
NORTH WARWICKSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Polesworth Conservation Area

On the 14th November 1995, the North Warwickshire Borough Council, by Minute No 69 of the Planning and Development Committee, formally designated the area of Polesworth shown on the map appended to the Designation Report as a 'Conservation Area' in accordance with Section 69(2) of The Planning(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

In accordance with the Act, the Secretary of State for the Environment has been informed and a Notice of the Decision placed in the London Gazette and in the Coleshill Herald (being a local newspaper circulating in the area) on the (date).

INTRODUCTION

1. The statutory objective of a conservation area is to preserve or enhance its special architectural character or historic interest. It is, however, the character of an area rather than that of the individual buildings which is the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas. That character is derived from a range of interrelated factors, in particular the geography, history and townscape of the particular place.
2. The proposed Polesworth Conservation Area embraces the western end of High Street, Hall Court, Abbey Croft, the Abbey Churchyard, the Vicarage, Bridge Street, Abbey Green Park, Grendon Road as far as Bassetts Bridge, Market Street and part of Tamworth Road.
5. Polesworth was a rural settlement until the Industrial Revolution, playing its part in the agricultural economy of the area. There is evidence that the shallow seam of coal in the Hall Court area was mined as early as 1650 and small scale coal mining is recorded to the east of the present railway line. However, in the absence of an efficient means of transporting coal, the market would have been very local and therefore limited. It is thus likely that mining was not a full time occupation for most people but was combined with agricultural work.

Polesworth Abbey

- ## GEOGRAPHY
3. Polesworth is a village situated in the valley of the River Anker. Before the ice ages it is likely that the river flowed to the north of Shuttington and Warton but was later forced by the southern extent of the ice cap to cut a way further south through the ridge of triassic rocks upon which those two villages sit. The river valley through Polesworth is as a result relatively narrow and provided a convenient river crossing point. This feature, together with a relatively level river terrace enclosed by the loop in the river above the flood plain, provided a natural location for a settlement.
 6. Local research suggests that King Egbert chose Polesworth for the foundation of an abbey when returning from treaty negotiations at Dore in Derbyshire in 829 AD. His route to Winchester passed along Watling Street and on reaching Dordon he found that the nearest water supply for his troops was the River Anker and therefore set up camp at Polesworth. There he held a service of thanksgiving for his success and promised to found a monastery at that place.
 7. The Abbey at Polesworth was one of only seven Benedictine abbeys in England and prospered until the Norman Conquest, but later fell into decay and it is believed that the nuns moved to a cell at Oldbury. The reasons for this are not certain but by 1139, under the patronage of Sir Robert Marmion of Tamworth, the Abbey had been rebuilt and enlarged and the nuns had returned from Oldbury.
 8. At the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536, the Nunnery at Polesworth was granted exemption from dissolution, the Commissioners reporting that "the towne will shortly fall into ruine and decaye" and commenting that some 30-40 children were educated by the nuns. However, in 1539 the Abbess surrendered the Abbey, but the reasons for this are not known.

HISTORY

4. The first record of Polesworth as a settlement was the foundation in 829 AD, of a monastery by King Egbert of Mercia in thanks for the Treaty of Peace with the Kingdom of Northumbria.

-
9. Most of the remains of the Abbey are either incorporated in the fabric of the present church, or the Gatehouse or are buried in the surrounding grounds

Polesworth Hall

10. Following the surrender of the Abbey, Henry VIII sold the whole of Polesworth in 1545 to the Goodere family who built Polesworth Hall on the site of the Abbey cloisters. The Goodere family were patrons of the arts and the poet Michael Drayton was employed initially as page and possibly later as a tutor at Polesworth Hall. There is evidence to suggest that William Shakespeare, as a boy, also went there as a page in order to be educated and that his eventual move to London was sponsored by the Gooderes.
11. In 1620 Lucy Goodere married Sir Francis Nethersole, then English Minister to the Court of Bohemia. In 1627 she inherited the Polesworth estate and they subsequently came to live there in 1634.
12. The Manor of Polesworth subsequently descended to relatives of the Nethersoles, the Biddulphs and eventually in 1747 to Walter Chetwynde of Grendon. By the 1860s Polesworth Hall was unused. In the 1870s it was exchanged for the Vicarage in Warton Road and rebuilt as the Vicarage. Following the death of the Marchioness, Lady Celia, in 1907 and later her husband Sir George Chetwynd, the Chetwynd Estates were broken up and sold. The then Vicar of Polesworth, Canon Trotter, took the opportunity to consolidate the church's ownership around the Church and Vicarage, by acquiring the Abbey Gateway, Hall Court, Dovecote and Tythe Barn.

The Abbey Church

13. The Goodere Family demolished the majority of the Abbey buildings leaving the Norman aisle, the Lady Chapel and the tower for the villagers' use. In 1866 following the appointment of the Rev Nigel Madan, as Vicar, the prominent architect G E Street (responsible for the Law Courts in The Strand, London) was appointed to direct the "restoration, reseating and enlargement of the Parish Church of St Editha". A new chancel was constructed, the original nave reroofed and the restored church reopened in August 1869.

Nethersole School

14. It appears that from the earliest times the nuns of Polesworth Abbey taught local children and there is evidence that this took place in the Abbey gatehouse. This school was continued by the Goodere Family, the teaching being provided by the family Chaplain.
15. Sir Francis Nethersole had been briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London by King Charles the First, for his support for the King's sister, Elizabeth Queen of Bohemia. He was released in April 1634 on condition that he retired from public life and he therefore came to live at Polesworth Hall which his wife Lucy Goodere had inherited.
16. Sir Francis provided a vicarage and land in High Street where the Polesworth Working Mens Club now stands. In 1638 he erected and later endowed a new free school in High Street. The Tythe Barn at Hall Court was rebuilt to house the tythes which were used to support the school. In 1818 the Trustees rebuilt the school on the original site.

The Industrial Revolution

17. Coal had been mined from the shallow seams under Polesworth since the 17th Century but it was not until the extension of the Coventry Canal from Atherstone in 1790, together with the corresponding development of steam power, that the first deep mine was sunk at Pooley Hall in 1848. Other mines were Whitehouse Colliery (also known as Gorby Knob Pit), Butt Lane Pit east of Station Road, and Polesworth Colliery (sometimes called Fowler's Colliery) near Bassetts Bridge and Potters Lane.
18. The canal also served other mines in the area and at Polesworth Basin, by the Bulls Head Bridge, coal was loaded from the Birch Coppice and Birchmoor mines.
19. Other industrial activity in Polesworth was the Steam Mill, adjacent to the canal by Steam Mill Bridge, the Midland Brick and Terra Cotta Co Ltd by Polesworth Basin and Sephtons Boatyard (later Lees and Atkins), well known for its 'Castles and Roses' decoration of canal boats.

The Twentieth Century

20. Production at the mines at Pooley Hall and Birch Coppice was considerably expanded during the Great War. The village experienced considerable growth at that time with the development of municipal housing estates to the north of High Street (Nethersole Street and Coronation Avenue) and to the south at St Helena. Further growth followed the Second World War and by the 1970s the developed area extended northwards to the railway. Development has continued to the south of the village with the redevelopment of the St Leonards Road/Chaytor Road area in the 1960s and the brickworks at the former Polesworth Basin in the 1980s.

PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT

21. Development at Polesworth is typical of many late 18th Century mining communities such as Brierley Hill in the Black Country, Oakengates in Shropshire and Buckley in the North Wales Coal Field - a scattered pattern of cottages on large plots and no tightly defined nucleus. This loose, original pattern has been followed by progressive in filling of vacant plots from the period of expansion of the coal industry which has continued to this day and has resulted in a homogenous mixture of buildings from nearly all decades of the last two centuries.

Spaces

22. There are no 'urban' spaces in Polesworth, nor is there a village green providing a focus for the village. In mediaeval times the focus of the village was undoubtedly the Abbey gateway in what is now High Street. A weekly market, granted to the nuns in 1242 together with an annual fair, was held here but was presumably never of such size to require a defined "market place" to become established. A market later came to be held in Market Street, south of the river, presumably in the area that has again become used for that purpose.
23. It appears therefore that until the Hall Court area north of the river, was acquired by the Parish Council from the Chetwynd Estate at the turn of the Century, and later the Recreation Ground off Station Road, the only public areas were the water meadows on the south bank of the river adjoining Polesworth Bridge. The water meadows to the east of the bridge were substantially altered by opencast mining in the 1950s.

-
24. The village now has an extensive area of green and open space accessible to the public extending from Hall Court to the north of the river to Abbey Green Park to the south. This has become the most distinctive feature of the village.

Trees

25. Trees are not a particularly prominent feature within the village except in the green spaces referred to above. Of particular note is the avenue of limes from the Abbey Gatehouse to the Abbey Church. None-the-less more distant views are dominated by trees to the extent that the Abbey Church tower is not a dominant feature when seen from the surrounding countryside.

BUILDINGS

Pattern

26. With the exception of the late 19th Century terraces in Station Street, Market Street and Grendon Road, houses and cottages are generally detached or semi-detached, albeit close together.

Density

27. Although the frontages to the principal streets (Bridge Street, High Street, Market Street) are quite closely built up, the back land is less so and the overall density of building within the Conservation Area is not great. The predominant types of building are purpose-built houses and cottages of all ages. Several buildings in Bridge Street date from the 18th Century, many apparently conversions of former agricultural buildings, some of which are now used for commercial purposes. In the principal streets High Street, Bridge Street and Market Street other building types occur - including

chapels, public houses, shops, clubs, the fire station and offices.

Age

29. A particular characteristic of Polesworth is the homogenous mix of buildings of all ages referred to earlier. Buildings from all centuries since the 14th are represented. In this present century, examples of buildings from nearly every decade are evident.

Style

30. Prior to the 19th Century buildings were all built in the local vernacular style. 19th Century buildings onwards reflect a style to be found more widely throughout the Midlands as a result of the availability of mass produced materials distributed by canal and rail. Buildings of the 20th Century conform more to a national style typical of each decade, a reflection on the wider availability of choice in building materials and mass production.

Listed Buildings and Ancient Monuments

31. With the exception of the Fosters Yard Hotel in Market Street, all the Listed Buildings are to be found in the High Street and Bridge Street area of the village. Polesworth Bridge and remains of the Abbey in the Vicarage grounds are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Materials and Techniques

32. Before the 18th Century the majority of domestic buildings in Polesworth were timber-framed and several of these survive more or less intact. Remnants of timber frames survive in others. The Tithe Barn at Hall Court was extensively renovated in 1994. The Victorian brick infill panels have been replaced with

modern lightweight materials, reflecting the original use of wattle and daub.

33. In the 18th Century brick was the predominant material used. A multi-coloured red stock or common brick presumably from local brick works is widely evident. During the 19th Century a redder facing brick was frequently used on the front elevation with blue brick below damp proof course level. It would appear reasonable to assume that these bricks came mainly from the works beside Bulls Head Bridge and possibly from other similar works in the neighbourhood, usually associated with coal workings.
34. Although most of these earlier buildings would have been thatched only one survives, at 64 High Street. Roofs in Polesworth are now almost exclusively plain tiled. There is little evidence of the use of slate. The tiles on the roofs of earlier buildings are generally dark brown in appearance. During the 19th Century a redder tile has been used possibly reflecting more up-to-date mechanised production techniques. It is likely that the majority were produced at the local brick and tile works. The 20th Century has seen a greater variety of tile used, in particular concrete plain and pantiles. A notable exception to the use of tiles is the new fire station which is clad in profiled coated steel sheets, dark grey in colour.
35. There is negligible use of terracotta dressings. Reconstructed stone sills and lintels were frequently used at the turn of the century.

Roofscape

36. The roofscape of the village is predominantly conventional pitched roofs with gable ends, the ridges generally parallel to with the main Streets. Dormer windows are rarely found, a notable exception being the Fosters Yard Hotel. The examples at 24 to 30 Bridge Street are probably more recent additions introduced to

create additional accommodation within the roof space. Most buildings have prominent chimney stacks and it is only in relatively recent times that the trend has been to omit or remove these. The central octagonal cupola on the Nethersole School is a prominent feature. The tower of the Abbey is a noticeable feature but is barely higher than the adjoining mature trees.

SPECIAL FEATURES

37. Although a key part of the infrastructure of Polesworth, the bridge over the River Anker, built in 1776 and widened in 1924, is in practice only visible from Grendon Road and the adjoining Abbey Green Park. As noted earlier this structure is Listed and an Ancient Monument.
38. The Abbey Church of St Editha and adjoining Vicarage are a self-contained group of buildings and together with remains of the Abbey are a key part of the history of Polesworth.

FLOORSCAPE

39. There are no parts of the village where the surfacing of roads, footways, etc, is contemporary with the older buildings.

ACTIVITY

40. There are two commercial areas in Polesworth linked by Polesworth Bridge. The greater number of shops are in Bridge Street. These, together with the library/health centre complex at Hall Court, provide the main focus of activity except on market days when the focus shifts over the bridge to the Grendon Road and Market Street area.

VIEWS

41. Views within, into and out of an area contribute to its character. The long view along Bridge Street to the south is closed by the view of the Dordon ridge on the skyline. Looking northwards along Bridge Street the view is closed in the middle distance by the corner of Nethersole School. Middle distance views along Grendon Road, Market Street and Tamworth Road are all closed by the humps of the respective bridges over the Coventry Canal. The relatively short views along High Street are closed to the west by the cottages at No 2 Station Street and to the east by a narrow gap between the Spread Eagle Pub and No 28.
42. The steeply rising ground to the south and east is dominated by Pooley Hall. The hill provides a number of view points into the Conservation Area, in particular from The Lynch, The Gullet and Bassetts Bridge as well as a backcloth for the whole area in this direction.

DISCORDANT FEATURES

43. A particular characteristic of Polesworth is the mixture of ages and styles of buildings which, grouped together, display a considerable degree of harmony. Individually few have special merit. There are, however, some buildings and features which by reason of their design, scale and location are particularly discordant. Examples include:
 - The Co-op Store in High Street
 - The Polesworth Working Mens Club in High Street
 - The modern concrete footbridge over the River Anker.
 - The garage premises in Grendon Road.

44. The presence of road vehicles, the space required for their movement and parking and signs and other street furniture required for their control have an all-pervading impact on the area.

CONCLUSIONS

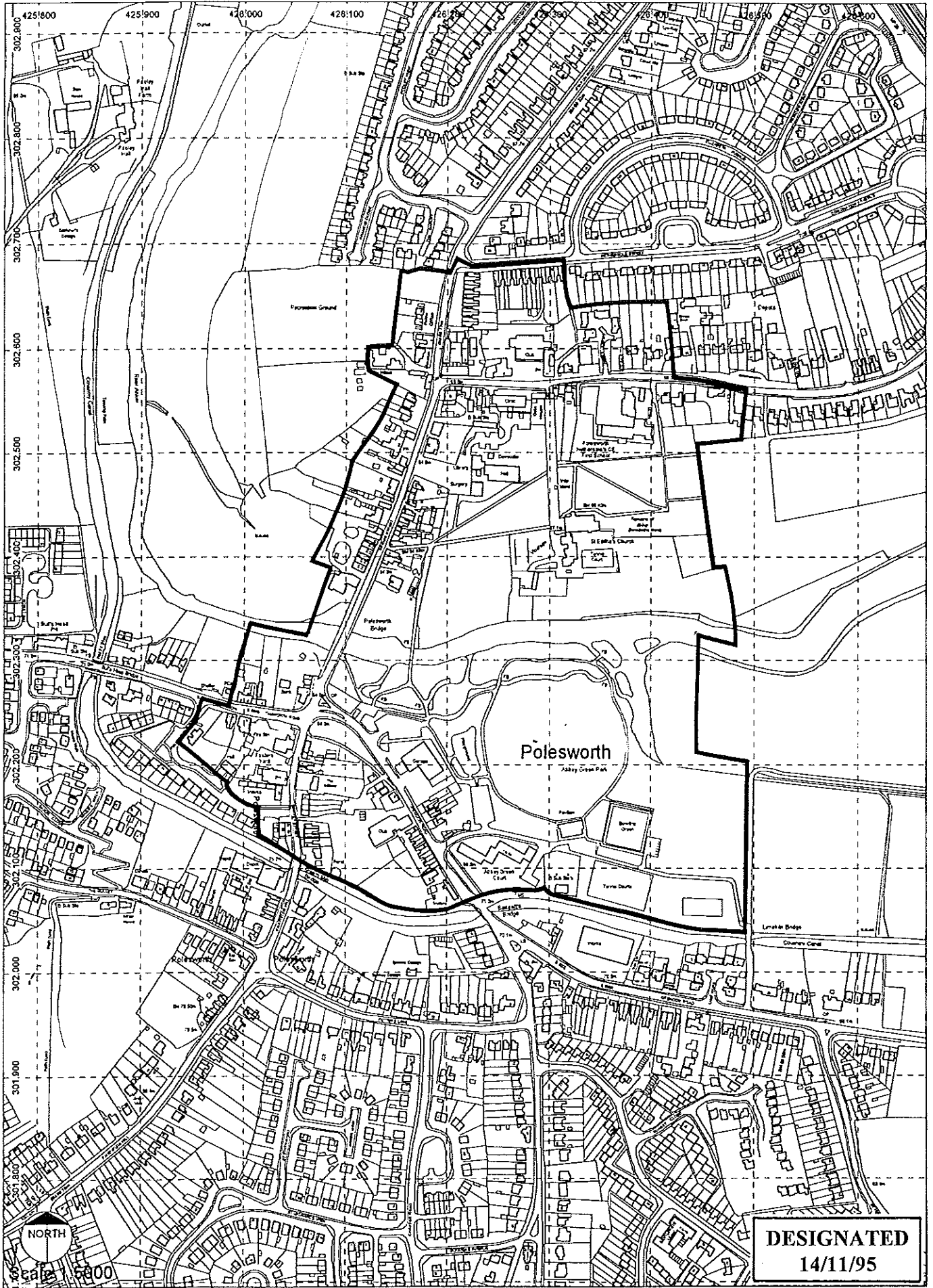
45. Polesworth has a distinctive character which reflects the geography of its setting and its history, and this is unique to North Warwickshire. Whilst pressure for dramatic change, may not be experienced in the future there will certainly be continuing demand for infill development. Hitherto that has, for the most part, been successfully absorbed into the character of the village. However, traffic access requirements for more than a handful of houses can have an unfortunate effect on the street scene.
46. It is considered that the designation of a Conservation Area at Polesworth will provide a firmer and detailed basis for controlling development of all kinds within the village.

PROPOSED BOUNDARY

47. The boundary broadly embraces the west end of High Street, the whole of Bridge Street and Market Street and Grendon Road northwards from Bassetts Bridge. To the north the recreation ground is included together with the houses at the west end of Nethersole Street. The eastern boundary follows that of the churchyard and Abbey Green Park and the southern boundary follows the canal. It is anticipated that a further Conservation Area will be designated along the length of the Coventry Canal and this may extend to include parts of Potters Lane and The Gullet. To the west the boundary includes the east end of Tamworth Road and then follows the rear of properties in Bridge Street.

PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS

-
48. In deciding to designate a Conservation Area, a Local Planning Authority must formulate and publish proposals for its preservation and enhancement.
49. The Borough Council intends that the primary means of protecting and enhancing the Polesworth Conservation Area is the implementation and application of Policy ENV14 of the North Warwickshire Local Plan (Appendix A)
50. The Borough Council, in partnership with Polesworth Parish Council and Warwickshire County Council with grant aid from the European Commission has (in 1994) carried out a package of measures at Hall Court including:
- Restoration and conversion of the mediaeval Tithe Barn to a 'Community Enterprise Centre' with a meeting room and computer room.
 - Repairs to the Dovecote
 - Construction of eight workspace units
- Extensions to the County Library
 - Location and capping of a disused mine shaft
 - External improvements and environmental works
51. It is unlikely, in the foreseeable future, that the Borough Council will be able to make further capital expenditure available for enhancements in Polesworth.
52. In the short term it is unrealistic to expect that significant improvements to discordant features can be achieved. Some can only be realised as a result of sympathetic redevelopment. Others, however, only require quite modest action such as the replacement of shop fronts, fascias and signs, the undergrounding of overhead power and telephone lines, tree planting and repaving of both private forecourts and public footways.
53. The problem of providing safe vehicular access for visitors and to new housing development may be helped by the introduction of traffic calming measures, and this could have wider environmental benefits within the village.



POLESWORTH CONSERVATION AREA

Reproduced under Ordnance Survey licence LA 07991X

North Warwickshire Borough Council