



**St. Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area Management
Plan Supplementary Planning Document**



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1 Introduction

“Our built heritage represents the very best of our past. It provides a huge resource that can play an important role in the future of our towns, cities and rural areas in giving the stimulus provided to regeneration and the promotion of sustainable development” - Heritage Works, English Heritage, 2005.

1.1 A conservation area is defined by the Planning [Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas] Act 1990 s.69 as being an “area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

1.2 The St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area was designated in July 1982. The boundary was extended in April 1984 and further amended in December 2007. Figure 1 illustrates its boundary.

1.3 The management plan is the next step after the designation process and preparation of the character statement. The plan provides guidance to enable the effective management of change and secure the preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of the conservation area. This is in accordance with the Planning [Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas] Act 1990 s.71 and 72; s.71 specifically requires the local planning authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of their conservation areas and to submit these proposals for public consideration.

1.4 The character statement provides a comprehensive assessment of the physical character and appearance of the conservation area and defines what elements are of merit, what the key issues are, what opportunities exist for preservation/enhancement and which elements detract from the conservation area.

1.5 Its purpose is to provide a benchmark for assessing the impact of development proposals on the character and/or appearance of the conservation area.

1.6 The management plan is based on the Conservation Area Appraisal⁽¹⁾ and advice from English Heritage⁽²⁾.

1 St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area Appraisal, BEAMS, 2009

2 Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas, 2006 and Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management, 2011.

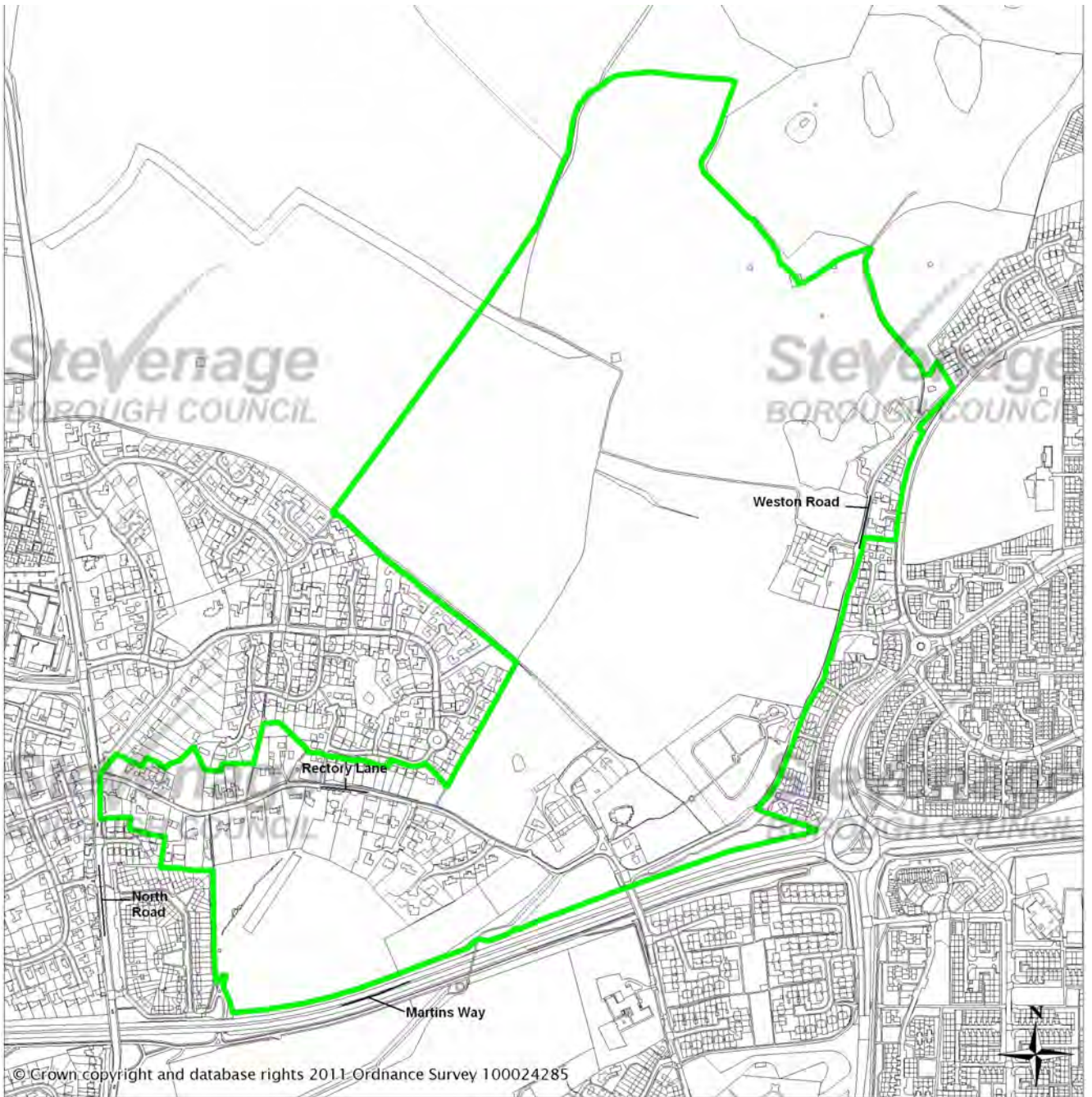


Figure 1 St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area map (Green line denotes boundary)

2 Conservation areas and planning procedures

2.1 The Council has a duty to only allow developments in a conservation area that preserve or enhance its character or appearance. Demolitions, alterations, extensions and other works affecting the character or appearance of properties in a conservation area will probably require planning permission and/or conservation area consent and/or listed building consent.

2.2 At the time of writing, there are nine listed buildings within the St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area (See Appendix 1). You should confirm whether a property is listed prior to the consideration of any potential scheme as listed buildings are subject to more stringent controls. In addition to the works identified above, development that would not normally require planning permission or conservation area consent, such as internal alterations to a building, may also require listed building consent.

2.3 The Council generally requires more detail than usual with applications submitted for listed building consent or for planning permission and conservation area consent for buildings within a conservation area.

2.4 The following section provides a brief overview of applications in conservation areas but you should always contact the Council to clarify how your proposals might be affected by conservation area designations.

Building alterations

2.5 In a conservation area you sometimes need planning permission for changes to buildings which would normally be permitted elsewhere. This might include extensions, alterations, dormer windows, satellite dishes or altering the external appearance of a property. You should contact the Council to determine how your proposal might be affected.

Demolition

2.6 For any unlisted building within a conservation area, a planning application to demolish a building is not required, however conservation area consent will be necessary. Conservation area consent is required to totally or substantially demolish most buildings within a conservation area.

2.7 Conservation area consent is also required to totally or substantially demolish a gate, fence, wall or railing over 1m high where it is next to a highway (including a public footpath or bridleway) or public open space; or over 2m high elsewhere.

Works to trees

2.8 The Council requires six weeks notice in writing before felling or cutting back the majority of trees in conservation areas, even if they are not specifically protected by a tree preservation order (TPO). In giving notice it is necessary to specify precisely what works are to be carried out.

2.9 Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are designed to protect important trees that make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the area. There are numerous trees within the St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area covered by TPOs. Any works to trees covered by a TPO must be approved by the Council.

Advertisements

2.10 Additional planning procedures apply to the display of advertisements within a conservation area. In particular prohibiting the use of advertising hoardings around building sites and the use of captive balloons for advertising.

Enforcement

2.11 The failure to comply with any of the special planning procedures listed above could lead to prosecution by the Council. It is therefore advisable to consult the Council before proceeding with any works, which might affect the character and appearance of a conservation area and/or a listed building.

It is always advisable to discuss any proposals with the Development Management team at Stevenage Borough Council at the earliest opportunity.

Please see our website for further information and direct contact details.

Alternatively you may telephone the Council on 01438 242159.

3 The aims

3.1 The management plan has four objectives:

Objective 1

To establish and define the significance of the conservation area as a whole and of the individual elements which contribute to that significance, building on the character appraisal.

Objective 2

To assess and define the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the area and how these impact on the significance of the individual elements and of the conservation area as a whole.

Objective 3

To provide a benchmark for assessing and managing change.

Objective 4

To provide guidance to ensure that the character and appearance of the conservation area will be maintained through the effective management of change and that opportunities to enhance the character and appearance are maximised.

4 In context

Planning policy context

4.1 The management plan will support existing planning policy as adopted by Stevenage Borough Council.

Regional Spatial Strategy [RSS] – The East of England Plan

4.2 The management plan complies with policies ENV6 and ENV7 of the RSS as adopted May 2008.

4.3 It should be noted that the regional level of plans (The East of England Plan) is proposed for revocation.

Stevenage District Plan 2nd Review 2004 [SDP]

4.4 The management plan supplements the following saved policies within the SDP:

Policy number	Policy title
Town-wide	
TW2	Structural open space
TW6	Green Belt
TW9	Quality in design
TW11	Planning requirements
Transport	
T6	Design standards
T13	Cycleways
T14	Pedestrians
T15	Car parking strategy
T16	Loss of residential car parking
Environment	
EN9	Archaeology and development (EN9/1)
EN10	Green Links (EN10/2)
EN13	Trees in new developments

Policy number	Policy title
EN15	Ancient lanes and associated hedgerows (EN15/2)
EN17	Wildlife sites (EN17/5 & EN17/6)
EN21	Other sites of nature conservation importance
EN32	River corridors and water meadows
Leisure and recreation	
L10	Principal open spaces (L10/14)
Social and community	
SC11	Cemetery extension at Weston Road

Table 1 - Policies of particular relevance in the Stevenage District Plan (2nd Review)

4.5 This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Emerging Planning Policy

4.6 Emerging planning policies within the Site Specific Policies document are also relevant as material considerations. The following policies are of particular note:

SSP08	Principal open spaces (SSP08/27)
SSP10	Wildlife sites (SSP10/31 & SSP10/35)
SSP12	Green Lungs (SSP12/02)
SSP13	Ancient lanes and hedgerows (SSP13/02)
SSP15	The Green Way
SSP16	Flood storage reservoirs (SSP16/01)
SSP17	Areas of archaeological significance (SSP17/12)

Table 2 - Policies of particular relevance in emerging local planning policies (Site Specific Policies)

Wider planning policy framework

4.7 The following is a list of existing policy and strategy documents which are supported by the management plan:

NPPF - National Planning Policy Framework
A Better Life - The role of culture in the sustainable development of the East of England Plan, 2006

The Biodiversity Action Plan, 2010
The Stevenage Green Space Strategy 2010

Table 3 The wider planning policy framework

4.8 For up to date details of relevant planning policy please refer to our website www.stevenage.gov.uk.

5 A brief history

5.1 The St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area lies to the north of the town. The area is bounded by Martins Way to the south, North Road to the east and Weston Road to the west. The northern edge is formed by field boundaries. The conservation area has been occupied since the Saxon period and perhaps earlier, however it is not until the twentieth century that the area has undergone any significant development.

5.2 Part of the Saxon settlement of Stevenage is thought to have stood in the area around the parish church of St Nicholas. There might have been an early timber church sited on the higher ground where the existing church now sits. In the 12th century a flint and stone church was constructed and the tower is now the earliest remaining part of the church, dating to around 1125AD. A settlement grew around the church and the oldest remaining building is the Old Bury, dating to the 15th century.

5.3 Rooks Nest House, now known as Howards, was built in the 16th or 17th century, it was fronted in brick in the 18th century. The author E.M.Forster spent some of his childhood here. The northern section of the conservation area, and beyond, is known as Forster Country. The Howard family also built Rooks Nest Farm in the 17th and 18th century comprising several large barns and a farmhouse. Figure 2 illustrates the church, the Old Bury and Rooks Nest House.



Figure 2 St Nicholas Church (l) the Old Bury (c) ©Ted Ellis and Rooks Nest House (r) ©Ted Ellis

5.4 During the 18th century, the Granby Public House and a number of cottages were also built in the area. This included some barns and outbuildings.

5.5 The Avenue connects the area surrounding the church with the Old Town High Street. From 1756, either side of The Avenue was lined with horse chestnut trees although these were damaged by the 1987 storms and new trees were subsequently planted. Figure 3 illustrates The Avenue in the 19th century and today.



Figure 3 The Avenue in the 19th century (l) and today (r)

5.6 During the 20th century a number of houses were developed along Rectory Lane, one of which was occupied by Leonard Vincent - Chief Architect to the Stevenage Development Corporation. Most of the properties are large detached dwellings on large plots facing onto the lane. Development to the latter end of the 20th century included cul-de-sac style developments at Chestnut Walk and Nicholas Place, as illustrated by Figure 4.



Figure 4 Chestnut Walk (l) and Nicholas Place (r)

6 An analysis

6.1 The St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area Appraisal was produced by BEAMS in 2009. This involved carrying out a full assessment of the area's historical development, land uses, buildings, setting, views and spaces, in order to define its special interest.

6.2 The appraisal document identifies two distinct 'character zones' within this conservation area: the residential area of Rectory Lane, and the rural area of Weston Road and the open fields to the north. The two character zones are illustrated by Figure 5.

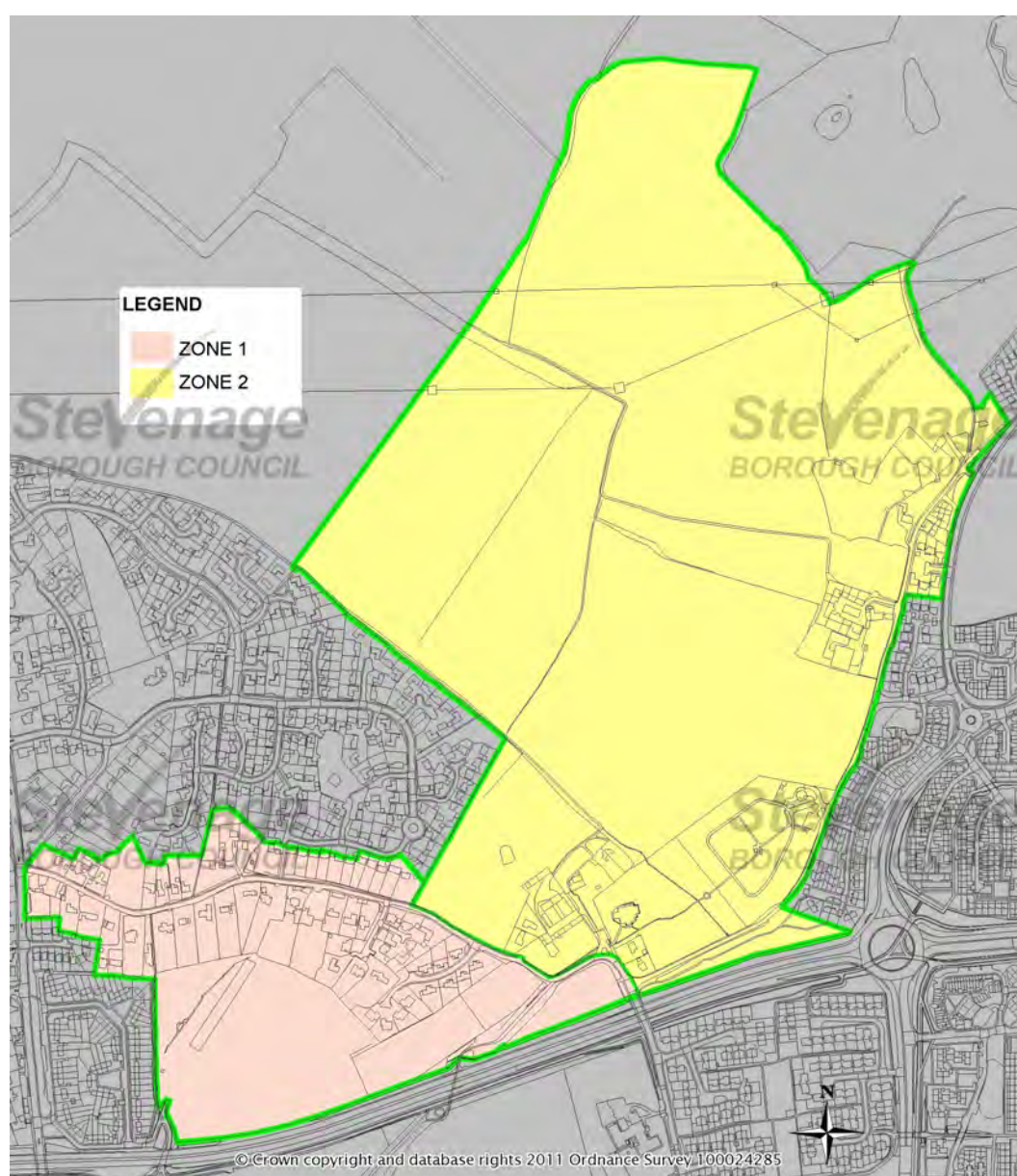


Figure 5 Conservation area zones

6.3 The following section outlines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the conservation area as a whole. This information has been compiled from a number of sources including the conservation area appraisal, site surveys and previous consultation comments.

Strengths

6.4 The St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area was designated in 1982 and there are number of strengths which warranted its initial designation and subsequent boundary amendments:

- The conservation area is generally in a good overall condition;
- St Nicholas Church and the surrounding landscape;
- A number of historically significant buildings;
- A diverse mix of individually designed homes;
- Green spaces, including the playing fields to the south of Rectory Lane, the open countryside, the water meadow and land associated with The Old Bury;
- The inclusion of some of the area within the Green Belt offers a high level of protection against development;
- Trees and hedges provide important green infrastructure, creating attractive tree-lined roads;
- The historical importance of the area, known as Forster Country;
- Views to and from fields forming the northern part of the conservation area.

6.5 This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Figure 6 and Figure 7 illustrate some of the key features.

6.6 The individual strengths combine to establish an area worthy of its conservation area status. The St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area has a part rural and part semi-rural character. The group of buildings surrounding the church provide the core for the area although significant historic and landmark buildings also hold prominent positions. The green and hedged tree lined roads of Rectory Lane and Weston Road form part of an historic road system. Green spaces enhance the rural nature of the area and provide access to views of significant importance to the north of the conservation area.

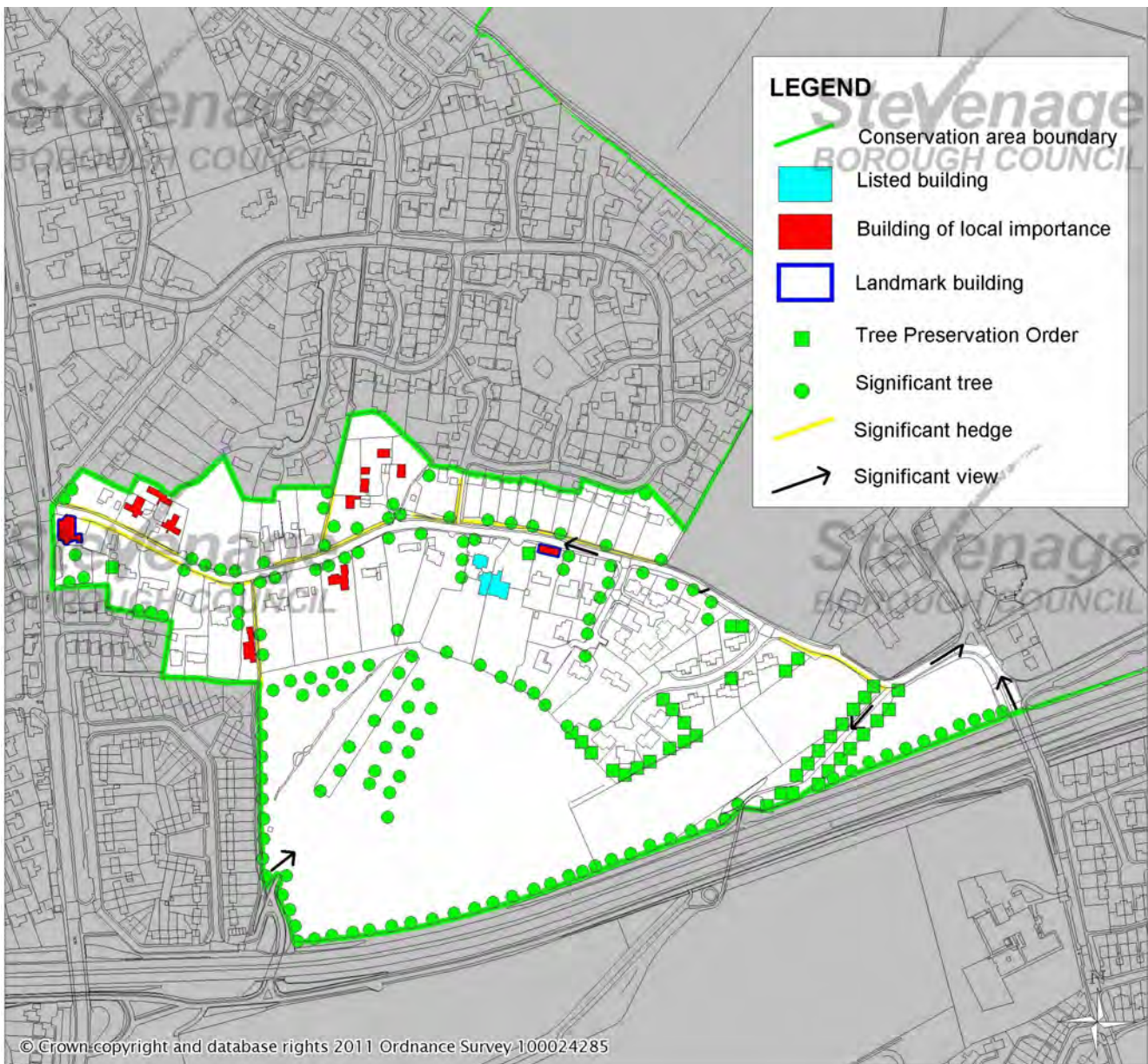


Figure 6 Character zone 1: Rectory Lane

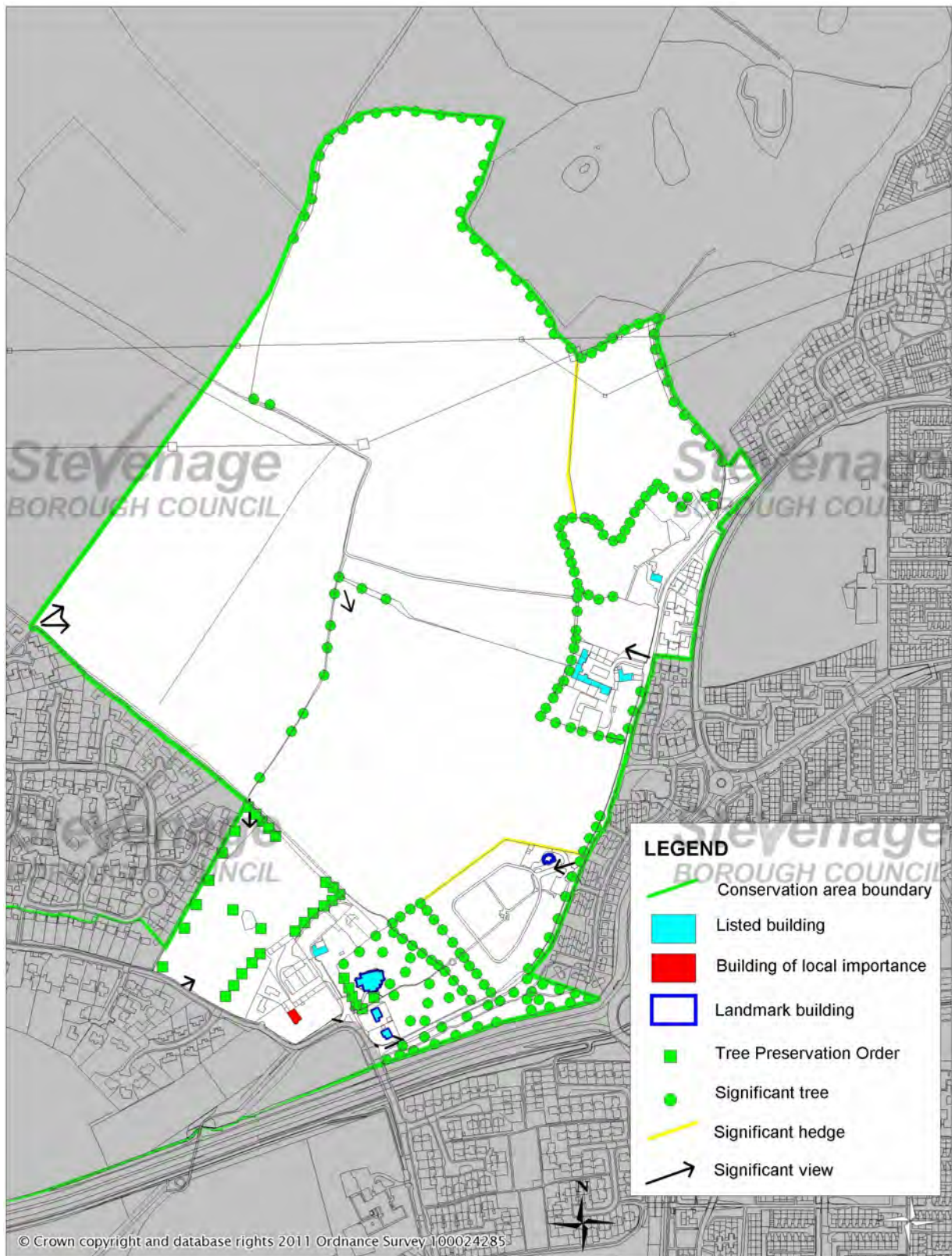


Figure 7 Character zone 2: Weston Road, Church, Bury and fields to the north

Weaknesses

6.7 The St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area is regarded as a generally well-kept neighbourhood; however the following issues have been highlighted:

- Recent developments do not fit well with the existing rural character of the area, particularly due to;
 - the use of close board fencing along Rectory Lane
 - intrusive triple garage on the corner of Rectory Lane with Chestnut Walk
 - the lack of landscaping
 - cul-de-sac developments do not follow the same pattern of development and destroy the continuous frontage of the lane
 - the large modern agricultural building to the south of Rooks Nest Farm disrupts the hedge line and does not fit in well with existing buildings
- Unsympathetic repairs/upgrading of existing buildings are causing the distinctive character and features to be diminished. One of the main issues is the replacement of traditionally designed windows with uPVC.
- Poor condition of the barn to the east of The Old Bury.

6.8 Together, these weaknesses impact upon the conservation area. Intrusive buildings, breaks in hedgerows and the removal of trees all have a negative impact on the rural nature of the area. Unsympathetic repairs and buildings detract from those features which make the area special. A continuation of such practices could potentially lead to a reduction in the size of the conservation area, or complete removal of designation. If those special features are lost forever, future reviews of the area would determine that there are no points of special architectural or historic interest which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Opportunities

6.9 There are a number of opportunities which may provide solutions to some of the mentioned issues.

- Promotion of the historic qualities of the area.
- Strengthening connections to the past.
- Encourage use of traditional materials.
- Enforce breaches of planning law and legislation.
- Increase protection for features of the conservation area through planning policy.

6.10 These opportunities present options to promote the area to visitors and improve local knowledge of the historic qualities of the area. Improving the image of an area will encourage sympathetic repairs and development.

6.11 There are numerous pedestrian and cycle access routes into and through the area, linking to Forster Country, the Old Town High Street and beyond. We can increase protection for the area through planning policy and ensure that these links are retained.

6.12 A pro-active enforcement process will ensure that conservation is at the forefront of people's minds when considering alterations or home improvements.

Threats

6.13 There are also a number of potential issues which pose a threat to the local environment.

- Possible development of additional cul-de-sacs, and other new infill development, within and around the conservation area.
- Pressure to find large amounts of land for housing.
- Inappropriate traffic management solutions.
- The cumulative negative effect of landscape erosion.
- The demolition of unlisted buildings.



Illustrative examples of the analysis: the core area of the church is a significant strength of the area although buildings in disrepair are a weakness. There are opportunities to improve local historical knowledge through information markers such as those illustrated.

The open fields are attractive development opportunities and this is a threat to the conservation area.

6.14 These threats are potentially damaging to the conservation area in the long-term. The pressure for development alongside unsympathetic changes to the existing environment could lead to erosion of all the special local features. It will be necessary for various stakeholders to integrate their activities, to work together and ensure that these threats do not impact negatively on the conservation area as a whole.

7 Development issues

"New developments are likely to have the greatest impact on the historic environment." - HELM website, 2011⁽³⁾.

7.1 The pattern of development within the conservation area, particularly along Rectory Lane, is important in terms of its visual appearance and historic character. Generally, dwellings along Rectory Lane are set back from the road, facing out onto it. Most of the properties have large building footprints and are sited on significantly sized plots. Figure 8 illustrates this pattern of development within the area.

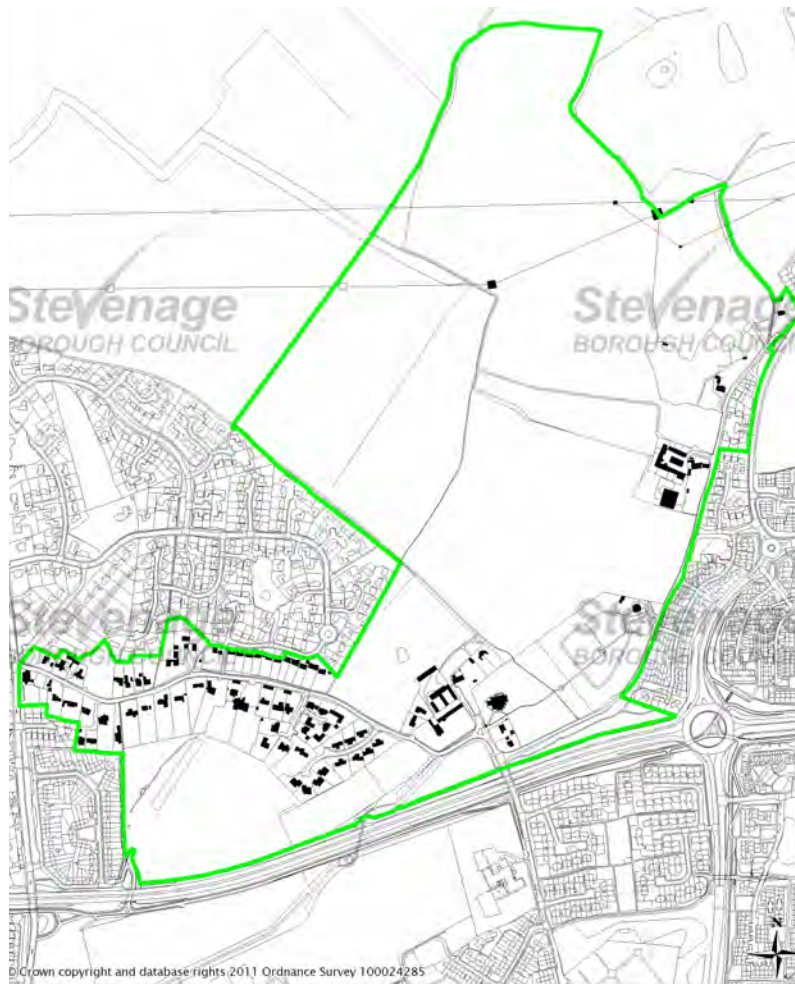


Figure 8 The built form of the St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area

3 <http://www.helm.org.uk/server/show/category.19582>

7.2 The more recent cul-de-sac developments look noticeably out of place along Rectory Lane, as their blank frontages (see Figure 9) and smaller plot sizes do not fit in with the character of existing buildings in the area.



Figure 9 St. Nicholas Place (l) - blank frontages of newer developments have a detrimental impact on the rural character of Rectory Lane (r).

7.3 The large plots within this conservation area appeal to developers. One property can be redeveloped into a small development of several properties. Chestnut Walk is located on the site of the old Rectory and the property known as Woodfield is to be the site of seven new homes. In the case of the Woodfield redevelopment, efforts have been made to follow the existing pattern of development, as three of the dwellings will front Rectory Lane.

7.4 Developments which require the removal of hedgerows and mature trees and the installation of new access roads break up the rural nature of the conservation area. It is recognised that to provide safe access, new roads require unobstructed views but this must be carefully balanced with a need to protect the rural nature of this conservation area.

7.5 Historical residential properties carry a premium in price terms and the re-use of existing buildings is a simple way of achieving sustainability. The re-use of buildings can also retain those features which make an area special. This has been successfully achieved along Weston Road with the conversion of the barns associated with Rooks Nest Farm.

7.6 Much of the northern section of the conservation area is designated as Green Belt, which offers a high level of protection against development. However, with a high demand for new housing and limited land available, there is great pressure in the area for development. This will be avoided, in order to protect the views which are integral to the character of the area.

7.7 One of the key features of this conservation area are the views into and from the area. Development should not block significant views between buildings, particularly around the historically significant core of the church and The Old Bury.

8 Transport issues

"Improving the streets brings a range of benefits to everyone [...] more people are encouraged to walk and cycle, the streets become safer, more sociable places, and the historic character of an area is enhanced rather than degraded." - HELM website, 2011⁽⁴⁾.

8.1 It is necessary to ensure that traffic safety and control measures harmonise with the landscape and that road signs and markings are integrated, as far as possible, with the character of the street.

8.2 The existing transport network can have an impact particularly where there are high levels of congestion which can increase noise levels and intrude visually on historic areas. Small developments may have a cumulative impact, either permanently (such as the development of new access roads) or in ways that may be reversed (such as the accumulation of signs and other street clutter).

8.3 Higher volumes of traffic increase pressure on roads and streets throughout the country, many of which were never designed for such use. Historic areas in particular are more sensitive to high vehicle speeds and volumes and need careful consideration of ways of calming the traffic. This is particularly true of Rectory Lane.

8.4 The Stevenage Urban Transport Plan (UTP) recognises that the lane is often used as a through route during peak times. Many standard traffic calming solutions are known to have had an adverse visual impact on the street environment and damaged the character of the street and the built environment⁽⁵⁾.



Figure 10 Examples of the traffic calming solution: pinch points

4 <http://www.helm.org.uk/server/show/nav.19645>

5 Streets for All: Practical Case Studies 5, English Heritage, 2008

8.5 As the local Highway Authority, Hertfordshire Highways examined the possibility of a road closure for through-traffic on Rectory Lane. Although this experimental measure was eventually abandoned, it was popular with local residents as it eliminated the possibility of rat-running. Recent transport modelling work has identified that closure of Rectory Lane would have a detrimental effect not only in the local vicinity but also on the wider network performance. This would lead to some roads operating over capacity.

8.6 The UTP proposes a scheme to introduce horizontal traffic calming (by way of pinch points) along Rectory Lane to try and control traffic flow and to prevent excessive vehicle speeds. Figure 10 illustrates pinch points and Figure 11 illustrates the indicative location on Rectory Lane.

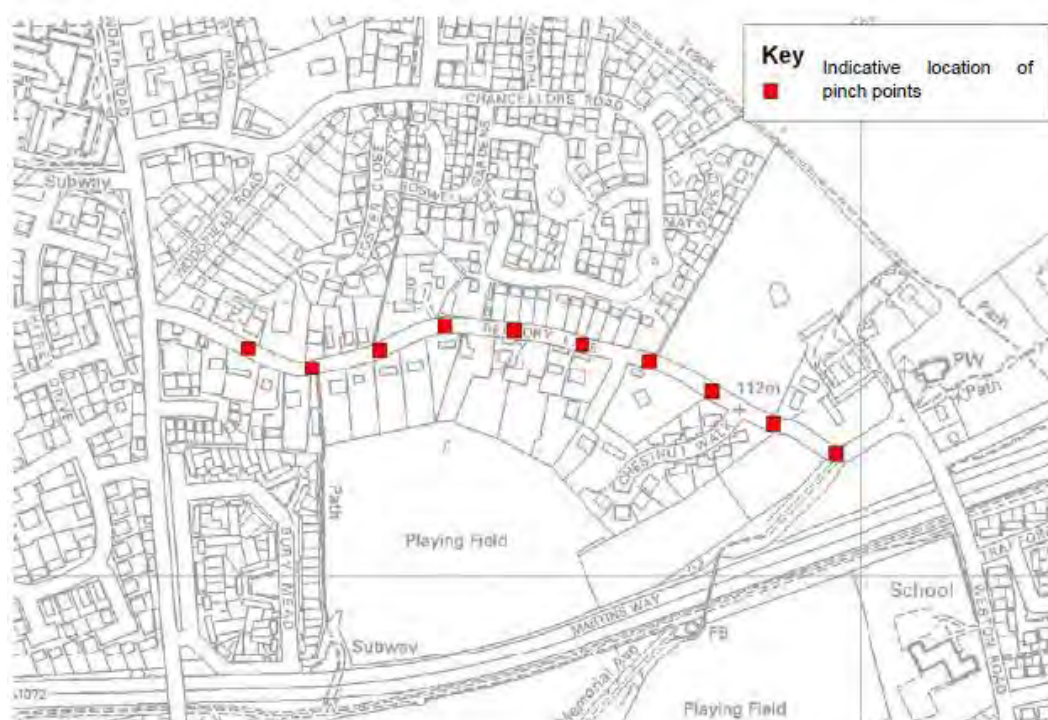


Figure 11 Indicative location of pinch points, Stevenage UTP, 2010, Vol 2:206

"Good design need not cost more, and may save money through fewer traffic signs, road markings and related equipment and street furniture." - Traffic management and streetscape, Department for Transport, 2008.

8.7 Traffic calming measures should be fitted sensitively into the street-scene as though they were part of the original design of the area. There is a need to ensure that appropriate solutions to this recognised issue do not have a detrimental impact on the conservation area.

8.8 The impact of using the lane as a through-route also has a negative effect on the amenity space for pedestrians and cyclists. An attractive public realm encourages people to travel by more sustainable forms of transport such as by foot or bicycle. The area currently has a charming rural appeal and it is necessary to retain this to maintain those elements which warrant the designation of the conservation area.

9 The Management Plan

9.1 All development in the conservation area, or which forms part of its setting, must respond to its immediate environment and context, in terms of scale, alignment, form, materials and detailing. This plan sets out a series of design guidelines aimed at ensuring appropriately designed development in the conservation area.

Alterations and extensions

9.2 Proposals to develop/redevelop sites or convert buildings to new uses will be required to preserve and enhance the character of the conservation area. The design, position, scale, massing and materials of new development will be expected to respect the existing character of the conservation area.

9.3 Alterations and extensions should not dominate an existing building's scale or alter the composition of its main elevations. Any alterations, including partial demolition, should respect an existing building and its materials. All new work should complement the old in quality, texture and colour as well as method of construction. Walls and stone detailing which have traditionally not been painted should remain undecorated.

Layout

9.4 Building footprints provide a reference for how the conservation area has developed over time. For the St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area the layout of the buildings generally illustrates an informal cluster around the church and a linear pattern along Rectory Lane. The buildings generally face onto the main streets. Figure 8 illustrates the building layout. Where possible, we will seek to retain the traditional urban layout in this area.

9.5 The height of local buildings is generally between 1 and 2 storeys. We will expect this to be reflected in any new proposals.

Materials

9.6 The predominant building materials are brickwork walls, occasionally rendered, with red clay or slate roofs. The style of windows and doors varies owing to the extended development of the area. For new planning applications, the applicant is provided the opportunity to illustrate how the local palette might be reflected in the design and access statement. For large scale developments it will be necessary to consider the overall rural character of the area and the impact on important views into and out of the conservation area.

9.7 New developments or re-developments need not replicate historic buildings. In appropriate locations there will be opportunities to develop more unique, single, contemporary designs which are screened and landscaped appropriately. This would reflect the architectural ambitions and unique designs of the immediate post-war period as illustrated along Rectory Lane (see Figure 12).



Figure 12 Contemporary 1960s and 1970s housing along Rectory Lane

Roofs

9.8 The roof is one of the most important parts of a property as it makes the building wind and watertight and can bring harmony to a landscape. It would be preferable to retain, repair or replace (on a like for like basis) original roof material, ridge tiles and hip tiles.

Dormer windows and rooflights

9.9 The conversion of loft space and the installation of inappropriate dormer windows and/or rooflights may have a negative impact on the appearance of a building and detract from the character of a roofscape. Proposals to add or alter roof windows which are inappropriately designed would be resisted.

Windows and doors

9.10 Windows and doors are important components of a building and any alteration or replacement can significantly alter its character and appearance. Cumulatively, even small changes can detract from the special character of an area.

9.11 Wherever possible the original windows and doors should be retained and repaired in order to keep the integrity of the original design so preserving the character and proportions of the building. The energy efficiency of windows can be increased through the use of appropriate secondary glazing.

9.12 The variety of building styles and designs requires property owners to consider each alteration on an individual basis. There is no common theme. In older properties imitation replacement window styles and inappropriate replacement window materials are poor alternatives for traditional single pane, timber, vertical sliding sash windows. Mock sliding sash windows generally have heavy top opening casements for the opening section. For some of the more contemporary designs of the post-war period the replacement of metal windows with uPVC is equally inappropriate, as uPVC windows generally also have thicker, cruder frames than the slimline, linear metal windows (see Figure 13).



Figure 13 The uPVC alternatives, to the left of the example, are thicker, cruder frames.

9.13 For all buildings, unsuitable styles and materials can impact on the proportions and overall appearance of a window and a building. The character of a building is then changed, which has a detrimental impact on the overall appearance of the conversion area.

Other architectural details

9.14 Chimney stacks can contribute greatly to the local character and should be retained and repaired. When retained they provide a dominant and attractive feature of the roofscape.

9.15 Functioning and decorative building features such as soffits, fascias, barge boards and porch brackets are attractive elements on many of the properties within the conservation area. Their maintenance and repair, with traditional materials, greatly adds to the attractiveness of the area.

9.16 Various sources offer guidance when dealing with the maintenance or restoration of period homes. English Heritage provide a great deal of information on heritage protection and understanding your property. It is recommended that you engage professional help to manage a project, such as an architect or building surveyor. Only a small proportion of qualified professionals specialise in the repair of old buildings. English Heritage offer advice on how to choose the most appropriate tradesperson for your property. See www.english-heritage.org.uk for further details.

Aerials, satellite dishes and alarm boxes

9.17 Aerials, satellite dishes and alarm boxes can have a detrimental impact on the appearance of a building. Where possible they should be situated inside or to the rear of a property or carefully located to minimise the impact on the character of the building.

Landscaping and open space

9.18 The Biodiversity Action Plan (2010) contains policies and action for wildlife species and habitats which must guide management and The Green Space Strategy (2010) contains an action plan with recommendations on how green spaces across the town are maintained and improved.

9.19 A significant strength of the St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area is the visual amenity of the local rural character. The original pattern of gardens and grounds and the presence of trees and hedgerows contribute greatly to the character of the area.



Figure 14 The fields to the north (l), the meadow north of the church (c) and Weston Lane (r)

9.20 There are no formal areas of public open space although the playing fields to the south west of the area and open fields to the north contribute greatly to the recreational opportunities for Stevenage and the wider area. This is also true of the area surrounding the church and cemetery which provide quiet areas for contemplation.

9.21 The Council is responsible for maintaining and managing the extensive grounds of St. Nicholas Churchyard. As the land is owned by the church, the current arrangement is for the budget to be given to them, and for the church to be responsible for carrying out any necessary improvement and maintenance works to the site.

9.22 Projects currently being developed include the planting of a hedgerow along the boundary and a research project around plotting and collecting information on the graves within the site. Funding is available through the Heritage Lottery Fund, Landfill Communities Fund and the Big Lottery Fund. However, this is subject to being able to demonstrate that the projects are for

public benefit/to meet need and that the churchyard is well used as a thoroughfare to other parts of the town. There is a need to ensure that the site is managed proactively, in order for it to benefit from the funding sources available.

9.23 There are no formal maintenance works for the area to the north which is left to its natural or agricultural state. The playing fields are maintained by Hertfordshire County Council.

9.24 For publicly owned areas of land, such as the cemetery and the trees and hedgerows that border the roads, the continued maintenance of the area will be monitored by the Council.

9.25 The Council will monitor privately owned areas of open space and liaise with owners to encourage remedial works as required.

9.26 The potential presence of protected species associated with older buildings should be acknowledged. We will support the improvement of existing habitats and encourage the development of new nesting areas for protected species as appropriate.

9.27 Green infrastructure assets within the St. Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area are currently protected by a number of specific District Plan policies and these policy designations will be carried forward in future iterations of the document to offer a similar level of protection.

Boundary treatments

9.28 Original boundary treatments such as hedges play an important part in the rural character and appearance of the conservation area and they should be retained, maintained or reinstated where possible. Where reinstated or replaced, appropriate species should be planted. For further assistance you may contact the Council's arboricultural officer.

Street furniture

9.29 Street lighting improves night-time safety for road users and members of the community and can reduce crime and the fear of crime during the hours of darkness. Hertfordshire County Council are moving to a part-night street light operation to reduce carbon emissions and overall costs. There are some exceptions to this programme, particularly where safety is an issue.

9.30 We will continue to support the use of light fittings which are appropriate to their location in terms of material, scale, design and illumination, particularly for listed buildings and conservation areas.

9.31 Rectory Lane has a 20mph (advisory) speed limit. Whilst providing enough lighting for safety and security purposes, street lighting should be minimised as far as possible. This will enhance the rural character of the conservation area.

9.32 Signage in the area is generally well proportioned and, where possible, is attached to existing columns to prevent clutter. We will continue to encourage this approach. It is recommended that signage is removed as it becomes redundant or is replaced to reduce visual clutter.

9.33 It is recommended that consideration is given to the siting of new signage. Where possible existing poles should be used. Where supplementary poles are required these should be dark in colour unless pedestrian safety is compromised. Signs should be grouped to avoid visual clutter. Street signs or finger posts should be carefully planned in a comprehensive manner and should consider a simple but bespoke design to create distinctiveness.

9.34 Benches can provide an opportunity for people to stop, relax and reflect upon their surroundings. The opportunity for people to sit and relax in the open space creates a feeling of safety for other users as they move through the area. English Heritage guidance proposes the retention of historic street furniture which reinforces local character and the removal of superfluous or redundant items.

Pedestrian and cycle links

9.35 There are a number of links through and near the conservation area. These are currently promoted via a number of sources. There are five public rights of way included, either wholly or in part, within the conservation area boundary. These routes are publicised on the Hertfordshire County Council website. See also Figure 15.

9.36 The area also links closely towards the Stevenage Outer Orbital Path (STOOP) from St Nicholas church. STOOP is a 27 mile continuous path circling Stevenage developed and promoted by the Ramblers' Association. Walk 10 of the STOOP links Graveley to Dane End Farm. The footpaths across the fields to the north of the conservation area link to the start of Walk 10 of the STOOP network.

9.37 The southern section of the conservation area forms part of a Green Link between the Bowling Green to the south and St Nicholas Church to the north. This forms an important green wedge providing a link between open spaces and opportunities for informal recreation. The link is an essential part of the urban structure of the town and protected through policy within the Stevenage District Plan (2nd Review). Will will continue to protect this link through emerging planning policies.

9.38 The Stevenage Cycle Map also promotes a number of cycle routes through the area.

9.39 We will encourage the promotion of these routes as they bring movement into the area, encourage sustainable travel and improve local knowledge of the special historical characteristics of the conservation area.



Figure 15 Public rights of way and cycle links in the St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area

Traffic calming and parking

9.40 No single authority or agency has control over or responsibility for the presentation and management of the street and this makes traffic management particularly complicated. We will continue to work closely with local stakeholders to ensure that traffic schemes are designed appropriately.

9.41 The Department of Transport recognise that traffic management scheme briefs rarely identify streetscape considerations.

9.42 During the development life of many schemes, the responsibility for design integrity may be unclear, with the baton of responsibility passed among several individuals and departments. The Department of Transport recommend the designation of a design champion. This might be a Stevenage Borough Council officer not directly involved in the design process on a day-to-day

basis or a Councillor but the role of design champion can be taken by any individual with the necessary desire, understanding and facility to maintain the vision. A design champion will help to promote and maintain design integrity. We recommend that a design champion is considered for the traffic calming proposals along Rectory Lane.

9.43 Physical measures should involve minimal visual interference with the established street scene. Ideally, traditional materials such as asphalt and granite setts should be used. Coloured surfaces are usually unnecessary and undesirable and should be avoided. Road markings should also be minimised to those which are essential for highway safety. Without careful consideration, these features can have a significant negative visual impact on a street scene, particularly one with a rural feel, such as Rectory Lane and Weston Road.

9.44 The issue of rat-running is a significant issue on Rectory Lane. As the local planning authority, we will encourage a scheme that minimises the visual impact on the rural lane. We will work with Hertfordshire County Highways to achieve an appropriate solution.

9.45 Parking is not recognised as an issue within the conservation area. The development of large homes on large plots of land has provided sufficient off-street parking. However, should proposals come forward for new dropped kerb access points we will encourage the retention of key features such as hedgerows and trees.

9.46 Yellow lines for parking restrictions may have a negative effect on the visual character of a conservation area. If parking restrictions are proposed in the future we will consider the narrower 'primrose lines', although traffic regulations do not always allow this as an option.

Advertisements

9.47 For businesses, interesting and eye-catching advertisements play an important role in attracting customers but poorly designed advertisement displays can have a negative effect on the appearance of a building and its surroundings.

9.48 Enhancing the appearance of the street scene and making the best use of the existing historic features creates an attractive, readily identifiable environment and can improve the economic and social vitality of the area.

9.49 All advertisements within the conservation area should be sympathetic to its historic character. New advertisement displays will be strictly controlled. There will be a presumption against internally illuminated projecting fascia signs and advertising above ground floor level. Advertisement hoardings of any description will not be appropriate.

Pre-application discussions

9.50 Any proposed works within a conservation area require special consideration and all applicants are encouraged to seek pre-application advice prior to submission. For extensions, alterations and significant development proposals, applicants are advised to employ the services of an agent or architect with extensive knowledge of working in conservation areas.

9.51 Proposals for development which fall within the conservation area, or which affect its setting, including views into and out of the area, will not be permitted unless they include a detailed assessment which identifies how the proposals will preserve or enhance, or otherwise complement the special character and appearance of the area. We will pay particular regard to the St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area Appraisal⁽⁶⁾ when considering development proposals in, or adjacent to, the area.

Enforcement

9.52 Local planning authorities have a duty to consider taking enforcement action where they believe there to have been a breach of planning control. Key aspects of the enforcement service are to investigate alleged breaches of planning control, listed building control and advertisement control. Wherever possible the Council will seek to resolve breaches without the need to take formal action.

Opportunities for an Article 4 Direction

9.53 Article 4 Directions can be used to withdraw certain permitted development rights under the 1995 Town and Country Planning [General Permitted Development] Order. In order to implement such a Direction it is necessary to prove that works carried out under the Order have a direct and detrimental impact on the character and/or appearance of the conservation area.

9.54 There are resource implications in dealing with applications, appeals and planning enforcement investigations for Article 4 Directions. It is hoped that by developing a positive relationship with local homeowners, combined with a promotion of the benefits of conservation area status, that the need for restrictive planning controls can be avoided. The area will be subject to a review cycle to measure future change and to identify patterns of change on the conservation area. It is recommended that an Article 4 Direction should not be designated at this time.

Summary

9.55 In conclusion, we will seek to strengthen those elements of the built environment which warranted the designation of the area. The retention of traditional architectural features will be monitored. Proposals to reinstate lost features or repair existing features and/or buildings will be welcomed. We will also support applications for new listed buildings.

6 St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area Appraisal, June 2009, BEAMS

9.56 We would seek to maintain the structure and layout of existing buildings, particularly those of historical merit and where they reflect the rural character of the conservation area. The success of the conservation area will depend in some part upon the care which individual owners take with the maintenance and repair of their properties, and their surrounding plots of land, and in any alterations or extensions they make. We will promote the conservation area to ensure that local residents are aware of the contribution they are able to make when considering even small alterations to their homes.

9.57 Many of the challenges for local authorities lie with changes to the public realm. The focus in conservation areas must be on the careful maintenance of public space, and the use of appropriate signage and materials for traffic management and street furniture. We will work with local stakeholders to ensure that, in particular, traffic management schemes are designed appropriately.

9.58 The area can contribute to local historical knowledge and develop lifelong learning and improved health. The development of links which introduce people to the historic diversity of the town are encouraged. Strengthening connections to the past can be achieved through promotional literature such as the current Stevenage Cycle Map, STOOP and public rights of way. These routes can bring movement into the area and encourage use of the open space to the north of the town which provides an important green lung for the town and wider Hertfordshire area. We will continue to support these links through local planning policies.

9.59 Conflicts between the interests of residents, local businesses and visitors must be sensitively managed, with solutions tailored to the specific circumstances of the place. Good working relationships between authorities and with relevant external agencies are vital. We will work closely with all stakeholders to deliver local projects which preserve and/or enhance the conservation area.

11 Monitoring measures

"Changes in the appearance of conservation areas ... should be monitored regularly" - Guidance on the management of conservation areas, English Heritage, 2006.

11.1 The management plan will be subject to a five year review, subject to staff resources, commencing from the date of adoption. The conservation area appraisal and this conservation area management plan provide a benchmark for assessing change. This may result in a revision or expansion of the existing appraisal and management plan and will include:

- Recording changes;
- Re-assessing the definition of special interest that warrants designation;
- Identifying new issues affecting the conservation area and revising the management plan accordingly.

11.2 Reviews will, where possible, link with the emerging local plan so that development opportunities can be properly considered against the heritage interests of the St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area.

11.3 The input of stakeholders including local conservation groups in this process, and in the wider management of the historic environment, such as monitoring buildings at risk, will be welcomed.

11.4 Stevenage Borough Council's Historic Environment Champion will take an active role in championing the importance of Stevenage's historic environment. Officers will meet the Historic Environment Champion and local Council Members as issues arise and these meetings will be used to monitor and review the Conservation Area Management Plan.

11.5 Future iterations of the appraisal and management plan will be subject to public consultation with the local community, relevant stakeholders, and others with an interest in the area. They will be made available on the Council's website and hard copies will be placed in local libraries. Adverts will be placed in local press. Comments received will be taken into consideration in the final drafting of these documents.



Appendix 1



Appendix 1

At the time of writing, the following buildings are listed:

The Priory, 1 and 2 Rectory Lane	Grade II
Priory Cottage	Grade II
The Old Bury	Grade II*
Church of St Nicholas	Grade I
Moonhill	Grade II
Dominic Cottage	Grade II
Rooks Nest Farm	Grade II
L-shaped outbuilding west of Rooks Nest Farmhouse	Grade II
Howards End	Grade I

Table 4

For detailed descriptions of each listing, please refer to the English Heritage website at www.english-heritage.org.uk.



Appendix 2



Appendix 2

Further to the statutory listings as catalogued in Appendix 1, a number of the buildings could be considered of local importance to the conservation area:

The Granby Public House, North Road.	Two storey red brick building. Pebbledash rendered front, open porch with ridge tiles. Flemish bond with blue headers to side elevation. Tiled gabled roof to main, single storey extension with hipped tiled roof to north side. Timber lattice windows to front. Mid 18th century with later additions.
'Rivelin', Rectory Lane	Single storey cartshed. Red brick with small buttresses to exterior wall. Weather-boarded end. Tiled gabled roof. Probably late 17th/early 18th century.
'Priory Meadow', Rectory Lane.	Single storey yellow brick property with flat roof. Located close to the road, it has an attached garage located near to the front door with few windows. A 1960s architect designed bungalow.
'The Driftway', Rectory Lane.	Single storey yellow brick property with a concrete flat roof. A long narrow bungalow, it is located back from the road next to the path onto the water meadow. Some timber, some metal windows. Its garage is attached and stands at the front of the entry. 1960s architect designed.
'Medbury', Rectory Lane.	Two storey yellow brick house with canopies and round tower, possibly housing interior staircase. Part flat roof, part half-gabled. Hung slate detail. Believed to have been designed by Leonard Vincent for himself (Chief architect to the Stevenage Development Corporation during the early phases of the New Town).
The Rectory Croft, Rectory Lane.	A small group of two storey yellow brick houses with gabled slate roofs. Large glass windows. Attached garages. End chimney stacks to gables of No.4. An unusual 1960s development in the style of Stevenage Development Corporation.
Houses at The Close, Rectory Lane.	A small group of single and two storey yellow brick houses with tiled roofs, some hipped, some gabled. Large glass windows. Garages attached or inbuilt to the design. An unusual 1960s/70s development.

Appendix 2

The Bury, Church Corner, Rectory Lane.	Two storey red brick Victorian house with a bay. Slate roof, probably gothic in style with a turret. Dates to the mid 19th century.
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Table 5

This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

