

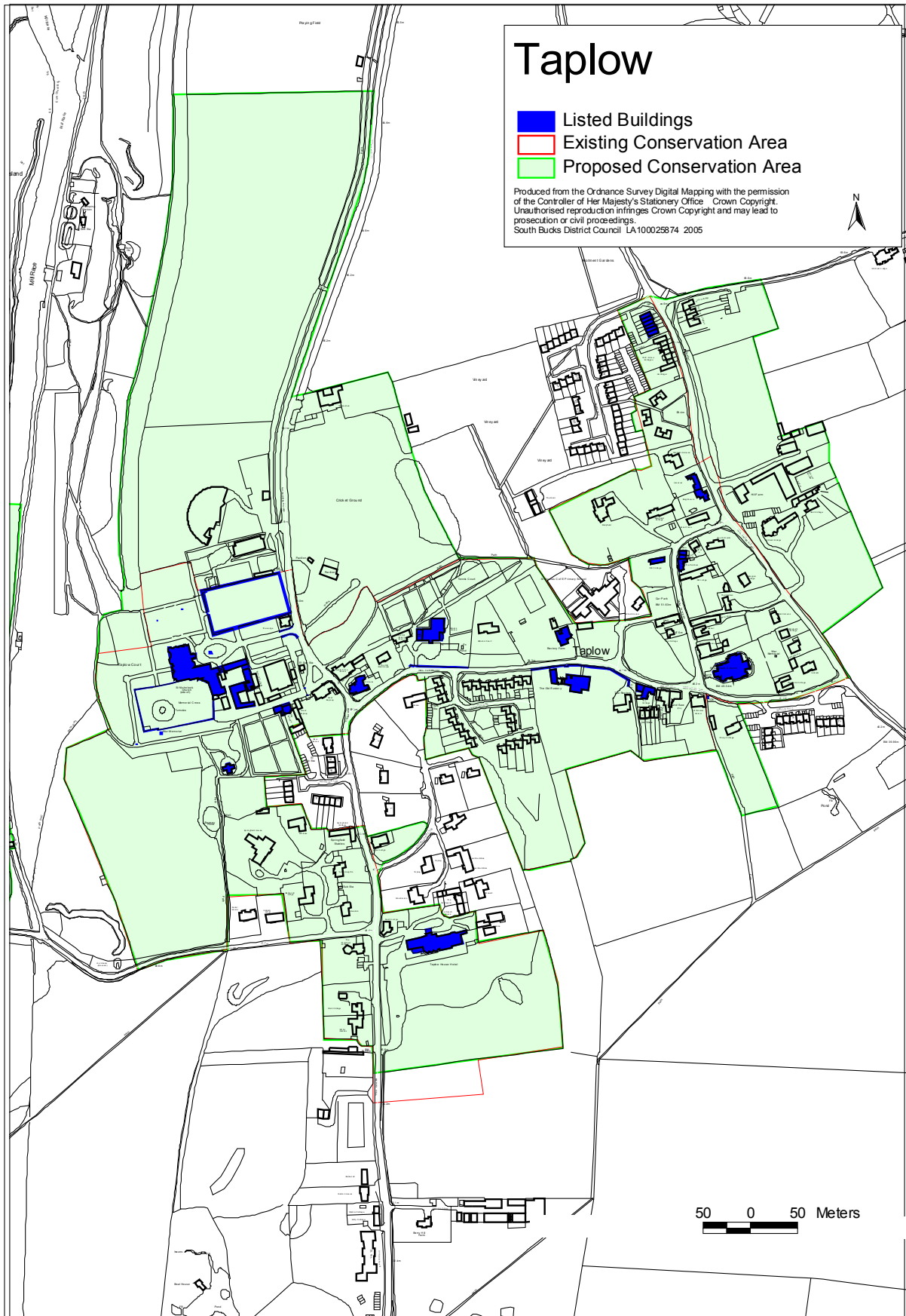
**DRAFT**  
**Conservation Area Character Appraisal**



**Taplow**  
**Designated 1975 & 2006**

**Conservation areas were introduced through the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and are “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance” (Section 69 (1)(a) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.**

**This document identifies, describes and illustrates the features and characteristics that justify designation of Taplow as a Conservation Area. Any alterations or extensions to buildings within or adjacent to the Conservation Area are constrained by the need to respect the special characteristics identified in this document and in the Council’s local policies.**



## Location & Setting

Taplow lies on the borders of Buckinghamshire and Berkshire close to the River Thames, on the western edge of the Burnham plateau. The settlement is built into a hillside that sweeps up from the valley floor in the south towards the Cliveden estate. The most significant architectural feature of the area, and the historic focus of this settlement, is Taplow Court, a large country house set in 80 acres of grounds leading down to the river. Much of the surrounding land, including the neighbouring village of Taplow, has strong historic links to Taplow Court, which stands imperiously on the headland overlooking the Thames Valley.

## Origins & Development

Evidence points to Taplow having been continuously occupied for at least 10,000 years, the longest period for any settlement site in Buckinghamshire, and among the longest for any site in England. However, the centre of Taplow has moved over time. From the Middle Stone Age, through to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the core was close to the present site of Taplow Court. Subsequently, a new settlement grew around a new church, built half a mile east, and became the present day village of Taplow.

Taplow Court stands on a promontory overlooking the Thames Valley. The grounds contain the remnants of Iron and Bronze Age hill forts which were built on land that had already been occupied for many thousands of years: by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers and Neolithic farmers. Other archaeological finds show that the Romans also inhabited Taplow.

The area's dominant strategic position overlooking the Thames Valley provided good defence as well as access to fishing and transportation, resources which have been valued throughout the ages. Natural springs in the locality provided fresh, clean drinking water and watered the verdant hillside.

By 650 AD a Saxon burial mound had been constructed close by. The barrow, which still stands today, may have contained the remains of Taeppa, a Saxon lord or Thane. This gave the name to Taplow: Taeppa's Low ("hlaw" is the Saxon word for mound). The location became famous in 1883 when local antiquarian James Rutland excavated it, producing treasures that are displayed in the British Museum. It is still the third richest early medieval burial ever excavated in Britain. Similar burials discovered in Essex and Kent indicate the existence of a connected series of Saxon power bases stretching along the river. The River Thames has been an important communication and trading route throughout history.

Local tradition cites St Birinus, the first Bishop of Dorchester, as baptising his Saxon converts at Bapsey Pond, a short distance to the south of the mound. This lower field is undeveloped and other earthworks, possibly the southern extent of the hill fort ramparts, can be found on the brow of the escarpment. The flourishing Christian religion led to the construction of a church within sight of the mound. The church would serve as a new focus for this community and represents the fusion of pagan and early Christian beliefs in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

By the time of the Norman Conquest, a manor house stood close by. It was on, or close to, the manor house site on which Taplow Court would eventually stand. In due course, the manor itself passed to King William I's half-brother, the Bishop of Bayeux. In 1197, William de Turville sold the manor to the Prior of Merton and it was passed to successive priors until the

reign of Henry VIII when the land came to the Honour of Windsor. Under Windsor there were a series tenant leaseholders, until 1630 when the Taplow estate was bestowed on Charles Harbert. In 1700, George Hamilton, the 1st Earl of Orkney acquired the estate from the Hampson family to add to a portfolio, which already included Cliveden.

Successive Earls of Orkney adapted and rebuilt Taplow Court extensively before the fifth Earl of Orkney sold Taplow, without Cliveden, to Charles Pascoe Grenfell in 1852. It was Grenfell who pulled down the last remains of the old church of St Nicholas as he embarked on his ambitious plans to rebuild Taplow Court in a grand Tudor style: turning a manor house into a country house. His grandson William Henry, who was created Lord Desborough in 1905, was the last lord of the manor.

The hamlet of Taplow had grown around the manor house and church. Many inhabitants would have worked for the lord of the manor, either at the house or on his extensive landholdings in the area. However, the area half a mile to the east, which had previously contained a scattering of cottages, farms and a gentleman's residence, developed as a new heart of the community from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The new village flourished with the construction of a new church there in 1828. The old church had fallen into disrepair under the Hampsons and Earls of Orkney. Worshippers no longer traipsed past the lord of the manor's residence for Sunday services. Taplow became divided: into village and country estate.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the village continued to establish itself as a settlement in its own right. A handsome Victorian school stood on the current site of the village centre car park, part of which, the "Reading Room", now serves as the village hall itself. The church was rebuilt in quite lavish style to the designs of George Fellowes-Prynne in the Edwardian era.

During the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many influential people of the day chose to live in the area, attracted by the large houses and the village's location, both rural and connected directly with Paddington by rail. Many of the large houses have now been replaced by modern residential development.

The current village is sited on the East-West oriented Rectory Road which links the church and Taplow Court and is focused on a village green which was created out of farmland in the 1960s. A modern school also serves the community and its playing field, along with the adjoining cricket field, provide open space that was given to the village by Lady Gage (Lord Desborough's daughter) in 1959.

### **Landscape and Views**

The character of the village is partly defined by its wooded hillside location. The terrain affects the views in, out and across the Conservation Area. Some larger properties have used the gradient and trees to give themselves privacy and seclusion. The Edwardian church was built with a fine tall spire, which is visible from a number of key points and anchors the "new" village centre. The curve of Rectory Road and its junction with Cliveden Road/ Berry Hill through the settlement gives the Conservation Area many charming vistas. The views over the green in all directions are also key vistas.

The considerable amount of historic walling throughout the Conservation Area provides a visual link between the natural and built landscapes, with the red brick complementing that of the houses, while the deviations and bends follow the sloped lanes which track the landscape.

At key points the built environment in Taplow village reflects its topography. The cottages, which line the south side of the green, nestle in their little hollow and are of small stature. Taplow Court on the other hand is resplendent with grand chimneystacks and other Victorian adornments giving a clear signal of its importance in the area for miles around. It is interesting to note that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the larger part of the Taplow Court Estate lay in Berkshire, towards and around the village of Bray (all visible from Taplow Court). The taller houses, which line High Street as it climbs the hill and winds towards Hill Farm, create a scene reminiscent of a drover's road in a working village. The jettied façade of The Porches on High Street adds to this traditional rustic character.

Cedar Chase, a 20<sup>th</sup> century development on Rectory Road, has buildings which react to the natural landscape and, rather than acquiesce to its character, provide a juxtaposition of sharp angles: the roofscape and sheer walling of grey brick. However, the relationship of the buildings to each other and the green spaces in between give a strong feeling of community. The settlement makes a strong statement that this is a residential area within a rural setting and that the two can coexist while having fundamentally different appearances.

Other important views in and out of the Conservation Area are in a southerly direction across the Thames Valley: from the car park of The Oak and Saw Public House towards Windsor Castle; from the Saxon mound across the Jubilee and Thames Rivers towards Bracknell Forest; and from the southern approach along Boundary Road, where the green spire of St Nicholas' Church rises from the wooded area behind Wellbank. The spire is also visible from across the fields to the north, along Cliveden Road and Hill Farm Road.

The many shades of green in Taplow are characteristic of its hillside location and are echoed by the verdi-gris of the copper church spire. Much of the area is located over natural springs, which feed the abundant trees and flora, and water occasionally spills out into the roads.

### **Townscape and Spaces**

The central village green is sloped towards the north and the gently winding roads provide a visually attractive street scene with interesting variations in roofscape, particularly evident in High Street.

A traditional village scene is presented by the position of the gothic style church and spire near to the green. The two storey properties around the green complete the scene and these varied structural forms, sensitively placed, do not lend themselves to being described in terms of "townscape": Taplow has defiantly remained a village.

The source of character is identifiable in the open spaces, green areas, trees, walls and roads as much as in the buildings; it is the relationship between all of these features which produces Taplow's character. The juxtaposition of natural to built; old to new; large to small houses; wooded to open areas, is key. Also the variation in positioning of buildings: those by the green front almost directly onto the highway, while those beyond are often set back behind gates, walls and mature trees.

The principal green space is the village green which, until the 1960s, was part of a farm owned by South Bucks District Council. The district still owns the land, which has been retained as an open area for the amenity of the local people. Sensitively sited trees are spaced so that there are good views across the green and a large open area remains in the middle. Due to the narrowness of the lanes and the prevalence of historic walling and mature trees on the roadside there are not many verges in the village.

The Cricket Ground (connected to the village by a tree-lined footpath) is a key community open space opposite Taplow Court. It is host to a number of activities, including cricket matches, which enhance the character of the village. In this corner of the Conservation Area, public open space is limited to a small area of grass close to the junction of Cliveden Road and Rectory Road.

At Taplow Court, the village character is replaced with that of a country house and garden: there are extensive open areas, although not all are in their original use: a large car park has replaced the kitchen garden. The Taplow Court grounds are one of three nationally designated Registered Parks and Gardens in the parish. The house is kept well hidden from view by a high brick wall and various smaller buildings, which service the Court. There is a clear view of Taplow Court through the main entrance gates where the long shingle drive sweeps up to a statue of George III and the circular lawn in front of the entrance porch.

To the north of the main house are the canteen building, formerly Lord Desborough's tennis court and swimming pool, and a modern "Chanting Hall". The latter is constructed over part of the hill fort defences. Beyond, further north, is open land that is partly given over to pasture, and defines the northern extent of Taplow Court grounds. Below ground there are the remains of the Neolithic, Roman and Saxon settlements (some of which extend underneath Taplow Court and beyond). The long historic occupation of this western edge of the plateau has occurred because of the qualities that the landscape has to offer here, and the ability of successive communities to use those qualities practically.

Wooded slopes extend up to the north towards Cliveden. To the south the landscape sweeps down Berry Hill to the Thames valley floor. On Berry Hill a number of cottages and houses have been built during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, although its narrow, winding village lane lined with mature trees has retained the village feel.

Additional green areas are currently only found in the grounds of the larger houses and farms, particularly Taplow House Hotel and Hitcham Grange and Hill Farm.

## Uses

Although crop marks show evidence of extensive Neolithic and Roman farming, the heavy gravel content of the soil has not suited farming well. Mineral extraction and quarrying has, however, been profitable in the area since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Hampton Court account books for the 1530s show burnt lime and bricks having been brought down the Thames from Taplow Quarry. In earlier eras, the main economic base for the area has been the Thames, which provided fish; and the surrounding woodland, which suited the farming of pigs, the hunting of game (the right of free warren was much sought after) and provision fuel.

The river, or the relationship to it, has always been the primary feature of Taplow, socially and economically. The Thames has been the boundary of parishes, counties, and possibly even Saxon kingdoms. It was a vital resource in the area and the focus of much activity: by the medieval period water was being used to power mills. In The Domesday Book of 1086, 1,000 eels from the fisheries in Taplow Manor are mentioned. This stretch of the river was crowded with eyots, which could have provided temporary crossing until a bridge was constructed. In 1768 there was an Act of Parliament, which banned people from mooring boats at Taplow Mill stream in response to trespassing in the gardens of Taplow Court. Fishing disputes were numerous throughout the centuries and indicate the importance of fishing in the area. During World War II, Taplow Court was used to accommodate evacuees and was later used as a girls' school. It then changed to business use until the 1990s when a lay Buddhist community bought the house and grounds.

The prevailing use is residential, although the Oak and Saw public house, named after emblems on the Orkney Coat of Arms, operates in Rectory Road. Other shops have come and gone over the years, the last being a small general store in High Street that closed in the early 1980s. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century many of the buildings around the green were shops and businesses whose products and trades served Taplow Court.

A prevailing residential use has existed in recent times and numerous smaller houses have replaced some of the large residences. This change has reflected the changes in demographics, with modern families having different requirements from the householders in the large properties on the hill at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Taplow's location near a mainline railway station connected to London remains an attraction for those seeking a semi rural life but with access to wide-ranging employment opportunities. The large school at the centre of the village provides two spells of frenetic activity each weekday during term time.

## **Architecture**

The area is characterised by a great range of ages and styles of houses and cottages. 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages face the green and contrast in scale and style to the large 19<sup>th</sup> century houses on the fringes of the village. Smaller, late 19<sup>th</sup> century houses are grouped around the "new" church next to the green. A modern school stands on the north of the green at the top of an incline next to the fine redbrick Parish Hall. Other modern developments, of varying standards of design, are scattered around the village.

### **Taplow Court**

This former manor house has been much altered since its initial construction prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century (including complete reconstruction following at least one fire). Its present "Tudor-cum-French Gothic appearance" (Pevsner) dates to the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century and was designed by William Burn. While there is no trace of remains of earlier historic fabric within the house besides sealed vaults, there is Tudor brickwork in the service range to the left of the forecourt and the tall red brick walled kitchen garden has earlier origins. It has been home to lords of the manor, including Hamiltons/ Orkneys and Grenfells/ Desboroughs. Charles Pascoe Grenfell continued Orkney's "gothicisation" with the addition of ornate gothic chimneys and mullioned windows.

The cluster of cottages around the service entrance to Taplow Court, near the junction with Rectory Road, has a small village character with some Victorian features such as decorated



bargeboards. On the eastern side of the road Queen Anne's House is barely recognisable as a former inn.

The Court lodge is a grander version of the cottages on Hill Farm Road which bear the same initials inscribed on the front elevation: WHG (William Grenfell, Lord Desborough). Its decorated bargeboards adorn this dainty building on the threshold to the soaring elevations of Taplow Court.

On the other side of Cliveden Road, Wickenden is a modern addition to the Taplow tradition of large houses. Although its appearance is more in the style of Lutyens than Burn or Barry its existence confirms the principle that large detached residences belong in Taplow, more so than estates of smaller houses. Wickenden is built in a grand Arts and Crafts style and is a successful example of new development in the village which is neither pastiche nor self-consciously modern.

### **Berry Hill**

Individual lodges (to Taplow House) and cottages, one of which is thatched, line the route down the hill, which splits at the junction of Mill Road. Many modern houses are hidden by hedging or trees or are excluded from the Conservation Area as they do not display any special character. Taplow House itself was once the home of Pascoe Grenfell whose son Charles was to buy Taplow Court in 1852. It is a large, much extended residence, now serving as a hotel. The white rendered façade is castellated and slightly sprawling. The house has extensive gardens to the front, with a high red brick wall bounding Berry Hill and tall wrought iron gates protecting the approach to the house. At the rear, the garden has been partitioned off by fencing, beyond which the former stables and servants quarters (outside the Conservation Area) have been converted into residential accommodation.

The character of this part of Taplow, which is of large detached mansions, has been diminished by the loss of many of these large houses (such as Berry Hill House and Summerfield) to fire or demolition over the years. In their place, and in their grounds, more modest sized residences have been built although the significant amounts of trees have hidden this change somewhat. The remaining grand structures of Taplow Court and Taplow House, enclosed in substantial grounds, are the only surviving examples.

### **Rectory Road**

Around the corner of Berry Hill, towards the village centre, Rectory Road has a number of fine 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings on its northern side as well as detached modern residences. They are mainly set back from the road, except Hill House on the corner of Cliveden Road, which confidently stands on the corner, facing down Berry Hill towards the Thames Valley. The building has been enlarged and otherwise altered over the years but despite its impressive height retains the character of a more modest building at the centre of the older hamlet, a foil to the large Taplow houses.

Continuing along Rectory Road, the houses stand further back behind brick walls, with more private settings. The Old Malt House is a 20<sup>th</sup> century construction, while Elibank/ The Dower House is an early 18<sup>th</sup> century house with Victorian additions that has retained much of its original charm and is one of the few remaining large houses in the area.

Opposite is Cedar Chase, a Span development. This road was laid out in the 1960s after the demolition of a large 19<sup>th</sup> century house (Taplow Hill House) on the site. The 24 homes owe



more in appearance to the Span style than any Taplow style, varied as the latter is. Materials are modern - grey brick and charcoal tiles not native to the local area. In fact, this development could be termed the antithesis of “vernacular” and yet their positioning as a group of buildings is rooted in the village ideal of community. It could be argued that Cedar Chase is an honest later addition to what is really quite a modern village itself. It represents how new design can sit well with older character if done with integrity, and that new buildings do not have to resort to pastiche of older styles in order to relate with existing character.

On the edge of the large green are the Old Rectory, Rectory Farm and the Old Barn, which mark the return to properties of earlier vintage. They, too, are red brick but retain a more rural feel than Elibank, consistent with the former farming use in the vicinity. The row of shops down to the Oak and Saw PH are early 19<sup>th</sup> century in origin and have served as many types of shops and enterprises (including a bakers and a sweet shop), which supplied Taplow Court as well as the village itself. This small row of cottages is painted white and two storey, although appearing even smaller in this setting, nestling at the low point of the hill below the high bank of the green. Larger painted timber service doors are found at the east end of the terrace and confirm a former commercial use.

Beyond the pub, the grand, detached St Nicolas House sits prominently at the entrance to the Conservation area with exposed red brick and an elaborate porch. This taller, detached property makes a different architectural statement to the more modest neighbouring terraces. Next door, Priory Cottage stands on the site of a former alehouse, Old Friends, and is sensitively placed and scaled so as to not intrude onto the character of the Conservation Area. It is set back from the road and has views down towards Windsor Castle which complement the character of the village.

On the opposite corner, St Nicolas’ Church stands behind a lych-gate and surrounded by tall trees. It was constructed in 1911, incorporating an earlier church and is of plain brick in a Gothic style. It is dressed in stone and has a tall copper spire. It is a large church, lavishly finished, and surrounded by a large churchyard, which accommodates a cemetery and a war memorial.

### **High Street**

Next to the church, Mulberry House and a succession of individual houses line High Street, which winds up and out of the village centre. These were shops in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including an abattoir and livery outfitters. Some shopfronts remain although most have facades that have been remodelled and all are now in residential use. They are all built of brick although The Porches and Old Cottage have timber-framed cores. Cottages and small village terraces are picturesquely grouped with the dominant 19<sup>th</sup> century Village Centre building peering over them. Features such as the jettied second storey of The Porches present a medieval village character. At a turn in the road, beyond Old Cottage, Maryfield is a large detached house which is set back a long way from the road. It has more in common with the Taplow tradition of the gentleman’s residence, and is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century half-timbered building.

### **Hill Farm Road**

As High Street continues around into Hill Farm Road, the small rows of cottages continue, some dating from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century other from the mid 19<sup>th</sup>. Each row has a distinctive character. The earlier ones with uneven roofs are more rustic, whereas the later ones stand

taller and have a slightly more modern, but still rural, character. The cottages on the eastern side of the road bear the WHG inscription on their front façade. Other, 20<sup>th</sup> century houses and bungalows, are sprinkled in between.

Hill Farm itself has a modern farmhouse with fine Victorian stables and barns, which has retained some good architectural features. Next door, Hitcham Grange is a converted 18<sup>th</sup> century gentleman's residence. It has two full height canted bays and is mainly rendered. The only surviving structure within the formal gardens is a disused icehouse.

On the other side of Hill Farm Road, leading down to the mouth of Rectory Road and Wellbank estate, are modern detached houses. They are set back from the road behind various trees and hedges.

### **Materials**

There is little timber-framed construction remaining in Taplow although some is hidden behind facades of the older buildings facing the green. The majority of buildings are of brick construction using local red brick and have tile roofs. Brickwork is generally found in the traditional Flemish bond. Many properties are rendered or painted white. The church is faced in limestone with a copper spire that gives a suitably green landmark. Modern developments, such as Cedar Chase, have tended to use non-local manufactured materials.

### **Negative Features, Neutral Areas & Enhancement Opportunities**

The village of Taplow suffers relatively few negative features, although the village school is of modern design without any particular architectural sensitivity to the character of the rest of the village. It is a low-rise building and although excluded from the Conservation Area it has some visual impact on the green.

The schoolhouse next door makes a more emphatic architectural statement in its rejection of the village feel, being suburban in character. It has an overtly modern style boundary treatment, which is visually intrusive on the Conservation Area. While there are a number of other modern developments around the village, including Buffins, Wellbank, Stockwells and Saxon Gardens, none of these impose their character, or lack of it, on the Conservation Area quite like the schoolhouse. This is due to its location on the north end of the green, which has an elevated position and, therefore, dominates the setting. The extension to the Village Hall has a similar, if not so extreme, effect but this is tempered by it being single storey.

There are a number of modern properties in a cul-de-sac off Mill Lane on the former site of Springfield, another grand house that has been lost. These would not usually meet the criteria for inclusion in a conservation area: they are modern with no architectural interest. However, their exclusion would result in the loss of an area to the south, including Taplow House, that retains much of the village character. Their inclusion is justified by their minimal impact on in the Conservation Area due to their screening from Berry Hill by large amounts of high hedging.

An additional negative feature of this part of the Conservation Area is the large amount of heavy goods traffic on Cliveden Road/ Berry Hill. The width of the lanes and the pavements do not lend themselves to the volume and speed of the traffic and this detracts considerably from the village feel. Large lorries thunder through regularly.

30 years on, the garages on the High Street (as identified in the original Conservation Area Document) are still a potential for improvement in the Conservation Area. They are prominently sited and have a character that is more suburban than rural.

The Village Hall car park provides a necessary amenity for the village, but visually does not contribute to the character of the area, nor does it particularly detract from it either.

Very little new development has taken place in Taplow Village in recent times and there is little scope for further new housing.

## **Designations**

### Listed Buildings

Grade II\*

Grade II

### Scheduled Ancient Monuments

### Registered Parks And Gardens