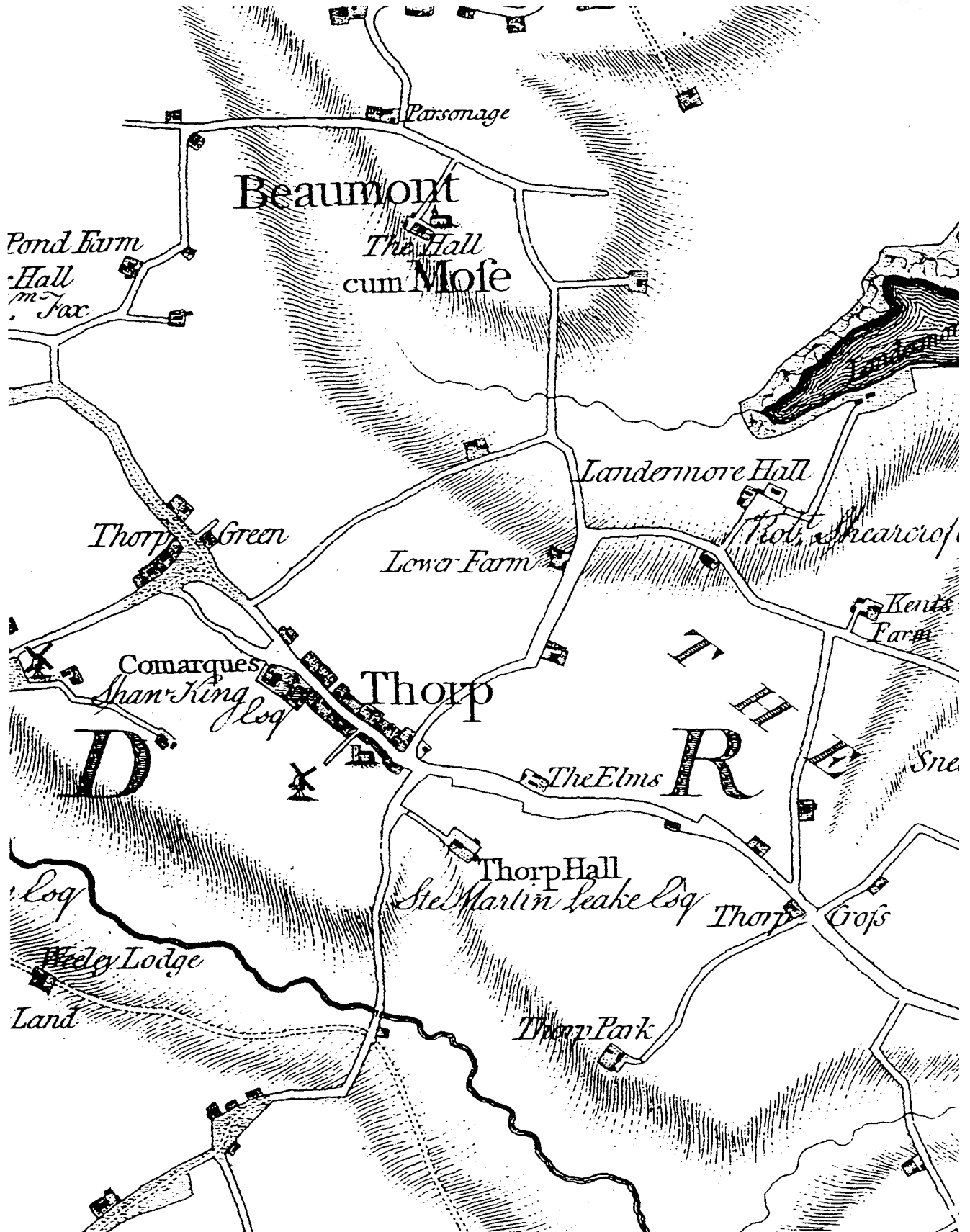




# Thorpe-le-Soken Conservation Area



### Thorpe-le-Soken Conservation Area

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal has been produced by the District Council but is based on earlier work by consultants Smith Stuart Reynolds in 2001. These earlier documents contain the views of the consultant and did not necessarily reflect the Council's Officer's views. Although these documents have existed for some time they had no formal, planning status.

The Council subsequently agreed in 2005 to prepare Conservation Area Character Appraisals for each of its Conservation Areas and as a forerunner to updating the above consultant's documents a consultation exercise took place in late 2005/early 2006. This involved town and parish councils and certain local amenity bodies. The results of the consultation exercise were reported to the Council's Planning Portfolio Holder when the document was formally considered for adoption as Council planning policy. As a result of this consultation the Appraisal documents have been amended and updated in the light of the comments received from consultees and as a result of certain changes which have taken place since 2001. Much of the descriptive material used in the original SSR documents has been retained.

Proposals originally put forward by the Consultant involving suggested changes to Conservation Area boundaries, enhancement works or proposed Article 4 Directions have been retained in these latest documents. However, it is recognised that town or parish councils do not support some of these suggestions and this is referred to in the appropriate document. Their inclusion in the documents as suggestions only does not indicate that the District Council supports such proposals at this time. They will be subject to further consideration by the Council in due course. Indeed all such proposals for boundary changes, and any new Article 4 Directions will be required to go through quite separate, statutory processes which will also be carried out with further public consultation.

This document has been formally adopted by the Council as part of its planning policies for this conservation area under the provisions of Section 71 of the Planning [Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas] Act 1990. It will therefore be an important material consideration in relation to the assessment and determination of planning and related applications in the Conservation Area.

#### **SUMMARY**

**The special quality of Thorpe-Le-Soken Conservation Area derives ultimately from its importance in medieval times, indicated by the wealth of historic buildings lining a sinuous main street. Neighbouring parts of the village that relate to the medieval core in plan form and in the intrinsic interest of their buildings are also included in the Area because of their supporting role. The Area contains a wealth of mature trees which frame buildings and spaces and contribute to its character and appearance. Not all of the current Area relates fully to this assessment. As a consequence, a number of boundary changes are put forward for discussion. The status of Thorpe Hall as part of this Area or as a separate Area is discussed.**

## Thorpe-le-Soken Conservation Area

### LOCATION

Thorpe-le-Soken stands on a ridge of high ground running from north west to south east between the sea at Hamford Water and the Holland Brook. Two secondary roads cross in the village: the roads from Mistley and Manningtree and from Colchester to the Kirbys and Frinton (B1033) runs along the ridge, while the road between Harwich and the Clacton area (B1414) crosses it. The Conservation Area covers this staggered cross roads, the older part of the village running north west along the ridge, and extends to include Thorpe Hall to the south east.

In common with many of its neighbours, public spaces in Thorpe are enclosed by buildings and trees so that there are few glimpses out to open countryside. The village environment is thus in strong contrast to the extensive vistas generated by modern farming methods on the Tendring plateau.

### DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Thorpe is a long-established settlement as is clear from the Saxon origins of the substantial parish church of St Michael, and the wealth of older buildings, both vernacular and “polite”, lining the gently-curving High Street. However, the earliest evidence for a settlement in and around Thorpe consists of Palaeolithic worked flints (500,000 – 10,000 BC) at two nearby sites. Crop-marks probably of bronze Age or Iron Age date occur at Thorpe Green and in the vicinity of the Hall. Both the 1772 Essex map of Chapman and André and the Ordnance Survey First Edition 1” map of 1805 indicate that the original village was almost entirely confined to the High Street, between the current edge of the Area towards Thorpe Green and the crossroads. Prominent on both these maps are the extensive private grounds of Thorpe Hall to the south east and, to a lesser extent, those of Comarques at the north western end of the High Street.

The suffix “Le Soken”, also applied to Kirby and originally to Walton, reflects a Viking presence denotes special privileges regularised in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and deriving from the manorial holding under the chapter of St Pauls Cathedral rather than the see of London. Kirby was the largest of the three, but Thorpe’s relative importance as a focus for social interaction and commerce is indicated by the rare survival until recently of a guildhall (now the Bell Hotel, and currently undergoing considered restoration following fire damage).

Along with most of the rest of this part of Essex, Thorpe would have remained a remote agricultural backwater until the advent of the railways. Colchester was reached by 1843, and a branch to Walton opened in 1867 with a station 1km (0.6 miles) south of the village. The most tangible result is the impressive maltings by the station, but doubtless the existence of the railway helped to widen the horizons of Thorpe villagers in general and to make viable otherwise marginal areas and activities. That Thorpe, along with its neighbours Kirby and Great Holland, had the bodies of their churches rebuilt around this time is also suggestive of a greater confidence.

The abandoned “New Town” expansion projected in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was doubtless also a product of confidence following the proximity of the railway. A grid of streets was proposed to the north east of the High Street, a major connection being provided by the road still know as New Town Road. In the event, only part of this layout was implemented, with parallel roads off Landermere Road (the B1414 to Harwich). These are balanced by later and more piecemeal developments on the south east side of Landermere Road, while development has also crept southwards towards the station during the last century or so. There is also an unconnected ribbon of housing along the Frinton Road to the east.

With the relative decline in the importance of agriculture, Thorpe importance rests on its commercial activities and its wide range of local services, notably a primary school, a full-time doctor’s surgery and the junior section of the Tendring Technology College. While the location of the village on the main road network generates bustle and movement, traffic congestion – particularly during the summer holiday season - leads to impaired conditions for motorists and pedestrians and has a negative impact on the character of the Area as a whole.

## CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARIES

The Area follows the general layout of Thorpe as a linear village aligned north west to south east. In general terms, the boundaries define the older part of the village: where more modern developments adjoin to the north, the boundary tends to be tightly-defined. Where the Area adjoins open countryside, the plots are larger and the boundary consequently looser and more extensive.

At its north western end, the Area boundary identifies where the scatter of cottages forming Thorpe Green group together with stronger boundaries to produce a more urban approach to the village. At this point, the southern boundary runs outside the curtilages of Rondo and Comarques Cottage to take in the extensive mature grounds of Comarques itself. The Area includes the large curtilages of High Street properties and then turns south to include land associated with houses along Mill Lane. Turning south east again round the former mill, densely planted if not overgrown areas south of the church burial ground give way to a considerable area of mature woodland fronting Station Road.

The boundary then runs south along Station Road to the southern edge of the Registered parkland of Thorpe Hall. Following the Registered parkland, the Area runs around the south east side of the pleasure grounds before following Hall Lane northwards to Frinton Road, to complete the southern boundary.

The northern boundary, again starting at the north western tip of the Area, begins with the Old Vicarage and then follows the 20<sup>th</sup> century frontage development closely past the old Rose and Crown to New Town Road. Here the boundary turns away from the High Street to include two modern properties on New Town Road and define the Area as the rear boundary of properties on Argyll Road. The boundary continues to separate High Street properties from those to the north east past Gull Court and the short open frontage of the Primary School. Beyond this point, the boundary turns north east to include properties on the north west side of Landermere Road as far as the Police Station.

Turning back down Landermere Road towards the crossroads, the Area includes The Abbey and modern houses fronting the crossroads area, including land to the rear. This boundary is taken eastwards to include Oak Close, and then takes in the Frinton Road frontage past The Laurels to Elm Farm and the connection to the southern boundary.

## REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN POLICY CONTEXT

The contrast between the northern and southern boundaries is also found in its relationship to the Development Boundary, which seek to concentrate development within the existing built-up area of the village. The Boundary defines denser development: while the Area boundary is without exception the more extensive on the south side, the reverse is generally true on the north. The limited exceptions are the open High Street frontage of the school, which is outside the Limits, as are The Laurels, Elm Farm and the strip on the north side of Frinton Road.

The small concentration of shops in the centre of the village is recognised by its designation as a “Local Centre”.

Important wooded or open areas contribute to the character of the Area. Those identified in the Local Plan within the Area are the woodland on the west side of Station Road, the recreation ground south east of the crossroads, and the bowling green on the south side of High Street. Another designated area of open space defines the inner north eastern edge of the village and runs down to the strip of Conservation Area north of Frinton Road. Allotments, part of which front Frinton Road are also shown on the Proposals Map Inset.

The churchyard is designated as a County Wildlife site, including the burial ground to the south. Finally, the Thorpe Hall Registered Park or Garden is recognised within the Plan, its boundary including the former Hall and pleasure grounds, parkland to the south and north west, and the recreation ground mentioned above.

## AREA APPRAISAL

For this appraisal, the Conservation Area will be divided up into seven character areas as set out on Map 1.

### ***1. High Street: "crossroads" to The Rose and Crown***

*This is the heart of the Conservation Area. It contains the majority of older properties and listed buildings, arranged on either side of the gently sinuous High Street.*

The predominant building style in this character area is the individual house, either detached or physically

attached to its neighbours, and rising from the back of the pavement. Massing is simple and uncomplicated, with roofs characteristically pitched parallel to the main road. There are thus strong contrasts set up: the first of these is with those properties, such as Norfolk House, which are set back from the road, revealing the gables of their neighbours. In this particular case, Norfolk House retains a strong relationship with the High Street by virtue of a front garden with some formal planting, while the revealed gable of Gower House is clad in dark-stained weatherboarding, and is an extremely significant visual element in townscape.

The second contrast is with those properties presenting their gables to the High Street. There is a good example opposite Norfolk House, where the Tack Room, a single storey outbuilding in red brick with a clay tile roof, juts out to the edge of the pavement to provide visual incident in the street scene.

These buildings tend to be vernacular in origin, usually timber framed but recast in later centuries in brick or render. Detailing is also treated sparingly and simply, whether in the vernacular tradition or in the introduction of more polite forms. The pretty eruption of bow-fronted windows on the south side of the High Street north west of the church, for example, is achieved tastefully and without any ostentation. Roof materials are usually plain clay tiles or grey slate, while wall facings are mostly red brick or painted render. The windows of these attractive buildings are generally vertically-sliding sashes, often small-paned.

Forecourts where they occur can be significant in the street scene, particularly the taller boundaries in masonry. There are numerous glimpses, important to the character of the Area, past buildings to rear areas, and beyond to open countryside, notably associated with the public footpath network.

Thorpe's High Street is a classic example of the visual benefits in townscape of a balance between unity and variety. Designs of considerable ingenuity and interest are created within tightly-defined constraints concerning massing, height, materials and colour finishes. These constraints vary across the country, define the local vernacular, and have been on the defensive over the last two centuries in the face of the universal availability of building materials and alterations in building technology amongst others.

As well as these general comments, special note can be made of the following, beginning on the north side of High Street at its east end:

- The group opposite the Bell Hotel, consisting of a small cottage on the highway edge with a prominent rendered gable, a small gabled shop finished in deep Suffolk pink, the Chinese Cottage Restaurant, listed and set back behind an attractively-detailed forecourt, and the house fronting the Baptist Church, of brick under a hipped slate roof though with some modern replacement windows;
- While the majority of properties in this part of the High Street are on or closely related to the road frontage, mention must be made of the Baptist Church of 1823, set at the back of a deep plot but now most obvious from the adjacent car park of the Crown Hotel. It is square in plan, of two storeys, with walls roughcast or weatherboarded under a hipped slate roof. In its setting and appearance it is quite distinctive, though of course nowhere near the scale of the parish church across the road;
- The Crown Hotel, an appropriately self-important facade with elevations rendered and painted primrose yellow;
- the next group is extremely varied in character and finishes, with views through to The Cottage, and ending with a late-Victorian building in red brick with prominent yellow brick bands, and a projecting gable with an 1897 date-stone housing an attractive and appropriately-detailed shopfront for a ceramics business. An arched window head is dated 1897. The slight setback of the main facade is paved with cobbles;
- The group including Norfolk House as detailed above. Norfolk house itself is a two-storey building, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century with a steeply-pitched roof in traditional style partly hidden by a parapet. The delicately-modelled facade is of brown brick with red brick details, including attractive segmental heads to the small-paned sash windows. Its centrepiece is a fine timber door surround, set back in a small garden with ornamental conifers making a formal design statement in the street scene. Next door, the facade of the Tesco Express mistakenly tries to imitate aspects of its attractive neighbour. Proportions are altered, however, and the bland brickwork is meanly detailed.
- The adjacent group to the west, beginning with the weatherboarded side gable of Gower House, its frontage finished in pink render, and two properties of some substance, including a distinctive arcaded ground floor treatment at Red House;
- Following this, a pleasant two storey brick vernacular group leads to the petrol filling station, beyond which is The Furze, a large colourwashed house and unusually set back from the road, and Hawthorns, a listed 18<sup>th</sup> century house of timber framing faced in brick, roughcast and weatherboarding;
- The final significant grouping lies across New Town Road and includes Chelsea Cottage and Goose Cottage, new "Design Guide" properties. While the former is gabled and finished in pink render, the latter is

aligned parallel to the road and contrast with a buff finish. Both, like Hawthorns, are set back behind a low brick wall in well-stocked gardens, and complement the street scene in this location. Behind these two properties is Honey Dew, a small modern cottage fronting New Town Road. Local character is provided by the gambrel roof and the catslide dormers.

- To the west is the Rose and Crown, listed, with an appropriately commercial facade though sadly the forecourt and its boundaries could be improved. This part of the High Street ends with June Cottage, a tiny house set back from the road, and given a little visual weight by its decorated bargeboards.

On the south side, beginning again at the east:

- Beyond a key view of the church, Rolfe House, The Bell, a small cottage in russet render and Church Cottages all emphasise the slight bend in the street with their locations at the back edge of the pavement. The history of Rolfe House has not been assessed but it was in all probability designed by William White, responsible for the restoration and rebuilding of the church. The Bell was created from the former guildhall, dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and a fascinating secular survival of medieval social life in the village;
- To the west, a High Street frontage made more broken and random by modern alterations leads to an attractive sequence of listed and unlisted buildings again on the footpath edge, all with mainly vernacular details. The exception is Mill House, a double-fronted facade with bow windows, pink rendered walls and a parapet;
- This scale and positioning is retained with one or two interruptions as far as Ashdown. There are two particularly significant listed buildings beyond the prominent gable of the Tack Room, the first being half-timbered though with considerable alteration, the second (Ashdown) dating from around 1600 with a colourwashed brick frontage. Further along, the frontage opens up again with the car park to the surgery. Though good views are obtained of its attractive rear extension and neatly-designed gabled entrance, the gap in the frontage is perhaps too great in this context;
- The next house, The Limes, is a substantial early Victorian villa in gault brick, with a typically shallow-pitched hipped slate roof and a central Doric portico. The side entrance provides an important view of open countryside past a small range of outbuildings;
- To the west, the frontage is enclosed again with a varied group of one-and-a-half and two-storey properties, of various ages and mostly in the local facings. Set back from the pavement edge is The Dutch Gable, a quirky little building dated 1650 with grey painted brick, real window shutters and shaped gables. It stands behind its own small forecourt, disappointingly plain at present and ideal for a small formal design to complement the distinctive exterior. At the extreme west end of this group stands a post-war shop building with a first floor facade of picture windows in weatherboarding over a long plain fascia. This building is unfortunately out of scale and proportion with its setting which is regrettable given its prominent position as the first High Street property on the approach from the west.

The generally harmonious relationships between these distinct but mutually supporting buildings are based on their common evolution, and the traditional palette of facing materials in a limited range mostly of earth colours. These relationships are disrupted by buildings which conflict with the considerations outlined above. Examples are modern developments of identical buildings, properties with front areas designed and laid out on suburban lines, and buildings set back with little or no discernible treatment of the resulting frontage space. Examples of all of these can be found once again in the near vicinity of Norfolk House. In addition, the visual problems raised by the "One-Stop" shop have been covered above. On the same side of the High Street, Gull Court is an example of an overscaled building insufficiently articulated and without a proper relationship with the pavement edge.

Taken as a part of this character area are two sub-areas with definable characteristics.

#### ***Sub area 1A: Mill Lane***

This is an extension of the older part of the village but with greater informality. The lane is a roughly surfaced public footpath, and leads past simply-detailed individual houses with roofs parallel or perpendicular to the lane, at first within well-defined plots lining both sides of the lane. A pronounced dogleg closes views from the High Street and leads to a more informal area defined to the east by the remnant of Mill Meadow backed by the mature trees associated with the churchyard and the cemetery. Views northwards are presided over by the church tower. The houses on the west side are more varied, with two new ostentatious dwellings: front curtilage boundaries have generally disappeared, and the gradual loss of enclosure gives attractively-filtered views out to open countryside past the roundhouse the former mill and Mill Barn Farmhouse. The farmhouse dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, is listed, and makes a picturesque grouping, having been divided into four cottages and then recombined. Its list description dates the surviving brick roundhouse of Thorpe Little Mill from around 1820, though a mill is clearly shown in this position by Chapman and André in their 1777 county map.

### ***Sub-area 1B: churchyard***

The churchyard area falls into three units. Firstly there is the area occupied by the church itself. This has the most formal character, linked as it is with the approach to the north porch from the High Street. The slight angle of the church as seen from this viewpoint is most attractive, the refaced late medieval porch being set against the warm red clay tiles of the nave roof and a three-quarter view of the fine 16<sup>th</sup> century west tower with its facings of diapered brick. The remainder of the church dates from 1875 to the designs of William White, a prolific church architect not well represented in Essex. Closer to, the setting of the church is not as urbane as the proximity of the High Street might suggest. While the relationship between the church and the Bell Hotel is pleasant, there is a lack of enclosure to the north, and a small hut near the north porch is an eyesore. The south side of the church gives way to an attractive combination of mown and wild churchyard areas, with the site of the Saxon church marked with timber posts. There are footpath connections to west and east, though the latter path through the lychgate is locked at present.

This area in turn leads further south to the current cemetery and its reserve area to the west, studded with - and almost totally enclosed by - mature trees. Further south again, there is an overgrown area of grass and shrubs leading through to the mature woodland where the Area boundary joins Station Road. This area creates a strong buffer to the south, and the vegetation is part of the setting of the church and of the Area as a whole in wider views of the village from this direction.

### ***2. Outer High Street and Colchester Road***

*Represented here is the western extension of the medieval village towards Thorpe Green.*

This part of the Area is characterised by a greater variety of residential built development on the north side of the road, usually within well-defined curtilages of generally suburban scale. Houses are set back in their gardens, the street scene is more spacious, and mature trees become dominant. No particular rules can be derived from the buildings apart from those associated with "good manners" in development terms. Interest and importance derives from the continuing sinuosity of High Street, so that various buildings perform an important function in closing and defining views, although they are unexceptional and can only be regarded as "neutral" in terms of the Area's appearance.

The character of this part of the main road is also dependent on the substantial frontage to Comarques. This fine listed house dates from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and has a double-range plan faced in warm red brick. Its entrance front shows signs of continuous development and is almost completely screened from public view by a substantial belt of trees. The road frontage is bounded by a wall and fence to the High Street which with another bend in the road effectively creates the north western entrance into the village. On the other side of the road, the well-proportioned late Georgian facade of the Old Vicarage (1823) is more open to view. Its facades of gault brick under a shallow hipped slate roof are softened by imposing specimen trees behind the front boundary fence. Some corrugated metal structures opposite the Old Vicarage disrupt the scene and are a negative feature.

### ***3. Western junction area***

*This is the eastern tip of the High Street and the junction with Landermere Road. It represents the last remaining part of the medieval village to be considered.*

The roundabout at the south eastern end of the High Street is very important in terms of the townscape of Thorpe. It is the other end of the older part of the village, but as a modern traffic intersection it could be visually disastrous. That it is not is a tribute to the quality of the surrounding buildings, their variety of forms and interrelationships, and the different ways in which the various routes away from the intersection are treated.

Visual enclosure is assured on the south side of the junction by a sequence of attractive houses, beginning next to the lych gate. Like the buildings in the High Street, they are of simple, unostentatious form, with roofs parallel to the main road. Both The Trossachs and Oakley House are colourwashed under roofs of plain clay tiles: Oakley House has an attractive decorative eaves detail of Gothic styling which is similar to that of a house in Great Oakley. Ivy Cottage is small and colourwashed, while Ivy House is a more rambling structure faced in red brick. These houses are generally a little grander and more spaced-out than those in the High Street, yet they make a convincing group. The modern brick house next to Oakley House makes the contrast by presenting its well-detailed gable.

Another contrast is provided by 1-4 Landermere Road, a terrace of modest colourwashed cottages, under a concrete tile roof, rising from the back of the pavement. Their townscape contribution is crucial in partially screening views from the east, and framing the church, its lych gate and Rolfe House. The eye is also led northwards along Landermere Road, which again curves and presents no long vista. Enclosure is promoted in an

entirely different way by The Abbey on the north eastern corner. Here a large property dating from the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century is screened by mature trees so that the decorative projecting entrance bay is most prominent. Its important brickwork details, including diagonally-set chimney stacks and stepped gables, are rendered and immaculately finished in white and contrast with the substantial roof of old clay tiles.

Eastwards, the second part of the junction is framed by mature trees. This junction, therefore, is in a space created and modulated by its surrounding buildings, how they interrelate and how they frame views.

#### **4. Landermere Road**

*This is a small area north of the eastern end on the High Street, containing some older buildings and physically distinct from surrounding modern developments.*

Varied building groups here line the outside of the slight bend, closing views from the junction while announcing the village centre from the north. All the buildings relate positively to the street apart from the modern semis between the Methodist Church and the Police Station. Frontage treatment assumes greater importance in these three-quarter views and the existing hedges provide an attractive foil to more prominent parts of buildings such as the projecting porch of the Chapel and the white facades of “Three Steps”. Materials and forms are again simply and unselfconsciously handled. The exception is the Police Station with two integral cells reached by a barrel vaulted passage and a Magistrates Court. It was built in the 1840's in mock Tudor style, the red brick facades being enlivened by blue brick diapering and yellow brick features. The Police Station was listed grade II in July 2000.

#### **5. Eastern junction and Abbey St/Frinton Road**

*This part of the area has developed more sporadically along one of the main roads through the village.*

In contrast to the other junction, the eastern half of the crossroads is defined by mature trees with the surrounding buildings taking a secondary role. Only Charfield, a single unlisted cottage in deep russet- pink stands out, on the back edge of the footpath on the south-eastern side of the junction. The stone War Memorial and its formal frame of iron lamp posts are not quite prominent enough to hold this area together in visual terms, given the considerable extent of the road surface at the junction.

From this point, a line of buildings is visible along the south side of Frinton Road. The weatherboarded gable of the photocopying office is important in views in both directions, projecting forward to the back edge of the footpath. Some modern houses intervene before a small group of Victorian terraced houses, again given additional prominence by their relatively forward position. Two pairs of council houses take the built edge of the village to the bend in the road and a group of mature trees helps to close the view.

Opposite stands a disparate group of unexceptional, mostly modern detached dwellings, generally keeping to a building line but with a variety of frontage treatments. Frontage walls are staggered back on either side of Oak Close, a conventionally-planned modern development of modest detached houses with dark stained weatherboarding at first floor level. Beyond this, Bell Cottages help define the view as a 19<sup>th</sup> century group set further forward, with a prominent end gable and substantial chimneys.

The Area continues along Frinton Road, the north side taking in open fields with hedgerow frontages past The Laurels, a cottage formed from two tiny dwellings set gable end to the road in the centre of a small plot. Beyond this, hedgerows intervene until The Elms is reached, a fine listed half-timbered house with an interesting and underutilised sequence of farm buildings.

The other side of the road is screened by mature trees, and comprises access to the recreation ground, a group of modern pavilions and pasture. At the eastern edge of the Area, Dairy Cottage and two pairs of semi-detached dwellings line Hall Lane in an informal manner: the latter are much altered and extended, with a variety of frontage treatments.

#### **6. Station Road**

*Like Frinton Road, this is the later development of a long-established route out of the village.*

Station Road, like the north western end of High Street, forms an effective gateway to the village. The straightness of this section of road is enclosed by mature trees at either end. On the west side stand a pleasant row of inter-war houses in brick and pebbledash, their roofscape and chimneys making an attractive scene with the woodland at the southern edge of the Area. This woodland acts with the bend in the road to close off longer views.

Buildings on the east side are more varied. Nearest to Frinton Road stand a sequence of older, vernacular buildings in a staggered relationship set back from the road. The most attractive is the weatherboarded Bowling Green Cottage, with its steeply-pitched slate roof and low, small-paned casements. To the south, the frontage opens out with the garage and the curtilage to the Sports and Social Club, which is a bland single-storey building typical of its period. Remaining properties date mostly from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and have been heavily altered, before the entrance to Thorpe Hall is reached, combining piers and walls of yellow brick and stucco with evergreens. The gate lodge appears to have been altered, and is surprisingly suburban in appearance.

### **7. Former Thorpe Hall**

*The south eastern part of the Area comprises the site of the Hall, its secluded pleasure grounds and associated parkland towards the village.*

The now demolished Thorpe Hall dates originally from 1668, but was rebuilt in 1823. It gained a new lease of life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century while occupied by Lord and Lady Byng. Most recently, it was in use as a retirement home and fell into disrepair. The Hall was not considered to be listable. The land associated with the Hall and within the Conservation Area operates on three layers. Firstly, there is the area used by the village for formal recreation: this is a grassed area with play equipment, well-screened by mature hedgerows on most sides. Adjacent to this is an area of denuded parkland through which runs the main approach from Station Road, a sweeping drive lined on the south side by mature oaks of imposing appearance. Finally, there are the pleasure grounds surrounding the former house as laid out by Lady Byng: these include lawns, a rose garden, and a sequence of lakes leading through a cascade to a sunken rock garden. While the house has now been lost, the gardens are still attractively laid out and maintained, and entirely screened from outside view. The Registered parkland therefore continues to provide a setting for this part of the village, but in a low-key and unostentatious manner.

### **Summary**

The older part of the village is characterised by its sinuous street pattern, closely defined by buildings with generally simple massing. These properties are distinct from one another, but mutually supportive given their scale, simple detailing and harmonious materials and colour finishes. An important related area groups these buildings in a slightly looser though still related pattern around the western part of the crossroads. Other roads are all visually enclosed to longer views, but the pattern of built development is less consistent: older buildings may be prominent in forward positions by the road edge while some are set back. Remaining development similarly lacks consistency either in materials, position or frontage treatment, though the better sequences support the visual function of these streets as entrances to the village.

## **APPRAISAL MAPS**

The Appraisal Maps show the above information in graphic form. Because of its complexity, the village has been divided in two, with maps separately showing structural elements and visual quality for each part.

## **SUGGESTED ENHANCEMENTS: BUILDINGS**

- Improvement or removal of hut north of north porch in churchyard;
- Reconsideration of standard signage on commercial properties in the High Street, for example Bairstow Eves, Tesco Express.
- Reconfiguration of petrol filling station, High Street, to be more sympathetic to the design and siting of adjacent buildings;
- Long-term solution for the Thorpe Hall estate which recognises and develops the importance of the Registered garden.

## **SUGGESTED ENHANCEMENTS: CURTILAGES**

- Repaving and incidental planting of ill-considered forecourts with or without boundary treatment on High Street: for example Tesco Express and the terrace of shops opposite;
- General improvement of under-used spaces behind High Street frontages;

- Replacement of current chain link fence between Crown PH car park and Baptist Church, most appropriately with 1.5m brick wall to promote enclosure without obscuring the Church;
- Improvement of curtilages and boundary treatments of Forge Garage and the Sports and Social Club, Station Road, to promote visual interest and enclosure. Brick walls and unit paving might be considered.

### **SUGGESTED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS**

- Complete overhaul of setting of Gull Court, including its frontage to High Street, introducing more interesting paving patterns;
- Resurfacing of entrance to Mill Lane and the car park behind Oaks Restaurant with unit paving.

### **ADDITIONAL CONTROLS**

The character of Thorpe is derived from the varied character of its constituent buildings and the sequences of spaces they enclose. These properties have been subject to continuous evolution, sometimes over many centuries. There are no largely unaltered set pieces or formal layouts which might benefit from additional controls to retain or promote consistency. The current dispositions of brick, white render or coloured render in street facades, for example, is not considered to be a suitable subject for an article 4 direction. No additional controls are therefore suggested. Instead, supplementary planning guidance should be considered to prompt those responsible for the maintenance and improvement of property to reflect the items of interest outlined in this appraisal and to be neighbourly and considerate in all future operations in the Area.

### **BOUNDARY REVIEW**

The heart of the Conservation Area is the High Street and its traditionally-scaled frontages which complement each other with their generally simple massing and limited palette of facing materials. Closely associated with the High Street are Mill Lane and the churchyard. Historically, part of the importance of the village has been its position at a relatively important crossroads, and the western junction today retains that significance by virtue of its setting within a group of older buildings. It is therefore highly appropriate in principle for all these locations to be included in the Conservation Area. Map 6 indicates those areas thereby considered to be justified in absolute terms for inclusion in the Area.

The current Area boundary includes many other locations which require special justification on more relative, subjective grounds, for example to help resist unusual development pressures or to promote enhancement.

#### ***New Town Road***

This road, intended as the spine of a major expansion of the village, now has an inconsequential junction with High Street and is unmade. The Area as currently designated contains some modern properties behind the High Street frontages. That on the north side, Honey Dew is of one-and-a-half storeys with a gambrel roof: it is therefore designed with reference to the local vernacular. On the south side, and set further back from the High Street behind the garden of Hawthorn, are two post war houses. The Oake and Hawthorn End, of standard design and materials with no concessions to their setting. There is a fine oak tree immediately to the north east but this is in the neighbouring property. There is some value in the inclusion of Honey Dew as far as a simple and understandable boundary is concerned but little in the other two dwellings. They are therefore suggested for exclusion.

#### ***Colchester Road***

Interlinked with the essential core of the Area are approach roads that offer glimpses of the historic core of the village or hint at the relative importance of the village as a whole. The most important is Colchester Road, the approach from the north west containing two considerable listed houses at the Old Rectory and Comarques. The character of these and the continuity of this approach with the High Street argue for its continued inclusion. The only question mark hangs over Rondor, the most distant house on the south west side of Colchester Road. As a modern house with limited mature planting, this house fits in more with the sporadic developments surrounding Thorpe Green. Its neighbour, Comarques Cottage, is evidently an older property and shares the more mature setting of Comarques itself. The current boundary has the benefit of simplicity, however, and the existing

designation is justified on this score because the issues are finely balanced.

### ***Landermere Road***

Landermere Road contains a collection of pleasant residential properties and public buildings such as the Police Station and the Chapel underlining Thorpe's local importance. Some modern properties with little visual or historic merit are also included, particularly following the decision to include the Police Station in the Area. The Police Station is however a distinctive building and forms the effective edge of those parts of Landermere Road with any architectural interest it is listed Grade II. The existing designation is therefore supported.

### ***The south east end of the Area***

It is believed that conservation areas should have simple, "smooth" boundaries wherever possible, as they relate most to the character of locations rather than to individual buildings. The character areas in this part of Thorpe comprise Thorpe Hall gardens and park, and two frontage roads. Issues surrounding the designation of these character areas are therefore to some extent interlinked, in that support for one character area raises the eligibility of its neighbours.

### **Frinton Road**

This is a major road feeding into the Area. The small collection of vernacular properties on the south east side of the junction with Station Road are considered above for automatic inclusion. Adjacent properties on the south side of Frinton Road provide some visual support, particularly from a terraced group and a pair of Council semis all in traditional village scale. Properties on the north side, however, are more varied in appearance, are mostly of post war date, and though deriving access from Frinton Road do not either relate to historic development patterns or create discernible townscape. Oak Close, included in its entirety as an estate development north of Frinton Road, is at odds with the "historic frontage" basis of the core part of the Area. Though pleasant in its own terms, its connection with Frinton Road is unexceptional. Bell Cottages opposite the access to the recreation ground alone act as a kind of gateway to the village and hint at the historic character of the centre of the village. Even The Laurels and Elm Farm, of historic importance, do not relate visually to the rest of the village or provide a coherent entrance to it. Properties on Hall Lane are heavily-altered cottages with little relationship with the village centre.

### **Station Road**

Beyond those buildings and gardens identified for automatic inclusion, Station road consists of a pleasant though unexceptional row of houses on its west side, while on the east side stand the Forge Garage, the Club, a group of more altered (and therefore less worthy) houses and the gates and lodge to the Hall. None of this relates to the pattern of development identified as essential to the character of the core of the village.

### **Thorpe Hall Estate**

Both the above locations border the open fields north of Thorpe Hall which quite obviously introduces an entirely new kind of character to those urban and suburban streets and spaces noted above. Whether included in the Registered site or not, the park could be said to help define the setting of the village and therefore to have been an element of its character for many years. Conservation Area status might be a useful additional statutory tool to add to the Register entry to ensure that future decisions are made in the most appropriate circumstances. If so, the question is whether the Thorpe village area needs to extend over the park or whether a specific conservation area covering Thorpe Hall would be a better way of identifying the issues involved.

### **Conclusion**

The character and appearance of conservation areas is easier to define when they are as tightly-defined and as consistent as practicable. They are thus easier to preserve and enhance, and the Council's finite resources can more easily be applied to issues of undoubted interest and importance.

In this particular case, the designation of Thorpe Hall as a conservation area is supported, but as an individual area on its own terms. The de-designation of Frinton Road and Station Road is recommended because these streets do not have the necessary architectural or historic interest in their own right and with the separation of the village and the park there is no need to consider regular boundaries in the intervening locations. The implications for these suggestions are shown on map 6. However, it is important to note that the Parish Council does not support any reduction in the existing Conservation Area.