

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ribbesford Conservation Area (the Area) was designated by Wyre Forest District Council in 1991. It is situated about 1 mile (1.4 km) to the south of Bewdley, in the county of Worcestershire. It comprises a small rural hamlet with buildings dating primarily from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, set in the valley of the River Severn against a steep wooded hill-side.

This document aims to set out the special architectural and historic characteristics of the Conservation Area. The character appraisal will be of interest and use to those involved with development and use of the area, and that adjoining it, to preserve and enhance the Area's character.

The Adopted Wyre Forest District Local Plan (January 2004) contains policies, outlined in Appendix 1 of this document, to assist in preserving and enhancing Conservation Areas within the District: these will be used when considering any development or other proposals within the defined boundaries of this Conservation Area. Appendix 2 of this document shows the boundary of the Conservation Area, in map form, together with a number of the features referred to in this document.

2. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The first Conservation Areas were designated under the Civic Amenities Act (1967). This Act was superseded by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 69 of this later Act imposes a duty on Local Planning Authorities to identify areas that are of special architectural or historic interest, where it is desirable to preserve and enhance the character and appearance, and to designate them as Conservation Areas.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG 15) Planning and the Historic Environment gives further guidance on Conservation Areas, their designation and their assessment, and clarifies the legal responsibilities of both owners of properties within Conservation Areas, and the Local Authorities whose areas the Conservation Area falls within.

The General Permitted Development Order 1995 (GPDO), and its subsequent Amendments (2003, 2008 & 2009) classes a Conservation Area as being "Article 1(5) land". Whilst planning permission is not required for many types of works outside such areas, control is given to Local Authorities for works being undertaken within Conservation Areas, through limiting the enlargement of a dwelling-house, the rendering of such properties, and limitations on the installation of antennae and satellite dishes.

The Adopted Wyre Forest District Local Plan (January 2004) contains various policies describing the aims and objectives of the Local Authority with relation to the wider historic environment and in particular to the preservation and enhancement of the conservation areas within the District. These policies are contained within Appendix 1 of this Appraisal.

English Heritage published new guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals in August 2006. In preparing this draft Appraisal, regard has been given to this guidance; likewise, the public consultation will all be in accordance with these guidelines.

It should be noted here that it is not only buildings that are protected when a Conservation Area is designated – trees are also given some protection. Furthermore, PPG 15 also advises that highway work should reflect the need to protect the historic environment, including road building and highway maintenance.

3. ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

3.1 Setting and topography

Ribbesford Conservation Area lies about 1 mile to the south of Bewdley, in the parish of Ribbesford. The Conservation Area covers about 13.5 hectares set in a mix of semi-ancient woodland and agricultural land, with River Severn forming south-eastern boundary. The hamlet is approached via a narrow lane, following the western bank of the Severn.

The underlying geology is one of a mix of sulphur coal and Old Red sandstone, whilst a small area of the Kidderminster Formation (Bunter Pebble Bed) lies immediately to the north, along with mudstones. Sand and gravel alluvial deposits are present along the edge of the River Severn.



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An aerial view of Ribbesford Conservation Area and its setting

thin topsoil lying directly over the sandstone bedrock, mixed with archaeologically-destructive modern agricultural techniques probably contribute highly to the lack of evidence for pre-historic settlement in this area.

3.2 Historic Evolution

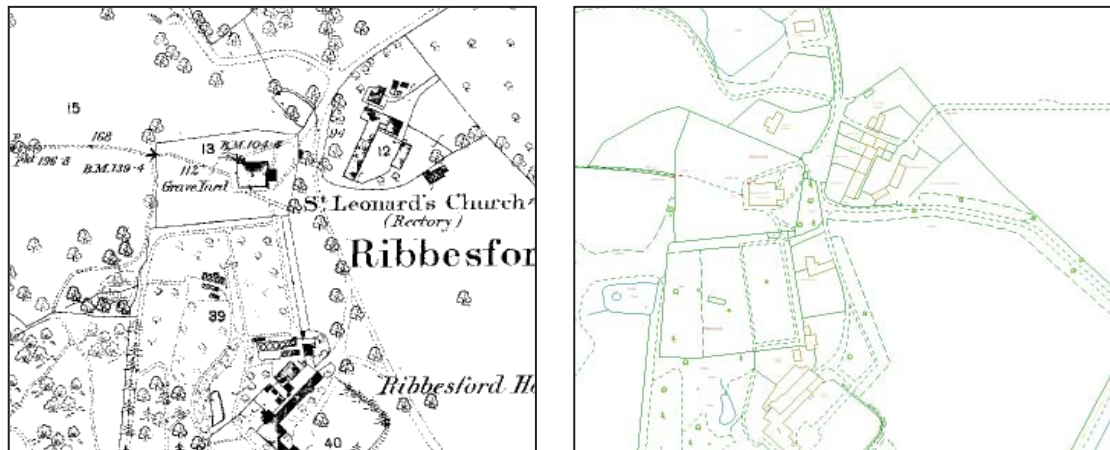
There is little pre-historic archaeological evidence of settlement around Ribbesford, save for flint workings around the Blackstone to Astley Aqueduct, and a single Bronze Age rapier. It is suspected that an Iron Age hill fort may lie in the vicinity of Stagborough Hill, and a mid-C1st settlement has been identified across the River at Brant Farm, which also had evidence of later Roman-British occupation. However, it is important to note that the

Ribbesford is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles as belonging to the Parish of

St Mary at Worcester (itself created in 680AD with the establishment of the episcopal see of the Hwiccas), and as one of the lands lost to the Danes during the invasions

The hamlet has changed little since the Twelfth Century, with the Church of St. Leonard forming the focal point, together with the presence of the moated manor house adjacent, and the Tithe barn. Whilst all three buildings have Medieval origins, they have all been substantially altered from their original form, including the domestic conversion of the barn, and the in-filling of the moat. Until the C17th, the Church was the main location of worship for the whole of Bewdley, hence the presence of a track-way linking the two settlements. A landscape survey undertaken during 2007 identified considerable evidence of Medieval landscape workings suggesting activities generally associated with manorial workings, including farms, holloways, boundary ditches and woodland management.

Ribbesford House was also used during the World War II as a base for the Free French Army (French fighters who continued with the support of the Allies against the Axis after the 1940 Armistice and occupation of France) and a plaque adjoining its front porch lays testament to this.



Comparison of maps between 1884 and 2009 showing minimal development Area.

3.3 Land-uses

Land uses in the Area are as follows:

Most of the buildings within the Area are now residential, typical of a small rural settlement such as this;

The church provides a religious and social, together with a visual focal point for the hamlet and the surrounding area, together with the large grave-yard – the historical importance of this building in this context should be emphasised;

The surrounding countryside is predominantly agricultural (a mix of arable and pasture);

A large tract of woodland is included in, and abuts, the west and south-western boundary, much of which is open for public access and is used for recreation and woodland management, and is predominantly owned by the Forestry Commission.

The principal colours within the Areas are as follows:

- Red is one of the dominant colours, varying in shade from deep plum through to light pink, from brickwork, roof-tiles, sandstone, and trees;
- Green both surrounds and fills the Area, arising from the surrounding countryside, the trees and shrubs, varying through degrees dependant on seasons;
- White elements of dwellings, from the colour of doors and windows through to pebble-dash and render and the creamy white of the sandstone bring lighter shades to the Area;
- The brown of stained window-frames, doors, and fences, together with trees, whilst subtle, is also one of the dominant colours within the Area.

Outside the Area, the dominant colours are the range of greens and reds of trees and grass, the brown colour of the earth of agricultural land. The River Severn presents a light grey-green-blue swathe to the edge of the Area, whilst also reflecting the colours of the surroundings.

3.5 Climate

Climate exerts a number of influences over the Area, from the natural environment, through to the design and location of buildings.

All of the buildings within the Area are sited either on the edge or outside, but in close proximity to, the flood plain. Whilst the defined floodplain boundary is a modern limitation, the flooding of the area from the River Severn is historic, and it is evident that the hamlet has evolved with this in mind.



Most of the roofs within the Area are pitched, between 40 and 45 degrees, the more historic properties often having parapets to the gables, preventing overspill of water down side walls. Similarly, wall copings are designed to allow water to flow away from the walls, with either chamfered coping stones or tile overhangs. More modern walls often have tile-creases capped by a soldier course of

brick-work, although this is not considered as a feature characteristic of the Area.

The surrounding countryside, creating the setting for the Area, and giving rural views out of the Area, is heavily influenced by the climate, with the seasonal changes associated with the woodland to the west and north, the agricultural landscape to the east, and the River Severn.

3.6 Trees

Ribbesford Conservation Area is bounded to the West by the Ancient woodland (pre 1600) site of Ribbesford Wood, part of which is contained in the Conservation Area

around Ribbesford House. This Ancient woodland site was planted in the 1970's with conifers, but significant areas of broadleaves remain, and it is an important wildlife habitat. Native species such as hornbeam, oak, yew and holly are present. The horse chestnut avenue extends East to West along both sides of the track to Ribbesford Church and Ribbesford House, and then along the private drive to Ribbesford House itself. The mature specimens are approximately 140 years old and they are interspersed with young horse chestnut trees, which appear to have seeded themselves. This avenue of trees is visible from the road and to walkers using the Worcestershire Way footpath. The horse chestnut trees are on important wildlife habitat due to their age, and they act as a flight corridor for bats flying between the river and Ribbesford Wood.

Ribbesford church yard itself contains various trees including several yew trees approximately 200-275 years old. These trees would have been planted to acknowledge the superstition that yew can ward off evil spirits, therefore yew is a common sight in church yards.

The trees within the Area serve to enhance the built structures present providing naturalness, unity with the landscape and privacy for the residents.



One individual Tree Preservation Order is present, covering a single Yew to the north of the northern range of buildings attached to Ribbesford House.

3.7 Historic pattern and movement

The layout and historic movement of the hamlet has changed little since the Medieval period, and probably since before, although the purpose behind these movements have altered, with the changes in building uses, and rates of occupancy of buildings.

The track-way, now forming part of the Worcestershire Way, passing through the hamlet, through the churchyard, and heading west towards The Beeches, was originally the route from Bewdley to Ribbesford, and was used as the path to the church: it still remains an important recreational route today.

The lane creating the junction adjacent to the southern end of Home Farm barns, is also an historical route, giving direct access down to the River Severn, and to the track and towpath following this section of the River. Again, this is still in use today, although this now gives access to the B4194, which now forms the main route for traffic to access the hamlet from both Bewdley and Stourport. A new access to the barn complex has also been created from the B4194, utilising the original farm access to the fields at this point.

The driveway to the manor house, from the church, also now gives access to the modern Rowan House.

The pattern of movement of the hamlet is very simple, with direct access from a central lane to most of the properties, retaining the historical pattern of access and movement, linking all properties through a simple network of paths and single arterial lane.

3.8 Illumination and night-time appearance

There is an absence of street lighting in the Area, which helps it retain a rural and uncluttered feel.

3.9 Views

Due to the natural topography of the Area and its surroundings, views into, out of and within the Area are limited, helping to retain the secluded feel of the hamlet.

a) Into the Area

There are limited views into the Area due to topography and setting, with the hamlet sitting at the base of ground sloping up to the north and west. However, the open fields between Ribbesford House and the Ribbesford Road to the east give glimpses of the House. These fields are an important component of the setting of the House and that of the Conservation Area, defining the distinct boundary of the settlement. To the north, the Ribbesford Road curves sharply west and gives views across open fields towards the group of barns adjoining Home Farm, forming an important view of the Area.

Views from the top of the churchyard, and beyond, are predominantly of tree tops, restricting the views of the buildings, save for the occasional roof-top and the Church itself. As one of the original accesses to the hamlet from Bewdley, this view has to be considered as one of the most important vistas of the Conservation Area.



Looking toward the settlement from the track linking the hamlet with the A456 many of the buildings are hidden from view, save for the roofs and glimpses of walls of the farm and its associated buildings. Again, as one of the principal historic entrances to the hamlet from Bewdley, and without doubt historically the most used route, this view is essential in retaining the secluded appearance of the Area.

b) Out of the Area

Similarly with views into area, views out of the area are considerably restricted by both tree coverage and by rising ground helping to retain the seclusion of the Area.

To the west of the Conservation Area, the ground rises up, and is mainly wooded but with a few small fields immediately behind the Church. This hillside forms an impor-

tant green backdrop to the western side of the Conservation Area.

The track leading to Ribbesford House, passing Rowan House, gives the most uninterrupted views out of the Area, towards the Ribbesford Road. However, these views are halted at this point, by the tree cover beyond. Similar views can be gained from the rear of Home Farm and its associated buildings, including the barn conversion.

c) Views within the Area

The principal means of access to the hamlet is via an unmetalled track, leading from the Ribbesford Road, and is lined on both sides with an attractive avenue of mature horse chestnut trees, also affording glimpses across the open fields towards the House on one side, and the rear of the barn conversions on the other.



From the churchyard views over the Area can be gained, although trees dominate and restrict views, only allowing glimpses of rooftops and church.

Elsewhere, most buildings are hidden by the green undergrowth and trees with the church retaining its dominance in visual terms. Views to Manor house are restricted due to the nature of the landscape, and positions of the buildings, helping to retain the secluded feel of the Area. On approaching the House, the entrance piers frame the main house, emphasising the importance of the property, with limited views of the outbuildings and other wings.

The centre of the Area, between the church and the farm probably provides one of the best views within the Area, framed by most of the socially important buildings of the hamlet, with the more modern buildings set back from the road, and often hidden by the landscaping.

3.10 Pattern and density of building

As mentioned before, the pattern of the building plots within Ribbesford have altered little since the Medieval period, with the main focal buildings being the manor house and the church. Related buildings of both of these help form a cohesive historic layout, with the tythe barn across the track from the church, with direct access from the fields, and presenting a gateway with the church from the main entrance from Bewdley.

Additional properties have been constructed in the Area more recently, although due to the lack of other buildings, in particular residential properties, the low level of development within the Area has helped to retain its character and appearance.

The most dense area of buildings is situated with the tythe barn, and the associated buildings, constructed as a result of the loss of power and tythes during the C17th.

3.11 Type of buildings

There are three types of buildings within the area: residential, religious, and agricultural, although the latter type has been subject of residential conversion.

3.12 Style of buildings

The style of buildings are typical of a small hamlet, with the church and Manor forming the main buildings, together with tithe barn, and farm. Constructed in local materials, in particular sandstone, both the church and the House are polite in their architectural origin, designed to impress from both outside and inside, whilst the farm and its associated buildings and barns, now converted, show the history of the Area, and the importance to which agriculture was, and still is, for the surrounding area.



More modern properties have been constructed within the Area, in particular Poolside, Church House and Rowan House. Whilst in architectural style they would not be considered as being sympathetic to the character of the Area, they none-the-less do not stand out as negative features. Partially this is due to the tree and shrub coverage afforded to them, but also that they are within their own large plots, and do not have physical or visual relationships with other buildings around them, retaining large open spaces around them.

The contemporary extension to Poolside, currently being constructed, on the northern edge of the Conservation Area, rising above the rest of the Area, are not necessarily considered as being appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the Area. However, the potential harm of this property on the Conservation Area is somewhat minimised by the considerable tree and hedge cover both within and outside of the Area.

3.13 Size and morphology of buildings

There is a range in size of the buildings within the Area, still reflecting the medieval hierarchy associated with such small settlements. The three principal buildings within the Area are typically the church, the tythe barn and the manor house. The tythe barn is positioned directly across the lane from the church, and on the main historic access to the hamlet. Together with the church, these religious and quasi-religious buildings

would have formed important focal points for people as they approached the settlement. The manor house, however, is sited towards the River, away from the Church, ensuring that traffic along the river would have clear views of the building, and its moat, showing the dominance of the owner in the social hierarchy of the area.

Over time, various buildings have been constructed within the settlement. With the church's loss of power and land during the C17th, came the removal of the rights for tythes, leaving the large barn useless. As was common at this time, these were assumed by the local gentry, and used for storage of crops. It is likely that the origins of Home Farm started around this time, with the existing farmhouse and associated barns being constructed.

More recently, three properties have been added to the settlement, although one lies outside the boundary of the Area. These have all be positioned to minimise the impact on the settlement, and through their positioning and landscaping, have ensured that the general size and historic morphology of the settlement has remained relatively unaltered.

3.14 Materials and construction

There is a variety of materials found throughout the Area, showing the use of local materials, and traditional construction.

a) Walls and construction methods

Local red sandstone is the dominant building material in the Area, with both the church and surrounding wall, together with the Tithe barn constructed in dressed sandstone, in random coursing, with narrow mortar joints; this is complimented with a local green/ white limestone used for dressings, such as quoins and window surrounds.



Red brick is used in the rest of the buildings, with outhouses and side wings of Ribbesford House, Home Farm and the more modern properties in the Area all being constructed in a variety of different bricks. Different renders are also present, from the stucco render on the manor house, to the pebbledash on Church Cottage. Mortars also vary from the rich creamy white traditional lime mortars, to a more modern brown cement.

b) Windows

There are a range of shapes of windows throughout the Area, most reflecting the use of the buildings in which they sit.

The church has a range of windows, varying through the differing periods of construction and extension, reflecting the changes in church architecture and design, ranging from lancet and tri-arched windows through to decorative tracery, all set in local green sandstone.



Ribbesford House has a selection of different windows, reflecting the status of the various elements of the house. Full length timber sash windows are present on the main building, whilst Crittle-styled metal-framed windows are more common on the out-buildings, often either side or top-hung casements. The front elevation of the House also has metal-framed windows, but set within dressed limestone mullions.

The cottages retain the traditional style of 3-light side-hung timber casements, painted white.



The barn conversions retain some of the original openings, such as the elliptical windows to the gable of the main barn, and also introduce a style of windows commonly associated with such conversion, utilising a stained timber frame, with thick transoms and heavy detailing, together with stable-effect infills.



Roof-lights are present, especially on the barn conversions. However, these are dated in appearance, and do not have the detailing associated with the conservation-style roof-lights. They are also heavily concentrated on the roof-slopes with the greatest impact on the Conservation Area, rather than aiming to minimise this impact.

There are some Upvc windows in the more modern properties, which are considered as highly inappropriate, especially within such a small hamlet, where the use of such materials has a larger than usual impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.



d) Doors

There are a variety of doors within the Area, reflecting the use and period of the buildings.

The two main entrances to the Church, to the north elevation and the west elevation, are oak ledged and braced doors, with highly ornamental brackets and hinges. The main door at the western end of the church is framed with sandstone ashlar linking it to the main west window, and sits under a four-centred arch. The northern door is surrounded by a timber porch, and framed with decorative carved sandstone detailing and motifs, including centaurs and birds (both forms of Medieval symbolism), indicating that this frame has been moved, during the construction of this element of the church during the C17th.



The manor house has various entrances, reflecting the status of the building, with different entrances dependant on status. These range from a three-centred arch, with partially glazed timber double doors acting as the principal entrance, through to painted ledged and braced doors on the stable block.

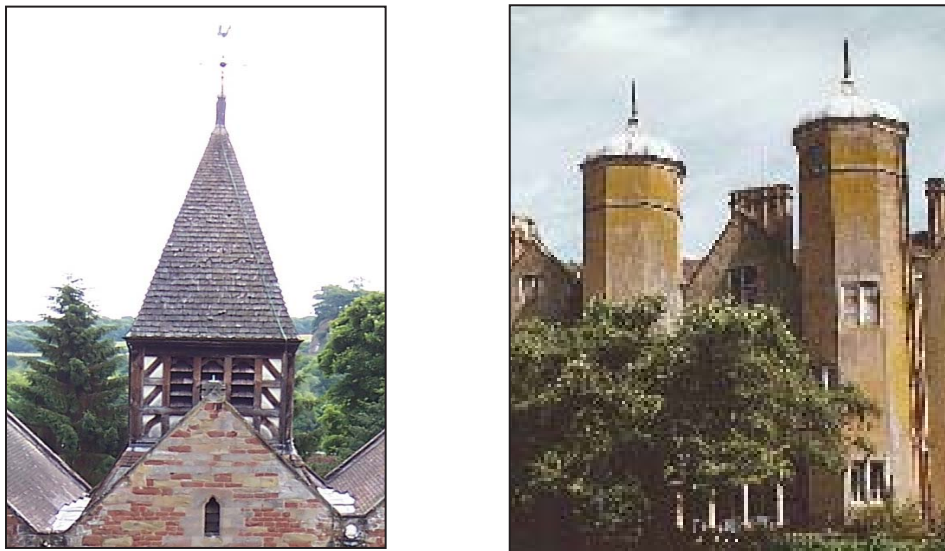
e) Roofs

The principal roofing material within the Area is a modern red clay Rosemary tile, and whilst there are some traditional hand-made tiles, these tend to be mixed in with the modern, flatter versions. Ridges are covered in red ridge tiles – these are predominantly half-round in style, although the church does have ornamental ridge tiles.

Pitches are a uniform 45 °, with many roofs having parapets to finish the gables off.



There are some small variations to these, although they are usually on details of buildings. The church spire is covered in cedar shingles, with a roof pitch of 60°, and Ribbesford House has two towers capped with squat helmet domes, covered in lead.



f) Boundary walls, copings and railings

There are few boundary walls within the Area, save for those to Ribbesford House and to the church, indicating their prominence and historic hierarchical importance in the social layers of the community. These are constructed in materials complimenting both the sites and the Area: whilst the boundary walls and entrance piers for the House are constructed in dressed limestone, the decorative wrought iron railings which sat on top of the wall have long been missing, resulting in the loss of meaning of the imposing piers. The boundary walls for the church vary, dependant on the location: dressed sandstone walls are present on three sides of the churchyard, constructed in a random coursing, and with chamfered stone copings, and ranging in height from c.300mm in height to over 1m. However, the boundary wall to the southern boundary is constructed in historic red brick, bedded in a creamy white lime mortar. Thick tiles are laid flat as copings, overhanging the wall, providing a method of shedding water away from the wall.

For the majority of other properties, simple fencing is present, much of which is modern timber, varying from close-boarded to picket fencing. More traditional materials and styles are found on the boundary to the central lane of Home Farm and the associated barns, including wrought iron hooped fencing, and estate fencing, although much of this is suffering through lack of maintenance and painting, and is often backed with other less locally traditional materials, including close-boarding and wire mesh.

A traditional-style 5-bar timber gate is present at the entrance to Home Farm Cottages, whilst decorative wrought iron gateposts remain at the entrance to the Church, unfortunately now, however, lacking the gates.

A large yellow painted steel barrier is present to the side of Rowan House, together with a large steel gate, marking the rear entrance to the gardens of Ribbesford House. Both these elements are not considered to be sympathetic or according with the character or appearance of the Area.

3.15 Survival of architectural features

As there has been little development within the Area, and the principal buildings have not been subject to much alteration, there is a high rate of survival of architectural details and features within the Area.

The churchyard has retained much of its character, with many of the important graves retaining their headstones in situ, and wrought iron fences surrounding the stones, together with the boundary walls, and the bier house on the eastern boundary wall.



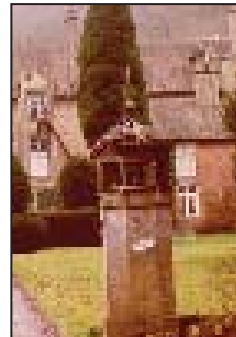
Other details which have been retained within the Area include:

- a) chimneys pots,
- b) roofing materials, including handmade tiles;
- c) the use of local sandstone as building material;
- d) parapets and raised gables to roof-lines;
- e) traditional estate and hooped fencing;
- f) original windows and openings;
- g) unrendered brick and stonework;
- h) lime mortar



Noticeable losses of, or damage to, architectural features include the following:

- a) use of black-top tarmac for surfaces
- b) use of upvc for windows, gutters and down-pipes
- c) loss of wrought iron gates and fences
- d) lanterns to Ribbesford House.



3.16 Landmarks, focal points and special features

Due to the size and morphology of the hamlet, all the buildings could be considered as focal points, and landmarks. However, the more modern buildings have been positioned to minimise on the impact of the main buildings.

a) Landmarks

Landmarks are buildings, structures or other features that are important because their size, design or position makes them particularly noticeable. Special care is needed when considering alterations of landmarks, or their settings.

The three principal buildings are all considered as important landmarks, with the church being the most dominant, with the spire seen from outside the Area, and set on higher ground than the rest of the hamlet. Ribbesford House, whilst set away from the main area of the hamlet, is considered as an important landmark, the social importance of the building emphasised by the two entrance pillars. The tythe barn forms an important visual boundary, drawing the eye along it from the northern entrance of the Area, into the heart of the Area.

The River Severn, whilst outside the Area, should also be considered as a landmark, impacting heavily on the character and appearance of the Area.



b) Focal Points

Focal points are buildings, structures or areas that are important because of their position in view lines, or because they are the centre of well-frequented public activity. Special care is needed in the treatment of focal points because they are particularly noticeable to the public.

The Church of St. Leonard (Grade I) forms an historical and important social and visual focal point of the hamlet, and the surrounding area. Constructed of sandstone, with parts dating from the twelfth, fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, the church is set in a churchyard containing trees, including old yew, and edged with a sandstone wall and hedge. The Worcestershire Way passes



through the churchyard, resulting in the church being a focal point for walkers, as well as for its religious function.



Ribbesford House is considered as an important focal point, providing a visual end-stop to the south-western edge of the Area, with the River Severn creating a boundary to the south-eastern boundary.

The avenue of trees flanking the approach from Ribbesford Road are considered as a focal point, in a group, providing a visual and physical channel for the principal approach to the Area.

c) Special Features

Special features are buildings, structures or other features which positively contribute to the special historic and/or architectural interest of the Area, which if lost would be considered as detrimental to the character or appearance of the Area.

There are eight Statutory Listed Entries within the Area, each representing one building. Home Farm, and 1 & 2 Home Farm Cottages which, whilst not Listed, are considered as being of local architectural and/or historic interest.

The soft landscaping of the Area, in particular the hedging and trees, are all considered as being one of the important natural special features, helping to create a settlement nestled in a rural setting, with little impact from outside the Area.

The River Severn, again, whilst sitting outside the Area, should be considered as a special feature due to its importance in the history, character and appearance of the Area.

3.17 Ground Surfaces

The majority of the ground surfaces within the Conservation Area are covered in a

loose compacted stone, helping to retain the rural character of the Area.

Blue bricks and pavements are used in various places throughout the Area, including as rainwater channels within the churchyard and to the stables area of Ribbesford House.

Blacktop tarmac has been used for some areas, including the paths of the church, presenting a visually hard surface, not considered as sympathetic to the character or appearance of the area. Similarly, concrete slabs have been used to create paths and steps within the churchyard.

Grass and wild flower verges create soft edges to the public areas, including the entrance road and the paths within the churchyard, forming part of the Worcestershire Way.

3.18 Hard landscaping/street furniture

There are few elements of hard landscaping or street furniture within the area, save for the fingerposts and styles for Worcestershire Way. These are all constructed in timber, and present a soft, sympathetic approach to such details.



3.19 Tranquil areas and active areas

Tranquillity is the peace of a place where the noises and views of human mechanical activity do not intrude to a noticeable degree. It is particularly important to retain the tranquil character of such areas. Due to the location and nature of the Area, the whole Area can be seen as a tranquil area. In particular, the churchyard is seen as being a particular tranquil area, where human contact is limited.

The active parts of the Area are those covered by patterns of movement, and where focal points exist. Focal points within the Area include the church and its immediate environs and access, and the area between the tythe barn and the church, where the road enters the hamlet, and where cars park to access either the church or the converted barns.

The area to the front of the converted barn complex is also seen as being an active area, used by owners and residents of the converted barns.

3.20 Noise

There are several types of noise and sources of noise within the Area, but on the whole, the Area is quiet and peaceful. Bird song is the most dominant noise within the area, emphasising the natural surroundings of the Area. The sound of people talking, whilst not loud, does carry due to the topography of the area, and the otherwise lack of noise. Traffic from the Bewdley by-pass can be heard, but is an underlying noise, and as such does not have significant impact on the Area.

Periods of noise also vary, with the church and the surrounding agricultural land being

the focal points, dependant on times and seasonal activities.

3.21 Paths

The Worcestershire Way regional recreational footpath runs through the Conservation Area, adding to its public profile. This route passes along the unmetalled track to the north, past the church and up the hillside to the rear of the church. At the latter point, on the edge of the churchyard, a bench affords a view-point for looking eastwards over the church and Conservation Area, to the Severn Valley beyond. An alternative spur to the above route takes the walker from the riverside and along the chestnut-lined track before linking to the churchyard.

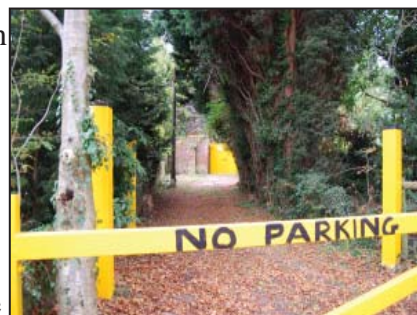
3.22 Alien features

An alien feature is one which is not considered to be sympathetic or characterful of the Area, and provides detriment to the character and/or appearance.

Upvc is present in the occasional property within the Area. This is a strong alien feature, and when used in windows alters the character and appearance of the property in which it is in, due to the increase in size of glazing bars, and the flat reflection given off. It detracts from both the buildings in which it is in, and from the character and appearance of the historic Area. It is also present in rainwater goods, resulting in poor quality detailing within the Area.

The yellow steel gate and barrier are also considered as strong alien features.

The use of inappropriate materials for paths, such as those within the churchyard, are also considered to be alien and negative features.



3.23 Neutral areas

A neutral site is defined as a small part of an area whose character does not conform with that of its immediate surroundings. These sites do not necessarily detract from an area, but should development proposals be forthcoming, then they should improve the site, in terms of visual and/or social impact on the Area, and relate well to the surroundings, or be designed that the development is confined to spaces within the neutral area that are not visible to the public gaze.

A small car parking area is provided in the middle of the hamlet for visitors to the church. This facility is informal in its layout, appearance and use of materials, which minimises its impact.

3.24 Areas that would benefit from enhancement

Ribbesford House is considered as the most important element in the Area which would benefit from enhancement. Being one of the dominant elements of character and history of the Area, the building is suffering from continued neglect, and having great detriment on the character, appearance and history of the Area.

The paths within the churchyard are also considered areas which would benefit from enhancement, providing good quality, sympathetic finishes to one of the most widely used elements within the Area.

Some of the monuments within the churchyard are also suffering from neglect, including some of the wrought iron decorative guards and surrounds to some of the graves.

4. CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Ribbesford Conservation Area covers an historic hamlet, focused around the church, manor house and tythe barn, retaining much of its early Medieval layout, with buildings dating from the Seventeenth Century through to the present day. The rural character of the Area is enhanced by the presence of numerous trees, and its natural topography, together with the undeveloped nature of the Area.