



Offley Brook Conservation Area Appraisal



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1. Introduction

1.1. Definition

- A Conservation Area is defined in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Section 69 (1) of the Act imposes a duty on the local planning authority to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest, and to designate those places as conservation areas. Designation helps to ensure that an area identified for its architectural and historic significance is managed and protected appropriately.

1.2. Purpose of Appraisal

- Conservation Area Appraisal is a means of identifying and assessing the special architectural or historic character of a place. Offley Brook Conservation Area was designated in 1993 by Staffordshire County Council after an appraisal of the special architectural and historic interest of the area. Under section 69 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, it is a requirement of the local planning authority to update conservation area appraisals regularly, and designate further areas as necessary. The purpose of this appraisal is to assess and define the special character and appearance of Offley Brook as it stands today, and identify any threats or future threats to the area's character and integrity.
- Appraisal ensures that the local authority, developers, property owners and the local community are aware of the area's special character when drawing up and assessing proposals for change.

1.3. Effects of Conservation Area Designation

- The conservation area appraisal will be adopted as a “material consideration” in the planning process and will be used by the local planning authority when considering the effects of any proposed development affecting the conservation area, including its setting and the desirability of *preserving and enhancing* the character or appearance of the conservation area.

1.4 Certain works in a Conservation Area require consent:

- Planning permission must be obtained from the local planning authority prior to the substantial or total demolition of any building or structure within a Conservation Area (with some exceptions)
- Permitted Development Rights, i.e. those works of alteration or extension that can be carried out without planning permission, are slightly different in conservation areas. Some conservation areas are covered by Article 4 Directions, which restrict certain Permitted Development Rights, for example the installation of uPVC windows or satellite dishes. These are specific to each conservation area, and are in place to ensure the special historic and architectural character is protected.
- Works to trees: Anyone proposing to cut down, top or lop a tree in a conservation area, even if the tree is not protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO)), must notify the local planning authority and allow six weeks before commencing work. This gives the local planning authority the opportunity to make a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) if the tree is considered to be important.

1.5 Community Involvement

- Stafford Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement sets out to ensure that all sections of the community and interested parties have a reasonable opportunity to engage with plan-making and planning application processes. A public consultation took place between 17 March 2015 and 30 April 2015 and a public exhibition was held at Offley Hay Village Hall on 1 April 2015. Letters were sent to all properties within the conservation area and to key stakeholders and other interested parties, inviting comment. The draft appraisal was made public on the Borough's website, or in paper form. All representations were then considered and some minor amendments made to the text of the Appraisal and an addition to the conservation area boundary was made.

1.6 Planning Policy Context

1.6.1 National Planning Policy Framework policy relevant to Offley Brook Conservation Area

- National planning policy is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Section 12 relates to conserving and enhancing the historic environment and paragraphs 127-141 are relevant to Offley Brook Conservation Area.
- *PPS5 Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide (2010)* remains relevant. National conservation guidance to support the NPPF policies is currently in preparation by national government and will replace this guidance.

1.6.2 Local Planning Policy relevant to Offley Brook Conservation Area

- Local planning policy is contained within The Plan for Stafford Borough (adopted 2014). Section 12 *Environment* contains policies relevant to Offley Brook Conservation Area: Policies N8: *Landscape Character*, N9: *Historic Environment* and paragraphs 12.45-12.56.

2. Summary of Special Interest, Offley Brook Conservation Area

Offley Brook Conservation Area was designated by Staffordshire County Council on 10 June 1993, as a means of preserving and enhancing the special architectural and historic interest that has been retained and enriched through its development over the centuries. Offley Brook is considered worthy of Conservation Area designation as an example of a small rural community based on agricultural related activity.

The key elements of this special character are summarised as follows:

- Site of a watermill from at least the 18th century, possibly much earlier.
- The Mill and associated mill pond are a survival of an 18th century milling environment still in use for its original function.
- The wheelhouse retains two overshot waterwheels, one of which is still operational.
- Contains a small group of vernacular buildings which reflect the local character of Offley Brook, including examples of traditional cottages, houses and a farmstead.
- A grade II listed cottage dating from the early 17th century
- A combination of unspoilt setting, surviving historic buildings and evidence of past economic activity
- A distinctive isolated, rural setting, enhanced by the peace and tranquillity of the location.
- A preserved historic road layout, including the crossroads connecting the cottages to the mill, and Offley Brook to the surrounding area in all directions.
- Surviving historic landscape features, such as woodland and field systems; mature woodland of environmental significance extends to the majority of the perimeter of the mill pond and enhances the setting of Offley Brook.
- A significant area of water provided by the mill pond both within the context of the historic mill site, and as a valuable habitat for wildlife.

2.1 Location and Topography

2.1.1 Offley Brook lies approximately 3.5 miles west of Eccleshall and slightly north of the neighbouring hamlet of Bishops Offley. An isolated hamlet set among narrow lanes and deep cuttings, Offley Brook is characterised by narrow, leafy lanes and high hedgerows. Its general air of seclusion is accentuated when approached from Bishops Offley through the steep sandstone cutting which descends into this upper reach of the Sow Valley. The cutting is an historic feature of significance identified in Historic Environment Records and is a designated Local Geological Site of significance.

2.1.2 The setting of Offley Brook is directly linked to the topography of the area which is controlled by the underlying geology with the valley of the River Sow. The River Sow passes under the main road just before the crossroads and forms a mill race which feeds the large mill pond. Offley Brook is less than a mile upstream of its neighbouring mill site, Walk Mill; The availability of water for driving waterwheels was an important factor in the location of industry and many watermills were sited on the most suitable watercourse in order to harness water power, often leading to the location of watermills in isolated, rural spots.

2.1.3 The Conservation Area encompasses the watermill and large mill pond which covers a large area of the Conservation Area and forms a significant part of this rural setting. Houses along Fair Oak Road and a number of houses situated in the proximity of a crossroads at the junction of Lodge Lane, Fair Oak Road and Jacksons Lane form the rest of the building stock.

2.2 Archaeological Background

2.2.1 The place name Offley, or Offeleia, derives from the Anglo-Saxon name, Offa and 'Lea' or 'Ley' meaning wood, and so 'Offa's wood'. The suffix of brook means a small stream, most likely relating to the River Sow which runs through the hamlet. The name Offley Brook therefore defines the topography of the Conservation Area which is essentially wood and water. There are numerous other Offleys nearby; Bishops Offley and High Offley are recorded as Saxon settlements, along with Offley Hay, Offley Marsh and Offley Rock.

2.2.2 Offley Brook lies in the parish of Eccleshall. The Domesday Book of 1086 records the Manor of Offelie as being part of the lands of Robert de Stafford. At the time of the Domesday survey, two mills were recorded at Eccleshall; the site of Offley Brook Mill and its position on the River Sow is likely to be one of the mills recorded, along with its neighbour, Walk Mill.

2.2.3 Offley Brook was predominantly a settlement based around an historic watermill; the mill being recorded as Bishop's Offley Mill on early OS mapping. The area also housed a small scale stone working enterprise, most likely related to the numerous stone quarries in the nearby local area, providing evidence of past economic activity.

2.3 Historical Development and Relationship to Current Layout

2.3.1 Offley Brook is a dispersed rural settlement developed over the centuries, most likely in relation to the presence of a watermill and agricultural activity in the surrounding area. The scattered dwellings and farmstead are indicative of hamlets established after the enclosure of open fields or common land. Field enclosure occurred in Offley Brook in the early part of the 18th century.

2.3.2 Offley Brook retains its historic road layout, as recorded on 18th century mapping. The crossroads within the Conservation Area can clearly be identified on Yate's map of 1775, along with a mill and mill pond. The cluster of buildings around the crossroads, and the two buildings to the north of the mill pond, reflect the settlement pattern within Offley Brook; some of these buildings will be partly or wholly the extant buildings we see today.

2.3.3 A cottage and smithy were recorded at Offley Brook from at least the mid-18th century. Occupying the area of land at the corner of the crossroads between the river and the road, the smithy was demolished in the 1960s. Adjacent to the smithy was the Four Crosses public house, a former coaching inn, thought to date to at least the 17th century. Now known as Brook House, the Four Crosses pub is now a Bed and Breakfast.



Figure 1 Historic photograph from between 1915-1930, showing the now demolished smithy and the Four Crosses (now Brook House) beyond. Greatwood Cottage can be seen in the foreground.

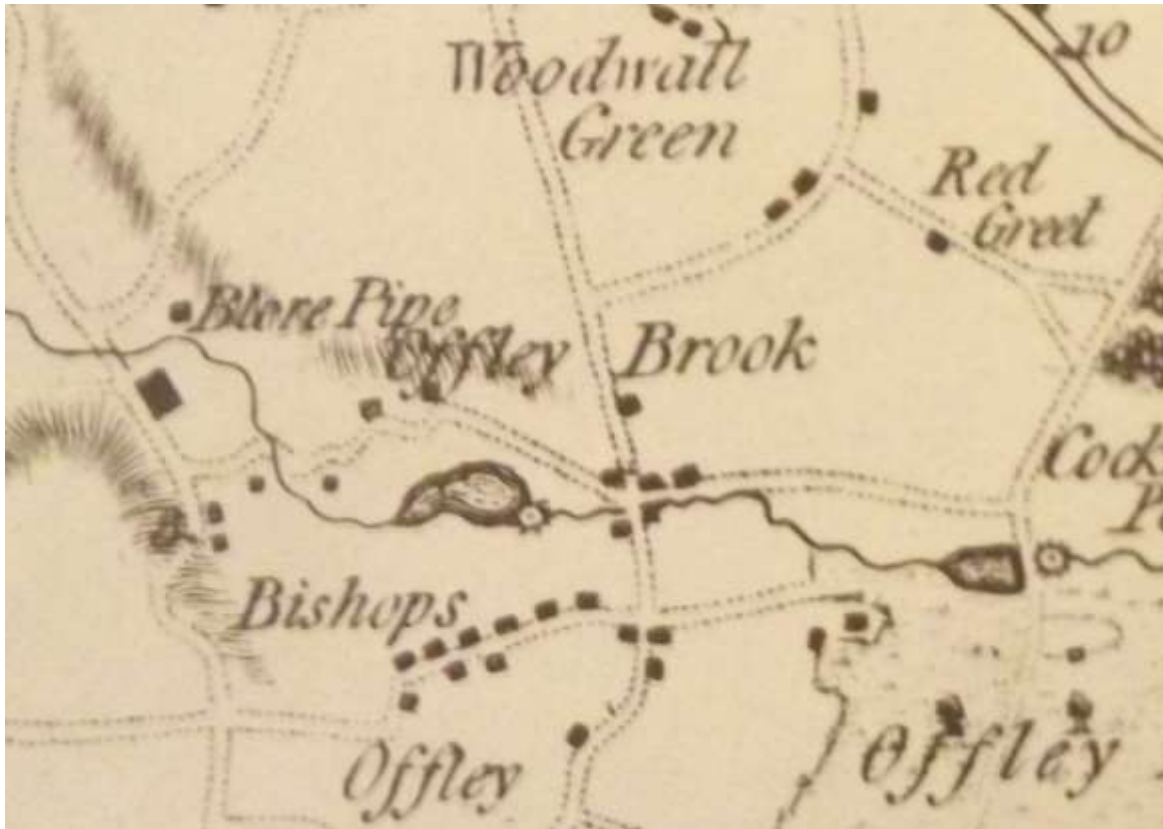


Figure 2 Yate's map of 1775, Reproduced with permission from Staffordshire Record Office



Figure 3 Greenwood's map of 1820 shows the historic road layout and surrounding hamlets. Reproduced with permission from Staffordshire Record Office

2.3.4 The owner of the mill from 1801 was William Heath, who had built Heath House in the 1780s as the miller's house. In 1840 Heath owned Heath House, Offley Mill and Mill Farm; the mill and farm being let to tenants.



Figure 4 Heath House from across the mill pond c.1910

2.3.5 Agricultural and industrial activity through the milling of corn and quarry work means that this area has in the past bustled with activity. Most of the hill or valley banks around Offley Brook are studded with old quarries as shown on 1879 1st edition OS map.

2.3.6 The area surrounding Offley Brook is dominated by open countryside. There are well-preserved patterns of irregular and piecemeal field enclosure surrounding the Conservation Area to the north, east and south, indicating medieval agricultural activity in the area. Areas of re-organised piecemeal enclosure can be seen to the south with small, rectilinear fields, most likely re-organised in the 18th and 19th centuries. Map regression clearly shows the surviving historic field system surrounding Offley Brook.



Figure 5 1st edition OS map 1889 Reproduced with permission from Staffordshire Record Office



Figure 6 2nd edition OS map 1901. Reproduced with permission from Staffordshire Record Office

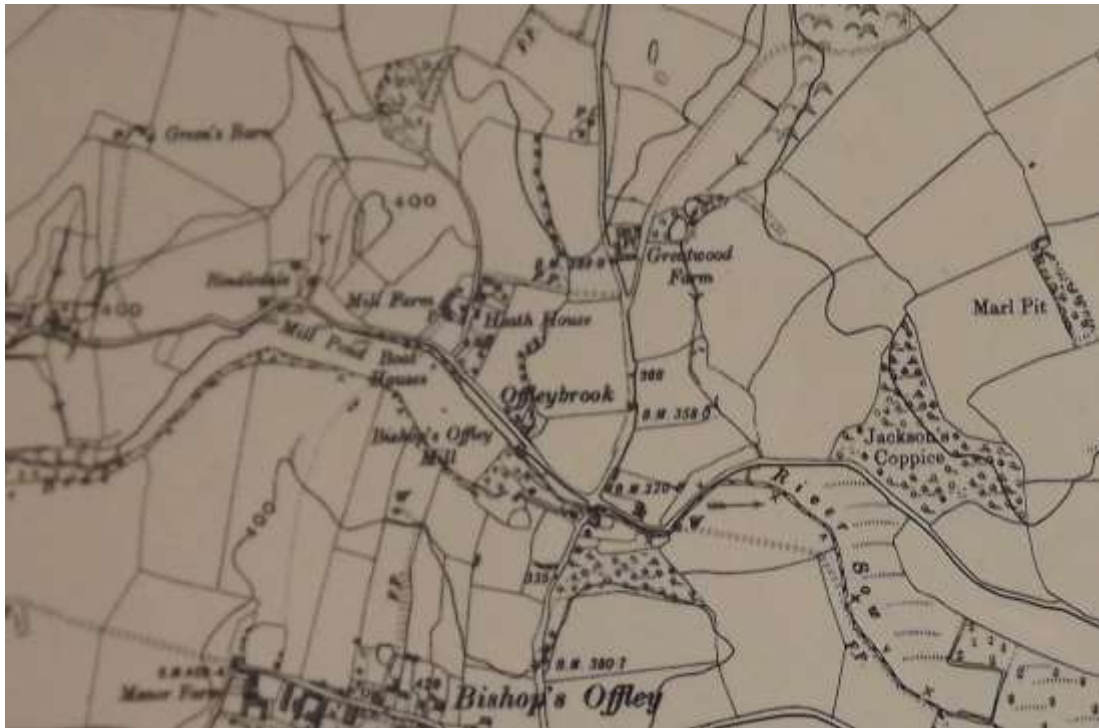


Figure 7 3rd edition OS map 1924. Reproduced with permission from Staffordshire Record Office

3. Built Character

3.1 Building types

3.1.1 The buildings within the Offley Brook Conservation Area are mostly domestic cottages and houses, with a working mill and associated buildings forming an industrial group at the heart of the Conservation Area. Agricultural outbuildings, associated with Mill Farm, can be found to the rear of the farm and Heath House. There are no public buildings in the Conservation Area and commercial activity is concentrated to the Mill and a Bed and Breakfast at Brook House.

3.1.2 The domestic buildings consist of some modest, two storey cottages of brick and tile, dating from the early 17th to the 19th century with some 20th century extensions and alterations. The larger domestic buildings include a 19th century farmhouse and the former miller's house. Both buildings are two and a half storeys over three bays, and of brick and tile. Agricultural outbuildings are of one to two storeys and include a barn/grain store, dove cote and stables. The mill building is an 18th century brick building with some 19th century alterations; the mill was most likely rebuilt from an earlier structure, a phenomenon not uncommon in the history of watermills in general.

3.2 Scale, size and plan form

3.2.1 At the crossroads, the modest cottages are historically rectangular in plan form, some with later front and side extensions. The cottages are sited close to the road and have their main frontage to the road with side and rear gardens. Rock Cottage is situated near the top of the bank and stands gable end to the road, and Watermill Cottage lies secluded down a grass track not visible from the road.

3.2.2 The mill building itself is quite modest, of three storeys with the lower ground floor below road level. On an irregular plan with varying orientations of gables, the mill's proximity and informal relationship to the road perpetuates the feeling of its former position at the heart of this small community.

3.2.3 The larger scale buildings can be found along Fair Oak Road and consist of Mill Farm and Heath House. Both buildings are rectangular on plan with rear extensions and set back from the road behind imposing, but informal mixed hedgerows. A farm track runs up the middle of the two buildings leading to a range of rectilinear agricultural outbuildings developed over a loose courtyard arrangement.

3.2.4 Pitched roofs of varying height dominate, aside from Heath House which has a hipped roof.

3.2.5 20th century development in Offley Brook has been limited. Some modern agricultural/industrial buildings are evident to the mill site and the front section of Mill cottage has been obscured by a 20th century front elevation extension.

3.3 Architectural style and features

The buildings within the Offley Brook Conservation Area reflect character through the use of vernacular building materials and architectural styles. Similarities and marked contrasts in style add architectural interest.

3.3.1 The profusion of varying sizes and orientation of gable ends create a sense of activity and movement within the Conservation Area. This style is most evident to the mill building but is also reflected at Brook House and Waterfall Cottage, providing a harmony between the domestic and industrial buildings.



Figure 8 Varying orientations of gable end create sense of movement

3.2.2 Gabled dormers set into the steep pitched roof give a vertical emphasis to The Cottage, a grade II listed building. The dormers appear to be an 18th/19th century addition to this early 17th century cottage, most likely added when the former thatched roof was replaced with tile. The dormer to the side elevation displays a date stamp of 1629 which is likely to date the original cottage, but not the dormer itself.



Figure 9 Gabled dormers to the roof of The Cottage

3.3.3 The buildings of Offley Brook retain much historic fenestration. Although many original windows and doors have been replaced, a variety of windows styles and openings offer architectural interest and create a feeling of movement and activity throughout the Conservation Area. Three light, side-opening casement windows were the predominant historic style for the smaller cottages and examples can be found at The Cottage, which retains timber-pegged side opening casements and historic glass. Good examples of replacement casement windows can be seen to Mill Farm and Heath House retains historic eight over eight sliding sash windows. Multi-light metal casement windows and circular openings can be found to the mill building, and circular and elliptical arch openings to the agricultural buildings at Mill Farm accentuate the sense activity throughout the Conservation Area.



Figure 10 A variety of window openings and styles can be found within the Conservation Area

3.3.4 Notable doorways are found at Greatwood Cottage, which has a four-panel timber door, and Heath House which displays an attractive fan light and stone column door surround. Historic door openings are retained at the mill on the ground and lower ground floor. The upper door would have been used for taking in grain to the upper floor of the mill.



Figure 11 Notable doorways

3.3.5 Architecturally styled brick detailing and patterning can be found throughout the Conservation Area. Features such as dentilation at eaves and verges are found on a variety of buildings, and shaped brick vents to the barn and brick detailing to the dove cote, add interest to the agricultural buildings of Mill Farm.

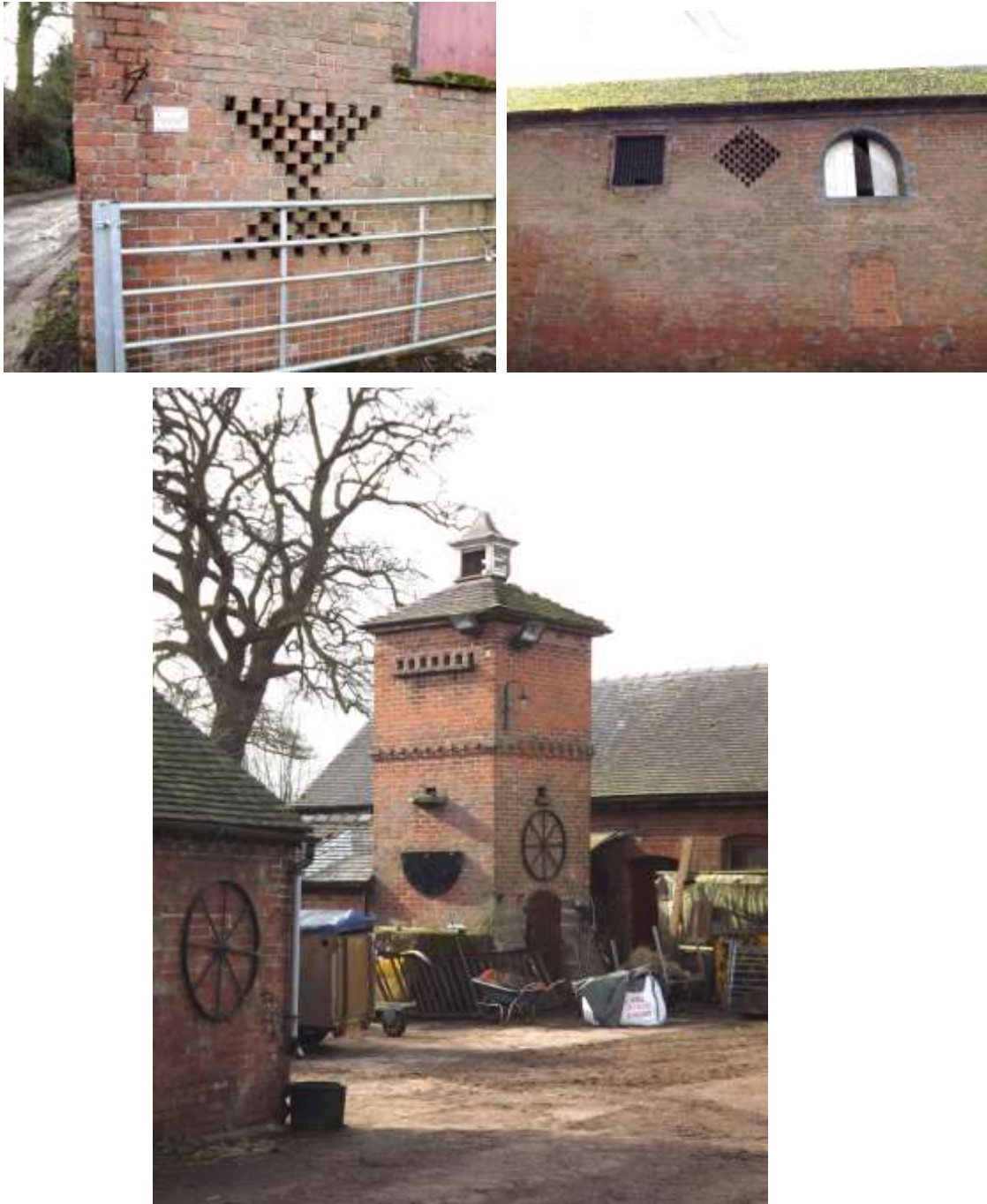


Figure 12 Brick detailing and patterning to agricultural buildings of Mill Farm

3.3.6 Wrought iron gates in varying design add architectural interest to the Conservation Area.



Figure 13 Wrought iron gates add architectural interest to the Conservation Area

3.4 Building materials

3.4.1 The predominant building material within the Offley Brook Conservation Area is red brick and roof material is exclusively Staffordshire blue clay tile. Stone is found mostly at footings and to farm buildings, and is the predominant material used in boundary walls. Original timber framing is recorded at The Cottage and is evident internally at the mill. There is early 20th century render to Brook House and later 20th century render to Greatwood Cottage, Waterfall Cottage and sections of The Cottage. Blue bricks are found in decorative form to the agricultural buildings at Mill Farm and Heath House and there is historic metalwork in the form of iron gates and two surviving waterwheels to the mill.



Figure 14 Former stable building to the rear of Heath House displays a variety of buildings materials of the Conservation Area: red brick and tile with stone and blue brick surrounds.

3.5 Listed Buildings

The Cottage is a grade II listed building thought to date to the early 17th century, The Cottage is of timber frame and brick with some render and painted brick, and a converted stone building to the rear. A steep pitched roof indicates former thatch and it has wooden gabled dormers, thought to be later additions.



Figure 15 The Cottage is a grade II listed building

3.6 Positive Buildings

The majority of the buildings in the Offley Brook Conservation Area are part of the history of Offley Brook and contribute positively to the overall character, appearance and special interest of the Conservation Area

3.6.1 Offley Mill

The mill building is thought to date from the mid-18th century with some 19th century alterations, although stone footings suggesting the rebuilding of an earlier structure. A mill on this site is recorded on Yate's map of 1775 and identified as Bishops Offley Mill on the 1st edition OS map of 1889. Housing two, tandem overshot waterwheels, one within the mill building and the other external, Offley Mill is still operated as a corn mill. Both waterwheels were operational until 2006 and power is now electrical and generated by the external overshot wheel.



Figure 16 Offley Mill

3.6.2 Rock Cottage

Of red brick and tile on sandstone footings, Rock Cottage is of two storeys over three bays with a single storey extension, gable end to the road. The house appears to date from the 19th century and was the old Post Office for Offley Brook. Painted timber window lintels and cills surround uPVC windows and there is a modern porch built to the front elevation.



Figure 17 Rock Cottage was the former Post Office for Offley Brook

3.6.3 Brook House

Brook House occupies a prominent position at the corner of the crossroads, set adjacent to the stone bridge which crosses the River Sow. Brook House is a 17th century, two-storey former coaching inn with a twin-gabled, 19th century brick extension to the front. Of red brick and tile, the building has been rendered and has modern replacement windows. Formerly the Four Crosses Pub, Brook House is now run as a Bed and Breakfast.



Figure 18 Brook House, a former coaching inn, the Four Crosses Pub.

3.6.4 Greatwood Cottage

Of red brick and tile, this two-storey cottage dates from the 18th century and forms part of the cluster of historic buildings located around the crossroads. Some 20th century render and mock timber frame to the first floor covers historic brick and original three-light timber casement windows have been replaced by modern timber-effect mock-sash windows. A single storey extension displays some historic architectural details although has been partially adapted to include a garage..



Figure 19 Greatwood Cottage

3.6.5 Heath House

Heath House was built by William Heath in the 1780s and employs a more polite architecture than some of the modest cottages of the Conservation Area.

Architecturally attractive, this former miller's house is three storeys over three bays and of red brick in a distinguished Flemish Bond. The house has a tiled, hipped roof which contrasts with the pitched roofs of the other buildings in the Conservation Area. With eight over eight sliding sash windows and a pedimented door surround, Heath House retains many historic features. Although the dormers to the roof are a 20th century edition they are in keeping with the Georgian period architecture employed in this building.



Figure 20 Heath House was the former Miller's house

3.6.6 Mill Farm

Mill Farm dates to the early 19th century and is of red brick with a pitched tile roof. A substantial farmhouse of two storeys and three bays, Mill Farm has segmental brick-headed window openings with typical farmhouse casement windows and two bay windows to the ground floor. Barge boarding to the verges and dentilation to the eaves give this building an architectural attractiveness which is accentuated by its picturesque setting.



Figure 21 Mill Farm

3.6.7 Agricultural buildings

A range of outbuildings form a loose courtyard arrangement to the rear of Mill Farm and there are former agricultural buildings to the rear of Heath House. Dating from the late 18th to the early 19th century, the outbuildings are one-to-two storey and of brick and tile with some stone.



Figure 22 Two storey barn and grain store to Mill Farm



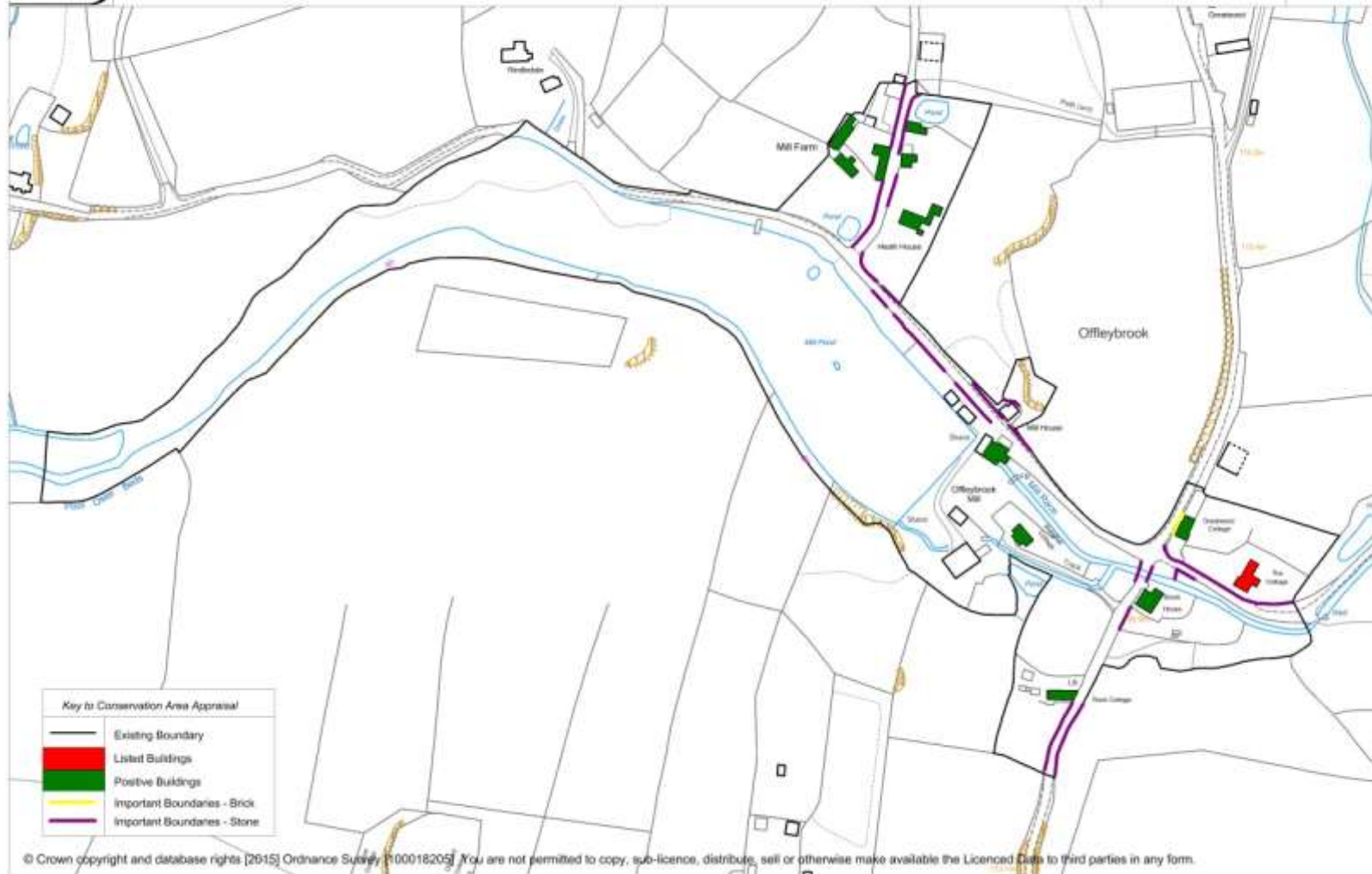
Figure 23 Former stables to rear of Heath House



Offley Brook Conservation Area Appraisal Built Character

Date: February 2015

Not to scale



4. Spatial Analysis

4.1 Plan form and layout

4.1.1 The Offley Brook Conservation Area covers an irregular shaped area within the hamlet of Offley Brook. The buildings have a dispersed layout with a scattering of cottages at the crossroads and Rock Cottage at the top of the bank. The cottages are sited close to the road with gardens to the rear apart from Waterfall Cottage, which is situated down a track, between the river and the mill race. Heath House and Mill Farm are located along Fair oak Road, set back from the road in their own substantial grounds. Farm buildings form a loose courtyard arrangement to the rear of Mill Farm. All buildings are oriented to face the road apart from Rock Cottage which is side on to the road.

4.1.2. The River Sow passes under the road almost at the crossroads and flows adjacent to Fair oak Road until it is dammed to form the mill pond. The mill building lies in close proximity to Fair oak Road with land to both sides and to the rear. There is a farmyard to the rear of the mill with some barn and shed storage. The mill pond forms a significant part of the conservation area and stretches for over 600 metres upstream. Flanked to the south by mature trees and steeply rising ground, and to the north by dense shrubs and hedgerows, the massive pond is largely obscured from view from Fair oak Road.



Figure 24 The mill pond at Offleybrook is an important ecological site providing valuable habitat to waterfowl, aquatic plants and emergent poolside flora

4.2 Landmarks, focal points and views

4.2.1 This sleepy part of the Sow Valley has in the past undoubtedly bustled with the activity of the milling business. Little obvious evidence of that activity remains now save the mill and mill pond which are key landmarks within the Conservation Area. The mill is still operational today and the mill pond is a vast expanse of water, recognised as a feature of great landscape value. The pond is largely obscured to view from Fairoak Road, particularly during summer months, but glimpses through trees and hedgerows passing up the road create a secluded and tranquil atmosphere which contrasts with the remnants of past industry. The view looking west along Fairoak Road captures the essence of the mill in its rural setting, with the waterwheel to the rear and the footbridge over the River Sow to the fore.



Figure 25 Waterwheels to the rear of the mill building

4.2.2 The visual introduction to the Conservation Area from Bishops Offley is of a high sandstone bank lined with trees, and there is a distinct feeling of enclosure as the narrow lane winds through this tightly enclosed holloway. Continuing along the lane, the cutting is replaced by high, steep, tree-topped banks which accentuate the enclosed feel and provide sequential views entering the Conservation Area.



Figure 26 Approaching the Conservation Area from Bishops Offley through a high sandstone cutting

4.2.3 The stone bridge and the crossroads provide a strong focal point within the Conservation Area. Crossing the River Sow before it feeds into the mill race and mill pond, this historic bridge forms a significant road link for the hamlet. Historically the crossroads most likely bustled with the commercial activity of the smithy and traffic from the mill and the former Four Crosses pub.



Figure 27 The stone bridge over the River Sow viewed from the crossroads

4.2.4 Linear views of the crossroads in all directions reinforce the enclosed and isolated feel of the Conservation Area. The hedgerows lining the road and glimpses of historic buildings create a picturesque, rural feel and create pinch points as the lanes narrow in the distance inviting exploration. During the summer months these views become significantly more enclosed, and the isolated rural character of Offley Brook is accentuated.



Figure 28 Views of the crossroads in all directions

4.2.5 Entering Fair oak Road from the crossroads the eye is drawn up the narrow lane along hedgerow-lined banks. Sequential rural views continue as the view opens up to the mill building and beyond. Along Fair oak Road as it winds away from the hamlet of Offley Brook on the valley side, the views further emphasise the enclosed, rural nature of Offley Brook with high hedgerows interspersed with trees.



Figure 29 Sequential views travelling up Fair oak Road emphasise the enclosed feel of the Conservation Area, opening up to views of the historic buildings

4.2.6 Glimpses of the mill pond between trees and hedges along Fair oak Road create a sense of intrigue and intimacy. The tranquil and secluded setting of the pond is reinforced during the summer months when glimpses of the mill pond are limited.



Figure 30 Glimpse view of the mill pond from Fair oak Road

4.2.7 Long views out of the Conservation Area towards surrounding open countryside define the setting of the Conservation Area within its isolated context, and contribute to rural character.



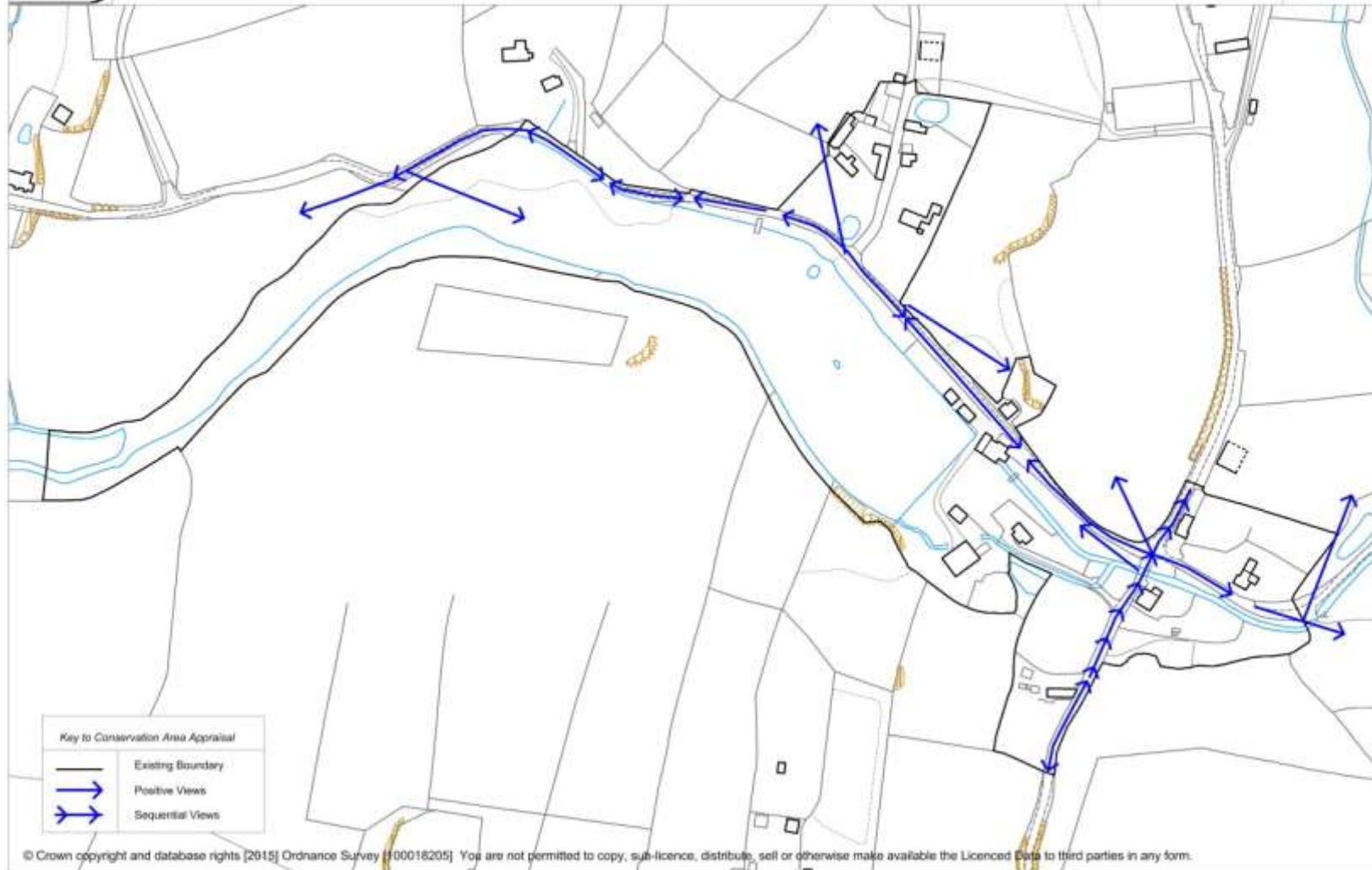
Figure 31 Views out of the Conservation contribute to the significance of the setting



Offley Brook Conservation Area Appraisal Important Views

Date: February 2016

Not to scale



4.3 Public Realm

Roads through Offley Brook are of modern tarmac, with road markings at the junctions to the crossroads. There are no pavements but informal grassy verges, and no street lights and minimal street signage. There are no defined public areas in the Conservation Area, although the mill is open for sales to the public on occasion and the gardens of Heath House have limited opening to the public through arrangement via the National Gardens Scheme. There is a post box to the roadside at Rock cottage which is the former Post Office.

4.4 Open Space and gardens

The Offley Brook Conservation Area is surrounded by open green countryside which forms part of its rural setting. Due to the enclosed nature of the lanes and the high banks, open green space is limited to private land and gardens within the Conservation Area itself. The field sloping down from Rock Cottage towards the crossroads offers important green space, as does the land surrounding the mill to the south, east and west. The garden plots of the cottages tend to be to the back or side with the properties fronting the road, and the larger houses, such as Mill Farm and Heath House, are positioned in larger plots with substantial, landscaped front gardens.



Figure 32 Landscaped gardens to Heath House offer open space and are open to the public by arrangement (ngs.org).



Figure 33 Open green space surrounds the mill building and site

4.5 Important trees and hedgerows

4.5.1 The Offley Brook Conservation Area has a heavily wooded setting and important groups of deciduous trees and mature hedgerows line the roads both approaching, and within, the Conservation Area. Trees form canopies along the lanes which reinforce the enclosed feel of the Conservation Area; this sense of enclosure is enhanced throughout the summer months.

4.5.2 The southeast corner of the Conservation Area is bordered by a heavily wooded steep bank of important trees. Formed from an area of historic woodland, these trees form a backdrop to this section of the Conservation Area.

4.5.3 Dense areas of trees and woodland border the mill pond to the north, south and west and form a natural boundary to the Conservation Area, often masking the mill pond and some buildings from view. These important trees contribute significantly to the wooded character of the Conservation Area and further reinforce the isolated nature of the Conservation Area

4.5.4 Individually significant trees can be found to the north of Greatwood Cottage and two Lime trees and a Yew tree are to be found to the gardens of Heath House.



Figure 34 The steep bank of trees form a back drop to the Conservation Area



Figure 35 Lime trees to the rear gardens of Heath House



Key to Conservation Area Appraisal	
	Existing Boundary
	Important Hedgerows
	Important Trees
	Important Groups of Trees
	Important Green Space
	Significant Area of Water

4.6 Boundary treatments

4.6.1 Typical boundary treatments within the Conservation Area are coursed stone walls with stone copings and stone rubble walls topped with hedges.

4.6.2 Contrasts to stone and hedge boundaries can be found at Greatwood Cottage, which has red brick walls with blue brick saddle copings to the front boundary wall. Some remnants of red brick walls and stone footings can be identified to the demolished smithy site and offer historic interest.



Figure 36 Brick and stone walling to the demolished smithy

4.6.3 Examples of historic metalwork gates set between stone posts are evident at Mill Farm and Heath House. Some 20th century metal gates and railings are observed, as is some aluminium agricultural fencing, and there is some modern timber paling fencing along Jacksons Lane.



Figure 37 Boundary treatments within the Conservation Area

5. Key positive characteristics to be considered during any proposal for change

Layout of the Conservation Area

- An historic, dispersed settlement within a rural hamlet, with surviving historic street pattern.
- Identifiable historic field boundaries, trees and hedgerows emphasising the rural feel of the area.
- Surviving historic agricultural, industrial and domestic buildings, providing evidential value of farming and milling activity in Offley Brook over several centuries.

Building types

- Survival of an operational historic mill building in its historic form and setting.
- Example of a large scale domestic farmhouse and agricultural buildings.
- Modest cottages and houses dating from at least the 17th century and an example of a large Georgian country house.

Plot size and plan form

- Modest two storey cottages fronting the road and set down secluded lanes
- Large scale farmhouse and rectilinear outbuildings and former miller's house set back from the roadside in large grounds..
- Asymmetrical form of mill building set by the roadside surrounded by large grounds to side and rear.

Building materials

- Red brick, and Staffordshire blue clay tile with some render, both historic and modern.
- The use of stone to footings, boundary walls and window lintels and cills.
- Historic metal found in iron gates, the waterwheel and associated mill machinery.

Public Realm

- There is no defined public space in Offleybrook.

Boundaries

- Positive boundaries are created through historic hedgerows interspersed with mature trees. Stone walls, some topped with hedges, dominate within the Conservation Area and there are examples of red brick walls, wrought iron gates and some timber paling fencing.

Architectural features

- Varying orientation of gables ends and some dormers.
- Historic sash and timber casement windows, stone and segmental brick-arched lintels, decorative openings and bargeboarding.
- Brick detailing including dentilation at eaves

Open space

- The open countryside which surrounds Offley Brook contributes significantly to its rural setting. Open space within the Conservation Area is provided by private land and large landscaped gardens.
- The most significant area of open space is provided by the large mill pond. The pond provides an openness which contrasts with the enclosed feel created by tree-lined boundaries, and large groups of trees and woodland.

Important views

- It is important that significant and positive views are protected both into and out of the Conservation Area.
- Key views, landmarks and focal points, identified within this Appraisal, positively contribute to the character of the Offleybrook Conservation Area.

Important Trees and Hedgerows

- Mature trees and hedgerows line the majority of boundaries of the Conservation Area, reflecting the historic layout of the surrounding lanes and giving an enclosed feel.
- Large areas of woodland contribute to a wooded character and reinforce the sense of enclosure within the Conservation Area.
- Individually significant trees and groups of important trees can be found throughout the Conservation Area. The trees provide aesthetically pleasing and picturesque contrasts throughout the changing of the seasons .

6. Negative Aspects that impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area

In order to manage the Conservation Area's special architectural and historic character and appearance, it is essential to identify and address any problems that dilute this character. As a small rural settlement even slight changes can have a substantial impact on character and affect the significance of what makes Offley Brook special. The following issues have been identified as having a negative impact on the Offley Brook Conservation Area.

6.1 Effects of 20th century materials

The use of 20th century materials within the Conservation area impacts on the appearance of some buildings. Modern render and mock-timber framing, and modern grey bricks have been used which mask historic brick. Non-historic paint colours have been used to some buildings, which create a noticeable contradiction to the historic colour palette. There has been some replacement of historic windows with wood-effect modern windows and uPVC. Mill Cottage has had a late 20th century extension to the front elevation which now masks the historic facade of the building. Modern metal railings painted white contradict historic boundary finishes.

6.2 Felling of trees

Areas of tree felling to a section of land at the north of the mill pond has resulted in the unsightly appearance of the area. A significant element of the character of the Conservation Area is that it has tree-lined boundaries and a heavily wooded character. Any erosion of this character will have a negative impact on the Conservation Area and potentially dilute special character.

6.3 Lack of maintenance and repair

Some sections of stone walling have fallen down along Fair Oak Road, creating a negative appearance to this historic boundary wall. Some sections of rubble stone walling have become masked by overgrown vegetation causing deterioration to the historic fabric.



Figure 38 Areas of tree clearance have a negative impact on the Conservation Area



Figure 39 Some important boundary walls have fallen down or are hidden behind overgrown hedgerows.

7. Protecting the character and appearance of the Conservation Area

Any new development should reinforce the character outlined in the summary of special interest and be sympathetic to the historical evolution and character of Offley Brook through the consideration of the historic buildings and their setting, the historic layout and street pattern, significant spaces, massing, volume and scale of the existing and proposed buildings and the employment of vernacular materials and details.

Policies for the protection and management of the historic environment are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraphs 127 through to 141 and in the Plan for Stafford through policies N8 and N9, paragraphs 12.45 to 12.56. These should be used in conjunction with this appraisal to guide or assess any future development within the Offley Brook Conservation Area.

Other organisations such as the County Council Highways Authority, and statutory undertakers also have their own commitment to protect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in the exercise of their duties.

To manage and protect the special historic character and appearance of the Offley Brook Conservation Area in the exercise of these policies and duties:

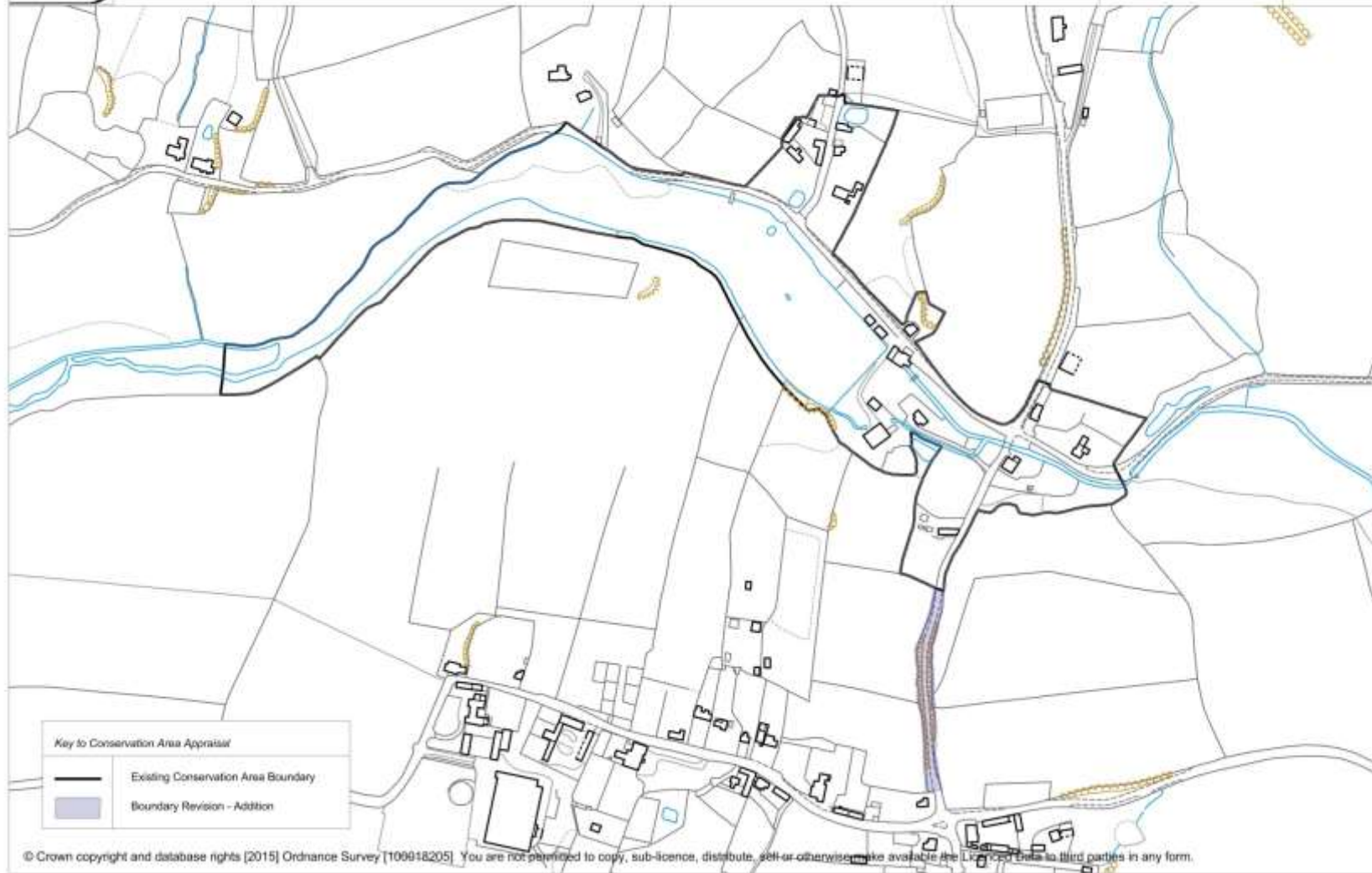
- The existing special historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area as set out in this appraisal and all features identified as positive on the Conservation Area Appraisal Map should be retained and reinforced.
- Further works that harm the significance of the area, as set out in this appraisal, should be avoided.
- *'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment' in the Planning Practice Guidance (2014) and Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide (Department for Communities and Local Government, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, English Heritage, 2010).*

- Existing and emerging design or conservation guidance published by Stafford Borough Council and English Heritage guidance should be consulted where relevant, such as *The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: A guide to good practice* (English Heritage, 2006), *Living Buildings in a Living Landscape* (English Heritage, 2006), *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (English Heritage, 2008), *Streets for All* (English Heritage, 2004), *Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (English Heritage, 2011), *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (English Heritage, 2011).
- Some works that could harm the character or appearance of the conservation area can be carried out under “permitted development rights”, which means that home owners do not need to apply for planning permission. Owners are nevertheless encouraged to take heed of the special historic character and appearance of the area when carrying out these works.

8. Boundary revisions and amendments

Offley Brook Conservation Area was designated in 1993 and boundaries were drawn quite tightly to include the mill building and the large mill pond, a small cluster of historic buildings at the crossroads and the larger houses of Mill Farm and Heath House. The designated boundary was felt to accurately represent an historic milling and agricultural environment, and reflect the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Whilst the buildings are of a dispersed nature they form part of an historic settlement which grew from agricultural industry and provide evidence of a previously busy and economic part of the local area. The setting of the Conservation Area in a shallow valley surrounded by open fields and defined by heavily wooded boundaries contributes to the character of the Conservation Area.

After the completion of a physical survey of the Offley Brook Conservation Area and following public consultation on the draft Conservation Area Appraisal, a review of the boundary was considered. This review concluded that the conservation area boundary be extended to include the whole extent of the sandstone cutting which links Offley Brook with Bishops Offley. The cutting is a feature of historic significance identified in Historic Environment Records as Hollow Way, and is a designated Local Geological Site (LoGS) of significance.



References

English Heritage: *Guidance on conservation area appraisals* (2006)

English Heritage: *Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (2011)

Horowitz, D. (2005). *The Place Names of Staffordshire*: Brewood

Staffordshire County Council, Stafford Borough Council: *Offley Brook Conservation Area* (1993)

Selected sources

<http://www.imaginingstaffordshire.org.uk/mt/mt4.htm>

<http://www.search.staffspasttrack.org.uk/engine/resource/default.asp?txtKeywords=&lstContext=&lstResourceType=&txtDateFrom=&txtDateTo=&X1=378853&Y1=329351&X2=379699&Y2=330055&scale=1&originator=%2Fengine%2FGIS%2Fdefault%5Fhndlr%2Easp&page=&records=&direction=&pointer=22346&text=0&resource=26627>

<http://www.ngs.org.uk/gardens/find-a-garden/garden.aspx?id=10473>

Further information

The Plan for Stafford Borough 2014

<http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/live/Documents/Planning%20Policy/Plan%20for%20Stafford%20Borough/PFSB-Adoption.pdf>

The National Planning Policy Framework 2012

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

Staffordshire County Council, Historic Environment Record

http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Application.aspx?resourceID=1010

Appendix 1

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: THE COTTAGE

List Entry Number: 1039050

THE COTTAGE

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Staffordshire

District: Stafford

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Eccleshall

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 25-Apr-1980

List Entry Description

ECCLESHALL OFFLEYBROOK 1. 5373 The Cottage SJ 72 NE 17/84

II 2. C17 with later alterations. Painted brick on stone base to earlier timber frame revealed internally; 2 storeys; 2 iron casement windows; 2 later, possibly modern, gabled wood dormers; moulded wood pilaster doorcase with modern wood gabled canopy on brackets; plain eaves; tiles replacing former thatch. Incorporates converted outbuilding attached at rear. Interior has exposed ceiling beams and simple C18 turned baluster staircase.

