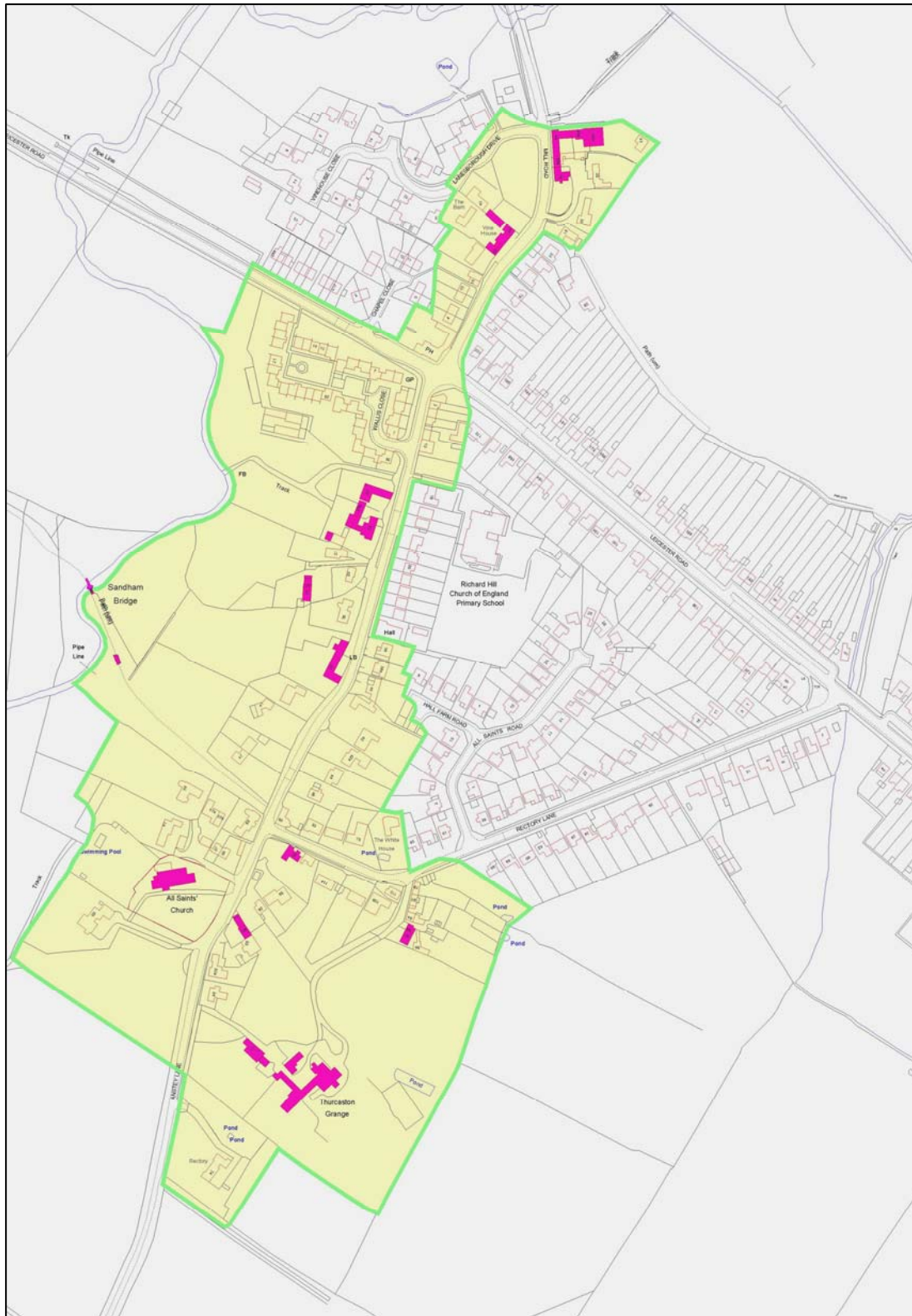




## **Thurcaston Conservation Area Character Appraisal**

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# THURCASTON CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL



*Current map of Thurcaston showing the Conservation Area and the Listed Buildings*

## Introduction

In March 1986, the Planning Department of the Borough Council carried out an environmental appraisal of Thurcaston Village. In the context of identifying land for more housing, the designation of a Conservation Area was proposed. The suggested boundary would include the full extent of the Mediaeval settlement and some of the rural fringe.

The environmental appraisal said, “the open washland and agricultural land provides the setting for built development and allows unhindered views of the church. The definition of entrances to the historic core are particularly important, as buildings, landscape and topography combine to provide a distinct change from farming to settlement without being either rural or suburban in character. Similarly, the settings of various important buildings, especially the Church and Bishop Latimer’s House are particularly sensitive.

“Within the old part of the village the principal elements which provide the unique character are the presence of landscape within the built form, spaciousness, trees, traditional materials and walling, and the linear nature of the main street. The overall impression is that the buildings are set into the landscape, rather than dominating it, an impression which is further complemented by the mature landscape backdrop. The intimate rapport between this part of the village and its setting is the key to its rural quality.”

The Conservation Area was advocated so that “the listed buildings, their environments and the surrounding areas that give the village its flavour of history ... be retained for future generations to enjoy.”

Thurcaston Conservation Area was designated in March 1988. It covers an area of 17.6 Hectares.

The purpose of this present document is a character appraisal which will examine the historic development of the village and describe the appearance of the Conservation Area in order to assess its special architectural and historic interest.

The document sets out the planning policy context and how this appraisal relates to national, regional and local planning policies.

The main part of the report focuses on the assessment of the special interest of the Conservation Area:

- Location and setting describes how the Area relates to the historic village and surrounding area;
- Historic development and archaeology sets out how architecture and archaeology are related to the social and economic growth of the village;
- Spatial analysis describes the historic plan form of the village and how this has changed, the interrelationship of streets and spaces, and identifies key views and landmarks;
- Character analysis identifies the uses, types and layouts of buildings, key listed and unlisted buildings, coherent groups of buildings, distinctive building materials and architectural details, significant green spaces and trees and biodiversity.

These elements are brought together in a summary of the special interest of the Conservation Area. The document is intended as a guide to people considering development which may affect the Conservation Area. It will be used by Development Control in their assessment of proposals. It may, of course, be used by Thurcaston & Cropston Parish Council and residents of the village and the Conservation Area.

## **Planning Policy Context**

The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a conservation area as ‘an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’. Local planning authorities have a duty to review the overall extent of designation in their areas regularly and if appropriate, to designate additional areas. The Act sets out the general duties of local planning authorities relating to designated conservation areas:

- From time to time, to draw up and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas in their districts and to consult the local community about these proposals;
- In exercising their planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS 5), published by the Department of Communities and Local Government, states the Government’s objectives for heritage assets and puts forward policies to balance the need to ensure the viability or usability of an asset against doing no harm to its architectural, historic, cultural or artistic values. The PPS advises that “*local planning authorities should ensure that they have evidence about the historic environment and heritage assets in their area and that this is publicly documented*” (Policy HE2.1). Conservation areas are ‘designated heritage assets’.

A conservation area contains a number and variety of elements which combine together to create the significance of the heritage asset overall. This appraisal describes those elements but it does not attempt to be exhaustive and the policies in PPS 5 lay the duty on all concerned, including residents and prospective developers, to understand the significance of any element.

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS), published in March 2009, advises local authorities that the historic environment should be understood, conserved and enhanced, in recognition of its own intrinsic value (Policy 27: Regional Priorities for the Historic Environment). The RSS is due to be withdrawn but remains in place until the enactment of the ‘Localism Bill’ by Parliament, which is expected in 2012.

Charnwood Borough Council Local Plan Saved Policy EV/1- Design, seeks to ensure a high standard of design for all new development and that the design should be compatible with the locality and utilise materials appropriate to the locality.

The Council’s adopted Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) ‘Leading in Design’ reinforces the need to understand the setting and context when proposing development in a sensitive location such as a conservation area. It encourages developers to use local guidance such as Conservation Area Character Appraisals when considering their designs.

### **Other guidance adopted by the Council**

- Backland & Tandem Development Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)
- House Extensions SPG
- Shopfronts & Signs SPD

## **ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST**

### **Location and Setting**

Thurcaston sits in the valley of Rothley Brook about 8 Km north east of Leicester. The village is sited on the slopes above the brook, a position typical of settlements in the East Midlands. The valley has a rural character, though traversed by the massive pylons of the high voltage transmission lines from Ratcliffe Power Station. There are some fields of wheat and rapeseed on the slopes but most of the valley, being in the flood plain, is left to meadow and scrub. On the other side of the valley is Cropston, with the hills of Bradgate Park and Charnwood Forest in the distance.

To the south and east of the village is a rolling landscape of arable fields, pasture and woodland. The village is close to the suburban edges of Leicester City, Beaumont Leys and Birstall, though the village is separated from the conurbation by the A46 bypass. The proximity to the city means that Thurcaston is largely a dormitory village, with a lot of commuter traffic using its roads.

The Conservation Area encompasses the Mediaeval settlement, the extent of the village as it was until its great expansion in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Area includes a significant area of unbuilt landscape, the lower slopes and meadows of the valley and the garden and grounds of Thurcaston Grange.

## **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **Origins and Development**

It is known that there has been human activity in the area from the Bronze Age and also in Neolithic times. However, the village probably has its origins in the period after the Romans left Britain, when Anglo-Saxons began to settle. The village is typical of settlements in the East Midlands occupying the slopes of a valley, where there was good access to spring water, with meadows for pasture in the valley below and drier fields above for arable land and crops. The name is first recorded as Turchitelstone, or Thurkitelstone, which suggests a Viking occupation of an existing Saxon village. Thorketil is a Danish name, the suffix "tone" is a Saxon word.

The settlement was recorded in the Domesday survey as having 9 ploughlands worth 30 shillings. Later at the time of the general survey in the 12<sup>th</sup> century it was worth £4. In 1280 Thurcaston was included with Wanlip, Bradgate, Newtown Linford and Cropston as one vill, which was a taxable land unit.

All Saints Church probably had its beginnings as a wooden structure in Saxon times. The present stone church was first built in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century; the Norman doorway is still there. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century the tower, nave and chancel were added. A screen in the north aisle is one of the earliest in England and the beamed nave roof is unusual for the county. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century the height of the nave was increased and large windows in Perpendicular style were incorporated. The present timber roof was added; the unusual timber framed gable at the end is still visible. Corbels on wall-posts include a king, cow, woman and other human and bestial characters. In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the church and living came into the patronage of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. An engraving of the church in John Nichol's history of 1801 looks almost identical to the current building.

The village suffered greatly from the Black Death of 1348-9. Archeological evidence suggests that a major part of the village was abandoned along Brooky Lane, the path from Anstey Lane across Sandham Bridge to Cropston. Subsequent development then took place at the present crossroads with Leicester Road and only later moved back along Anstey Lane.

Arguably, the most famous son of Thurcaston was Hugh Latimer, born some time in the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century into a farming family. He was ordained a priest and became known for his vigorous assertion of the Catholic church. With the Reformation he became an equally zealous protestant, preaching for the translation of the Bible into English. When Queen Mary reimposed Roman

Catholicism, Bishop Latimer was charged with heresy and burnt at the stake in 1555. He is remembered in the village through what is called “Latimer’s House”, No 37 Anstey Lane, though the present building seems to have been erected after his death as witness an inscription on a beam in the house: “Thys hows was boylded anno d’ni 1568 and in ye 1 yer of ye raig<sup>n</sup> of ovr soveraign ladye Quene Elizabeth by me Nycholas Gravno”.

The earliest parish registers in Thurcaston began in 1561, recording baptisms, marriages and deaths. Within the registers it is said that 12 boys were taught to read. Then in 1715 the rector, Richard Hill, established a free school and built a School House and School Room. The building still stands as No 60 Anstey Lane and Richard Hill is remembered by the present Richard Hill Primary School at the other end of the lane. The register also records a terrible fire in 1748 which destroyed much property in the village.

For centuries, Thurcaston had an agricultural economy based on an open field system in which the farmers, in theory, shared the better and the poorer land. Fields began to be inclosed in 1600 and in 1799 an Inclosure Act was passed. 700 acres of uninclosed land along with 350 acres of land already inclosed was parcelled up amongst a limited number of landowners, no doubt dispossessing several of the poorer villagers. The Act also specified that the boundaries of Thurcaston and Cropston should be ascertained, that no part of Charnwood Forest or Rothley Plain be affected by the inclosures and that the brook, which had been built up with weirs and sluices to provide a good flow for the watermill, should be reduced to its “antient height”. The corn mill is last shown on the OS map of 1903 near the bridge of Mill Road.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the village seems to have been relatively stable, a self sufficient farming community. The census from 1851 shows that all the trades required in a rural village were being met: butchers, a blacksmith, a miller, a carpenter, laundrywomen, dressmakers, bakers, brewers, shoemakers and innkeepers. In common with most villages in North Leicestershire some people engaged in framework knitting though there appears to be little evidence of that trade today. Some of the women and girls were laceworkers. However, with the growth of factories in Leicester and along the valley of the Soar the trade came to an end.

While Thurcaston did not share in the economic fortunes brought by the railways, the situation changed dramatically in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, presumably inspired by the motor car. There was some building at the beginning of the century but after World War I there was a huge expansion of the village with ribbon development along Leicester Road and Rectory Road, as well as substantial infilling on Anstey Lane. Development continued after World War II with small estates based on culs-de-sac, first All Saints Road, and later Wallis Close and Vinehouse Close.

### **Archaeological Interest**

During fieldwork in the 1980s and 1990s to the south of the village there were a number of finds: worked flints of the Early Neolithic to Late Bronze Age; various Late Iron Age and Roman finds including around 100 sherds of pottery, tile, kiln fragments, brooches and coins; and several Mediaeval finds - a possible brooch, 2 openwork fragments and a spindle whorl. North east of Thurcaston Grange a fragment of a bronze blade was recovered. It is most likely that it belonged to a sword or dagger of Bronze Age date. An Edward I silver penny was found to the rear of the vicarage in 1993.

In the fields around the village one can see the remains of ridge and furrow, evidence of Mediaeval farming practice. A substantial area of ridge and furrow is on either side of the brook: the washlands were not necessarily reserved for pasture but were also ploughed and used for crops, either because of need or because the terracing was good enough to avoid the worst of the flooding.

There is evidence of former houses or cottages in the rough ground along Brooky Lane, the path leading to Sandham Bridge. It is presumed that these houses were abandoned after the tragedy of the Black Death in 1348-9.

The churchyard contains many fascinating Swithland Slate headstones dating from the early 18th Century and some from the mid 17th Century. It is said that these are the earliest examples of Swithland Slate being used for headstones. The early ones are a simple rectangle with clear simple engraving; the later stones are more elaborate in both shape and style.

Within the old farmhouses is evidence of their age; the cruck framing itself, the inscription on the beam in Latimer's House recorded by Nichols, dating the house to 1568, and another inscription on a beam in Bybrook farmhouse dated 1593.

It is likely that there is further evidence of human settlement and historic activity anywhere within the Conservation Area, especially below ground, in the fabric of the farmhouses, and in the fields around the village.

## **Population**

Thurcaston for most of its history was a small village. Figures for population are difficult to ascertain because what is and has been counted is so variable. At the time of Domesday there were 22 villeins, 4 bordars and 4 servi. At the Poll Tax of 1377 there were 92 taxpayers. In 1563 there were 25 households or families which had increased to 40 in 1757. A similar number of households, 36, were assessed for Hearth Tax in 1670. The families must have been quite large because in 1603 there were 216 communicants registered at the church, though a similar count in 1676 recorded only 91 communicants, a possible indication of the ravages of plague. After 1800 the figures from the national census every decade are more reliable. Between 1801 and 1901 the population was fairly stable at between 215 and 281. Then it began to grow in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and in 1951 there were 1126 people in the parish. Current figures have become less meaningful because the population is counted for the whole parish including Cropston. Within the village as a whole there are now about 410 addresses of which 115 are in the Conservation Area.

## **SPATIAL ANALYSIS**

### **Plan Form**

The original settlement of Thurstaston is essentially a linear village along Mill Road and Anstey Lane, rising from Rothley Brook at the east, following the sloping side along the valley of the brook until it rises and goes over the hill to Anstey in the west. There was a Mediaeval crossroads at Brooky Lane that descends now as a footpath from Anstey Lane, close to the church, across Sandham Bridge and the meadows to Cropston. Another footpath starts now as a sunken green path from the south corner of the churchyard going across Coffin Bridge to Cropston.

While the linear form of Anstey Lane and Mill Road is the backbone of the character of the Conservation Area, the long ribbon of Leicester Road from the brook to the bridge over the A46 is more important for the village as a whole. Leicester Road and the linking Rectory Road have been in existence for a long time but they have only been built on in the last 50 years or so. Rectory Road was probably the path to Rothley; a footpath still goes across the fields to Town Green there.

A substantial part of later development has been in culs-de-sac, being Wallis Close within the Conservation Area, Vinehouse Close and All Saints Road outside it.

### **Villagescape**

The original farmhouses and their barns and outbuildings were set rather haphazardly along the linear street. To a large degree this pattern remains so that the principal character of Anstey Lane for most of its length is its spaciousness, composed of broad verges, with the houses generally set well back from the road. As noted in the appraisal of 1986 the buildings are set into the landscape, rather than dominating it, an impression which is further complemented by the open views across the brook to Cropston on the opposite slope of the valley with the hills of Bradgate Park and Charnwood Forest as a backdrop.

At the crossroads there is a short terrace of buildings at the pavement edge, Nos 2-10 Anstey Lane, but still the feeling is of loose enclosure which is strengthened by the green space of Wallis Close. The spaciousness was maintained during the 20th Century expansion when suburban style development took place. Individual houses were built along the east side of the lane, set back from the road and higher up the slope. However, the suburban character has almost overpowered the original village.

From the junction with Rectory Lane to the churchyard a canopy of trees encloses the space more tightly and the view over the valley is obscured but as the lane rises up the hill the enclosure loosens once more and the view becomes a panorama.

Mill Road is more enclosed, partly by the topography, partly by the setting of the buildings. The road dips steeply and the bank on the east side rises substantially above. More of the buildings are set at or close to the pavement edge. The view over the valley is constrained.

Rectory Lane rises steeply to the top of the valley side with mostly suburban development on either side. At the top, just below the ridge, leading to the gate of Thurstaston Grange, there is a lane of older cottages including the thatched November Cottage.

### **Interrelationship of Spaces**

As noted in the appraisal of 1986, there is an intimate rapport between the broad valley of Rothley Brook, the setting of Mill Road and Anstey Lane on the slopes of the valley, and the loose enclosure and spacious siting of most of the buildings within the landscape which is key to the rural quality of the Conservation Area.

Within this rural character, nevertheless, is the seemingly vast space of the crossroads at Leicester Road which is poorly defined. Despite the attractive siting of the Wheatsheaf Inn on one corner and the encouraging planters of flowers maintained by the parish, the other three corners have substantial areas of pavement and verge and two corners have the houses and bungalows set well away from the public realm. Together, instead of a rural village scene, there is an almost hostile environment, through which traffic would prefer to speed were it not for the speed humps.

At the southern end of Anstey Lane the churchyard, more or less secluded by trees, is a more private space. The privacy is matched by the secluded nature of the Old School House opposite, the trees sheltering No 52 Anstey Lane and the general covering of trees.

### **Key Views and Vistas**

Along the whole length of Anstey Lane there are views and glimpses between the houses into the valley, across to Cropston and to the hills of Bradgate Park and Charnwood Forest beyond.

There is a delightful approach into the village from Anstey. As one comes down the hill one enters through a canopy of lime trees with the churchyard on the left, the stone church visible through the trees, and the lane winding gently in front.

Going down Brooky Lane there is an expanding view of the valley as one goes down the hill and in the opposite direction, coming from Sandham Bridge, the village is seen on the rising slopes within its surrounding trees.

### **Landmarks**

The principal landmark for the village and the Conservation Area is the Wheatsheaf Inn, its name prominently painted in large white letters on the roof.

The tower of the church, of which the 1986 appraisal wanted to protect the unhindered views, today merely peeps above the trees of the churchyard. Many other important buildings are also shielded by trees such as No 52 Anstey Lane, the Rectory and Thurcaston Grange.

## **CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

### **Building Types, Layouts and Uses**

The original buildings of the Conservation Area were the farmhouses with their associated barns, outbuildings and cottages. Some of these are ancient, such as Latimers House. They are vernacular in style and grouped in quite complex layouts although individual buildings are generally based on a simple rectangular plan with a single ridge. The principal building is generally of 2 storeys and the subsidiary buildings generally single storey. The Wheatsheaf Inn probably belongs to this genre. It was built in the early 1600's, formerly an old coaching inn and the home of a bee keeper.

Later buildings are more polite in style such as the 3 storey Rectory at 52 Anstey Lane, and the 2 storey Vine House at 24 Mill Road, both of which are of simple rectangular plan with a single ridged roof with additional buildings to the side and rear. There are some other simple 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century cottages in vernacular style which present to the street a simple rectangular plan and single ridge. Examples are the Methodist Chapel and its attached cottage on Mill Road and the terrace of Nos 2-10 Anstey Lane.

The Victorians introduced a more complex style of building with gables and dormers. No 64 Anstey Lane at the entrance to the Conservation Area is a fine example, white painted, with a Welsh slate roof and decorative carved barge boards to the gables. The fashion can also be seen in the dormer windows of Bybrook Farmhouse at 25 Anstey Lane. The Old School House at 60 Anstey Lane is also Victorian in style though built to a simple rectangular plan with a single ridged roof. Together with the School Room the complex is set away from the lane and at an angle which enhances the sense of intrigue within this part of the Conservation Area under the canopy of trees.

The village has lost most of its facilities. There is the church and a Methodist chapel, which is noted for being the smallest in the county, seating only 30 people. There is the Richard Hill Primary School and the Memorial Hall, which commemorates people lost in World War I, and is used for the Parish Office and provides a venue for the community. The Wheatsheaf Inn stands at the crossroads and there is an electrical store opposite but otherwise there is no commerce. All the farms have become purely residential and domestic.

### **Key Listed Buildings and Structures**

The Church, Thurcaston Grange and Latimers House are the most important historic buildings in the Area. Combined they represent the continuation of the settlement through several centuries.

### **Key Unlisted Buildings**

The Wheatsheaf Inn, is one of the original buildings in the village but it is unlisted because although on the exterior it is clearly historic, apparently too many changes have happened to the interior.

The Memorial Hall is a well built and well used community facility. The later extension at the front is rather utilitarian but the whole makes a valuable contribution to the village scene and it deserves to be included in the Conservation Area.

### **Coherent groups**

The complex of Bybrook Farm, with its barns, stables and outbuildings, similarly the complex of Mill House Farm and to a lesser extent the complex of Vine House demonstrate the original agricultural character of the village.

The cul-de-sac off Rectory Lane makes a pleasant terrace of housing culminating in the attractive thatched November Cottage.

### **Building Materials and Architectural Details**

Just as the style of building and the setting of buildings in the villagescape has been dominated by the later suburban character of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, so has the use of modern non-local materials weakened the original vernacular and agricultural character and appearance.

### **Walls**

The local building material is or was a soft red brick, together with small amounts of slate and Forest stone. The stone, being hard to dress, is seen primarily in boundary walls and retaining walls and in the plinths of the houses. Occasionally the stone may be used for a building such as the cottage of Mill House Farm but more often it is used only for outbuildings, such as at Latimer's House and at Bybrook Cottage. In all such buildings it is generally combined with red brick for any door and window surrounds and quoins. The red brick is used as infill panels in the timber framing of the principal building of Latimers House. Occasionally the brick is laid to Flemish bond though without the obvious pattern of contrasting header and stretcher, a good example being No 52 Anstey Lane.

Several buildings are rendered and painted or the brick is painted, usually white. Important examples are Thurcaston Grange and the Wheatsheaf Inn. The terrace of Nos 2 - 10 Anstey is rendered and painted, though the style of buttered render is not traditional.

Many of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century houses also use red brick though it rarely has the softness of the original material. However, these later houses use so many different materials, often several in one wall, there is not a dominant style and since the proportion of 20<sup>th</sup> Century buildings outweighs the older it tends to diminish the character of the original vernacular. There are examples of yellowish and buff brick which feel out of place, tile hanging, vertical timber weatherboarding, and Forest stone cladding.

### **Roofs**

If the walls show a degree of variety, remarkably the roofs are mostly of Swithland Slate. There are some houses with Welsh slate and some with plain clay tiles. Amongst the slate and tile roofs the thatched roofs of Latimers House and November Cottage on the side cul-de-sac off Rectory Lane stand out as examples of the earliest buildings. The delightful uneven roof of plain clay tiles of the Wheatsheaf Inn also stands out. The later 20<sup>th</sup> Century houses have lost the traditional vernacular, using more often concrete tiles, sometimes profiled, sometimes large and flat.

The roofscape of the Victorian No 64 Anstey Lane is especially interesting for the carved eaves and barge boards to the gables.

Occasionally chimneys form an important feature of the villagescape. Older examples are those at Vine House and Mill House Farm, newer examples are at No 10 Anstey Lane and No 38.

### **Doors and Windows**

There is no dominant pattern of windows. Only Vine House and its cottage have fine timber sash windows. Elsewhere there are casement windows, the more original being flush casements, often now renewed with storm casements. November Cottage and its companion No 88 Rectory Lane have Yorkshire sliding sash windows. Of note are the older houses which have metal casements, good examples being Latimers House and Mill House Farm and Cottage. Of especial note are the unusual leaded lights of No 52 Anstey Lane with their elongated diamond pattern.

A few houses have dormer windows, notably the Wheatsheaf Inn which also has a charming eyebrow window in the roof. Bybrook Farmhouse, less authentically, also has dormers along the roof.

Elsewhere, regrettably, many of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century houses have been fitted with uPVC windows which have neither the charm nor veracity of the original timber windows which they replace.

Doors in the Conservation Area are generally simple without adornment, doorcases, porches or canopies. The exceptions thus tend to stand out. Examples are the low timber porch of Latimers House, the new thatched porch of November Cottage, and the elaborate and rather severe stone porch of No 42 Anstey Lane.

### **Details**

There is a wall-mounted letterbox in the wall at No 38 Anstey Lane.  
The verge at Latimers House is edged with a strip of granite setts.

### **Parks, Gardens and Trees**

The principal open space of the village is the broad valley of Rothley Brook which forms a background to the whole length of the village much of it being accessible from the footpaths. Within

the village is the peaceful secluded space of the churchyard and the almost private garden at the centre of Wallis Close. For much of Anstey Lane there is a grass verge on the north side instead of a pavement.

Surprisingly, there are few trees within a substantial part of the village. The exception is the stretch of Anstey Lane from Rectory Lane to the churchyard. At No 52 there is a border of yew trees with a fine cedar in the garden and the churchyard is bordered by several mature lime trees.

Opposite Mill House Farm there is a well tended grass bank with dense shrubs which continue the side garden of Vine House Cottage.

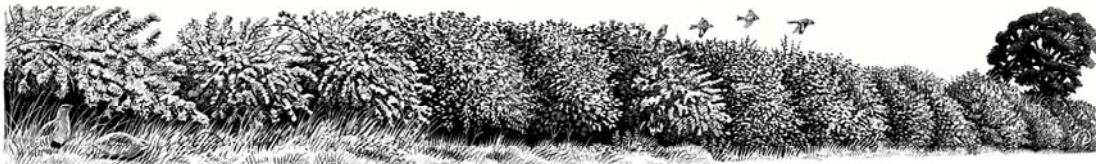
The private grounds of Thurcaston Grange are a mixture of formal gardens with informal parkland containing many trees, both mature and newly planted. Many of them have been protected with Tree Preservation Orders.

The Parish Council have taken care to decorate the crossroads with sturdy planters.

## Biodiversity

The Conservation Area nestles within the rolling countryside characteristic of High Leicestershire: the rural environment never seems very far away and the western side of the Area indeed comprises agricultural fields which extend down to Rothley Brook, lending a pastoral quality.

Open fields within the Area (and in its proximity) have largely been agriculturally improved through agricultural intensification: the pastures have lost their flowering plant diversity and become rather species-poor, whilst other fields are managed for arable crops. Many hedgerows in the surrounding countryside have become fragmented or are severely trimmed, reducing the resilience of the local biodiversity network.



This is in contrast to parts of the Conservation Area, where strong hedgerows, lines of mature trees, ponds and private gardens provide a range of valuable habitats for a variety of species, including small garden birds, which ensures that some degree of habitat connectivity has remained.

Rothley Brook, which defines part of the Conservation Area's eastern boundary, has been notified as a Local Wildlife Site, a county-wide designation conferred to the best non-statutory ecological sites. Along the meandering watercourse, clumps of marginal aquatic vegetation and exposed roots of bankside trees, such as alder *Alnus glutinosa*, crack willow *Salix fragilis* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, provide a range of microhabitats. The brook forms an important habitat and functions as the main wildlife corridor across the landscape.



Field evidence of otters *Lutra lutra*, a species of principal importance listed in Section 41 of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006, has been recorded in several instances along the section of brook within the Area. Spraints have been found at Sandham Bridge: otter often leave them on exposed rocks to mark their territories. This charismatic species, which had largely disappeared from

most watercourses, appears to have made a successful comeback following a marked improvement in water quality.

Several bat roosts have been recorded within the Conservation Area. This includes a maternity roost of soprano pipistrelle bats *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, which is known to occur at a property on Mill Road. It is one of the smallest bat species found in Britain. In early summer, females give birth to their single offspring in communal roosts. Colonies are at extreme risk at this stage as the young bats are unable to fly and feed by themselves for several weeks after birth.

A brown long-eared bats *Plecotus auritus* roost has also been recorded on Anstey Lane. This species relies on large lofts and good tree cover in proximity to their roosts. Due to their severe decline and high vulnerability, all bat species are now legally protected.

## **DEFINITION OF SPECIAL INTEREST**

The main contributions to the special character of Thurcaston Conservation Area are:

- The remaining vernacular style farmsteads, now converted to dwellings
- The historic associations with Bishop Hugh Latimer
- The views across Rothley Brook to Cropston and the hills of Charnwood Forest beyond
- The sense of intrigue from the canopy of trees by the churchyard.
- The delightful grounds of Thurcaston Grange, though hidden from public view

## **Weaknesses**

In general the Conservation Area is in a reasonable condition. The principal concern is the volume of traffic using Leicester Road and, to a lesser extent, Anstey Lane, which has prompted the installation of traffic calming measures which detract from the Conservation Area. As noted above the expanse of the crossroads at Leicester Road is out of character with the rural quality of the Area.

# MANAGEMENT PLAN

## General Principles

The appraisal above should be used to inform and guide development decisions.

Any proposed changes should be carried out in a sensitive manner, taking into account the established character. New development must respond to its immediate environment i.e. its context, in terms of scale, form, materials and detailing. Otherwise, alterations will have a detrimental effect on the historic and locally distinctive form of the Area.

Within the Area the Council will insist on good quality schemes which respond positively to their historic setting. This extends to small buildings such as garages and even boundary walls and fences. Minor alterations need to be carefully considered as incremental change can have a significant detrimental effect on the character of an area over a period of time.

Central government guidance contained in PPS 1 and PPS 5, the Borough of Charnwood Local Plan, Leading in Design and other SPD will be used to assess the quality of proposal for new development.

The character of the Conservation Area identified in the appraisal above is such that the following general principles should be noted when considering any development in all parts of the Area:

- The Conservation Area has a distinct “grain” or pattern of built form and spaces which are part of its historic development. This gives the Area its individuality, characterised by the pattern of historic buildings, ancient footpaths and highways and clearly defined boundaries. This “grain” is an important part of the character of the Conservation Area and will be protected.
- The emphasis for new proposals will be on high quality of design. There may be opportunity for innovative modern design. However, a dramatic contemporary statement is unlikely to be appropriate.
- Scale is the combination of a building’s height and bulk when related to its surroundings. Proposed new development must take into account the scale of the existing buildings, and must not dominate or overwhelm them.
- Alterations and extensions must respect the form of the original building and its locality. The use of high quality materials and detailing, whether modern or traditional is essential. Roof lines, roof shape, eaves details, verge details and the creation of new chimneys are important considerations.
- Windows and doors of a traditional design respect the historic nature of the buildings to which they belong and make a very important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The use of uPVC and standardised high speed joinery techniques nearly always leads to unsuitably detailed windows which will be generally unacceptable in the Conservation Area. In most cases the building regulation requirements can be met without the need to use clumsy and awkwardly detailed windows.
- The appraisal has identified the types of materials that characterise the Conservation Area and where possible they should be used to help alterations respect the established character. In particular it is important not to introduce any further variation in materials.
- Applicants for planning permission must provide a meaningful “Design and Access Statement”, to explain the design decisions that have been made and to show how proposed alterations relate to their context. A detailed analysis of the locality should demonstrate that there is a full appreciation of the local streetscape and how it has developed, including prevailing building forms, materials and plot ratios.
- Safeguarding of protected species must be taken on board when considering planning proposals such as conversion, tree felling, housing development and other changes which may affect wildlife and their roosting places, commuting routes and feeding areas.

## **Enforcement strategy**

Effective enforcement is vital to make sure there is public confidence in the planning system to protect the special character of the Area. Unauthorised development can often be damaging to that character.

Taking proactive action can improve the appearance and character of the Area, making it more attractive and in some instances increasing the potential for investment. Effective monitoring of building work to make sure it is carried out in accordance with the approved details and with planning conditions ensures new development makes the positive contribution envisaged when permission was granted.

In order to protect the character of the Conservation Area the Borough Council will seek to:

- use enforcement powers in cases where unauthorised development unacceptably affects the character of the Conservation Area;
- take proactive action to improve or enhance the appearance of the Area;
- monitor development under way to make sure it fully complies with the terms of any planning permission or listed building consent.

Carrying out unauthorised work to a listed building or to protected trees and hedgerows and the unauthorised demolition of a building within a conservation area is an offence. In such cases, the Council will consider prosecution of anyone responsible and enforcement of any necessary remedial action.

The powers set out in Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 will be used where sites are identified as detracting from the character of the Conservation Area by being eyesores or untidy.

## **Article 4 Direction**

The quality of a conservation area is often threatened by the cumulative impact of numerous small changes to many buildings. Terraces that once displayed integrity of design through the use of matching features such as doors, window, chimneys and porches, have been unbalanced by various alterations and additions. On the whole such changes do not require planning permission.

In order to preserve and enhance the character of conservation areas, many planning authorities use Article 4 Directions to restrict permitted development rights on groups of buildings or areas. Restrictions normally relate to particular elements such as replacement windows and doors, or roofing.

It is not proposed to introduce any Article 4 Direction for Thurcaston Conservation Area.

## **General condition**

The Conservation Area is in a reasonable condition. The only issue identified as a weakness in the appraisal is the volume of traffic and, as a consequence, the traffic calming measures which are unsympathetic to the historic settlement.

## **Possible buildings for spot listing**

The Wheatsheaf Inn is said to be an ancient building. Certainly from the exterior it would deserve further investigation, though the interior is said to be too far changed from the original.

### **Possible Boundary Changes of the Conservation Area**

During the consultation period for the original designation of the Area it was suggested that the Memorial Hall be included but this did not happen. It is suggested again that the Memorial Hall be part of the Conservation Area. For both its history and as a good quality village hall it would make a valuable contribution to the character and appearance of the Area.

### **Enhancement opportunities**

The crossroads of Anstey Lane with Leicester Road should be redesigned. It is too wide for the village and especially for the Conservation Area and the present traffic management scheme of road humps does not enhance the appearance of the Conservation Area. Consideration should be given to create a more sympathetic scheme.

### **Economic development and regeneration strategy for the Area**

A limited fund is available from Leicestershire County Council to repair Listed Buildings.

### **Strategy for the management and protection of important trees, greenery and green spaces**

The Borough Council supports the priorities set out in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan for the conservation of a variety of wildlife and their habitats within Charnwood. The Council will collaborate with its partners when the plan is reviewed and modified to ensure that the necessary actions are being taken by the appropriate agencies.

General management guidelines:

- Retention and protection of mature trees.
- Replacement planting to provide the next generation of trees.
- Additional planting at key strategic points to reinforce habitat connectivity within the biodiversity network.

### **Monitoring change**

A photographic record of the Conservation Area has been made and will be used to help identify the need to review how changes within the Conservation Area are managed. A greater degree of protection will be accomplished if the local community help monitor any changes.

### **Consideration of resources**

This management plan sets out the commitment of the Borough Council to protecting the character and appearance of Charnwood's conservation areas and how it will use its resources to achieve these aims. Pursuing all actions may be seen as desirable but continued monitoring and review will help focus the use of available resources in the most effective way.

## Summary of issues and proposed actions

Conservation Area Issue	Proposed Action	Lead Partner	Other Partners
Inclusion of Memorial Hall	Extend the boundary of the Area	Charnwood BC	
Traffic calming measures	Consideration of a more sympathetic scheme	Leicestershire CC Highways	Charnwood BC & Cropston & Thurcaston PC
The crossroads of Leicester Road - Anstey Lane - Mill Road	A comprehensive scheme to redesign the crossroads.	Leicestershire CC Highways	

### Developing management proposals

Various forces, historical, cultural and commercial, have shaped the development of the conservation area, creating a sense of place and individual identity. The character and appearance of the conservation area is vitally important, both in attracting investment in the area itself, and in the encouragement of initiatives to the benefit of the wider community.

### Community involvement

This document will be made available as a draft via the website for 4 weeks prior to submission to Cabinet for adoption. A public meeting will be held in the Area so that local residents and businesses may contribute their ideas about the Area. All comments and responses will be considered and appropriate amendments made to the document before being submitted to Cabinet.

## Advice and Guidance

The Borough Council Development Department can advise on the need for Planning Permission or Listed Building Consent and can provide guidance on matters such as appropriate methods of maintenance/repairs, changes to shopfronts, alterations and extensions and suitable materials.

Contacts: Conservation and Landscape Team  
Tel. 01509 634748  
[built.heritage@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto:built.heritage@charnwood.gov.uk)

Development Management  
Tel. 01509 634691  
[development.control@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto:development.control@charnwood.gov.uk)

Planning Enforcement  
Tel. 01509 634722

## Bibliography

John Nichols, "History and Antiquities of the County of Leicestershire", Vol 3, 1800  
Victoria History of the County of Leicestershire, Volumes II & III, 1969  
Thurcaston Village Appraisal, Charnwood Planning, March 1986

## Internet

[www.leicestershirevillages.com/thurcaston/localhistory.html](http://www.leicestershirevillages.com/thurcaston/localhistory.html) (accessed June 2011)  
[www.heritagegateway.org.uk](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk) (Leicestershire and Rutland HER) (accessed June 2011)  
[www.wheatsheaf-thurcaston.co.uk](http://www.wheatsheaf-thurcaston.co.uk) (accessed June 2011)

## Statutory Listed Buildings in Thurcaston

Grade II\* Church of All Saints  
Grade II Gates, piers & wall, Church of All Saints  
Grade II\* Bishop Latimers House, 37 Anstey Lane  
Grade II The School House, 60 Anstey Lane  
Grade II Bybrook Farmhouse, 25 Anstey Lane  
Grade II 88 and 92 Rectory Lane  
Grade II Thurcaston Grange & Stable Block, Rectory Lane  
Grade II Mill House Farmhouse, Mill Road  
Grade II Bybrook Farm Cottage, 23 Anstey Lane  
Grade II Barn at Bybrook Farm, 25A Anstey Lane  
Grade II Vine Farmhouse & outbuildings, Mill Road  
Grade II 52 Anstey Lane  
Grade II 29-31 Anstey Lane  
Grade II Sandham Bridge  
Grade II Bridge near Sandham Bridge