East Northamptonshire Council

DRAFT: Ashton Conservation Area
Appraisal & Management Plan

LIBERTY ROTHSCILD
1909 - 1987

Ask now the beasts
and they shall tell thee,
And the birds of the air
shall declare unto thee.

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1.0 STATEMENT OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST OF THE ASHTON CONSERVATION AREA.

The key characteristics of the Ashton Conservation Area are:

- It lies in an attractive setting rising from the Nene Valley which closely reflects the immediate post enclosure countryside and is a mosaic of small fields enclosed by hedgerows with native hedgerow trees all with a backdrop of woodlands and attractive panoramas of the surrounding landscape.

- At various times in the 19th and 20th centuries parts of the landscape have been specifically managed with nature conservation objectives, initially for hunting and later for lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) and later for wildflower meadows. The estate (and the Rothschilds) became internationally recognised for this pioneering ecological work.

- There is a long history of occupation and settlement which adds greatly to the historic interest of the village and landscape.

- The village and the Wold to the east is an almost unique example of a planned “model” rural settlement and country estate from the first years of the 20th century which was designed by a single architect for a single owner to reflect a particular view of the rural idyll.

- With some notable exceptions, all buildings and associated stone walls and tree planting is from a single decade. The buildings are planned around a village green and two farmyards, superimposed on a previous settlement to form a nuclear village and distant from it, to the east is a contemporary mini “stately home”, with a cricket ground, walled garden and gardeners dwellings, stables, gatehouse and stewards house all loosely clustered around with a model farm a short distance to the west.

- All the buildings are constructed in a locally quarried high quality oolitic limestone, carefully dressed into squared blocks and reed thatch roofs for the more utilitarian and Collyweston stone slate roofs on the higher status buildings.

- The planned estate includes some innovative examples of technology including a water tower, petroleum and electricity supply.

- Until recently, the whole parish has remained in a single ownership and so managed and maintained with absolute consistency, thus maintaining the buildings as originally built with minimal alterations.
2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

This Conservation Area Appraisal has been prepared by Richard Donoyou on behalf of East Northamptonshire Council. Survey work was substantially completed during 2015. A discussion with the parish council took place in September with the draft document being completed by October 2015.

This Appraisal, with the accompanying management proposals, will be used to guide future management of the village and its landscape and to assist in the consideration of proposals for the adaptation of existing buildings and for new development in conjunction with the formal planning policies adopted by East Northamptonshire Council.

2.2 Planning Policy Context

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 (The Act) defines Conservation Areas as “areas of architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. Local Authorities are required by the Act to identify the parts of their area that should be designated as conservation areas and to formulate and publish proposals to preserve or enhance them. Local Authorities must submit proposals for the protection and enhancement of conservation areas for consideration at a public meeting within the relevant area. They must also have regard to any views expressed by people attending the meeting.

Broadly, the effects of designation are:

- Planning permission must be obtained from the local planning authority or Secretary of State prior to the substantial or total demolition of any building or structure within a conservation area, with some exceptions;
- The local planning authority must consider the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area when assessing applications for change in conservation areas;
- Permitted development rights are slightly different in conservation areas;
- Permission is required from the local planning authority to top or lop a tree over a certain size.

As well as receiving statutory protection, conservation areas are protected by national, county and local planning policies.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the current national policy and guidance for the designation of conservation areas and for the determination of development proposals that may affect them.

NPPF section 12: ‘Conserving and enhancing the historic environment’ (paragraphs 126-141) sets out the range of national policy criteria in respect of conservation areas, in accordance with the core national principle, to ‘conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution of the quality of life of this and future generations.’ (NPPF paragraph 17). The North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (adopted June 2008), or ‘Joint Core Strategy’ (JCS), sets out the current strategic Local Plan policies for development and growth in the
North Northamptonshire area. JCS Policy 13 sets out a range of criteria both for raising standards (e.g. design standards) and protecting assets; this includes historic landscape and designated built environmental assets and their settings.

Within East Northamptonshire, the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (RNOTP, adopted July 2011) provides the more detailed local policy framework. The RNOTP defines Ashton as a ‘Category B Network Village,’ where the emphasis of new development will be focussed on the re-use and conversion of buildings within and adjacent to the village (Policy 1).

The RNOTP contains further relevant policies regarding windfall development in settlements (Policy 2), and the adaption or re-use of rural buildings (Policy 23). It is emphasized that the relevant national and local policies must to be taken into account when assessing development proposals which affect the conservation area.

2.3 Purpose of the Appraisal

This Appraisal defines the special architectural and historic interest for which the Ashton Conservation Area merits designation. It identifies positive features that should be protected and highlights challenges which may detract from the conservation area and its surroundings. It will be used by the Council in considering proposals for the demolition and adaptation of buildings and for new developments. It will help Ashton Parish Council and East Northamptonshire Council to continue to develop positive understanding of the management of conservation areas and assist property owners and developers to take account of the importance of buildings and other structures, spaces and landscape within and adjacent to the conservation area. It will also provide clarity for the Ashton Estate / OHL Limited in their management of land and buildings.

The Conservation Area Appraisal sets out policies and reasoning and includes management proposals and practical actions to help conserve and enhance the conservation area and to mitigate the negative features and effects.

Preparation of this Appraisal involved extensive research and survey work. However, should any particular feature not be specifically identified or noted within the document, it should not be taken that it is of no significance.

2.4 Community Involvement

The conducting of the research and survey work included a meeting with the Parish Council on 8 September 2015. It is anticipated that this process of consultation and inclusion of local knowledge and key landowners, will continue to develop this draft document into the formal appraisal.
3.0 THE ASHTON CONSERVATION AREA

3.1 Designation

The Ashton Conservation Area was first designated in October 1970 and subsequently extended in June 1996.

3.2 English Heritage Review

English Heritage conducted a defined area survey of the Ashton Estate between 2009 and 2010. This survey concluded that the historical importance of the Ashton Estate had not been fully identified and recommendations were made to the Secretary of State to upgrade the listing of some historic buildings, to add previously unlisted buildings to the statutory list and to designate a significant part of Ashton Wold as a Grade II Park and Garden under the Register of Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 for its special historic interest (List entry Number: 1001715). These recommendations were confirmed by the Secretary of State in January 2010.

3.3 Activities and Uses

Ashton is, and has always been, a small village within a parish estate. The entire estate has been bought and sold, mainly for its sporting value, a number of times from the 17th c onwards. Following the parliamentary enclosure, the village was centred around two mixed farms. The majority of people in the village were employed in farming and estate management or related work or as domestic servants. From 1901 the village was redeveloped as a model agricultural settlement and a country house and model farm and diary were also part of this new model farm estate. The loss of manpower resulting from the First World War changed estate management practices. The drive for food self-sufficiency in the Second World War led to mechanisation and intensification of farming and ploughing of previously uncultivated land. Until the mid 20th century, Ashton remained a small largely agricultural village with the majority of people tied to the land and estate cottages.

The massive mechanisation of agriculture from the 1960s led to farm buildings within the village becoming redundant and the former tied workers houses and cottages being rented out. As a result of consistent management of the estate buildings made possible by single estate ownership, the appearance of Ashton is largely unchanged. However, the majority of people in the village now commute by car to work beyond the parish. The status of Ashton as a conservation village and the policies of Ashton Estates have resulted in no new dwellings being constructed in the second half of the 20th c. but the farm buildings of Chapel Farm are currently being converted for residential use. The house and buildings to Ashton Green Farm have been vacant since the last quarter of the 20th c.
4.0 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

4.1 Geographic Location

Ashton, a parish of 748 hectares on the east bank of the River Nene, was created in 1885 by uniting Elmington and Ashton, two former townships in Oundle parish. It is situated in the Nene Valley 1 mile east of Oundle and occupies a position above the river terraces, just off the Oundle /Polebrook /Folksworth/Yaxley/Peterborough classified road (Nene Way). Ashton Wold is situated a further mile to the east on the top of a hill 70m above sea level. Ashton was connected to neighbouring villages and to Oundle by road well into the 19th c, as shown by the Cassini map.

When the parish was purchased in the mid-19th c the east west road from Ashton village to Warmington did not become a public highway and thus the settlement became a cul-de-sac, increasingly so as car movement superseded walking and bicycles as the principal mode of
personal transport. This isolation has done much to prevent the domination of traffic and highway engineering that has greatly changed the character of many small settlements.

4.2 Topography and Geology

The parish covers occupies a broad strip of land extending from the R. Nene at about 20 meters above OD in the west and rising to a generally flat plateau to the east. at 70 meters above OD. Ashton village is situated on rising ground above the first river terrace gravels on the 35m contour level. Ashton Wold is situated on the top of the plateau at the 70m contour. The underlying rock is limestone comprising the Upper Lias, Great Oolite and inferior beds of sedimentary clay and limestone. Most of the eastern two-thirds of the parish lie on Boulder Clay or Oxford Clay, but nearer the river there are outcrops of Oolitic limestones and clays.

4.3 Landscape Setting

The west parish boundary is the River Nene and the parish between the river and Polebrook Road is a series of water meadows, divided by the Mill Stream and defined by drains along which crack willows are the dominant tree. The pasture, trees and drains are not strongly managed and the landscape has a feel of gentle neglect.

From the Polebrook Road, the land rises from the river and the landscape comprises a patchwork of small fields enclosed by hawthorn hedges, punctuated by groups of trees planted around The Laundry Cuckoo Spinney and more recent plantings close to the A605 and self-set in the Old Quarry. East of the village the landscape becomes more open, reflecting the change from mainly pastoral to arable farming. However, the strong sense of an 18th c enclosure landscape is retained with relatively small fields enclosed by hedges with regularly spaced hedgerow trees of ash and oak.
At Ashton Wold the landscape changes to woodland with old coppice compartments containing distinctive variations in tree species and composition with the cruciform road pattern and superimposed grid iron coppice compartments imparting an ordered feel to long neglected woodlands. The open meadows surrounded by woodland are surprise elements in this landscape, as are the romantic buildings such as Woodend Cottages.

5.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

5.1 A Brief History of Settlement

People have settled in the East Midlands since ancient times but evidence of their lifestyles and impact on the landscape is limited to few sites and chance finds. We know that Neolithic people cultivated emmer wheat and “naked six row” barley along the Nene valley suggesting that significant areas of woodland had been cleared on the river terraces where the alluvial soils were fertile and light to work. We also know that these people grazed stock on the flood meadows suggesting mixed farming settlements. They consumed wild fruits, berries and nuts in large quantities, suggesting strong dependency on the remaining woodlands. Their worked flints have been recovered from the parish but no evidence of settlements has been found and so we cannot be sure if they lived in small family groups or larger communities. However, we can be sure that the river valleys and higher ridges were used as trackways (such as the ridge of land running from Chesterton southward through Warmington, Polebrook and The Giddings).

In the Bronze and Iron Ages population increased, the mixed agricultural economy greatly expanded and significant resources were devoted to constructing religious sites. This was a period of great woodland clearance both for agriculture and to give open ground for religious purposes, for example, on the Welland river terrace, excavations at Maxey have revealed a large curcus of parallel banks stretching for over a mile into Helpston parish with a henge at one end and surrounded by circular earthworks representing burials. From excavated artefacts it is thought that this monument dates back as far back as 1700 BC.

Undoubtedly, the area around Oundle was similarly developed and it is likely that the woodlands along the Nene valley from the flood plains to the upper river terraces would have given way to a chequerboard of small fields defined by ditches with settlements sited just above the winter flood levels. The ditches provided drainage and also separated crops and animals, indicating a mixed farming landscape. Whilst specific evidence of Bronze and Iron Age settlement has not been found close to the current village, excavations in advance of the A605 road improvements revealed two crouched beaker burials of probable Bronze Age date (HER 32003). A number of flint artefacts were also recovered including two arrowheads, a blade, a core, a scraper and a flake (HER 21883).

The area around the current Oundle town bridge became increasingly important as a river crossing and by the end of the Iron Age (43AD) a settlement had become established but the only feature to produce exclusively early Iron Age pottery at Ashton has been a single isolated pit (HER 21884). The Iron Age settlement was gradually superseded by a Roman town, sited on the Roman Road from Titchmarsh to Durobrivae (Peterborough). The Iron Age circular dwellings were gradually replaced by Roman stone buildings fronting the road. The new Roman buildings were used as shops and dwellings with workshops to the rear. The evidence shows that smithing iron was an important activity. Around the settlement new
field patterns were superimposed over the Iron Age landscape for the new Roman methods and new crops such as vines, onions, shallots and leeks and most importantly, grains, resulting a more intensive pattern of enclosures. Later excavations for the Railway Station Yard redevelopment (Laxton Drive) and for the A605 road improvements show that the town extended to the west with timber framed as well as masonry buildings and pottery production was also an important activity. So, from a strictly linear form along the main road, side streets were constructed to extend the town outwards. The exact extent of the town streets is not known. Approximately on the site of the A605 roundabout was a cemetery in which 170 burials were made; excavations also showed that there were many burials outside the cemetery. The town (the Roman name is not known) continued to prosper until the 4th and possibly the 5th centuries. It then appears to have been abandoned and relocated west of the Nene possibly on drier ground, to form the core of today’s Oundle. In other areas it has been shown that the wetter colder climate toward the end of the Roman period had effects on settlements and connecting roads.

By the end of the 5th century, at the end of the Romano British period, mean air temperatures had fallen to their lowest point since the Ice sheets had retreated some 10,000 years previously. Whilst some crops brought by the Romans were no longer viable, cereal production continued and grasslands thrived in the cooler, wetter conditions so pastures continued to provide grazing for stock. The intensively cultivated Roman landscape would have given way to a patchwork of small fields separated by open commons on the heavier or stony ground which could not be readily ploughed. The woodlands, now mainly limited to higher ground, remained as an important source of timber, fruits and nuts and also grazing. As Roman influence and administration diminished, Saxon people from Germany migrated to the east of England, settled and assimilated into the population. Over the next 5 centuries, Anglo Saxon peoples wrought a cultural identity through re-establishment of Christianity and a civic administration with the establishment of charters and common laws. Land was part of this civic order and was defined in shires and hundreds. The gradual political unity was key to defending the country for successive raids by Viking invaders. However, the position of Ashton, relatively close to the east coast and close to the Nene (Danish raids in Peterborough and Nottingham are recorded in the 8th and 9th centuries), meant that life was uncertain and investment of time and money in major projects was unlikely.

By the end of the 9th century there was relative stability and in the East Midlands a highly organised communal system of agriculture evolved based on large open fields divided into strips, shared grazing of heathlands and river pastures and joint woodland management. The social stability and gradually warming climate brought an increase in population and economic activity and as a result large areas of the remaining primary woodland were cleared for agriculture. The extent of this woodland clearance has been recorded by the Rockingham Forest Trust in their Rockingham Forest Atlas. The higher ground to the ne of the parish known as The Wold was probably further cleared to provide permanent dry grazing from the Saxon period. Archaeological studies in the Nene and Welland valleys indicate that settlements moved from the close to the riverside to sites above the river terraces, on the spring line where there were ready supplies of fresh, clean water. Villages including Ashton, Polebrook, Warmington and many others along the Nene valley follow this pattern. Saxon administration also established many parish boundaries and these also follow a pattern. In very many cases parish boundaries include the river as a boundary, thus giving access to flood meadow grazing on the fertile alluviums of the river terraces, rising to permanently dry ground where the settlement was (and still is) located rising further to open fields with heaths and woodlands on the highest ground.
The increasing influence of the Church is illustrated by the fact that it lay within one of the eight hundreds assigned to Oundle and owned by Peterborough Abbey. Indeed the Abbeys of Crowland, Peterborough and Ely exerted an overwhelming influence on land management and taxation, even by the time of the Norman Conquest. Furthermore, across the fields in Oundle, there was a monastery and church which would have been clearly visible across the open fields from Ashton. Whilst the Saxons were primarily builders in wood, they were also skilled masons and erected a number of stone churches, and Saxon masonry survives at Barnack, Brigstock and Wadenhoe churches). They have also left a legacy of stone crosses and boundary posts across East Northamptonshire / North Cambridgeshire. So, at 1066, the evidence of pre-Roman Britain had effectively been erased and there was a landscape of huge open fields interspersed with heaths and woodlands on higher ground and flood meadows and marshes close to the rivers with small towns and villages, constructed in timber with possibly monasteries and important churches in stone. Ashton was already in existence at the time of the Conquest and the Domesday Book records it comprised 8 ploughlands (land for), meadow 16 acres, woodland 4 acres and 2 mills and had a population of 11 villagers, 2 smallholders and 1 slave. At this time, there was also hamlet at Elmington. At the time of the Enclosures, in 1810, there were 6 open fields in Ashton and Elmington.

Whilst the Conquest brought massive change for people, the Normans simply superimposed their repressive system of taxes and dues over the Saxon traditions of open field communal farming. Common rights changed to feudal dues and the nearby Rockingham Forest, which was claimed by the King, so hunting, grazing and felling were either outlawed or strictly controlled. The effect of the royal forest commandeering was to put great pressure on areas of woodland outside the Royal forests, resulting in their over exploitation.

A chapel was recorded in 1189 but it went out of use before 1548. Its site cannot be confirmed but excavations in the current Chapel grounds revealed Saxon sherds and evidence of earlier occupation. It is reputed that fragments of masonry in the present chapel (built 1706) may have been re-used from the earlier building. The massive programme of Norman castle, monastery and church building largely passed Ashton by, although people in the parish would have noted the castles in Fotheringhay and Barnwell, the new stone churches in Warmington, Wadenhoe and other nearby villages and of course the great monastery buildings in Peterborough, Ely, Thorney and Crowland etc. So, despite the massive upheaval of the Conquest, and the huge medieval stone building programme, the life and landscape of Ashton would have continued to be dominated by cultivating the great open fields for the next 300 years.

This stability was massively changed in the 14th century for two reasons. Firstly, the climate suddenly became cooler and wetter and secondly, in 1349, the Black Death reached Northamptonshire. The cooler climate would have favoured pasture rather than arable and the loss of 50% of the peasantry meant there was insufficient labour to work the fields. So, significant areas of land were turned over to grazing of sheep. As a result large areas of Ashton parish were turned over to grass, or abandoned. Ridge and furrow can clearly be distinguished in Ashton Wold woods, indicating the former fields were left to scrub over and gradually become woodlands. Records show The Abbey (of Peterborough) enclosed and converted 20 acres to pasture (in Elmington) in 1490 and a further 160 acres between 1494 and 1513, destroying six houses but leaving one house and three cottages. In 1524 only two people paid tax in Elmington and by 1664 there was only one person recorded in the parish. As a result, Elmington fell into ruin and became a “lost village”. Aerial photographs show that much of cultivated land in Ashton was converted to grazing pasture or allowed to
scrub over and then become re-forested. Ridge and furrow remains in the former Brook Field to the north / north east of the village and to the south / south east in the former Polebrook Field. A block of slightly curving ridge and furrow is said to be visible ne of the present Ashton Wold House and other ridge and furrow remains are visible in old enclosures of 1810.

So, between c. 1350 and 1550 Ashton comprised woodlands and heath on higher ground, with large areas of open fields put down to grass. The population had declined and abandoned land at Ashton Wold had reverted to scrub and thence to woodland. It is likely that the village would have been approximately in its current position but was comprised of nothing more than timber, wattle, daub and straw thatch shanties, clustered around the remains of the stone chapel.

In the 16th c, the Dissolution of the monasteries brought about great changes in the landscape. The grip of the church was broken as monasteries were possessed by the Crown and their assets sold off. For most of the village’s inhabitants, this had no real effects for the tithe previously paid to Peterborough (monastery) was now paid to a local vicar or similar church representative. However, for some people, the breakup of the monasteries represented new opportunities for farming and land ownership. Well placed and enterprising individuals could now buy up or exchange strips of land (or an individual’s rights to common rights on pasture land that was formerly in strip cultivation) and amalgamate land to form independent farmsteads. This process was called “engrossing” and was encouraged by the profitability of sheep farming for wool production. With the ability to trade farm produce and wool the new breed of “Tudor yeoman” had sufficient means to build their own houses and with the Church’s monopoly on quarries broken, they could now reflect their new found wealth in houses constructed in local limestone. Manor House may be an example of building arising from this process.

It seems that the whole Ashton estate passed from the Abbots of Peterborough to a single private owner. It did not grow as a result of the change to an increasingly arable farming economy. So, it seems likely that large tracts of land was used to graze sheep. Managing sheep required considerably fewer people than arable production. In 1673 Ashton contained 32 households but by 1802 it had only 22. In the intervening time, in 1706, the chapel and associated school were built possibly with the assistance of the profits from wool made by the Creed family which owned the parish.

By the 18th c Ashton was known as a sporting estate and the farms were tenanted. It is thought that during this time the cruciform tracks were set out in the Wold and the (elm) avenues were planted along with fox coverts.

Drawing. Peter Tillemans. 1719 or 1721
The above drawing, said to be made by Peter Tillemans and probably dating from 1719 or 1721 is a view from Ascheton Field and shows large open fields beyond the town closes, with sheep tended by a single shepherd.

In 1810, an estate map was prepared for William Walcott who inherited the Ashton Estate from his mother Mary Creed. This shows that, at the end of the 18th c., the following buildings that still exist today, were in place - The Manor House, the chapel and school, Chapel Farmhouse barn and other farm buildings, Ashton Green Farm, Shepherdess and Vine Cottages, The Cottage and buildings on the site of Ashton Mill and Mill Cottage. It also shows the main roads, tracks and the basis of the greens that we see today. Remarkably, the map shows buildings approximately in the positions of the current dwellings but set right on the back edge of the street in terraces, detached and semi-detached forms all set out in their own plots, or small gardens. These cottages are of strongly rectangular plan form and do not seem to have out-shuts and extensions normally expected in vernacular buildings; it almost appears that there was some form of planned development even at this point.

It is clear that even before parliamentary enclosure, large areas had been given over to sheep grazing and this was probably reflected in a more enclosed landscape. However, following the Enclosure Act, the village landscape was transformed and vestiges of the open aspect of the medieval fields gave way to the patchwork of small fields all enclosed by hawthorn hedges with oak, ash and elm planted at regular spacings within the quick hedges. The 18th century also brought a change to farming methods with the more scientific approach of the Agricultural Revolution and the demand for meat, milk and grains in the cities that grew up with the industrial revolution. This changing mixed farming practice is reflected in the farm buildings to both Chapel Farm and Ashton Green Farms.

In most villages in East Northamptonshire the wood and daub shanties of the medieval /post medieval period had given way to rubble stone and straw thatch by the 18th c. Whilst the construction of the cottages shown on the 1811 map can only be guessed, it is likely to be coursed stone rubble and straw thatch with farmhouses covered in Collyweston stone slate.

The map also shows that the main tracks and avenues and coppice compartments of the Ashton Wold woodlands were in place before the Wold was developed in the first years of the 20th c.
In 1860 the estate it was purchased by Lionel Rothschild. The sale particulars describe it as 'a very valuable and important landed estate', with sporting advantages, but there was no grand house for the occupation of a gentleman. Both Lionel Rothschild and his son Nathaniel Mayer, 1st Lord Rothschild (1840-1915), showed little interest in the estate, and the only structural work undertaken in the C19 was the building of a hunting lodge at Ashton Wold. However, when Lord Rothschild's second son, Nathaniel Charles (1877-1923) - known as Charles - discovered Ashton by accident whilst on a butterfly-collecting expedition with the vicar of Polebrook, he was so impressed by the rich fauna and flora of Ashton Wold that he persuaded his father to build him a house on the site of the hunting lodge. In 1900, Lord Rothschild commissioned William Huckvale to design not only a house, but a model farm, an entire complement of estate buildings which included the Steward's house, stables, gardeners' accommodation, a building to house a fire engine, a petrol store, kennels (now derelict) and a dog hospital. Most of the cottages at nearby Ashton were rebuilt to create a model village. Ashton boasted mains electricity (to Ashton Wold), generated by turbines housed in the old mill below the village on the River Nene. Here also, water was pumped to a water tower and so the estate buildings had mains running water on top. Each cottage had a separate wash house and was placed in a large garden planted with a lilac, a laburnum and fruit trees.

The rebuilding of Ashton and development of Ashton Wold all appears to have taken place within 2-3 years from 1901. Thus, in just a couple of years, Ashton was transformed from a small village that had probably evolved organically over the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and with no sewage, power of mains water to a model settlement with remarkably modern facilities. Early photographs of the rebuilt village show that there were relatively few trees in the immediate vicinity of the rebuilt village. It is clear that a substantial programme of planting took place, especially to provide settings for The Cottage and The Laundry.

Charles Rothschild was a renowned naturalist and a pioneer conservationist. He pioneered the view that the whole natural habitat needed to be protected rather than just individual species and this is, to some extent, reflected in the landscapes the Rothschild’s adapted and formed at Ashton Wold during the early part of the 20th c. However, estate management was then a labour intensive process and during and following the First World War, the shortage of manpower and loss of traditional skills meant that the Ashton estate could not be managed as was intended.
Ashton Wold house was commandeered for use as a hospital during the Second World War and the gardens and estate suffered much damage and neglect. The Second World War also have resulted in great changes to the landscape with pastures ploughed to grow crops to feed a nation deprived of food from the colonies and the US. Following 1945, the widespread use of tractors and associated ploughs, harvesters, harrows etc. meant that farm stables were adapted and/or replaced by implements sheds and large quantities of oats (to feed horses) were no longer required.

From 1965 when the UK joined the EU, the system of agricultural subsidies and emphasis on mechanisation and cereal production led to clearance of hedgerows to give larger, more efficiently managed fields. This signalled the end of mixed farming and the start of amalgamation of farms to ever larger units, the gradual phasing out of mixed farms, a huge reduction in the need for farm labour and the redundancy of traditional farm buildings. These changes have had a marked impact on Ashton. There are now no working farms in the parish, Ashton Wold Farm has been converted to dwellings, the Chapel Farm buildings are in the process of conversion and the Ashton Green farm buildings are now disused. During the 1980’s, at the instigation of Miriam Rothschild, some of the arable fields to the east of the Wold, were transformed into wildflower meadows as an experiment in wildflower habitat creation. These practical experiments were controversial with ecological purists but were so successful that they have transformed thinking on creation and management of grasslands and many parks, garden, roadside verges and roundabouts and indeed the new Olympic Park now include substantial areas of wildflower meadow.

The break between the Estate and farming has meant that the current population of the parish is not employed within the village or in agriculture and will commute to work elsewhere. In 1901 there was no need to make provision for car ownership in workers cottages. Similarly, the Chequered Skipper PH would have served local people and visitors who walked to the village. The increase in car ownership since the 1970’s has meant that parked cars are now a feature of the village. Because the village is small, and on a cul-de-
sac, there has been no need for the highway engineering in the form of kerbs, modern lighting, armco barriers and signage. Apart from the hard tarmac surface of the road, the village retains much of the feel it would have had on completion of the model settlement in 1901. The buildings of Ashton Wold retain the isolation romantic settings which were part of the original Huckvale design concept.

5.2 Archaeology

The area of the Roman town has now been designated a scheduled ancient monument, ref 35630. There are other areas of great archaeological potential, for example adjoining the area of the known Iron Age and Roman town, the river terraces. In other areas buildings are known to have existed in the late 17th / early 18th centuries. Our knowledge of medieval and post medieval villages is limited, simply because buildings have been developed and redeveloped over time with each successive phase of building, removing evidence from the previous periods. It is therefore important that such remains and as opportunities arise, field research through excavations are conducted.

6.0 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

6.1 Approaches to the Village

There is one road approach to the village, at the “T” junction from the Nene Way. At this point, aside from the road sign, the impression is of a lane in landscape. As one travels up the slight hill, the wall on the right-hand-side becomes more formal in construction, there is a feeling that the lane is leading somewhere and this sense is reinforced when stone walls strongly enclose both sides of the land which now has speed humps at regular intervals. The self-set ash trees at the base of the walls further frame the view and, as the view opens there are distant glimpses of buildings (the Manor House and Corner and Pear Tree Cottages) and the grouping of trees indicate the presence of the settlement. The gateway to the Manor House and more formally cut verges give notice of close habitation. As one is funnelled between the high walls and banks at Corner and Pear Tree Cottages, there is a strong sense of expectation and this changes to a feeling of arrival as the view opens out at the green and the grouping of buildings, walls and raised verges make a well-defined central space.
6.2 Plan Form and Layout

Pre 1901 maps show that up to the 20th c Ashton had a more organic form, with cottages set on the back edge of the village street and the village green, with outhouses and sheds behind. The cottages on the south side of the street included ranges with “T” shaped plan forms indicating cottage tenements whilst the north side included a tandem form with cottages immediately to the rear of those on the frontage.

All this changed in 1901 when Huckvale brought a planned form to the settlement. The village green was extended to the south and laid out in the current tear drop shape and new mainly in semi-detached cottages were built, in their own plots clearly defined by stone walls. In the middle was the public house in almost a rural garden city layout. Other key buildings including the chapel and two farmyards remained virtually unaltered.

The Huckvale redevelopment must also have included the demolition of buildings on the fringes of the village including cottages on the east side of Polebrook Road opposite the Mill, the dovecot and barn immediately south of the Manor House and the two detached cottages on the road frontage directly opposite the Manor House. So, the village became slightly more nuclear.

The buildings at Ashton Wold were constructed in a landscape undeveloped except for the former Ashton Wold Farm (now known as Home Farm). Ashton Wold House is placed in a slight dip in the landscape, thus giving a strong degree of seclusion. The Stables, Water Tower, Stewards House and walled garden and gardener’s dwellings are spaced apart although there is strong relationship between the buildings. The buildings at Home Farm are clearly a formal group, but are in isolation from the other buildings at the Wold, replacing the farm buildings that previously existed. The buildings at Ashton Wold can be considered as buildings within a landscape whereas in the village the built form takes precedence over the landscape.
6.3 Ashton Village Townscape Appraisal
6.4 Character Areas

1. The Green

The Green is well defined by the Chequered Skipper at the east end, the Corner and Pear Tree Cottages to the west, the raised verges, and Chapel walls and the cottages 8, 9 and 10 to the north side and to the south by the walls, horse chestnut trees and cottages 22 – 30 Ashton Green.

It is the centre of the village and gives Ashton its strong sense of place. The consistency of the building design and materials reinforce this special character.

2. Transition Space between The Green and the Triangular Green to Ashton Green Farm

This is a linear space, clearly defined by the continuous stone walls un-punctuated by gaps for car drives etc and the cottages constructed to a consistent building line behind, with grass verges to the front. The shared use of stone and thatch and associated architectural detailing reinforce this area as a defined space with its own strongly positive character. The parking of cars on the verges by residents and visitors detracts from the quality of the area.

3. Ashton Green Farm Triangle

This space should be well defined by the walls to 22 and 23, and 13, 14 and Hazelnut and Walnut Cottages and the walls surrounding Vine Cottage with Vine Cottage and Thatcher Cottage enclosing the south east side and the shed and Shepherdess Cottage forming a vista to the south where the entrance to Ashton Green Farm appears enticing. The ash tree on the north road verge and shed on the south verge provide a gateway into and out this space.

The mass planting of semi-ornamental trees on the triangle has lessened the spatial organisation and “sense of place”.

4. Ashton Green Farmyard

This is a small, intimate space strongly defined by the farmhouse and farm buildings. The farmyard has not been in agricultural use for some time and, at autumn 2015, all the buildings were vacant. It is likely that proposals will come forward for new uses to the buildings. Care should be taken to retain the essential qualities of this space.

5. Chapel Farmyard

This is a strongly defined space but it is in transition. By the beginning of the 20th c Chapel Farm comprised a series of yards and sheds to house stock and implements to carry out the mixed farming practices of the time. The buildings are currently being converted to residential units. Retention of the buildings has kept the cohesion of the farm building group; the setting out of domestic gardens, patios etc. has changed the character of the areas from a working farm to a secluded residential enclave.
7.0 BUILDINGS

7.1 Pre – 20th c buildings

It is clear that the buildings surviving from the 18th c and earlier are firstly, important buildings such as the Chapel, Manor House and the farms and secondly, are situated just beyond the centre of the village. The character and appearance of these buildings is largely retained to this day.

There are no photographic records of sketches of Ashton prior to 1901 and therefore the character and appearance of the more ordinary dwellings is less clear. However, the main street may have looked similar to many Northamptonshire villages that escaped 19th c development and comprised of 17th and 18th c cottages. The photograph of Orton Waterville below may give an impression of pre-1900 Ashton.

It is clear that a substantial number of buildings were demolished between 1886 and 1901. Some of these were to make way for the “model” village; the reason for the demolition of others, such as the cottages opposite the Manor House, is not clear. Possibly, they simply looked “untidy” in comparison to the rural idyll the Rothschild’s were planning.

Orton Waterville – picture date unknown

Shepherdess cottage and the adjoining barn give clues of the small domestic buildings that once made up the village, taking account that even these, along with Vine Cottage were much altered in 1901 to make them similar to the newly designed Huckvale cottages.
At Ashton Wold, a lodge existed approximately in the position of Greenwood Manor and Ashton Wold farm buildings that can readily be identified on the 1886 OS, prior to their redevelopment.

### 7.2 1900 – 1905: The Huckvale Era

In a very short space of time, reportedly from 1900 -1901, the village was redeveloped and Ashton Wold constructed. Given the scale of building, a period of 1900-1905 may be more likely. Cottages were romantic well proportioned, with simple plan forms, in local materials and detailing was restrained but included ashlar stone windows and chimneys.

*Photograph dated 1901 on completion of Hawthorn and Broom Cottages*

In contrast, buildings such as The Laundry, The Old Dairy and Ashton Wold House have complex plan forms. They retain the rustic, arts and craft inspired materials and incorporate more ornate detailing such as the louvred and thatched roof vents.
Ashton Wold House

Ashton Wold house is more complex still in plan form comprising a basic “U” shaped plan but with punctuated by a series of gables to each elevation. Architectural detailing such as the grand entrance and the use of Collyweston stone slate on the roof denotes a more formal approach than the rustic cottages and working buildings. It is known that the house was reduced by a complete storey in height.

7.3 Post Huckvale Buildings

Ashton Village and Ashton Wold have remained largely unaltered since the early part of the 20th c and have been unaffected by housing development from the 1930’s, 1950’s and 60’s and 70’s that characterise many villages. Equally, the massive expansion in house building in the latter part of the 20th c and early 21st century have passed Ashton by. The pair of cottages Walnut and Hazelnut Cottages, the K6 phone box, agricultural sheds and barns to Chapel and Ashton Green Farms and a summerhouse to The Manor House represent almost the total extent of the post 1925 development.
7.5  Listed Buildings

English Heritage conducted a defined area survey of the parish during 2009/2010. Almost all buildings constructed by the Rothschild estate to the designs of Huckvale that have remained substantially intact were added to the statutory list of buildings of historic interest and architectural merit.

7.6  Other Protected Buildings

There are no buildings in the parish that are designated as “locally listed” or made subject to Article 4 Directions – a planning mechanism which removes permitted development rights so making alterations such as changing windows, erecting boundary fences and altering chimneys subject to planning control. Article 4 directions were specifically conceived to maintain the visual continuity of groups of houses that are of consistent design and some architectural quality, but do not meet the very specific criteria for adding to the statutory list. Hazelnut and Walnut Cottages, Honeycomb Cottage and Greenwood Manor are examples of such buildings. It may be expedient to consider some of the buildings put forward in the 2009 / 2010 review but which were not added to the statutory list for additional protection.

7.7  Building Materials

As explained previously in this document, it is likely that prior to the 17th c, only the chapel and manor house were constructed in stone. Ordinary dwellings were in timber and wattle with straw thatch roofs. From the 17th c stone rubble was commonly available and became the dominant building material. We can only guess at the pre-1900 cottages demolished but it seems likely that most would have been constructed in stone rubble with straw thatched roofs. By the 19th c some bricks were locally made and used on agricultural sheds and the work based buildings at the mill but still the vast majority of structures were built in local stone. The Rothschild reconstruction continued the stone tradition but rather than using rubble, carefully selected and dressed stone was used, reputedly from a local quarry. In the late 19th c horizontal boarding was used for cart sheds and this tradition continued with model estate buildings such as the cricket pavilion and sheds to Pavilion House and Greenwood Manor.

Until 1900 most buildings of some standing would have been covered in Collyweston stone slate with more modest cottages and farm buildings in straw thatch. The influence of 19th c industrialisation is reflected in the Welsh slate, presumably imported via the nearby railway station, and used on farm sheds with pantiles also used for utilitarian farm buildings. From 1900 the romantic concept of the model village was reflected in the use of reed thatch for many buildings, including quite sophisticated designs such as the Laundry and Model Dairy. It is notable that the wash-houses and outbuildings of the Ashton Village are also in stone, with matching reed thatch roofs. In both Ashton Village and Ashton Wold, Collyweston stone slate is the preferred roofing material for higher status buildings, notably the Stewards House, Ashton Wold House and its Gatehouse, but also for nearby buildings in this group including The Stables and Pavilion House. In a clear hierarchy, the washrooms close to this group are in stone and thatch whilst the sheds and workshops are constructed in horizontal boarding and thatch.
A hierarchy of building materials

7.8 Building Management and Maintenance

All buildings have been owned and maintained by The Ashton Estate until very recently. Changing farming practices have meant that buildings such as the Stables, the Dairy and the farm groups can no longer be used for the purposes for which they were designed and as a consequence have been vacant for at least 30 years. Until the 1990s, there was a strong Rothschild family presence and Ashton Wold House was occupied as the single dwelling for which it was designed. Changing management of the Estate has greatly influenced the use of buildings. The Ashton Wold (Home Farm) buildings, the Stables and Ashton Wold House and other buildings and now all in multiple residential occupation. The Chapel Farm complex is currently being converted to a group of dwellings and some of the Huckvale cottages have become the first buildings sold off by the Estate.

Other parts of the original estate including the walled garden and ornamental gardens to the House have the appearance of being abandoned.

The sub-division and change of use of buildings has changed their character but, on the positive side, the buildings have been retained in the single ownership of the Estate, there is a strong element of consistency in management and maintenance and extensions and alterations have been avoided.

Furthermore, this consistency has meant that when maintenance does take place, such as the re-thatching of roofs, it takes place with a strong degree of building logic. So for example, in a semi – detached cottage, all dwellings have been re-thatched at the same time, so avoiding the situation where one side of a semi has a new thatch whilst the other remains in poor condition and in time, when the side needing repair is attended to, it is undertaken by a different thatcher, with thatch from a different source. Similarly, where there
was a single colour for repainting front doors etc, different colours can now be expected and changes made to front gates and name plates and so on.

7.9  Alterations and Extensions

Cottages that have been sold are clearly subject to a measure of “personalisation” expressed in the erection of new fences, installation of greenhouses and summer houses, and applications to the local planning authority for alterations and extensions. Under the Estate, no cottages have been substantially altered on the outside, or extended and so retain their original plan forms, doors, staircases, windows etc.

There is an almost total consistency in the selection of stone across all Huckvale buildings and the stone has been carefully dressed to meet his architectural ideas. From a purely practical point of view, it is unlikely that new stone can be found and dressed to provide a consistent “match” to the existing cottages.

7.10 Mechanical and Engineering and Service Requirements

The cottages were designed to be heated by open fires. Modern living requires central heating in some form and this, in turn, requires oil and gas tanks to be sited outside dwellings and the installation of radiators, boilers and extract and air vents.
Examples of m & e service installations

IT servicing, satellite television and electricity and phone lines all require installations and new owners will undertake these according to their individual needs and perceptions. To effect better recycling, the local council’s require that domestic waste is separated and disposed of into (three) wheelie bins, one for each type of waste. In 1900 there was little packaging and most waste could be composted, so no provision has been made to store and manoeuvre wheelie bins.

7.11 Stone Walls

The stone walls in the landscape and Ashton Village are a particular feature of the conservation area and in the gardens of the Ashton Wold complex.

Most appear to have been constructed or reconstructed as part of the 1901 rebuilding. They are of carefully selected stone, dressed into even rectangular blocks and laid in regular courses with a consistently sized stone on edge coping. Some, such as the boundary walls to The Cottage and The Manor House are part retaining walls forming ha-has. All appear to be constructed either as true dry stone fashion or with a thin layer of lime mortar between courses allowing for stones to bedded rather than wedged into place and giving the very even courses, but also to enable the walls to shed water, so helping longevity. The copings are generally bedded onto a thin bed of lime mortar. Most walls have survived the 100 years since construction in remarkably good shape but self-seeded trees (especially ash) and ivy are affecting stability in localised areas.
Examples of walls in Ashton

The Ashton Wold House garden walls are part constructed in a vertical 'crazy-paving' style with no tie between faces. This has not proved durable and there are a number of areas of severe structural failure.

8.0 ASHTON WOLD HOUSE & GARDENS

The House, its gardens and the woodlands, scrublands and meadows are registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by English Heritage for its special historic interest (List entry No.: 1001715).

The walled garden and House Gardens have not been maintained as intended when designed in 1900, partly as a result of manpower shortages arising from the 1914-1918 War, partly due to the requisitioning of the house as troop billets in the period 1939 – 1945 and partly due to the Charles and Miriam Rothschild's pre-occupation with the more informal "wildflower gardening" in preference to the more formal garden planting originally envisaged. As a result the walls, buildings, ponds, pool, pump house, greenhouses, boiler house etc. have all deteriorated to the point where they are derelict and at risk of complete loss. It is not known if there are records of the original planting schemes but a cursory search on site did not reveal any evidence such as lead or copper plant labels.

For the last 20 years, any form of management, including wildflower meadow management, appears to have been abandoned in the lawns and terraces around the house. Despite its registering as a grade II garden of national importance, there is a probability that many of its historic features may be lost.
Designation map for Ashton Wold as Historic Park and Garden of Special Interest.

9.0 TREES, WOODLANDS AND HEDGES

9.1 Ashton Village and Surrounds

1811 Enclosure Map
Hedges

The 1811 Enclosure Map shows closes and small fields created by enclosure. Each boundary would have been marked with a hawthorn hedge. The 1860 map even shows the oak, ash (and formerly elm) trees planted within the hedgerows. Some of these hedges have been removed or part removed. Modern flail management has resulted in large gaps.

Within the village, hedges are not a strong feature, although planting between front gardens on terrace and semi-detached cottages does have some visual impact.

Woodlands

The historic maps show that the small pockets of woodland around The Cottage and north of Chapel Farm existed at the turn of the 19th c. The Estate records are said to note that spinneys were planted during the 18th c for hunting purposes. No surveys have been conducted to ascertain if these are residual areas of ancient or semi ancient woodlands. The principal species are oak and ash.

Some areas of woodland can be associated the 1901 model village. For example the pocket of woodland around the Laundry does not appear on pre 1901 maps and on site surveys confirm the age of the trees. Species are typical of the Victorian Edwardian era and include Holm oak, beech, Scots pine, yew, common laurel and leyland cypress. The copses planted on either side of the road beyond Ashton Green Farm were planted at the same time but are quite different comprising mainly oak and ash.
Orchards and Other Significant Fruit Bearing Plants

There are orchards to Ashton Green Farm and The Cottage that have been in existence since at least 1885 when they were recorded on the first OS map. The glass houses at the Cottage appear on the 1901 OS map and it can be guessed that the grapevine within is at least 100 years old.

Trees within the Village

The trees that make most telling visual and ecological impacts within the village are the now mature forest trees that were planted at the turn of the 20th c and together with the buildings and walls form a characteristic townscape.

Ash dieback and the canker and leaf miner afflictions to horse chestnut trees are likely to have impacts on the character of the village.

The more ornamental species of trees, planted as close spaced groups on the greens outside Pear Cottage and the triangle outside Vine Cottage do not have the same impact as forest type trees and tend to “fill” rather than create positive townscape.

9.2 Ashton Wold

The above map, prepared in 1979, helps to explain the evolution of the woodland and associated habitats at Ashton.

Ashton Wold Wood

The cruciform avenues of elm trees were in place and shown as mature trees on the 1811 estate map. The avenue was reputedly planted by Dr William Walcott, the former owner of the estate in about 1700. This map also shows an unusually large close (approximately
The Rothschild records suggest that this woodland contained indicator species of plants and invertebrate’s characteristic of long established woodland habitat. However, there is evidence to suggest that it had grown over on land ploughed before 1300, there being clear of ridge and furrow undulations. It once contained large numbers of ancient trees including elms.

Today the wood is mainly oak standards with ash trees of various ages with the occasional birch. There appears to have been little management carried out in the last century, or historically, there being no evidence of old coppice stools or pollards. There is some understorey of hawthorn and blackthorn. The ground flora (in September 2015) appeared to be principally dogs mercury, ground ivy and woodland grasses. Nevertheless, the wood has been designated a site of special scientific interest (notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981). In 2014 Natural England recorded the site as 100% unfavourable but recovering.

The plantations planted since 1900 are mainly oak and ash, the oaks forming standards. Since the trees were closely planted, they generally grow with an upright habit with little canopy. The lack of light prevents development of a shrub under-layer and the ground flora is mainly stinging nettles and dogs mercury. These will prevent the growth of plants such as violets, honeysuckle, blackthorn and woodland grasses which are the staple food plants of many woodland butterflies.
Avenues

Discontinuous avenue planting of horse chestnut
the former and lime trees

Sprouting elm stools denote the presence of
elm avenue

Wildflower Meadows

The wildflower meadows

The meadows are still managed as wildflower meadows, but the hay remained on the fields in October; it is usually baled and collected in August.

10.0 ECOLOGY

There are two areas of obvious ecological interest, these being:

1. the River Nene flood meadows
2. the Ashton Wold Estate

10.1 The River Nene Flood Meadows

The land between the Nene Way and the River has traditionally been managed as summer hay meadows, providing a hay crop in summer and grazing in early Autumn. The regularity of this regime, over centuries has favoured particular plant and invertebrate species. The cutting of the sward after it has flowered has enabled seed heads to dry and when the hay crop is removed, the seeds are dispersed over the meadows. Subsequent grazing leads to the cattle treading the seeds into the ground so they can successfully germinate, grow into plants and set seed, the following year. Species such as yellow rattle, clover, ragged robin,
birds foot trefoil and cuckoo flower particularly benefit from this form of management and these in turn provide food plants for butterflies including the orange tip, common blue, gatekeeper and small copper as well as a range of other invertebrates.

It is estimated that over 95% of traditional hay meadows have been lost in the last 50 years as a result of draining, ploughing and neglect.

Wet meadows divided by drainage ditches are also good habitats for amphibians such as toads, grass snakes and frogs, dragonflies, and a range of small mammals including short tailed vole, water vole, harvest mouse and common shrew. These in turn provide a food sources for birds of prey whilst starlings, lapwings, wagtail, snipe feed on invertebrates in the damp grassland.

The crack willows along the drains and river have also traditionally been managed by regular pollarding which has encouraged bird and bat roosts and niches their own attendant range of invertebrates. The willows have not been pollarded for many years.

These management regimes have been neglected in the last decades and the meadows are reverting to scrubland and very rough grazing. As a consequence, it can be concluded that the range of species in these meadows is in decline. However, no ecological surveys of this area could be found and it is probable that none have been undertaken in the last 20 – 30 years.

10.2 The Ashton Wold Estate

The Ashton Wold Estate is of particular ecological importance for two reasons. Firstly, it was an area of known nature conservation importance and secondly, recordings of species have been maintained over an extended period of time.

Charles Rothschild planted woodlands and scrub and meadows on fields around the old wood in 1900 – 1905 with the idea of creating buffers between the ancient wood and farmland and to provide a more suitable range of habitats for wildlife. This interest was stimulated by the fact that around 1900, Ashton Wold was said to have given up specimens of 44 different butterflies (from a British total of 52 -54 species including migrants). As far back as 1829 the Rev William Bree, the vicar of Polebrook spent much time collecting butterflies in the Wold and established the existence of the then scarcely known Black Hairstreak. It is said Bree was a hospitable man and that Barnwell (Ashton) Wold, soon thronged with leading Victorian collectors. However, the area was then subjected to heavy collecting and when in 1860 more than 200 adult large blue specimens were “collected” by one dealer in a single summer, this species, (and presumably others) became locally extinct.

The areas of scrub were set aside for grassland butterflies and chequered skipper butterflies were present in the 1940’s.

Records before 1900 could be treated with a degree of scepticism, some butterfly collectors being known for “planting” specimens, only to “discover” them at a later date. However the Rothschild’s kept notes on species recorded at the Wold and other eminent naturalists recorded the flora and fauna over a 50 year period.

It is clear that great changes have occurred to species and habitats for reasons which are not totally understood. In the old woodland, the ground flora changed from the rich carpet of bluebells, violets etc. typical of old ancient and semi ancient woods, to a more uniform covering of dogs mercury. Since violets are the staple flood plant of the fritillary group of
butterflies, these disappeared. Other butterflies including the chequered skipper also became extinct. This happened not only at Ashton but in all local woodlands, the last local chequered skippers being recorded in Castor Hanglands in the 1960s. The white letter hairstreaks, which are specific to elm, have also greatly diminished (or totally disappeared) from many Northamptonshire woodlands since the 1960’s.

On the other hand, it is reported that honeysuckle has become far more widespread and since this is the food plant of the white admiral, this butterfly was noted to have colonised the Wold in the 1990’s. The continued presence of the oaks may mean that purple hairstreaks have continued to be present.

There have been no thorough ecological surveys of plants and trees, birds or invertebrates (particularly butterflies and moths) for at least 50 years. An ecologically rich woodland is generally associated with some form of definite management. The plantations and old woodlands, rides, clearings (Cabin Plain) have not received regular management since the beginning of the First World War.

In the 1970s Miriam Rothschild pioneered techniques to establish species rich grassland and received the Royal Horticultural Society Gold Medal. The wildflower meadows continue to be managed, and produce an annual crop of “wildflower and traditional grass and wildflower seed mixture. It is likely that butterflies particularly associated with hay meadows, such as small and large skippers, marbled whites and common blues are still present in these habitats. However no recent survey information appears to be available.

11.0 KEY ISSUES ARISING FROM THE APPRAISAL STUDY

11.1 Conservation Area Boundary and Archaeology

The conservation area boundary was drawn at a time when the primary concern was buildings. It is now understood that the development of settlements is closely related to the surrounding landscape and that the settlement boundaries we see today may not relate to the past.

The research for this document has demonstrated that:

- It is highly likely that there are pre-medieval remains on and around the river terraces.
- A group of post medieval buildings existed around the Mill, either side of Nene Way.
- A group of post medieval buildings existed around the Manor House and a large building existed immediately south of the Ashton Green Farm Group.
- Historic orchards exist one of which is not within the current conservation area boundary.

The Nene terrace is an area of high archaeological importance and therefore archaeological investigations would be required before the ground is disturbed for possible developments. Potential post medieval remains are less well defined. Furthermore, they have had more of an impact on the form of today’s settlement. It may therefore be appropriate to extend the conservation area boundary southward to include the sites of buildings that are known to exist on the 1811, 1860 and 1886 maps.
Consideration has also been given to linking Ashton Wold and Ashton village through a northward extension of the conservation area. It has been concluded that:

- Ashton Wold is recognised by its designation as a SSSI, its registering as a Scheduled Park and Garden and through the updating of the statutory list of buildings to include almost all the buildings as “listed”.
- The character of the Wold is one of “buildings dominated by (woodland) landscape” whereas Ashton is a cohesive settlement complimented by landscape.
- The woodland is a principal part the Wold character. It has been established that more interventionist management of the woodland is highly desirable. Conservation Area designation offers protection to three and would be unduly restrictive in the management of large woodlands. As such, any conservation area designation at Ashton Wold will need to be extremely selective to recognise the unique buildings and formal garden areas but at the same time, allow for management of the woodlands, field and field boundaries and other elements of the landscape without undue hindrance.

11.2 Historic Buildings

- Some buildings not added to the statutory list are nevertheless of interest and contribute to the character of the village.
- Some groups of historic buildings, most notably the Ashton Green Farm group have been vacant for a considerable time and it may be that new uses are needed to secure the buildings long term future.
- The gardens and garden structures of Ashton Wold House are at risk due to structural instability and dilapidation.

11.3 Alterations and Extensions

- Ashton is unique in that it is an Edwardian model settlement and the buildings have been largely unaltered since their original construction thus giving an unprecedented sense of continuity.
- The Estate decision to sell some properties has led to multiple owners, each with different ideas and aspirations for individual properties, some of which are part of a terrace or pair. English Heritage have issued clear guidance in order to maintain the historic and architectural integrity of the buildings.
- The buildings are now over 100 years old; it is inevitable that elements such as windows and doors, thatched roofs, boundary walls etc. require repair and/or replacement. Such changes will require careful management to maintain architectural integrity.
- New purchasers often have an element of aspiration leading to plans to extend cottages that were conceived as an entity and are part of an architectural terrace or pair. Extensions may therefore unbalance the original architectural composition. Most of the cottage designs incorporate thatched roofs with low eaves. Extensions would therefore require “breaking into” the original thatched roof.
- All cottages incorporated a detached stone and thatch wash house. These are very small and difficult to put to modern uses.
11.4 **Mechanical, Electrical, IT, Waste Services**

- The need for wheelie bins poses problems because the original designs did not make provision for storage and bins stored in the open gardens detract from the setting of the cottages.
- The various service boxes needed for IT, sewage management together with satellite dishes, oil and gas tanks etc. have been installed without consistency or full consideration of their impacts on the setting of cottages.
- Vents, flues and chimneys for central heating, wood-burners etc. require structural alterations. Various options have been adopted, some more successful than others.

11.5 **Boundary Treatments**

- The stone walls to the front and rear (and some side) boundaries are an integral part of the estate. These need maintenance to consistent standards.
- The desire for privacy and boundary demarcation has led to erection of various styles of wooden fencing and in some cases these clearly detract from the setting of the cottages.

11.6 **Car Parking**

- Most cottages have no provision for car parking and as a consequence residents and villages park on the grass verges outside their homes. The parked cars detract from the appearance of the village and chew up the grass verges. Some off street parking would be desirable.
- Ashton is much used by walkers and other visitors who also park on verges.

11.7 **Trees and Woodlands**

- Many of the village trees were planted around 1900 and have now reached maturity.
- Ash dieback is likely to have a devastating effect on trees throughout the parish comparable to Dutch Elm disease in the 1960's/1970's.
- Horse chestnut trees are a key feature of the village green. Their life expectancy will be limited due to canker, leaf fungus and leaf miner diseases.
- Much recent planting has been of relatively short lived ornamental species rather than the forest type trees that are indigenous in the landscape and were planted in the 18th c enclosures and 1900 landscaping.
- Urban design considerations could help guide future tree planting proposals.
- Tree management programmes would greatly benefit the landscape, wildlife and arboricultural value of the flood plain willow (and alder) trees.
- A positive woodland management plan would greatly benefit the ecological value and long term future existence of the Ashton Wold woodlands.

11.8 **Ecology**

- There is no up to date information on the ecological importance of Ashton Wold, despite its designation as a SSSI and there is no current survey information on the Nene flood meadows.
Ashton has a strong association with butterflies; Lepidoptera are recognised as important "indicator" species. It may be that some important species of butterfly once recorded such as white letter and purple hairstreaks and white admirals are still present, but their continued presence and wider species diversity is probably dependant on habitat specific management.

12.0 MANAGEMENT PLAN & RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 Conservation Area Boundary and Archaeology

It is recommended that the conservation area boundary is extended in accordance with the Ashton Conservation Area Review Map. Additionally, it is recommended that a conservation area is designated at Ashton Wold which incorporates key historic features such as built form and the cruciform tree avenue. The proposed conservation area is in recognition of the Wold's special architectural and historic significance, and also its close inter-relationship with the village. However, it also recognises the need for continued management of the woodland, farmed land and general landscape management which it is intended should not be unduly restricted by conservation area designation.

12.2 Historic Buildings

With Ashton Parish Council, and the Ashton Estate, consideration is given to the use of specific protection to unlisted buildings through compilation of a local list and/or article 4 directions.

Design briefs are prepared to guide the redevelopment of buildings and groups of buildings that are vacant and at risk, notably the Ashton Green Farm group.

Discussions are opened with the Estate and other interested bodies to consider the repair, future maintenance and management of Ashton Wold House historic gardens and associated buildings and structures.

12.3 Alterations and Extensions

It is recommended that East Northamptonshire Council in consultation with Historic England consider the preparation of a "design guide" to give a measure of certainty on the permissibility of proposals to make alterations to cottages, outbuildings and other "Estate" buildings.

12.4 Mechanical, Electrical, IT, Waste Services

It is recommended that the design guide noted in 3.1 above also covers mechanical, electrical, IT and other service installations. Specific consideration should be given to the design of free-standing sheds to house wheelie bins, oil and gas tanks etc.

12.5 Boundary Treatments

It is recommended that a brief specification is prepared to assist consistency in the repair of existing walls and construction of new walls.
It is recommended that a single boundary treatment is agreed in order to give more privacy / better boundary demarcation where this is required. It is suggested that this could be provided by planting common privet hedges either freestanding or behind existing 1m high walls. Privet is a suitable species for the Edwardian setting, is shallow rooting and will not unduly affect the wall stability and is fast growing. Privet provides habitat ad food sources for native invertebrates. Finally, within the consistent framework of a single species hedge, privet can be shaped into a variety of topiary forms, so giving the possibility of individuality to each cottage.

As the recommendations in 2.1 are implemented, the existing inappropriate fences could be removed.

12.6 Car Parking

It is recommended that discussions are opened with the estate to make available buildings currently unused or underused for use of secure car parking by residents.

12.7 Trees, Woodlands and Orchards

It is recommended that the parish council work with the district council’s arboricultural officer to review the condition, health and age of trees on the village green and draw up a plan for their future management.

The parish and estate jointly consider how best to manage and replace the enclosure hedgerow trees and hedgerows and remove inappropriate trees such as self-seeded trees that may compromise stone walls.

Discussions should be opened with the National Trust, Natural England, the Estate, Historic England and other appropriate organisations to devise and implement strategies for the positive management of the Ashton Wold woodlands and Nene water meadow trees.

It is recommended that:

1. the orchard and glasshouses recorded on the 1901 OS map and containing the grapevine still in existence immediately north of The Cottage; and

2. the orchard immediately west of Ashton Green Farm are specifically recognised and added to the register of historic orchards held by the East Anglian Orchards Project.

12.8 Ecology

It is recommended that the parish contact Butterfly Conservation (Northamptonshire Branch) to initiate surveys of butterflies throughout the Estate, firstly to establish the species and numbers of Lepidoptera that currently exist, secondly to make recommendations to restore habitats for butterfly conservation and (possibly re-introduce lost species) and thirdly to consider the possibility of continued monitoring of key habitats and colonies.
13.0 REFERENCES

- The National Heritage List for England (on line resource).
- Archaeological Desk Based Assessment.and Building Survey of The Riverside, Oundle. Northamptonshire Archaeology. 2008 Report 08/147
- Oundle Museum Archives and Exhibits.