



THURSTASTON CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Prepared for Wirral Council by Donald Insall Associates Ltd, 2007 – Wirral Council 2009

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PREFACE

Background to the Study

This report has been prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council. Its purpose is to clarify the designation of the Conservation Area, which will protect and enhance the character of the Thurstaston Conservation Area.

Scope and Structure of the Study

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is based on the guidelines published by English Heritage ('Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' and 'Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas', both dated February 2006) and represents a factual and objective analysis. In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been used as the basis for this analysis:-

- Location and population
- Origins and development of the settlement
- Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
- Archaeological significance
- Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
- Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
- Character and relationship of spaces
- Prevalent and traditional building materials
- Local details
- Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
- Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
- Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
- Existence of any neutral areas

The document has been structured to encompass these areas of study and concludes with recommendations for the Conservation Area boundary and other matters such as provision of Article 4 Directions.

Existing Designations, Legal Framework for Conservation Areas and the Powers of the Local Authority

Since the 1967 Civic Amenities Act local authorities have been empowered to designate as Conservation Areas those areas within their districts which were considered 'special'. The subsequent Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 consolidated those powers and defined Conservation Areas as:-

"areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".

Such areas are diverse. They may be large or small; residential or commercial; civic or industrial; old or relatively modern. They may represent social ideals or civic pride. They may be specifically designed or speculatively produced; modest or grand. They may contain Listed Buildings of architectural or historic interest or may simply have local historic association. However, common to all will be an identifiable environmental quality which should be protected from unsympathetic redevelopment or alteration.

Wirral Council has designated 25 Conservation Areas throughout the Borough reflecting the variety of building styles and environments exhibited within its borders.

The content of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is clarified by national Planning Policy Guidance (PPG15): Planning and the Historic Environment and is supported by more recent Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13), which identifies as a key objective the need to ensure active management of the region's environmental and cultural assets.

The principles of these documents are further supported by Wirral Council's local Heritage Conservation policies contained within its Unitary Development Plan.

This legislation and policy framework enables the authority to exercise greater control over development within Conservation Areas and, where appropriate, this may be supplemented by the use of 'Article 4 Directions' to remove permitted development rights. In this way, minor changes, such as window replacement or loft conversions, which may be cumulatively detrimental, can be controlled.

National policy stipulates that local authorities have a duty to review, from time to time, their area to ensure that places of special architectural or historic interest are being protected. The boundaries of existing Conservation Areas may be revised, new areas may be designated and those areas which have been eroded to the extent that their special character has been lost may be de-designated.

Whilst the Council recognises that, for Conservation Areas to remain 'live' and responsive to a changing society, changes must and will occur, it nevertheless undertakes to ensure that all changes make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of its Conservation Areas and do not result in any serious loss of character or features.

Planning legislation supports the authority in this by increasing its control over development. It does this in the following ways:

- Buildings and structures may not be demolished without formal consent from the Council (Conservation Area Consent).
- Trees are protected and all work to them requires consent from the Council.
- New development is expected to reflect the quality of design and construction of the surrounding area and should make a positive contribution to the area's character.

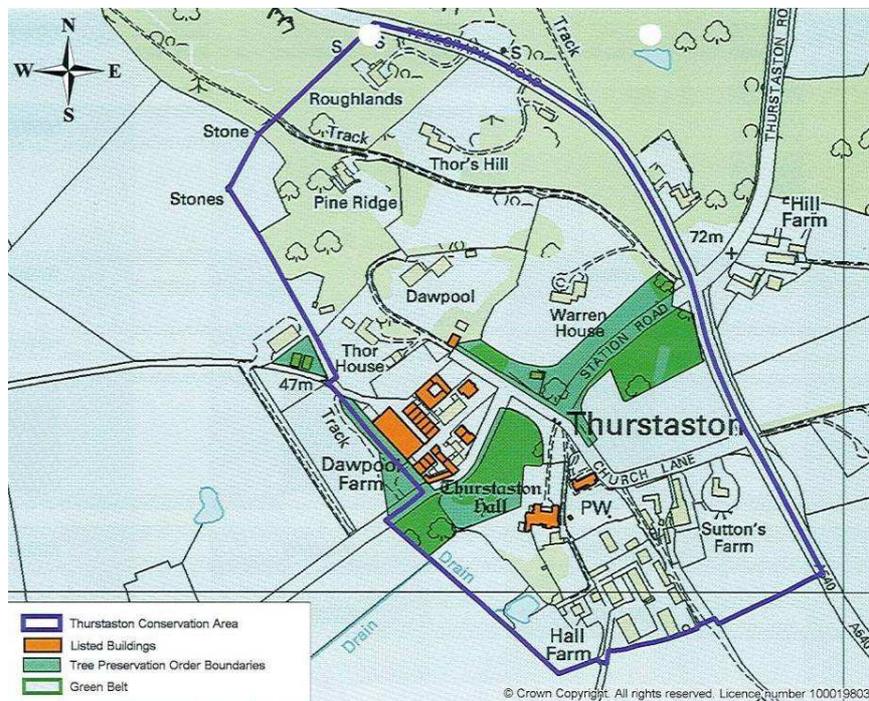
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- Local planning authorities may, if necessary, exercise even greater control by removing the basic permitted development rights of householders.
- Under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council has a legal obligation to ensure that "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance" of the area when formulating decisions on planning applications.

The first step to protecting the inherent qualities of a Conservation Area is having a thorough understanding of its character and Planning Policy Guidance PPG15 advises that "the definition of an area's special interest should derive from an assessment of the elements that contribute to (and detract from) it".

This should then underpin local policies for the area's protection. Such a definition requires a thorough appraisal of the area to assess the contribution of each element (e.g. buildings, boundaries, trees, surfaces, etc.) to the area's overall character. PPG15 notes that "the more clearly the special architectural or historic interest that justifies designation is defined and recorded; the sounder will be the basis for local plan policies and development control decisions".

Whilst an appraisal aims to identify the essential elements which give an area its character, it is not intended as a detailed evaluation of each building and feature. Therefore any buildings, features and details may still have importance even though not specifically referred to in the document and any omissions do not indicate lack of merit or interest.



Dating of buildings and sources: In undertaking this conservation area appraisal, age has been estimated on the basis of visual inspections from public areas only, map evidence (1844 Tithe map, OS maps from decades: 1870, 1890, 1930 and 1950s) and publications: The Hundred of Wirral, P Sulley, The History of Wirral, SJ Roberts and Wirral and its Viking Heritage, P Cavill, S Harding, J Jesch).

Many buildings have been altered considerably over time and would require detailed study to fully interpret. The dates provided in the gazetteer, unless otherwise stated are approximate and relate to the original phase of construction or if that cannot be determined the most prominent parts. Unless clear documentary evidence is referred to, the periods ascribed to buildings should not be regarded as definitive. Where the original period of construction has been estimated, fabric from earlier various periods may exist. This is particularly true of vernacular buildings in ancient settlements where building facades can have been successively remodelled and roofs changed from thatch (universal before the later C18) to slate. Date stones cannot always be relied upon as they could have been incorporated into substantial rebuilding.

References from Publications: Show in parenthesis and abbreviated as below and followed by page number.

The Hundred of Wirral, P Sulley, : HoW

The History of Wirral, SJ Roberts: HistW

Wirral and its Viking Heritage, P Cavill, S Harding, J Jesch.: WVH

PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

1.0 LOCATION

1.1 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

- 1.1.1 Thurstaston Conservation Area is located on the west side of the Wirral Peninsula approximately a mile inland from the shoreline of the Dee estuary. To the east, Station Road and Church Lane link the settlement to the ‘high road’ running between Chester and West Kirby (the A540). Station Road passes through the village and leads westwards to the River Dee shore and the Thurstaston Country Park. The park’s headquarters is based on the site of Thurstaston’s former station. The former railway line is now the Wirral Way, a linear path and cycle route linking with West Kirby to the north and Heswall and Parkgate to the south. Set within a rural landscape Thurstaston has remained a small community, little more than a hamlet, still separated from the suburban development of nearby Heswall, Pensby and Irby.

1.2 TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.2.1 Landscape and terrain has a considerable influence on the visual character of the conservation area. The settlement sits on the escarpment along the west side of the Wirral peninsular which slopes down to the Dee estuary. The general height of the escarpment edge is approximately 100m above sea level and at its northern end its landscape is characterised by outcrops of red sandstone and open heath land. Thurstaston lies below the steeper upper section of escarpment at an elevation of 60m,. Below the settlement farmland of open pastures fall more gently to the red cliffs above the Dee shore.



Station Road descending from A540



View from the 'Green' looking east

1.3 GENERAL USAGE

- 1.3.1 Up until the middle of the C19 Thurstaston was purely an agricultural settlement. With the construction of Dawpool House in the 1850s the area began to be appreciated as a desirable rural retreat away from the urbanised parts of the borough. Although long since demolished the site of the old Dawpool estate has been sub divided into large residential plots occupied by very substantial properties. A number of Thurstaston's farm buildings have been converted to residential use, most notably at Dawpool Farm. Nevertheless, the surrounding fields are still in agricultural use, Hall Farm remains active and a substantial 'rural' business has been developed at Church Farm, with farm shop, café, touring caravan site, farming, plantations and 'pick your own' market gardening.

1.4 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY AND STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

- 1.4.1 Thurstaston was designated as a Conservation Area in February 1981. As well as the historic settlement core, the boundary encompasses adjacent fields and the wooded hillside of the former Dawpool Estate in which now stand substantial but secluded residences. To the east the conservation boundary follows the A540 with the remainder of the area being defined along field and property divisions.

Not included within the designated Conservation Area but of some historic and visual interest is a zone to the north and east of the A540/Station Road junction which includes the group of sandstone buildings at Hill Farm (and adjacent structures), the Cottage Loaf public house and the sandstone cutting, (through which runs the A540).



Church yard view looking north with Hall, 1824 Tower and Church



Church yard view looking south with Suttons Farm Barn and Cottages

2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 EARLY HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF SURROUNDING AREA

Pre Norman Conquest: There are no reports of any significant archaeological finds which could shed light upon pre historic or post Roman precursors to the present settlement, if indeed any existed. It is now generally accepted that the north west of the Wirral Peninsula was occupied by settlers of Norwegian Viking origin who came across the Irish Sea following expulsion from Dublin in the late C10. Much attention by C19 antiquarians was given to the interpretation of the name 'Thurstaston'. A relationship was presumed with the strange free standing rock outcrop, about a mile distant, on Thurstaston Common, known as Thor's Rock, about which there were romantic notions of it having been a site of Viking ceremony and sacrifice. It is not known when this term for the rock came into use and its actual significance remains shrouded in the mists of time. C20 research casts considerable, if disappointing, doubt on the more lurid explanations and points to the Norse settlers already being Christian at the time of arrival. The name Thurstaston which appears to have undergone various mutations being referred to in the Domesday book as Turstanetone.

A Saxon / Viking settlement must have existed prior to the Norman conquest and most probably also a church as these already existed at the time of the Domesday survey in the 1080s. No obvious visible evidence remains from the Saxon / Viking period but there has been some speculation about the land form of the wooded knoll above the settlement and whether this was once a defensive site. It is understood that an excavation was undertaken in the 1960s but no evidence of occupation was found (Merseyside SMR).

The early manor or hamlet at Thurstaston appears to fit with the pattern of ancient (pre Conquest) settlements that lie along the sandstone escarpment of northwest Wirral. Nearby villages of Gayton, Heswall (Lower Village), Thurstaston and West Kirby are all at similar elevation, below the steeper slope

leading up to the crest of the escarpment and set back some ½ to ¼ mile from the shoreline of the Dee. This settlement pattern does not appear random but the influencing factors can only be conjectured. Why are the villages not along the coastline where the River Dee provided a means of communication and presumably some livelihood through fishing? It may have been easier to dig wells for water here than through the deeper layers of boulder clay on the shallower slopes above the Dee. In contrast to a river side location these settlements were centrally located within the lands farmed by their communities. Additionally the inland position may have been defensive; the river provided an element of insecurity by giving free passage to not only friend but also foe.

C 11 (Late): Following the Norman Conquest, the Manor of Thurstaston was granted to Robert de Rodelent (Rhuddlan). At his death in 1088 the estate was passed to his son Matthew who transferred title of the church at ‘Turtaniston’ to the Abbey of St Wuerburg at Chester. Where the earliest manor house was situated is not known but it could well have been on the site of the present Hall, although one C19 source has suggested that, ‘in the earlier part of the C19, an older hall or castle appeared to have existed more northward’, close to the sea’ and that ruins of this structure were reported to have been removed and used for building purposes. (HoW p86). There appears to be no later substantiation.



Thurstaston Hall



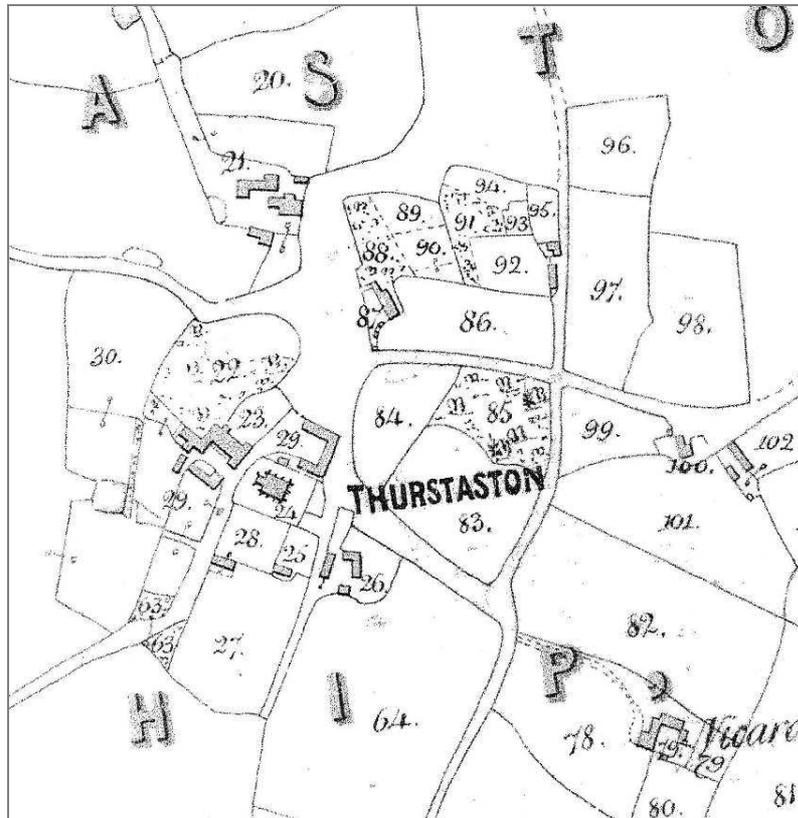
Early C19 church tower on site of medieval church

Middle Ages: Thurstaston was the centre of a parish that included the neighbouring village of Irby. The existing Thurstaston Manor house still contains fabric in its east wing dating from the mid C14, the church stood close by and around it will have been farm buildings and store houses associated with the manor and rectory together with humble cottages. Surrounding the settlement will have been the open strip fields and common grazing land which characterised the feudal agricultural system. Other than the Manor there are no visible structures which date from this period. Within the conservation area only Sutton Farm remains from before the Tithe Map of the 1830s. Although certainly in part pre C19 it is doubtful whether the present

farm house originates from any earlier than the later C17, a period of general rebuilding within the district.

2.2 Post Medieval to 19th Century Development

Post Medieval to Mid C19: The Tithe map shows the plan form of the settlement much as it probably had existed since the C17 but with some notable early C19 changes to church and rectory and possibly fewer dwellings than in previous centuries.



1830s Tithe Map

The Church shown was rebuilt in 1824 (HoW p89). Only the bell tower of that building still remains. The original rectory once occupied the plot to the south of the church, where a terrace of cottages now stands (25)

In 1826 two years after the church was rebuilt the old rectory was demolished and a new dwelling constructed on the glebe land in its present position above the Chester high road, although the 1826 structure has since been rebuilt (79).

The field names give some insight into the make up and workings of the settlement. A croft was either a small farm, especially one worked by a tenant,

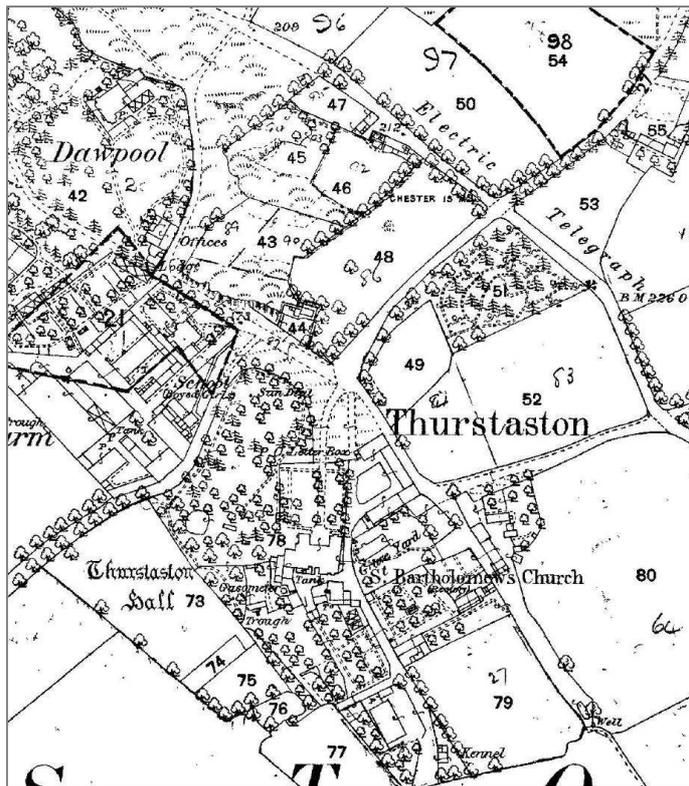
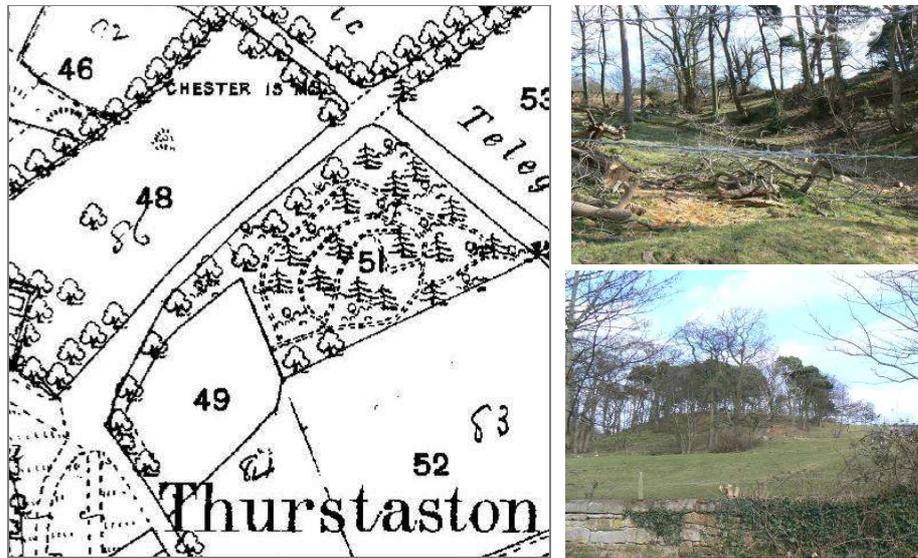
or a small plot of ground adjacent to a house and used as a kitchen garden or as a pasture for one or two cows and large enough to feed a family. A 'hay' was a grass field cut for hay as winter fodder. From the names of empty plots and fields on the Tithe map, it is evident that Thurstaston had been a self-sustaining rural community with a number of tradespersons such as cobbler, blacksmith, publican who supplemented their livelihoods through the adjacent small holdings (crofts and heys). It could be inferred that the village had been more populous in the previous century as a number of plots were called 'crofts' but appear remote from any adjacent dwellings. It may be that there were once dwellings on or immediately adjacent to these fields. However, by the 1830s only the names survived. Alternatively, the croft fields may have been remote from the dwelling of, say, the 'carter' but if so where was the 'carter's' dwelling in the 1830s? Tithe map plot descriptions that may indicate that by the 1830s Thurstaston had contracted as a settlement include:

- 84 – Site of old house and garden
- 20 – Cobblers croft
- 27 - Rectory croft
- 80 - Croft
- 81 - Carters hey
- 82 - Smithy hey

The Tithe plan shows the main concentration of buildings grouped around the church. Where the present church now stands was a large farm (29) this overlooked a central communal space, a 'green' possibly (22)? (Tithe map appears to show trees as occurs today), from which radiated lanes and tracks into the fields to the west and south. Tracks also extended up to the higher fields and common grazing lands which were traversed by the Chester High Road running above the village. The central 'green' and lanes all exist today much in their historic alignments except that the broad open area leading onto the common lands to the north that was later enclosed for the Dawpool estate.

Today the wooded knoll that rises above the village forms a prominent and picturesque landscape feature. A cluster of deciduous trees and pines sit within undulating ground that appears to have within it the course of an old ditch or track. This area of trees is shown on the 1830s Tithe map and recorded as a 'plantation' (85). It appears again on the 1870 OS plan which also shows a number of pathways winding through the plantation entered from the field to the west. This field, 49 on the 1870 plan, is a plot 84 on the tithe map and was listed as the site of an 'old house and garden'. It would appear possible that this was a substantial C18 house and that the wooded knoll above was once part of its 'pleasure garden', with 'walks' meandering through trees and possibly culminating in a fine viewing point overlooking the Dee Estuary. (this is a bit speculative – why 18th century)

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1870s OS plan

Later C19 / Early C20: Even though it was not subsumed into Wirral's rapidly expanding suburban areas, this was a period of radical change for Thurstaston. The first significant development appears on the 1870s OS plan. To the north of the central green the old cluster of farm buildings that had

been present on the Tithe map have been replaced by 'Home Farm', a new 'model farm' and with a new school adjacent. Further to the north previously common land has been enclosed and the new Dawpool House constructed. This is shown entered via a lodge on the lane beyond Home Farm (map also shows offices beyond the lodge but they disappear by the next map) All these new buildings were fine sandstone structures and all survive today except for Dawpool House itself. The agricultural buildings are in a sturdy traditional design and the houses, school and lodges are architecturally impressive in a 'Stuart' period style. It is interesting to note that even in the 1870s a track still connected the central village green with the common lands to the north and the old church still sits between the ancient Manor and its old farm.

The 1890 OS plan records further major changes. By that time the Dawpool estate had been purchased by the owner of the prestigious White Star Line whose Liverpool based fleet was to include the Titanic. The new owners, the Ismay family, demolished the older property (comment - including the offices referred to above and a property on the old road at the junction of fields 46 and 47 on the 1870 map) and commissioned a new house in a grand late medieval style by the architect Norman Shaw. Most significantly for the wider landscape, the project involved the realignment of the Chester High road which was diverted through a deep rock cutting to conceal it from view of the house. The principal entrance to the house was now accessed via a long drive which emerged at a new gate lodge built at the junction of the High Road with Station Road. The enlarged Dawpool Estate severed the direct physical relationship between the village and the common lands.



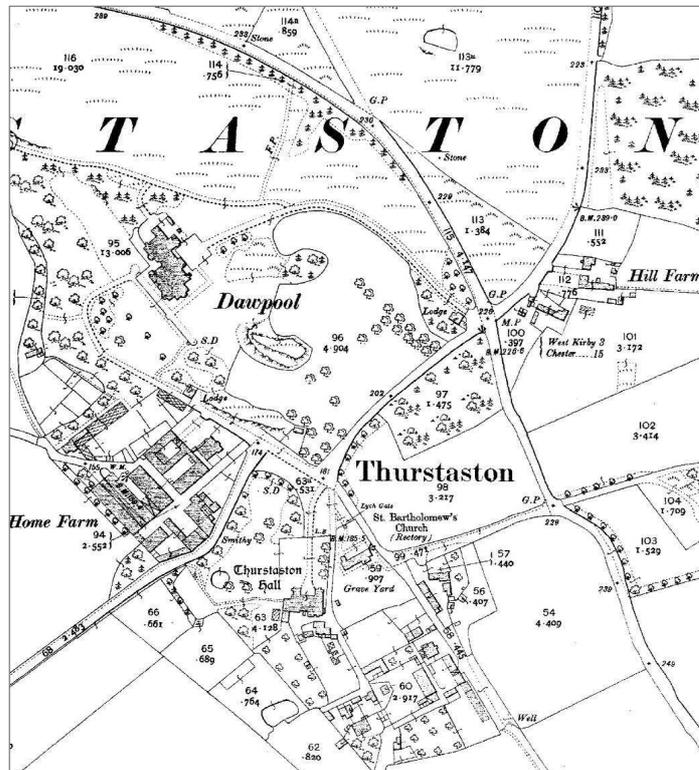
Dawpool House (the second house constructed)

This final stage of the process of enclosing common land took place in 1879 when the Rector and the Ismay family who were joint owners of the commons sought formal enclosure orders. The Town Council of Birkenhead intervened and made representations to the Commissioner that some part should remain unenclosed for recreation 'having regard to the health, comfort and

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convenience of the inhabitation of Birkenhead and the benefit of the neighbourhoods. The old common extended some 206 acres and of this 45 acres were allotted to the public. Thurstaston Common still survives today as an extensive area for nature conservation and informal recreation.

In 1886 the Hooton to Parkgate railway was extended to link to West Kirby. From there a line joined the townships on the north side of the Wirral with Birkenhead and Liverpool. The nearest station to Thurstaston was just short of a mile from the church and a new roadway, Station Road, was constructed to the old settlement. (The previous lane shown on the Tithe map and 1870 OS map had not extended as far as the coast). The 1910 map shows Thurstaston at the culmination of the C19 phase with all the common land close to the settlement being enclosed and the grand Dawpool House standing in its extensive grounds.



1910 OS Historic Map

2.3 20th Century

Unlike neighbouring villages of West Kirby, Heswall and Irby, Thurstaston was not developed with inter or post war suburban housing developments and

its rural character has subsequently been protected by ‘Green Belt’ policies. The former Dawpool estate and Church Farm have seen significant major changes since the end of the C19. In 1927 the grand Dawpool house designed by Norman Shaw was demolished but the area’s secluded character had been maintained. By the time of the 1930 OS map the new residences, ‘Dawpool’ Thors Hill, Warren House, Pine Ridge, Roughlands, had all been constructed in the private grounds of the former estate. The major change since the 1950s has been the expansion of the Church Farm development on previously open fields and the recent conversion of the ‘model’ Dawpool Farm into residential units.

2.4 Archaeology

This is an ancient settlement and as such there will be the potential for below ground archaeological remains. However, the mid C19 century developments which saw the construction of the new Dawpool Farm and the new church would have resulted in the loss of earlier buildings of which little buried remains are likely to have survived. Field names may suggest that the township had been more extensive than shown on the Tithe map. For example enclosure 84, the lower field facing the church and ‘green’ is noted as being ‘site of old house and garden’. Traces of the rear stone boundary wall to this plot are still visible and evidence of demolished structures here and elsewhere may exist below ground. The two standing building complexes documented on the Tithe Map, Thurstaston Hall and Suttons Farm, still survive and may have further unrecorded archaeological interest.



The Tithe documents indicate that land facing the ‘green’ was the site of a former ‘house and garden’. The remains of a boundary wall are still visible along the line of the copse

3.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS

3.1 Setting and Relationship with the Surrounding Area



Views overlooking Thurstaston from A540 with distant views of the Dee and Welsh Hills

Thurstaston has a notably rural setting. To the north east is Thurstaston Common with its heath land and rugged sandstone escarpment, and surrounding the settlement in all other directions is open agricultural pasture. Nestled below the steeper part of the escarpment and protected by the wooded grounds of Thurstaston Hall to the west, the historic core of Thurstaston is not highly visible. However, the church can be glimpsed from the Chester high road. The view looking down to the church across the sloping fields and wooded knoll with the Welsh hills in the far distance, is a picturesque scene much featured in postcards and paintings of Wirral. The public footpath, which leaves the historic core, past Hall Farm and leads towards Heswall retains its rural character and the hamlet's connection with the fields and countryside beyond.



Footpath approaching from Heswall

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West Boundary of CA towards 'Pine Ridge



West boundary of CA towards Thurstaston Hall (Hall and settlement screened behind trees)

The landscape features and buildings immediately to the east of the conservation area boundary are of particular importance to the Conservation area's setting and indeed add further visual and historic interest. Of particular note are:

- The western escarpment edge of the natural heath land of Thurstaston Common
- The sandstone cutting through which the A540 climbs some distance to the north of the Station Road junction.
- The Cottage Loaf public house/restaurant which is a local landmark shown on the 1930s OS map. It is a vernacular style building with heavily modelled thatch roofs
- The Hill Farm group of vernacular buildings close to the Thurstaston cross roads, to the east along Thurstaston Road the A540



Cottage Loaf



Hill Farm and adjacent buildings

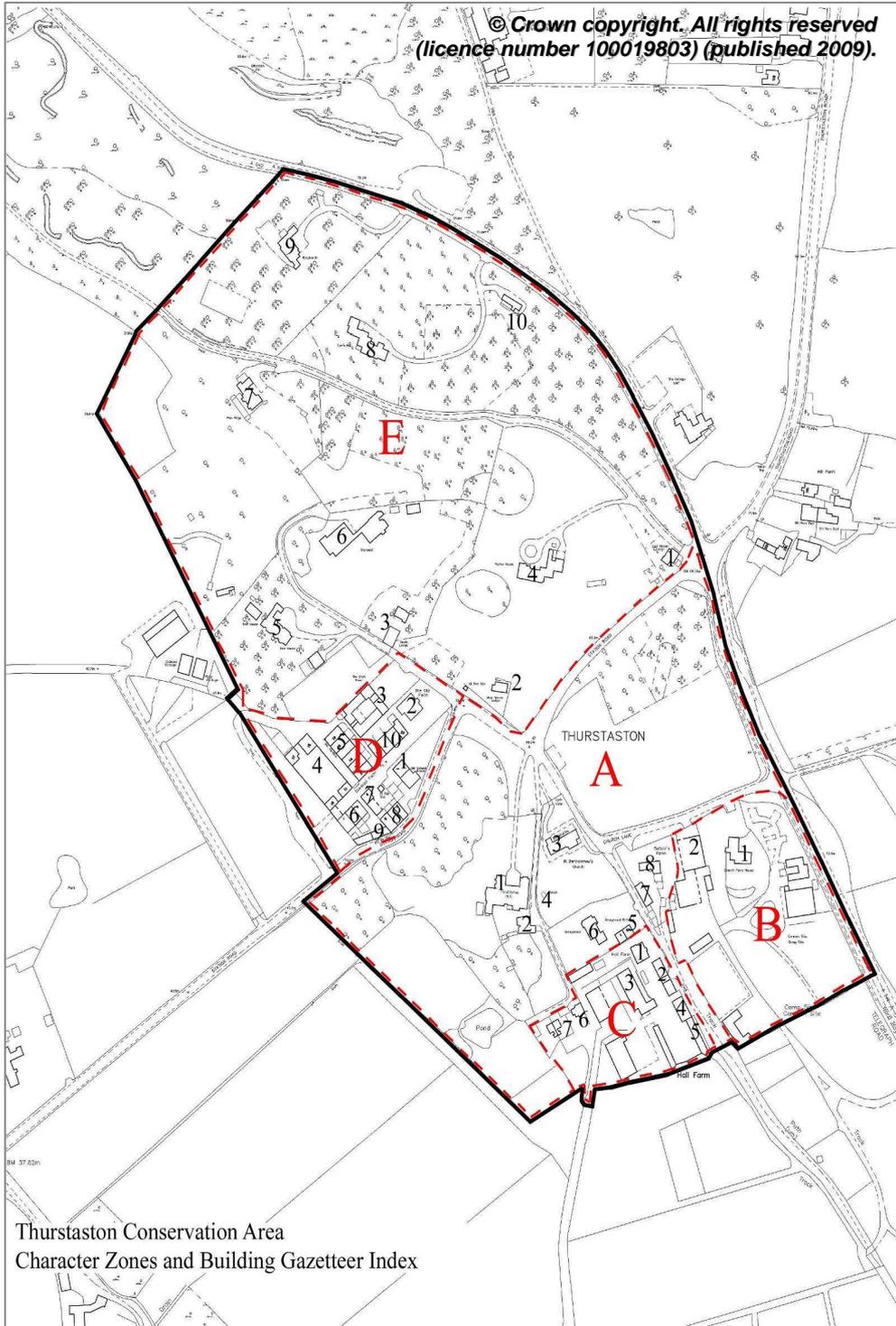


3.2 Character and Relationship of Spaces

Thurstaston's development pattern is that of a loose knit agricultural settlement centred around the historic core. At its heart is the church and ancient manor house which overlook an open 'green' Surrounding the 'core are a number of areas of differing character identified as the following 'Zones':

- A. The historic core includes the area's 'defining' structures and their landscape setting namely: Thurstaston Hall, St Bartholomew's Church, Suttons Farm, the houses adjoining the south of the church yard and the wooded hillside fields leading up to the A540. This open area is bounded by Station Road and Church Lane both of which are narrow lanes with no pavements and high banks on either side and cut through outcrops of red sandstone bedrock.
- B. Church Farm comprises the farm main residence together with a collection of timber structures and out buildings related to various economic activities, all of which are of relatively recent construction and are screened from the historic core of the settlement by high perimeter hedges of leylandii and landscaping.
- C. Hall Farm lies to the south of the historic core and is a self contained complex of farm buildings with some attractive C19 brick barns as well as more modern utilitarian structures.
- D. Dawpool Farm together with the old school house is visually separated from the historic core by the wooded grounds of Thurstaston Hall. The area represents a 'set piece' model farm of the mid C19 with tightly packed fine sandstone farm buildings, principal residence and school all in late Gothic style.
- E. The former Dawpool estate now comprises ten residences. Only the lodge at the A540 entrance and the gate house on the drive off Station Road date from the C19 the other plots being occupied by substantial C20 properties. Only one of these, Warren House, can be glimpsed from the historic core with the others hidden deep within wooded grounds.

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3.3 Views and Vistas within the Area

Station Road descends steeply down from the main high road. It is bounded by a high stone wall along its north side and passes past a copse and fields to the south and opens out into a 'green' overlooked by the Church and Thurstaston Hall with its entrance gate. The view across the green to these landmark buildings is the defining view within the conservation area. Other key buildings are not so visible from any distance and can only be viewed from closer quarters. Important amongst these closer views are those down the lane leading between the C19 brick barns associated with Hall Farm and Sutton Farm and the views of Dawpool Farm and school house from Station Road.



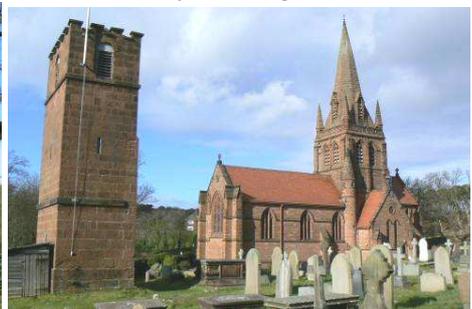
The Church from the 'green'



The Hall viewed from the 'green'



The open hillside looking east from the 'green'



The old tower and church from the church yard



Dawpool Farm House



Entrance to Dawpool's 'model' farm

3.4 Green Spaces and Planting

The following landscape features are key visual amenities and crucial to the area's character:

- The 'green'
- The sandstone boundary walls to individual properties and field enclosures
- The banks and hedges which support wild flowers such as spring celandine and primrose.
- The wooded copse and knoll along the upper section of Station Road as it joins the A540,
- The wooded grounds of Thurstaston Hall which help define the 'space' occupied by the 'green'
- The wooded hillside of the former Dawpool estate



Clipped hedges and wild banks (gorse) Church Lane



Lane to Heswall with stream and wild flora (Celandine)

4.0 TOWNSCAPE AND PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

4.1 Grain, Scale, Repetition and Diversity

Zone A, the historic core, has an open character which allow the key buildings of the Church and Hall an unimpeded prominence. Zones B,C and D are tightly packed farm complexes. In contrast Zone E is characterised by substantial residences spread wide apart in generous wooded plots and accessed down long private driveways.

4.2 Principal Buildings and Features

The principal buildings which define the area are:

- Thurstaston Hall together with its boundary wall and gates facing onto the 'green'
- St Bartholomew's church
- The old church tower which stands isolated in the church yard
- Hall Farm Barn
- Sutton's Farm Barn (house of some architectural interest but not particularly prominent)
- Dawpool 'Model' Farm
- The Old School House
- Dawpool West Gate House
- East Warren Lodge at the entrance to the former Dawpool estate

4.3 Boundaries, Surfaces and Public Spaces

Sandstone walls form the typical property boundary and provide important features in the landscape.



CA boundary alongside the A540 south of Station Road

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The public realm, (that is the roads, tracks footpaths and spaces between property boundaries, that are publicly accessible), makes a major contribution to the character of this conservation area. Although Station Road and Church Lane have standard tarmacadam surfacing, they help define its visual character by:

- Being relatively narrow with few pavements
- In places, cutting through exposed bedrock
- Having grass banks and verges with little or no maintenance which allow wild flowers to grow
- Being enclosed by sandstone property boundaries and, in places, having buildings immediately abutting.

Private drives and tracks with their gravel and sometimes cobbled surfaces are also significant. The rough track, a public footpath, leading to Heswall is particularly attractive as it passes between Hall Farm and Sutton's Farm. Here the interest is created not only by the vernacular buildings but also by the roughly stoned path, the natural verge flora and adjacent stream.

A key central feature of the conservation area is the 'green' which is the focal point for the roads and tracks leading into the hamlet and allows open views of the church and hall.



The 'green' looking north



Entrance to the track way to Heswall



Cobbled surfaces at Dawpool Farm



Private gravel lane between the Hall and Church

5.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS

5.1 Prominent Styles

Multi period:

- The original medieval building of Thurstaston Hall has been adapted and added to over 600 years and now presents a range of period styles. The front elevation and front gate piers are predominantly mid C17 English Baroque. Its west wing has late medieval elements and its east wing is in a C19 medieval style.



Thurstaston Hall, central section late C17 in brickwork
East wing C19 in sandstone (early C17 style)

C19 vernacular

- The barns and farm buildings of Sutton's Farm (shown on Tithe Map could have existing fabric which pre dates the C19, but the stone elevation appears mid C19 and the farm house has been much modified)
- Brick buildings associated with Hill Farm
- The remnant square tower in the church yard dates from the 1820s. Its simplicity makes it difficult to judge the quality of the complete building but it does appear to have been a relatively humble structure according to written accounts.
- Semi detached cottages (north of Hall Farm)



Hall Farm C19 barns and House (render probably not original)

Mid/Late C19 ‘polite’ architecture:

- St Bartholomew’s Church is a fine example of Victorian Gothic designed by John Loughborough Pearson, the architect of Truro Cathedral noted as an exponent of the Early English Style.
- Dawpool ‘model’ farm, the west gate house to the original Dawpool House and the old school house are mid C19 buildings consciously designed in an early C17 style and form a strongly coherent group.
- East Warren Lodge (the south lodge to the former Dawpool estate) gives an indication of the architectural quality of the former main house designed by Richard Norman Shaw.



West Gate House to Dawpool Estate



St Bartholomew’s church



Entrance to Dawpool 'model' farm

C20

- The Lodge facing the 'green' is probably but the building plot is shown on the Tithe Map.
- Residences within the former Dawpool Estate date from the 1930s with later additions; all are large houses in various styles.
- Church Farm House is later C20 but in a traditional style suggestive of late C18.
- The Cottage Loaf is 1930s in a mock vernacular style
- Utilitarian agricultural structures within Hall Farm (mainly mid C20)
- Church Farm utilitarian structures (various late C20 early C21 buildings of mainly frame structures clad in stained vertical timber boarding)
- The house to the south of the church yard is later C20 with plain rendered elevations.



Church Farm House



Church Farm outbuildings



Warren House



Hall farm C20 outbuilding

5.2 Materials

The dominant material for elevations and external boundary walls is the local red sandstone but examples of brickwork are also present. The main farm houses of Sutton, Church and Hall farms have been rendered externally and are painted, continuing the local tradition of lime washed of sandstone cottages. The principal roofing material is Welsh slate with some red tiles, notably on the church and East Warren Lodge.

5.3 Typical Features and Details

The buildings, constructed in a vernacular manner, are generally simple in form with pitched slate roofs relieved by chimneys spanning to end gable walls and with little ornamentation. Generally, roofs overhang gable ends but some have gable parapets with end kneelers. Windows in houses are wide proportioned casements. Barns have small shuttered openings and sometimes circular ventilation openings in gables (pitching holes).

The ‘designed’ C19 buildings including the West Lodge, the model farm and school are in a late medieval style which is ornate with steeply sloping slate roofs and with stone elevations (ashlar for the houses). Details include parapet gables, dormers, chimneys and stone mullioned casement windows.



Fine detailing and modelling at the Church



Typical vernacular brick, stone and timber detailing of Hall Farm barn,



Fine attention to detail at the west Gate House to the Dawpool estate (Gable parapet with end kneelers, stone mullioned window with stepped dripstone, rare use of six sided slates, ridge tiles and heavily modelled chimney)

6.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS AND BUILDING APPRAISAL

6.1 Overview

The urban development pressures of the C20 and early C21 have had little impact on Thurstaston. It remains much as it would have appeared at the end of the C19, dominated by the ‘improvements’ made by the incoming wealthy owners of the Dawpool estate. They largely reshaped the old agricultural hamlet into a miniature ‘model village’ and the nearby heath land into a grand residential estate. Changes that have taken place since then have generally been discrete and well considered with little intrusion on the public domain.

6.2 Changes to Plan Form and Recent Development

The evolution of the area’s plan form has been discussed in detail in previous sections. The C19 saw radical changes with the loss of earlier buildings and the enclosure of common land, but the new development of the model farm buildings, the church and residential estate were all of a particularly high visual and material quality. The environment so created reflected the economy and culture of the period and has added to rather than detracted from Thurstaston’s value as a conservation area. Recent development initiatives have brought about some further changes but these have not had a significantly detrimental effect on the area’s established character:

- The adaptation of the redundant Dawpool farm buildings to residential use has been undertaken without major interventions of new building, extensions or alterations. Overall the scheme can be seen to have had the positive benefit of ensuring the care and upkeep of the historic fabric.
- The diversification and intensification of activities at Church Farm have involved new building in an area that was previously open land. However, the development is well screened by perimeter landscaping and the buildings which are small scale timber constructions are contemporary in style, understated and do not intrude upon the character of the conservation area. The visitor facilities and farm shop are appropriate to the rural setting.
- The house, Grangewood, constructed to the south of the church yard sits in a previously undeveloped plot. Although two storey, with its low profile and simple rendered elevations it does not made an obviously negative impact.
- Extension of the Hall Farm complex in the mid C20 saw the construction of additional structures to the south of the C19 Barns. Two that border the public footpath to Heswall are not visually attractive and are purely utilitarian (one in brick, the other timber clad and both with profiled sheet roofing). Nevertheless, they do contribute to the rural/agricultural character of the place and the sense of enclosure of that part of the lane.



Hall Farm buildings to the south of the C19 barns

6.3 Extensions and Alterations

There are no glaring examples where historic buildings within the area have been subjected to alterations or new building extensions which have radically harmed their architectural character. The changes that have taken place have generally been discrete and not visible from publicly accessible areas. (N.B. This survey has not been able to assess the condition of or any alterations to properties not visible from public areas, notably the residences occupying the former Dawpool estate).



Rear extension to the old school house is not over obtrusive

6.4 Public Realm

The contribution of the public highways to the character of the area is referred to at paragraph 4.3 and pressures for change are as noted at paragraph 6.7

6.5 Loss and Development Pressures

There has been no recent loss of historic building fabric or landscape but there may be latent development pressures that have been held at bay by current planning policies particularly the Regional Spatial Strategy, and the area's green belt and conservation area status. Because of these measures Thurstaston has remained quiet and unobtrusive and that is an essential part of its charm. This could be threatened by any pressures to:

- Increase the density of housing development by subdividing existing residential plots.
- Undertake new residential development within zones A B and C involving the removal of farm yards and agricultural buildings.
- Convert farm buildings that would affect their character and appearance.
- “Improve” the public realm which would erode the area’s rural charm

6.7 Changes to the Setting of the Conservation Area

There have been no recent changes that have affected the setting of the area which is protected by its greenbelt status and the publicly owned open spaces of Thurstaston Common. However, as a result of concerns about road safety there are current proposals to alter the Station Road/A540 road junction with the introduction of a round about. This will have an impact on the setting of the conservation area. If not sensitively handled in terms of layout and detail design, its effect could be detrimental to the area’s appearance, reducing its charm and compromising the visual links between the conservation area and the Hill Farm Buildings and the Cottage Loaf. Of particular concern will be alterations to Station Road in terms of:

- alignments,
- sight lines and levels,
- alterations to existing sandstone wall boundaries,
- changes to the surrounding soft landscape
- introduction of pavements,
- signage
- lighting

all of which are likely to intrude on the area’s landscape character and rural appearance.



Station Road/A540 Junction, consideration is being given to a new round about.

7.0 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER

7.1 Thurstaston Conservation Area's special character can be summarised as follows:

- Ancient settlement dating from the pre Norman period
- Retains the quintessential features of an historic small English hamlet with Manor house, church, farm houses and farm buildings grouped loosely around a public 'green'.
- A quiet and picturesque location, it became a place where the wealthy could live and define a lifestyle far removed from the grime and clamour of port and city.
- Here a few extremely rich individuals sought to recreate a medieval idyll by constructing a new church in the style of the C13th, a new model farm, and new baronial hall (Dawpool House).
- Private residential grounds in the northern and western parts of the conservation area are camouflaged by the wood.
- The church is the focal point of the conservation area and a fine mid C19 recreation of C13 style by an eminent Victorian architect.
- The dominant feature of the Hall, although 'multi period', is its late C17 façade and entrance gate way which has survived as a remarkably intact and relatively rare example of its type.
- Dawpool farm, old school house and lodge to the former Dawpool residence (Zone D) form a fine tightly knit group of buildings from the 1860s to 1880s. The use of common building materials (red sandstone) and common architectural style based on late medieval and Jacobean precedents reinforce the cohesion of the group. The 'model' farm buildings are excellent examples of their period.
- The historic farm houses and barns within the south side of the conservation area (Zone A and C) are vernacular in character based on a rural tradition rather than designed to a 'period style'.
- The mid to later C20 residences which characterise the north part of the conservation area (Zone E) are generally hidden from public view.
- The existing sandstone boundary walls and close cut hedges add to the rural character of the area.
- Remaining areas of cobbled surface, rough 'un-metalled' tracks and soft verges which support wild flora are all important to maintaining the area's rural appearance.
- The vista, from above the village looking down to across the fields to the church with the Dee estuary and Welsh hills beyond, is picturesque and provides a defining image of the west Wirral landscape.
- The views, within the conservation area across the 'green' towards the church and hall, and over the adjacent fields, still retain a strong rural character. They also show the sensitivity of the changes brought about in the

mid C19 to the notions of the picturesque and an idealised concept of the 'medieval'.

- The wooded private residential grounds which make up the northern and western parts of the conservation area and the open fields to the east make a positive contribute to the wider landscape of west Wirral.
- Thurstaston Hall dates from the middle ages and has archaeological potential within the grounds and also concealed within existing building fabric.
- There is some evidence to suggest that there may have been a substantial house on the east side of the 'green' with a pleasure garden on the wooded knoll above, possibly C18. This could be the subject of further investigation.