

North Crawley Conservation Area Review

December 2021

Conservation & Archaeology



www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/conservation-and-archaeology

This document should be read in conjunction with the General Information Document available online.

Historical Development

Settlement of this area came rather later than the general Anglo-Saxon colonisation of the Ouse and the Lovat valleys. The pre conquest history seems to have been one of scattered settlement initially making use of existing clearings amongst woods, eventually settling as two communities known as Little and Great Crawley with a series of 'ends' dotted around the surrounding countryside. The name Crawley is derived from 'Crauelai' the Old English for 'crow' and 'clearing'.

The Domesday Book has little to say about early settlement in the area but importantly has a reference to a minster (religious community) of St Firmin of Crauelai, later thought to be the site of the parish Church of St Firmin. There is some Norman stonework of circa 1100 in the church which also contains a very rare, near intact, 15th century painted rood screen.



Church of St Firmin

Before the Enclosure Award of 1773 the open field system predominated over the areas to the west and south west of the village. The church and three farms formed a nucleus with smaller 'home closes' clustering around the emerging High Street. Church Farmhouse, just east of the church, was one of the early farms.

Several manors existed in the parish, including three with moated sites in and around North Crawley village, for example Moat Farmhouse on Chicheley Road. Mathias Manor was the basis for the presentday Crawley Grange, off Pound Lane and Haudlo Manor was replaced by the present Old Rectory in 1800.

Crawley Grange itself is a substantial Elizabethan mansion, with extensions dating from 1907. There is also a sizeable walled garden and a series of iron framed glasshouses. In the late 1970's the house and ancillary buildings were divided up into several separate dwellings, the interior much altered in doing so.

Modern day North Crawley sits slightly elevated above the surrounding landscape and is partially screened from view by trees. Approaching by road one is generally first aware of the church before houses, visible amongst the trees, can be made out. Within the village are a Victorian school, which, as is common, lies adjacent to the church grounds, this time on the west side. There are late Georgian and Victorian houses of varying size along High Street with some older labourers' terraced cottages and conventional, standardised 20th century houses here and there testifying to a move away from the need for a local labour force to dormitory village serving the new town.

The influence of the North Crawley Estate on the



View of High Street, North Crawley

village has been to leave some modestly embellished late 19th century dwellings, and in the early 20th century, some much less remarkable estate worker housing. These replaced what were then deemed to be obsolete thatched cottages. Numbers 20-22 High Street are the best examples of otherwise somewhat perfunctory house designs.

Standing opposite the entrance to Pound Lane is a former Congregational church of 1821, built of local brick but with a carefully proportioned frontage comprising a central arched doorway with an arched window to each side and two more above.

To the north is an orderly but standardised late 20th century housing estate which does not contribute to local character. Whilst it all but doubles the size of the village, it is largely hidden from view as one passes along High Street. It is likely that the resulting increase in the village's population has helped to provide sufficient demand to support a village shop and two public houses in the settlement core.

Dominant building styles, materials and details

Frequently, long standing local materials and methods have become unorthodox and rarely used but an appreciation and understanding of them is required if the authentic historic character of the conservation area and its individual buildings is to be appreciated and maintained.

The principal construction materials used for a settlement's older buildings are often indicative of the underlying local geology and can vary a great deal from one place to another. Underlining this importance of locality to appearance, the British Geological survey's online 'Geology of Britain Viewer'

<https://www.bgs.ac.uk/mapviewers/geologyofbritainviewer/> confirms that North Crawley sits on a bedrock geology of Oxford clay. This is a common occurrence for settlements south of the River Ouse and means that there is a significant tradition of brick buildings and walls within the villages of this part of north east Buckinghamshire close to its boundary with Bedfordshire.



Landscape around North Crawley

Almost all of North Crawley is built from brick, the chief exception being the church which is built from a coarse Blisworth type limestone. Even here, however, the rubbly local stone is pushed aside for the decorative work to windows and the castellation details where a freer, finer grain limestone from further afield is used. Roofs tend to be of plain clay tile or Welsh slate, both now frequently replaced by late C20th clay or concrete tile. Here and there one or two thatched roofs also survive on cottages to add some characterful diversity.



Thatch and clay tile roofs in North Crawley

Other important materials used in traditional construction include timber, metal and glass. There are also fragments of timber framing and weatherboarding but it is brick and the variations brought about by changes in methods of manufacture and use that most strongly characterise the village.

Quarries and limekilns are, as one would expect absent from early Ordnance Survey maps of the area.

However, about a mile east of Chicheley on the A422 Newport Pagnell Road at Brickyard Cottage the 1st and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey maps of 1880 and 1900 respectively confirm the presence of kilns, clay pits and yards that one assumes supplied bricks to a wide area where good building stone was largely absent. It is likely that for a time this yard was one of a number, perhaps three or four operating on a small scale in the area during the 19th century, however, by the time of the 3rd edition Ordnance Survey in 1925 the works' buildings are not shown and so operations must have ceased at some point prior to that. It seems likely that the main reason for this would be a slowdown in building combined with loss of workforce due to the 1st World War. There may have been other local economic reasons too such as the relative ease of supplying mass produced bricks brought by canal and then train as far as Newport Pagnell. Later still, the establishment and development of huge brickmaking works in the Marston Vale during the 20th century and improvements in road transport would all contribute to the final demise of local brickmaking traditions.

Prior to its loss, the impact of the local brick building tradition has been to impart particularly rich, ruddy orange-brown blocks of colour to the general appearance of the buildings in the conservation area. On closer examination there are subtle variations in colour and finish that lend the walls texture and a mottled appearance. The rows (or 'courses') of bricks are laid to different patterns, one being Flemish bond where brick headers and stretchers are placed alternately to create decorative cruciform patterns in the brickwork. This is sometimes accentuated by using the heads of cream coloured brick or over burnt brick to create a distinctive 'chequerboard' pattern.

Numbers 32-34 High Street are a striking example of this technique. Flemish bond and variations of it are used almost exclusively in the village, particularly an elongated version known as Flemish garden wall or Sussex bond where three stretchers and one header alternate to make the bricks go further. Often Flemish garden wall bond is used for the sides of buildings keeping the full Flemish bond to the front, but some house frontages make use of this stretched version and here and there it is used decoratively too.



Decorative chequer board pattern made using Flemish bond, 32-34 High Street

Only one instance of English bond, where courses of headers and stretchers alternate, was noted at the Cock public house on the east face that overlooks the open area commonly known as the 'Waste Ground'.

For the most part decorative brickwork is absent but nevertheless there are some examples of good technical work for rubbed brick placed vertically to create flat head arches or the judicious use of headers to create a curved wall on the corner of 1 High Street (Grade II listed) at the junction with Folly Lane.



Brick 'headers' used skilfully create a curved wall. The windows are horizontal (Yorkshire) sliding sash that predate vertical sliding sashes. They are of small 12x12 pane puttied into structural (rather than applied) glazing bars under simple segmental brick arches. Some old glass survives and the impressions for a hinge that supported a shutter are still observable.

Here and there are imperfections that confirm the small scale handmade nature of production. To prevent cracking in the kiln wet bricks were racked before firing to help dispel moisture. This often means that traces of straw, fingerprints, scantlings (impressions formed by the bricks above and below in a stack), tally marks, ears of corn and even paw prints are permanently embossed on the bricks and are pleasing to note.

Modern brickwork is now almost exclusively stretcher bond as an outer dressing to blockwork inner walls that prevent the use of headers unless the bricks are broken in two or manufactured as 'specials' of half depth to appear as headers in the body of brickwork. Stretcher bond almost always gives away a mid to late twentieth century building with a block work inner wall, the headers having been the traditional means of tying a double thickness wall together.

Stone is rare in the village and is only found as randomly coursed rubblestone on the Church, Manor Farm and the cottage at 11 Chequers Lane (Grade II listed). Elsewhere there are tantalising glimpses as at the chimney breast of 18 High Street or just peeping out from under the coating of cement render applied to 11 Folly Lane. At the attractive late Victorian Lodge to Crawley Grange and overlooking the junction of High Street and Pound Lane, limestone dressings have been sparingly applied to doors and windows to add expression and weight to the neatly balanced formal composition. Although the presence of stone is interesting to note and may possibly indicate a more widespread use at one time, its use is incidental for the most part.



Stone dressings (left unpainted) used to enhance the presence of doors and windows, 29 High Street

The mortar for brick and stonework is white with small pebbles and/or black hearth grit evident. The whiteness comes from the slaked quicklime into which coarse and smooth sand and material considered to aid consistent curing of the mortar was added. Lime mortar in particular can be temperamental to use and inconsistent in inexperienced hands so, as a result, its use in general building has ceased. The porosity of the material and its suitability for use in softer handmade brick and porous limestones means that air curing lime mortar is more widely available for use again. In the slightly darker than usual orangebrown brickwork of North Crawley the whiteness of the mortar creates more of a contrast. This acts to heighten the visibility of the coursing bond and thus any slight variations in

the brick laying. Careless repointing or repointing in grey modern cements can have a disproportionately harmful impact on the appearance of brickwork as its careful setting out becomes blurred and, by preventing proper evaporation of water vapour from within a wall, can cause brickwork to fail prematurely.



Orange brick with pawprints embedded, set in an offwhite lime and sand mortar with a little hearth grit to aid curing

Early roofing materials would have been long straw thatch or locally made plain clay tiles. Long stemmed straw for thatch was once available easily from the surrounding fields but the change to shorter stemmed wheat varieties and mechanised harvesting has led to its replacement in the latter part of the 20th century with reed thatch. This material has a much sharper clipped appearance compared to the shaggier and softer looking long straw variety traditional to the area. Long straw also lacks the pronounced ridge detailing found on reed thatches as it is flexible enough to wrap over the top of roofs.

Plain clay tiles often with a plain shallow curve that imparts a pleasing slightly jumbled look are now rare in the village. Here and there are ridged or curved pantiles which add characterful texture; they are mostly used on outbuildings. Later mass produced tiles from the late 19th century onwards tend to lie much flatter, are more uniform in colour than the handmade kind and now dominate the village.

With the advent of rail and then road transport came a switch to using slate for shallower pitched roofs. In North Crawley the impact has been surprisingly limited, and slate is comparatively rare. Unfortunately, concrete tile, a late 20th century material, has made a showing on one or two buildings in the conservation area and by appearing as a heavier duty utilitarian materials is at odds with the more characterful materials that comprise the majority of the village's buildings.



Clay tiles old and new (new, with cat sat on ridge) seen from Chequers Lane

Roofs themselves are mostly dual pitched with their ridges running in line with the road. The dwellings have chimneys that are functional in nature but at 29 High Street they are used as understated architectural embellishment. Some buildings present gable ends to roadside views, such as The Cock public house and Church Farm or have pronounced dormer windows at first floor as at 39 High Street. Hipped roofs are largely



Weatherboard store standing on the west side of The Cock public house. Note the pantiled outbuilding beyond. The Cock's windows have flat head segmental arches and are set some 90mm into their opening

configuration all add to the visual distinctiveness of the conservation area.

Timber, glass and lead and occasionally metal would have once been commonplace materials for details such as doors and windows, each tending to be made bespoke rather than to standard 'off the peg' sizes.

Weatherboarding is evident on gable ends and one or two weatherboard structures survive. There is also evidence of timber framing although sometimes newer applied decorative timber work can be mistaken for traditional framing.

Early cottage windows (circa 17th century or earlier) tend to be side hung flush fitting casement type but few genuine examples now survive. At first they combined small pieces of glass held in place by lead 'comes' but evolved to have larger panes of glass fixed by putty into frames subdivided by wooden glazing bars. Cills tended to be absent and the windows placed almost flush with the external stonework or framing. During the 18th century vertically hung sliding sash windows became prevalent. At first these too were flush with external masonry but late 18th century laws aimed at reducing the risk of fire spreading pushed the windows into their openings by four inches. The shadow lines this creates adds expression to later Georgian and Victorian windows. Whilst modern windows are influenced by the configuration of historic casement and sash windows few correctly replicate the characteristics of the early joinery. The



Church Farm early, cill-less, side hung, flush fitting, small pane with lead comes timber windows, set in a timber frame gable with a stone base and modern plain clay tile roof. The wall is Flemish garden wall bond

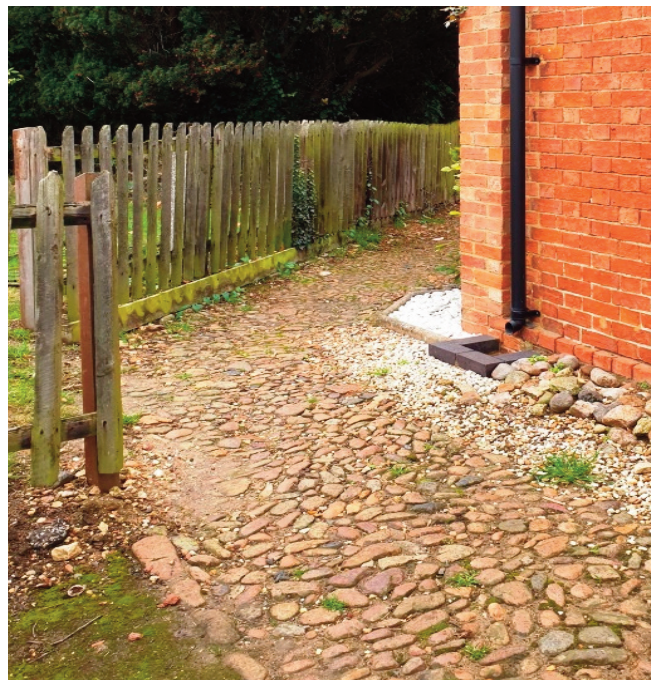
imperfections of the cylinder glass used in Victorian windows also creates a sparkle that is absent in modern windows.

Where modern windows predominate the variations in appearance are normally quite evident, and often profoundly weaken the appearance of historic buildings and their contribution to local character.

Doors come in a variety of designs from basic plank doors to ornate Victorian and Edwardian designs. In North Crawley some Victorian or Edwardian era doors survive. They typically comprise vertical stiles and horizontal rail frames further divided vertically by muntins into which wood panels or glazing is placed. Fanlights, where present, are invariably placed above doors and never incorporated into them. Polished brass knobs, rather than lever handles, were used to open doors. The doors are always painted smooth and woodgrain finish is absent. Georgian and Victorian doors, particularly on higher status buildings often have a door hood supported by brackets. These can be very plain to highly decorated and sometimes accompanied by an ornamental door surround.



Timber doors and windows set in a symmetrical brickwork composition under a Welsh slate roof. The windows are 'six over six' timber vertically sliding sashes whilst the front door is of eight panels under a fanlight (or 'transom' light) and set within a restrained early Victorian door surround. Note the relatively small size of the door in the context of the ornamental treatment and the ornamental iron gate.



Stone pavement of uncertain date.

Iron too would have been in evidence for incidental features and details around the village but not for major structural elements. The presence of iron boot scrapes, bollards and railings is very rare in North Crawley now. An exception is the line of railings that run around the west and south side of the church yard.

Historic cobbles and kerbs are also now largely absent from the village, replaced by modern granite sets.

Improvements in transport, DIY, fashions, and short term cheap fixes have cumulatively caused a great deal of harm to characterful buildings but the variety of designs and quality of materials means that a selection of original features and details still survive, nonetheless.

Whilst not every building is of sufficient merit to warrant statutory listing there are still those of local interest which either individually or cumulatively contribute to the character or appearance of the conservation area. Failure to mention a specific building, structure or open space in the review does not necessarily mean that it has no part in reinforcing local identity. Where historic materials survive, they usually impart a strong sense of character and individuality to the buildings and areas in which they are located.

Statement of Special Interest

North Crawley's prevailing historic character and appearance is derived from an accumulation of predominantly domestic dwellings of varying ages placed irregularly along High Street and Folly Lane with more informally arranged, finer grained groupings of houses and gardens reached by Chequers Lane or Church Walk on the south side of the High Street. As usual for settlements located south of the Ouse on Oxford clay, the predominant historic materials include locally made (pre-C19th) orange brown brick, sometimes laid in chequer pattern, and plain clay tile. There is also some grey Welsh slate and occasional thatch and timber framing. Whilst St Firmin's church is built of a local pale honey coloured limestone there are only vestigial uses of stone around the village although it may once have been more widespread. There is a high consistency of materials among the older buildings, particularly the handmade bricks, and some shared detailing, all reflective of locally available materials and the methods and traditions of construction.

The narrow lanes and paths by which some parts of the village are reached are also an important component of the village's character. They invite exploration on foot by which means the settlement slowly reveals both itself and important views of the church, which dominates the village, as well as views across attractive garden spaces and out into open countryside on the south side known locally as the 'Rolles'. The hedging and trees edging Folly Lane in particular reinforce a sense of informal rurality at its junction with High Street and southward on a falling incline, out of the conservation area at the point where church walk leads off eastwards, looping back past the school and church to emerge at The Cock public house and the open area commonly known as the 'Waste Ground'. Church Walk is rich in charm and character alternating between hedged field rurality to attractively huddled brick built terraced cottages with the quaintly proportioned school all overlooking the church grounds but separated from it by a narrow path and characterful fencing and metal railings. The unmetalled connection back to Folly Lane via 'Emma's Lane' adds further rural character to this corner of the village as well as providing an important view from the west upwards to the church tower.

An attractive built grouping also stands within a loop formed by Chequers Lane, with a notably picturesque view of the timber framed Church Farm seen in tandem with St Firmin's. An intriguing passage from Chequers Lane leads out through brick, stone, weatherboard, thatch and tile roofed cottages to attractive hedge lined fields beyond.

In combination, the older buildings, their materials and details, the enclosed spaces created and the views through and out, often with mature trees forming a backdrop, create a harmonious and distinctive settlement pattern and a strong sense of place, both reflecting and documenting the underlying geology and the local craft skills that brought it about.

The road that passes through the village is a local road between Tickford End at Newport Pagnell and Cranfield. Despite clearly being a popular back road, the traffic is not a constant or particularly troublesome presence but it does add a degree of noise and activity as traffic makes its way through the village.

20th century housing development has been largely contained to the north in a standardised, development of no historic character or design merit and is effectively shielded from views of the High Street by the older and more characterful properties. The conservation area has been populated by some 20th century houses which similarly take no account of the specific qualities that give the village its special character or appearance, but, by being small in number means that any detrimental impact on the village's appearance is limited.

The expansion in housing and the road may explain the continued presence of a school, shop and two pubs in the village, all of which provide important, ongoing day time activity

Despite the presence of some unsympathetic late C20th developments and a growing prevalence of late C20th materials the sense of a well preserved, traditional rural village is still strongly discernible.

Draft Management Plan

Proposals for new development should be particularly mindful of the provisions of national and local policies set out in the General Information Document. The appearance and character of the conservation area as it is set out in this review should be demonstrably understood in proposals for new development. Milton Keynes Council (the Council) will expect applications to demonstrate how proposals will sensitively respond to and reinforce local character and distinctiveness.

The Council will normally refuse applications for development that are deemed to be inconsistent with national and local plan policies intended to protect designated conservation areas from insensitive change.

New or replacement buildings should remain complimentary or subordinate in scale (height and massing) to other existing street frontage properties or preserve a sense of hierarchy within an existing plot.

New development within the conservation area should consider the extent of spacing and rhythm between buildings and placement within the plot. Parking spaces should be provided in a way which minimises impacts to landscaping to the front of houses or the loss of verges beside the road.

New development will be expected to employ good quality materials that are consistent with the historic materials used in the conservation area.

Planning applications will be required for material alterations to the exteriors of buildings in non-domestic use in the conservation area. For example, changes to windows, doors, roofing material will normally be held to be a material change to buildings in non-domestic use that would require planning permission.

There is no article 4 direction withdrawing permitted development rights in North Crawley Conservation Area preventing the loss of original features on unlisted buildings in domestic use and there are no proposals to alter the existing levels of control. However, where deemed appropriate to do so, the LPA may withdraw permitted development rights as part of granting planning permissions for proposals to develop within the conservation area.

Proposals for development should seek to avoid disruption or loss of historic boundaries unless there are clear and convincing reasons for so doing.

Boundaries within the conservation area are generally formed by hedges, brick walls or railings. The use of timber fencing and stone walling will normally be resisted.

In line with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 six weeks' notice must be given to the Local Planning Authority before undertaking works to trees.

The Council shall give careful consideration to the positive contribution made by the open spaces in the conservation area when considering proposals for development within or adjacent to them.

The village's public houses are an important community facility. Although the conservation area is covered by special advertising controls the Council will be supportive of the need to advertise sympathetically, operate and undertake events that contribute to village life.

The Council shall continue to offer pre-application advice to occupiers of unlisted property in the conservation area in order to avoid unsympathetic, ad hoc choices for replacement or repair of properties and features such as windows or boundary walls.

Accumulations of street furniture or visually intrusive individual items of street furniture will be discouraged. Traffic orders should take account of the sensitive historic environment and use muted colours and minimise applied road surface lines and signing. The Council will seek to encourage utility companies to coordinate works and reinstate disturbed road and pavement surfaces sympathetically. Road improvements should avoid 'urbanising' the rural character of the conservation area.



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