerbs and footway, which adds to the rural feel to this entrance to the town.

Generally street lighting is provided by four modern antique style lanterns on old cast iron columns which complement the atmosphere created by the surrounding buildings. However, in the area of the Bardfield Road junction there are three 5-metre-high modern, antique style columns topped with small lanterns, which appear incongruous with the surroundings.

There is modern directional signage at the north end junction with Bardfield Road and a dilapidated advance warning of the junction by the Disabled Centre, which serves little purpose and could be removed to advantage. There are two solar powered speed and school signs in the west verge near the tennis courts. These could be mounted on one post with advantage.

There is a George V post box built into the boundary wall of Mill Hatch at the Bardfield Road junction.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

The view down Mill End has already been noted and is of vital importance to the beauty and character of Thaxted.

There is a good view of the windmill for pedestrians between Chapel House and Roston House.

KEY ELEMENTS

The key element in the character of Dunmow Road is clearly the view that it provides into the centre of the village.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

1. Off street parking for the tennis club.
2. Sympathetic conversion of the corrugated iron roofed barn at Totmans
3. Repair of boundary wall at Totmans
4. Flower bed around the town sign if it could be guaranteed that it would be maintained. (possibly by the Gardening Club).
5. Retaining all the current trees.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There is a possible infill site between the Tennis Club and the bottom of Claypits garden using the farm-style garden entrance on Dunmow Road.

BARDFIELD ROAD

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

This road is mainly unobtrusive in the overall context of Thaxted but is significant in that it contains the primary school. It also contains the entrance to a potential area for development and improvement.

CONSERVATION AREA

A short length of Bardfield Road, approx. 100m from Magdalen Green to Mill End, falls within the Conservation Area, in the south-east.

TOPOGRAPHY

The section within the Conservation Area is at the bottom of the hill where it meets a grassy sward in front of Molecular Products which contains one of the Thaxted signs. This creates a pleasing scene and pleasant setting for the primary school.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **South Side:**

Claypits Farmhouse – Grade II listed 15th Century hall/farmhouse modified in 16th and 17th centuries with modern plastered pargetted walls and a plain tile roof. A sympathetically designed modern porch has been added. There is a mixture of 18th century and more modern appropriately detailed windows. A large detached 20th century garage building with gabled tiled roof has been added to the east side. The surrounding garden has a large pond and there are paddocks providing a good green open space towards the tennis courts to the south and with access through a 5-bar gate onto the Dunmow Road. The area to the east of the house has a dilapidated timber garage and a rough breeze block enclosure which detract from the otherwise pleasant access from the adjacent fields.

Rear of Mill Hatch – This presents a pleasing aspect from the road with varied elevations of assorted outbuildings and extensions framed by trees generally of rendered brick but with some old flint panels at the base. A number of tall Scots Pines and a mature horse chestnut tree to the rear of the property and a grassy verge enhance the street scene here.

- **North Side:**

School House – A well maintained double fronted red brick Victorian house with slate roof and ornate terracotta ridges and finials and an attractive chimney. There is a bay windows with double hung sashes and a modern front porch and flat roofed side extension.

Primary School – Classic Victorian red brick school building with end gables and central entrance retaining most of its original features including slate roof with ornate terracotta ridges. The northern gable is now obscured by a modern extension built partly in a matching style but with large

folding/sliding doors on the elevation facing the road which, whilst no doubt providing amenity, detract from the symmetry of the buildings.

The playground between the school building and the road contains 11 mature trees 10 of which are limes and 1 silver birch. These trees have a vital and significant impact in enhancing this end of the town.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

On the north side is the Victorian Thaxted Primary School and School House. On the south side is the rear of Mill Hatch and obscured behind trees and at the top of a slope is the 16th century Grade II listed Claypits Farmhouse. There is public access from adjacent rural footpaths past the farmhouse to Bardfield Road with an interesting view towards the school and town roof-scape. Tall mature trees on either side of the road within the curtilage of the school to the north; to the rear of Mill Hatch to the south; and in the frontage of Molecular Products are significant contributors to the ambience of this part of Thaxted.

HIGHWAYS

This is an unclassified road with granite kerbs and tarmac footway on the north side. The south side is a steep grass verge. There are double yellow line parking restriction markings on both sides.

On the south side the school and School House are bounded by an attractive, approx. 1.3m high, Victorian red brick wall with circular brick copings. The wall contains the gate pillars of the original school entrances with engraved stone notices and stone caps. The gate openings have been closed with matching brickwork. The wall bounding School House is deteriorating and in need of repair.

The modern traffic signage at the junction with Mill End is obtrusive but inevitable. There is no dedicated parking for the school, which causes problems at the start and end of the school day.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

There are no significant views to note.

KEY ELEMENTS

The mature trees and generally green environment is a key element that determines the character of this corner of the Conservation Area.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

1. Repairs to wall of School House.
2. Removal of unsightly structures behind Claypits Farmhouse.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There could be a small development on the land to the east of Claypits Farmhouse to replace the jumble of outbuildings. This area is however outside of the Conservation Area.

MILL END

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

This is the continuation of the southern approach to Thaxted from Dunmow Road with a large throughput of traffic, including heavy lorries and buses.

CONSERVATION AREA

Mill End is within the Conservation Area as a continuation of Dunmow Road.

TOPOGRAPHY

The road continues northward and downhill and at the southern end at the top of the hill there is an iconic view northwards of the town, Town Street and the Guildhall all dominated by the backdrop of the Church at the top of the opposite rise. The scene is flanked by the buildings down Mill End.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **East Side (South to North):**

From the junction with Bardfield Road to The Maypole public house the road is lined by a row of terraced Grade II listed cottages.

No 47 – a single storey timber framed and plastered thatched 17th century or earlier cottage with attic rooms of later date. There are attractive 19th Century windows and two gabled dormers in the thatch. It has a slate roofed lean-to extension on the south end.

All the remaining cottages in the row are two-storey, timber framed and rendered buildings with tiled roofs and red brick chimneys.

No 45 – a double fronted building with attractive windows and oak door elevated above the footway and accessed by a flight of 5 stone steps and landing with an ornamental iron handrail and balustrade. The roof is of plain tiles and in common with the adjoining houses the ridge is undulating.

No 43 – a double fronted residence having two attractive rectangular projecting windows on the ground floor with fine glazing bars and flat roofs. This was the shop of Mr Clark, cobbler until the mid 1950s. The central, unused, entrance door is in a very dilapidated condition and detracts from the overall attractiveness of the entire terrace.

No 41 – a small residence with wooden casement windows.

No 39 – a tiny residence with a studded oak door.

Nos 37, 36 & 35 – these are similar buildings where the first floor is jettied over the footway, all with appropriate sash windows and some attractive features.

The Maypole public house – Timber framed building of uncertain date with frontage bricked and faced with modern pargetting. Modern windows have double hung sashes at ground floor level and the roof is slate clad. There are 2 flights of four steps with iron handrails projecting into the footway. The sign and bracket overhanging the road is impressive from both north and south.

From where the road narrows to Broomfield House is a pleasing collection of terraced houses of differing sizes and types:

No 27 – The first house in the narrower part of Mill End is, at the south end an unattractive single storey building in fairly poor condition with gutters and fascia badly deteriorated. There is a public covered way between it and the main house. This was, until the 1950s the workshop of the last farrier in Thaxted, Ted Bright. It is an unprepossessing structure which detracts from the general scene. The house is two storeys and rendered with 1930s metal casements and a slate roof but generally accords with the rest of the row.

No 25 – Adjoining No. 27 this is an old timber framed and rendered house with an attractive tiled roof. The window frames are however modern and plastic coated.

The Old Organ Works – These are 3 dwellings created from one buildings and which were originally the first Lee's sweet factory but more recently an organ building factory with a retail electrical shop. In about 1995 this was converted into three town houses with entrances in Orange Street. It is of Victorian origin and of brick construction with recently rendered walls and a slate roof. The arches over the new windows in the infilled shop frontage do not replicate the attractive arches on the rest of this facade. The industrial character is maintained by the dark grey paintwork.

No 23 & 23A – A pair of rendered houses with contiguous slate roofs of a lower height than the adjoining buildings in the terrace. They were refurbished in the 1980's. The sash windows are modern and incongruous and there is a pair of unusual vertical side windows.

No 21 Mill End House – This is an imposing Victorian rendered brick double fronted house with full height bays on both sides and a tall slate roof. It has clear double hung sash windows and an imposing recessed entrance door. The upper windows are church like with ornate central mullions.

No 19 to 11 – these are lower terraced houses, which have been refurbished in recent years with various window treatments and pretty scalloped slate tiles to Nos 15&19. Interestingly there is no No 17.

No 9 Broomfield House – The house is an imposing Grade II listed timber framed and rendered house which complements The Star opposite and used to be The Sun Inn. It has a slate roof, imposing lined entrance door and plain timber windows. The soft red brick garden wall fronting the highway for about 20yds is in a deteriorating condition. (The owner is considering repairing it. It should be ensured that this is done sympathetically and not in modern bricks)

There is a narrow vehicle entrance to Cadgers Lane.

No 5 – Late 18th Century Grade II listed timber framed and rendered house with attractive pargetting and plain tile roof.

No 3 – Early 19th Century Grade II listed timber framed and rendered house with attractive pargetting and plain tile roof. The plaster has been damaged beside one of the ground floor windows which is in urgent need of repair.

No 1 – Small disused shop with plain glass window in a deteriorating condition. Possibly jointly owned with No2 Town Street.

- **West Side (South to North):**

Saracens Garage – Whilst an essential ingredient to the wellbeing of Thaxted it is completely out of character with Mill End and the rest of the town. Large illuminated signage on the edge of the footway detracts from all views in Mill End and also looking to the south from the direction of the Guildhall. There is much signage surrounding the area and a large, typical fuel-company-canopy covers the filling area.

There is a large sycamore or maple tree in a grassed area at the south end of the forecourt which was planted to celebrate the accession of King Edward VII in 1901 which does a little to soften the impact of the garage and should be maintained at all costs.

No 26 – A modern bungalow with dormer windows, which doesn't blend with the general character in this part of Thaxted but is fortunately set well back from the road and partially obscured by a substantial wall.

Nos 24-10 – A terrace of 19th Century brick fronted slate roofed cottages fronting the highway mostly with steps to the entrance doors. Nos 24 – 18 have had the brickwork painted in various colours the remainder are still yellow/grey bricks. The buildings are unusual in that all are internally timber framed.

The Star public house – The Star dates back to the late 14th or early 15th Century. It is timber framed and listed. Being set back from the road gives a feeling of space in anticipation of the entrance into the expanse of Town Street. There is a low picket fence bounding the footway and the carpark. Across the carpark there is an attractive jumbled roof-scape of the rear of Nos 4&6 and on toward Park Street.

Nos 4 & 6 – Small attractive timber framed and rendered buildings generally in character with the area. No 6 has a plain tiled roof and No 4 has slate. These have recently been sympathetically renovated and with pleasing details like exposed rafter ends and appropriate sash windows.

No 2 – A formerly attractive timber framed, plain tiled cottage. The ground floor has been converted to a Fish & Chip shop with full height plate glass windows on both the east and north faces. The shop name board on both faces is colourful and with very large script which is out of character with the adjacent iconic townscape of Town Street and the view toward the Guildhall and Church.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

- **South to North:**

Initially the road widens progressively to meet the end of Orange Street forming a triangular area but at The Maypole public house it cuts back to form a fairly narrow (though 2 carriageway) road bounded on both sides by terraced buildings abutting the highway.

The view down Orange Street from outside The Maypole takes in the eastern side of the main town dominated by Clarence House.

- **East:**

The east side is initially a row of 8 cottages all of which are Grade II listed and set high above the highway necessitating an attractive double height kerb from the carriageway to the footway. Adjacent and to the north of these is the more imposing Maypole (formerly The Rose and Crown) public house, also Grade II listed.

At this point Mill End reverts to a single carriageway and the first house on the eastern side has an unsightly southern extension. From there to the northern end at the junction with Town Street and Park Street the road is lined with an assortment of domestic properties all abutting the footway. Towards the northern end there is a gap in the houses on the east side bounded by a red brick wall over 2m high enclosing the garden of No9 Broomfield House with attractive mature ornamental blossoming trees visible over the wall and spreading over the footway. Broomfield House and the two houses to the north are all Grade II listed, as is the house at the junction, which is the flank of No2 Town Street.

- **West:**

The west side is dominated at the southern end by Saracens Garage and filling station which is an essential village facility but visually intrusive. Adjacent to it is a modern bungalow of little aesthetic merit but mostly concealed by a substantial brick wall. From here there is a terrace of 10 brick, flat fronted Victorian cottages abutting the footway. Opposite the gap in the buildings fronting the east side of the road there is a corresponding gap where The Star is set back some 10 metres from the road with a tarmac car park in front. This gives a spacious feel to the otherwise rather claustrophobic second part of Mill End.

Between The Star and the junction with Park Street are some listed buildings but the Fish and Chip shop at the corner of Park Street is a dominating feature.

HIGHWAYS

Mill End is part of the heavily used classified B road (B184).

Initially the highway has a spacious feel as it widens towards the junction with Orange Street but as there are no restrictions on the east side of the road the space is compromised by parked vehicles, necessary for the residents of the cottages numbered 35-47. It then abruptly closes in to a relatively

narrow road with parking restrictions on both sides. This gives a dramatic impact to and ensures that the extended view of the town to the north is relatively unobstructed.

There is a triangular paved area of footway in the centre of the widened highway with an attractive ornamental iron lamp post which is dominated by an adjacent solar powered school warning sign. This is no doubt mandatory but could be moved to the southern end of the paved area to give the lamp more prominence and effectiveness. It would improve the appearance of this area if this triangle were converted to a grass or planted area as long as its maintenance could be guaranteed.

The east side of the widening carriageway is edged with stepped double granite kerbs and the asphalt footway extends to the frontages of the houses. It is partially obstructed by access steps to the houses whilst there are four treads to the Maypole steps.

The west side of this area is kerbed with a mixture of old granite and new concrete kerbs in particular in front of the garage. Consistency would be an improvement.

The relatively narrow carriageway down to Town Street has obvious but necessary parking restriction lines and granite kerbs on both sides with narrow asphalt footways up to the house frontages which are restricted in places by projecting steps to the house entrances.

Street lighting consists of a modern antique style lantern mounted on an old iron column in the triangular area at the south end and modern antique style bracket lamps attached to the old Organ Works and Broomfield House. The lit sign for The Star and the illuminated garage sign give added light.

There is an obtrusive but necessary modern traffic sign opposite Park Street against the flank wall of No 2 Town Street.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

The iconic view of the town down Mill End has already been noted.

The view down Orange Street and over the north east of the town from outside The Maypole public house has recently been partly obstructed by new houses built in Orange Street and St Clements though a magnificent view is still visible from the centre of the road and from the pavement.

KEY ELEMENTS

Saracens Filling Station – vital to the community and economy of Thaxted and yet a potent example of unsympathetic building and signage style.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

1. Rationalise and limit signs to the filling station
2. Remove the canopy to the filling station - though it is appreciated that this will be virtually impossible to achieve.
3. A more harmonious sign to the filling station
4. Granite kerbs to entire highway

5. Slab paving to footways
6. Repairs to the unused central door of No 43 along from The Maypole
7. Move solar powered sign clear of street lamp in widened area
8. Grass or planting to island in widened area
9. At minimum maintenance on old farriers No 27
10. Rationalise treatment to facades of No 25-10. Either all brick or all paint. A palette of colours for the conservation area could help here.
11. Repair wall to Broomfield House
12. More appropriate boundary to The Star car park
13. More discreet sign to shop at No2, the Fish & Chip Shop
14. Repair to plaster No 3
15. Maintenance of disused shop at No 1

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

None.

ORANGE STREET

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

A narrow street sloping down to the centre of the town at The Tanyard, it was originally an area of workshops for businesses in Mill End but is now entirely residential. There is an attractive mix of old houses on the eastern side while the rear garages to houses on Mill End give a workaday feeling to the west side.

CONSERVATION AREA

Orange Street falls within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

There is a superb view from the southern end of Orange Street, looking northwest over the centre of Thaxted with a roofscape of the centre of town, a view of the Guildhall with the Church and its trees hanging majestically over it all from the top of the hill.

A terrace of 4 new houses is being constructed at the junction of Orange Street and St Clements together with 2 detached houses on the north side of St Clements. The latter restricts the view slightly but at the same time creates a frame for it. Appropriate detailing of rafter ends and slate and plain tiled roofs are sympathetic to the local environment.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Generally, the character of Orange Street is of an intimate backwater. It seems that the southern end will be improved further by the new houses being built on the east side as they add to the general character there. The railings, steps and porches of the houses at the north end and the rear boundaries and garages of the houses in Mill End on the west side all add to this atmosphere. The roof-scape on the eastern side is generally very pleasing with old tiles and varied roof pitches.

- **East Side (South to North):**

The restricted entrance to Orange Street from Mill End gives an immediate claustrophobic feel. Cutlers Cottage is an imposing substantial 16th/17th Century two-storey Grade II listed timber framed and plastered house with a plain tile roof. It has double hung sashed windows on the ground floor and a twee entrance porch on the south side. Internally it has some medieval wall paintings on the first floor. It adds dramatically to the surrounding character particularly in its juxtaposition with The Maypole public house.

St Clements – a 1950s housing development giving a more suburban feel unlike the back street feel of Orange Street generally. The new houses currently being built to the north of the entrance are an improvement.

Elmswood – a late 20th Century two-storey rendered house with a plain tile roof which fits in with the character of nearby houses.

Woodcroft – a 19th Century timber framed and brick house, weather-boarded and painted with an asbestos slate roof. It is Grade II listed for its group value only. It has an attractive porch to the entrance door abutting the highway.

Sapling Cottage and Oak Cottage – 2 two-storey early 19th century cottages timber framed and plastered with low pitched slate roofs and modern casements with glazing bars. Steps up to entrance doors add irregularity to the footway.

Stoneville – a late 17th century Grade II listed timber framed, weather-boarded two storey house with plain tile roof with two dormer windows. Bay windows on ground floor and double hung sashes with glazing bars. Attractive joist ends and pargetting.

No3 – a modern brick building circa 1980 which replaced an old flint cottage. It was originally austere and sterile but more recent refurbishment with pargetting and false rafter-ends (in an attempt to match Stoneville) have improved it immeasurably and it now blends into the general scene.

Sarah's Cottage – tucked into the NE corner of Orange Street. It has a modern panelled entrance door and bright colour to the walls which is very jolly but doesn't blend well with the historic conservation area.

Rosary Cottage – 17th century or earlier two-storey timber framed cottage with attractive flint walls with brick dressings and window arches probably added in 19th century. It has modern casement windows on the ground floor, horizontal sliding sashes on first floor and an attractive red tiled roof and antique brick chimneys.

Victoria Cottage – dated 1897 it is one of the few 19th century houses in Thaxted. It is of rendered brick with a slate roof and modern casements. Its unusual shape, squeezed into the space between Rosary Cottage and the entrance to The Tanyard, gives it a unique appeal.

- **West Side (South to North):**

The rear of 25 Mill End – bounded by panels of modern woven fencing which doesn't blend well with the conservation area.

The rear elevation of the old organ works – This is three storeys high and now three separate dwellings. The exterior decoration in an austere grey gives an appropriate cramped feel to this part of the road.

The rear of No11 Mill End – has a new timber framed extension with a slate roof which is not obtrusive though the full height glass panels, which add a contemporary touch, could be seen to be incongruous.

Rear of Broomfield House (former Sun Inn) – has a vertical lapboard fence which is covered in ivy. There are 4 pollarded lime trees which add greenery and stature. The remainder of the road frontage to Orange Street comprises a single storey building resembling public conveniences.

The side elevation of No 6 Town Street – well maintained and with pleasing slate blue/grey elevations this makes an agreeable constricted access to the north end of the street. The rear of No 6 Town Street, though, has a garage with a corrugated iron roof and soft red brick elevations which are bowing alarmingly.

Cadgers Lane – This is a narrow cut between Orange Street and Mill End between the backs of 2 – 6 Town Street and Broomfield House. It serves little purpose except giving access to the garage of No4 Town Street. At the eastern, Orange Street, end there is an attractive but deteriorating wall of soft red bricks with a dilapidated corrugated roof of a structure behind the wall visible over it.

The garage to No 4 Town Street – has a corrugated asbestos roof with no gutters and a section of attractive flint wall on its western side.

The rear of Nos 3 and 5 Mill End – a tight jumble of small outbuildings one of which has an attractive short brick chimney.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Apart from the old organ works, now three dwellings, the west side is a series of garages and garden boundaries of the houses on the east side of Mill End.

The south end is dominated on the east by Cutlers Cottage a 16th/17th Century Grade II listed house on the corner of St Clements, an unremarkable 1950s development of detached houses and bungalows.

New 2 and 3 storey houses currently being constructed approximately half way down the hill are generally in keeping and the three small cottages at right angles to the line of the road and facing southwards form a pleasing frame to the narrow entry to The Tanyard.

HIGHWAYS

The carriageway is relatively narrow but widens out towards the southern end before dramatically narrowing to the restricted access to the Tanyard. There are no parking restrictions so cars park on the west side between the various garage accesses and on the east side in the widened area at the northern end. This effectively restricts the road to a single carriageway.

The footways are narrow on both sides with generally granite kerbs.

Street lighting consists of a modern antique style bracket lamp attached to the old organ works and old iron light column with a modern antique style lantern in the widened area at the north end. The parking for houses at the northern end of Orange Street, near The Tanyard, is on the street and there is virtually no off-street parking for houses on the eastern side of Mill End so parked cars are always evident in Orange Street.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

There is an impressive and exquisite view of the east side of the town dominated by Clarence House from the southern end of Orange Street. This is marred only by the blank flank of Lowes premises in Town Street in its centre. The small cottages facing south at the northern end give added atmosphere to it.

There is also an interesting view southwards, uphill, from about half way up Orange Street where the buildings at the top of the slope at the southern end frame the sky with the bracketed sign of The Maypole dominating the scene.

KEY ELEMENTS

The key feature of Orange Street is its backwater character created by a 'jumble' of cottages which frame attractive views of the village centre.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

1. Repairs to brick walls on west side
2. Use of a colour for Sarah's Cottage that is more sympathetic to a conservation area.
3. Use of fencing to rear of 25 Mill End that is more sympathetic to a conservation area.
4. Use of roofing materials on the outbuildings in Cadgers Lane that are more sympathetic to a conservation area.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

None.

PARK STREET

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

This is the B1051 and is a relatively wide approach road to the town from the south-west carrying a large volume of traffic including heavy lorries.

CONSERVATION AREA

Park Street is within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

Before reaching the town, the traveller will already have been treated to extensive views of the church and the windmill. Upon reaching the built area however the view is abruptly cut off by the road twisting sharply between houses on the south and the walls of Park Farm on the left. As the bend opens out there is a gentle rise in the ground past Park Farm.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **West Side (South to North):**

Park Farm Barns – Whilst obscured from the road this is a pleasing and well maintained collection of barn conversions which have a cohesive appearance and are, to an extent, still in keeping with the rural nature of this part of the village.

The Great Barn is a 17th century timber framed weather boarded grade II barn which has recently been converted to a domestic dwelling. Its old corrugated iron roof has been replaced with plain tiles and it is good condition. In addition there are two timber framed and boarded grain stores of indeterminate age also now converted to domestic use.

An 18th century open timber framed and weather boarded Grade II listed cart shed, has been refurbished and converted to car parking for the adjacent dwellings.

An attractive red brick single storey stable and kennel block with plain tile roof is still being used as originally intended.

Boundary Wall between entrance to Park Farm Barns and 36 Park Street

An attractive brick garden wall. A short length of it has been repaired with concrete blocks and the panel fencing is in poor repair.

36 Park Street – A 16th century timber framed and plastered Grade II listed two storey house with a patterned plain tile roof and red brick chimney. Standing at the top of a slope at a bend in the road it has a unique and interesting shape with semi-hexagonal tiled roof on the west face. The south face, fronting the road is jettied with exposed timbers rising from substantial brick support walls and has double hung sash windows on both floors. A flight of four brick steps leads up to central entrance door. It is in need of maintenance at the rear.

Wall between 36 Park Street and Park Farmhouse – possibly of 16th century origin this high wall (2.3m) is Grade II. It is built of flint with stone and brick dressings, tile and stone cappings and incorporating 14th century carved stone ornamentation reputed to have come from Tilty Abbey.

Park Farmhouse – This is a large, imposing early 16th century timber framed and plastered house with plain tile roof. Facing the road the first floor is jettied with exposed timbers interestingly showing the outline of a door probably to the room over a porch now gone. There are original window heads and appropriate window sashes. There are also interesting vertical slit windows on the upper storey. There is attractive cobble paving between the footway and house and a substantial red brick wall between Park Farmhouse and No32 Park Street.

36 Park Street to Park Farm forms an impressive and important collection of buildings.

32 and 30 Park Street – An attractive pair of 17th century or earlier timber framed and plastered cottages fronting the highway with plain tiled roof and brick chimney. The gable dormer windows and modern casements are not obtrusive.

28 and 26 Park Street – A pair of rendered cottages with attractive plain tiled roof with ridge cap and bonneted ridge to hipped end and gabled dormer windows. There are modern windows in a Victorian style.

Park Villa and Garden House – Modern houses built in Victorian style behind substantial original soft red brick walls in English wall bond with stone copings and spherical pillar caps to the piers. A partially successful attempt to integrate new build into old surroundings.

There is a view to the windmill through a gap between Garden House and Aldborough House, where a driveway leads to a pair of modern bungalows.

Aldborough House – An imposing Grade II listed mid-18th century brick and timber framed rendered house with plain tile roof behind a front parapet. Two full height window bays with sliding sashes are placed either side of a central cased entrance door. The house adds a certain dignity to this part of Park Street.

Oakhurst & Aesculus – two substantial modern houses designed successfully to sympathetically complement Aldborough House. Aesculus has UPVC windows and adhesive leaded lights.

St. Johns Cottages – two modern houses of more modest proportions than Oakhurst and Aesculus but again designed sympathetically. Parts of an original low red brick boundary wall abutting the footway are retained.

St John Ambulance Charity Shop – A rather unattractive semi-permanent single storey building serving a useful purpose to the community. It is surrounded by an older low red brick boundary wall containing two large, mature sycamore trees which do much to enhance Park Street.

Thaxted Tyre and Exhaust – Modern barn like business premises with plastered walls and tiled roof. Orange pantiles are not in keeping with the surrounding buildings but dwarf hip on the front and featured plasterwork go some way to ameliorating this. The business sign is in an attractive style.

Access Road between business premises – an old deteriorating red brick wall with flint plinth to the rear of No7 Town Street

Park Street Garage –business premises dating from the 1920s/30s with brick frontages and an attractive triangular brick frieze across the front elevation at high level and a stepped brick parapet partially obscured by No10 Park Street. Windows are industrial style metal casements. The front elevations are all painted white and are now looking shabby. Depending on the type of brick this could be improved by removal of the paint creating a match with the low boundary wall to the footway.

Nos 2 - 10 Park Street – Two storey modern brick buildings with some plastered panels and a mix of slate and tiled roofs which lack coherence. The ground floor of Nos10 and 2 are shop premises and there is a single storey flat roof extension to No2. Some attempt at jettying to the first floor of Nos 4 and 6 doesn't quite work. The first floor walls support a number of satellite dishes which muddle the view. The brick upper section and gable of the west end has attractive Arts and Craft style detailing with elaborately detailed chimneys and edge tile arches and sills to the windows.

- **East Side (South to North):**

No 27 – The old Gas Works manager's house of 19th century brick now rendered and with slate roof and appropriate windows and doors.

1-4 Park Lodge Cottages – These are modern houses with rendered brick walls, dormer windows and plain tiled roofs. They generally accord with the conservation area.

Chapelorth – This is a large detached house in the same sympathetic style as Nos 1-4 Park Lodge Cottages painted in a very bright non-traditional colour.

Tamarisk Cottages 1 & 2, and Peggys – Two brick and flint cottages with slate roofs probably 19th century and one older timber framed and rendered cottage with thatched roof. All very attractive.

The Maltings – This is a modern estate of 11 houses with varied external treatments to walls, including traditional black lap-boarding.

No 17 Belvedere – At right angles to Park Street and facing The Chase. A pair of 17th century Grade II listed timber framed and pargetted houses with red plain tile roofs with interesting lap boarded 'mill like' slate roof extension to the rear creating an interesting view from the road. There is a single large Leylandii on the corner of The Chase, which detracts from the scene. **The Chase**, which runs at right angles to Park Street, is a *cul de sac* of mostly 20th Century detached individual houses but also contains the small (and rather basic) Roman Catholic church.

No 15 Park House – rare in Thaxted, this is a substantial 19th century building. It is double fronted and of brick with slate roof and is raised above the road and abutting the pavement. There is an ornate front porch over the entrance door and full height bay windows with sliding sashes on both sides. There are attractive brick outbuildings to the rear.

Nos 11, 11a and 13 – A modern terrace of three houses with attractive brick ground floor and weather boarded jettied first floor, plain tiled roof with Victorian style ridges and finials. It is raised

above the road behind narrow gardens contained by brick retaining walls. Some effort and expense has been successfully put into making the design complementary to the surrounding buildings. Externally these are some of the most satisfactory houses built in Thaxted in recent years.

No 9a and The Manse – a large brick and stucco house with plain tiled roof built in 1914 (there is a plaque at a low level on the building which states this) raised above the road behind a small garden. It complements Aldborough House opposite. No 9a is a small, modern extension.

Baptist Chapel – An 1832 red brick Grade II listed building with stucco façade facing the road behind a small garden bounded by a 19th Century ornamental iron fence and gates with ornamental circular iron arch. It improves the look of this part of Park Street beside the bland 1950s development Star Mead.

The Star Garden – This has recently been improved and is a well-kept green open space on the corner of Star Mead.

Star Mead – This is a small modern estate with yellow brick and tiled roofs. The entrance is wide and more suburban in character but the grassy swards to each side add to the scene at this point in Park Street.

No 5 – A small timber framed and plastered cottage with a slate roof attached to No2 Mill End. It is generally in good condition though the black modern windows and door are unsympathetic to buildings of this type. There is a green corrugated outhouse on the west side of No5.

Side of No 2 Mill End – A timber framed and plastered two storey cottage with a plain tile roof. It has sash windows on the first floor. The ground floor has been converted into retail premises as a Fish & Chip shop with full height plate glass windows. There is a large and obtrusive business sign at first floor level, which is wholly inappropriate in the context of the Conservation Area. Generally, though, the building is in good state of repair.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

There are a number of significant and individual features in Park Street, both good and bad. Park Farmhouse is the stand-out feature of quality while Aldborough House, Park House and the Baptist Chapel all add character.

There is also good modern development including the barn conversions, Park Lodge Cottages and Nos. 11-13.

The quality of the environment deteriorates markedly however at the junction with Town Street/Mill End (arguably where the built environment should be at its best) with the shabby mid 20th century development on the Town Street side and the poor signage of the Fish and Chip shop on the Mill End corner.

HIGHWAYS

The reasonably wide highway has parking restrictions at the eastern end and again at the sharp bend at the western end. It is generally edged with granite kerbs except where the late 20th century residential roads of Star Mead and The Maltings emerge.

The footways are of a reasonable width and generally surfaced with asphalt with the exception of the length on the north side, which is paved with modern concrete pavements. The footways on the north side between Park St Garage and Park Farmhouse are however, habitually obstructed by vehicles parked partially on them. In front of Park Farmhouse and the adjacent wall there is a narrow grass verge, which together with the pump and adjacent planting opposite adds significantly to the quality of this area.

The footway in front of Park House has been disturbed by tree roots and is hazardous.

There are modern traffic signs at low level at the junction with Town Street, which are necessary and tolerable.

Footway lighting is by modern antique-style lanterns on old iron columns and bracket lamps.

Parking along Park Street is generally well managed with most properties having off street parking. There are, however, major parking issues at the eastern end at the junction with Mill End. Frequent queues (including lorries, vans and cars) form in Park Street to enter the B184 in either direction but customers of the Fish & Chip shop who park illegally on the double yellow lines cause dangerous overtaking by the queuing traffic at or very close to the blind junction.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

Being almost level the views along and from Park Street are not as impressive as in the more undulating areas of the town. Nevertheless, the views along the street from both ends are attractive and set the scene for the magnificent views at the centre of Thaxted and which the traveller will have glimpsed at a distance when approaching from the Broxted direction.

Looking westwards from Town Street the imposing building of Park Farmhouse closes off the view at the end and the cottages on the south side close to the junction and the new weather boarded houses beyond the Baptist Chapel improve this view. The trees on the south side of The Star garden and north side beside the St John Charity Shop are important.

The view from the east emphasises the nature of the town with its mixed dwellings and mature trees. Perhaps of greatest significance however is the view looking out from the eastern end of Park Street. Thaxted's built environment comes to an abrupt halt at this point and the transition into a delightful rural landscape is immediate. As such the sense of place and the quality of the village and its Conservation Area is dramatically enhanced.

There are a number of viewpoints to the windmill glimpsed between properties on the north side most notably through the access to Park Farm with the cluster of farm buildings in the dip in the foreground.

There is also an interesting townscape view looking southeast from the end of Star Mead to the back of The Star Public House and its adjacent outbuildings. A modern shed in the garden of No1 Star Mead and the dilapidated corrugated iron roof on one of the outbuildings of The Star do detract.

KEY ELEMENTS

Parking and traffic management at the eastern end of Park Street near and at the junction with Mill End where customers at the Fish & Chip shop park illegally on the double yellow lines and cause hazardous conditions for through traffic are a major concern. There is also serious concern over heavy lorries at the double bends at the far end of the village. The 16th century 36, Park Street is constantly at risk.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

1. More appropriate signage to the Fish & Chip shop.
2. Removal of satellite dishes from exposed side elevation of 2 – 10 Park Street;
3. Repaint or expose brickwork to Park Street Garage;
4. Remove or planting screen to the shed in the garden of No1 Star Mead;
5. Remove Leylandii on corner of The Chase;
6. Repair footway outside Park House;
7. Replace concrete block retaining wall to 36 Park Street with more suitable materials;
8. Resolve the parking problems outside the Fish & Chip shop – e.g. enforce the double yellow lines or have allocated parking spaces in the Park Street car park, although this is frequently full.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

None identified.

WEAVERHEAD LANE FROM MARGARET STREET TO COPTHALL LANE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

Weaverhead Lane is essentially residential containing, within this section, a number of relatively small modern developments – Orchard Close, The Lees and Cooper’s Place as well as providing access to the much larger Wedow Road development. There are elements of open space and Brooklyns at the southern end, adds character.

CONSERVATION AREA

This section of Weaverhead Lane is within the Conservation Area although the two small *cul de sacs* off it, Cooper’s Place and The Lees are technically outside the boundary.

TOPOGRAPHY

The road slopes down from north to south. There is an area of public amenity land at the northern end and there are mature yew trees behind fencing on the western side. Otherwise the frontages are fully developed.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **From north to south, western side**

Behind the surgery at the top end of the street is a modern development of 24 units known as **Orchard Close**, a mix of houses and flats. It is arranged around a paved courtyard which is used for access and car parking. All of the units are two storey and mainly of brick but with some rendering and tiled roofs.

A driveway leads to the rear of the former Cock public house in Watling Street and a close boarded fence encloses a large rear garden screened further by mature yew trees.

Then, an attractive modern development of six small cottage-style units, imaginatively designed with a mix of elevational treatments all under a tiled roof. Arches (with accommodation over) provide access to rear garaging. **Lowes’ yard** is next containing storage buildings and enclosed by a high brick wall. At the corner of The Tanyard is another small cottage development covered under that section.

- **From south to north, eastern side**

On the corner of Copthall Lane is **Brooklyns**, a substantial and attractive late Victorian house of brick with tile hanging detail and a ‘wrap-round’ canopy supported on iron columns. Cast iron fencing set on a low brick wall encloses the garden.

Then, two individual modern houses, Clachan Brae and Corner House, the latter occupying the corner plot at the junction with Wedow Road. Beyond number 2, Wedow Road (the corner unit) is a small development known as **The Lees**. Numbers 6, 7 and 8 are three double fronted detached houses with rendered elevations set within a small *cul de sac* which also contains ‘cart store’ style

garaging. Numbers 1-5 are then arranged in a terrace on the main Weaverhead Lane frontage, the irregular rendered elevations forming an attractive element within the streetscape.

Next is the **old telephone exchange** a small single storey shell building set on a grassed site which would no doubt accommodate two new houses quite adequately. Adjacent to that is an area of recreational space planted with sapling oaks and a rose bed around a painted village post sign.

At the top of the street is another small housing development known as **Cooper's Place** which is given a degree of prominence by its position on a slight bend in the road opposite the junction with Margaret Street.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Probably the one significant feature is the large Victorian house known as Brooklyns. Most other housing is small scale (although in some cases well designed to integrate into the Thaxted style) and the only other feature that is different is the recreation area maintained by the parish council at the northern end.

HIGHWAYS

Weaverhead Lane is narrow and with some on street parking is wholly inadequate to accommodate the amount of new housing that it serves, particularly with the proposed extension to Wedow Road. Street lighting is mixed and arguably inadequate although this probably suits the residents whose houses front directly onto the pavement. There are pavements on both sides of the road.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

The narrowness of Weaverhead Lane and the fact that it is generally enclosed with development on both sides, limits the scope for significant views.

KEY ELEMENTS

The one key feature of Weaverhead Lane and probably the only element that contributes to its status within the Conservation Area is Brooklyns. Otherwise this residential street, though perfectly pleasant of its type, is relatively featureless.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

Having been recently developed for most of its length there are no significant opportunities for enhancement.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The one development opportunity is the site of the old telephone exchange which would no doubt accommodate two new units.

TOWN STREET

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

Town Street is the principal retail centre and the location for the Friday market. Although retail dominates there are also a number of town houses and cottages some of them very fine and with considerable heritage value. The focal point is the Grade I listed Guildhall and the eye is automatically drawn beyond it to the church spire that looks down on the village. This is undoubtedly the heart of Thaxted in which individual buildings, all of different ages and style nonetheless sit harmoniously together. It is a wide street which befits its status as the market site and provides short-term car parking for convenience shopping.

CONSERVATION AREA

The whole of Town Street is within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

There is a gentle incline at the western end of the street but the principal climb up to the church is within the westerly extensions to Town Street – Stoney Lane, Fishmarket Street and Watling Street.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **From the south at the most easterly end:**

Numbers 2, 4 and 6 were formerly three separate cottages, now two. They are all probably of early 19th century origin and are rendered at the front with a weather-boarded side elevation to Mill End. Number 6 has modern pargetting. They are listed as a group (UID 122411).

- **South side from the eastern end:**

Thaxted Bakery and Butchers is probably an extension from the middle of the 20th century to an older building, part of a re-construction of the Park Street corner. The Pharmacy is at number 3 – quite a long double-fronted shop unit with a poor quality fascia out of keeping with the general character of the street. The building probably has 19th century origins but is of little merit. Number 5 however is a small Grade II listed cottage (UID 122427) wedged between the pharmacy and the Community Information Centre (CIC) which possibly dates back to the 15th century though with a later front façade.

The CIC is a 20th century reproduction of a Queen Anne building. Formerly a bank it has bow-fronted windows and dormer windows serving an attic floor. It currently houses the Tourist Information service, the library and the Parish Council offices. A driveway to the side leads to a modern dental surgery building.

The Little House is an intriguing detached house with a double gabled roof probably from the 17th century. Steps lead up to an unpainted front door and moulded door case. It is listed Grade II (UID

122428 but it should be noted that it together with The Recorder's House and The Manse are incorrectly marked on the Historic England search map).

The Paragon School of Furniture Restoration is a two storey workshop-type unit with a rendered front elevation and lap-boarded side, formerly a garage/petrol filling station where a pump would be swung out on an extended arm reaching over the pavement.

Number 15 is an 18th century cottage with a rendered front elevation under a tiled roof. It is listed Grade II (UID 122429).

The Recorder's House, now Gifted and formerly a restaurant, is an historically important 15th century jettied three storey dwelling which is listed Grade II* (UID 122430). A particularly significant feature is the decorated oriel brackets beneath the first floor windows which are carved with the arms of Edward IV on one side and a griffin on the other. Moving west, there are then a series of fine town houses of various dates but all listed either II or II*:

The Manse (UDI 122431) – a handsome double fronted house with a fine Georgian front elevation. Steps lead up to a front door set within a diapered architrave with a good ornamental fan-light above. A blue plaque records that Gustav Holst lived here between 1917 and 1925.

Becket House (UDI 122432) – doors at either end suggest that this might originally have been two houses. The front elevation is of painted brickwork under a slated roof and it would appear to be mid 19th century in origin.

Dove House (UDI 122433) – a Georgian brick façade probably conceals an earlier interior, it is of three storeys in height with a pitch tiled roof. Three doors (two subsidiary and one main) sit between double height bays.

Number 25 (UDI 122434) – a fine medieval house with an 18th century façade distinguished by its dentilled cornices and its pillared door pediment. It is thought that the original hall house section was related to the Manor of Thaxted.

- **At right angles to the street and filling the space between Fishmarket Street and Stoney Lane:**

The Guildhall – a Grade I listed building (UID 122435), it was built between 1390 and 1410 for the Guild of Cutlers. It is of three storeys and is significantly jettied. The ground floor is open with flagged floor and would originally have acted as a market place. It incorporates an original cellar (now a small museum) and the village lock-up cage.

- **From Watling Street heading east along the north side:**

Number 38, The Priory is another important Grade II* listed building (UID 122426). It has been much altered over the centuries but has its origins in the 14th. The present façade dates from the 18th century and the first floor balcony is modern. It is said to contain 16th/17th century wall paintings inside. Parrishes next door was formerly a Coaching House dating back to the 17th century and is listed Grade II (UID 122425). The ground floor shop-front is modern but subdued and not out of

place. The Nisa supermarket beyond is 19th century and extended at the rear. It has two bays at first floor level and although listed (UID 122424) its status is for group value only.

Numbers 32-28 are a row of three attractive cottages of varying dates but all with rendered elevations and sash windows. They are all listed (UID 122421-3). Number 26 was formerly a public house. Numbers 24 and 22 both have shop fronts, one a laundry, the other a hairdressers. Both are 19th century but listed Grade II (UID 122419 and 122418). Number 20 is, similarly, 19th century and listed Grade II (UID 122417) but is distinguished by its elaborate late 19th century portico.

Lowes, ironmongers and general stores, is characterised by a rather dull shop front and double doors leading to a rear yard and stores buildings. The first floor elevation is equally unappealing but the façade is concealing what was originally part of a medieval hall house. It is listed Grade II (UID 122416).

Numbers 16 and 14 are residential again and 19th century. Number 14 is listed Grade II (UID 122414) and includes a former shop front. Finally at the eastern end on the northern side is Wayletts, the newsagents and Post Office. This is essentially two buildings both of which are listed (UID 122413 and 122412). The three storey section is attached to the attractive two storey element whose principal feature is a centrally placed demi lune window flanked by a pair of sashes.

Two further listed features of note in Town Street are the 19th century **cast iron pump** outside Wayletts (UID 122436) and the **K6 Giles Gilbert Scott telephone box** near to the Guildhall (UID 122463).

Town Street as a whole has immense character and has the atmosphere of a busy community hub but where little has changed in the past 100 hundred years or so. It is the epitome of the small unaltered East Anglian town. Colour is all important to this image. Fortunately, the worst excesses of colour choice now seen in Newbiggen Street and other parts of Thaxted have not featured in Town Street although Gifted must be considered to be on the margins. The Recorders House is a prominent building which can be enhanced by a prominent colour within the overall Town Street palette, but the current scheme is not quite correct particularly now the original colour has faded and become more obviously purple with weathering. Car parking and through traffic are also obviously damaging features but these are probably inevitable and there is little that can be done to improve matters. There are however other improvements that could be made and which are set out under the relevant subsequent heading.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Town Street is rich in heritage and the majority of its buildings are listed and of considerable significance. Their group value is of even greater importance. Clearly though the Grade I and three Grade II* buildings stand out – The Guildhall; The Priory; The Manse; The Recorder's House; and number 25. The church spire in the background also is a dominant feature and the focal point of most views.

HIGHWAYS

Highways related issues are the single most detracting factor in the appearance and character of Town Street. It is a part of the route of the B 184 which connects Great Dunmow to Saffron Walden.

Whilst it is only a B road there are no obvious alternative routes (indeed, Thaxted is some 7 miles from the nearest A road) and there is an often continuous flow of traffic, much of it heavy goods vehicles.

Similarly, on-street parking also has a diminishing effect on environmental quality. A continuous line of parked cars and vans detracts markedly from the overall appearance of the streetscape. Fortunately, Town Street is wide enough to physically accommodate parking but the aesthetic impact is damaging. In the final analysis however it is probably better to tolerate it for the economic benefit it brings through enabling local convenience shopping.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

Without doubt the single most significant view is looking west towards the Guildhall with the church behind it. This is the view that defines Thaxted.

KEY ELEMENTS

Clearly the most significant element in the make-up of Town Street is the Guildhall at its western end. What makes Town Street special however is the whole cluster of buildings within it. What is key therefore is all of the individual buildings that together create its special character.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The major traffic related problem has been outlined above. There are no other major improvements that could be undertaken but a few smaller items could make a difference.

Town Street does not suffer unduly from a proliferation of street signage or street furniture. Indeed, much of what there is, is good and fits with the Thaxted character. The preservation of the early style of street lighting is of great significance and whilst the pedestrian's signposting and parish notice board are fairly standard off-the-shelf products seen in many heritage (or would-be heritage) settings, they fit well into their environment. The style of the bus stop sign however is clearly out of place and does rather add to the sense of clutter outside Wayletts. Similarly, the extra litter bin set between the 19th century pump and the pillar-box is unnecessary and again clutters the nostalgic image. This was something suggested in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals published in 2012, but has never been implemented. Similarly, the two 'build-outs' to assist pedestrian crossing are also unnecessary and detract from the heritage setting. They are of no benefit to pedestrians since parked cars provide the same 'line of defence' against on-coming traffic and all they serve to do is to remove up to four parking spaces.

Finally, the two planters set outside the Guildhall bring colour to a grey and white building but the current planting scheme of dwarf conifers is so out of keeping as to be laughable. They are more suited to the lesser north London suburbs than to Thaxted's historic centre.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There are no opportunities for development unless a better scheme was ever submitted for the redevelopment of the Park Street corner. The only other related opportunity would be on the

former coal yard behind Lowes but this would in any case, be accessed from the rear and not through Lowes gates.

THE TANYARD

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

The Tanyard is a particularly short street though nonetheless significant. It is the principal access point to large areas of housing development to the north and east of the village though in truth, is wholly unsuited to this purpose.

Its character is now entirely residential but there is a heavy flow of motor traffic with vehicles often queuing to get out into Town Street.

CONSERVATION AREA

It is wholly within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The Tanyard is essentially flat. The incline up the valley side does not occur until the road becomes Weaverhead Lane. Frontages are in one way or another all built up.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **On the north west side from Town Street:**

Wayletts – Frontages initially comprise rather unattractive fencing and gates enclosing the backyard and outbuildings of Wayletts.

Modern cottages – There is then a row of modern cottages, rendered and with slate roofs and blending well with their surroundings.

An archway – provides access to garaging and a tarmac surfaced parking area.

Lowes store – The blockwork and corrugated asbestos cladding of Lowes store provides an unappealing backdrop.

- **On the south east side from Town Street:**

There is again **timber fencing** enclosing gardens to the rear of Orange Street.

May Tree House then provides an attractive feature in the view from the Town Street/Orange Street corner. A typical town house of some size, it dates from the early 16th Century. It is timber framed is double fronted with rendered elevations and a tile clad roof. Beyond is the side wall of the Brethrens' meeting hall (discussed under Copthall Lane).

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Although the new cottages are attractive the only significant feature is May Tree House which is listed Grade II (UID 122410) and where it is described in the list description as early 16th century.

HIGHWAYS

Despite its short length The Tanyard represents a highways and traffic problem. There is a pinch-point at its junction with Town Street (where it also converges with Orange Street). It is very much the principal outlet for traffic coming from the housing developments along Weaverhead Lane/Guelphs Lane and now, perhaps more significantly, from Wedow Road. With a further phase of 49 additional dwellings shortly to be built on Wedow Road the problem is likely to become critical. There is however nothing that can be done to enhance the Town Street junction without significant detrimental impact on the Conservation Area.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

Being flat, low lying and with fully built-up frontages there are limited views available out of The Tanyard. The view looking into The Tanyard and at the Orange Street corner is however an attractive one and significant in the context of the Conservation Area.

KEY ELEMENTS

The view into The Tanyard and towards the cottages at the corner of Orange Street is a key feature of this corner of Thaxted (that is when it is not obscured by traffic). May Tree House is the dominant building.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The only scope for enhancement lies in the reduction of vehicle movements at the Town Street junction. This seems unattainable.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The only realistic development opportunity is with the Brethren's site which is covered under Copthall Lane.

WATLING STREET FROM TOWN STREET TO BELL LANE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

This section of Watling Street is essentially now a residential area containing historic town houses and cottages. Many are linked and sit abutting the pavement. The continuity is broken on the south side by the A.M. Memorial Gardens which adjoin the churchyard. A number of shop fronts remain although there is no pure retail offer. There is a single restaurant.

CONSERVATION AREA

The whole of the street is within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

There is a significant gradient as the road bends round to the west leading to the higher ground of the churchyard. The only significant vegetation is in the Memorial Garden.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **From Town Street heading west on the south side:**

Number 1 is at an angle to number 3 to which it is attached and as a consequence, has a small paved area in front. It is listed Grade II (UID 122455) and is of plastered timber frame dating from the 18th century. The shop front is from the 19th century and the building has been in retail use for well over 100 years. It is currently the Thaxted Beauty Boutique. There are sash windows at first floor under a tiled roof and there is a side door to Stoney Lane.

Whitings, at number 3, is a handsome town house again listed Grade II (UID 122456). Steps lead up to a pedimented Georgian front door casement with sash windows either side. The roof is tile clad and a side annex has a carriage arch leading to the rear.

Numbers 5, 9 and 11 (number 7 seems to have disappeared as a part of some historic re-configuration) are three probably early 18th century timber framed cottages, all listed Grade II (UID 122457/8). All have sash windows and dormers are set into the sagging tiled roof. To the rear of number 11 is an attractive and early outbuilding with access through a pedestrian side gate.

Next is **the Memorial Garden** contained within a brick and flint wall which abuts the churchyard. It contains quite dense shrubbery and several mature trees but is somewhat unkempt.

- **From Bell Lane returning east towards Town Street on the north side:**

The Indian Villa restaurant is something of a Thaxted landmark. Formerly the village post office it has considerable charm and the signage and general appearance sit well within the Conservation Area. It, together with **number 18** to which it is attached, are listed Grade II (UID 122449) and it clearly has late medieval origins. Georgian frontages were added and the bow windows, though enhancing the appearance, are comparatively recent.

Bank House is of considerable importance and is listed Grade II* (UID 122448). Whilst the front was a Georgian modification it has preserved much of its 15th century structure behind and has crown-post roofs. **Sparrows** next door may once have been two cottages. It too, is listed, here at Grade II (UID 122447), and is thought to have 16th century origins with 17th/18th century alterations. A flat hooded casement surrounds the door and there is a single modern bay window with sashes above. The roof is of old clay tiles.

Beech House (number12) is of a similar period to Bank House but the Georgian front contains a large, probably 19th century, shop window.

Number 10a was formerly a butcher's shop but now acts as an informal administration office for the Thaxted Festival. Together with the adjoining **number 10**, it is listed Grade II (UID 122445) and is of 17th century origins with later alterations. Windows above are again multi-pane sashes and the roof is tiled.

Number 8 and the adjoining Saddlers both have matching shop-fronts although only one is in use (by Oliver Wilson, clock repairer), the Saddlers part being wholly residential. Both cottages are brick-fronted, painted and with a tiled roof. This principal section is probably from the early 19th century although Saddlers has an earlier part, of lower height, which is attached to number 4. The whole is listed Grade II (UID 122444).

Number 4 is separately listed Grade II (UID 122443) and probably has 18th century origins. The side elevation is weather-boarded.

Double gates at this point provide access to the yard of **the former Cock public house** which is itself now a particularly attractive house. Features of the original pub use are preserved in the street door and the sign hanging. The 'Venetian' windows are a modern addition and, although arguably alien to Thaxted, are nonetheless, an attractive embellishment.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Like Town Street, the importance of Watling Street is in the grouping of its buildings. Almost all are listed and important in their own right but the character of Town Street is based on the mix of dwelling types made harmonious by their Georgian doorways and sash windows.

HIGHWAYS

Watling Street suffers in the same way as Town Street from an often continuous flow of traffic along the B184 but the bend and slope of the road does help to reduce speeds and the absence of parking improves the quality of the streetscape.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

Undoubtedly the most important view is that travelling west up the hill. On rounding the bend the church and Clarence House both come into view.

KEY ELEMENTS

The key feature of Watling Street is the continuous row of Georgian frontages made even more interesting by the occasional shop-front. The Memorial Garden adds a 'green' break.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

Apart from the obvious desire to reduce the flow of traffic (and large lorries in particular which must have a damaging effect on the timber structures of the houses) there would be considerable benefit to be had from work to the Memorial Garden. The trees are now mature and with dense shrubbery the garden appears gloomy and unwelcoming. A clearance and cutting-out exercise would improve this area of green space considerably.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There are no opportunities for development.

BELL LANE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

Bell Lane is nothing more than a short cut-through connecting Margaret Street to Watling Street.

CONSERVATION AREA

It is wholly within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The roadway is only some 50 yards long and is entirely flat. Both Margaret Street at one end and Watling Street at the other are on significant inclines where they are joined by Bell Lane.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Development is limited to a listed brick wall which defines the boundary of Clarence House and its garden on the west side and the return frontage of the Indian Villa restaurant on the east side. The latter is at the southern end, at the junction with Watling Street, and is part of a listed late medieval timber framed and plastered former cottage. There is a 20th century extension to the kitchens at the rear which abuts the former bowling green section of Margaret Street gardens which completes the Bell Lane frontages.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

There are no significant features along Bell Lane (except for the smells from the Indian restaurant).

HIGHWAYS

Bell Lane is narrow and accommodates one way traffic only (in a southerly direction). There are no pavements.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

The high wall of Clarence House and the narrowness of Bell Lane serve to limit views. At the southern end however where it meets Watling Street the view of the north elevation of the church opens up in all its glory.

KEY ELEMENTS

The Clarence House wall is a key part of the character of this corner of Thaxted. The Margaret Street gardens also provide an element of calm green space.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The signage on the Margaret Street gardens is considered severe. It could be rather more welcoming and less negative. Better provision for the storage and collection of rubbish from the Indian Villa restaurant would improve the appearance of Bell Lane.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

None.

THE BULLRING AND WATLING STREET FROM THE BULLRING TO BELL LANE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

The Bullring comprises a group of terraced listed houses which were formerly shops, with a broad pavement area in front of them. It has a unique triangular road space which would formerly have been part of the market area.

Watling Street falls away to the east joining Town Street opposite the Guildhall. Immediately to south of the Bull Ring is the Parish Church with the Swan hotel to its right. Further down the hill there are two linked half-timbered listed houses followed by Clarence House, a large detached early eighteenth century property standing in its own grounds.

CONSERVATION AREA

This area lies wholly within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The Bull Ring itself is a flat area at the top of the town. Watling Street falls away to the east swinging to the south east with its houses enclosing the north and east side of the church.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The buildings along the western edge of the Bull Ring are currently dwelling houses but were formerly retail outlets. They are all Grade II listed dating from the 17th century and extensively altered in subsequent periods. The buildings are timber framed and plastered, with grey slate roofs hipped to the south with double hung vertical sash windows. There is a timber framed wing at the rear with a red plain tile roof and red brick chimney stacks. The properties open straight onto the pavement.

Maple Cottage to the left side of the terrace has a courtyard garden and extends along Bolford Street.

The Swan Hotel is a Grade II listed 17th century timber framed building with an 18th century brick façade, now painted. It has a red plain tile hipped roof, part hidden by the brick frontage. The windows are vertical sliding sashes seven in total, two of them blind at first floor and three pediment headed door cases. The break front parapet has a modillioned string course. The timber frame is exposed internally.

To the rear it has a high walled parking courtyard flanked on two sides by buildings which now act as annex accommodation for the hotel. Part of the wall has recently been re-built. The brick courses are however modern and there has been no re-use of the original bricks. Buildings in the conservation area should set standards of restoration and an opportunity has been lost in this particular case.

Church House at No 26 Watling Street is a Grade II listed house dating back to the 15th century, perhaps earlier, though with a more recent frontage. It is timber framed and rendered, with red plain tile hipped roof. Windows on the upper floor are vertical sashes. The canopy to the door is flat with a 19th century large bow window to the right. An off road parking space lies to the left of the building and a recent extension and walled garden form the rear. The front door steps open straight onto the pavement.

No 24, next door, is also Grade II listed. It is a C 15th house with a jettied cross-wing to the west. It is timber framed and rendered, the framing being exposed on the western side. It has a red plain tile roof with modern leaded casements some in the original openings.

Clarence House follows. It was built in 1715 in local red brick with plain tile roof. In Victorian times bays were added but these have subsequently been removed and the building restored to its original form. The windows are arched, double hung vertical sashes with glazing bars in keystone, segmented heads. The central door case is a segmented pediment flanked by fluted pilasters with composite capitals. There is a single storey addition to the north-west with a flat hooded door case. Its two windows are vertical sliding sashes. The front has two rain-water heads inscribed in 1715. Internally much of the original detailing remains and is in process of restoration. There are various other buildings within the grounds and a charming walled garden behind the house.

The Church of St John the Baptist, Our Lady and St Laurence occupies pride of place at the top of the town from where it can be seen for miles around. This Grade I listed building was built between about 1350 and 1510, replacing an earlier Anglo-Saxon church. It is of flint rubble with cut limestone and clunch dressings. The roof is of lead, slate and tile. The north and south arcades date to about 1350. The south transept, south porch and porch chamber are a little later. The north transept, is early 15th century. The north porch and porch chamber is later 15th century and decorated with the Plantagenet coat of arms. The west tower is late 15th century with an early 19th century spire which replaced an earlier spiral which collapsed. The chancel, north and south chapels were rebuilt in the early 16th century when a clerestory was added. Thaxted church is probably the largest church in the county and has a wealth of original features. It is known to have been on a pilgrim route and may possibly have housed a shrine.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

The principal feature is the church. It is adjacent to the main thoroughfare which turns at right angles around the Swan public house. Traffic is a major concern with the potential for serious accidents, the most recent having taken place in 2015.

HIGHWAYS

The current volume of traffic and the spate of heavy vehicles using the road allied with junctions to Bolford Street and Watling Lane make this a hazardous place and the scene of many a traffic jam and accident as the road swings north into Newbiggen Street.

The street lighting is in keeping with the town but the bollards in a semi-circle round the broad pavement in front of the Bull Ring, though necessary, are less than complementary.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

The Bull Ring forms a focal point for the upper part of the town, looking south east towards the medieval core and north and north-west to the later houses in Newbiggen Street, Bolford Street and Watling Lane.

KEY ELEMENTS

The area is dominated by the church but complemented by the array of late medieval and early seventeenth century dwellings which form its north western and northern border.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

Traffic poses the greatest environmental problem in this area of the town. Buildings are well looked after and left in keeping with the town as a whole.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

None.

STONEY LANE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

The street is unique in character being the only remaining cobbled thoroughfare in the town. It contains a significant number of listed buildings, most notably a group of ancient timber-framed former merchants' houses with double jetties and cellars on the left hand side of the street. There is a small detached house on the right hand side of the street overlooking the church and graveyard. Two further houses to the right complete the street scene.

CONSERVATION AREA

The lane is located wholly within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The lane rises sharply to the north-west with properties opening directly onto the cobbles.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

This is a residential area dating back to the 14th-15th centuries. On the south side of the lane, house numbers 1-8 inclusive are listed as is Rose Cottage and number 10 on the north side.

Number 1, Grade II* dates back to the 14th century. It is a timber framed and rendered building with a red plain tile roof gabled to the street. It exhibits modern panelled pargetting to the front. Internally the frame survives with arch braced building joists.

Number 2, Grade I dated at around 1410 is a 3-storey town house with a double jetty. It is timber framed and part rendered, with frame exposed externally and red plain tile roof. The cellars are original and many of the leaded casements are in original openings. It features curved jetty brackets and crenelated and moulded top plates. It has one original doorway with a four centred head.

Number 3, also Grade I, known as Dick Turpin's house, displays features similar to No 2 with frame exposed to Stoney Lane. The red brick chimney stack is of 16th century origin.

Number 4, another Grade I listed property it has features similar to number 2 with the addition of some original tracery window heads. There is a bow window to the ground floor and a much repaired 15th century door. Carved jetty brackets have carved spandrels, formerly on pilasters, of which only the moulded capitals remain. It is gabled to the street with a 16th century red brick chimney. Ground floor framing over the cellar is original.

Number 5 has a Grade II listing. It is a newer 18th century house, similarly timber framed and part rendered with a red plain tile roof. There is a bow shop window on the ground floor with one vertical sash above. It has plaster cornices beneath the eaves.

Number 6 also Grade II listed, is an early 19th century house, timber framed and part rendered with a red plain tile roof. Windows on both floors are vertical sashes. The door has a flat canopy on moulded brackets.

Number 7 is again Grade II listed. It is an 18th century dwelling, also timber framed and rendered with a red plain tile roof. The windows are a mixture of modern and 18th century leaded casements. The building is decorated with modern pargetting.

Number 8, Grade II listed is a small 18th century house, timber framed and rendered, with vertical sash windows and red brick chimney stack. It features decorative pargetting and has modern extensions and a walled courtyard to the rear. The cat weather vane is a delightful feature.

The back gardens, courtyards, and extensions of the houses on the south side of Stoney Lane extend through to Fishmarket Street forming its northern boundary. It is likely that some additions to the rear of these buildings have been added more recently.

In the north corner of the Lane is **Rose Cottage**, also Grade II. It lies to the east of the churchyard corner. It is an 18th century house, timber framed and rendered with red plain tile hipped roof. The chimney stacks are red brick and the windows on both floors are vertical sashes. There is a modern extension to the north end. The house has a small paved front courtyard. A rose emblem is featured on the gable end.

On the north side of the lane there are two further houses:

Number 10 is listed grade II. It is an 18th century building, timber framed and rendered, with grey slate hipped roof. It has a painted brick facing with dentilled eaves cornices. Upstairs windows are modern casements. Downstairs is an 18th century bow window with moulded fascia above. The entrance door has a flat canopy on brackets. This property has a paved corridor to one side and no garden. Its rear window overlooks the garden of the first property on Town Street. The triangular building on the corner of Town Street and Stoney Lane fits together with the two previously mentioned buildings. The internal structure of no 10 suggest that it was formerly part of the adjoining building.

Number 9 is the only house on Stoney Lane which is not listed. This white cottage with tiled roof and Georgian style windows does blend in well with the other buildings. It has a long high-walled garden, part paved, which stretches from the side of Candle Cottage to Rose Cottage. There is a small, barely visible building tucked in the corner of the garden, which supports a satellite dish.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Although now entirely residential, Stoney Lane with its cobbles and highly important timber framed former merchants' houses is a particularly important feature within the Thaxted townscape.

HIGHWAYS

The street is cobbled with no pavements and parking for residents only. There is no street lighting. The modern parking restriction notice is an eyesore. There is, on Town Street, more tasteful signage. Many of the houses display tubs of flowers at their front steps and hanging baskets.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

The views west looking up to the church are unique and do give a real sense of timelessness to this historic lane. Turning down to the east there is a glorious streetscape formed of the imposing colourful buildings of Town Street with a kaleidoscope of coloured rooftops and gables in the background.

KEY ELEMENTS

Mention has already been made of the cobbles, the historic houses and the inappropriate parking signage.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

There are several parts of the cobbled surface near to doorways which have been covered in concrete much of which is cracked or broken. It would improve the street greatly if the concrete were removed completely and the cobbles exposed and, if necessary, replaced.

Weeds do proliferate and it would be helpful if these were treated as they spoil the overall effect of the cobbled street. A member of the Parish Council currently treats the weeds but it would be more appropriate for the upkeep to be a matter for the relevant authority.

Most houses are in a good state of repair. The colourful flowerpots add to the charm of the street and could be supplemented to some effect by the householders.

Such an important street should be entirely free of car parking.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

None.

FISHMARKET STREET

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

The properties along the north side of Fishmarket Street are the rear entrances to the houses on the south side of Stoney Lane. These comprise tiny courtyards and a variety of rear extensions which extend to the boundary. There is one detached cottage at the top right hand side of the street.

The houses on the south side of the street include a number of listed terraced cottages. The properties towards the top end of the street are detached or semi-detached and newer in origin.

The street slopes upwards initially in parallel with Stoney Lane but later swinging away to the west.

CONSERVATION AREA

Fishmarket Street is wholly within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The street forms part of the original main road. It was effectively bypassed by the building of the Guildhall and later led to a midden located behind the cottages in Mill Row. It has a gentle gradient from left to right as does Stoney Lane.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The buildings on the north side are the back entrances to houses on the south side of Stoney Lane. These create a pleasing wall of shapes and colours which blend with the ancient character of the buildings at the lower end of Fishmarket Street.

There is a small lane half way up the street on the right hand side which connects with Stoney Lane and above that, in a corner of the old graveyard stands a Grade II listed detached house Church Cottage.

Church Cottage is a mid 19th century timber framed and weather-boarded house with grey slate roof. The building has vertical sash windows top and bottom. The central front door has a flat canopy on moulded brackets and architraves. It features pierced bargeboard and has grey and red brick chimney stacks. There is a modern garden room extension to the far end of the house. The courtyard is paved and fringed by an attractively patterned brick wall.

Numbers 1,2,3, at the foot of the south side of the street formerly housed the County Library. They are 17th century terraced cottages, Grade II listed, timber framed and rendered with red plain tiled roofs. The buildings have modern casement windows some of which are leaded. Their chimney stacks are of red brick.

The two houses that follow are Victorian in origin. One has double fronted bay windows with central door and casement windows upstairs. Until very recently it was a tea room and prior to that, a shop. The other is a brick built house with casement windows upstairs and double bay windows downstairs. The door is central to this former shop.

“Chat Sauvage” and Liberty Cottage follow. Both are listed Grade II. They are early 19th century timber framed houses, weather-boarded at the sides with painted brick at front and rear. The roofs of the two cottages are grey slate, their windows vertical sashes. The central chimney stacks are red brick.

There follows a pair of semi-detached red brick houses with modern casement windows and roofs gabled to the street. They have small front gardens and paved parking spaces with larger gardens behind. **Cecil Lodge** has a white wooden wicket fence. **Hillside House** sports very attractive pargetting in sage green depicting a tree on the end of the original house. An extension is built to the far end of the building a room depth back creating an L shape. The door nestles in the arm of the extension. The area in front of this is paved with attractive red stones.

Towards the far end of Fishmarket Street there are a number of detached houses. **Orchard End** is a seventies house with Georgian style windows, tiled roof and is painted green. There is a generous paved parking area and small grassed area concealed behind a stone built wall with attractive brick topping.

Opposite lies a cream two-storey detached dwelling with decorative ridge tiled gables to the street. A garage is attached to the side. It has sash windows and an attractive front porch. Raised flower beds decorate the front of the house.

Adjacent to this lies **Mill House** a two-storey detached dwelling with tiled roof and decorative pargetting. An attractive garden room has been attached at the far end of the building and there is a walled garden with pedestal gate. The garden is adjacent to the old churchyard.

Along the passage way leading from Fishmarket Street through to Mill End lies **Maud Lamb’s**, a Grade II listed 17th century (possibly earlier) cottage, timber framed and rendered with a thatched, half hipped roof. It is single storey with attics. The chimney stack is red brick. The windows are modern casements and there is one gabled dormer.

The gateways across the top of the street are the back entrances to the properties in Mill Row. They have longish ribbon gardens and the outhouses, as mentioned earlier. Some of the space is used for garaging. This area has a rather random appearance and could be improved.

Along the alley leading to the south end of Mill Row lies **Mill Cottage**, a Grade II listed 17th century house, timber framed and rendered with modern plain tile roof with dormers. The central chimney stacks are rendered.

The final buildings in the street are, first, **Rosecreat**, a post war house, with modern replacement windows, painted pebble-dashed walls, a single garage and off-road parking, secondly **The Haven**, a house set so far back from the road as to be barely visible. It has a high wooden gate and a long ribbon garden full of attractive flowers and foliage. **Dovehouse Yard**, is next, tucked back off the road with attractive garden in front and tarmac drive. It stands well back from the road and has a well-tended lawn in front of it. The driveway is in need of repair. Finally there is **Fernlea**, a brick built cottage. It has an overhanging porch with wooden pillars and a small walled front garden.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Entirely residential.

HIGHWAYS

The street is narrow in places and there is barely room for parking or for passing traffic. The turning circle end of the road is very badly potholed and needs resurfacing. The link through to Mill Row is currently pedestrian only but it may be necessary to provide access for hearses needing to reach the new graveyard.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

Looking west there are glimpses of the churchyard and windmill. Eastwards there is a similar view to that from Stoney Lane of Town Street and the streetscape of coloured buildings and roof tops beyond. The angle is different so the view is also slightly different.

KEY ELEMENTS

There are two small areas of land one half-way up on the right-hand side, the second a triangular portion just off the turning circle. These are currently tended by residents who have planted shrubs and flowers and cut the grass. The larger triangle sports a beautiful oak tree.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The properties are well tended. One fence and gate is in serious need of a coat of white paint. As the whole street is narrow, the issue of parking needs to be faced. As it is, many of the residents park off road. On the right hand side the back premises of Stoney Lane are kept reasonably tidy, though some could do better by organising space to accommodate their rubbish bins out of sight. The pavement on the left-hand side is rather patchwork in appearance and requires sympathetic restoration.

Those properties which are less in keeping with the street tend to be out of sight – back off the street or hidden behind a wall. The post-war properties are least in keeping with the street. If there comes a time when planning permission is sought to rebuild, alter or extend, it is to be hoped that the applicants would be required to adhere to stringent criteria to ensure a more sympathetic ‘fit’ with their surroundings.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

None.

MILL ROW

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

This is a picturesque area of the town. It is approached from the west via Fishmarket Street, two “kissing gates” leading to the windmill or the footpath past Maud Lamb’s cottage. There is a single detached house close to the first “kissing gate”, a row of terraced 19th century cottages on the south eastern side of the path and, past the second “kissing gate” at the northern end, a row of alms houses on the left side and “The Chantry”, on the right. The 19th century cottages were built as replacements for half-timbered houses which were destroyed by fire in the 1880s. This is wholly a residential area.

CONSERVATION AREA

This is wholly within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

A pathway runs from the windmill to the church entrance on its northern side. On the right side is an old wall that leads to an 18th century “kissing gate”. Behind the wall is the extension of the church’s graveyard. Houses line the left side running along the west edge of the churchyard. The old churchyard is reached via the “kissing gate” and here we find the alms houses and “The Chantry”. The area is flat, the path mostly gravelled.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The detached house nearest to the windmill is a new build encompassing many eco-friendly features including solar panels. It has a steeply raked thatched roof which overhangs the red brick building which is partially painted. It has a central stack for ventilation and heating purposes. The door is central and there are no windows along the visible side of the house. On the gable end of the building which is to the path there is an attractive, ground floor, conical-shaped extension, also thatched which provides a cottage-like feel. It has one dormer window to the rear of the house. This is an excellent example of a new build house well in keeping with its surroundings.

Towards the church on the right-hand side is a row of terraced cottages. They are brick built, rendered with slate roofs and red brick chimneys. In more recent times they have been extended. Behind the houses are gardens leading to what may have been wash houses or outside lavatories. Space has been cleared for car parking.

The first has sash windows and a central door with ornamental porch. The second has casement windows, the upstairs ones being at two different heights so the left side of this rendered building is taller and much wider than the right. The third has a door to the left with casement window on the right. The final tiny cottage has casement windows to the left of the door. All the cottages are painted in pastel colour, providing a pleasing outlook.

On the left-hand side, past the second “kissing gate” and in the original church grounds are the alms houses. They are Grade II listed and originally of 17th century origin but altered extensively in the 19th century. The building is timber framed and rendered with a red plain tile roof hipped at the south end. It is a single storey building with attics. There are 7 gabled dormers to the rear, The cottages have decorative pierced bargeboards with pendants at the north end above a lancet-

headed window, and square mullion and transom window with moulded label. The dormer at the south end is gabled and the chimney stacks are red brick. This Suffolk Pink building won an award in the 1970s for the sympathetic restoration work undertaken on it. It is divided internally to create four separate small dwellings each of which has its own door.

Opposite lies **The Chantry**, also Grade II listed. This was originally related to a chantry bequest and subsequently became an alms house. The Chantry is timber framed and rendered with a thatched roof. The door is vertically panelled. In the 19th century modern casement windows were added. There is a semi-circular, bull-nosed extension at the north-eastern end. The house has a sizeable garden adjoining the old churchyard.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

This is an attractive residential backwater most significant as a pedestrian route to the windmill.

HIGHWAYS

There is no scope at present for vehicular access. The pathway is of asphalt covered with fine grey gravel and flanked by traditional gas effect lamp standards. To the right of the main section of Mill Row a path branches off into the churchyard itself. It is entered through a “kissing gate” of which there are several in the town.

At present there is no access for hearses to the new graveyard. This issue may have to be addressed. This would no doubt involve creating a restricted access over the existing pedestrian-only route from Fishmarket Street.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

Having no houses on one side the area provides views of the churchyard, the windmill and the church itself.

KEY ELEMENTS

This is a picturesque area of the town. Nothing is out of character. It all feels as if it belongs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The cottages are well maintained and painted and the path is litter-free. The pots outside some of the cottages are an attractive feature and could be further enhanced by the residents.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

None.

MARGARET STREET FROM NEWBIGGEN STREET TO BELL LANE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

Margaret Street, a former 'back lane' which served Clarence House, is a narrow street leading from Newbiggen Street to Weaverhead Lane. It has become an increasingly busy thoroughfare in recent years as it is one of only two routes into the new housing estates off Wedow Road. It is also one of the two routes to the free car park in Margaret Street and to the Doctors' Surgery. The top section of Margaret Street is one-way and becomes two-way at the junction with Bell Lane.

CONSERVATION AREA

Margaret Street here is within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The street runs down hill with the rear wall of the Swan Inn to the right and housing and gardens to the left.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The rear wall of the Swan Inn runs part way down the hill on the right. Part of the wall has recently been replaced and as has been noted elsewhere, it consists of modern brickwork, where older bricks would have offered a more suitable alternative. Continuing down the road on the right-hand side beyond The Swan is a small brick built house of sympathetic design called **The Wee House**. This has been built on the site of a former public lavatory. Further down the road and within the curtilage of Clarence House, is **The White House**, which fronts onto Watling Street. This is a two-storey ancillary building of red brick and render, weather boarding, original windows, corrugated iron roof and single chimney. The rear of **Clarence House**, which fronts onto Watling Street, is the last house on the right-hand section of this street. The fine boundary wall is interrupted by pillars topped with spherical finials which frame a sturdy iron gate through which the house and its rear lawns can be seen. The back of Clarence House is almost as elegant as its front, with its perfectly proportioned windows, tall chimneys and rich red brick.

On the left-hand side of Margaret Street, are two houses of note that back onto Vicarage Lane (**nos. 1 and 2 Margaret Street**). The houses are red brick Victorian buildings with tiled roofs and a central chimney stack. There is decorative barge boarding to the side elevations and also to the dormer windows of no. 2. The flat roof extensions to the rear detract. The early windows and rubbed brick lintels are in keeping with the Conservation Area adding character albeit of a different note.

The flint wall that continues down the left-hand side of the road borders the Conservation Garden, which is owned by the Parish Council and maintained by a group of local volunteer gardeners. The garden is open to the public at week-ends when the gate is opened and you can see the variegated greenery of a large, natural garden with established trees and shrubs. When the gate is closed, which it is for most of the time, the rustic effect is spoiled by two large 'no parking' notices, one in bright blue, and a notice board either side, one of which is unused. The gate itself is in need of refurbishment and a review of the signage and trappings of bureaucracy that spoil it.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

This is a pleasant section of Margaret Street, despite the traffic. It slopes downhill towards Bell Lane and is partly bordered by the listed Clarence House wall on one side and an attractive flint wall

enclosing the Conservation Garden on the other. When it is quiet, it has a rural feel with the trees of the Conservation Garden nodding over the wall on the left, and the glimpse of Clarence House Garden through the gate on the right, and the pristine lawns of Margaret Street Garden just beyond the junction with Bell Lane.

HIGHWAYS

Access to Margaret Street is difficult for cars coming from Newbiggen Street as the entrance is narrow and difficult to see. It is also close to the blind bend that takes Newbiggen Street round The Swan. Obviously, Margaret Street was never intended to take so much through-traffic, and it is difficult to see how access could be improved.

Parking is allowed on the left-hand side of the road from Vicarage Lane to Bell Lane, which means that there is only room for one car on the road down the hill to Bell Lane. As there is no pathway for pedestrians, they have to take refuge on a grass verge if a vehicle is passing.

Negotiating the turning into Bell Lane is difficult for motorists from either direction and could be made easier if parking restrictions were imposed on the left-hand side for a few metres.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

The church can be seen above the roofs of the houses in this section of the road, and there is an excellent glimpse of the west side of the church through the pedestrian entrance to The Swan.

The best view, though, is through the bars of the gate of Clarence House garden, where the roof line of the fine early 18th century house is juxtaposed against the slender church spire piercing the sky.

KEY ELEMENTS

There are certainly difficulties for pedestrians walking this section, indeed all sections- of Margaret Street. A well-tended grass verge would help at the top end, and it is difficult to see why this has been allowed to become overgrown. The danger to pedestrians (and cars) is exacerbated by the long stretch of parked cars on the left-hand side. If the parking area were reduced in length this would help pedestrians and motorists alike. With a free car park yards down the road, there is no obvious reason for this not to happen.

The principal features are undoubtedly the fine rear elevation of Clarence House glimpsed through its iron gate but when traffic-free the street as a whole has the character of a quiet backwater.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The well-kept lawns of Margaret Street Gardens throw into the sharp relief the unkempt verges across the other side of Bell Lane. These also detract from the setting of Clarence House. The gate to the conservation garden could be improved by a coat of paint and the removal of some of the paraphernalia on and around it.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There is no scope for development in this area of Margaret Street.

VICARAGE LANE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

Vicarage Lane is a narrow lane leading off Margaret Street with no through way for vehicles. One side of the lane largely comprises a mixture of old lap-boarded workshops, sheds and garages which belong to houses fronting Newbiggen Street. Interspersed with these are three cottages which face into the lane. The right-hand side of the lane (from the Margaret Street end) comprises a mix of 20th century housing and a section of original wall which has its own separate heritage listing. In essence, Vicarage Lane is a mixture of ancient and modern.

The lane has no footpath and no room for parked cars. It provides access for vehicles and is sufficiently wide to provide for services. At the end of the lane is the former vicarage from whence the lane gets its name. There is also a pedestrian entrance to Vicarage Mead, a retirement home for the elderly and opposite, pedestrian access to Newbiggen Street via an alley running by the side of the old vicarage. This alley used to be called Duckwaddling Alley but is now unnamed.

CONSERVATION AREA

The Newbiggen Street side of Vicarage Lane is within the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The road runs slightly uphill from the junction with Margaret Street. It is closely flanked with buildings on the left side and the gardens and drives of the modern houses to the right. An old, 18th century wall runs part way along this side of the lane.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The key features of Vicarage Lane are the black painted weather-board workshops along the left-hand side. These are mostly in good condition, though sometimes attempts to keep them in good repair and make them more usable unwittingly destroys their character. One has had stained glass windows added and a centralised door that makes it look more like a small wooden house than a workshop. Others are still used as workshops.

The 18th century wall that runs part way down the right side is a potentially lovely feature but is in poor condition. Spalling and general deterioration was noted in the Thaxted Conservation Area Appraisal of 2012, which stated that consideration should be given to entering this part of the wall on the Buildings at Risk Register. It is not known if this has been done, but clearly no restoration has taken place since that report was written.

Although not strictly in Vicarage Lane, the old water pump in the alley formerly known as Duckwaddling, can be seen from the north end of the lane and is worth a mention. This pump provides another link with the past, but though it is restored, it is somewhat obscured by weeds, giving the alley an unkempt look and detracting from the impact of this feature.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Despite the two faces of Vicarage Lane, the overriding impression is of a time gone by. This was once a back lane for the weavers who lived in the houses fronting Newbiggen Street, which made it possible for them to take in deliveries and despatch their cloth and generally carry out their trade.

Even though some of the workshops have been turned into garages with roll-up doors, the black painted weather board of the others remains dominant and bears witness to the history of this little back street.

HIGHWAYS

The Council has done well to clear all parked cars from this lane. Some of the houses on the conservation side have tiny spaces between houses where residents manage to squeeze their cars. Parking has also been improved by providing the bungalows on the opposite side of the road with large parking spaces. These are disproportionate in size to the modest bungalows and takes up a large part of their well-kept, colourful front gardens. This incongruity is highlighted by the shiny black asphalt finish of the parking spaces. A practical solution to parking has been reached, but no thought has been given to the character of the lane in achieving this.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

There is a fine view of the church tower from Vicarage Lane, with the time on the clock being clearly visible even from the north end. From some angles, the view must look much the same as it did when Conrad Noel strode down the lane to take mass a hundred years ago.

KEY ELEMENTS

There is a difficulty when only one side of a road is in the Conservation Area, as the same planning rules do not apply to both sides, which could lead to development that could have a detrimental effect on the character and nature of the road. A particularly sensitive approach is needed to all planning applications in hybrid roads such as Vicarage Lane or their history could be destroyed for ever.

There does not seem to be quite so much care taken to preserve heritage features if buildings are industrial or rural rather than domestic, yet these wooden structures are more vulnerable to time and weather. Vicarage Lane is also tucked away out of the public eye and not likely to attract much attention. Tucked away treasures like these need a champion.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

If all the workshops are eventually turned into a row of garages, a historic memorial to the weavers of Newbiggen Street will be destroyed. There needs to be a policy to preserve what is left and to stop too much urbanisation of buildings that could be dismissed as 'just sheds'.

There should also be a moratorium on adding modern sheds and extensions. Vicarage Lane is of more significance than 'just the back' of more important Newbiggen Street houses. If an extension would not be allowed at the front of a house it should not be allowed at the back in a conservation area. A new shed has been erected towards the Margaret Street end of Vicarage Lane, which is of untreated wood, obviously 21st century and out of character with the old workshops in scale and design. This detracts considerably from the charm of the traditional wooden buildings.

Consideration should also be given to the colour and finish of these old buildings just as there should be a colour palette for the front of the houses. The two untreated sheds currently in Vicarage Lane

could be painted purple in the future. Similar care should be taken to use finishes that are in character with the surroundings when resurfacing roads.

The section of the Conservation Garden wall in Vicarage Lane needs to be reviewed and restored before it is too late.

Finally, the name of Duckwaddling Alley should be reinstated and a sign erected at the Vicarage Lane end of the alley. This would be an evocative reminder of the once rural nature of this part of Thaxted – and such a characterful name should not be allowed to die out.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There is no scope for development in Vicarage Lane.

BOLFORD STREET

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

This street gives entry to the town from the south-west. It winds up the hill towards the church. The buildings are a mixture of large detached properties, terraced cottages, a modern hall and the United Reform church. Some of the buildings are listed. The area was badly affected by fire in the 1880s, with many of the old timber framed properties destroyed. Recent development is for the most part in harmony with the street as a whole.

CONSERVATION AREA

Most of the street within the built-up area is in the Conservation Area. The limit is a property called Roseville.

TOPOGRAPHY

The street winds its way quite steeply up to the church from the south-west. There is no pathway on the right side before number 30 and on the left before "Borough Hill".

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The first property on the right **Borough Farmhouse** is a late 14th century Grade II* listed house with early 16th century extensions. It is timber framed and rendered, with red plain tile roofs. The west range is a late 14th century open hall house, with floored end bay to the west end with a jettied cross wing to the east, the latter formerly gabled, is now over sailed. The timber frame is exposed externally with multiple bracing. The 16th century extension to the east has a long wall jetty. The building is set well back off the road and fronted by a well-maintained strip of lawn. Behind it lies a walled garden and the original outbuildings of the farm. The land between this property and the next some distance along the road is owned by The Borough.

Greensleeves was built in the 1930s by Cedric Arnold and is set high back off the road. It had a large garden, views over the countryside from all windows and an attractive flint wall to the front.

Numbers 28 and 30 are detached modern houses with views over the fields. No 28 also has a detached garage.

On the north side of the street **Numbers 24 and 26** are Grade II listed cottages built in the 17th century, possibly earlier and extensively altered in the 20th century. They are timber-framed and plastered with modern plain tile roof. They are single storey with attics. The windows are modern casements and there are three gabled dormers.

Next door **No 22** also Grade II listed is an early 19th century cottage in flint with red brick dressings and red plain tile roof with chimney stack. It has leaded casements that have segmental heads to the ground floor.

No 20, Daisy's, is a modern detached house with pretty part-walled front garden with a block-paved drive and open aspect to the rear.

No's 12 and 14 are Grade II listed houses dated to the late 16th or early 17th century, timber framed and rendered with red brick plain tiles and a most attractive 18th century red brick front. There are 19th century casements on first floor and double hung sashes to the ground floor. A modern

extension has been built to the rear with a courtyard garden to the side. In common with nearly all the cottages along Bolford Street, it opens directly on to the pavement.

No 8 is a detached modern house set back off the road behind an attractive high red brick wall with a detached double garage, shingle drive and raised beds.

Rails Farmhouse (No 6) Grade II listed is a 16th century (possibly earlier) timber framed and rendered house with a red plain tile roof. The building has a gabled cross-wing at its east end and a modern extension to the west. Windows are double hung vertical sashes. There is a gabled wing to the rear.

No 4 is a single storey detached building housing an office based business (QM).

On the south side of the street No 23 is a Grade II listed 19th century house, timber framed and rendered with a grey slate roof and double hung vertical sash windows. There is a small bow window at the east end and red brick chimney. Again this is set back from the edge of the road.

No's 9,11,15,17 are all Grade II listed 17th century cottages, timber framed and rendered with red plain tiled roofs and red brick chimneys. All have been subject to "modernisation" in the late 19th century as a result of fire. They have modern pargetted plasterwork and are currently painted in autumnal shades. They open again straight to the pavement.

These listed buildings are interspersed with more modern and, in some cases, renovated properties.

No 23 Roseville is a large weather-boarded house with bay windows, big beautifully tended garden and sloping drive. It has an extension with a dormer window which is tiled and rendered with a wrought iron fence set in a stone wall.

The United Reform Church on the north side of the street stands in its own grounds with wrought iron fence and graveyard to the rear. It is very large and arguably, out of scale with its surroundings, a testimony to the popularity of nonconformity in Thaxted during the Victorian period.

Adjacent to the URC is a large detached two storey new build brick house with pink render. It has additional outbuildings but is set well back off the road behind a brick wall and is barely visible. The colour helps it to blend well into the street.

19 and 21 are brick built cottages with leaded windows and tiled roofs.

No 7 is a detached building with slate roof and casement windows together with a modern extension.

Bolford Street Hall is a modern single storey building set well back off the road with car parking and access to the graveyard from its rear gate. The site was formerly a school. Nowadays it is used for many purposes including nursery, classes, weddings and other functions daytime or evening, family celebrations and also as a polling station on election days. Whilst not an inherently attractive building it is functional and is sufficiently far back from the road to be near invisible to passers-by. Its long sloping tiled roof and red brick construction help it to blend in with its surroundings.

Two properties remain; a modern brick and render detached building with modern sash windows and tiled roof with off road parking, and garden to rear. And next to it **The Old Engine House**, (formerly the Fire Station) an attractive detached property with sash windows and a thatched roof. Next door is the engine house.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Despite the impact of the 1880s fire, the street as a whole fits in well with the ancient core. The United Reform church is out of scale but is a statement building in its own right. Most important, the road forms a particularly picturesque approach to the town, with church and windmill forming a background as the road winds uphill.

HIGHWAYS

Bolford Street is a through road leading to the town centre. Residents park on either side and the road can be dangerous to traffic and pedestrians alike. It is used by buses, heavy lorries and on at least one occasion, tank transporters from the nearby army base. The lack of footpaths, in places, add to the dangers.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

Glimpses of the church and windmill make this one of the most attractive roads into the town.

KEY ELEMENTS

Clearly the appearance of the church and windmill add to the picturesque quality of the street. The Borough is a striking property, forming as it does one part of the ring of farms that surrounded the town in medieval times. Equally interesting are the groups of listed terraced cottages which are so typical of the town. The properties are, for the most part, maintained and cherished. The URC may not be entirely in character yet somehow its idiosyncratic nature would be missed from its place. It is interesting how oddly juxtaposed buildings grow to belong together with time.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The issue of the lack of pavements at the lower end of the street is a problem. The road is unsuited to heavy traffic and, with parking on both sides, positively dangerous at times.

Care should be taken to preserve the quality and harmony of the buildings on this, a most attractive entrance to the town.

A particular issue is the state of the United Reform Church. There are concerns about its structural integrity with major cracking in some walls. Its use as a place of worship is also now limited. A project for alternative use needs to be considered which would result in its restoration.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

None other than alternative use of the URC.

NEWBIGGEN STREET (WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA)

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

Newbiggen Street is part of Thaxted's main thoroughfare, taking traffic from Saffron Walden to the north and through the town to destinations towards Dunmow, Elsenham and the Bardfields. It runs from Thaxted's northern limits to The Swan, where the road makes a steep left-hand bend, opposite the church.

Newbiggen Street has been described as "one of the prettiest streets in England" with its rows of ancient, colour-washed houses jostling against each other companionably. The street is urban in character, the terraces of houses producing the effect of continuous 'walls' of buildings on both sides, providing a satisfying strong tie to the heart of the town. The houses form an interesting mix. The larger buildings for the most part lie to the western side of the street, with smaller, possibly former weavers' cottages, to the east. Facades are predominantly rendered and colour washed, mostly in traditional pastel shades, though some more strident colours have added a jarring note in recent years.

Newbiggen Street forms part of the B184. It has become increasingly busy during the latter part of the twentieth century and even worse in terms of heavy vehicles using this route in this century. Large lorries, which should be using the M11, thunder through at regular intervals. Newbiggen Street is narrow by modern standards and large lorries disrupt and create vibrations which have the potential to damage ancient buildings. The turning at the Swan is particularly dangerous.

The volume of traffic is of concern for safety, something compounded by the extensive parking along the lower part of the street towards the Swan. As a result of a consultation between Essex Highways Authority and the Parish Council, a scheme was introduced in 2014, to allow cars to park legally on the pavement. Many residents have found this makes walking along Newbiggen Street difficult, unless in single file, and crossing the street dangerous because of obscured vision. The effect of parked cars upon the visual impact of this main entrance to Thaxted has resulted in almost universal dismay: one of the prettiest streets in England has become a car park.

CONSERVATION AREA

Newbiggen Street is partly within the Conservation Area, number 69 forming the boundary.

TOPOGRAPHY

Newbiggen Street is flat for its full length. There is limited vegetation due to the continuous building frontages.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The majority of houses in the Conservation Area are Grade II listed. Some of the houses stem from the 14th and 15th centuries, though altered over time. These ancient houses are mainly gable end on to the east side of the road. They include numbers 6, 18, 20, 34 and 36, and numbers 40 and 42, which was originally a hall house, and 48, another small house. On the West side, only number 5 is of great age, being a 15th century house and shop.

Most of the houses are timber framed and rendered. This means that they are liable to move, resulting in cracks in walls, sloping floors and crooked window frames. The houses remain sound if not symmetrical. Stripping plaster from the timbers of timber framed buildings is a more modern

fashion and can look quaint. There are very few timbers visible on the outside walls of houses in Newbiggen Street, no.25 being the exception, and it stands out for that reason.

It is traditional in Thaxted that the render on these houses is colour washed in a variety of pastel shades. Unfortunately, this tradition has not been kept up on some houses during recent years. Vivid colours such as bright green and orange strike a discordant note in a conservation area. . They jar the senses and destroy the harmony and setting of these wonderful old buildings. The Thaxted Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals of 2012 states that it is "highly important that sensitive, muted and discreet colour continues to be used on fine listed buildings." This advice seems to have been forgotten in the last four years, with a subsequent deleterious effect on the visual impact of Newbiggen Street.

A record and description of the individual listed buildings in Newbiggen Street has been made by Historic England. The description below is a broad-brush view of the street as it runs from The Swan to the limits of the Conservation Area at number 69 on the West side and number 50, the Old Vicarage, now called Father Jack's, on the East side.

- **East side:**

Nos. 2 and 4 are 17th century timber framed and brick clad buildings that form the return front to The Swan. The weatherboarded barn adjoining no.4 to the North side is 18th century.

No. 6 is a small early 15th century house, timber framed and rendered, with much of the original internal frame intact. From here to No. 48 is a continuous terrace of houses broken at last by a small alleyway leading to Vicarage Lane. This used to be called Duckwaddle Alley, but the name, sadly, has fallen out of use.

All the houses on this side of the road are listed, up to and including no.50, Father Jack's, the former vicarage. Most are timber framed and rendered. The shape, size and style of the houses varies every few feet: not surprisingly as they range in age from the late 14th century to the mid-19th century, with modifications to suit the changes of the intervening centuries .

Nos.8 to 10 are small 18th century cottages, probably built for the workers in the burgeoning weaving trade, and of Group Listed value only.

No.14 is 17th century with 19th century alterations. It has a shop front at the north end but is now a private dwelling.

No.16, another small cottage, is early 16th century, or earlier, with the addition of some interesting modern pargetting. Examples of the East Anglian tradition of decorating the plaster of timber framed buildings can be seen on many of the Newbiggen Street houses in the Conservation Area.

Nos.18 and 20 are now one house, built in the late 15th or early 16th century as an open hall house. It has two gabled dormer windows with casements and the original crown post roof. It is pargetted in panels.

Nos. 22 and 24 are latecomers to the street being early 19th century brick and timber houses.

Nos. 26 and 28 are late 18th century cottages with 20th century alterations. They are rendered brick, but the uneven surface of the render, despite its tasteful pastel paint, looks somewhat out of place against the smooth render of earlier centuries.

Nos.30 and 32 are a mid-19th century pair of houses with yellow stock brick frontages. No.32 has a plaque on the front celebrating the constitution of the Morris Ring on the 2nd June, 1934.

Nos.34 and 36 are late 14th and early 15th century houses extensively altered in the 16th and 19th century. The original internal framing is exposed.

Nos.40 and 42 were originally a hall house dating from the 15th century. It has a gabled cross-wing at the south end. There is pargetting on the external walls, and inside the timber framing remains visible.

Nos.44 and 46 are both 17th century houses. No.46 has some interesting pargetting of sheep, cows and thistles included in the pattern.

No.48 and 50a form the two sides of Duckwaddle Alley. No.48 is a 17th century house, timber framed and rendered with weatherboarding at the back. It has a small 19th century bow window at the north end. No.50a is a small early 15th century house, gable end to the street. It is timber framed, plastered and weather-boarded. Named The Coach House, it bears a plaque dedicated to the Morris dancing that used to take place there when this tradition was revived by Miriam Noel during the early 20th century. Her husband, Conrad, was a controversial Vicar of Thaxted. This house was probably part of the vicarage estate when the dance practices were held. The plaque reads: "Thaxted Morris danced here 1911-1939" and pays tribute to Miriam and Conrad Noel.

No.50b, Applebarn, formerly an outbuilding belonging to the vicarage, lies approximately 3 metres to the South West of Father Jack's and is now a small dwelling. It may have been an earlier guildhall.

No.50, Father Jack's, the former vicarage, ends the unbroken line of houses on this side of Newbiggen Street. It is a large 17th century house with subsequent alterations. It originally stood in considerable grounds, which extended almost to the current town sign in Newbiggen Street. The impressively tall yew hedge that borders the house next door, and is listed, was part of the vicarage garden, as was the land on which several modern houses now stand. Those which were once part of the vicarage garden can be identified by the large, mature trees that form an elegant screen to their front gardens. The Church sold the house and grounds for development in the 1980s.

Father Jack's is timber framed and rendered, with pargetting in panels on the walls. It has two large bay windows with flat tops at the front of the house and the original red brick chimney stacks. There is a staircase tower at the rear, with an 18th century stair window with semi-circular head. There is an early 18th century pediment door case at the east end (moved from the south end in the 1980s) with a 6 panel door. There is a Blue Plaque on the front wall stating that Conrad Noel lived there from 1896-1942, "Priest, writer and Christian Socialist".

- **West Side:**

On the West side of Newbiggen Street, the numbering is erratic and the houses tend to be bigger. The terraced 'wall' effect is still a feature of this side of the street. Nos.1,3,5,7 and 9 are all joined before the first break in the terrace.

No.1 is an early 19th century house with 19th century and 20th century shop fronts. This house still operates as a shop, with living accommodation above.

No.3 is also 19th century and old photographs show that its render was painted black at the end of the 19th century. Thankfully, it is now pink.

No.5 was a house and shop originally, built in the 15th century. The ground floor has two shop windows with four centred heads, but, in its early days, it would have had two let-down counters where the widows are now, which would have allowed the shopkeeper to show his wares. The house was originally jettied and is now underbuilt. There are leaded casement windows on the first floor, and inside much of the original timber frame remains.

No.7, The Old Bakehouse, is late 16th or early 17th century. It is timber framed and rendered, with pargetted panels in a combed pattern.

No.9 is a 16th century house with a modern porch on timber brackets.

Nos.11 and 15 were built in the late 18th or early 19th century, and have been converted into one house. It is painted brick with gauged brick arches. On the centre front there is an iron tie rod boss with a floral motif.

After this house, there is a gap, with a bus shelter and access to a small winding alley which enables pedestrian access to Watling Lane.

No.21, formerly The Bull Inn, is a late 15th or early 16th century building, now business premises, though it looks like a house from the outside. It is timber framed and rendered, with a hip roof at the south end. The doorways have flat canopies on brackets, with pilasters and rectangular fanlights. The iron bracket that once held the inn sign is still in place. There is a modern extension and parking at the rear.

No.23, The Court House, is an impressive 16th century house, extensively altered in the late 18th century. It has a cart way at the North end, now a garage entrance, but it does not break the line of houses as the entrance is concealed by double gates.

No.25 is the only house in Newbiggen Street with its timber frame exposed at the front. It is a mid-17th century house, originally jettied at the south end and now underbuilt. The front has been partially rebuilt and extended north. It has a four centred door head and side light with mullions. There is also an iron bracket on the wall that may indicate that the building was once an inn.

Nos.27,29 and 31 – These three cottages were originally four, built in the early 19th century. No.31 has the original door surrounds with pilasters, consoles and flat canopies.

No.33 is 17th century, timber framed and rendered.

No.35 is 17th century, timber framed and rendered with a corrugated iron roof.

Nos. 37 and 39 are not listed, and break the line of houses by having long front gardens and being set back from the road.

No.41, Wedgewood Cottage, is a 16th century house with a long wall jetty on small brackets.

No.43 was a group of 17th century cottages, extensively rebuilt in the 20th century. They are rendered and timber framed.

Nos.45 and 47, now one house, is late 16th or early 17th century with a half-hipped roof and an original chimney stack.

Nos.51 and 53 are early 18th century cottages, with long front gardens set back from the road. Unlike nos.37 and 39, they are Grade II Listed.

No.55 is an 18th century thatched cottage with a gabled dormer and hipped roof.

No.57, also 18th century, has a half hipped thatched roof and an original red brick chimney stack.

At this point the street becomes fragmented, with spasmodic modern development leaving gaps between houses that are set back from the road. Insoll calls them "gap-toothed", which is an apt description. **Nos. 57a, 59, 63, 65 and 65** are, however, still in the Conservation Area, and are not in harmony with the close-knit frontages of the rest of this part of Newbiggen Street. This disharmony is exacerbated if they are painted in vivid modern colours. The juxtaposition of a strikingly bright modern house against an 18th century thatched cottage detracts from both. It also raises the question as to whether all houses in the Conservation Area, not just the listed ones, should be painted in colours from a common palette of traditional pastel colours.

Nos.67 and 69 were originally a detached farm house dating to the 17th century, subsequently they lost status and were extended to form a terrace of three cottages, now two houses. They are timber framed and rendered with modern pargetting. They have flat canopies and pilasters to doors with early chimneys, all of which have been modernised above roof level. The Conservation Area ends here on the West side of Newbiggen Street.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Newbiggen Street is an attractive area full of half-timbered houses painted in a range of colours. Its appeal is damaged by the high levels of traffic that pass through it; a problem compounded by residential parking on both sides.

HIGHWAYS

Parking – Parking on the pavement in Newbiggen Street was a two-year trial instigated by the Parish Council in 2014 after consultation with Essex Highways Authority. The trial ends in Autumn 2016. Various scenarios were explored in an attempt to deal with the flow of traffic and the wishes of

residents to park their cars outside their houses. The result of this exercise was published in a report: 'Feasibility Study into Footway Parking Arrangements in Newbiggen Street'. Three other options were considered during the study but were rejected as taking too long to deliver or too expensive - or both. The result has been an aesthetic disaster. It is no longer possible to see the stretch of historic houses along the street; the view is one of parked cars and vans.

Cars parked on the pavement have also led to difficulties for pedestrians using the footpath for what it is intended - walking. This is particularly the case for those pushing a buggy or using a wheelchair or mobility scooter. Clearly, a paper exercise was done in measuring a sufficient gap for pedestrians to walk, but many of the houses have raised steps that take up pavement space, and impede wheels or trip up feet. Other hazards on the pavement, such as benches and some ill-placed flower pots, though attractive, make matters worse: walking along Newbiggen Street is like an obstacle race.

Parked cars on the pavement also pose a danger for those crossing the road because they cannot see oncoming traffic from between the parked vehicles. Little consideration has been given, either, to residents who live in cottages with small windows that front onto Newbiggen Street and are plunged into darkness when a car is parked outside their window. It is a sad fact that the car has taken precedence over people in Newbiggen Street.

There is a conflict of interests here between those who would restore the beauty of the street at a stroke by putting double yellow lines down the length of the street and residents who, naturally, want to park their cars outside their houses. The problem is exacerbated by some residents having two or even three cars and others who have garages or off-road parking facilities but fail to use them. The only fair compromise would seem to be 'residents only' parking, which would allow residents to purchase a parking space if they needed one. Parking could then be limited to one side of the road or alternate sides. Those with multiple cars could purchase unsold parking spaces or use the free car park 100 metres away. An additional bonus would be the slowing down of traffic owing to the presence of parked cars on the road - a simple and cheap traffic-calming measure.

It is interesting to note that the Feasibility Study states that a residential parking scheme "may be an option for the future". Perhaps we have now reached that stage. Such a decision would require a long engagement process, but the sooner this was started, the sooner a compromise solution could be reached. It is also worthy of note that Essex Highways did not view the current option of delineating studs on the pavement favourably because of damage to the footway by parked cars, the uncertainty over legal responsibility should there be a collision between a vehicle and a pedestrian on the footway, and possible territorial disputes between neighbours. The latter has already become an issue.

Speed of traffic – The speed at which traffic flows along Newbiggen Street is another major issue for residents. When asked to register any concerns they had about the development of Thaxted at a Neighbourhood Plan event (28th January, 2016), traffic volume and speed was the most frequently mentioned. Several speed surveys have been carried out (one is included in the Feasibility Study). It seems that the 30mph limit is not broken regularly by drivers, yet the residents' perception that vehicles are travelling too fast is almost universal. To keep demonstrating that the 30mph speed limit is observed by most drivers by repeated traffic surveys is not helpful. It is the volume of traffic, the number of heavy vehicles which shake ancient buildings to their foundations, the noise of the traffic which bounces off the terraced houses which front straight onto the pavement, the difficulty in crossing the road which makes a 30 mph too fast for a road with the nature and history of

Newbiggen Street. One sure way of slowing traffic down would be to have some parking on the road again.

Footnote: There has been ongoing protest at Parish Council meetings, and correspondence to various bodies about parking and traffic speed. A meeting of the Highways Committee of the Parish Council at which the public could express their views was called on 19th May, 2016. The Parish Council has dutifully passed on residents' concerns to the Highways Liaison Officer for Essex County Council (email 26th April, 2016); the response discouraged any attempt to pursue the issue further and presupposed that residents would oppose a resident parking permit scheme on the grounds of the £70 per annum fee. This view needs to be tested.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

The main view in Newbiggen Street is the street itself: the variety of shapes and finishes, the historic reminders that people have lived in this street for generations and that we, with our very different 21st century priorities, are just passing through. The roofs of the houses, higgledy-piggledy as they are, also provide a wonderful roofscape, particularly if you are able to look down on them.

The spire of the church can be seen clearly from the west side of the street with the view opening up at the Court House. To the right of the Church, the sails of the windmill form a backdrop to the alms houses within the churchyard. It is one of the iconic views of Thaxted.

KEY ELEMENTS

Clearly, the volume and speed of traffic in Newbiggen Street is a major issue, as is parking. This cannot be approached in a piecemeal fashion. Thaxted residents have to decide what their priorities are and produce a plan for the future, as things are only going to get worse. The current situation with parking on the pavement is a case in point: it solved one problem and created others. Priority was given to the car, but none to the heritage and history of Newbiggen Street, and not enough to pedestrians.

Any solution will have its downside, the proliferation of street 'furniture' that accompanies any scheme, being one. A survey of parking spaces and garages in Watling Lane, behind Newbiggen Street, would help to establish how many parking spaces were needed in Newbiggen Street. Visits to other historic centres to see their solution to signage could open up possibilities for Thaxted. At the other extreme, a relief road around the town would provide an environment more suited to the needs of its historic core.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

A relatively straightforward improvement would be to have a palette of pastel colours from which residents in the Conservation Area could choose to paint their houses. It seems strange that this is not already in place in such an important historic town.

Perhaps residents should be reminded that Newbiggen Street was described as one of the prettiest streets in England, and work out ways to restore it to meet that that description again.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There is no scope for development in Newbiggen Street.



A street by street review
Beyond the Conservation Area

BARDFIELD ROAD, MAGDALENE GREEN AND BARNARD'S FIELD

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

The area is characterised by low/medium grade housing, much of it ex-Council stock constructed during the middle of the 20th century. Development is generally of a ribbon pattern although Magdalene Green represents a spur off the main Bardfield Road leading to an area of open space around which the housing is arranged. Barnard's Field is a more recent development of small estate houses.

Included within the sector however, are two former farm houses and yards (Levetts and Claypits) both of which may offer some scope for development, and the Thaxted Fire Station.

CONSERVATION AREA

The sector envelope is entirely outside the Conservation Area although it does abut the boundary at the western end where it adjoins the school and at Claypits Farm.

TOPOGRAPHY

The land slopes gently down from east to west.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **From the west, north side of Bardfield Road:**

Magdalene Green acts as the western boundary of the area being assessed. The primary school lies to the west whilst on the east side of the road are a pair of small detached houses probably constructed within the last twenty years. Immediately to the north on the east side is an area of grass used by the school as a sports and play area. From here on development is of a continuous form, all housing constructed during the middle of the 20th century by the local authority, principally in the form of pairs of semi-detached units. The exceptions are numbers 33-38 which are pairs of bungalows. Construction is generally of partially rendered brick with cement tiled pitched roofs and the large green around which most of the houses are built provides a pleasant open environment.

- **Returning to Bardfield Road north side:**

A grassed bank separates the main road from a parallel estate road serving Wainsfield Villas. This development comprises twelve ex-local authority units arranged as pairs of semis set back in a shallow crescent formation. They are pebble-dashed with cement tiled roofs. At the eastern end is an individual bungalow known as The Anchorage.

- **At this point turning to the north is Barnard's Field:**

This is a more recent development of late 20th/early 21st century small detached and semi-detached houses. The units are effectively arranged in two parts. Numbers 1-25 are within a close off to the right with numbers 26-43 arranged around a continuation of the central estate road. At

the far end a recently completed scheme of eight small units has provided an extension known as Oliver's Close. At the bend in the road is a larger block, the former Barn Babies nursery which is now being converted to seven small flats with two further new units in an extension to the rear (planning permission UTT/15/1959/FUL granted September 2015).

- **Returning to Bardfield Road north side:**

Numbers 14-45 are further pairs of semi-detached ex-local authority houses with four individual detached units beyond including one bungalow, all constructed probably during the 1960s/70s. At the extreme east end of the study area on the north side is Levett's Farm. The former farmhouse has been rebuilt to provide a larger individual dwelling whilst a timber clad barn has been rebuilt to create a further dwelling known as Levett's Great Barn. Adjacent though, are unconverted former farm buildings set on a narrow strip of land lying north/south. This site may provide scope for limited new development. There is also a roadway forming an access to the former Knights yard. Knights were a local road surfacing company. The yard is currently disused and if it were ever redeveloped the access road would no doubt have to service whatever was built in its place.

- **Bardfield Road south side, from the east:**

Numbers 1-20, Claypitts Villas are pairs of former local authority semis of brick and tile construction again dating from the mid-20th century. Townfield (numbers 1-9) is a development of more individual private houses of brick and tile construction dating probably from the 1970s. The character then changes with a mix of older and infill units. A period thatched cottage known as Coldham's Fee has recently been re-roofed and a modern cottage style unit with part weather-boarded elevations has been constructed in front of it. Then Woodbine Cottage, a small late Victorian dwelling with rough rendered elevations and a slate roof adjoins a footpath leading southwards to open fields. Then Appledore, a modern bungalow, Hillside Cottage (a thatched period cottage with restored/converted outbuildings) and Swallows (a modern individual detached house). The next site going west is the fire station, a brick built unit with associated garage set on a grassed and hard surfaced site with its associated training tower. Behind it a high bank rises up to the former Claypitts farm buildings. Then an area of tarmac surfaced car park designated for coaches. The grassed bank continues behind it with leylandii screening the former farm buildings. Finally, Claypitts Farm buildings themselves comprise a group of mixed buildings to the front (part timber, part brick and generally with corrugated metal roofing) and a large three bay metal-clad warehouse unit to the rear. There are additionally former silos and a meadow in the same ownership beyond. The 'brown field' element of this site provides scope for sensitive development.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

In terms of built features this sector of Thaxted is relatively mundane. Much of the housing is uninspiring and the principal focal point is probably the Fire Station.

Magdalene Green however is a valuable piece of green space which does much to lift the environmental quality of the housing built around it. There are two listed buildings, Coldhams Fee, described as 17th century or earlier (List UID 1 112968) and Hillside Cottage described as 16th century or earlier (List UID 1 323314) both Grade II. Adjacent to the approach to the Claypitts buildings however (although just outside the study area) is Claypitts Farm House, a rather more

significant listed building the setting of which will be sensitive in considering any future development of the Claypits site.

HIGHWAYS

The roadways are principally adopted and there are, in the main, pavements/verges for pedestrians. Bardfield Road itself forms part of the main route to Little Bardfield and Great Bardfield and has a significant flow of traffic although not on the scale of other routes through Thaxted. A traffic calming bay with humps has been installed to reduce speeds along a straight and often clear route. Casual parking along Bardfield Road is limited. Most of the housing has off-road parking either within private driveways or on adjacent service roads with parking bays. Street lighting is by way of older style overhead arcs which are probably adequate for a road such as this.

Magdalene Green and Barnard's Field are narrow estate roads where parked vehicles are sometimes encountered although in general there is no significant parking problem.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

From the east looking down Bardfield Road there is an excellent view of the church spire which because of the change in levels, sits well above the housing at the eastern end but loses significance towards the west.

KEY ELEMENTS

This sector of the village was used as the principal area for the provision of local authority housing. As such it has no significant character and indeed, this has had a detrimental impact on the approach to the historic core from the east. There are few redeeming features. The fire station with its red paint and training tower does stand out within an essentially residential environment but this is of no consequence. The school and Claypits Farm House which are the principal characterful elements on the eastern side of Thaxted are both within the Conservation Area and as such are outside the scope of this assessment.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The impact of the bland housing development is softened in many places by mature landscaping and broad stretches of grass. There are however, areas of verge which would benefit from further planting or from planted 'tubs'.

The Claypits buildings are generally well screened from the road and although ugly in themselves, do not constitute an 'eyesore'. Their demolition and replacement with something constructed of better materials and rather better landscaping (other than leylandii) would have a beneficial effect.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There are two potential areas where some limited development might take place.

The buildings at Levett's Farm are essentially redundant and the site could be used to provide a very small scale housing scheme. The site is tight and narrow and does not lend itself to high density

housing which would, in any case, be out of character with the two larger units that immediately adjoin it and which retain some element of the original farm character. The land has been promoted for development under the Local Plan Call for Sites (12Tha15) with a suggestion of suitability for 5 units. It is not thought that this could be satisfactorily achieved and two or perhaps three would be the maximum. In addition, a small strip of frontage land owned by the Parish Council to the north of Levett's Farm may offer scope for two or three affordable units on an "exception" basis.

The Claypits buildings have also been put forward under the Call for Sites initiative (15Tha15). The area marked on the plan includes the adjacent meadow which is very much a part of the rural and agricultural character of the surrounding landscape rather than a part of the 'brownfield' site. It would therefore be inappropriate to develop on this green field area but there is scope for re-development for housing on the previously developed part. Under the Call for Sites the total area of land is shown as 1.07 has. and the suggestion is for the development of 25 units. Based on a proposed density target of 30-50 units per hectare this is below what could be possible if the whole area, including the meadow, were to be developed. Excluding the meadow however, 25 units is rather more than would be appropriate particularly given the sensitivities associated with the listed Claypits Farm House which is sited directly adjacent to the access to the site.

It should also be mentioned that a residential development scheme is also currently being promoted on the former Knights yard site. This site is associated more with Copthall Lane but if any development were to take place it would no doubt have vehicular access only from Bardfield Road. The proposal is for five or six larger "agricultural" style dwellings. Whilst the site can be classified as brownfield there must inevitably be concerns over sustainability in relation to what is quite a remote site. It may be better if development were limited to one large unit with a more significant plot of land.

COPTHALL LANE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

A pleasant rural by-way which leads nowhere, but provides a quick route into open countryside away from the built-up area. It is particularly tranquil and since the closure of the depot at the end of the lane is almost traffic-free. At the start at its western end the lane is still residential in nature but characterised by older housing. Brooklyns, Brooklyns Cottages and, on the opposite side of the road, the flinted terrace known as Bridgefoot Cottages is essentially unspoilt and represents an important corner of the Conservation Area. Travelling east the lane quickly becomes entirely rural marred only by development in Barnard's Field (and particularly Oliver's Close) which is prominent at the top of the hill and highly visible in the winter months.

CONSERVATION AREA

It is only at its western end that Copthall Lane falls within the Conservation Area boundary. This includes Brooklyns and its associated garden, Brooklyns Cottages and Bridgefoot Cottages. This corner however, makes an important contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The route of Copthall Lane itself is flat, effectively running along the line of a minor valley through which a culvert runs. The land rises quite steeply however on the southern side.

Beyond the extent of the residential development, the lane is closely bounded to the south by a deep ditch with a bank rising to a line of trees which partially overhang the roadway. A tree-line is also present along part of the north side where it abuts Walnut Tree Meadow and also at the most easterly end. For most of its length to the north however the lane is adjacent to a narrow belt of arable land.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **From its junction with The Tanyard heading east, north side:**

Brooklyns is a large red brick Victorian house which abuts Weaverhead Lane. Although unlisted, it is of considerable character and its garden to the east which is enclosed by a Victorian flint wall is an important feature in the context of its setting. The garden contains some fine mature trees which also serve to enhance the quality of the Conservation Area. 1 and 2, Brooklyns Cottages are also immensely characterful. They are weather-boarded and date originally from the late 16th century. They are set back from the roadway with lawns in front and with access to the culvert at the east end of the garden of number 2. Then, two detached houses probably from the 1970s known as The Willows and Walnut Meadow House, both brick built with roof dormers. Then, on the north side the residential development ends and the rural character begins with a field known as Walnut Tree Meadow which is maintained by the Parish Council with permitted public access. Beyond, the adjacent land becomes cultivated arable which continues for much of the remaining length of the road before it meets an area of woodland and the entrance to the former Knight's depot.

- **Heading west, south side:**

From the former depot the roadway is flanked on its south side by a ditch and a belt of trees/hedges beyond which arable land slopes up steeply to the south. The hedges, particularly in the winter, fail to conceal the stark form of the new development of Barnard's Field which sits prominently on the plateau at the top of the hill. A further belt of trees/hedging at the top of the slope is a more effective screen for the older houses but the latest phase known as Oliver's Close rises well above the top of the bland close boarded fence erected to create a boundary line and the rear extension to the former Barn Babies building is particularly prominent.

As the lane returns to the west and the character reverts to residential, development is a mix of post-war dwellings, some houses, some bungalows, of limited appeal, but mostly with well-maintained colourful gardens. Number 9 is a rather larger unit and the two adjacent houses known as Elmcott and Firlands are older, the latter probably Victorian.

Numbers 6-1, known as Bridgefoot Cottages, are an attractive terrace of 19th century flint cottages extended at either end which, combined with the flint wall of Brooklyns opposite, represent an interesting feature in the Conservation Area where flint is a rarity.

At the junction of The Tanyard is the Brethren Meeting Hall, an uninspiring 1970s single storey brick and tiled block set within a large area of tarmac surfaced car-parking.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

The outstanding quality of Copthall Lane is derived from both the characterful housing at its western end and from the truly rural nature of its eastern end. Of specific importance in the context of built form are Brooklyns, Brooklyns Cottages and the flinted terrace known as Bridgefoot Cottages are listed Grade II (UID 122298). The features that contribute most to the rural scene are Walnut Tree Meadow, the narrow belt of arable land that runs along its northern edge and the tree lines in the valley floor.

HIGHWAYS

Copthall Lane is hard surfaced and adopted but narrow and very little used by motor traffic. It is well used by pedestrians and dog-walkers in particular. The limited flow of motor traffic however and the fact that the nature of the road is just not suited to speed, give rise to few problems. There is car parking adjacent to Brooklyns boundary wall, used principally by the residents of Bridgefoot Cottages. Clearly this detracts from the setting of the Conservation Area.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

Apart from the general rural idyll of the eastern stretch the only other significant view is at the western end where the sails of the windmill are seen above the buildings at the corner of The Tanyard and Town Street.

KEY ELEMENTS

Copthall Lane is a very special feature within Thaxted. The built form at its junction with Weaverhead Lane is very evocative of the Victorian era whilst the almost immediate transition to bucolic landscape creates an image of timeless rural quality.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

There is very little that could be done that would improve the character of this area. The only possible enhancements would be the removal of cars parked along the boundary wall of Brooklyns and the possible redevelopment of the Brethren Meeting Hall for something more sympathetic to the character of the area.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There is scope for redevelopment of the Brethren Meeting Hall site. It is well located, development would be more sustainable than other possible sites and if appropriately designed, could provide significant enhancement to the area. Its deliverability however will depend upon the operational requirements of the Brethren.

The former Knights yard at the end of the Lane is a brownfield site and has been put forward for consideration under the Local Plan 'Call for Sites'. Its re-use however for housing would undoubtedly, have seriously detrimental consequences for this important area of Thaxted, even if access were from Bardfield Road. It is also some considerable distance from the centre and is considered unsustainable in terms of the availability of local facilities.

A planning application was made for development for retirement units (as well as being put forward under the Call for Sites) on the garden of Brooklyns. It is understood that this application has been withdrawn but it is in any case considered that any development on this important area of green space would be highly detrimental to the Conservation Area and to the character of the whole area.

WEAVERHEAD LANE / GUELPH'S LANE OUTSIDE THE CONSERVATION AREA

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

Weaverhead Lane and its continuation Guelph's Lane are entirely residential in nature. The housing is mixed with both former local authority stock and private but almost all dating from the second half of the 20th century. The quality is generally basic and each type is typical of its era, but areas of grass and semi-mature trees soften the setting.

CONSERVATION AREA

The area covered by this section is outside of the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

Guelph's Lane slopes gently upwards to the north and there is also a significant incline up towards the east in Weaverhead Close. The residential landscape is broken by large open areas of grass particularly the square around which Weaverhead Close is arranged and its continuation on the west side of Weaverhead Lane. At the northern end of Guelph's Lane is a belt of trees enclosing the recreation ground to the west and there is also a wooded area to the south of Rochelle Close through which the footpath down to Margaret Street car park runs.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **From the junction with Margaret Street going north, east side:**

Coopers Place is an early 21st century development of small terraced and linked two storey houses, a mix of brick and weatherboard clad with tiled roofs and Velux-type lights for loft accommodation. The two 'gateway' units are detached.

There is then a pair of 1970s bungalows before the streetscape opens into the green that forms the core of the Weaverhead Close development, a former local authority scheme dating from the mid 20th century. The units are arranged as pairs of semis or small terraces and are rendered with cement tiled roofs. Now privately owned they generally form a harmonious group looking out onto the green with its mature and semi-mature trees. Parking is in collective bays off the access road. A spur off the main 'square' in the north east corner meets (but does not link through) to Putterill Close a part of the Wedow Road development.

Weaverhead Lane at this point becomes Guelph's Lane where the character changes. Here are mostly individual detached houses dating probably from the 1960s/70s, some of brick, some rendered and all with tiled roofs.

To the east is The Mead, a *cul de sac* containing pairs of 1950s/60s bungalows of brick construction with pantiled roofs. Their appearance is marred by an abundance of solar panels on the roofs. At the end of The Mead a footpath connects with the new Thatcher's Grange development.

The pattern of individual detached houses continues to the north except for a pair of bungalows known as Southview. Numbers 15-22A, Guelph's Lane are then arranged around a *cul de sac* off to the east. They are a mix of detached houses, semis and bungalows but all probably date from the 1960s and are of brick construction.

The larger detached units with their integral garages continue to the north, the road then turning to the east and forming a hammerhead *cul de sac*.

- **Returning south:**

A mature tree- and overgrown hedge-line encloses the recreation ground to which there is a pedestrian access point. Rather characterless 1960s semi-detached housing with half-boarded elevations then fills the gap before Rochelle Close which initially contains similar pairs of semis on one side and detached units on the other. At a T-junction a left-hand turn takes us to Humphrey Lodge, a residential care home for the elderly, and a scattering of bungalows, whilst to the right are a series of small, mostly detached, 1960s units arranged in *cul de sac* formation. At the end there is again a pedestrian access to the recreation ground.

Returning to Guelph's Lane: there are a pair of perhaps early 1970s detached houses, before a return to the mid-20th century former local authority houses and bungalow arranged as a *cul de sac* and forming an adjunct to Weaverhead Close but on the west side of Weaverhead Lane. A green provides the frontage for the housing on three sides of the square.

After this there are just two further houses, Weaverhead Cottage and Ashfield House, both quite large, post-war and enclosed by high timber fences and formal hedging. Weaverhead Lane then again meets Margaret Street.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

This is one of the main residential areas of Thaxted and is characterised by some rather bland housing developed at a time when little effort was made to integrate new architecture with the village context. The housing is however inoffensive and does little harm to the character of the village as a whole. That said there are no principal features which contribute to character.

HIGHWAYS

A feature of house building during the second half of the 20th century as opposed to more recent development, was that estate roads were built with sufficient width to enable a reasonably smooth flow of traffic even with parked cars on the streets. The difficulty here though, is the contribution that the traffic generated from Weaverhead Lane and Guelph's Lane makes to the pinch-point junction where The Tanyard meets Town Street.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

With the rising land there are good views of the church tower and spire from a number of points. In particular the views from Rochelle Close are important as is the view from the north east corner of Weaverhead Close.

KEY ELEMENTS

It is probably fair to say that there are no particular elements of this area that are key to its character.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

Whilst generally rather bland and characterless there is probably little that can be done by the community as a whole to improve things. Re-decorating some of the houses and particularly tidying up some of the front gardens in Weaverhead Close would however make a significant contribution and would improve the setting for those house-owners who have made the effort. The removal of flags and general scrap would be a good first step.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Realistically there are no opportunities for further development in this area.

WEDOW ROAD AND WEDOW CLOSE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

Wedow Road, Wedow Close and its associated *cul de sacs* are a series of straightforward estate roads designed purely to serve the needs of a modern housing estate that has been built in phases along its ever-expanding length. The housing is mixed but is characterised by the mostly smaller units which are of limited merit.

CONSERVATION AREA

The whole of the road is outside of the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The land rises up towards the north and east and the most recent phase of development sits on a plateau at the end of Wedow Close beyond which is land currently under cultivation. This site has however received planning permission for a further phase of housing development. The only area of green space is a square of grass enclosed by fencing and bounded by Wedow Close and Noel Close, one of its *cul de sacs*.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

It is probably fair to say that Wedow Road and its associated subsidiary roads are generally devoid of any character at all. **From its junction with Weaverhead Lane going east, however:**

On the south side are a series of unimaginative detached or linked, brick-built units dating from the late 20th century. To the north Hatchetts Orchard is a *cul de sac* of small brick-built bungalows constructed about 1995. To the south Brook View is another *cul de sac* containing rather larger detached units.

Continuing east from Brook View is a group of small units characterised by brown painted weather-boarded detailing. The road then rises up to a more recent development of mixed housing where the principal estate road becomes Wedow Close off which are a number of small *cul de sacs*. Some units are 2.5 storeys high and although mostly of brick, some properties in Elers Way and Putterill Close have rendered elevations. A square of grass provides some relief in a densely developed hard environment. The principal road ends with a pair of gates leading to a field which is shortly to be developed as a further phase of housing.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

There are no significant features within this estate save the square of grass which provides something of a green break in a dense and rather unappealing environment. It also permits views of the church tower and spire.

HIGHWAYS

The road width is normal for estate roads but with parking can become excessively narrow particularly for delivery lorries. Whether the principal route will be sufficient to cope with an extra 47 units which it is proposed to serve, is debateable.

The bigger highways issue however is the amount of traffic that this development (particularly when extended further) will generate and the effect this will have on the roads it leads to. Almost all traffic will wish to use The Tanyard and the 'pinch-point' where that meets Town Street already causes problems without the extra movements that will be generated by an additional 47 houses.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

There is one significant view. This is from Wedow Close looking across the grassed square towards the church. Although compromised to a degree by housing there is still a substantial amount of the tower visible and the view is undoubtedly an important one.

KEY ELEMENTS

Given the limited character attaching to this area of Thaxted, key elements are rather irrelevant. The square of grass does however offer some degree of relief.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

Although the grassed square is of considerable benefit in offering at least some open space it is still stark and featureless. Some element of planting would help considerably although care must be taken not to impact on the view of the church. A viewing 'corridor' framed by low to medium height vegetation could provide significant improvement.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There is no scope for development within the existing road network. Planning permission was granted on appeal for the extra 47 units which will act as another phase of development. Layout schemes are currently being finalised. The pattern of development will follow an extension of the existing principal road looping around and leading to the rear of Weaverhead Close. There are at present no footpaths planned or other access points and it is debateable whether the existing road network will cope with this extra burden. It is also debateable how sustainable housing at the furthest end of the road will be given that the distance from the local facilities is such that residents will inevitably travel by car. On that basis there is no scope for further development in this area and it is likely that development, already consented, will create an unacceptable burden on the village.

MARGARET STREET FROM BELL LANE TO WEAVERHEAD LANE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

Margaret Street is essentially a back lane and this section of it serves little purpose other than as a service road providing access to the main visitor car park, the doctors' surgery, the allotments and the church hall.

There are three principal houses which, together with the doctors' surgery and church hall form the built element along the road frontage. Margaret Street does however provide the principal point of access for buildings away from the frontage including the telephone exchange, the Day Centre and the old people's bungalows in Vicarage Mead. There are green spaces provided by Margaret Street Garden, the allotments and trees and shrubs to the east of the car park.

CONSERVATION AREA

Margaret Street is part of the boundary of the Conservation Area and for the purposes of this assessment it can be assumed that the southern side of the road is wholly within it.

TOPOGRAPHY

From Weaverhead Lane the road slopes down past the surgery to level out in front of the car park before rising up again towards Bell Lane.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- **North side from Bell Lane going east:**

The church hall is raised above the level of the road with steps up to its front entrance. It is of single storey brick construction and dates from the first part of the 20th century. Although serving a useful purpose for various functions it is now somewhat dated and in need of maintenance. It sits adjacent to an area of allotments and a driveway leads to a telephone exchange to the rear.

The car park provides spaces for approximately 65 cars. It is well maintained and free. There are public lavatories on site. Through the car park access is provided to the day centre, a modern purpose-built hall with excellent catering facilities, and the old persons' complex known as Vicarage Mead.

- **Beyond the car park to the east:**

Trees behind a retaining wall form a screen for the only private house on this side of the road – **Allandale**.

- **South side from Weaverhead Lane going west:**

The surgery is a prominent modern building of double height with elements of first floor accommodation but with consulting rooms, waiting area, dispensary and records storage on the ground floor. There is a small car park to the west used by doctors and staff.

Christopher Cottage, one of two private houses on this side of the road with road frontage, is a Grade II listed (UID 122317) timber framed cottage with 17th century origins and altered in both the 19th and 20th centuries.

Coulters is another cottage next to Christopher Cottage, beside which a driveway leads to a further property:

Chantry Cottage – despite its name, this building has no great historic merit.

There are also **three garages associated with Bank House** in Town Street.

Next is the **Margaret Street Garden** which is on two levels, the upper level containing an area of flat lawn, formerly a bowling green, and the lower level laid out as formal gardens. Although small, these gardens represent an attractive feature and are well maintained by the Parish Council.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

Apart from one that is listed the buildings at this end of Margaret Street are generally unremarkable. Whilst the surgery has a dominant presence, it has little architectural merit. The principal feature of the street is, in reality, the car park which is well used and well looked after.

HIGHWAYS

Traffic along Margaret Street generally relates to the facilities that are there. Most vehicles are accessing the car park. It has little use as a through route since both the westerly end and also Bell Lane to which it connects are one way streets.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

There are good glimpsed views of the church tower and spire and also across Margaret Street Gardens to the rear elevation of Clarence House.

KEY ELEMENTS

The principal function of this section of Margaret Street is as an access/service road for the various community facilities that it contains. The car park, day centre, surgery, allotments, and telephone exchange all provide an important public function.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The church hall would benefit from some maintenance work and perhaps some simple improvements. One other point that has been highlighted is that a good street map at the car park

would be very helpful for visitors and would contribute to the tourism aspirations of the Neighbourhood Plan.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

It is well established that the surgery is too small for its current patient numbers. The practice has sought to develop a new facility elsewhere in the village but ultimately there is probably nowhere better than its current location immediately opposite the public car park. It is probably most likely therefore that the existing doctors' and staff parking area on site will ultimately be developed for expansion of the surgery.

Margaret Street generally though, is an area which needs careful thought in terms of future planning. It is fortunate in not only being close to the centre but also in having very few private houses. This does give rise to the possibility of some form of development scheme. The church hall is dated, the allotments could be relocated and the telephone exchange may at some stage be redundant with the development of new technologies. Similarly, there may be scope to increase the capacity of the car park with some form of decking. This does give rise to the possibility of a new form of centralised community facilities (perhaps even incorporating a new surgery) which could perhaps be linked to the day centre, a good modern building but perhaps a rather under-used resource. Funding options and ownerships would need to be considered in detail but if there is a requirement for a new 'social hub' in Thaxted, this may provide the opportunity.

WATLING LANE BEYOND THE CONSERVATION AREA

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

The southernmost end of Watling Lane lies within the Conservation Area. Data relating to it has been covered elsewhere so this section concentrates on the remaining section which wends its way down to the Chelmer River. The development follows the road on either side with one intersection. Watling Lane was referred to in the Domesday Book of 1086.

CONSERVATION AREA

This section of Watling Lane falls outside the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The land slopes in places down towards the river as the road progresses northwards. Similarly the houses become more sporadic and with more land attached to them and with fields beyond. Although not marked as such the road gradually peters out and is not a through route.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

With the exception of a charming cottage on the east side of the street, the houses are almost all detached properties built within the second half of the 20th century. Generally, both the properties and the gardens or grounds in which they stand are well maintained. No property particularly stands out but equally none is particularly unpleasant or offensive to the eye. The cul de sac off to the east, called The Maypole consists almost entirely of bungalows although some have been elevated to a second level creating extra living space. They tend to be brick built with tiled roofs many with solar panels.

The houses on the west side are larger, some with gated entrances which give them a curiously unwelcoming feel. Clearly these properties crave greater privacy. The houses in this cul de sac together with others on the lane itself were all the work of local builder, Peter Latchford who has provided a considerable number of the more recent dwellings in Thaxted.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

The Conservation Area end of the lane is frequently congested with traffic. Despite many properties having garages and/or off road parking, there are usually vehicles parked along the street. There is no pavement other than along the west and east intersections and the street lighting only goes part way along the road.

Many of the properties have been enlarged to create additional living/ office space. Small businesses operate from a number of properties along the lane. Generally, the gardens are well maintained. The lane narrows as it goes northwards and the surface of the road deteriorates markedly the further along you go, until it virtually peters out. The smattering of houses towards that end all have off-road parking.

This is an attractive little country lane towards its fullest reach past the slightly more dense housing in the central section. At its furthest end it enters secluded countryside down towards the valley.

HIGHWAYS

Initially the road is tarmacadam surfaced but then deteriorates into a narrow potholed way. It is not really suited to vehicles but, perhaps, keeping it that way discourages traffic and adds to seclusion. The actual lane has no pavements so pedestrians and dog walkers need to exercise particular care as do drivers. Before its transformation into a roughish footpath it is already too narrow for vehicles to pass each other.

There is a concern over safety. There may be an argument for pavements certainly along certain sections of the road or, if this is not possible, restrictions on parking should be considered.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

There are good rural views from the rear windows of houses on either side but especially on the west side where there are pleasant rural vistas over fields and trees. Walking south along the lane towards The Bullring glimpses of the church tower begin to appear.

KEY ELEMENTS

Watling Lane is somewhat unusual within Thaxted. At one end, in the heart of the town the buildings are consistent with the Conservation Area status but progressing north they become more modern. Ultimately though it leads to the bucolic landscapes of the Chelmer Valley.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

To try to change this street too much would be to sacrifice its unique character. There is only one property some way along on the west side where the garden is cluttered and would merit tidying up. Some recent improvement has been noted however and it may indeed be a 'work in progress.'

The road is in need of resurfacing at least towards its furthest end.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The road struggles to cope with existing traffic and it certainly would not handle any more. A further northward extension of housing development would therefore have serious consequences for the rural environment.

WALDEN ROAD AND NEWBIGGEN STREET FROM THE TOWN LIMITS TO THE START OF THE CONSERVATION AREA (INCLUDING LITTLE MAYPOLE AND CLARE COURT)

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

The north entrance to Thaxted is approached by the B184 from Saffron Walden. The road passes through open countryside, with a tantalising view of the church spire piercing the sky to the east as you approach the town. At the town sign, indicating the northern boundary of Thaxted, Walden Road becomes Newbiggen Street. The sign is brightly painted and depicts traditional Thaxted Morris dancers and the Cutlers' crossed swords: a reference to the industry from which the town once flourished. The town's sign is probably the most attractive single feature of this part of Newbiggen Street. There is no indication that in a few hundred yards, the road will miraculously become "one of the prettiest streets in England".

There are no attractive terraces of characterful houses here, just a jumbled assortment of mostly 20th century houses, spaced out at random. Many of the houses are unimaginative and there is little cohesion, and no link at all with the Conservation Area - or, indeed, the town sign. You can still see the top of the church spire from the road at the edge of town, but a single, square white house obliterates the lower half, which is more than a shame. This part of Newbiggen Street is full of lost planning opportunities.

TOPOGRAPHY

The road is straight at the entrance to the town. There are some gaps between houses with trees and hedges and this creates something of a suburban feeling.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

- **West Side:**

Little Maypole is a small development of 12 units of social housing, including a small block of flats. The design is utilitarian and urban. It is so out of keeping with the rural surroundings that when you go to the back of the buildings to the car parking area, it is a surprise to see open countryside rolling out to the distance. A small part of the field adjoining the car park is fenced off, and bears two notices. The first says: 'Maypole House, Respite Care Centre. Land acquired to build Maypole House, a respite care centre for young people and adults with learning disabilities'. The second, a newer notice, says: 'For Sale. Development Opportunity'.

It appears that planning permission has been granted for development of this site for a specific social need, and that the original proposal is not now going ahead. It is to be hoped that any further development of this sensitive area will fulfil a similarly important social need for Thaxted residents. Sadly, the Little Maypole development has intruded into the view of Thaxted from the Chelmer Valley, and the original plans to screen it with trees in order to define and soften the town entrance has not been carried out. Consideration should be given to protecting this view further by building only single storey houses if this site is ever developed.

Clare Court is a late 20th century development of 17 detached houses, laid out as a close with two branches leading off from the Newbiggen Street entrance. This configuration means that the houses do not overlook each other and face in different directions so that the linear effect of an urban

street is softened. This has been helped by the pleasing number of trees that have been planted in gardens. However, the red brick of the houses is still vibrant and at odds with the surroundings, and the design more reminiscent of suburbia than a rural village. Having said that, very little can be seen of the houses from Newbiggen Street.

The houses on the West side of Newbiggen Street that face directly onto the road are mostly former local authority dwellings. The houses, of brick and render, are set back from the road with a stretch of grass in front. The bungalows are squat and unimaginative. The last building before the Conservation Area begins is a Brethren Meeting House, red brick and unadorned, with a black Tarmac car park.

- **East Side:**

There is a pair of yellow brick Victorian villas on the East side of the street, built in 1872, otherwise the houses are all 20th century. As you progress towards the Conservation Area, the houses become bigger and more "gap-toothed", with spaces between them, unlike the terraced cottages that define Thaxted a few metres down the road. Some of these detached houses have splendid trees in their front gardens, dating from the time when the land was part of the Vicarage garden. These trees are particularly fine and shield the houses from the road. Another reminder of the old Vicarage garden is the enormous yew hedge, which shields the two houses before the Vicarage itself, This hedge is kept in pristine condition. The Vicarage itself, now called Father Jack's and with a garden much reduced in size, marks the beginning of the Conservation Area on the east side of the street.

HIGHWAYS

The problems with traffic has been dealt with in the report on the Conservation Area of Newbiggen Street and apply to the whole street. But while the northern part of the street does not share the Conservation Area problem of parking on the pavement, it does suffer more from speeding traffic. Cars entering the town are still slowing down to meet the speed restriction of 30 mph, and those leaving the town are speeding up as the de-restriction sign comes into view. Bearing in mind the particular vulnerability of pedestrians in this area, some consideration should be given to moving the restriction signs

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

The open arable land to the west of the B184 provides some good views across to the church. These must not be compromised by any further building, as the setting of Thaxted in its rural environment is the essence of its beauty and its identity.

KEY ELEMENTS

The recreation ground is Thaxted's only large open space and is used by footballers, young and adult, dog walkers, children playing in the playground, cycling or skating on the netball pitch or just running around. It is very precious to residents and very well used. In order to protect it for future generations, it would be expedient to apply for some form of formal protected open space status so that it cannot be developed.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The northern edge of Little Maypole should be screened with trees, as agreed in the original plans, so that the view from the Chelmer Valley is not compromised.

The site beyond Little Maypole should only be developed to benefit residents of Thaxted with a specific social need, as was the justification for the original planning consent. Because of the sensitivity of the site to important views of Thaxted, only development of single storey buildings should be considered.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There is no scope for development in Newbiggen Street apart from the site already identified beyond Little Maypole.

BELLROPE MEADOW

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

An uninspiring development of 30 houses mainly with a detached double garage and work/office space above. It comprises a mixed scheme of large detached 5 bedroom units and 3-bedroom terraced housing fronting Sampford Road. The larger houses are generally set back behind their garage blocks.

CONSERVATION AREA

Bellrope Meadow is well beyond the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

This principal area of development is set either side of a winding cul-de-sac generally level throughout leading to a footpath into the recreation ground and on down into the village centre.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

House frontages consist mostly of block paved driveways with varying size front gardens some heavily planted, others laid mainly to lawn with some young trees.

Houses to the east side have rear gardens rising sharply up to the more recent Thatcher's Grange development. Houses to the west have boundaries of very mature trees and hedgerow to the recreation ground.

The architecture is very much of the Essex Design Guide type but with an emphasis on black weatherboarding. Elevational treatments are red brick, smooth render (mono-couche), black fibrous cement boarded garage blocks and roofs are clad in red or grey concrete tiles. Painted joinery and cottage style windows are out of character and under-sized compared to the large elevations.

The garage blocks set closely to the back edge of the footpath give the impression of over-development with little or minimal green space. Drives are red block permeable pavers abutting uninspiring tarmac surfaced pavements and roadway.

Street lighting is poor with low level stub columns to each frontage at the back edge of the pavement.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

There are no particular redeeming or principal features. Indeed the development has something of an industrial feel with a distinct lack of architectural effort and design. This may be related to the fact that the site was originally intended for employment use and the live/work nature of the units was something of a compromise. There is no doubt however that the scheme pays no heed to the true Thaxted vernacular nor does it make a bold effort to do something original. It was heavily

criticised in the LUC publication sponsored by English Heritage 'Evaluating the Impact of Housing Development on the Historic Environment' (National Heritage Protection Plan project NHPP:6172).

HIGHWAYS

This is a cul-de-sac with no through traffic. From Sampford Road however there is a straight stretch of road where vehicles are often driven at an excessive speed. A speed limit of at least 30mph should be imposed.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

Views to the north are limited although there is pleasant open countryside across Sampford Road. To the west side mature trees obscure the views directly into the recreation ground.

KEY ELEMENTS

There are no significant factors associated with this development save good access to the recreation ground.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

There is no real scope for improvement.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There are no opportunities for development in Bellrope Meadow. The site is fully developed.

THATCHER'S GRANGE

THE NATURE OF THE SITE

A large recent development by Knights of 60 units arranged around an elliptical site consisting of a mix of large 5 bedroom double fronted units, 3/4 bedroom terraced and 2 bedroom bungalows. Tenure is a combination of privately owned, assisted purchase and affordable houses. In many respects this scheme represents a good mix of modern housing with individual units of some style. It has absolutely no regard however for the landscape in which it sits. Formerly magnificent views of the church within a rural framing seen from Sampford Road have been seriously compromised.

CONSERVATION AREA

Thatcher's Grange encompasses Mosscoats, Burns Ways, and The Pightle and lies well beyond the Conservation Area.

TOPOGRAPHY

The site is generally level throughout and is accessed from Sampford Road, Burns Way leads into a gentle sloping footpath leading into The Mead and on into the village centre. The site is yet (at the time of writing) to be fully landscaped. There are excellent rural views to open countryside from Mosscoats to the east and along Sampford Road (at the expense of views to the south west).

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Thatchers Grange is a large modern development with an interesting and thoughtful mix of house types and colourful elevations.

Frontages vary in size from small planted beds and a good mix of green spaces. Large houses on Mosscoats Lane have railing fences with lawns and paved driveways. Entrances are highlighted by red brick piers with concrete capping stones.

Painted joinery of good proportions is set into various finishes of render, red and yellow brickwork, and with minimum use of black boarding. Slate and plain tiles clad the steeply pitched roofs. Some effort has been made in relation to architectural detailing including attractively designed canopies to the entrances, projecting bay windows and chimney stack hips finished in good leadwork. Windows are set on canted brick sills or concrete lugs and there is some good brick dentil detailing.

Garages are set well back or behind houses so as not to detract from the main elevations. The larger houses in Mosscoats benefit from jettied upper floors on timber corbels and have lead covered weatherboarding above upper level windows and gables.

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

There are no specific features associated with this development but it is notable for a higher standard of design quality.

HIGHWAYS

Thatcher's Grange links into the highways network by way of a single access point on Sampford Road. This in itself is not a problem as Sampford Road is lightly trafficked. The estate roads are however particularly narrow. Lighting is satisfactory.

SIGNIFICANT VIEWS

There are fine views over open countryside to the east from Mosscoats. To the south the Church spire can be seen above the hedgerow. The most significant issue in terms of views however is the damage that this development has done to the setting of the Grade I listed church.

KEY ELEMENTS

In terms of the quality of housing design the key elements are the mix of materials, size and elevation treatments.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

It is essential that the agreed planting scheme is implemented in full without delay. At present this development represents a harsh and stark intrusion into the landscape, a hard edge in an otherwise soft rural environment. Whilst no significant benefit will be seen for 10/15 years it is important to ensure that something is done to break up a development that is truly out of keeping with its surroundings.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There are none save for extensions and these should be controlled and in the same quality and design as the host building.



Summaries

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE – A SUMMARY

A clear indication has been given in the assessment of individual streets as to their historical significance, the significance of specific views and the importance of various streetscapes. It is however, the village centre as a whole (and the setting provided by its surrounding landscape) that gives Thaxted its unique character - the twists and turns of its medieval streets, the glimpsed views of its church and its windmill from different angles and the juxtaposition of buildings often completely different in style, but which nonetheless complement one another perfectly.

It is therefore difficult to identify and classify the relative importance of individual areas. It is easy to say that Town Street, Watling Street and Stoney Lane and Fishmarket Street that lead off them, are the key ingredients. These streets do indeed have the high status buildings with the most picturesque settings. Yet, Newbiggen Street taken separately, represents one of the most perfectly preserved collections of medieval cottages in the country and Park Street with its complex mix of house styles and its glimpsed views of the windmill, are of considerable importance. Mill End/Dunmow Road and Bolford Street offer the most dramatic views of the village centre and its key ingredients, the church and the windmill. Orange Street and The Tanyard offer 'quaintness' while Copthall Lane offers rural tranquillity. Even Bardfield Road with its mid 20th century housing is relatively benign and provides impressive views of the church spire.

It is really only the 21st century developments of Little Maypole, Bellrope Meadow and Thatchers Grange that contribute nothing and have in fact, had damaging consequences for the village. It is of serious concern that in supposedly enlightened times when conservation should be properly understood that the most harm is being inflicted on this near perfect place. There are opportunities for new development and indeed improvement, but these need to be carefully considered within the context of their historical setting; they must of necessity, be small scale; and they must be of a design that harmonises with what currently exists.

SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT – A SUMMARY

As a part of the street by street assessment recommendations have been made as to improvements that would enhance the attractiveness of different parts of the village and which would, collectively, make a difference in terms of environmental quality. Some of these suggestions involve relatively minor matters which could be implemented quickly and easily. These have been listed in the main body of this report in relation to each individual street. There are however a number of rather more major issues that need to be considered in more detail as a part of the Neighbourhood Plan consultation process, some of which relate to more than one street.

In this section we have summarised the principal matters identified for each street followed by the broader issues that affect the village as a whole. It is appreciated that not all of these items will be achievable in the short term but the view of the assessors is that attention to at least some of them could make a significant improvement.

WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA

Dunmow Road

- Re-location of the old bus shelter
- Progress the re-development of the Molecular Products' site with all haste.
- Try to secure car parking for the Tennis Club
- Planting around the sign on the green facing Bardfield Road.

Mill End

- Try to improve the quality of the petrol filling station's signage
- Remove/relocate the electronic warning sign
- Lay turf and introduce some planting on the island area

Park Street

- Try to encourage improvements to the fish and chip shop signage
- Seek to ban satellite dishes from building frontages
- Seek to screen the shed at 1, Star Mead
- Seek to remove the leylandii on the corner of The Chase
- Repair the footway outside Park House
- Seek to build a retaining wall at No. 36 that is more appropriate to a Conservation Area
- Enforce the parking restrictions on the approach to the Town Street junction

Town Street

- Replace the bus stop sign with something more appropriate
- Remove the surplus litter bin outside Wayletts
- Seek to remove the pedestrian 'build-outs'
- Either remove or seek more appropriate planting schemes in the planters outside The Guildhall

- Press for a better quality shop front and signage for the Chemists that is more in keeping with the Conservation Area
- Press for window displays in Wayletts shop front

Watling Street

- Seek improvements to the Memorial Garden

Bolford Street

- Consider parking restrictions to improve pedestrian and vehicle safety

Stoney Lane

- Remove areas of concrete and restore cobbles
- Ban cars completely and remove inappropriate signage

Fishmarket Street

- Restrict parking so as to preserve a clear route for funerals if the P.C.C. proceed with their proposals to build a turning area within the new graveyard

Margaret Street

- Improve maintenance of the verges
- Re-decorate the Conservation Garden gate and rationalise the signage

Vicarage Lane

- Seek planning policies/planning enforcement to preserve the traditional workshop frontage
- Seek restoration of the Conservation Garden wall
- Re-instate the name Duckwaddle Lane for the cut-through to Newbiggen Street

Newbiggen Street

- Address the serious issue of car parking with a view to reducing significantly, the amount of space occupied by cars and improving accessibility for pedestrians.

BEYOND THE CONSERVATION AREA

Bardfield Road

- Consider the installation of some planters to add colour
- Progress a scheme for the sensitive re-development of Claypits barns with a revised access route, the removal of leylandii and the possible allocation of open space for use by the school

Copthall Lane

- Consider high quality redevelopment of the Brethren Meeting Hall site
- Consider possible controls on parking by Brooklyns garden wall

Margaret Street

- The provision of a good street map at the entrance to the car-park
- Improvements/modernisation of the church hall

Watling Lane

- Re-surfacing of parts of the roadway

Thatcher's Grange

- Proceed immediately with the boundary planting in accordance with the agreed scheme.

GENERAL MATTERS

- Reduction of traffic using Thaxted as a part of a through route
- Impose weight restrictions for Heavy Goods Vehicles
- Consider introduction of 30mph speed restriction further out from the centre, particularly along Newbiggen Street/Walden Road (but without the clutter associated with 'traffic calming' measures)
- Stronger enforcement of Conservation Area and listed building policies, the use of Article 4 directives.
- More control over modifications to buildings in the Conservation Area. In particular types of replacement windows and doors should be in keeping with the style of the existing building.
- There should be an approved palette of colours permitted to be used in the Conservation Area and which should be rigidly adhered to.
- There is a need for more parking close to the centre of Thaxted. Park Street carpark is frequently full and Margaret Street carpark is too far away/not signed well enough. This problem will only increase as more houses are built.

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES – A SUMMARY

Independent studies by landscape architects and heritage specialists have illustrated just how damaging development within the landscape that surrounds the village would be. The setting of the Conservation Area within its surrounding landscape and the views of its landmark buildings are of immense importance. The damage done by the development that has taken place on Sampford Road is plain to see. The scope for further development on the fringes of the village is therefore extremely limited and it is important that development limits are strictly adhered to. It may be however that some scope for development in Thaxted lies within the existing built area.

Despite the fact that so much of the centre of the village is covered by the Conservation Area designation there are still opportunities for small scale development that would not only provide housing but could, with sensitive design, actually enhance the historic environment.

These opportunities together with a few brief comments are listed below:

The Old Telephone Exchange

This site is laid to maintained grass and the shell of the old exchange building can in no way be considered an eyesore. It would seem feasible however to develop two units on the site without any significantly adverse impact on its surroundings.

Claypits Farm buildings

The existing buildings, although well screened, are unattractive and, in part, unused. Redevelopment of the 'brown field' area that is of an appropriate scale, could at best, be an enhancement to the quality of the village but at worst is unlikely to have any seriously damaging consequences. The sensitivities associated with the listed Claypits Farmhouse must be respected but a re-designed access arrangement could in fact, offer an improvement to its setting. Scale, heights, design quality and landscaping will however be critical. It is to be hoped that as a part of any development scheme some land could be offered to the school to provide much needed open space and play areas.

Levetts Farm

Although somewhat remote from central area facilities, there is scope for the development of two or three larger houses on the site of the former farm buildings on Bardfield Road. There is again a need to respect sensitivities associated with existing buildings on the site and unit numbers are limited by the access arrangements, but small scale high quality development is unlikely to be harmful.

Brethren Meeting Hall

The site occupied by the Brethren Meeting Hall at the junction of Copthall Lane and The Tanyard does, in the view of the assessors, offer scope for improvement through development. The existing hall dating probably from the early 1970s, is generally unappealing and out of context with its surroundings. It also sits within a rather larger site used for car parking. A well designed small scale housing scheme could in fact, make a much better contribution to this otherwise attractive corner. It

is recognised however that the practicalities of development will very much depend on the operational needs of the Brethren.

The Rescu site

The development of this site, which is to the rear of Little Maypole, would undoubtedly be controversial but for the right type of small scale, low rise development there may be some scope. It is located outside the development limits and development would, on that basis, be contrary to policy. Planning permission was however granted for the development of a single storey respite centre on an 'exception' basis. The owners claim that although the permission has lapsed, there was implementation since a small quantity of earth was moved on site. Clearly this contention is debateable.

The development of Little Maypole was also on an exception basis as it consists entirely of affordable housing. It has however been damaging to the quality of the landscape and harmful to the views from the northern approach. It is highly visual in any view coming into Thaxted from Saffron Walden and any further development in this immediate area could only compound the problem.

If however, there was a proven need for say, affordable housing for local people or people with special needs and development was in the form of a limited number of bungalows then, given the planning history of the site, there may be scope to build in this location.

Molecular Products' site

Planning permission has recently been granted on this site involving new development as well as the refurbishment of the listed buildings. While some features of the proposed scheme are not ideal and the internal arrangement of the housing in the central section is poorly designed the principal of housing development on this site is supported.

New Community 'Hub'

Thaxted has a number of community buildings – Bolford Street Hall; the Church Hall; the Day Centre; the Disabled Centre; the Guildhall; and of course, the churches. It is also apparent that Thaxted is in need of additional public car parking. All the existing facilities however, have their shortcomings, whether of quality or size. If there was ever the will, and the funding available, for a new community centre and if it was thought desirable for this to be located within the centre of the village, the one location which may offer scope is Margaret Street. The existing car park combined with the Church Hall, the allotments, the existing Day Centre and, subject to operational need, the current telephone exchange could provide a site of sufficient size to accommodate a new multi-purpose building together with an expansion of car parking provision (particularly if decking was used).

CONCLUSION

Thaxted is undoubtedly a special place. Its centre is a largely unspoilt gem set almost perfectly within the rolling north-west Essex landscape. It is a village still dominated by its heritage and each generation of local people have been passionate about preserving its unique identity for the next. The pressure to provide more and more new housing however, has probably never been greater than it is now. This pressure represents a constant threat to historic settlements such as Thaxted where the architectural and landscape balance can so easily be upset. Thaxted can accommodate small scale change if new development is designed in such a way as to respect the qualities of what currently exists. What it cannot accommodate without substantial harm is large scale development around its fringes.

Other studies have been commissioned by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group from professional specialists that consider in detail the sensitivities of the landscape that surrounds Thaxted. This document, also designed to support the drafting of the neighbourhood plan, limits its analysis to the village centre. In so doing, it seeks to highlight opportunities that exist to enhance what we already have, but also to identify where development might take place that would either have a low impact on the historic environment or might indeed, improve it.

In Thaxted four buildings stand out as being of major significance – the church of St. John the Baptist; John Webb’s windmill; the Guildhall; and (in spite of its architectural individualism) Clarence House. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the central area however, is in the harmony of its many smaller buildings. As Pevsner says nothing seems out of place (although Pevsner was writing at a time before the arrival of the Murco filling station and some of the more exotic paints now applied to its houses) and despite the wide range of styles and periods everything is to scale and most buildings sit comfortably with their neighbours.

The effect of listing and the broad extent of the Conservation Area have, to date, helped to prevent any significant deterioration of the streetscape, yet there are factors that now threaten, if not the physical features of individual buildings, the atmosphere and environment that they collectively create. The principal threats (which have become all too evident during the process of undertaking this survey) come from traffic, car parking and inappropriate decoration. New development within the central area is less of a threat simply because of the natural constraint of the already tightly developed urban envelope and also due to the constraints of planning policy and statutory designations. Any threat of development on the outer fringes (which is obviously very real), brings with it the indirect threats of exacerbated traffic and parking problems.

It is, in the view of the assessors, the three principal threats of traffic, parking and inappropriate decoration that need to be addressed as a part of the neighbourhood plan when it comes to drafting policies for the central area. It is to be hoped that the local community in formulating central area policies for the neighbourhood plan will appreciate the extent of the threats that Thaxted faces and will do everything possible to provide protection for an important and sensitive environment.

It is, in our view, vital that policies should seek to apply pressure to the highways authority to initiate a degree of regulation on traffic. A weight limit on lorries should be targeted for reasons of both personal safety and to reduce the physical risk to historic timber framed buildings.

Similarly, a number of our most important vistas and streetscapes are destroyed by car parking. Newbiggen Street has the potential to be one of the most perfect medieval street scenes in the country, yet all impact is lost as a result of car-parking on both sides. Parking in Newbiggen Street also takes precedence on the pavements over the pedestrians for whom they were intended with narrow channels that cannot possibly be negotiated by pushchairs or wheelchairs.

Finally, whilst the mix of pastel shades applied to Thaxted houses was warmly applauded by commentators from the past and contributed enormously to overall character, there are now several instances of jarring colours that destroy the harmony of the streets where they are applied. Whilst not physically harmful to individual buildings they nonetheless do serious harm to the main feature that makes our village so special – its collective appearance. It is no longer possible it seems to trust individual owners to randomly choose their colour schemes and it is essential that some degree of control is applied within the Conservation Area. An agreed and approved palette could still offer a wide range of colours but it is important that those colours are complementary and suited to such a special environment.

If the Neighbourhood Plan can address and control these three principal threats Thaxted will be safe for future generations.

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