

# Old Marston Conservation Area Appraisal



Consultation Draft

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## Statement of Special Interest

Old Marston's name (meaning settlement in the marshes) suggests it existed as a small village or hamlet by the Anglo-Saxon period. It was part of the manor of Headington recorded as the King's property in the Domesday Survey of 1086. It was first record by name in the grant of its chapel to the canons of St. Fridewide's in 1122. The chapel appears to have formed the nucleus of St Nicholas' Church, set in the heart of the present village and conservation area.

Evidence of the medieval village's development as a series of farm units, spread along a central road (modern Oxford Road and Elsfield Road) and surrounded by the common open fields and the manor's demesne farmland survives in the present street plan and property boundaries. Colleges of Oxford University, as well as local farming families, held land and farms in the village during the later Middle Ages. Back Lane marks the division of the medieval village closes and orchards from the open fields and is a rare surviving green lane with a distinctive character. Other lanes representing this medieval street plan run in-between farm units, around the churchyard, or provide accommodation lanes that lead to fields, mills and ferry points, as well as other settlements.

The village was the headquarters of the Parliamentary Army besieging Oxford in 1645, with 'Cromwells House' used by General Fairfax. The Treaty of Oxford was negotiated there in 1646, resulting in the capitulation of the city. The village's open fields were enclosed in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, which coincided with the building, rebuilding or enhancement of many of its farmhouses. As such, the village has a special architectural interest as a focus of 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses.

Old Marston remained a community of small landowners during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, helping preserve the farmhouses from later rebuilding. The conservation area's mixture of buildings reflects the local agricultural and commercial needs of a small rural community. It did attract settlement by Oxford tradesmen and cottagers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, which provides further architectural interest in the village as a focus of small 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century vernacular cottages and a number of larger houses.

The conservation area includes notable clusters of historic buildings in the south around the Red Lion Pub, in the middle, around the former White Hart Inn and in the north surrounding Alan Court and St Nicholas' Church, all of which create areas of particular architectural interest and distinctive character and appearance.

Old Marston remained relatively isolated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries despite development of Oxford's New Marston suburb to the south. The village retained a green and open setting, which makes an important contribution to its historic village character. Land was given for recreational use and as a memorial garden in the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further recreation grounds and allotments have been added taking in former fields. Other small fields in the village's immediate setting remain in agricultural use, as well as an orchard and several paddocks.

Later 20th century development included infill development as individual houses, generally set back from the road, maintaining the focus of views and vistas on older properties. Green hedges and stone boundary walls bridge gaps between more historic elements of streetscape and support the rural character of the area. Larger infill developments involved the redevelopment of farmyards. These are set behind the main street frontage, reducing their impact on the overall character of the area and retaining farmyard walls and barns, converted for housing, which provide evidence of past uses.

The conservation area's rural character is supported by the green public realm, including broad grassed verges, which add to the feeling of openness, as well as forming soft edges to the roads. The area is well timbered, partly through survival of hedgerow boundaries but also through the

mature planting of private gardens, which includes groups of trees that arch over the road creating attractive tunnels of greenery.

## Summary

### **Key Positive Features**

- An historic village that continues to be a quiet and attractive residential area.
- A medieval street pattern, including long, broad and winding main streets with narrow lanes running off.
- A long historic connection with the colleges of Oxford University, as landowners.
- Connections with the Civil War siege of Oxford and the negotiation of the Treaty of Oxford during May and June 1646.
- Green open spaces form the setting of the village and penetrate to the edges of the main streets and maintain a rural character.
- A mixture of different ages and forms of buildings, which collectively reflect the historical development of the village and its community.
- Buildings with scale, detailing and use of natural or locally produced materials that provide a good representation of the local vernacular style.
- Detached farmhouses with smaller cottages forming small informal groups as terraced rows but with an informal layout including varying alignment and roof lines, reflecting an 'organic' development.
- Excellent survival of architectural details, including local vernacular features, or surviving historic architectural flourishes, that adds to the character and interest of buildings
- Stone walls of various heights as front boundaries that link historic elements in the street scene.
- Evidence of former farmyards, including a scatter of former agricultural buildings and yard walls, now largely converted for self-contained infill housing developments
- Views of interest to landmark buildings and groups forming notable frontages.
- Channelled views along streets and expansive views across green open spaces or out to the countryside beyond.
- Greenery along the village streets, including grass verges to the road and mature gardens with groups of tall trees leaning over the road.

### **Negative Features**

- Suburban style developments of speculative housing in uniform styles and materials detract from the character of the area and overall high architectural interest.
- The dominance of hard landscaping in the public realm of new developments detracts from the green and rural character of the conservation area.
- The volume of traffic using narrow roads through the conservation area and often creating queues along the main village street is detrimental to its character as a quiet village location.
- A number of features of street furniture, particularly the urban style bus stop at the Mortimer Hall and a second new bus stop on Oxford Road are considered to detract from the rural character of the conservation area.
- The loss of front boundary walls and front gardens to provide off-street car parking has resulted in a loss

of the rural character of the conservation area.

- The lack of maintenance of a large proportion of the allotments at Court Place Farm has resulted in a neglected character after, at least, 800 years of continual cultivation.
- Cherwell Drive/Marston Ferry Road cuts through the main village street and the rural Back Lane, which have never been adequately reunited as pedestrian routes or public spaces.
- The contribution of buildings to the area's architectural character has been diminished where modern extensions rival them in scale and impinge on their green settings.

#### Vulnerabilities

- Loss of green space, including grass verges, gardens and fields within the conservation area and its setting, or loss of mature trees from gardens without suitable replacement could reduce the green and rural character of the conservation area.
- Any significant increase in traffic volume or speed would detract from the quiet residential character of the area
- Loss of architectural character and detailing, including unsympathetic alterations to former agricultural buildings would both detract from the architectural interest of the area and from its character and appearance.
- Loss of stone boundary walls and other front boundaries would detract from the character and appearance of the area and from its historic interest.
- Intrusion of urban and suburban character in new development, including monotonous building design and use of materials, high density of development and dominance by hard landscaping, as well as lack of division between public and private green open space would detract from the rural character of the area.
- Loss of village amenities including public houses or a village library/reading room would detract from the character of the area as a self-contained community.
- Intrusion of unsympathetic street furniture, including highways signage, urban style bus stops, street-lighting or boundary treatments such as shiplap fencing would detract from the rural simplicity of the streetscape.

## 1. Introduction

The Old Marston Conservation Area was first designated in July 1976 by South Oxfordshire District Council. The boundary of the conservation area was rationalised in December 1989. Old Marston became part of the City of Oxford's administrative area in 1991.

This character appraisal has been prepared by Oxford City Council following survey within and around the Conservation Area undertaken between Autumn 2010 and Summer 2011, which included the involvement of stakeholders representing the local community. Public consultation on the draft appraisal will be undertaken in January and February 2011, following which the appraisal will be amended to take into account representations made by the public. A final draft will then be presented to the City Council's East Oxford Planning Committee for their endorsement.

### Reason for appraisal

The City Council have a statutory duty under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to identify those parts of their area that are considered to have "... special historic or architectural interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" and to designate these as conservation areas. Within these areas the 1990 act requires the Council to have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the area when exercising its function as a local planning authority.

This character appraisal defines the special historic and architectural interest of the conservation area, including those features of its character and appearance that should be preserved. It also identifies negative features that detract from the area's character and appearance and issues that may affect it in future.

The government's policy for managing conservation areas is set out in Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5): Planning for the Historic Environment (DCLG 2010). According to PPS5 the government's overarching aim is that "... the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations". In conformance with the planning policy statement this appraisal provides a public record of the

conservation area as a designated heritage asset including an assessment of the features that contribute to its significance. PPS5 states that "... there should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets". It directs councils to have regard to the need to protect the contribution of the setting of a designated heritage asset to its special value.

This appraisal will be used by the Council to ensure that the qualities and local distinctiveness of the historic environment are considered and contribute toward the spatial vision of local plan documents. It should ensure that investment and enhancement in Old Marston is informed by a detailed understanding of the area's special interest. It will be used when determining planning applications affecting the area and should inform the preparation of proposals for new development. As a minimum requirement, planning applications should refer to the appraisal when explaining the design concept

The appraisal cannot mention every building or feature within the conservation area. Any omission should not be taken to imply that it is not of any interest or value to the character of the area.

### Local community involvement

This appraisal was prepared with the assistance of representatives of Old Marston Parish Council, Marston Ward Councillors of Oxford City Council, Oxford Preservation Trust Old Marston Branch and the New Marston Wildlife Group. Community workshops in the conservation area were held during September 2011, including the use of the City Council's 'Character Assessment Toolkit', a standardised questionnaire used to collect information on the positive and negative contribution of different features of the environment to the character and appearance of the conservation area.



## 2. Context

### Location

Old Marston Conservation Area lies at the northern edge of the City of Oxford, approximately 2.5 miles north of the city centre.

### Setting

The A40, to the north, forms both the city limit and part of the conservation area's boundary.

Otherwise the northern boundary runs through later 20<sup>th</sup> century housing developments at Church Lane (north), Harlow Way and Mill Lane (actually running through several buildings). Mill Lane runs north from the conservation area at the boundary between housing to the east and countryside to the west and reaches a dead-end at Hill View Farm, just inside the ring road.

To the east, the boundary of the conservation area runs from the A40 along the dual carriageway's feeder road and the centre of Marsh Lane, where a tall tree line limits views to sports fields further east. Elsfield Road joins Marsh Lane to the road network within the conservation area. To the south, the edge of the village recreation grounds forms the boundary of the conservation area, beyond which later 20<sup>th</sup> century housing developments are located at Horseman Close, Elms Drive and Cherwell Drive.

The later 20<sup>th</sup> century housing continues to the

south as an extensive housing estate. Oxford Road and Raymond Road approach the conservation area from the south, whilst Cherwell Drive and Marston Ferry Road provide access from the south-east and west, forming a continuous route through the southern edge of the conservation area.

The eastern edge of Old Marston is formed by the hedgerow that run alongside the long sinuous route of Back Lane, beyond which agricultural fields continue west to the River Cherwell and then as far as Summertown.

### Geology and Topography

The conservation area lies on a gravel terrace raised slightly above the Oxford clays, which are incised to the west by the course of the River Cherwell and to the east by a palaeo-channel of the river. The routes of Oxford Road and Mill Lane follow a gently sinuous course along the north – south alignment of the gravel terrace. Oxford Road forms the main street within the village. It dips almost imperceptibly between two higher points in the north and south, which historically formed two nuclei for the village's development. Side roads and lanes run off this main route. Elsfield Road runs eastwards from a junction at the northern end of Oxford Road.

Wide areas of green open space lie within the conservation area to the east and outside the conservation area to the west. Tree lines and hedgerows divide these areas into fields and form an attractive green background in many views.



**View north from Elsfield Road over fields in the conservation area to the rural setting beyond**

### 3. Historical Development

#### Origins of the village

The name of Old Marston indicates that it originated as an Anglo-Saxon settlement lying among the marshes beside the River Cherwell. Records from the 11<sup>th</sup> century suggest this was part of the large royal estate of Headington, to which Marston acted as a subsidiary settlement, providing specialist resources including fisheries, seasonal pasture and mills, two of which were recorded in the Headington estate in the Domesday Survey of 1086.

#### The medieval village

The first direct record of Marston dates from 1122 when Henry I granted a chapel located there to the canons of St Frideswide's. A large part of St Nicholas' church dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, including the chancel arch and seven arches of the nave.

The hundred rolls record the population of Marston in 1279 as including forty-six unfree tenants, in addition to a priest and two freeholders, one of whom was the miller (Hugh de Molendino) the other probably the owner or tenant of Court Place (the village's manorial farm). The rolls also record a ferry held by two fishermen as freeholders. A ferry was still located in the village at The Victoria Arms in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Middle Ages the village was surrounded by open fields, including Sutton Field to the south west, Colterne Field to the north west and Marsh Field to the north east. The manor's demesne land lay in the south east quarter of this circle between Court Place and the foot of Headington Hill. The village lay in a relatively isolated position off major routes. Indeed, until the construction of northern ringroad's bridge in the 1930s, the nearest bridges crossing the Cherwell were located at Magdalen Bridge over two kilometres to the south or at Islip, nearly five kilometres to the north.

Old Marston appears to have developed as a linear settlement with a series of large plots, probably each representing a small farm, set along the west side of Oxford Road and running up to Back Lane. The land of the demesne farm appears to have restricted the development of land on the east side of the road. Similar farm plots probably ran along both sides of Elsfield Road, with the church occupying one of these.

During the fourteenth century ownership of farmland was removed from the control of the manor to other individuals and organisations, particularly the colleges, as copyhold. These owners also held the farmhouses and buildings within the village. Brasenose College, for example, owned Court Place and Colthorne Farm until the mid and later 20<sup>th</sup> century respectively. The church was partially rebuilt in the fifteenth century, possibly at a time when canons of St Frideswide's were serving as vicars to the church.

Some of the village's common meadowland to the south was enclosed in the 1520s, when Magdalen College bought out the rights of the village's other landowners. Records of the churchwardens at this time include the requirements to keep up a bridge in the village and a gate at the 'town end'. The town end might well have been the focus of settlement now formed of the group of cottages in the south of the village around the entrance to Boults Lane. Indeed, Boults Lane may at one time have continued to the east as the road to the manorial centre at Headington. The most likely location for the bridge would have been at the southern limit of the conservation area where Oxford Road crosses the brook that runs across the allotments and under Boults Lane past Halford House.

#### 17<sup>th</sup> century Marston

In 1605 Corpus Christi College had maps of their Marston property drawn up which provide an interesting record of the village at that date. These show the present street pattern much as it is today, including clusters of buildings at the junctions of Oxford Road with Boults Lane in the south and Mill Lane, Pond Lane and Church Lane in the north.

The Mansion (later known as Cromwells House), standing at the dog-leg in Mill Lane, was rebuilt from an earlier property by Unton Croke during the reign of James I. Croke was a prominent Parliamentarian and when the Parliamentary army lay siege to Oxford in 1645 Croke was required to accommodate the army's headquarters in his home. The following year the Parliamentary headquarters were established in Headington. However, when the city surrendered, Croke's house was appointed as the meeting place for the commissioners of both sides to negotiate the Treaty of Oxford.



Inclosure of two of the village's open fields followed shortly after the Civil War, and may have been encouraged by the impact of the war on the productivity of the land. It also appears that ownership of land in the village had become concentrated in a small number of large farms, with a large number of residents either owning only very small parcels of land or none at all. As such the larger landowners were able to enclose land by agreement, preferring to use it as pasture rather than arable.

#### **Old Marston in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries**

The Crokes' landholdings were bought by Thomas Rowney in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, but when he died in 1727 these were divided to form smaller land units and from shortly after this point Marston became a village without any residents of the rank of gentleman, although several landowners were rated as yeoman farmers. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century much land in the village was bought by people living in Oxford and elsewhere as investments.

The 1801 census records the village's population as 264 inhabitants forming 45 households. A variety of crops including sheep, pigs, pulses, corn and fruit were raised to supply both subsistence needs and Oxford markets. However, the village did not attract the type of high status mansion houses built in other settlements surrounding Oxford, reflecting its relative isolation at this time. Indeed, Unton Croke's mansion became the village poorhouse for a period in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was bought by the Sims family in 1823 and, following a fire that destroyed part of the old building, they divided the property for two houses, the eastern half retaining a connection with the associated farm buildings.

The village population grew only slowly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The village continued to supply market garden produce and other crops to Oxford, but with no large landholding that could be developed for the types of residential estate built elsewhere around Oxford at this time. Indeed, the majority of 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings in the village are cottages, some of which are very small. A school building was established just to the east of the church with aid from the National Society in 1851 and a new schoolmaster's house was built at the same time. The church was restored under the guidance of H.G.W. Drinkwater in 1883.

Factors inspiring growth of the population in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century may have included growing demand for market produce from Oxford, the metalling of the roads, increasing the attraction of the village for craftsmen from the town and the partial removal of children from the agricultural workforce after elementary education became compulsory in 1871. The richer agricultural families invested in their houses between the 1840s and the long depression in the 1870s and 80s. These included new buildings at Boult's Lodge, Walnut Tree House and Norcott, as well as improvements to the Manor House, Colthorne Farm and Bryher Cottage. Brick was also introduced as a locally produced building material at this time.

#### **Old Marston meets New Marston**

The construction of the working class suburb of New Marston began in the late 1880s, reaching Old Marston as ribbon development along Oxford Road just before the Second World War. In the mid and later 20<sup>th</sup> century this development spread out to wrap around the southern edges of the old village. The village was cut off from the wider countryside by construction of the Oxford ringroad to the north in 1932. Municipal housing was developed along Mill Lane to the north of the village core during the Inter-War period.

Despite the changes in the village's setting, comparison of the Ordnance Survey maps from the 1870s and the 1930s reveals very little change within the village during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Exceptions are the creation of a recreation ground at the southern limit of the village through a gift from the Rev. J.H. Mortimer, a former vicar of the parish, and the creation of a village reading room through the gift of a former carpenter's workshop, also by Rev. Mortimer. The reading room was demolished in 1958/9 when it became too unsafe to use and the land was converted to a small public memorial garden which remains on the west side of Oxford Road. The reading room's function as a village meeting place was replaced through the conversion of the former National School into a church hall.

Cul-de-sacs of housing were built in the village at Boult's Lane, Cross Farm (Barns Haye) and off Elsfield Road on the land of the former Little Acreage Cottage, in the 1960s and 70s. A village hall named in memory of the Reverend Mortimer was opened in 1966. The Marston Ferry Road was constructed in the 1970s, cutting across the

Mortimer Recreation Ground and connecting the village with the Banbury Road and Summertown. Two further estates of houses were added on land formerly belonging to Cannon's Farm and Church Farm in the 1980s.

Recent years have seen a number of small scale infill residential developments, as well as larger infilling such as the land at the rear of the Whit Hart Inn. The village has also lost several of its amenities, including the village shop, post office and two of its public houses, most recently the Bricklayers Arms (planning permission recently given for conversion of the latter included a requirement that the frontage of the building was retained). Only one small farm remains inside the conservation area at The Butts, whilst a large part of the remaining open land within the conservation area has been converted to allotment gardens and recreation grounds.

Notable past inhabitants of Old Marston include Howard Walter Florey, Baron Florey of Adelaide and Marston (1898-1968) who oversaw the project to develop penicillin as an anti-bacterial agent and among other positions was President of the Royal Society (1960-65) and a Nobel laureate in Physiology and Medicine in addition to

numerous other honours. Norman Heatley, who was also a member of Florey's penicillin team, lived at No. 12 Oxford Road. The village was also home to the Reverend Jack Russell, a keen huntsman, after whom the famous breed of terrier dog was named.

#### **Archaeological Potential**

The conservation area appears to retain a medieval street pattern and potential must exist for the presence of subsurface remains of medieval occupation and subsequent phases of building and activity contributing to the development of the present village. Previous finds have included seventeenth century spurs and wig-curlers found at The Orchard, which may reflect some of the activity in the village during the Civil War. Medieval records of mills in the village may suggest one may have been located on the brook that runs through the conservation area. Informing understanding of the development of the settlement's structure, whether as a new foundation in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, or a development from an earlier settlement should be a priority for future investigation. The village also has a high potential for the presence of earlier phases of settlement exploiting the marshland resources.

## 4. Spatial Analysis

### Key Positive Spatial Features

- Linear development along the narrow, sinuous course of Oxford Road with green verges and raised pavements accentuating the rural character and providing a string of linked spaces - some well defined, others merging into each other;
- Boundary features include low stone walls and green hedges, which have a rural character and allow some visibility of buildings across private front gardens;
- Regularly sized land parcels (now subdivided) running off the west side of Oxford Road and ending at Back Lane, reflect a medieval development of small farms and now form larger gardens and paddocks that provide part of the village's green setting;
- Front gardens, including some mature trees, add to the greenery of the streetscene;
- Large areas of green open space to the east and west preserve a green setting to the village which reinforces the rural character;
- Historic buildings either at the rear of the pavement or with small set backs, create a greater sense of enclosure;
- Nodes of historic development around the junctions of roads and lanes, where historic buildings are closely spaced or have continuous frontages, creating enclosure and providing a strong sense place;
- Narrow lanes without pavements, with narrow grass verges and enclosed by low boundaries reflect a historic rural pattern of development;
- Distinctive enclosed area at Ponds Lane and Church Lane north, with high stone boundary walls and trees arching over the road;
- A green lane at Back Lane running parallel to the village's main street is a distinctive historically interesting space and provides access to the village's rural setting;
- Important views and vistas include enclosed views of groups of historic buildings, channelled views along streets to landmark buildings and views out to green open spaces both inside and outside the conservation area;
- Greenery of hedgerows and tree lines surrounding fields both inside the conservation area and in its setting support its rural character.

### Street pattern and layout

The village's street plan is made up of the main streets of Oxford Road and Elsfeld Road, with smaller lanes running off, including Mill Lane in the north and Boults Lane in the south (see Spatial Analysis Map). Mill Lane, Church Lane and Pond Lane form an intricate network in the north which divides former farmyard plots and the churchyard. These continued out of the envelope of the village to fields beyond along routes including Mill Lane and Butts Lane. Back Lane is an unusual survivor of a green lane, running along the rear of the gardens, paddocks and orchards immediately behind houses and gardens on Mill Lane and Oxford Road. Its long course is connected with the wider street grid at either end, although a small number of gates allow access to



**Oxford Road provides the historic spine of the village**

private property off the lane. This street pattern reflects the historic development of the village and, therefore, is valued for its historic interest. It also contributes to its appearance, uses and sense of activity.

The central route of Oxford Road is both narrow and gently sinuous, often running at a lower level than the footpath on its east side. This provides a series of unfolding views with enclosure provided by tall trees and individual buildings or groups of cottages providing points of interest. The land rises to either side of the road, suggesting it has been scooped out as a naturally formed 'hollow way' over centuries of use. The gap in the building line on the east side of the road for the Court Place Farm allotments is notable and preserves the connection between the village street and green setting.

Mill Lane, in the north, provides a continuation of Oxford Road, with a sharp dog leg in front of No. 15 Mill Lane, running around the western end of the adjacent No. 17. Surrounding buildings and high hedgerows create an enclosed space in this part of Mill Lane. North of the dog-leg, the western side of the road is bounded by an agricultural hedgerow beyond which views are seen across the small fields of the rural landscape.

Elsfield Road contrasts with Oxford Road with a long straight course that provides an attractive vista. Houses are set back from the road in large gardens that represent historical farmhouse gardens and farmyards. Modern cul-de-sacs to either side of Elsfield Road provide denser development, but set away from the main road frontage and in green landscaped settings that maintain a rural character.

Between Elsfield Road and Mill Lane, Church Lane, Ponds Lane and Butts Lane provide an area of narrow, inter-connecting lanes with an important focal space where the former Bricklayers Arms provides a landmark. Buildings around these routes are characterised as having a lack of consistency in their positioning, size or orientation that is a result of an 'organic' process of development. A positive feature is the winding courses of these narrow, enclosed lanes, which create intimate areas with unfolding views.



**Mill Lane has a distinctive, dogleg, wrapping around Cromwell House and joining the alignment of Back Lane**

The Court Place Farm Allotments provide a large open area crossed by a network of footpaths that allow visual access to surrounding greenery.

A crescent of green space is created at the southern end of Oxford by the front gardens of cottages at Nos. 47 – 71 Oxford Road, along with a small area of roadside verge. This space is enclosed by the Red Lion public house on the west side of the street. The origins of this area of settlements may have been as opportunistic development around a small village green that was subsequently enclosed for gardens by the cottagers.



**Narrow village lanes converge at a focal point outside the former Bricklayers' Arms Pub**



Boults Lane is another winding lane, with views across the rear gardens of cottages over low boundary walls and fences. It diverges from a fork in Oxford road and may represent the remnant of a former route to Headington, crossing the course of a brook in front of Halford House (now culverted). Houses and bungalows are set back from the road in unevenly shaped and spaced plots. It ends at a hard surfaced car park serving community buildings, including a scout hut, as well as recreation grounds which are the successors to historic fields.

At the southern end of Oxford Road the Mortimer Recreation Grounds, which are bounded by low railings, provide a feeling of greater openness around the junction with Marston Ferry Road and form part of the green setting of the village.

Looking north, No. 71 Oxford Road and the high wall surrounding No. 46 create a pinch-point that acts as an arrival point or gateway to the historic village. The large gardens surrounding Nos. 81 and 82 Oxford Road provide a tall screen of foliage that encloses views to the east.

Cherwell Drive and Marston Ferry Road cut across the routes of Oxford Road and Back Lane as well as cutting through the recreation ground. Local people have made a concerted effort to enhance the massive concrete-built underpass that passes under the road by painting attractive murals. Nevertheless, the modern highways landscape and traffic, creates a barrier to the natural desire lines of the village roads and footpaths and lacks the comfortable pedestrian landscape of pavements with grassed verges. The broad width of the road, extensive hard surfacing of the junction and long view lines are unlike the pattern of the more historic roads in the conservation area, whilst the southern edge of the recreation ground and the end of Back Lane have the feeling of being cut-off from the village. As a result this creates a suburban area that is intrusive to the rural character of the conservation area.

### Views and vistas

The conservation area provides numerous views, which contribute to the character of the conservation area and its special interest (See Spatial Analysis Map). These include views to significant groupings of buildings, forming attractive compositions such as those in the view north into and along Mill Lane, or views to individual landmark buildings, such as Colthorne



**Boults Lane**

Farm from the allotments or the Church Hall (the former National School) from Elsfield Road. More general views of street scene also contribute where the form of the street, roadside verges, boundary features, garden foliage and trees and buildings create a composition that expresses the rural character of the village. The gaps between buildings and the greenery of surrounding gardens make an important positive contribution to the quality of these views. Other views of value to the conservation area's character are those looking out into its setting and particularly those looking across the allotments to the greenery of Headington Hill, as well as those west from Back Lane and Mill Lane looking out to farmland. Some of the most interesting views are those glimpsed between buildings or along lanes to features of interest such as Church Farm at the north end of Church Lane. The Court Place Farm



**The view east along Elsfield Road with morning sunlight**

**The Court Place Farm Allotments provide a tranquil green open space with long views over greenery and a 'big sky'**



allotments provide expansive views in which the horizon is lost in the interface between garden plots and the surrounding tree lines, making the skyscape a dominant feature.

In addition to those views from within the conservation area, a number of views from outside it are of interest. These include City Council's designated view cone from the fields outside Elsfield which looks across the village (including the squat tower of St Nicholas' Church) with the spires and domes of the city centre in the distance; the view from Marston Ferry Road across fields to the village from the west; and the view from Headington Cemetery down to and over the village. These views exhibit the village in its green landscape setting, which helps to emphasise its historic interest as an ancient rural settlement, with its own hinterland of fields, as well as forming a part of its attractive character and appearance.

### **Trees and green landscape**

The greenery of the conservation area is an important element of its character as an historic village in a rural setting.

Trees make an important contribution to character throughout the area. Given the profusion of tree cover in the conservation area it would be impossible to identify all the trees that make a positive contribution to its character in this document; however some notable examples would include the following:

- The mixed species tree line on Oxford Road extending from No. 14 to No. 20 including beech trees and yew hedge within the Memorial Garden;
- Large yew trees at the White Hart
- Trees arching over Pond Lane from the gardens of Alan Court, Ibstocks, Byways and Apple Tree House;
- Large willow tree in the grounds of the former Bricklayers Arms;
- Large Robinia in the roadside verge outside No. 4 Elsfield Road.
- Trees in front gardens at No. 49 Oxford Road
- Tree line at the frontage to The Mortimer



**Trees form a tunnel of greenery at Pond Lane**



Recreation Ground and lining west and south edges of the recreation ground on south side of Marston Ferry Road.

- Tree in front garden of No. 12 Elsfeld Road

Other positive elements of the conservation area's green landscape include the lawns and ornamental planting of front gardens of private houses and areas of public or semi-public green open space such as the recreation ground, playing fields, memorial garden and churchyard, all of which have a local historical interest, as well as contributing to the green character of the area. The allotments and playing fields in the east of the conservation area provide valuable recreational opportunities in a green setting as well as routes for pedestrians away from the busy roads. The small field in the north east of the conservation area (south of Elsfeld Road has been identified as a last fragment of the former Sucroft Common and retains wildlife rich unimproved grassland, whilst the large field directly to the south preserves an extensive area of medieval ridge and furrow earthworks.

The green roadside verges reduce the visual impact of the hard road and pavement surfaces and are a rustic element in street scenes.

### Public Realm

As a general rule, street furniture is not common in rural settlements and Marston is no exception, helping to preserve its rural character. Bus stops are located outside the Mortimer Hall on Oxford Road and opposite St Nicholas' Church on Elsfeld Road. The latter was designed as a timber structure and is in-keeping with the village character of the area.

Paving of roads and footpaths is generally in simple tar macadam, although stone setts lining the gutter provide an additional element of quality and kerbs in several areas are of good quality granite in short blocks. The traffic calming infrastructure that has been introduced to the area, with setted build-outs and bollards, does detract slightly from its character and appearance, but are necessary to reduce speed and weight of traffic through the area. The bollards have increased the quantity of street clutter in views along the main street, whilst the build-outs disrupt the simple line of views along the village streets. There may be some opportunity to reduce clutter elsewhere by rationalising and enhancing highways signage.



**Picket fence with hedgerow boundary and large garden trees at The Orchard, Oxford Road**

Street lights within the conservation area have been installed with pale yellow mercury lamps rather than the more urban orange sodium lamps in order to contribute to the high quality appearance of the area.

### Boundaries

As mentioned above boundaries provide much of the enclosure to streets within the conservation area. Walls of local limestone rubble of varied height provide the most characteristic boundary form, often with additional height added by close clipped hedging or, more recently, with woven hazel hurdles. The loss of boundaries has a palpable negative impact as seen at the front of Nos. 67 and 69 Oxford Road, where the removal of the stone wall has eroded the rural character of the street frontage and the distinction between public street and private garden spaces.

Picket fences backed by close clipped hedges provide another suitably rural form of boundary treatment to residential properties. Small fields and paddocks surrounding the village are bounded by hedgerows of native species with hedgerow trees, although many are now tall and relatively unmanaged. This does have some value for wildlife, particularly as breeding sites for butterflies.

## 5. Buildings

### Key positive features

- The variety and types of buildings reflect the historic character of a small village, largely of 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century construction, including farmhouses and cottages, agricultural buildings, public or religious buildings and pubs or inns;
- The survival of a number of very small cottages is particularly unusual and distinctive;
- The use of a limited range local and natural building materials, including thatch, rubble and ashlar limestone, plain clay tiles, and red brick or lime render provide a distinctive local character;
- Traditional vernacular features, which include the design of windows and doors as well as single storey houses with additional accommodation in attics lit by dormer windows.
- Good standard of survival of domestic vernacular features such as timber-framed windows, schemes of fenestration, chimneys, timber lintels to openings, fire marks;
- Survival of a number of detached 19<sup>th</sup> century wash houses with lean-to fuel stores;
- Survival of a number of historic agricultural buildings, now largely converted to residential uses;
- Survival of rubblestone and brick boundary walls.

### Building types

Building types that contribute to the conservation area's historic and architectural interest include dwellings that reflect the development of the village and the status or activities of its past and present communities, as well as public or religious buildings (that have provided a spiritual and/or social focus), agricultural buildings and a small number of current and former public houses. Stone boundary walls also make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the village, providing a prominent rural feature in views along the streets, creating enclosure and carrying the eye between widely spaced historic farmhouses and associated buildings, as well as indicating the former boundaries of roadside farmyards.

### Farmhouses

Farmhouses represent the homes of the village's larger landowners in the past (although few now have any connection with agricultural businesses). Their vernacular architecture is a response to both the locally available materials, the opportunities of space and function and their status.

The oldest surviving house is Court Place, which was the manor farmhouse and may have medieval origins. A farm was owned here by Brasenose College from around 1500 and was the location for the manor court. The present building is believed to retain elements of an early

16<sup>th</sup> century structure with considerable enlargement in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century and remodelled again in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The older range of the house is aligned north – south and projects forward, with the later addition to the west. Cross Farmhouse and Alan Court are both of early 17<sup>th</sup> century origins and were originally single-storey farmhouses with thatched roofs. They now rise to one and a half and a low two-storeys respectively. Both have long, low frontages to the road but are only one room deep and spanned by steeply pitched roofs. These long frontages reflect the lack of pressure for street frontage space when they were constructed. As a result they sprawl along the



**Court Place. The older part of the building is to the right**

road frontage. They may also represent the linear arrangement of different functions in the building (including living space, dairy and storage). The long frontages may have also helped manage access to farmyards or other land to the rear. Cross Farm was once even longer, incorporating a barn.

The farmhouses were built with little external ornament. Alan Court stands out because of its later chimneys and the fine wrought iron gates that close the wagon arch on its Mill Lane frontage. The older part of Court Place retains evidence of a simple stringcourse.

An unusual detail at Halford House is a stair tower on the building's northern elevation (traditionally the rear of the house). These were typically a mid 17<sup>th</sup> century addition, providing access to stairs from a cross passage. Halford House is unusually tall among the farmhouses. The tower may have been added when the roof of the building was raised to provide additional accommodation.

Several of the village's later 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses share the long, low profile and steeply pitched roofs of the earlier farmhouses. These include Church Farmhouse, Church Lane North, Long/Cannon's Farm at Nos. 10 and 12 Elsfield Road, The Orchard and the White Hart, both on Oxford Road.

Bishops Farm (of late 17<sup>th</sup> century origin) stands with its gable end to the street, as does Almonds (No. 1 Oxford Road). Both may have been oriented to provide south facing frontages to exploit the maximum benefit of natural sunlight. As a group the farmhouses are integral to the character of the village as an historic agricultural community. Their construction clusters around the time of the enclosure of Marston's open fields and may be related to the consolidation of farm units, providing evidence of a key process in the development of the village.

Colthorne Farm is a late addition to the group of farmhouses representing the investment of either Brasenose College, or their tenants, in their property. No. 10 Boults Lane has the appearance of an even later farmhouse, built, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It may have replaced either Halford House or Nos. 81 and 83 Oxford Road as at the farmhouse of Boults Farm.



The long, low frontage of Cross Farmhouse



Church Farmhouse, Church Lane (north)

#### ***Other houses***

Old Marston did not receive the same suburban colonisation with large mansions or villas in extensive pleasure grounds and parkland seen elsewhere around Oxford in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, the village retained more of its agricultural character, including the farmhouses and envelope of small fields. Unton Croke's mansion was perhaps the nearest development to this pattern but did not have the grandeur of a parkland or garden setting and was later subdivided, partially demolished and rebuilt to create the present Nos. 15 and 17 Mill Lane. Nevertheless, there was some colonisation of the





**Cromwells House and  
The Manor (Nos. 17  
and 15 Mill Lane**

village by urban dwellers from the 17<sup>th</sup> century who appear to have built comfortable, fashionable houses that, nevertheless, are of a scale that complements the farmhouses.

Cromwells House (No. 17 Mill Lane) can be distinguished as a gentleman's home by the attention given to the aesthetics of its materials and appearance. The façade's symmetry is a product of its early 19<sup>th</sup> century remodelling. It once had a more elongated frontage including a striking two-storey bay window but was subdivided in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The eastern part was largely rebuilt for The Manor (No. 15), providing a second genteel residence. Other houses identified as reflecting historic settlement in the village outside the farming community might include Oak Lodge, Church Lane (a house of late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century construction), Nos. 28 and 26 Oxford Road; and Nos. 11 and 13 Elsfeld Road, both of which were constructed in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Features of the village's more grandiose houses include the symmetry of facades and greater height in elevations. These emphasise their separation from humbler farmhouses as well as the adoption of national architectural styles from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The proportions of these fashionable homes are emphasised by the use of stringcourses, which are seen at Oak Lodge, Colthorne Farm and The Manor. Oak Lodge also has a large porch to the front. Boults Lodge might represent a miniaturised version of these houses, with the design of the cottage showing a concern for symmetry. Given its name and position it may have had a subsidiary role such as a bailiff's

cottage for Boults Farm, the architecture reflecting the status of its occupant.

### **Cottages**

The village's 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages represent homes of farm labourers and other labourers (although these are now much sought after homes). Primrose Cottage is an eminent example of mid 17<sup>th</sup> century origin, which retains a thatched roof. A single bay extension to the north side was once a separate one-up, one-down cottage but has now been subsumed. It stands within a larger group, including examples of 17<sup>th</sup> (Nos. 71 and 71A), early 19<sup>th</sup> (Nos. 67 and 69) and early and mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (Nos. 47 – 61) origin. Many of these are very small and several have been combined to create a single dwelling from two cottages. Their size and simple architecture is testament to the economic status of their past inhabitants.



**Oak Lodge, Church Lane**

The earliest cottages are low buildings like the farmhouses. No. 38 Oxford Road is just a single storey, whilst one and a half storey buildings are seen at Nos. 47 – 53 and 67 – 69 Oxford Road. Both Primrose Cottage and No. 38 Oxford Road appear to have been built with symmetrical frontages, which suggest some concern for the external appearance over a simply utilitarian approach, although they both have extensions to the side. The half-tiled roof/half-thatched cottage at No. 38 Oxford Road has been partially rebuilt in recent years, but retains the qualities of an 18<sup>th</sup> century single-storey cottage with an attached barn under a thatched roof, reflecting the economy of the village's smaller landowners.

Cottages at Nos. 47 – 53 and 67 – 71 Oxford Road were built as a short terrace with a single room above and below, and one window and door at ground floor level and a half dormer window above to each unit. Although several of the smallest cottages have been combined to create larger dwellings it is still possible to identify the original properties through the survival of the pattern of windows and front doors.

The cottages are shallow with steeply pitched roofs, probably reflecting historical use of thatch, replaced later with tile. The survival of the detached outhouses (originally used for the wet services, including washing and some cooking) at Nos. 47 – 53 Oxford Road is exceptional and may be due to the use of the path dividing them from the cottages as communal access to the rear of each property. These are tiny structures, each with a small lean-to fuel store at the rear.

No. 22 Oxford Road preserves part of another cottage damaged by fire in the 1930s and



Small stone cottages at 47 – 53 Oxford Road



Primrose Cottage, Oxford Road

subsequently partially rebuilt with No. 24 at the front as a separate dwelling. Fir Tree Cottage (No. 14 Oxford Road) is now a large, two storey thatched house but was originally two cottages with both single and two storey sections fronting Oxford Road. The dimensions of the earlier cottages can be identified from variations in the finish of stonework in the front wall. One part retains a 'County' fire insurance plaque. The local builder who extended The Orchard also made alterations to Fir Tree Cottage in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At Elsfield Road, both Church Cottages and Cross Cottage represent further groups of small cottages of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century origin.



Fire insurance plaque at Fir Tree Cottage

The 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages tended to be larger structures built as formal terraces of a full two storeys. The four stone cottages at Nos. 23 – 29 Oxford Road were built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and are recorded on the 1843 Tithe Map. Another short terrace of stone cottages was built at Nos. 1 - 7 Mill Lane in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with brick used to bring the masonry to course at windows, doors and quoins. Each unit within these terraces has a door and window at ground floor level and a single window above in symmetrical pairs. At



Nos. 10 and 12 Oxford Road, where four cottages have been modified to form two larger houses. As well as being taller than their 18<sup>th</sup> century equivalents these cottages have shallower pitched roofs (made possible by use of natural slate) and, as such, they are deeper, normally of two rooms depth, with single storey extensions at the rear. Their design reflects an improvement in workers' accommodation in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century but may also reflect development in the village by speculative builders.

The smaller 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages at Church Lane are more idiosyncratic and don't follow a regular pattern. Rose Cottage at Church Lane, Lane Cottage and Bryher Cottage, both on Butts Lane, were all built in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bryher Cottage appears to have originally provided four separate cottages with frontages onto two small squares on Butts Lane. White Rose Cottage may originally have been designed with a south-facing symmetrical frontage. However, the addition of cement render to this façade, as well as changes to the original windows makes this difficult to confirm.

The cottages at Nos. 9 and 11 Mill Lane were probably added in the 1860s or '70s in a style that reflects the more suburban housing developing around the city.

### **Public houses**

Between the cottages and larger farmhouses, another set of buildings of intermediate scale is provided by the village's several historic public houses. Both the Red Lion and the Three Horseshoes probably originated as cottages in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century respectively, which in both cases appear to have been amalgamated to allow a combined commercial and residential use. This appears to have required the opening of their interiors, exposing parts of the timber frame. The exterior of the Red Lion shows evidence of various phases of extension or rebuilding. The Bricklayers Arms may have either originated as a small farmhouse or as a purpose built public house following the Beer House Act in 1830. The wing to the right-hand side of the frontage has the appearance of a large brew house. The name is likely to relate to the use of land at the rear as a builders' merchant's yard.

The position of all of these buildings directly at the rear of the pavement, without an intervening garden, reflects their accessibility to the public. The Bricklayers Arm's entrance is well marked by



**Nos. 1 – 7 Mill Lane**

a large hooded porch welcoming customers. However, it ceased use as a public house during the winter of 2010. The White Hart was converted to residential use in the early 2000s. Both the Red Lion and the Three Horseshoes remain in use as public houses, although the Three Horseshoes has received permissions to allow conversion into two residential properties.

A locally distinctive feature is the shelter for playing 'Aunt Sally' at the rear of the Red Lion, although it is the game, rather than the structure that is of interest.

### **Agricultural buildings**

The village contains numerous buildings built for an agricultural purpose, although many of these have been converted for uses including residential accommodation, garden storage, or vehicle parking. These contribute to the rural character of the conservation area and help to form farm 'units' with farmhouses, which illustrate the joint history of both. They include the following:



**The former White Hart Inn and the Three Horseshoes pub stand next to each other on Oxford Road**



- Barn (now garage and house) at No. 4 Elsfield Lane, formerly part of Almonds Farm;
- Former smithy at Bishops Farm;
- Barns at Colthorne Farm;
- Barns and stables at Court Place Farm (converted to residential use during the 1980s);
- Remains of a barn at No. 1 Cannons Field (now the roadside wall of a house);
- Barns at Alan Court, Mill Lane;
- Barns at The Manor, Mill Lane
- Barns at No. 81 Oxford Road

### **Public buildings**

A small number of public buildings provide evidence of the village community's historical investments in its amenities. These include St Nicholas' Church, which is the village's oldest building. In addition to its outstanding architectural and historic value (recognised in its designation as a Grade I listed building) it acts as the historic focus of the community, providing evidence of continuity and change over 800 years.

Just to the east is the small former church school (now a church hall), which has architectural merit as a small neo-Jacobean Victorian school building, possibly by one of the Victorian diocesan architects (G. E. Street at the time this was built). It continues to provide a valuable community resource. The small bell-cope over the porch creates a point of interest in the roofline, whilst the



**Converted barn at No. 4 Elsfield Road**



**The Church Hall, Elsfield Road**

large parapet gable directed towards Church Street and its street-corner position gives the building a landmark quality.

The Mortimer Hall and Library is a more modern building constructed in the 1950s. The library replaced the village reading room, which stood further north on Oxford Road. A gymnasium and doctor's room were added in the later 1960s. The hall is another important space for meetings and recreation. Although it does not reflect the vernacular forms of surrounding historic buildings it has maintained an architectural integrity that provides some architectural interest.

### **Walls**

Stone boundary walls play an important role in defining spaces within the village by enclosing the roads and public realm and providing an element



**St. Nicholas' Church**

of visual continuity within the road frontages. They also help to blend modern development, such as houses at 1a, 3 and 5 Oxford Road, into the wider street scene. The walls form part of the setting of some of the village's oldest buildings, including the parish church and Court Place. Built of local limestone rubble or 'rag', with lime mortar, they represent a relatively simple and rustic boundary treatment, whilst the material complements the surrounding vernacular cottages. A number of other walls still mark the boundaries of historic farmyards. Several of the walls are relatively high but were built without supporting piers of expensive squared stone. Consequently, they were built with sweeping curved corner to provide structural strength, which is therefore a locally distinctive feature.

### Materials and features

Given their long histories many buildings in the conservation area include several phases of extension or improvement. These often used different materials to the original construction. As a result, the presence of a mixture of traditional materials is a characteristic of the area's buildings.

### Limestone

Limestone is the most characteristic building material in the conservation area. Roughly coursed limestone rubble with lime mortar was used for many of the village's farmhouses and cottages built in between the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is most suitable for mass wall construction, which restricts the height of walls and encourages the long, low proportions. Historically, this material was often protected with a weather coating of limewash either in a natural colour or with the addition of a natural pigment such as iron oxide.

In older buildings the masonry around windows, doors and quoins was brought to course in larger blocks of squared limestone rubble. In the more prestigious Court Place and Cromwells House, squared rubble approaches the fineness of limestone ashlar, which is seen at The Manor and Oak Lodge. Colthorne Farm and Boult's Lodge both display the use of squared limestone for the main frontages with roughly coursed limestone rubble or brick on less prestigious elevations.

An attractive feature seen in some buildings (such as Alan Court) is the use of roughly

course limestone rubble in gable end walls with regularly spaced levelling courses of squared rubble, creating banding that rises up the building's exterior.

### Thatch

This must have been the most prevalent roofing material in the village until the introduction of more fireproof materials in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to being a sustainably material, with great aesthetic qualities, thatch is an excellent insulator, helping reduce energy consumption. Surviving examples of thatched roofs in the village make an important contribution to its rural and architectural character. They require a steeply pitched roof to shed water adequately and are relatively heavy. They often have low eaves projecting well beyond the walls (negating the need for gutters and downpipes), further adding to the low, long proportions of construction seen in the village.

Upper floors or attics in thatched buildings require dormer or half-dormer windows, normally rising flush with the wall and with a simple roof over creating a wave in the line of the thatch. Half-dormer windows remain as a characteristic of formerly thatched buildings.

Traditionally, the ridge was laid flush with the roof, as at Primrose Cottage, but in the post-World War II era the use of block ridges has become more common with decoratively cut lower edges as at Fir Tree Cottage and No. 38 Oxford Road. The thatched roofs in the village are most likely to be of wheat reed – wheat straw laid in a uniform direction and trimmed to create crisp eaves and an even surface. This tends to require a thicker layer than imported reed, which creates broader



Fir Tree Cottage, converted from two limestone rubble cottages with a thatch roof including a later 20<sup>th</sup> century style 'block ridge'





**Cross Farmhouse exemplifies the steeply pitched roof of local hand made tile, dormers rising flush with the wall, retention of timber lintels over casement windows and other features of the area's local vernacular style**

eaves and more rounded gables, often formed into half-hips

Where thatched buildings have been re-roofed in tile a characteristic feature is the raising of eaves. This is seen at No. 1 Elsfield Road, where a panel of half-timbered walling fills the new area of wall created in the gable end. This can also be identified in the gable wall of No. 47 Oxford Road and the Red Lion Public House, where additional stonework or brickwork was added to raise the eaves.

### **Timber**

Within domestic buildings, the external use of timber is largely restricted to the joinery of doors and windows, including prominent use in ledged and braced plank doors and timber lintels over windows and doors of the village's 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses and cottages. Some half-timbering reflects later 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century additions to earlier buildings including two gabled returns on the rear elevation of Alan Court or the additions to No. 1 Elsfield Road.

Timber was used to a greater extent in agricultural buildings as weatherboard cladding, laid as overlapping horizontal boards in the gables and upper section of walls to avoid laying more complicated stonework. Historically elm was a preferred material for weatherboarding as it had good natural resistance to rotting and could be obtained in broad planks. This may have been augmented with a treatment such as whitewash or bituminous pitch. It has been used in the rebuilt gable end walls of No. 38 Oxford Road and at Cross Farm. The use of stone lower down in the wall would have helped to prevent moisture penetration into the boarding from the ground. The large barn doors at No. 4 Elsfield Road add to the visibility of timber.

The former barn at No. 4 Elsfield Road is distinguished as the only building in the conservation area roofed with wooden shingles. These have a muted, non reflective silver grey surface that provides an interesting alternative to the red brown of clay tile or the similarly silver grey of thatch seen elsewhere in the village.

### **Brick**

Some of the earliest use of brick in the village was to bring to course masonry around doors and windows and for arches to openings in stone houses and cottages built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is seen in the cottages at Nos. 47 -53 Oxford Road and 1 - 7 Mill Lane, either as an innovation in new buildings or possibly an improvement to older ones. No. 28 Oxford Road was probably the earliest house in Marston to be built more fully in brick, using locally produced hand made brick laid in Flemish bond with dust brick headers. This style of brickwork is normally dated to between the 1820s and 1840s. The brickwork of the less prestigious side walls is far less ornate and is laid in a mixture of English Bond and Bastard Bond, which may suggest some rebuilding. The use of Flemish Bond in red brick with dust brick headers



**No. 28 Oxford Road**

is also seen on the principle frontage of Lane Cottage, where the side wall was constructed of roughly coursed limestone rubble.

The Bricklayers' Arms was built around 1840 in brick although sections of limestone are found at the rear, suggesting this was relegated to the status of a second-class material by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Again, the building was constructed in a mixture of different brick bonds, either marking out the more and less prestigious elevations or different phases of building. The brickwork has been painted white, although photographs taken in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century record it as unpainted. White Rose Cottage, Church Lane, No. 11 Elsfeld Road and Nos. 10 and 12 Oxford Road are all constructed of buff or yellow stock brick that, nevertheless, provides a sympathetic colour to nearby limestone buildings. They all have detailing in contrasting red brick.

Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century red brick became a more commonplace building material. It was used for the two Victorian Cottages at Nos. 9 and 11 Mill Lane. It was also used for farm buildings and subsidiary buildings such as the outhouses at the Three Horseshoes and the barns and outbuildings at Court Place and Colthorne Farm.

Brick was also used extensively throughout the conservation area to line chimney flues often creating a contrast of materials that can be traced up gable end walls. This reflects the difficulty of building chimneys in rubble stone, whereas finer ashlar masonry would have been prohibitively expensive for most farmhouse and cottage owners.



Alan Court's limestone slate roof is part of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century refurbishment of the building

Plain fired clay tiles are the most characteristic roofing material used in the conservation area and appear to have replaced thatch on many buildings, a process which probably started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Local brick and tile kilns were located at Shotover and just outside the village at Jack Straw's Lane. The tile has gentle variations in colour that result from variations in materials and the firing process. These are combined with a camber and slight variations in shape to produce a pleasingly uneven appearance, which complements the uneven textures and colours of the rubble masonry below, providing a contrast between roofs and walls. Fired clay or terracotta pan tiles in distinctive orange fabric have been used in the past to roof agricultural buildings and have been retained where these have been converted to new uses, helping to retain their character.

#### **Stone tile**

St Nicholas' Church is the only location in the village where local Cotswold slates are used, reflecting the high status of the church in comparison with the relatively humble status of the village's cottages and farmhouses. At Alan Court artificial or reconstituted limestone slate replaced the thatch roof in the 1930s.

#### **Natural slate**

During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the introduction of canal and railway transport allowed the import of materials from further a field including natural slate roofing tiles. These were used on many of the brick built houses constructed at this time, often with a shallower pitched roof, with hipped gables. A focus of these buildings is the group of cottages surrounding the Bricklayers Arms on Church Lane and Butts Lane. It was also used to roof extensions to buildings and as a replacement roofing material on earlier buildings, including the Red Lion and Nos. 47 – 53 Oxford Road. Nevertheless slate remains a relatively minor material in the conservation area.

#### **Render**

Lime, or later cement, render was used only rarely in the conservation area before the later 20<sup>th</sup> century and has sometimes been criticised as an overly harsh material, obscuring the aesthetic qualities of the limestone rubble construction on older buildings and failing to provide the level of texture and colour required for the conservation area on new ones.



### **Windows**

Among the vernacular dwellings in the village, windows are almost exclusively timber or metal framed casements of between two and four lights under long timber (presumably oak) lintels. These have a horizontal emphasis, which complements the long low proportions of the cottages and farmhouses. Their simple construction is part of the rural or rustic character of the village's architecture. Generally simple timber mullions separate the casements, although at Court Place a mixture of 17<sup>th</sup> century stone mullions and 19<sup>th</sup> mullion and transom windows add to the grandeur of the house. Traditionally, external joinery, including windows and doors, would have been painted to improve its appearance, as well as to preserve it. Stripped and varnished timber is a modern tradition and often contrasts harshly with historic materials.

Dormer windows generally rise flush with the main wall of the building and have pitched tiled roofs with rendered cheeks and gables. The dormers at Cromwells House are unusual in being placed further up the roof slope, but were moved from the rear to the front slope in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century and so may not reflect their original design. The small oriel windows in these dormers are particularly attractive, and are supported on small moulded timber brackets. In contrast, the large, flat roofed

visibility of the characteristic roof slopes and their materials resulting in a negative impact on the appearance and character of the conservation area.

Many of the 19<sup>th</sup> century houses and cottages are distinguished by the use of vertically sliding sash windows which are arranged in carefully executed vertically and horizontally even schemes. Their tall and narrow proportions would provide a more vertical emphasis, although their spacing along relatively long, low frontages prevents this from acting against the general horizontal emphasis of the village's buildings. At No. 13 Elsfield Road paired sashes are separated by chamfered stone mullions that reflect the detailing of older casement windows seen in the village (notably at Court Place) and reflecting an interest in vernacular detailing in the Victorian design.

### **Doors**

Relatively few doorways in the village are enclosed within porches and, as a result, front doors are prominent features of building frontages. Older doors include a number of examples of ledged and braced plank doors as seen at Cross Farmhouse, the vernacular cottages at Nos. 71 and 71A Oxford Road or the



**No. 38 Oxford Road, partially rebuilt, provides many of the distinctive features of the local vernacular cottages**

dormer windows that were added to a number of buildings in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century reduced the

19<sup>th</sup> century cottage at No.29 Oxford Road. On the exterior face, the vertical joints between

planks are protected by heavy beads that add interest to these doorways. Several of the 19<sup>th</sup> century houses and cottages have simple four panel timber doors which add to the integrity of their appearance where they have been retained. Even where doors have been part glazed, timber framed doors complement the vernacular character of the conservation area and the natural or simple manmade materials. Doors made of plastic or uPVC stand out as particularly incongruous due to their thick sections, seamless reflective surfaces and combined door and frame, whilst the loss of timber doors represents a loss of a part of the building's traditional character and architectural integrity.

### ***Roofs and Chimneys***



**Cottage doorways outlined in brick at Mill Lane.**

Roofs have a variety of profiles; although steeply pitched and gable ended roofs are the dominant form and represent a simple, rustic style of construction, designed to shed rainwater rapidly

and to transfer the weight of roofing materials to the stout limestone walls of the building. Some 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings were built with hipped roofs. It is likely that hipped or half-hipped roofs on older buildings are a later alteration introduced at the same time as replacement of thatch with tile. In some cases its use served to allow easier construction of return wings, as at Boults Lodge. In recently constructed buildings, half-hipped roofs have been used both to reduce the apparent bulk of buildings (some times ineffectually) and to provide a more rustic character to new development.

Chimneystacks add a great deal to the character of the vernacular farmhouses, by providing evidence of their past methods of heating, an external expression of internal division and function and by adding to the variety and interest of rooflines. A transition is seen in the farmhouses from the placement of chimneys near the centre of buildings or at irregular points along the roof, to their uniform placement at either gable end in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. This allowed greater flexibility in use of the interior space, the development of central circulation space and improvement of staircases as the use of upper floors became more usual. Among the short terraces of cottages, chimneys stacks add to the interest of the roofscape and provide an additional element of rhythm in views along the street. Their absence at Nos. 47 -53 Oxford Road is notable and is a loss of character from these buildings. Use of brick for rebuilt chimneys helps these to stand out from the limestone buildings, whilst the massive chimneystacks at Alan Court punctuate views along Mill Lane.



## 6. Character Areas

The conservation area has been designated for its special interest, character and appearance as a whole. However, it is evident that this is made up of several areas of quite distinct character, which together make up the richer whole. Old Marston has a complex landscape with roads, lanes and spaces creating numerous identifiable character areas. To summarise the special features and character of each, these have been grouped to form the following six overarching character areas.

1. Oxford Road (south) and Boults Lane
2. Oxford Road (north) and Elsfeld Road
3. Mill Lane
4. Church Lane, Butts Lane and Ponds Lane
5. Allotments and green spaces
6. Back Lane

Whilst these areas each have a distinct character the transition between areas may be gradual, whilst some characteristics may continue between areas or over the conservation area as a whole. The limits of the character areas are illustrated on the character areas map.



**Character Area 1: Oxford Road (South) and Boult's Lane****Significance**

Feature	Contribution to significance
Oxford Road and Boult's Lane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part of a medieval or early post-medieval street pattern that is evidence of the village's development over time.</li> </ul>
Focal group of small cottages and the Red Lion Inn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These contribute to the historic interest of the village as evidence of the status and economy of former inhabitants particularly from the 17th to early 20th century;</li> <li>An architecturally interesting group including unusual survival of very small vernacular cottages built over several centuries;</li> <li>The cottages' generally low scale, materials and detailing contribute positively to the architectural character of the conservation area;</li> <li>Contribute to the amenity of key views through the conservation area by providing both framing and visual foci;</li> <li>The Red Lion provides evidence of the village's past social history and economy;</li> <li>Survival of freestanding washhouses provides a rare element of architectural integrity.</li> </ul>
Green front gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make a positive contribution to the rural character of the area;</li> <li>Suggest an interesting pattern of development, possibly around a small village green, which adds to the historic interest of the area.</li> </ul>
Halford House , No. 12 Boult's Lane and Boult's Lodge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A group of buildings that provide architectural interest reflecting the development of architectural styles in the village and as farmhouses or associated buildings, its agricultural past;</li> <li>These buildings provide evidence of the historic pattern of development and the use of Boult's Lane.</li> </ul>
Former farmyard wall at Boult's Lane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of the village's past agricultural economy;</li> <li>Evidence of historical land divisions within the settlement and its development over time.</li> </ul>
Former Boult's Farmhouse (81 and 83 Oxford Road)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A large 19th century farmhouse which provides evidence of adoption of national architectural fashions in the village;</li> <li>Evidence of the village's past social and economic development.</li> </ul>
Bishops Farmhouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forms part of the group of historic farmhouses within the village that contributes to the area's architectural and historic interest;</li> <li>Provides an end-stop to views north along Oxford Road and framing of views south;</li> <li>The associated outbuildings include remains of a blacksmith's forge recorded on historic maps, which provides evidence of the village's past economy.</li> </ul>
No. 38 Oxford Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A building that provides considerable architectural interest as an example of local vernacular style with a mixture of locally sourced natural materials and detailing that provides evidence of different periods of development or function relating to the historic development and use of the property. This character has been maintained throughout recent rebuilding;</li> <li>A feature of interest prominently positioned in views south along Oxford Road.</li> </ul>
Front garden boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide definition to the public realm;</li> <li>Stone walls use a locally sourced, natural material that is complementary to surrounding vernacular buildings;</li> <li>Height generally allows views over green front gardens to buildings beyond;</li> <li>Green hedgerows add to the rural character of the area and provide wildlife habitat.</li> </ul>
The Brook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where not culverted, the brook provides a valuable wildlife habitat;</li> <li>A feature of the landscape that would have influenced the development of the village street pattern, including the placement of mills and a former ford on Boult's Lane.</li> </ul>

Village recreation ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An attractive green open space that creates a green gateway to the village and provides visual separation from nearby suburban estates;</li> <li>• Evidence of philanthropy in the gift of this land to the village by a past parish vicar adds to the historic interest of the area.</li> </ul>
Green landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trees running along the brook within the grounds of 81 and 83 Oxford Road provide a green backdrop to views through the area which contributes to the green and rural character of the conservation area;</li> <li>• Trees in front gardens provide vertical interest in views through the area, softening to the lines of surrounding buildings and provide an element of the area's rural character.</li> </ul>
Village Hall and Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An important community resource reflecting the continued village identity and sense of community of Old Marston.</li> </ul>

### Commentary

Small vernacular cottages surround a triangular green open space formed of private gardens fronting onto the east side of Oxford Road with the Red Lion Pub, in traditional materials and domestic scale, enclosing the third side of the triangle and built up to the pavement on the road's west side. The thatched roof of Primrose Cottage is particularly eye-catching and is complemented by the generally sympathetic scale and materials of surrounding buildings. Mature trees in the gardens arch over the road, providing a soft green element in views through the area. The low front-garden walls or post and rail fences allow transparency between the hard landscape of the public realm and the greenery of the gardens. The loss of some walls and green front gardens to accommodate off-road parking has detracted from the appearance of this group. A small green at the entrance to Boult's Lane blurs the division between green private space and hard public

realm and supports the impression of an historic village green. The road is narrow as it passes between the public house and gardens, with narrow pavements to either side, channelling views through the area and allowing the greenery of gardens and historic buildings to make greater visual contribution to the streetscape.

To the south of this focal area the east side of Oxford Road is lined with later 20th century bungalows and more recently constructed chalet bungalows built to a similar scale to the traditional cottages and set well back from the road, which runs into the village from Cherwell Drive. The stone walls running along the front boundaries of these properties make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area as a continuation of the distinctive boundary treatment seen in the village core further to the north. A screen of mature trees provides a backdrop to views east and marks the line of a brook.



**The Red Lion frames one side of the green space with small cottages, including No. 71 Oxford Road (in the distance, enclosing other sides)**

The Mortimer Recreation Ground has attractive municipal style tree planting running along its Oxford Road frontage. The trees draw the eye up to the mid 20th century Mortimer Hall. The modernist architecture of the building is unusual in the village, with flat roofs that contrast strongly with the pitched roofs found elsewhere. As such it has a more urban character than other buildings in the conservation area but the building is a well used community resource. Land at the front is used for an uninspiring car park, despite the presence of a larger but less well used parking area to the side of the building. The modern bus shelter at the front also stands out as a result of its intrusively urban design and materials. The course of the Marston Ferry Road cuts through the original extent of the recreation ground and has replaced green open space with a hard

highways landscape with poor pedestrian access.



### **Oxford Road looking north with the Mortimer Recreation ground greenery to the right**

Pedestrians can either use a pedestrian light controlled crossing or an underpass that has been brightened with murals but remains a distinctly urban feature at variance with the village's rural character. South of Marston Ferry Road access to the remains of the recreation grounds green open space is restricted by railings. No. 46 Oxford Road appears to be an outlier of the historic village located just to the south of the conservation area. An early 20<sup>th</sup> century red brick cottage with sash-windows in the first floor and bay windows below, it stands forward of the building line and is distinct from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century semi's directly to the south. It provides evidence of the extent of the village prior to the expansion of the New Marston estate up Oxford Road.

North of the group of cottages Oxford Road bends sharply, partially screening views out of the area. Garden walls and greenery at Bishops Farmhouse further enclose views northward. No. 38 Oxford Road re-enforces the low scale and cottage character of this area at its northern limit. Again, it is set back in attractive green garden space with a low hedgerow providing definition to the space whilst allowing transparency between the cottage and the road. In views looking south along Oxford Road this building, set diagonally to the road, helps to channel views into the focal group.

Boults Lane runs off from the focal group on a narrow and gently sinuous course between low garden boundaries as a shared pedestrian/vehicle lane. Views to the backs of cottages on Oxford Road include the interesting little wash houses, as well as the open green space of long narrow gardens running alongside the lane. The box

dormer windows on the rear facing roofs of Nos. 53 - 57 Oxford Road detract from the consistency of the roof-slopes in these views and are unfortunately conspicuous.



### **Halford House, Boults Lane**

A small cul-de-sac of bungalows is accessed from the north side of Boults Lane. These do not make any architectural or historic interest contribution to the conservation area. The low scale does help to prevent them from dominating the scene, with, instead, Halford House providing a focus of the view and street scene at the east end of the lane. The stair tower on the elevation facing the road emphasises the verticality of the building. Several other properties to the south of the lane are hidden from view along long unpaved drives and behind hedgerow boundaries, which help to preserve a rural character. At the far end of the lane a small housing development has been



### **Oxford Road with No. 38 on the far right**





**Boulds Lodge with the recent extension (left)**

constructed in the former Boulds farmyard. The farmyard wall and a small farm building are preserved, indicating the former use of the land. Boulds Lodge on the south side of the road stands out due to its unusual squat proportions, largely a result of the innovative use of slate. It was built as a detached cottage standing within a large garden. However a recently built extension, which was designed to resemble a weatherboard clad barn, has a similar visual mass to the older part of the building with a higher roof that competes for visual pre-eminence with the older structure and has reduced the spaciousness of the building's setting. As the cedar board cladding gradually changes colour to a silver grey it is hoped that the current contrast between the old and new will be softened and the building will be less visually competitive. The early 20th century farmhouse at No. 10 Boulds Lane provides an end to the lane where it provides access to the



**The former farmyard wall of Boulds Farm, now provides a boundary to Rimmer Close**

large green open spaces in Character Area 5 (see below). This was the last large farmhouse built in the village and serves to illustrate the longevity of farming in the village's history.

#### **Negative features**

- Large box-dormer windows on roof slopes of cottages that are visible from the street, which obscure the historic profile, disrupt the uniformity of roofscape and result in the loss of characteristic roofing materials.
- Loss of front boundaries and greenery of front gardens resulting in loss of definition between private and public space and loss of evidence of historic boundaries.
- Loss of front garden greenery through conversion for car parking
- Public transport facilities - Intrusively modern bus shelter outside Mortimer Hall.
- The poor appearance of the parking area outside the Mortimer Hall also detracts from the overall high quality of the area's appearance.
- Traffic volumes and speed through this area detract from its tranquillity and ease of use.



**View of the rears of Oxford Road cottages from Boulds Lane**



## Character Area 2. Oxford Road (north) and Elsfield Road

### Significance

Feature	Contribution to significance
Oxford Road and Elsfield Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of the village's medieval street plan;</li> <li>• A naturally hollowed route, evidence of the long history of occupation and use;</li> <li>• Oxford Road's curving line - a series of unfolding views;</li> <li>• Elsfield Road - long channelled views with framing by surrounding trees and buildings.</li> </ul>
St Nicholas's Church and churchyard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The earliest built evidence of the village;</li> <li>• Displays medieval and later construction and decoration and evidence of its past and current uses;</li> <li>• Phases of construction provide evidence of periods of patronage;</li> <li>• The church's scale and materials are sympathetic with those used in the village's vernacular architecture;</li> <li>• Churchyard boundaries have influenced the development of surrounding lanes;</li> <li>• Numerous memorials of historic interest, several of which are listed. A record of the village's community, with aesthetic value in their design, picturesque groupings and, sometimes, weird angles;</li> <li>• Churchyard - greenery and softening to the surroundings and an attractive public green space in the heart of the village.</li> </ul>
Buildings	<p><i>Vernacular farmhouses and cottages:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of the agricultural and social history of the village;</li> <li>• An important body of local vernacular buildings;</li> <li>• Individual aesthetic value.</li> <li>• Evidence of successive phases of building, including modifications for changing use and introduction of new materials</li> </ul> <p><i>Focal group (White Hart, Three Horseshoes, The Orchard and Fir Tree Cottage):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form the pinch point in Oxford Road, providing focal features in views both from the north and south.</li> </ul> <p><i>Former barns and agricultural buildings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide evidence of the area's agricultural history;</li> <li>• Provide variety in the architecture of the village, using different materials (e.g. horizontal timber boarding, pan tiles);</li> <li>• Distinguished from domestic and commercial structures by large door openings and uninterrupted roof slopes and walls.</li> </ul> <p><i>19th century terraced cottages:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of a later development;</li> <li>• Suggest some changes to the village's society;</li> <li>• High degree of integrity and group value;</li> </ul>
Building materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locally sourced natural or man made materials contribute to the architectural interest and unified vernacular character of the conservation area.</li> </ul>
Plots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boundaries of plots preserve evidence of the historic pattern of farmsteads;</li> <li>• Green spaces at the rear of Oxford Road's frontage contribute positively to the setting of the village in views from the west;</li> <li>• 20<sup>th</sup> century infill developments reflect the extent of the former farmyards.</li> </ul>

Front gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large front gardens contribute greenery and openness to the rural character of the area.</li> </ul>
Position of buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large farmhouses at the front of plots - reflects their historic location at the entrance to farmyards and are prominent in views along streets;</li> <li>Set at the back of the pavement with gable ends to the street - punctuate views along the roads and frame green, garden-filled gaps in long views;</li> <li>Varied positioning of buildings - evidence of an organic development.</li> </ul>
Boundaries	<p><i>Limestone rubble boundary walls:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enclosure to public space and definition to public and private spaces;</li> <li>Partially screen later 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings - older farmhouses and cottages retain their prominence;</li> <li>Natural and local material that complements the surrounding vernacular buildings and rural character;</li> <li>Evidence of the outlines of former farmyards;</li> <li>Wildlife habitat, especially where they are not over maintained.</li> </ul> <p><i>Hedgerows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to the rural character of the conservation area;</li> <li>Reflect the economic history of the village;</li> <li>Support biodiversity which is part of the area's character;</li> <li>Add to the greenery of views, particularly along Oxford Road, where they form part of the setting of No. 38 Oxford Road.</li> </ul>
Grass verges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part of the village's medieval street pattern;</li> <li>Provide greenery and a soft edge in the streetscene – part of rural character;</li> <li>Prevent hard highway surfaces dominating the streetscene.</li> </ul>
Mature trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add vertical interest, softening and greenery and help to create pinch-points;</li> <li>Have considerable value for the area's biodiversity;</li> <li>Potential heritage value of the orchard at The Orchard, Oxford Road as a repository of local traditional apple varieties remains unknown.</li> </ul>
Memorial Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The garden has both historic and community value as a village memorial garden.</li> <li>Contributes greenery and open space as well as a place to stop, rest and socialise.</li> </ul>

### Commentary

Oxford Road broadens to form the main village street, running north with a gently sinuous course and round a sharp bend into Elsfield Road which has a similar character. These provide evidence of the medieval village street plan. The roads are generally light with a feeling of openness supported by the traditional domestic scale of buildings and their position well back from the roadside. Buildings set near to the rear of the pavement or roadside verge include many of the historic buildings in the character area which, therefore, have greater visual prominence. Groups of trees in private gardens and public open space contribute to the creation of more enclosed spaces, framing views forming pinch



View north along Oxford Road

points that divide the roads into a series of definable spaces. Surrounding character areas are generally accessed from this central area, although other routes between them act as shortcuts.

At the southern limit of this character area a grass verge on Oxford Road's east side runs up to a raised footpath and a low limestone rubble wall. Over the wall are expansive views across allotments. Bishops Farmhouse, with the associated former smithy buildings, stands at the southern edge of a gap in the building line, where boundary walls and hedges provide the road with enclosure. Colthorne Farmhouse occupies a prominent position on the west side of the road facing the entrance to the allotments. The pantiled roofs of subsidiary agricultural buildings recede from view beyond the farmhouse. Modern houses to the south and north are set well back from the road and are partially screened from view by tall hedgerows.

Looking north, a focal group of buildings begins with a small barn and a row of 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages. The original appearance of the latter, originally stone fronted, has been concealed by the use of pebbledash, detracting from the group's appearance. Although only two storeys high, the cottages stand on a slight bank with steps up to front doors, increasing their stature. This scale is continued by the 1930s built No. 24 Oxford Road and new buildings at Nos. 15, 21 and 21A Oxford Road. Across the street, the Flemish bond brickwork with blue headers of No. 28 Oxford Road is eye-catching. The addition of louvered storm shutters does not have the appearance of an original feature however. The large box dormer window of No. 24 Oxford Road



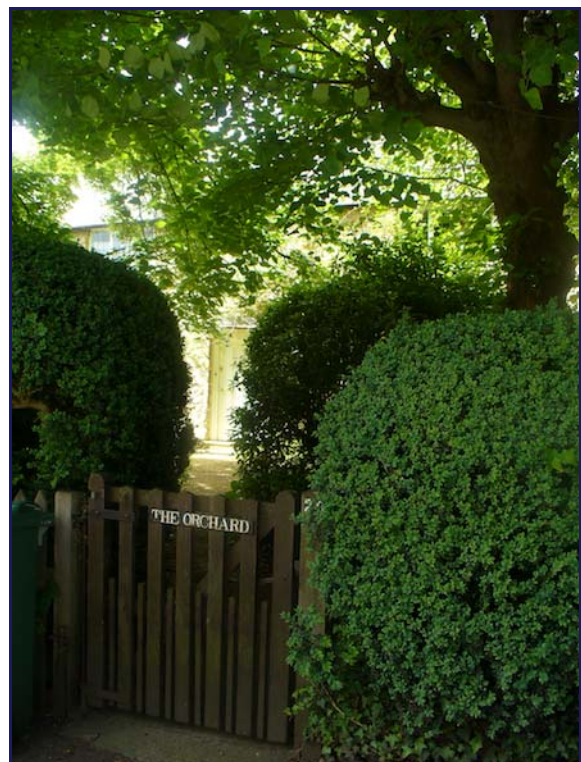
**Colthorne Farm with roofs of single-storey farm buildings at the rear.**



**Small agricultural building and 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages, Oxford Road**

breaks the general pattern of roof slopes and does not follow historic precedents in form, scale or materials. The older cottage at the rear is just visible from the street.

The focal group just to the north includes The Orchard, The White Hart, The Three Horseshoes and Fir Tree Cottage. The Orchard is part of the village's group of historic vernacular farmhouses and retains a spacious green garden setting, including the eponymous orchard at the rear,



**The Orchard. Oxford Road**

which area contributes to the area's rural



**The Memorial Garden, Oxford Road, with dappled shade and later summer wild flowers**



character. The building is partially hidden by its own high boundary walls, a dense box hedge and tall trees. Nevertheless, there is an atmospheric view from the pavement over a wicket gate and along the front garden path to the front door.

Tall trees in the garden of The Orchard, the Memorial Garden and Fir Tree Cottage's garden provide shade across the road and accentuate the pinchpoint. The memorial garden is by its nature a feature of historic interest, as a place of commemoration. It is an attractive public green space, adding to the greenery of the roadside and the rural quality of the street. The absence of tall buildings in the plot behind the memorial garden helps maintain this area's spacious feeling



**Oxford Road north from the shade of trees in the Memorial Garden and Fir Tree Cottage**

through the visibility of the green setting beyond. The trees cast considerable shade over the road and surrounding gardens, particularly in the afternoon as the sun moves behind them.

The White Hart and The Three Horseshoes stand at right angles to each other and frame two sides of a garden that runs up to the pavement. Both have been public houses, reflecting the village's economic history and its character as a self-contained settlement. The Three Horseshoes' stands at the back of the footpath, suggesting a more intimate relationship with the road than the White Hart. It has been suggested that at one time this was the village blacksmith's. Together, the trees and the Three Horseshoes form a pinchpoint that divides the northern and southern parts of Oxford Road.

Fir Tree Cottage has been considerably enlarged and is now of a similar scale to the historic farmhouses. Much of the fabric of the original two cottages survives, including its limestone masonry, casement windows with timber lintels and timber front door, has been retained or sensitively replaced, conserving its vernacular character.

Court Place is largely hidden from view from Oxford Road, along a private drive that runs to the east. The former extent of the associated farmyard is suggested by the high stone wall running around No. 31 Oxford Road and up to the



**Court Place Barn**

farm buildings, which have been converted for residential use. The house stands in isolation (apparently it was originally surrounded by a moat) with a high hedgerow surrounding the large garden, which is a relatively recent addition.

As the focus of the medieval manor demesne farm this physical separation of the farmhouse from the wider village community reflects its tenant's social separation from other villagers. It originally enjoyed expansive views across the manor demesne fields to the east reflecting the historic property ownership. However, the hedgerow now screens these views and has reduced this visual connection. The former farm buildings have retained much of their non-domestic appearance despite their conversion. The construction of a high wall to separate the grounds of Court Place from the converted farm buildings has resulted in an unfortunate division of the dependant farm buildings from the setting of the farmhouse. Nevertheless the relationship between the buildings is still appreciable.

The private drive continues around a sharp bend as access to modern two-storey houses to the north. The unmade surface of the drive preserves the rural character of Court Place's surroundings, whilst the newer houses are hidden in the main views of the house.

New development at the rear of the White Hart provides another hidden area, representing a former enclosed farmyard. The buildings include a variety of scales with materials that reflect those of the conservation area's vernacular tradition. They include character details such as half-dormer windows rising flush with the wall and chimneys rising from the roof crest. The layout provides a mixture of styles of housing, including

a terraced row of small cottages and larger houses. Covered car parking is provided in open sided car ports clad with weatherboarding and tiled roofs that resemble traditional agricultural buildings. Nevertheless the larger houses have considerable bulk that does not reflect the character of older buildings in the area, largely due to the size and pitch of their roofs. Hard surfaces dominate the landscaping which lacks the softening contribution that trees and gardens make elsewhere in the area.

Front gardens at Fir Tree Cottage and properties to the north at Oxford Road are open to the pavement or have only very low walls, widening the appearance of the roadside verge, which continues as rural character element. The grassed bank or verge also continues on the east side of the road and separates the footpath from the roadside. The gently curving line of the road increases the prominence of the banked verge in views. Granite setts add detail at the road's edge. Buildings west of the road include late Victorian or Edwardian cottages, as well as early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century houses that are relatively simple in their decoration, reflecting the functional style of older buildings in the area. On the east side, the houses include bungalows and are partially hidden behind stone front boundary walls. Houses to both east and west of the road are well-spaced and set in private gardens, a typical village form of development, allowing greenery and planting to soften the environment around the built elements.

By contrast, Barns Hay is an undistinguished later 20<sup>th</sup> century self-contained cul-de-sac of houses built to a suburban pattern with closely spaced buildings following a common building line. Nevertheless they were built using the materials available at the time that were most sympathetic to the local character. This included reconstituted stone as an alternative to limestone rubble and concrete plain tile. Their design incorporates non-symmetrical frontages providing variety and interest. The consistent roofline does not break through the conservation area's two storey scale, although extension over garages has reduced the gaps between buildings and blocked views out to rural greenery. The surrounding landscaping is dominated by the hard surfaces. The development fills a former farmyard, evidence of which is provided by the rebuilt thatched barn to the rear of Cross Farmhouse. The open southern aspect allows plentiful light into the street.



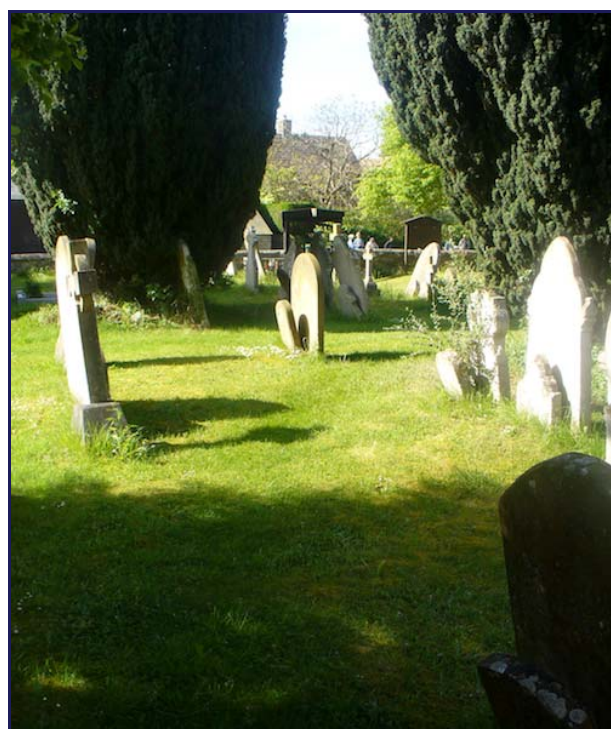
**Elsfield Road**

At the north end of the street Cross Farmhouse stands forward of the general building line, without any boundary treatment to divide its small front garden from the road. It makes a conspicuous positive contribution to the character of the road both as a landmark closing the street and as a distinctive historic farmhouse. Cross Cottage and Almonds Farmhouse both have gable ends that run up to the rear of the pavement and are prominent, whilst this alignment reduces their bulk in views along the roads, to which the greenery of the environment and stone boundary walls make a valuable contribution. Church Cottage has a similar relationship to the road and with Cross Cottage, the Church Hall and the many tall trees they create a rhythm in views along the long, straight western section of Elsfield Road. Houses on the south side of Elsfield Road are, set back from the road, with further stone boundary walls, which mark the boundaries of earlier farm units. Tall trees in front gardens add considerable height and greenery to the street scene.

The green roadside verges continue along Elsfield Road, although they are narrower than Oxford Road's, with a raised footpath behind the verge on the north side and a verge lying behind the footpath on the south side. A wider area of road has been created for a bus stop opposite St Nicholas' Churchyard, which is provided with a bus shelter clad with timber boards and a corrugated metal roof. As a relatively rustic structure this seems to be more suitable to the

area's character than the modern design outside the Mortimer Hall, without any obvious loss of amenity. Behind this, the converted barn at No. 4 Elsfield Road is prominent in views along the road, partly due its position at the back of pavement and lack of front boundary features. It contributes to the historic rural character of the conservation area.

St Nicholas' Churchyard provides a more open



**St Nicholas' Churchyard**

area in the street, with views to the greenery of the churchyard over the low stone boundary wall. The greenery of the churchyard penetrates to the street frontage, adding softening to the scene, and creating a break in the frontage that reduces the density of development. The churchyard gateway includes a carved timber lintel with floral motifs that add a simple touch of art in the street. Gravestones and crosses within the churchyard stand at curious angles and provide the evidence of the long use of the space as a burial ground for the village community. The church is set well back in the churchyard and is partially screened from view by trees, which reduces its contribution to the streetscene but does provide a sense of mystery that draws people into the space.

It is a relatively small church with a low tower and reflects the historically small size of the village. The Church Hall retains its appearance as a small National School, with an eye-catching tiled bell cope on a low entrance wing at the front.

Cannons/Long Farmhouse (Nos. 10 and 12 Elsfield Road, south side) is aligned to face the road and is set well back with a tree line that partially screens views to the building. The wall that separated the garden from the former farmyard can be traced running around and through the cul-de-sac at Cannons Field, whilst remains of barns belonging to the farmyard are preserved within the structure of No. 1 Cannons Field and No. 2 Southcroft (part of a second cul-



**No. 11 Elsfield Road**

de-sac). These are linked by the high farmyard wall, which screens views from Elsfield Road to the surrounding gardens). Both cul-de-sacs were built using informal layouts with detached buildings set back from the access road and spread out in private gardens. The surrounding landscaping is generous in providing green space as roadside verges. The design of the houses emphasises the roof slopes, which often come down to ground floor level, using dormer windows to light first floor rooms. Both developments infilled farmyards or small fields on the edge of the village. The infill developments have considerably enlarged the village, adding to the density of development and reducing both the green setting of historic buildings and the agricultural character of the settlement.



**Elsfield Road including the barn of Cannon's Farm, now converted as part of No. 1 Cannons Field.**



East of the church hall and on the north side of Elsfield Road, two Victorian houses provide evidence of expansion of the village in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for middle class families. No. 11 Elsfield Road is particularly dominating, set just back from the road and looming over its front boundary fence and hedge. It is built of yellow brick with an asymmetric frontage including a large canted bay window to the left of the front door and small gablets over the first floor windows that echo the village's vernacular half-dormer windows. It retains timber-framed sash windows, which provide an important part of its architectural integrity. No. 13 Elsfield Road is more secluded with a high hedge and trees to the front, although enough is seen to reveal a large late 19<sup>th</sup> century house, clad with a simple cream coloured render and with a slate roof. A detached block at the rear which may represent a former coach house.

Just to the east of No. 13 Elsfield Road is the self contained cul-de-sac of Little Acreage, which has a suburban character as large detached houses built in the 1970s to two repeated designs. The landscaping follows strong straight lines and is dominated by hard surfaces, failing to support the rural character of the surrounding area. Tall boundary hedges partially screen views of the buildings nearest Elsfield Road and the front gardens provide a variety of trees and greenery that softens the building lines.

#### **Cannons Croft from Elsfield Road**



#### **Negative Features**

- Impact of heavy traffic volumes, particularly at peak times;
- Urban style of new bus stop on the east side of Oxford Road;
- Intrusive, high density, suburban style developments, including dominant highways and parking areas, constraint of views to rural greenery and lack of definition of private green space attached to individual properties;
- Pressure for on-street parking, with the area of Barns Hay noted as particularly problematic;
- Condition of the Three Horseshoes;
- Intrusion of traffic calming build-outs to the streetscene;
- The recently developed flats and shop on Oxford Road competing with the prominence of the focal group of historic buildings in views along the street;
- Large area of hard standing associated with a former taxi business creates an area of less rural character on Oxford Road.

### Character Area 3: Mill Lane

#### Significance

Feature	Contribution to significance
Grouping of The Manor, Cromwells House and Alan Court;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus of buildings of special historic and architectural interest;</li> <li>• Evidence of the village's development - early 17<sup>th</sup> century into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century;</li> <li>• Alan Court – one of the vernacular farmhouses in the conservation area with evidence of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Arts and Crafts architecture;</li> <li>• Cromwells House and The Manor - evidence of the larger yeoman farmers, showing the influence of national styles in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.</li> </ul>
The bend in the road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encloses the southern section of the lane, views northward and to the south east are focused on historic building frontages;</li> </ul>
Later buildings and gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Later 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings set further back from the road in private gardens, have less influence on the character of the space;</li> <li>• Large garden at No. 4 Mill Lane allows rural greenery to penetrate to the roadside, contributing positively to the area's character.</li> </ul>
Mix of buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Juxtaposition of buildings of different status, function and style, provides evidence of the self-contained village community.</li> </ul>
Building materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of a variety of locally produced natural and man made materials contributes to the vernacular character of the area.</li> </ul>
Roofs and Chimneys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steeply pitched roofs - an important feature of the local vernacular tradition. Characteristic roofing materials make a strong contribution to the streetscene;</li> <li>• Eye-catching features - chimneystacks at Alan Court and dormer windows at Cromwells House contribute to the distinctiveness of the area.</li> </ul>
Green landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mature trees in back gardens - Trees frame views of buildings and add vertical interest, greenery and softening;</li> <li>• Roadside verges draw the eye along channelled view to landmark buildings;</li> <li>• Hedgerow, west side of Mill Lane - a rural green boundary to the street, which was recorded in historic depictions of the area.</li> </ul>
Raised footpaths on either side of the road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help to separate pedestrians from traffic in a surprisingly busy street;</li> <li>• An historic rural feature of the street recorded in depictions dating from the early 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (by J. C. Buckler and Taunt).</li> </ul>
Views out to green fields to the west;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A visual connection between the village street and the rural setting, emphasising the area's rural character.</li> </ul>
Used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders, as well as motorists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used and appreciated for its architectural and historic interest and its rural character.</li> <li>• This quiet enjoyment of the area contributes to its rural character, including the sound of passing horses.</li> </ul>

### Commentary

This small character area is probably the most distinctive location in Old Marston and, along with the village cross that stood near its southern entrance, has been the subject of several well known paintings, engravings and photographs over the past two centuries. The road continues as a sinuous rural route with soft edges of grass verge rising as banks to footpaths set back from the road.

The road includes a sharp bend that provides both west and south facing built frontages, which are responsible for much of the strong sense of enclosure. This area is relatively broad and, without tall trees to the south and west, benefits from a great deal of sunlight. The buildings include houses of distinction, such as the remains of Unton Croke's Mansion House (Cromwells House) and James Sims' Manor House adjacent. Both were imposing buildings designed to display the taste and wealth of their owners and prominently located at the northern end of views along the road. They are often bathed in evening sunlight, illuminating their limestone facades. The placement of the buildings just back from the edge of the road helps to bind them together with the less ostentatious architecture of other buildings in the street. Nevertheless, the low wall with piers supporting large ball finials helps to provide some definition to the small garden in front of the Manor House.

A large horse chestnut tree standing just to the west of Cromwells House provides a vertical emphasise and has grown around and over the house providing part of its setting and framing views of it. The masonry on the front of Manor House has gained the distinctive patina and



Entrance to Pond Lane



Mill Lane looking to Alan Court and Manor House

blistering associated with Headington softstone, both of which also illustrate its age. The interior of Cromwells House retains numerous interesting features including a panelled room with an armorial, tiled fireplace, both dating from the 16th century.

Between Manor House and Alan Court, Pond Lane runs off between high garden walls and with narrow grass verges and overarching trees, providing a tantalising channelled view into Character Area 4.

Alan Court's form typifies the village's farmhouses, with interest added by a bay widow at its northern end. The building's renovation in the 1930s has raised its apparent status. It provides a large part of the enclosure that makes this a unique location in the conservation area. The large cart arch at the southern end of the building allows views through to the former farmyard to the east and provides some indication of the area's agricultural past.

The row of cottages to the south of Alan Court provides a continuous frontage, channelling views to the buildings to the north. The simple design and materials of the small limestone rubble cottages, with their low brick garden wall and small front gardens contributes to the rural character of the street. The contrasting use of limestone masonry and red brick detailing also helps to pick out the rhythm of windows and doors in the frontages of these buildings.

Across the road, the green verge and high hedgerow reinforces the rural origins and setting. The houses on this side of the road stand well back from the street in large gardens and are



partially screened from view from the street by the tall hedgerow, which reduce their influence on the character of the street. The coping of the retaining wall of a former pond at Pond Cottage can still be identified protruding through the grass of the verge.

To the west of Cromwells House the lane passes through a second sharp bend to run north with a low hedge and post and rail fence to the west. This boundary provides a sharp transition from the historic village to its rural setting. The views out to the countryside have a particularly high aesthetic value, with ridge and furrow earthworks that catch the evening sunlight and provide evidence of centuries of agricultural history. To the east the gardens of Cromwells House are hidden behind high limestone walls whilst new development to the north included limestone walls that screen views from the road to private gardens and buildings, which, initially, are set back from the road. The three houses at 19a, 21 and 21a Mill Lane present a jumble of walls and shallow, mono-pitched roofs to the road, which reflects some of the organic mixture of forms expected in a rural setting.

#### Negative features

- The cluttered cars parked on the street intrude into views and influence the character of the area. Nevertheless they have a



**Former farmyard at the rear of Alan Court including a small barn**

positive impact in reducing car speeds;

- The volume of traffic passing through this narrow road is surprisingly high. Several traffic accidents in the recent past were reported by local residents during preparation of this appraisal, who stated they believed this was at least in part the result of the road's poor surface.
- Currently, street lighting is provided by grey tubular steel lamp standards with angled heads and unadorned lamps, which are not considered to support the rural or historic character of the conservation area.



**A view of Mill Lane in 1885 by Henry Taunt. The thatched cottage and pond are now gone. The hedgerow to the left, tall trees and the raised footways and verges either side of the sunken road all survive along with the 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages and their low garden walls.**

**Character Area 4: Church Lane, Butts Lane and Ponds Lane****Significance**

Feature	Contribution to significance
Narrow and sinuous lanes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intimate spaces with views foreshortened by buildings, trees or boundaries contribute to the rural character of the village.</li> </ul>
Triangular open space at the central road junction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A focal point with views channelled along the narrow lanes and converging on the Bricklayers Arms in a triangular open space, making this historic building a minor landmark.</li> </ul>
Buildings set at the back of the pavement or road with high limestone walls or hedgerows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creates a strong sense of enclosure to the narrow lanes that helps to create intimate spaces;</li> <li>High walls are a positive architectural feature in themselves, built of local materials, and marking the outline of historic farmyards;</li> <li>The enclosure channels views along roads to focal features such as the Bricklayers Arms, Church Farmhouse, Alan Court and The Manor.</li> </ul>
Roads with narrow grass verges and either narrow or no pavement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add greenery and softening at the roadside - part of the rural character;</li> <li>Shared surfaces slow traffic and avoid the additional detail of pavements and kerbs that would give greater emphasis to hard highways surfaces.</li> </ul>
Low density of development with 'hidden' historic buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organic character of development - evidence of the gradual development of the area;</li> <li>Provides a sense of discovery and an intimate character.</li> </ul>
Mixture of sizes and types of buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixture of buildings provides evidence of the historic social character of the village and the different activities that have contributed to its economic history;</li> <li>Representation of the development of the local vernacular tradition and adoption of national styles in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.</li> </ul>
Green spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These include: St Nicholas' churchyard, garden at Oak Lodge, gardens either side of Ponds Lane and farmland north east of the conservation area off Butts Lane;</li> <li>Add to the rapid transitions from open to enclosed areas that helps form the series of intimate spaces and forms the organic character of development;</li> <li>The greenery in this area contributes positively to its rural character, as well as opportunities for wildlife.</li> </ul>
Gaps between buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gaps between buildings contribute to the spacious feel of the area, allowing views to greenery in back gardens and the landscape beyond - an important feature of the area's rural character.</li> </ul>

**Commentary**

This character area is formed of small lanes set off the main routes of Elsfield Road and Mill Lane, which converge at a small open space overlooked by the former Bricklayers Arms pub. This stands directly at the road's edge facing the approach

along Church Lane from the south. Its prominent position on these back lanes and history of use suggests it may have been built as a public house following the Beerhouse Act of 1830. The lanes are narrow with narrow grass verges but often without separate footpaths, which contributes to their rural character and creates shared surfaces

that help reduce traffic speed. Both Pond Lane and Butts Lane follow sinuous routes with a strong sense of enclosure provided by high limestone rubble walls or hedgerows that channel views. Mature trees arch overhead at Pond Lane, contributing positively to both the rural and intimate character of the area. Mid and later 20<sup>th</sup> century houses off Pond Lane are set back from the road behind high stone walls and amongst trees in former gardens or farmyards. The low density of development and position of houses, set back within large private gardens, contributes to the tranquil atmosphere and green character of the conservation area. From the northern end of Butts Lane there are views out of the conservation area across the minimally managed pastureland to the north east, providing a rural setting. From Pond Lane there are glimpsed views to large gardens of houses on either side, including the former farmyard belonging to The Manor which now forms the setting of private houses and provides evidence of the area's agricultural past, as well as contributing an area of space and greenery that adds to the low density character and tranquillity.

Church Lane south follows a straighter course, with the churchyard to the west providing a more open aspect, letting in light and providing views out to the church and churchyard monuments and trees. The relationship between the churchyard and lane provides evidence of the medieval origins of this part of the village's street plan. The east side of Church Lane is more built up with the Church Hall, Glebe House and White Rose Cottage built either at the back of the narrow pavement or just back from it, providing enclosure that defines the space with narrow gaps allowing



Church Lane south, with Glebe House (right)



The former Bricklayers Arms, Church Lane

views to greenery in gardens beyond that adds softening to views out of the space. Glebe House has a distinctly modern character and is conspicuously placed just back from the road. Its form, materials and placement provide some references to the local vernacular tradition. Nevertheless it stands out as a modern building in this historic location. The building may be harmonised in future by using a less bright white paint over the rendered upper storey. The large garden at Oak Lodge provides a more open area in this frontage that has a formal character echoing the well maintained grassed lawns of the churchyard. Oak Lodge, the church hall and the churchyard have low limestone rubble boundary walls that provide definition to the road and continuity in views along it. To the north, Church Lane broadens to form a larger open space at the Bricklayers Arms, which is bounded by buildings at the back of the pavement, as well as high stone walls. Other lanes have narrow entries to this space, contributing to the feel of each lane as a series of intimate spaces.

The churchyard has been mentioned above in the description of Character Area 2 but also contributes positively to this area. The northern part of the churchyard is connected to Church Lane by a small gate through the wall and is a quiet, grassed area with some wild flowers, large evergreen trees and ivy covered wall, all of which contribute to a rural character that is carried over in the adjacent lane. The churchyard planting does not appear to follow any formalised plan and, as such, provides an organic character with trees mingling with gravestones and tombs that support the rural character of the open space between the church and The Bricklayers Arms.



The northern part of Church Lane is narrower and enclosed by a mixture of high garden walls and built frontages, including the side of the pub, the listed Church Farmhouse and modern flats at Nos. 35 – 38 Church Lane. The gardens also include a number of tall mature trees, including some striking evergreens that add significant height and greenery. Both Byways and At Last are large mid 20<sup>th</sup> century houses standing back from the road in spacious gardens that contribute to the greenery of the area and its low density character. To the north, the former yard of Church Farm is a recently completed housing development of two storey houses in short, informally-styled terraces set behind small, walled front gardens in narrow lanes and spaces with a central focus just north of the conservation area. Before its redevelopment it had served as a small manufacturing unit for a textiles business.

#### Negative features

- Lack of maintenance of some buildings;
- Lack of maintenance of front garden space at Lane Cottage means that overgrown shrubs block access to the former front door, affecting understanding of its use and present give impression of abandonment and neglect.
- The Bricklayers Arms closed in Spring 2011 due to lack of business and the building is currently boarded up awaiting a new use. Proposals for redevelopment, including building houses on the former car park at the rear have been granted planning permission.
- Removal of paint or render at White Rose Cottage appears to have removed the fire face of the brick and may result in more rapid weathering of the brickwork. It has changed the external appearance of the building and is likely to require remedial measures through application of an alternative weather coat in future;
- The hedgerow alongside Butts Lane is in a poor condition and is now in need of maintenance, possibly requiring some replanting.
- Several modern buildings are notable for an intrusive impact on the conservation area as a result of the contrast between their scale, materials and detailing with those of the area's more traditional rural buildings.
- On-street car parking on Church Lane is an obtrusive modern impact on the rural scene in this area, partially screening views of the churchyard, its surrounding wall and the green verge. However, it may serve a useful role in restricting traffic speeds.



**View east over fields off Butts Lane**



**Character Area 5: Allotments and green spaces****Significance**

Feature	Contribution to significance
Open green landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes surviving elements of the village's medieval and early post-medieval fields;</li> <li>• Provides a green setting to the village and a green gap between the village and surrounding suburban housing estates;</li> <li>• Contributes positively to its rural character in views through into and out of the area, as well as contributing to the mid ground of the protected view to the City Centre from Elsfield;</li> <li>• Provides areas of amenity green open space for local residents.</li> </ul>
Tree lines and hedgerows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve outlines of fields created by enclosure in the 17th century, and some older medieval field boundaries - these qualify as 'important hedgerows' within the definition of the Hedgerows Regulations;</li> <li>• Native tree varieties include the nationally scarce Midland Hawthorne (<i>Crataegus laevigata</i>) - evidence of ancient hedgerows dating from before parliamentary enclosure. Also an early flowering nectar source for pollinating;</li> <li>• Trees within the hedgerows alongside Elsfield Road include a high proportion of Wychelm</li> </ul>
Surviving areas of pasture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes areas of high value for nature conservation;</li> <li>• One field of unimproved lowland grassland in the north east (a remnant of the former Sucroft Common) includes sedges near the course of the Marston Brook and grassland plants with high value for pollinating insects;</li> <li>• The survival of the medieval fields and the representative grassland flora and fauna combine to create a living heritage.</li> </ul>
Areas of ridge and furrow earthworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of the historic cultivation of this land prior to its inclosure for pasture in the mid 17th century;</li> <li>• Supported by documentary evidence such as the Corpus Christi maps.</li> </ul>
Expansive views including views to historic buildings in the village;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sweeping views across green open space punctuated by hedgerows and tree lines to Headington Hill, the hills towards Elsfield and to the roofs of historic buildings in the village with high aesthetic value;</li> <li>• The visual connection between the historic village and its green setting is a key element of the area's rural character.</li> </ul>
Historic footpaths.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some of footpath routes through the area are of considerable antiquity, recorded on 17th and 18th century maps and are a continuation of the medieval and post-medieval street plan.</li> </ul>

**Commentary**

Nearly all this area lies within Oxford City's Greenbelt and was included in the conservation area to protect the village's green setting and rural character. It comprises a series of green open spaces in a variety of uses, several of which are

open for public access. A network of hedgerows and tree lines mark the historical divisions of fields that were most probably created during the enclosure of the village's medieval open fields in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century.



**View across the Court Place farm allotments to Colthorn Farm and Bishop's Farm, including the former smithy buildings.**

A large area of allotments runs right up to the village's main street at Oxford Road. This was formed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century from land that belonged to Brasenose College until the 1950s and can be traced to the 13<sup>th</sup> century as the manor's demesne fields. The allotments are an important resource for the community bringing green space into the centre of the village. They have a ramshackle appearance due to the varying management and planning of plots by individual allotment gardeners, which must vary considerably from year to year and even between seasons. This is a positive element of their character. However, where management has lapsed some allotments have become very overgrown. In some areas, large groups of allotments have lapsed from use, creating dense thickets of scrub and brambles, which create a negative impression. The medieval name of this land was 'Brookfield' after the brook that can be traced as a line of trees running through the allotments, although the brook is now overgrown. The green and leafy slopes of Headington Hill provide the background to views across the allotments, with The John Radcliffe Hospital sometimes appearing as a stark structure on the skyline.

In the south east, land has been converted from farmland to recreation grounds, providing valued community open space. Green playing field surfaces help to retain the rural character, which is greatly reinforced by the retention of hedgerow

boundaries with mature hedgerow trees. Two fields on the eastern edge of the conservation area remain in use as hay meadows and include ridge and furrow earthworks that are the evidence of ploughing with oxen drawn ploughs in the medieval or early post-medieval period, providing a tangible link with the agricultural past of the village. They may also provide a reservoir of unimproved meadowland fauna and flora that is part of the area's ecological history.



#### **Remains of ridge and furrow earthworks**

The fields either side of Elsfield Road provide tall hedgerows of native species with hedgerow trees that make this eastern section of the road a country lane, with green verges running into

**Elsfield Road approaches the village core as a tree lined country lane from Marsh Lane**



ditches on either side. They are notable for the survival of Wychelm whilst other hedgerows contain nationally scarce Midland Thorn a species of hawthorn that is a remnant of ancient woodland.

Just before entering the village, the land south of Elsfield Road includes a small cemetery, which is surrounded by an iron railing fence. This provides a transition in character between the countryside and the built-up village. The fields on the north side of Elsfield Road are not accessible to the public and are used as horse paddocks. However, from the field gate, there are views across this land to the countryside beyond the ring road, including the farmland and woods on the hill at Elsfield that provide a visual connection with the wider countryside and contribute to the area's aesthetic value. This farmland also includes ridge and furrow earthworks and wraps around the east and north sides of Little Acreage to the green pastureland that connects with Butts Lane to the west.

#### ***Negative feature***

- Large areas of neglected and overgrown allotments, nevertheless some of the 'scruffiness' of the allotments, including make-do boundaries and slightly unkempt areas is part of its character and some limited scrub provides opportunities for wildlife, particularly as areas for hibernation.

- **Lost biodiversity:** Overgrazed or over fertilised pastureland loses its natural biodiversity which is both part of its historic and evidential value and necessary for the sustained fertility of the land. Elsewhere grassland biodiversity has been lost by ploughing of former pastureland to extend the cemetery.
- Works to hedgerows have denuded the presence of Midland Thorn through replanting using non-native hawthorn varieties.



**Sweeping vistas across the allotments to Headington Hill**



## Character Area 6: Back Lane

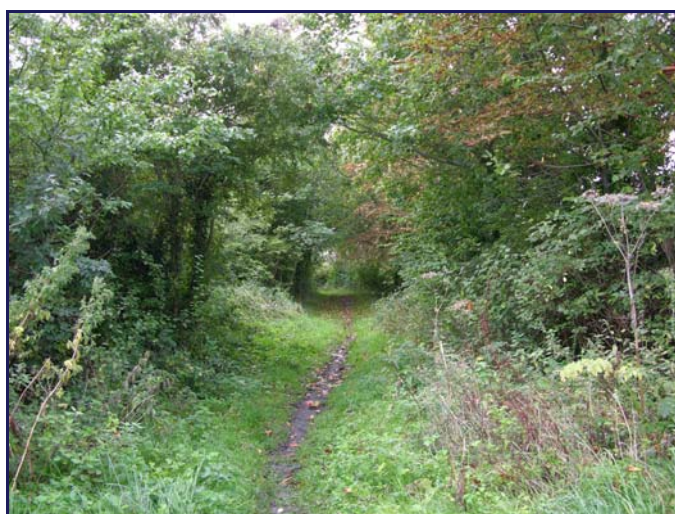
### Significance

Feature	Contribution to significance
Green sinuous footpath;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The corners and curves create a series of unfolding views and intimate spaces;</li> <li>The twists and turns are evidence of features in the medieval open fields which the lane ran alongside.</li> </ul>
Views out to the village's rural setting of fields, hedgerows and trees to the west;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Views to attractive green landscape that add to the rural character of the area;</li> <li>A visual connection between the village and its historic hinterland - part of the lane's character as an historic link between the village and the open fields.</li> </ul>
Views of the green setting of the village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small fields and orchard to the east - part of the medieval landscape of the village, evidence of the past economy of the settlement.</li> </ul>
Hedgerow boundaries; Tunnels of greenery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High green hedgerows and regular hedgerow trees arch overhead channelling views and creating tunnels of foliage – creates an enclosed feel;</li> <li>Acts as a noise barrier - adding to the area's privacy and tranquillity;</li> <li>Evidence of boundaries of medieval fields;</li> <li>Ecological value, acting as wildlife corridors and habitat.</li> </ul>
Farmyard wall and gate at Barns Hay.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of historic farmyards, and the connection between these and the lane.</li> </ul>

### Commentary

This long green lane contributes positively to the rural character of the conservation area by providing a secluded walking route through green and leafy surroundings for the full north-south length of the village. It has high historic interest as evidence of the past access between the village's medieval open fields and the small fields and orchards of farm units in the village core. Access from Mill Lane is well marked by the wide entrance to the green lane, positively contributing to its character by drawing walkers in. Unfortunately, the tubular steel gate controlling access at this entrance does not reflect the positive rural qualities of the conservation area. At the rear of houses on Barns Hay, the high wall that formerly enclosed the farmyard of Cross Farm curves around a corner to run along the rear of No. 9 Barns Hay and includes a simple plank door. The wall provides evidence of the former use of land adjacent to the path as a farmyard,

whilst the door demonstrates the connections through to this space from properties fronting on to Oxford Road. The wall has been reduced considerably behind Nos. 2 – 8 Barns Hay,



**Back Lane provides a tranquil and secluded green public space**





### The lane's hedgerows have a high value for wildlife

resulting in some loss to its architectural contribution to the area's character, but allowing properties on Barns Hay to look out onto the green space. The rather suburban character of the rear elevation of these properties is exacerbated by their very small rear gardens.

Along most of the lane's length tall hedgerows rise to either side enclosing the lane. At times it runs through a tunnel of foliage, with branches arching overhead creating an intimate and tranquil space. Although the lane runs between green fields, the high hedgerows confine most views within it, this adds to the intimate character but does reduce some of the connection to the rural setting. At the southern end there are views east into the paddocks at the rear of Colthorne Farm and to a paddock to the west, providing more of the historic connection between the lane and fields. Half-way along the lane a gateway allows access through the fields to a footpath leading towards Marston Ferry Road. As the lane has a curving line it presents a series of unfolding views that contribute to the feeling of seclusion. A dog leg at the southern end of the lane is a relict of a change in the direction of ploughing in the medieval open fields. The width of the bridleway depends upon the control of weeds but can be broad, reflecting its nature as a country lane. At present there are only a small number of gateways leading into properties within the village although it is likely that several of the small fields and paddocks to the east once had gates that gave access onto the lane.

The entrance to the lane at the Marston Ferry Road is less auspicious appearing as a narrow gap between hedgerows. The historic

continuation of the lane south has been cut by the new road and the bund on the far side, obscuring understanding of its historic route. The lane is now approached from the underpass with a metal post and rail fence dividing off the pathway from the adjacent recreation ground, providing a very suburban character detail at the entrance to the path and a barrier to access from the recreation ground that might encourage use.

### *Negative features*

- Poor quality entrance to footpath from Marston Ferry Road and poor gate at entrance from Mill Lane;
- Disruption to the historic route of Back Lane by the Marston Ferry Road;
- Screening of views out over fields to the west by overgrown hedgerow;
- Lack of signage indicating the presence of the lane, particularly at the southern entrance which is only a narrow gap between hedgerows;
- Need for hedgerow management: The hedgerow on the west side of the lane has become very high in places. This contributes positively to its character by creating the tranquil tree tunnel noted above. However, it can be oppressive and has resulted in the loss of views out over the fields. Laying the hedge in a number of places would help to ensure its longevity and, as well as providing more views out from the lane.



Poor quality signage and gate at the northern end of Back Lane

## 7. Negative Features, Vulnerabilities and Opportunities for Enhancement

During the survey and community engagement for this appraisal a number of challenges for the future management of the conservation area were identified. These included areas where the conservation area may be vulnerable to changes in character, negative features that detract from its character and several opportunities for future enhancement.

### Negative Features

#### **Traffic**

Traffic negatively affects the character of the conservation area through its speed and its volume. Elsfeld Road and Oxford Road are used as a shortcut between Marsh Lane and Marston Ferry Road/Cherwell Drive during the morning and late afternoon rush hours to avoid the congested roundabouts on Cherwell Drive. This causes a significant increase in the volume of traffic using these quiet, rural lanes. At other times, local people report that traffic through the village exceeds the legal speed limit and that several accidents have resulted near the sharp bend on Mill Lane.

Other routes through the village mainly serve residential properties, which generate relatively few traffic movements per day. The Victoria Arms, off Mill Lane, is notable as generating a significant amount of traffic as a popular pub and restaurant, although in the past it was notable for its accessibility by other forms of transport including bicycles and boats.

#### **Public Realm**

**Traffic calming:** Build outs have been used to reduce the speed of traffic through the village in order to make it less desirable as a shortcut route for commuters. Local people report that these have been largely successful on Elsfeld Road, but that they have caused additional issues of congestion and pollution from queuing cars on Oxford Road. They are also relatively unattractive features, despite the use of materials judged to be sensitive to the conservation area. They tend to intrude in views along the village's historic roads.

**Condition of roads:** Local residents pointed out the poor condition of some road surfaces within the village as a cause for concern. Local residents have noted an area of particular concern was at Mill Lane where a groove in the road has repeatedly caused problems during icy weather reducing the safety of the area.

**Bus stops:** The bus shelter on Elsfeld Road is considered to provide an example of good

practice in providing a design that reinforces the rural character of the conservation area. However, the urban style of the shelter outside the Mortimer Hall has been chosen with less consideration for the character of the area and adds to the more urban character introduced by the Mortimer Hall.

A new bus stop has been created further up Oxford Road by cutting a section through the grassed verge, which has been surfaced with tarmac and given edges of granite kerbs at various levels. This is a visually poor feature adding clutter to the streetscene, providing little benefit to bus users whilst detracting from the high quality visual contribution of the verge.

**On street parking:** Cars parked on the roadside intrude in views up and down the streets. However, they also have a positive impact by reducing traffic speeds and may be preferable to the loss of front garden spaces to provide off road car parking.

#### **Intrusive alterations to buildings**

**Box dormer windows:** Dormer windows with small, pitched roofs that do not dominate the roofs of buildings are a positive part of the local vernacular tradition in the conservation area. However, a number of examples of large box dormer windows are seen that either replace or dominate the roofs of buildings remove an important element of their character and are intrusive. Planning permission is required for any new dormer windows within the conservation area.

**Replacement of doors and windows:** The replacement of doors and windows with uPVC units has detracted from the character of some buildings in the conservation area. This is the result of the reflective texture and even colour of plastic units and the heavy frames that reduce the area of glass that is visible with traditional timber framed windows. Indeed, the replacement of windows with plastic units can significantly reduce the amount of light that reaches interior rooms. English Heritage have demonstrated that traditional windows can be just as energy efficient as modern plastic units, whilst repairing existing

windows is better for the environment than fitting new ones that may need replacement in less than twenty years.

### ***Intrusive Modern Development***

Loss of farmyards: The loss of clearly identifiable farmyards through infill development has removed a key characteristic of the conservation area as an historic rural village.

Loss of gaps between buildings: Infill development has reduced or removed the gaps between buildings that contribute to the low density character of the conservation area that is a legacy of its organic development as a village with properties surrounded by private gardens. The loss of glimpsed views to greenery beyond the building line has, in places, denuded a feature of the area's rural character.

Suburban character of new development: Much of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century infill development in the conservation area has used building styles, materials and landscaping that has a relatively suburban character that do not reflect the village's historic vernacular character or rural surroundings.

### **Vulnerabilities**

#### ***Loss of front boundary walls and boundary features***

The stone (and occasionally brick) walls and hedgerows that provide the front boundaries of many properties make an important contribution to the conservation area's rural character; defining the limits of public and private space, framing views along street, filling the gaps between historic buildings in the street frontage, etc. These features are vulnerable to removal to facilitate off street parking.

#### ***Loss of roof details***

The details and materials of the roofs of buildings in the conservation area are a significant part of their appearance and architectural interest. As they come to the end of their useful life, or as part of refurbishment and upgrading these historic and high quality roofing materials such as handmade fired clay plain tiles are vulnerable to replacement with modern derivatives that do not possess the same visual qualities and texture. The loss of chimneys can also result in a loss of character from historic buildings.

### ***Suburban character in new development***

New development has the potential to make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area in future. Employing standardised approaches without consideration of the local character has the potential to be harmful. As well as the appearance, the siting and layout can also have a harmful impact if it does not respond to the local characteristics of the area.

### ***Loss of mature trees***

Some of the mature trees are coming to the end of their natural lifespan. These trees are likely to be prominent in the streetscape or landscape and their loss will have an impact on views and character. Without proposals to ensure appropriate replanting this harm could be permanent.

### ***Increased density of new development***

Within the past fifty years the conservation area has become much more densely developed as a result of the infill development of former farmyards, paddocks or small industrial sites. Whilst further infill development may be necessary in future it will be necessary to ensure that this does not create a density of development that detracts from the rural character of the conservation area, or detracts from the distinctiveness of locations within it. Gaps, former farmyards and gardens may be vulnerable to development pressures.

### ***Loss of green rural character***

The greenery of the village's environment is made of green spaces in the public realm, such as the green roadside verges of the street, the recreation grounds, allotment gardens and the green lane and private green space that includes front and rear gardens and small fields and paddocks in the conservation area, as well as fields and other land outside the area. Loss of the contribution of green spaces to the character of the conservation area would result in an erosion of the rural character of the conservation area. These spaces could be under threat from the desire to use front gardens for parking, highway improvements affecting grass verges and development proposals on green spaces.

### ***Increase in traffic***

Any increase in the use Oxford Road and Elsfeld Road as a shortcut between Marsh Lane and



Marston Ferry Road/Cherwell Drive by peak time traffic would result in further degradation of the character of the conservation area and continued damage to and erosion of grass verges.

### ***Micro-generation***

Providing energy through renewable resources is becoming a popular means of reducing carbon emissions and some examples of the installation of both photovoltaic and photo-thermal cells are now visible within the conservation area.

However, at present the design of many of these units would be considered to detract from the appearance of historic buildings where they conceal and replace traditional roof details that make an important contribution to the character and appearance of both the building and area

### **Opportunities for enhancement**

#### ***Land at the front of Mortimer Hall***

The land at the front of Mortimer Hall stands out as a gateway location in the conservation area that could be enhanced. Enhancement might reduce the impact of the modern designed bus shelter, the area of cracked paving at the front of the building, relocate the car parking to the land at the side of the building and, potentially provide better definition of the roadside with a boundary feature such as a wall or hedge. Removing car parking from this area would also improve safety for users of the hall and library.

#### ***Allotments***

Many of the allotments at Court Place are currently unused and have become overgrown,

ending a tradition of cultivation that can be traced back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Once they have become colonised by scrub these allotments are very hard to return to cultivation and this has happened over some large areas despite recent popularity and publicity for allotment keeping. Nevertheless, some allotment keepers appreciate the presence of some uncultivated plots within the area, as these support biodiversity within the settings of their own 'patch'.

#### ***Entrances to Back Lane***

Back Lane is a special feature of Old Marston representing a part of the medieval landscape that remained unchanged for centuries until its southern limits were cut off by the construction of the Marston Ferry Road in the 1960s. However, the entrances to the lane from both north and south are uninspiring and unmarked. The tubular steel gate at the northern entrance detracts from the rural character of the lane. The southern entrance is a narrow gap between hedgerows with access from the adjacent recreation ground constrained by a metal fence.

#### ***Views out from Back Lane***

The hedgerows either side of Back Lane are part of its attractive character and help to provide privacy to residential properties to the east. However, the lane could provide better views out to the green fields to the west with some management of the hedgerow, including laying the hedge, whilst retaining trees to preserve the branches arching overhead that channel views along it.

## 8. Sources

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## Appendix: Listed Buildings

The conservation area contains a total of 21 statutory listed buildings. St Nicholas' Church is listed Grade I (indicating that it is of exceptional interest). Surviving elements of 13<sup>th</sup> century date include the chancel arch and nave arcades, whilst the interior also retains medieval wall paintings and encaustic tiles to the chancel floor. The exterior of the building is mostly of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, including the low tower that acts as a landmark in views from the surrounding area. Five churchyard monuments, including the 17<sup>th</sup> century Bannester Memorial have been designated as Grade II listed buildings.

Court Place is the earliest of the farmhouses and larger houses that have been designated Grade II listed buildings, potentially including elements of the 16<sup>th</sup> century building fragments, in addition to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century enlargements and late 19<sup>th</sup> century remodelling. The presence of archaeological remains of a moat surrounding the house has been suggested, which could form part of the historic interest of the house.

Grade II listed farmhouses include Alan Court and Cross Farmhouse of early or mid 17<sup>th</sup> century construction (although Alan Court also has substantial early 20<sup>th</sup> century elements of interest), as well as Halford House, Bishops Farm, Church Farmhouse, The Orchard and Long Farm, which were built in the mid or late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Cromwells stands apart from the farmhouses as an early 17<sup>th</sup> century manor house a part of which was either demolished or incorporated into the adjacent Manor House in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It includes a number of outbuildings, including two separately listed gate piers within the gardens that may relate to a former garden enclosure. Primrose Cottage is the only one of the cottages in the village that has been listed.

Both The White Hart and The Three Horseshoes are Grade II listed public houses, although the former may originally have been a farmhouse. The White Hart was built in the mid or late 17<sup>th</sup> century, whilst the Three Horseshoes was constructed approximately a century later.

The Manor House, built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with an attached section of garden wall is the latest building in the conservation area to be listed (Grade II).