

# **WIDFORD CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**2013**

**This Appraisal was produced by Officers of East Hertfordshire District Council to assess the current condition of the Widford Conservation Area and identifies a number of suggested improvements and selected boundary changes. The document was subject to public consultation in February/ March 2012 during which time a public meeting was held on 19 March 2012. As a result of this consultation some alterations have been incorporated into this final version of the document.**

## **1. Introduction.**

**1.1. The historic environment cannot be replaced and is a resource that is both fragile and finite. Particularly in an age when society and its needs change with rapidity, the various historic and architectural elements of Conservation Areas can be perceived to interact in a complex manner and create a 'unique sense of place' that is appreciated by those lucky enough to reside in such special places and the many interested persons who appreciate and visit them.**

**1.2. East Hertfordshire District has a particularly rich and vibrant built heritage, featuring 42 Conservation Areas and approximately 4,000 fine listed buildings displaying a variety of styles representative of the best of architectural and historic designs from many centuries. Generally and very importantly the clear distinction between built form and open countryside has been maintained.**

**1.3. The District is situated in an economically buoyant region where an attractive environment, employment opportunities and excellent transport links, road rail and air, make it a popular destination to live and work. In addition to London a short commuting distance away, the District is influenced by other factors beyond its administrative area, such as Stansted Airport and the towns of Harlow and Stevenage. With such dynamics it is inevitable that the historic environment will be subject to pressures which emphasises the need to protect it.**

**1.4. The East Hertfordshire Local Plan Second Review, adopted in April 2007, recognises these facts and commits the Council to**

review its Conservation Areas and their boundaries. The production of this document is part of this process.

1.5. Conservation Areas are environments which are considered worthy of protection as a result of a combination of factors such as the quality of design and setting of the buildings or their historic significance. In addition to the individual qualities of the buildings themselves, there are other factors such as the relationships of the buildings with each other, the quality of the spaces between them and the vistas and views that unite or disrupt them. The relationship with adjoining areas and landscape, the quality of trees, boundary treatments, advertisements, road signage, street furniture and hard surfaces, are also important features which can add to or detract from the Conservation Area.

1.6. This appraisal recognises the importance of these factors and considers them carefully. This document is a 'material consideration' when determining planning applications. The document also puts forward simple practical management proposals that would improve the character of the Conservation Area and which are capable of being implemented as and when resources permit.

1.7. The recommendations concerning non-listed buildings and structures are normally formed by the field workers observations made from the public realm and seldom involve internal inspection or discussions with owners. Thus such recommendations contained in this appraisal might be subject to reconsideration through the planning application process, where that is necessary, and which would involve the submission of additional information.

1.8. This Conservation Appraisal:

- Identifies the special character of Widford;
- Identifies elements that should be retained or enhanced;
- Identifies detracting elements;
- Reviews the existing boundary;
- Puts forward practical enhancement proposals;

1.9. The document has been prepared in partnership with the local community and the Council would like to record its thanks to the Parish Council and to the members of the local community who provided useful information to officers when the survey was being undertaken and for the responses to the consultation exercise that have been received.

1.10. This document is written in three parts: Part A - Legal and Policy Framework. Part B - Appraisal; Part C - Management Proposals.

## PART A - LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

### 2. Legal and Policy framework.

2.1. The legal background for designating a Conservation Area is set out in Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This states that the Council shall from time to time designate Conservation Areas, which are defined as being 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to conserve or enhance'. The same section of the Act also requires that Councils undertake periodic reviews.

2.2. Section 71 of the Act requires Councils to '*formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement*' of Conservation Areas and hold a public meeting to consider them.

2.3. Within Conservation Areas there are additional planning controls and if these are to be supported it is important that the designated areas accord with the statutory definition and are not devalued by including land or buildings that lack special interest.

2.4. One of the most important additional planning controls that applies to Conservation Areas is set out at section 74 of the Act which states that '*a building in a conservation area shall not be demolished without the consent of the appropriate authority*'. This requirement is known as 'Conservation Area Consent' and is subject to certain exceptions. For example, it does not apply to Listed Buildings which are protected by their own legislation but is relevant to other non listed buildings in the Conservation Area above a threshold size set out in legislation. **Another exception relates to certain ecclesiastical buildings which are not subject to local authority listed building and conservation area administration provided an equivalent approved system of control is operated by the church authority. This is known as the 'ecclesiastical exemption'. Importantly church authorities still need to obtain any necessary planning permissions from the Council.**

2.5. The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development Order) 1995 (as amended), defines the range of minor developments for which planning permission is not required (PD rights) and this range is more restricted in Conservation Areas. For example, the Order currently requires that the addition of dormer

windows to roof slopes, various types of cladding, satellite dishes fronting a highway and a reduced size of extensions, all require planning permission in a Conservation Area, whereas they would not require permission beyond.

2.6. However, even within Conservation Areas there are many other minor developments that do not require planning permission. So as to provide further protection the law allows Councils to introduce additional controls if appropriate. Examples of such controls can include some developments fronting a highway or open space, such as an external porch, the painting of a house or the demolition of some gates, fences or walls. The removal of important architectural features that are important to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area or individual buildings within it such as distinctive porches, windows or walls or railings to non-listed properties can be subject to a more detailed assessment and if appropriate made subject to protection by a legal process known as an 'Article 4 Direction' **which withdraws 'Permitted Development Rights'**. The use of such Directions can only be made in justified circumstances where a clear assessment of each Conservation Area has been made. In conducting this appraisal, consideration will be given as to whether or not such additional controls are necessary.

2.7. Works to Trees. Another additional planning control relates to trees located within Conservation Areas. Setting aside various exceptions principally relating to size and condition, any proposal to fell or carry out works to trees has to be 'notified' to the Council. The Council may then decide whether to make the tree/s subject to a Tree Preservation Order. This appraisal diagrammatically identifies only the most significant trees or groups of trees that make a particularly important contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. Other trees not specifically identified may still be suitable for statutory protection.

2.8. Some hedges may be protected by the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. This legislation is extremely complicated and only applies in certain situations that are determined by the location of the hedge, its age and or its historical importance, the wildlife it supports and its number of woody species.

2.9. National Planning Policy Framework. Published in March 2012, this document replaces previous advice, including PPS 5, Planning for the Historic Environment. The principle emphasis of the new framework is to promote sustainable development. Economic, social and environmental roles should not be considered in

isolation because they are mutually dependent and positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment should be sought, including replacing poor design with better design. Whilst architectural styles should not be imposed it is considered proper to reinforce local distinctiveness.

2.10. In relation to the historic environment the new National Planning Policy Framework advises as follows:

- There should be a positive strategy in the Local Plan for the conservation of the historic environment and up-to-date evidence used to assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make.
- Conservation Areas. Such areas must justify such a status virtue of being of *'special architectural or historic interest'*.
- Heritage assets. A Heritage asset is defined as *'a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listings)'*.
- Considerable weight should be given to conserving such heritage assets and the more important they are the greater the weight. For example the effect of a development proposal on a non- designated heritage asset should be taken into account and a balanced judgment reached. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II Listed Building should be exceptional whilst harm to heritage assets of higher status, e.g. a grade I or II\* Listed Building should be wholly exceptional.
- Local Planning Authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas to enhance or better reveal their significance and proposals that preserve such elements should be approved.
- The use of Article 4 Directions to remove national permitted development rights should be limited to situations *'where this is necessary to protect local amenity or the well being of the area...'*
- Green Areas. Such areas of particular importance can properly be identified for special protection as Local Green Spaces in selected situations.

**2.11. East Hertfordshire's environmental initiatives and Local Plan Policies. East Hertfordshire is committed to protecting Conservation Areas and implementing policies which preserve and enhance them; to support their preservation through the publication of design and technical advice and to be pro-active by offering grants and administering an Historic Buildings Grant Service. With regard to the latter grants are awarded on a first come first served basis in relation to works which result in the maintenance of listed buildings and other unlisted buildings of architectural or historic interest. The maximum grant will not normally exceed £1,000.**

**2.12. In respect of the above the Council has produced a number of leaflets and guidance notes that are available on request. Further details are provided in Appendix 1.**

**2.13. The Council also has a 'Buildings at Risk Register' originally produced in 2006 and updated in 2012/13. In relation to Widford, farm buildings at Widfordbury Farm, the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century western wall to churchyard and the south barn and adjacent stables at Priory Farm, High Street, are entered on the Register as being 'at risk' whilst the West Barn at Priory Farm, High Street is identified as a 'vulnerable' building. Grant assistance not exceeding £10,000 may be available for works that lead to such buildings' long term security.**

**2.14. The East Herts Local Plan was adopted by the Council in 2007. Most of the policies set out in the plan remain in force and are relevant in relation to Conservation Area and Historic Building considerations. The Local Plan and its policies can be viewed on the Councils website or a copy can be obtained from the Council (contact details are set out in section 7).**

**2.15. In accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Council is in the process of preparing a planning policy document which will replace the 2007 East Herts Local Plan. This will be known as the East Herts District Plan. The District Plan will contain the relevant Council planning policies.**

**2.16. Widford Conservation Area was first designated in 1968 and most recently in redesignated in 1981.**

## **Part B - APPRAISAL**

### **3. Origins and Historical Development**

**3.1. The County Archeologist advises of some prehistoric flint finds beyond the village so it is likely the general area has been settled since early times.**

**3.2. Similarly there is evidence of limited Roman settlement in the area as crop marks, assessed as being Roman in origin, also lie beyond the village. Hertfordshire generally was settled extensively in Roman times.**

**3.3. Carbon dating to the 10<sup>th</sup> century of a burial outside the north wall of the church implies the possibility of an earlier church from late Saxon times.**

**3.4. As generally is the case, evidence of medieval occupation is more apparent. In this respect perhaps the most obvious representatives from this period are fine medieval wall paintings in the church dating from about 1300. Widfordsbury nearby was the manorial centre of an estate owned by Bermondsey Abbey until the Dissolution. Crop marks north of the church might indicate earthworks of a medieval pond or moated site.**

**3.5. Wideford (1086), Widiford (1205), Wedeford (1346) and Wydforde (1428) are different spellings identified in The Place Names of Hertfordshire published by Cambridge University Press that states '*The village...must have taken its name from some ford...*' The Manor is referred to in Domesday Book as Wideford.**

**3.6. As set out above, the village expanded during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with more modest expansion occurring in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that saw the construction of a railway line built in 1859 that once traversed land to the north of the village. During all of these periods the economy of the village remained firmly based on agriculture.**

**3.7. Kelly's Post Office Directory of 1874 contains the following commercial entries: a commercial traveler, a shopkeeper, a grocer, three beer retailers, two publicans (White Swan and the Bell), a shoe maker, a cow keeper and a blacksmith. As entries in this Directory were subject to charge, those included may only have been partly representative of the full range of available local services at that time. Nevertheless they demonstrate that Widford was a small community within which a number of different trades were plied and where there was a degree of self sufficiency. The population in 1871 was 450, a total not dissimilar to that of today.**

3.8. The early Ordnance Survey map dating from 1874 shows that the settlement pattern and road layout were very similar to those of today. In addition to the several pumps, pounds, wells, springs and troughs that were shown, a Smithy existed on the eastern side of the High Street and a Post Office at the junction of Hunsdon Road and Bell Lane. Interestingly this map shows allotment gardens to the south of Nether Street, no longer in evidence. Greater tree cover existed at this time. A map dating from 1897 showed there were then two Smithies in the village. Another map dating from the 1920's indicates a single Smithy only, shows the cricket field boundaries in their current configuration and indicates Allotment Gardens on the site of what is now the Lower Croft repair workshop. A map dating from 1963 indicates a Nursery with two large glass houses to the west of the High Street. By the 1960's, the small estates at Bell Lane, Lamb's Gardens and Benningfield Road had been built.

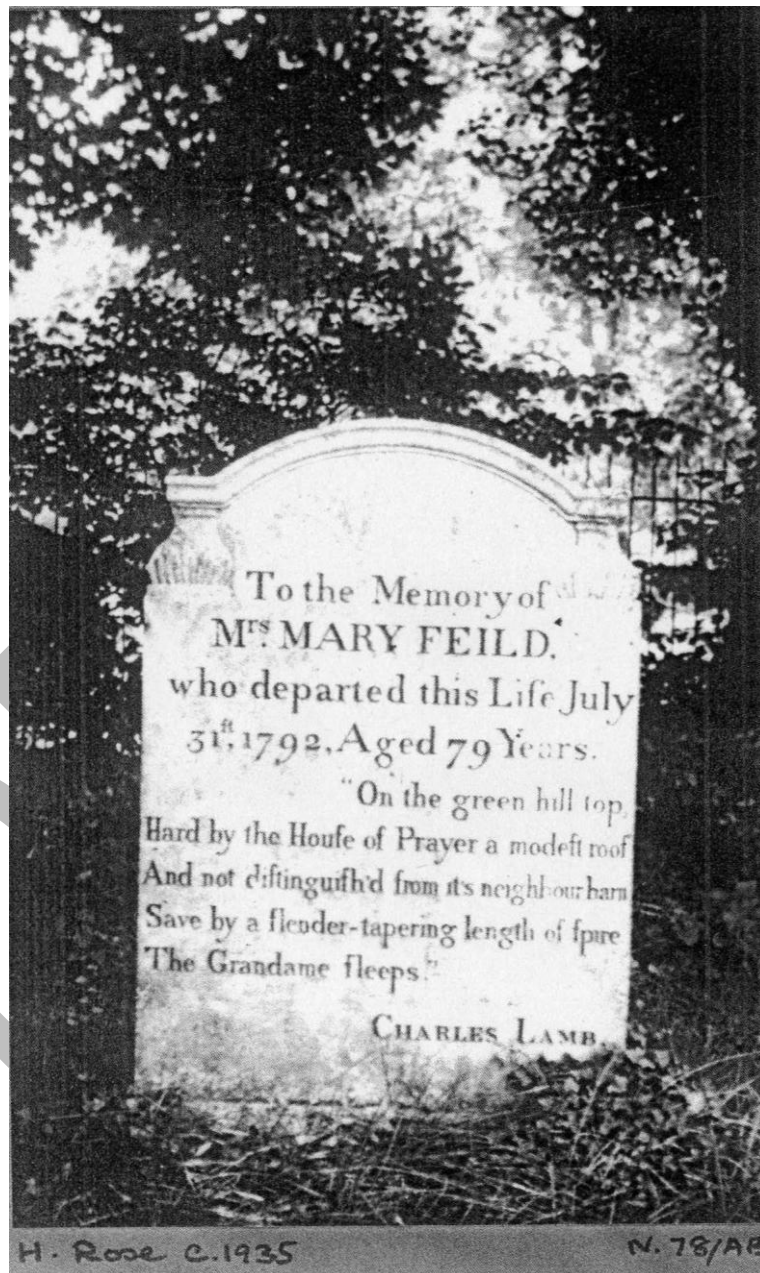


Picture 1 - Widford Smithy, probably early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Reproduced courtesy of Hertfordshire Archives and Records).

3.9. For a small rural community, the village has several interesting associations. For example a certain John Eliot who was baptized in Widford in 1604, was known as the 'Apostle to the Red Indians' because following his emigration to America, he translated the Bible into the local Indian language and undertook other evangelical work . His descendants presented the east window to the church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



3.10. Another interesting story relates to Charles Lamb, the 18<sup>th</sup> century poet and essayist whose works contain references to the village. He stayed with his grandmother, Mary Feild who is buried in the SW corner of the graveyard and whose headstone is individually listed. It is inscribed with words referring to his poem 'The Grandame'.



Picture 2 - Mary Feild's headstone, a Listed Building (Reproduced courtesy of Hertfordshire Archives and Records).

**3.11. Plan 1 shows the existing Conservation Area boundary approximately imposed on mapping dating from 1874.**

**4. General Designations and criteria used to identify Important Features.**

**4.1. There are no designated Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Conservation Area.**

**4.2. Areas of Archaeological Significance. There are four such designations in the Conservation Area and a number elsewhere in the Parish. Not all archeological sites are of equal importance and the Council will decide a course of action that may vary from recording any remains prior to development or protecting it from development, when determining planning applications. Much of the area around the Church, most of the centre of the village, most of land at Nether Street and Abbott's Farm is so designated.**

**4.3. Listed buildings. Individually listed buildings have been identified, plotted and very briefly described. Full descriptions can be obtained on line at English Heritage's web site or Heritage Gateway. Such listed buildings are protected from unauthorised demolition, alteration or extension. Structures, including railings and walls, within the curtilages of listed buildings, if they are pre-1948, are subject to the same controls as listed buildings. Importantly there are several listed properties with thatched roofs that are of particular architectural and historic significance.**

**4.4. Non listed buildings of quality and worthy of protection. There are also other non-listed buildings and structures that make an important architectural or historic contribution to the Conservation Area and these have been separately identified. The basic questions asked in identifying such buildings/structures are:**

- (a) Is the non listed building/structure of sufficient architectural or historic interest whose general external form and appearance remains largely unaltered?**
- (b) Does the building contain a sufficient level of external original features and materials?**
- (c) Has the building retained its original scale without large inappropriate modern extensions that destroy the visual appearance particularly in respect of the front elevation?**

**(d) Is the building visually important in the street scene?**

**4.5. Trees and Hedgerows. The basic criteria for identifying important trees and hedgerows are:-**

- (a) They are in good condition.**
- (b) They are visible at least in part from public view points.**
- (c) They make a significant contribution to the street scene or other publicly accessible areas.**

**4.6. Open spaces or gaps of quality that contribute to the visual importance of the Conservation Area where development would be inappropriate have been identified. The basic question asked in identifying such areas is does the open space or gap form an important landscape feature contributing to the general spatial quality and visual importance of the Conservation Area? Private open spaces forming an important setting for an historic asset and unkempt spaces that have the potential to be enhanced are candidates for selection subject to complying with the principle question.**

**4.7. Other distinctive features that make an important visual or historic contribution are noted and shown diagrammatically. Of importance to Widford are a number of walls and railings. Those above prescribed heights (1m fronting a highway including a footpath or bridleway, water course or public open space or 2m elsewhere) are protected and require prior consent for their demolition).**

**4.8. Article 4 – criterion for selecting unprotected walls or railings is as follows: those identified need to be below the prescribed height, be prominent in their location and make a positive architectural or historic contribution to its visual appearance.**

**4.9. Features that detract or are in poor repair have been identified.**

**4.10. Important views are identified. The most important of these is the view over the Ash Valley as seen from Ware Road from approximately at its junction with Abbott's Lane.**

**4.11. In suggesting any revisions to the Conservation Area boundaries, consideration has been given as to whether or not the land or buildings in question form part of an area of special**

architectural or historic interest whose character or appearance should be conserved.

## **5. General Character and Setting of Widford.**

**5.1. In terms of its wider setting, Widford is situated on elevated land and principally within the Middle Ash Valley as defined in the Landscape Character Assessment produced on behalf of the Council in 2007.**

**5.2. The general character and plan form of the village has not changed a great deal from the settlement pattern that existed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century despite the presence of more recent limited expansion. Whilst the quality of these later developments varies, they do not detract significantly to the quality of the Conservation Area and its general form and structure.**

**5.3. There are about 40 listed buildings in the Parish, most of which are in the designated Conservation Area. All centuries between 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> are represented. The 17<sup>th</sup> century dominates with about 34% of this stock followed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century (26%); the 16<sup>th</sup> century (18%) and the 19<sup>th</sup> century (16%). In addition, the Church largely originating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, is the earliest and the telephone kiosk designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott is the sole representative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The buildings are principally grade II with two being classified grade II\*.**

**5.4. Throughout the Conservation Area, trees, either as groups or as individual specimens add to its quality. Elsewhere part of the charm of Widford is represented by fragmented pasture lands forming part of the village and different in character from more open countryside beyond. Narrow lanes with steep banks and hedgerows add to the diversity and charm.**

**5.5. In summary the designated Conservation Area contains a mixture of good quality buildings, trees and open spaces together with some interesting historical associations.**

**5.6 The village has developed as several clearly defined identity areas and consists of four main parts:-**

**5.7. Area A - the historic properties grouped around the Grade II\* church that largely originates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century at Ware Road to the west of the settlement. This area is separated from the main part of the village by pasture land.**

**5.8. Area B is fragmented agricultural pasture land and associated buildings which together with the Cricket Ground to the north of Abbots Lane, contains the village in this location.**

**5.9. Area C - Nether Street to the north of the village is a narrow lane consisting of a rural grouping of historic buildings that forms a distinct area, largely separated from the main part of the village.**

**5.10. Area D consists of the remainder of the village with its existing and historic centre grouped around the junctions of Ware Road, Hunsdon Road and the High Street.**

## **6. Detailed Character Analysis.**

**6.1. Area A - Ware Road. The historic properties grouped around the Grade II\* church and land to the junction of Abbots Lane.**

**6.2. *General over-view.*** The land rises from the collection of agricultural buildings at Widfordbury in the west to the elevated view point at the junction with Abbots Lane closer to the village, and overlooks the expansive countryside and the River Ash Valley beyond. The general picture is that of an agricultural landscape containing a picturesque group of buildings at the western extremity of the village. One modern building and other features detract.



Picture 3 – View of Church from Graveyard extension.

**6.3. *Archeological sites.*** The church, the former Rectory to its east and part of the Widfordbury farm complex to the west and extending beyond the Conservation Area boundary to the River Ash is so defined. As previously indicated Widfordbury was the manorial centre of an estate owned by Bermondsey Abbey until the Dissolution. In the churchyard there is a modern stone erected in 2005, inscribed with the word *'Disturbed during the archeological dig in 2004 the remains of a Saxon woman C10 and a man and infant of a later date were re-interred here in 2005.'*

**6.4. *Individually Listed Buildings.*** There are 4 separately listed buildings, 2 of which are listed Grade II\*. The latter are the Parish church mainly originating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, whose spire is a very prominent feature in the landscape and a mid 16<sup>th</sup>/early 17<sup>th</sup> century wall with classical gateway that forms the western boundary of the churchyard. The listed building description accurately describes the church as being *'a small medieval church, little altered, with many features of special interest and outstanding interest for its medieval wall paintings and literary associations'*.

**6.5.** The District Council's Buildings at Risk Register identifies the Grade II\* classical gateway as being 'at risk' and states the

necessary action will be to (a) source the owner of the property; (b) undertake general repairs to brickwork and gate and (c) remove vegetation. Part of the brickwork collapsed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and some has been carefully rebuilt. There are many spalled bricks that need cutting out and replacing and this would be a specialist, time consuming and expensive job. Removal of limited vegetation growth would be a minor task.

6.6. The remaining listed buildings consist of the grade II Widfordbury Farm and Widfordbury House to the west of the church, 17<sup>th</sup> century in origin; the former Rectory, 18<sup>th</sup> century with its fine Georgian detailing and windows, particularly in the rear elevation, extended in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the charming late 18<sup>th</sup> century Headstone monument to Mary Feild in the old churchyard. All form part of a picturesque grouping around the church.

6.7. *Other buildings that make an important architectural or historic contribution.* Within the curtilage of Widfordbury Farm is a range of 19<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings varying in height, some weather boarded, principally with slate roofs or with missing roofs or with replacement corrugated asbestos. The buildings are in deteriorating condition and make a valuable architectural and historical contribution to the village approach. As they are within the curtilage of a Listed Building, they are protected and in law are viewed as if they were listed. The barns are currently being marketed 'to let subject to planning' Additionally these buildings are identified on the District Council's Buildings at Risk Register which recommends an action plan that includes general renovation and repairs.



Picture 4 – 19<sup>th</sup> century barns considered to be ‘At Risk’ at Widfordbury Farm.

**6.8. Within the curtilage of the former Rectory referred to above and similarly protected by its listing status, is a modest 19<sup>th</sup> century outbuilding worthy of retention. This is single storey, of brick construction with hipped slate roof and 2 no. semi circular windows to west elevation.**

**6.9. *Other distinctive features that make an important architectural or historic contribution.* The wall defining the frontage to the Churchyard is 1m in height and constructed of brick and flint with decorative brick detailing, dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

**6.10. Of similar date is a gault brick wall, 1.7 m in height and a brick and flint wall with decorative brick capping stones that forms an**



attractive continuous feature in this location to the curtilage of the former Rectory.

6.11. The wall defining the northern, southern and western boundaries of the private family graveyard of the Gosselin family is about 1.5 m in height and of brick construction and probably dates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The small burial ground contains fourteen graves and a central stone cross and is an interesting and unusual feature. Nearby and separating this burial ground from the farm complex, is a simple metal agricultural fence of similar date.

6.12. Another Lych Gate, commemorating those who gave their lives in two world wars, provides the entrance to the graveyard extension erected early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and located south of Ware Road opposite the Church. Here there are an interesting range of gravestones including a central cross, the burial place of General Percival who surrendered Singapore during WWII and that of Robert Brickdale, Commander of the Royal Navy, who died in 1992.

6.13. Elsewhere further east is another metal agricultural fence about 1.2 m in height. This probably dates from early 20<sup>th</sup> century and its simple but elegant style is a good example of its type and the function it performs. In part it is in good condition but an eastern section extending to the property 'Wilmoor' is in need of repair.

6.14. These walls and railings and lych gate to the original graveyard are protected either by being within the curtilages of or attached to Listed Buildings or by exceeding the prescribed height.

6.15. *Important open land, open spaces and gaps.* The graveyard attached to the church is neat and well cared for with an interesting range of tombs, including the one individually listed referred to above. Many date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and vary considerably in size and design. Together with its traditional mature trees and church spire, it dominates the local scene and represents the most important landscape feature of the village. The graveyard extension referred to at 6.12 is also an important open space.

6.16. The open agricultural land adjacent to Ware Road opposite Abbots Lane introduces expansive pasture land into the village scene and performs another important function by separating distinct parts of the village and providing expansive views over the Ash Valley.

**6.17. *Particularly important trees and hedgerows.*** The native hedgerow fronting Widfordbury farm buildings, the trees in the churchyard and a spinney opposite 'Long Meadow' are important landscape features.

**6.18. *Important views.*** See above.

**6.19. *Elements that are out of character with the Conservation Area:*** The property known as 'Green Acres' is a modern bungalow whose design, set on an elevated position, is out of keeping with the picturesque historic grouping opposite. Its scalloped front boundary fence and decorative planting and the western boundary of tall *Leylandii* trees are inappropriate to this rural open area. Adjacent to Green Acres is a field and small grouping of untidy buildings called Long Meadow. The site is obscured from view by a roadside hedge that varies in density. Access is gained from a narrow entrance of poor quality locked wooden gates. The buildings on site come into view when the gates are unlocked and appear to be poor quality and agricultural in nature. Near total screening would be achieved by additional roadside planting. The eastern section of railings extending to the property 'Wilmoor' on the opposite side of the road would be improved and benefit from simple repair work.

**6.20. *Opportunities to secure improvements.*** Retain through the planning process those properties within the curtilage of listed buildings and other distinctive features, trees, open spaces and views that have been identified as contributing to the quality of the area; seek to negotiate a rolling programme of repairs to the Grade II\* western wall of the church; seek to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the long term future of the agricultural barns at Widfordbury farm through negotiation, possible grant assistance and /or through the planning process, seek to reduce the impact of the detracting elements through negotiation and repair. Seek additional roadside planting to the front of Long Meadow in selected roadside locations.

**6.21. *Boundary changes.*** For reasons stated above the property Green Acres has been removed from the Conservation Area.

**6.22. Area B - Fragmented agricultural land and cricket ground, principally to the north of Abbots Lane.**

**6.23. *General over-view.*** Abbots Lane is a narrow lane linking Ware and Hunsdon roads. Use by local traffic has resulted in some damage to the roadside verges. The general picture is that of a

fragmented landscape composed of pasture land and sports facilities, traversed by a well used public footpath where mature trees along existing boundaries contribute to this part of the Conservation Area. However, modern buildings at the junction of Abbots Lane and Hunsdon Road detract.

**6.24. *Archeological sites.*** Abbots Farm to the south of Abbots Lane is so designated. Information is limited and essentially restricted to the listed building description of that property. It may have been the house of a John Abbott, resident in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

**6.25. *Individually Listed Buildings (all are Grade II).*** There are four such buildings namely the prominent Abbots Farm to the south of the Lane, possibly late medieval in origin; The Coach House also on the south side; Ashfield Nursing Home (formerly Walnut Tree House) on east corner with Abbots Lane dating from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, extended in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Tree Lodge, late 19<sup>th</sup> century in date that the listed building description describes as being in '*a picturesque Arts and Crafts style...*'

**6.26. *Other buildings that make an important architectural or historic contribution.*** None have been identified.

**6.27. *Other distinctive features that make an important architectural or historic contribution.*** Part of the eastern boundary of the cricket pitch is defined by traditional railings 1 m in height, probably dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These are in need of repair.

**6.28. *Important open land, open spaces and gaps.*** The quality of the fragmented pasture land, playing fields and quintessentially English cricket pitch with significant numbers of mature and maturing trees defining strong boundaries makes an important visual contribution to this part of the Conservation Area. The cricket ground was laid out in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The whole area is separate in character from the open arable farmland to the south.



Picture 5 – Cricket Ground, quintessentially English. Railings are in need of repair.

**6.29. *Particularly important trees and hedgerows.*** These are at varying stages of maturity, of different types but essentially all performing the task of defining existing boundaries and providing a pleasant and verdant environment, particularly for pedestrians using the footpath and persons participating in sporting activities. Those trees on the circular perimeter of the cricket pitch are particularly noteworthy for their contribution to the local scene.

**6.30. *Important views.*** Views of the cricket pitch particularly from the public footpath and views south west from Abbots Lane across open countryside are important.

**6.31. *Detracting elements.*** Land immediately west of the public footpath and south of the Cricket Pavilion appears unkempt and untidy. For example there is a large heap of builder's rubble that detracts and is visible from the public footpath.

**6.32.** Two modern properties, typical of standard mid/late 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture at the junction of Abbots Lane and Hunsdon road are not in keeping with the general surrounding architectural and historic quality of the Conservation Area. Their scale and form, including shallow pitched roofs make little contribution to the environment and are prominent when viewed from beyond the village further south on Hunsdon Road.

**6.33. *Opportunities to secure improvements.*** In association with the Parish Council, seek to identify additional planting particularly on verges and footpaths in the public realm; remove rubble near pavilion in public realm near footpath and consider possibly providing a seat; discuss the potential of repairs to the eastern boundary railings to the cricket pitch with the owner and consider potential of offering grant assistance and discuss untidy nature of site with owner in respect of land to the west of the public footpath.

**6.34. *Boundary changes.*** The Conservation Area has been redefined by removing modern properties as previously described.

**6.35. Area C - Nether Street.**

**6.36. *General over-view.*** Nether Street is a narrow lane, characterised in part by steep banks and hedgerows and small paddocks. Interesting Listed Buildings are set in open settings contained by a strong tree boundary alongside a tributary to the River Ash that clearly defines the area and separates it from the larger field patterns in the countryside to the north.

**6.37. *Archeological sites.*** Most of the area is designated as being an Area of Archaeological Significance. However information is limited. Some documentary evidence exists of Common Land having existed but the historic period is uncertain. Nether Hall incorporates elements dating from about 1500.

**6.38. *Individually Listed Buildings (all are Grade II).*** As set out above Nether Hall is 16<sup>th</sup> century in origin, significantly extended in

the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other listed properties date from 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are variously constructed with tiled, slate and thatched roofs that provide interest and variety in this rural setting.

**6.39. *Other buildings that make an important architectural or historic contribution.*** Hawthorn Cottage is a two storey 19<sup>th</sup> century property in appearance with weather boarding and slate roof with modest central chimney. Despite modern windows its overall scale and appearance is pleasing and it adds historic and architectural diversity in the lane and is worthy of retention.

**6.40. *Other distinctive features that make an important architectural or historic contribution.*** Walls to the eastern end of Nether Street , probably 19<sup>th</sup> century in origin of varying heights constructed in various materials, brick , brick and flint, brick cappings, define the edge of the lane and property and are important features worthy of retention. They are protected in law virtue of being within the curtilage of a Listed Building.

**6.41. *Open land, open spaces and gaps.*** As referred to above, the general character of the whole area is open in nature and steeply sloping paddocks at the western end of Nether Street add to this general characteristic of the Conservation Area in this location.

**6.42. *Trees and hedgerows.*** The trees and hedgerows provide an essential and pleasing character to the rural qualities of this part of the Conservation Area. This is particularly the case in respect of the hedgerows of native species on steep banks at both ends of the lane and the strong landscape feature of the mature trees alongside the tributary brook in the valley bottom.

**6.43. *Important views.*** Views across open countryside from the central part of the lane, looking south, are particularly important.

**6.44. *Detracting elements.*** The site of the Lower Croft garage and repair workshops is untidy when viewed from within but is hidden from external view so its impact on the Conservation Area is limited.

**6.45. *Opportunities to secure improvements.*** Ensure that the elements that are identified as contributing to the quality of the area are retained.

**6.46. *Boundary changes.*** None have been identified.

**6.47. Area D – Remainder of village grouped around Ware Road, Hunsdon Road and High Street.**

**6.48. *General over-view.*** The junction of these three streets is the centre of the village around which most of the Listed Buildings in the Parish are grouped and where the historic buildings are interspersed with modern buildings of limited architectural or historic value. South west of the school on Ware Road is more open in character.

**6.49. *Archeological sites.*** Most of the area is designated as being an Area of Archaeological Significance. However the information provided by the County Archeologist principally relates to the age of various Listed Buildings. A William Goddard was associated with ‘Goddards’, located on Hunsdon Road, in 1294.

**6.50. *Individually Listed Buildings (all are Grade II).*** These are grouped around the obvious centre of the village extending from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothick School constructed of brick and slate on Ware Road to the thatched properties dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on their elevated position at the north end of High Street. The High Street from its junction with Nether Street and extending along both sides of Hunsdon Road provides the greatest concentration of Listed Buildings. Within this group there is a mixture of ages, materials and styles including the telephone K6 type kiosk designed in 1935 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. Goddards on Hunsdon Road dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was an academy for young gentlewomen in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Little Goddards Cottage dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century with its distinctive design and parapet is a pleasing and dominant feature in the street scene.



Picture 6 – Little Goddards, Hunsdon Road.

**6.51. Priory Farmhouse, tall with steeply sloping roof dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is described in the Listed Building description as being ‘an historic small Queen Anne brick farmhouse little altered.’ Together with its barns, some of which are separately listed, it forms an important group in the centre of the Conservation Area. West Barn within its curtilage has been identified as being ‘vulnerable’. Subsequent updating of the Council’s ‘Buildings at Risk Register has identified South Barn and adjoining stables in the same grouping as being ‘at risk’. South Barn is separately listed and dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Both barns and stables are in a state of slow decay. Roofs may be leaking, some weatherboarding needs replacing and some vegetation needs removing. This is a key historic site in the centre of the village and it is most important that this issue is resolved and that the long term future of the barns is secured.**

**6.52. Other buildings that make an important architectural or historic contribution.** Within Priory Farmhouse is another former agricultural building, single storey brick with slate roof and some original window features of architectural quality and merit dating from late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whilst being protected in law by virtue of its location within the curtilage of a Listed building, this



barn is worthy of identification for long term protection and retention.

6.53. Rose Cottage dates from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, is of brick construction with slate hipped roof and prominent chimney, partly rebuilt to front. Despite this and other additions, the building retains its essential character and especially because of the prominent site it occupies, is worthy of retention.

6.54. Elsewhere at the White's Farm site on Ware Road are an interesting group of buildings dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The residence to the front is two storey, tiled roof with central chimney and decorative wooden barge board to front. To the rear is a group of farm buildings probably dating from the same period being weather boarded agricultural barns of varying heights and slate roofs, one with tall prominent agricultural door. Access to the site could not be obtained so their location and the description provided is limited to visual observations from the street.



Picture 7 – 19/20<sup>th</sup> century barns at White's Farm. Wall to front in need of repair. Dutch Barn and fence detract.

6.55. Wilmoor (former Victoria Inn) dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is constructed of brick with slate roof. Vertical sliding sash windows exist and despite some modern additions this building is worthy of retention.

**6.56. Other distinctive features that make an important architectural or historic contribution.** Distinctive 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century metal railings forming boundary with road, south east end of High Street. The horizontal metal bars are supported by sturdy metal supports, pleasantly but simply constructed with rounded detailing. Less than a 1 m in height these railings are technically unprotected in law, but it is understood they are owned by Hertfordshire County Council, a responsible statutory undertaker. They need repainting.



Picture 8 – Distinctive 19/20<sup>th</sup> century railings in need of repainting. See also Picture 1. Also photo shows thatched roof, an important characteristic to be retained.

**6.57.** Nearby is a simple 2 m brick wall protected by virtue of forming boundary to a Listed Building. Elsewhere walls forming the boundaries of several listed buildings add to the quality of the street scene and are important in defining and enclosing it. There are two stretches of modern wall, 2.5- 3m in height at Priory Farm and the 1 m brick wall with piers and rounded capping detail that forms the front boundary to the school on Ware Road.

**6.58. Important open land, open spaces and gaps.** Two small greens well maintained by the Parish Council with decorative trees form an important open space at the junction with Benningfield Road.

**6.59. *Particularly important trees and hedgerows.*** The trees on their steep banks with over arching canopies at the junction of High Street and Nether Street form an important environmental approach to the village. Elsewhere individual trees add to the quality of the street scene.

**6.60. *Important views.*** Of particular importance are views of the tree canopy from the south approaching Widford; view of Little Goddards Cottage on Hunsdon Road with its striking front elevation and views looking into the centre of the village.

**6.61. *Detracting elements.*** The simple bus shelter that also acts as an advertisement hoarding upon which private notices are pinned, together with road sign, directional sign, litterbin and timetable, all separate on individual supports, are located in a strategic visually central position to which the eye is drawn. Some modest rationalization could benefit the street scene.

**6.62.** The dwarf wall that forms the front boundary to White's Farm site is in a deteriorating condition and in need of repair. Together with the fence, it forms an untidy feature in this part of the Conservation Area. Also in this location, the Dutch barns in low key use detract when viewed from several locations, including the public footpath connecting with Abbots Lane.

**6.63. *Opportunities to secure improvements.*** Retain through the planning process those properties, identified within the curtilage of a listed building, unlisted properties, other distinctive features, trees, open spaces and views that have been identified as contributing to the quality of the area; seek to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the long term future of the agricultural barns at Priory Farm through negotiation, possible grant assistance and /or through the planning process, seek to reduce the impact of the detracting elements through negotiation.

**6.64. *Boundary changes.*** None are proposed.

**6.65** Summary overview of whole Conservation Area. Widford Conservation Area is of sufficient architectural quality containing distinctive buildings and well documented historical associations to justify its continued designation. Several thatched roofs exist, the retentions of which are most important. A key quality is the number of important open spaces and the relationship the built form enjoys with the surrounding countryside. Its historical association with agriculture is obvious and there are several good

quality barns, previously used for agricultural purposes that are currently in a state of decline. A principle imperative of this appraisal has been to identify this situation and recommend resolutions to the problem through negotiation and the planning process.

## PART C – MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

### 7. Management Proposals.

**7.1. Revised Conservation Area Boundary.** The revised boundary is shown on Plan 3 and includes the following amendments.

(a) Green Acres on south side of Ware Road is excluded.

(b) Home Field House, The Coppice and Little Goddards corner of Abbots Lane and Hunsdon Road is excluded.



Picture 9 – Properties at 7.1(b) above proposed to be excluded from the Conservation Area.

**7.2. *General Planning Control and Good Practice within the Conservation Area.*** All current planning policies are contained in the East Herts Local Plan Second Review adopted in April 2007. It is against this document that the District Council will process applications. As set out above, this will be superseded in due course by the District Plan.

**7.3.** Applicants considering submitting any application should carefully consider the relevant policies and if necessary contact Council Officers to seek pre-application advice. For further details including advice on Planning Applications, Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Landscaping and other general administrative advice, please contact the Planning Department for assistance.

Telephone no. 01279 655261

E-mail [planning@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:planning@eastherts.gov.uk)

Or write to E.H.D.C. Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford SG13 8EQ

**7.4.** Applicants may also wish to refer to one of the several Guidance Notes referred to in Appendix 1 below.

**7.5. *Planning Control - Potential need to undertake an Archeological Evaluation.*** Within the sites designated as being an Area of Archaeological Significance the contents of policies in the Local Plan which are relevant to this designation will need to be taken into account.

**7.6. *Listed Building Control and Good Practice.*** Those buildings that are individually listed and other buildings, structures or walls within the curtilage of a Listed Building are similarly protected in law.

**7.7.** The Listed Buildings and associated buildings within their curtilages are important and contribute to the quality of the built environment in Widford. It is essential that their architectural detailing is not eroded or their other qualities and settings not compromised. Of particular importance are properties with thatched roofs, the replacement of which by other materials would be entirely inappropriate. Good practice for applicants will be to carefully consider the content of the policies set out in the Local Plan.

**7.8.** The Appraisal agrees with other findings that the very important listed western wall to the church and the 19<sup>th</sup> century

barns in the curtilage of listed Widfordbury Farm are quality buildings at risk. Similarly South Barn and West Barn at Priors Farm in the centre of the village are respectively considered to be 'at risk' and 'vulnerable'. The District Council considers the resolution of these issues as being of paramount importance. In partnership with owners and within the limitations of existing staff and financial resources, it will seek a satisfactory solution that secures their long term future. The loss of these buildings would be entirely unacceptable.

**7.9. Planning Control – Other Unlisted Buildings that make an Important Architectural or Historic Contribution.** Several such unlisted buildings that make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area have been identified. The Council will seek to ensure that these are retained. These are Hawthorn Cottage, Nether Street; Rose Cottage, Ware Road; White's Farm and outbuildings to rear, Ware Road and Wilmoor also on Ware Road.

**7.10. Planning Control – Other Unlisted distinctive features that make an Important Architectural or Historic Contribution.** In addition to the walls and railings already protected, by virtue of being within the curtilages of Listed Buildings or above the prescribed heights, there are others that are unprotected which can only be protected in law by the introduction of an Article 4 Direction. Prior to considering such a course of action, the Council will seek to establish ownership and discuss further with owners.

**7.11. Planning Control – Important open land, open spaces and gaps.** This appraisal has identified the following important spaces: the churchyard; the churchyard extension south of Ware Road; land north of Ware Road overlooking the Ash Valley; the Cricket Pitch, playing fields and pasture land north of Abbots Lane (extended following representations during public consultation) and the formal open spaces junction of Ware Road / Benningfield Road.

**7.12.** These represent open spaces and other landscape features that materially contribute to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area and will be protected.

**7.13. Planning Control – Particularly important trees and hedgerows.** Only the most significant trees are shown diagrammatically. Subject to certain exceptions all trees in a Conservation Area are afforded protection and a person wanting to carry out works has to notify the Council. Trees that have not been

identified may still be considered suitable for protection by Tree Preservation Orders. Owners are advised to make regular inspections to check the health of trees in the interests of amenity and Health and Safety. As previously advised at paragraph 2.8 some hedges may be protected by the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

**7.14. Planning Control –Important views.** The most important views within and out of the Conservation area are diagrammatically shown.

**7.15. Enhancement Proposals.** The Appraisal has identified a number of elements that detract that are summarised below together with a proposed course of action. Within the staff and financial resources available, Council Officers will be pro-active and provide assistance. It must be recognized that such improvements will frequently only be achieved with the owners co-operation.

<b>Detracting element</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Proposed Action.</b>
<b>Landscaping/ fencing.</b>	<b>Green Acres, south of Ware Road.</b>	<b>Seek to negotiate solution with owner.</b>
<b>Agricultural railings.</b>	<b>North of Ware Road.</b>	<b>Seek to negotiate repairs to agricultural railings.</b>
<b>Deteriorating listed wall and agricultural buildings in curtilage of a Listed Building.</b>	<b>Widfordbury farm and western wall of church.</b>	<b>Enter discussions with owners. Seek to initiate repairs. Without prejudice, consider possibility of grant aid. Seek satisfactory planning outcome in relation to future of barns.</b>
<b>Untidy site.</b>	<b>South of cricket pavilion and west of public footpath.</b>	<b>Seek resolution following discussion with owner.</b>
<b>Boundary railings in need of repair.</b>	<b>Cricket pitch.</b>	<b>Discuss with owner, seek repairs.</b>
<b>Boundary railings in need of repainting.</b>	<b>Northern end of High Street.</b>	<b>Establish ownership, seek repainting.</b>
<b>Small accumulation of debris.</b>	<b>Adjacent to public footpath/ near cricket pavilion.</b>	<b>Discuss modest environmental improvements, including possible provision of seat with Parish Council</b>

<b>Untidy site.</b>	<b>Lower Croft garage.</b>	<b>Discuss potential of initiating limited internal improvements with owner, commensurate with use of site.</b>
<b>Untidy site</b>	<b>Long Meadow, Ware Road</b>	<b>Discuss potential of providing additional screening to roadside boundary.</b>
<b>Discordant signage.</b>	<b>Bus shelter area.</b>	<b>Consider rationalization of discordant elements.</b>
<b>Dwarf wall / fencing/Dutch barns.</b>	<b>Whites Farm.</b>	<b>Discuss potential of repairs/improvements with owner.</b>
<b>Deteriorating listed properties.</b>	<b>Priory Farm.</b>	<b>Enter discussions with owners. Seek to initiate repairs. Without prejudice, consider possibility of grant aid. Seek satisfactory planning outcome in relation to future of barns.</b>

**7.17. The features identified in paragraphs 7.1- 7.15 above are shown on Plan 3.**



**Appendix 1. Guidance notes produced by East Hertfordshire District Council. The following represent useful technical information and can be obtained via the details provided above.**

- 1. Brick Repointing and Repair.**
- 2. Conservation Areas.**
- 3. Cleaning Historic Brickwork.**
- 4. Farm Buildings**
- 5. Flint and Flint Wall Repair.**
- 6. Hard Landscaping in Historic Areas.**
- 7. Listed Buildings.**
- 8. Rainwater Goods and Lead.**
- 9. Shopfronts.**

**DRAFT**