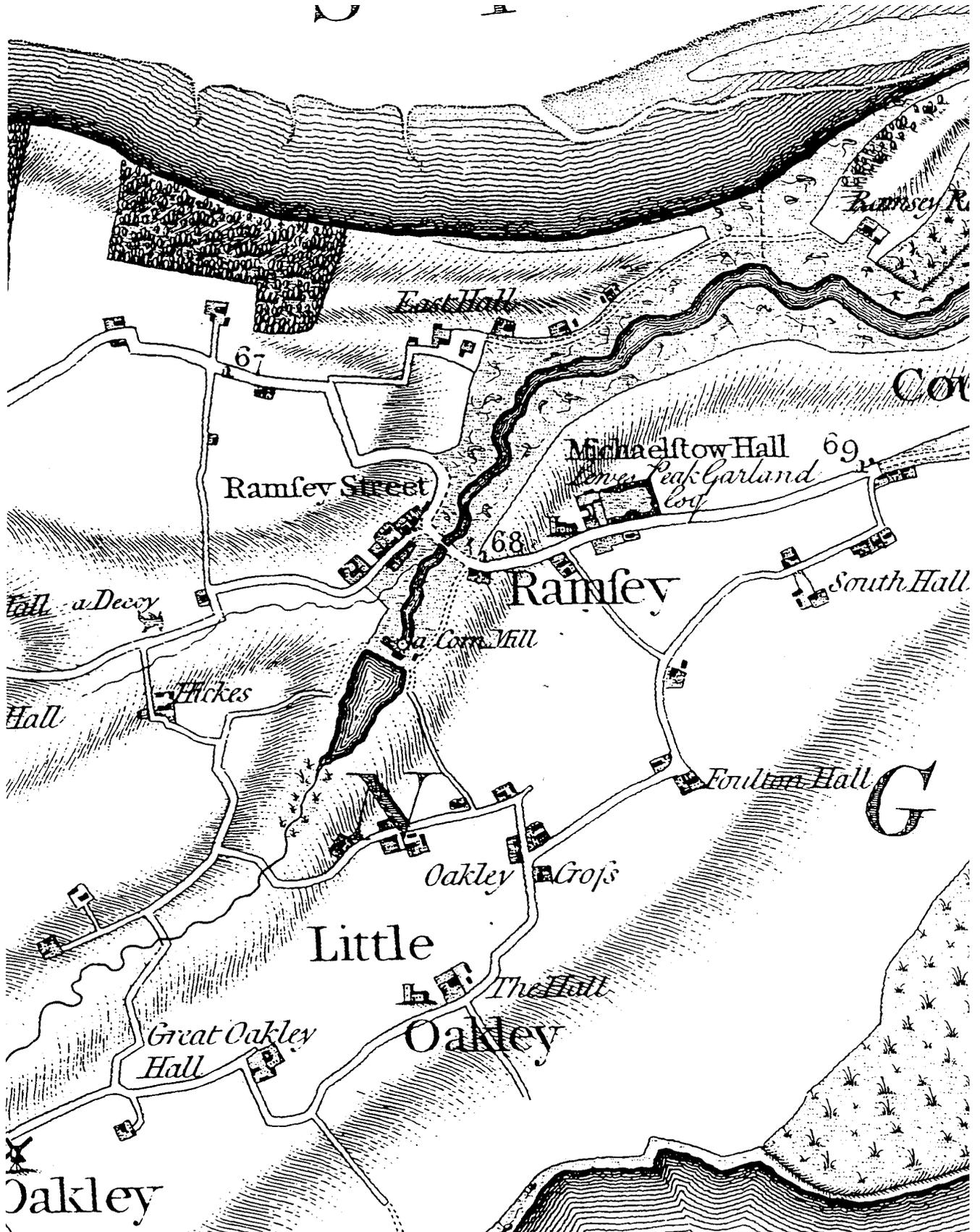




Ramsey Conservation Area



Ramsey 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 essential character of Ramsey Conservation Area is of a relatively short, tightly-defined, traditional village street, closely lined with vernacular properties with others forming strong groupings away from the road. The generally limited scale of these properties contrasts with occasional larger buildings such as the listed farmhouses and the prominent post mill, though the restricted palette of facing materials applies equally to all these structures.

Ramsey Conservation Area

LOCATION

Ramsey Conservation Area includes the majority of the southern half of the main part of the village, off the B1352 road between Dovercourt and Mistley and immediately north of the A120 bypassing Dovercourt to the north. The Conservation Area was designated on 21 September 1991 and there have been no boundary alterations since.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

The village lies in the valley of Ramsey Creek, between a ridge carrying the main road to Mistley and a ridge to the south on which stands the Parish Church of St. Michael. The 1777 Essex Map of Chapman and André defines Ramsey as the area at the top of the hill surrounding the church and Michaelstow Hall: the village, and the current Conservation Area, is represented by the settlement known as Ramsey Street.

The church is an impressive building, dating back to the 12th Century with square-headed Elizabethan windows to the chancel and a massively-butressed west tower. Michaelstow Hall, a neo-Georgian redevelopment dating from 1902, was in use as Chafford School in the mid 1960's and has in turn been re-developed as a Residential and Nursing Home.

Bridgefoot Farm can be identified on Chapman and André's map, with buildings strung along both sides of The Street almost as far as White House Farm, a fine listed timber-framed house dating from the mid 16th century. Also shown on the map is a corn mill with a substantial pond on Ramsey Creek to the south of the village. Mill Farm and Millpond Farm still identify its general location.

The current mill was originally built in 1842 and had thus replaced the former mill on the Creek by the time of the Ordnance Survey edition of 1874. Buildings on the north side of The Street had virtually connected Bridgefoot Farm with White House Farm by this date. Development on the south side was more concentrated around the junction, the road to the south leading past a smithy and the National School on its way to the church.

The mill was last worked in 1939. By 1974 it was on the verge of collapse, and was rescued by Michael Organ and the Suffolk Mills Group. A network of steel ties was inserted to stabilise the frame, and the external cladding has been replaced.

The church and the village are now separated by the main A120 Harwich Road which passes close to the southern end of the village and intrudes in the otherwise pleasant views across the valley of Ramsey Creek. While development on the road to the church remains sporadic and piecemeal, the village has continued to expand, most notably to the north east where a large developed area is within the Development Boundary though outside the Conservation Area.

CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARIES

Starting at its north-east corner, the Area boundary includes Bridgefoot Farmhouse and buildings to the rear, before running along the backs of properties on the north side of The Street. It takes in the mill and the land either side of its drive, and continues along rear property boundaries to include the site of the outbuildings of White House Farm, since redeveloped as Windmill Close.

Running along the south side of Wix Road as it passes close to the A120, the Area boundary takes in the fields and paddocks between the village and the main road before rejoining domestic rear boundaries at the recent redevelopment opposite Back Lane, and returning to The Street to exclude post-war houses opposite The Castle.

The Area therefore comprises two redevelopment sites and open areas important to the setting of the Area on the south side of The Street, as well as significant buildings on The Street/Wix Road and the land associated with them.

REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN POLICY CONTEXT

The mill and the open land to the south of The Street are beyond the Development Boundary, and the latter area is also part of a Local Green Gap defining the north side of Dovercourt. The Coastal Protection Belt also limits development on the eastern side of the village and on Church Hill. Much of the village is within a Flood Risk area. A country park proposal is to be established east of the village either side of the A120 with access from Church Hill.

AREA APPRAISAL

The eastern end of the Area

The entrance to the village from the main road is now via a small brick bridge over the Creek. A small, barren triangular area at the ensuing road junction is fronted by Bridgefoot Farm, an attractive two-and-a-half storey listed building, dating back to the 17th century, with sash windows in a smooth rendered façade under an old clay tile roof with dormers and prominent chimney stacks. A range of weatherboarded barns and stables to the north are partly screened by a prominent conifer hedge. The rendered front boundary wall of the farmhouse, with its semi-circular brick copings, is another important feature of the street scene. With one or two exceptions, the remaining development surrounding this road junction is post-war and of no historic or architectural interest.

The Street

This particular village main street is probably the most tightly-defined in Tendring District. There is no footpath on one side of the narrow carriageway, and only a diminutive pavement on the other: many of the houses spring from the back edge of the carriageway and the overwhelming character is of dense development and a strong feeling of enclosure. The largest single group of buildings are the one-and-a-half or two storey vernacular cottages with pitched or gambrel roofs parallel to the road. Contrast is provided by short front gardens, and by the occasional gable adding interest to the street scene. Roofs are typically of old clay tiles though there are some of natural slate and machine tiles. Dormers have gables or are flat roofed; those associated with gambrel roofs tend to have catslides. There is a limited amount of weatherboarding: facades are otherwise generally rendered, with some facing brickwork. Some structures are set back from The Street: there may be incidental views through nearby gaps in frontages, and the treatment of the spaces between them and The Street assumes considerable importance to the character of the Area.

From the triangle in front of Bridgefoot Farm, The Street runs south westwards as the sinuous spine of the Area. Next to Bridgefoot Farm is The Castle public house, a pretty vernacular double-pile building attractively finished in yellow render with sash windows and a clay-tiled roof. A small semi-octagonal extension at its northern end gives additional character to the street scene. The pub forecourt to the south is rather too open, with temporary bollards and chains. The pub garden to the rear is attractively planted-out though the larch lap fencing to the rear of the pub and the flat roofed sectional garage are alien features.

Next comes a terrace of five properties. The centre three show some of the original character, with facades of red brick articulated by band courses and vertical stripes of yellow brickwork. One house has the original sash windows, while another still retains its slate roof. The greatest alterations have occurred to the end properties: the most northerly has been converted from two cottages and is faced in green render with replacement windows, while the house at the other end has plain panelled pargetting finished in a warm ochre colour. A gravelled drive leads to a pair of post-war semis and two older cottages, both rendered and colour-washed with slate roofs. Across the road, two modern houses in orange brick with darker red brick quoin features make an effective entrance with the terrace to the remainder of the village street. The limited pavement in front of these houses has not yet been reinstated and needs attention.

Beyond a post-war detached house next to the semi-detached pair mentioned above and which break all the foregoing rules, stand Herb Cottage and Bridge House. Their one-and-a-half storey facades of rendered walls under a gambrel roof make a delightful contrast with Wroxham, the boldly-projecting front gable of which leads on to Friars Cottage and No. 16, once again of one-and-a-half storeys and set back slightly from the road edge. Opposite, on the south side of the road, is Sunny Bank, a small vernacular cottage now finished in pebble-dashing. The prevailing scale is maintained on the south side of the road by Swan House, a small partly-weatherboarded cottage with a gambrel roof.

The Gables and two subsequent cottages, nos. 19 to 22, alter the development pattern on the north side. The Gables is a tall two storey building of late 19th Century neo-vernacular design. A corner doorway in a canted bay under a projecting half-timbered gable suggests some form of communal use in the past. There is a delightful bell pulley by the main entrance. The following buildings are comprised in two blocks with prominent gables

and facing lean-to roofs in a symmetrical arrangement to the main road. The block next to The Gables retains a substantial chimney stack and decorative window heads. Other original features of interest are lost under a smooth rendered finish surrounding replacement windows.

Undistinguished modern houses on the south side face an interesting group set back from the road. They comprise a group of three workers cottages, with slate roofs, chimneys parallel to the ridge direction, and eaves details formed by diagonally-set brickwork. These are now all rough rendered with replacement windows. Next door is a double-fronted house, again made plain by alterations over the years though with a distinctive central panel over its arched front door. The deep cottage gardens are relatively well-stocked and are a significant feature in the street scene at this point.

A public footpath leads past the Wesleyan Chapel dated 1854, of red brick with yellow brick details, plain pointed windows and with a rendered side extension. The path leads out to open fields, though the ridge below which the village sits is distant and there are no large scale views. The path itself, part of the Essex Way, is overgrown at this point and would be improved by better maintenance. The southern approach is informally laid out as a car park but not unattractive in the circumstances. It is reached from an unadopted gravel drive serving a variety of houses, of which the first two on the north side, Mill View of 1904, are a pair of brick houses with good chimney stacks and attractive cast iron front railings with their original iron copings. Both houses have replacement windows, and one is smooth rendered.

On the road frontage, Chaise House is of one-and-a-half storeys, finished with colour-washed render under a gambrel roof of clay tiles. Its low frontage wall with posts and chains frames a small front garden with attractive planting. Keeble Cottage is also one-and-a-half storeys, of pink render under a clay tiled roof with flat roofed dormers. Again, a low brick frontage wall screens an attractive front garden. The side elevation of this property to the gravelled lane mentioned above is detailed in a non-traditional way and consequently less attractive in the street scene. A garage with an asymmetrical roof is reached through a low rendered archway, while the wall is again of pink render but has clay tiled copings.

Opposite is Rose Cottage, a small house substantially extended at the rear and now finished in render with aggressive fake half-timbering. The sectional double garage is also an unwelcome feature in this context. The drive between the house and the garage provides one of the few glimpses away from The Street. Next on the south side are two groups of modern houses. The first is of three houses, one and a half storeys in height, with rendered walls under a roof of plain clay tiles. The next group, also of three houses, contrasts a gambrel roofed wing with weatherboarding with a projecting rendered gable which acts as a visual termination to development on this side of the road. A central access way is neatly detailed, but its generous width is carried down its entire length and provides an excessive and unfiltered view of the A120.

Beyond two unprepossessing bungalows opposite, two cottages frame the entrance to The Mill. The first, The Old Barn, is the more substantial, with a gambrel roof of concrete tiles over panelled gabled elevations. The other is a traditional gambrel roofed cottage, gable end to the road, with a substantial two storey rear extension. Further up The Mill drive stands Old Mill Cottage. Here again, a modest original cottage, this time with a thatched roof, has been given a larger rear extension.

The drive continues to The Mill through an archway of conifers into a small paddock surrounded by mature hedgerows. To the left stands The Mill House, a two storey mid-Victorian building with rough rendered walls under a hipped slate roof. While windows have been replaced at first floor level, the original Victorian sashes survive on the principal elevation at ground floor level while there are small-pane sashes to the side and to the rear overlooking a small yard. A weatherboarded outbuilding with a slate roof and rear out-shut stands on the other side of the drive.

The Mill stands at the top of the enclosure. It is a post mill, the three storey timber-framed and weatherboarded upper section rotating above a two storey red brick drum with plain boarded doors and sash windows. While there are no extensive views to the north, there is a pleasant view south-westwards over the adjoining paddock. There is a small group of single storey outbuildings to one side of The Mill; one part has a pitched roof of Welsh slate, but the rest are flat roofed and do not enhance the setting of The Mill as a listed building.

Back on The Street, a bungalow with an astonishingly well-maintained front hedge leads to White House Farmhouse, a beautiful vernacular property of five bays, white rendered with small-paned sash windows under a spreading clay tiled roof. Beyond this, and on the edge of the Conservation Area, is Windmill Close, a small but relatively densely developed estate of detached houses, with walls of red brick and render under roofs which are variously tiled and pantiled. Immediately beyond this is a bungalow and a track leading to livery stables and

further outbuildings, which are not Conservation Area material. The Street here is only feet away from the main A120, and the dense hedgerow screen is an important feature although outside the Area.

APPRAISAL PLAN

The above analysis has been used to generate Maps 1 and 2, indicating the essential structure of the Conservation Areas and its relative quality. Included in Map 2 are features regarded as either negative or neutral compared to the character and appearance of the Area, as follows.

Negative factors

Most buildings in the Area support its essential character, which they do by lining the sides of The Street or by forming coherent groups in a position set back from the road. In both cases, the identity of the village is enhanced and the strong sense of enclosure and special character is maintained.

The Street

The group of post-war houses south west of Back Lane and the bungalows north east of the drive to the mill fail to respond to the particular character of The Street either in design or in siting, and must be considered negative features.

Rose Cottage is an older building but its applied finishes are discordant given the limited palette of facing materials evident in the rest of the Area. Its concrete sectional garage is an unfortunate element in the street scene.

Main Road

The special character of the Area comes to an abrupt halt at the junction with Main Road leading to the roundabout on the A120. This is particularly unfortunate given the quality of Bridgefoot Farmhouse and the part that the junction plays in the setting of this listed building. The enhancement of this triangular area is suggested below.

Neutral factors

Three neutral areas are identified on Map 2. The new houses opposite Back Lane are not especially sympathetic to the character and appearance of the rest of The Street. They have their own styling, and do not form a coherent grouping. They are however built with a stronger relationship to the road than the buildings cited as negative features above. With the cottages opposite they help to announce the narrow section of the road, in contrast to the undistinguished houses leading to the junction with Main Road.

The rear access and parking associated with The new houses opposite the bungalows mentioned above were in the process of site landscaping works when viewed for the purposes of this report. It may be a little soon to question how well such works might be assimilated into the street scene, but it appears that the access is too regular and to relentlessly wide for this to be easy. The strong groupings of buildings on the street frontage are welcome, and rear parking is a necessary feature if this is to work, but the design of these elements is charmless at present. The rear access and circulation are therefore indicated as a neutral feature, but it is sincerely hoped that they will soften over time.

While the strong sense of enclosure in The Street is not as intense beyond the mill drive, buildings still front the main road. The internal logic of Windmill Close does not relate to the street frontage, and only the attractiveness of the house designs prevents it from being a negative feature in the Area as a result.

SUGGESTED ENHANCEMENTS: BUILDINGS

Rose Cottage

The removal of applied timber-framing and other finishes at Rose Cottage, and the replacement of the garage with an equivalent building of traditional construction, would enhance the Area.

SUGGESTED ENHANCEMENTS: CURTILAGES

The Castle PH

The car park and the forecourt of The Castle, like so many in the District, lack definition. This is particularly noticeable in Ramsey where the sense of enclosure is otherwise so strong in The Street. The improvement of paving surfaces and the better marking-out of the carriageway edge would improve the appearance of this otherwise attractive property with its well-stocked pub garden.

Open frontages

The bungalows described above as negative features have a relative open frontage to The Street, and front walls of concrete blocks between brick piers. The enclosure of The Street and its appearance would be improved with a reconsideration of these front walls – perhaps along the lines of the low brick wall in front of Keeble Cottage – and with some shrub or tree planting.

SUGGESTED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Main Road junction

The junction in front of Bridgefoot Farm is a wide area, paved entirely in tarmac. Most of this is road surface, though the small triangular space in the middle is treated in a similar manner. It contains a street light, a finger post, a seat and a sandwich board advertising The Castle.

Improvements might start with a reconsideration of the relative widths of the roads forming the junction, to see if any reduction can be made in the area of carriageway. Resulting spaces and the central triangle – if it survives this analysis – could then be considered. Any improvements would enhance the setting of Bridgefoot Farm as a listed building, the character of the Conservation Area and the appearance of the village as a whole by helping form a visual and functional buffer to the nearby A120 with its roundabout.

A120 Screening

The A120 runs close to the Conservation Area, though only at the western end of The Street, where it becomes Wix Road, is it in view. The Area includes the intervening paddocks, and the suggestion is that planting within the Area along the northern edge of the dual carriageway would strengthen existing planting, promote enclosure and soften the effect of the A120 on this part of the village.

BOUNDARY REVIEW

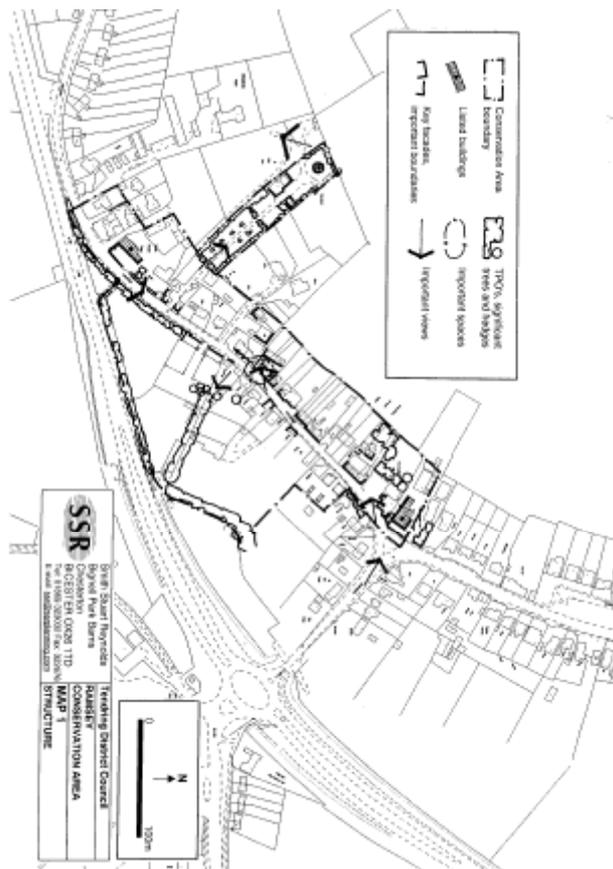
The boundaries of Ramsey Conservation Area have not been reviewed since its designation in 1991. Map 3 contains some limited proposals mainly aimed at regularising the situation as it has developed since designation.

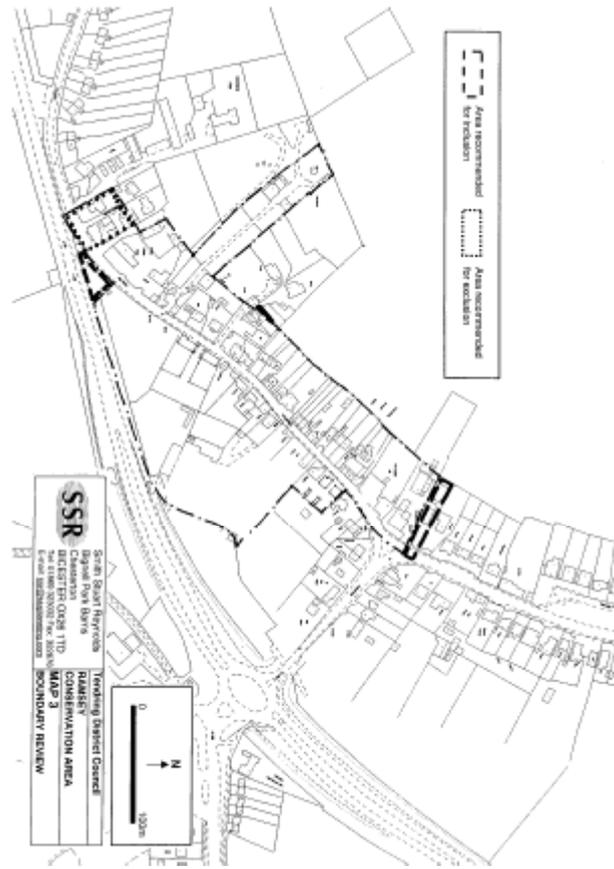
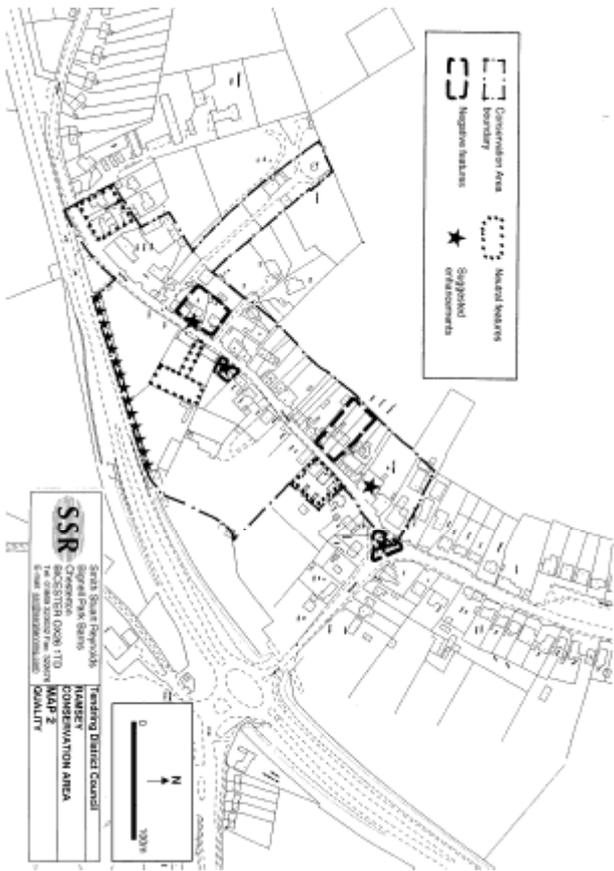
Windmill Close has been constructed on the site of farm buildings associated with White House Farm, the southern portion of which was included in the Area presumably as a precautionary measure. The current boundary runs through the middle of the development, indeed between a house and its garage. The boundary evidently needs adjustment. As the scheme has its own internal logic and does not relate strongly to the road frontage, it is recommended that the anomaly is removed by the exclusion of Windmill Close from the Area.

Three small additions are also suggested. Opposite Windmill Close, the rural character of Wix Road is heavily dependent on the surviving hedging screening the A120. While paddocks are already included to the east, it seems strange that the Area boundary leaves the edge of the dual carriageway precisely where it is closest to the public part of the Area and to White House Farm, a listed building. It is proposed therefore that the boundary continues along the edge of the A120 until it turns north along the western side of the lane separating White House Farm from Windmill Close.

According to the current Ordnance Survey maps and recent visual survey, the Area boundary cuts across the garden of the northern half of Mill View. This might easily be regularised at the same time.

Finally, the curtilage of Bridgefoot Farm extends to the north of the Area, including a prominent frontage with a dense hedge which is a significant feature in the triangular junction with Main Road. It is suggested that this location be included for consistency.







1. This view of Ramsey village from the direction of Michael's Church shows the relationship between the historic components of the village and the visual importance of the Mill. Though one or two historic properties are visible to the right of the picture, the Area extends only to the tightly-knit street to the left.



2. Bridgefoot Farm occupies a prominent position overlooking the triangular junction at the north eastern end of the Area. The yard to the right with its frontage planting is recommended for inclusion in the Area. The junction itself is excessively barren and could be improved with better surfacing and street furniture.



3. The Castle is an attractive building with pleasant grounds to the rear. Its forecourt is in contrast rather open and full enclosure would be a visual improvement. This particular view includes the houses served by Back Lane, which adds character to the appearance of the Area, otherwise dominated by frontage developments.



4. While the Mill is an important part of the local landscape it is less visible from the village until approached from T. Street. The Mill, its house, outbuildings and the drive itself make a fascinating group, which would be enhanced by improvements where possible to the less attractive parts of the compound.



5. This view is typical of the essential character of the Area. Traditional buildings closely line The Street, with limited or non-existent footpaths. Gables punctuate the view and contrast with roofs of traditional tiles or slates with simply-detailed dormers. The limited opportunities for planting are taken to soften the outlines of buildings.



6. While the street scene at the south western end of the village is less consistent, the character is maintained by buildings constructed with a close relationship with The Street. In this view, a manicured hedge and a traditional field boundary link the prominent structures and complete the visual framework of the Area.



7. The Wesleyan Chapel is an important feature in the Area, providing a contrast to the buildings fronting The Street and occupying a prominent position where the Essex Way descends from the north west. Better maintenance of the footpath at this location would be an enhancement.



8. This row of cottages has a different relationship to The Street from most older properties in the Area. The essential enclosure and character of the Area is maintained by their continuous frontages and in the way these front gardens contrast with frontage buildings and enhance the visual quality of the village



9. These post-war bungalows fronting The Street must regrettably be regarded as negative features because their siting and built form do not reflect the characteristics of the surroundings. The front gardens and walls are also visually disappointing and are suggested for enhancement in the report.



10. New houses near The Castle have many attractive design features but seem to be conceived more for their internal logic than for their contribution to the street scene. The nearer house has been placed close to the edge of the carriageway, however, and has a more positive impact than many of its modern neighbours.



11. Rose Cottage is evidently of some historic interest but this is overlain by the modern finishes which clash with the limited palette and neighbourly qualities of most other older buildings in the Area. Its garage is not of traditional construction and is unfortunately prominent in the street scene.



12. The Area includes some of Windmill Close, where facing materials and massing have been carefully chosen to reflect historic patterns in the county. However, the siting of these houses, and their lack of a proper relationship with the main road and White House Farmhouse, leads to the recommendation to exclude them all.