

Vale Royal Borough Council

WHITEGATE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL UPDATE

AUGUST 2005



Conservation Areas were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act of 1967, and are now an accepted part of Town and Country Planning legislation and practice. Local Authorities are required to identify “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. They are also under a duty to review existing designations from time to time.

It has been recognised that if the special interest, character and appearance of a conservation area is to be retained, it must be managed. The first task in this process is to define and analyse the special characteristics that justify the designation of the conservation area. This is achieved by carrying out a Conservation Area Appraisal.

The character of an area depends upon its historic background, the architectural quality and interest of its buildings, their materials and detailing, the way they relate to each other, the line of the highway, the quality of the landscape, trees and open spaces and a variety of unique features.

A Conservation Area Appraisal provides a description of those elements that contribute to and define the character of the conservation area. It also provides the basis for development plan policies and development control decisions, both within and adjacent to the Conservation Area boundary. Subsequently the appraisal will provide the background for proposals to preserve or enhance the area. It may also identify development opportunities. Therefore the Government has stated that appraisals are considered to be essential for all existing and proposed conservation areas.

Vale Royal Borough Council understands the importance of involving the local community in the appraisal process. It has recognised that these studies are only valid if those people who are most closely affected by the designation of the conservation area accept the content of the appraisal. As a result, a public consultation exercise has been undertaken, the considered responses from which have been incorporated into this final version of the appraisal.

The Borough Council’s methodology for conducting Conservation Area Appraisals has been accepted as an example of Good Practice In Conservation by the Royal Town Planning Institute. However the Council has resolved to continue to revise and improve its methodology for conducting conservation area appraisals whilst striving to maintain a degree of consistency between the various completed studies.

The principal effects of this designation are as follows:

1. The Council is under a duty to prepare proposals to ensure the preservation or enhancement of the area
2. In carrying out its functions under the Planning Acts, and in particular determining applications for planning permission and listed building consent, the Council and the Secretary of State are required to take into account the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area
3. Permitted development rights are more restricted within the designated area
4. Consent must be obtained from the Council for the demolition of any building in the area (subject to certain exceptions)
5. Special publicity must be given to planning applications for development in the area
6. Six weeks’ notice must be given to the local planning authority before any works are carried out to trees within the designated area. It becomes an offence, subject to certain exceptions, to cut down, top, lop, uproot, wilfully damage or destroy any tree in the area without the prior written consent of the local planning authority

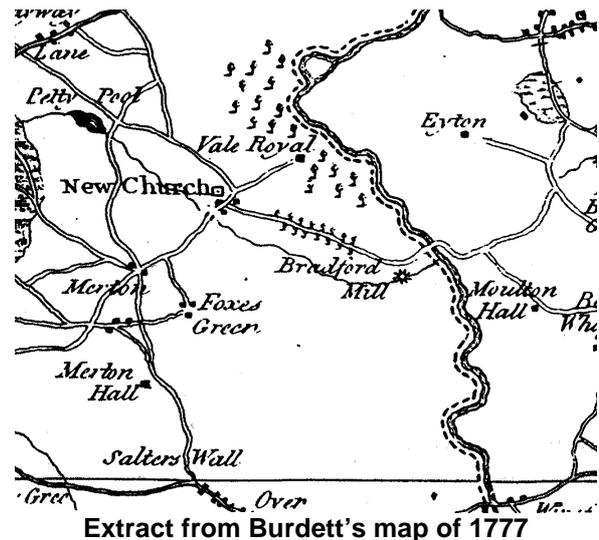
HISTORY

1. Historic evolution of the settlement

1.1 Origins and development of the settlement

- Vale Royal Abbey, built in the Domesday manor and vill of Conersley, exerted considerable influence over the local area.
 - Foundation stone laid by Edward I in 1277.
 - Last and largest monastic church to be built by the Cistercian Order in England.
- Church for common people established at the Abbey gates.
 - Known as 'Newchurch' during the Tudor and Stuart periods.
- Estate village developed nearby and became known as 'Whitegate'.
 - Supposedly named after the white gate situated at the driveway entrance to the Abbey.
- Dissolution of monasteries in the C16th.
 - Stone from the Abbey robbed for use in new secular buildings in the area.
- Site of Vale Royal Abbey acquired by Thomas Holcroft in 1543.
 - Remnants of the old ecclesiastical buildings incorporated into country house – 'Vale Royal Great House'.
- 'Vale Royal Great House' became the family seat of the Lords of Delamere, a branch of the Cholmondeley family.
- The second Baron Delamere developed the village.
 - Original Girl's School became the Delamere Estate Office.
 - Considerably rebuilt and redesigned the village Church via John Douglas.
- 'Whitegate House' was formerly the 'Rifleman Inn'.
 - Named after the formation of the Rifle Brigade in 1800.
 - Lost its licence in 1870 due to "unseemly behaviour".
 - Became home of the estate agent.

NB Vale Royal Great House is listed as Vale Royal Abbey



1.2 Topographic elements that have influenced the settlement form

- On the north slope of Pettypool Brook valley with Petty Pool to the northwest.

1.3 Influences of current or previous land uses on the area

- Agricultural landscape.
 - Part of former Delamere estate.

2. Archaeological significance and potential of the area

- Stone robbed from the Abbey probably used to form boundary wall to the Church.
 - Damage to wall in 1996 revealed hidden faces of stones that had been previously worked into elements such as lintels, sills and plinths.
 - Unusual narrow copings to wall may include original ridge-stones.
- Otherwise no recorded archaeological finds in the Conservation Area.

TOWNSCAPE

3. Form and structure of the settlement

3.1 Boundary of the Conservation Area

- Western boundary of the Conservation Area defined by timber fence edge of the Church of England School playground;

- North of this the boundary is marked by a hedge along the line of a ditch. (The red sandstone wall of the Churchyard, north of which is a run of rusting spear-topped metal railings, lie to the east.);
- Following the hedge-line which bounds the graveyard, the Conservation Area boundary then crosses Whitegate Road;
- The northeast boundary of the area then follows the highest visual point of the land, through the trees of 'Church Wood', around the garden of 'Lodge Cottage' and across Vale Royal Drive, enclosing trees in the grass verge;
- The eastern boundary follows the curtilage garden of 'Whitegate House' and runs southeast along the centre-line of Grange Lane;
- The boundary follows the eastern curtilage of the garden to 'Sunnyside', down to Pettypool Brook, where the stream forms the southern boundary, along the rear of the well-treed gardens of Grange Lane, and across to Cinder Hill;

3.2 Views within, into and out of the area

- Linear view along the tree lined Vale Royal Drive – the terminal view ahead is of the Church and its Lychgate.
- As the road bends slightly to the left, into the Conservation Area – the terminal view ahead is of 'Lodge Cottage', at the end of Vale Royal Drive.



'Lodge Cottage' providing view closure

- View of the Church spire, slightly to the left through an avenue of trees when approaching the village from the south.
 - Prominent feature against a back-cloth of mature trees.



Church spire against back drop of trees

- Good open views from the northern end of the Conservation Area;
 - Northwest, across to the edge of New Pool.



View northwest across to New Pool

- North to the skyline trees surrounding what once was 'The Old Vicarage', now known as 'Newpool House'.
- Northeast, through sparse tree cover, towards the imposing scale of new development on St. Mary's Drive.
- Looking westerly from high ground in the centre of the Conservation Area, past the Mews and over the school playground;
 - Views across green meadow and playing fields to rising tree cover.
 - Hints of reed beds can also be seen.
- Looking south, the skyline is tree-lined.

3.3 The importance of spaces within the Conservation Area

- Primary space within the Conservation Area is the Green, together with the rising grassy bank up to the Churchyard wall.
 - This has an airy open quality.



Primary open space in village centre

- Open playground spaces around the School are less public and do not really impact on the area.
- Two important linked spaces are the Church graveyard and the wide Vale Royal Drive / Whitegate Road junction.

3.4 Enclosure within the settlement

- Sandstone walls bound the important buildings such as the Church, 'Lodge Cottage' and entrance to Vale Royal Drive.
- The Churchyard wall, with its gate piers and the ornamental gates stand prominent on top of the grassy slope above the Green.



St Mary Church gate and gate piers

- Hedges and sandstone walls tend to define the private enclosed areas.
- Palisade fence to the front of 'Whitegate House' provides a more open boundary.
 - Similar effect achieved on the Green through the use of low post and chain fence.
- Sense of enclosure at the wide highway junction between Whitegate Road and the entrance to Vale Royal Drive is:
 - Achieved by tree canopy above,
 - Reinforced by changing alignment of the highway.

3.5 Urban form

- Village is a closed settlement with two distinct elements to its urban form;
 - Historic core of the village and the basis of the Conservation Area consists of low density, key, historic, social and community buildings radiating loosely around the Green.
 - Two suburban residential areas, along Grange Lane and in the adjacent Sutton Field development, both lie outside the Conservation Area.
- The open gardens to the southeast of 'Whitegate House' and 'Sunnyside' on Grange Lane act as a buffer between the more modern residential development and the older Conservation Area properties.
 - These should be protected against future development.
- At the southern edge of the village, two white properties lying close to the edge of the road, 'Whitegate Cottage' and the Old Estate Office, form a visual and physical pinch point.
 - Less obvious feature when the trees are in leaf.

3.6 Road pattern

- Centred around a horizontal 'T' shaped road junction.
- Grange Lane runs east to west.
- Whitegate Lane is the main route through the village and is the transept of the 'T' running north to south.

- However, the road alignment curves around the church, almost symmetrically, at the intersection with Vale Royal Drive.
- 'Church Green' – Semi-circular loop road close to the intersection – important service road to the Church Mews and School.

4. Buildings

4.1 Age profile

- Continuous development from medieval period through to the C20th.
 - Biggest concentration however, is of post-war residential development, lying outside the Conservation Area.

4.2 Dominant architectural styles and types

- No one single style dominates.
- 'Whitegate Cottage' is vernacular.
- 'Whitegate House' and the terrace on Grange Lane display some Georgian influences.
- The former 'Lodge' to Vale Royal Abbey is Victorian and the Church is remodelled Victorian.

4.3 Building materials - texture and colours

- Orange/red brickwork is prominent.
- Whitewash and pale red sandstone ashlar are also common.
- Some timber-framing is visible.
 - Early 20th Church Lychgate.



Timber framing on Church Lychgate

- 'Whitegate Cottage'/'Hamletts House'
- Victorian replica work on Church porch.
- Older buildings have a variety of roof pitches, colours and materials.
 - Grey slate is the most common roofing material.
 - Green slate, plain tiles and thatch can also be found.
 - Shingles used on Church spire.

4.4 Key buildings - listed and unlisted

- The Conservation Area has 6no. listed buildings;
 - 'Church of St. Mary', Grade II – Originally a timber framed structure it was drastically altered in 1728.
 - Later alterations included its virtual rebuilding in 1875 – to the design of John Douglas and at the expense of the second Baron Delamere.
 - More recently, in the early C21st, the Church tower was restored.



St. Mary's Church, South elevation

- St. Mary's Church Lychgate, Grade II – Timber framed with plain tile roof above an ashlar base, erected in 1922.
- Gate piers in the Churchyard of St. Mary, Grade II – Ashlar piers dated 1736 and restored early C21st.
- 'Whitegate Cottage', Grade II – Late C17th timber-framed, thatched cottage.

- Subdivided late C20th – ‘Hamlett’s House’ created.



Timber framed & thatched ‘Whitegate Cottage’

- ‘Whitegate House’, grade II – Early C19th house – formerly ‘Rifleman Inn’.



Grade II listed ‘Whitegate House’

- ‘Lodge Cottage’, Grade II – Former gate lodge to Vale Royal Abbey dating from c1870 with C20th extension.



‘Lodge Cottage’ at the foot of Vale Royal Drive

- Also 3 locally listed buildings in the area;

- ‘October Lodge’ (formerly ‘Njoro’) – former girls school and estate office.



‘October Lodge’ – former Delamere Estate Office

- The Mews – Originally a stabling used by the Delamere family whilst worshipping at the village Church.



The Mews – former stabling

- Quasi-semi (four dwelling) terrace on Grange Lane.



‘Lisryan’, ‘Queens Cottage’, ‘Park View Cottage’ and ‘Sunnyside’

- Originally built for employees of the Vale Royal Estate c1840.

4.5 Interesting and unusual details

- Decorative brick chimneystacks give interest to the roofscape on many of the older buildings.
 - 'Whitegate Cottage' is a good example also featuring a thatched roof and decorative sedge ridge.
 - Also on 'Lodge Cottage'.



Decorative chimneystacks on 'Lodge Cottage'

- 'Whitegate House' features interesting decorative bargeboards.
- Leaded lights to the Church and 'October Lodge' porch.
- Many old, interesting features and gravestones within the Churchyard.
 - The Church gates.
 - Sundial in St. Mary's churchyard on sandstone plinth and base.



Interesting sundial within the yard of St. Mary

- Delamere family vault within the Churchyard.

5. Street Scene

5.1 Street furniture, wirescape, water pumps/troughs

- Minimal street furniture and wirescape.
- Cast iron bollards featuring Vale Royal insignia directly adjacent to the school.
- 'ER' post box mounted on steel post in same vicinity.
- Also a plaque mounted on a freestanding stone slab located adjacent close to the highway credits the sponsors of the late C20th enhancement scheme works.
- White flagpole within the Green.
 - Maypole for May Day event.
- Seating is confined to the Church and graveyard in the form of wooden benches.
 - Many feature memorial plaques



Round log memorial bench – dedicated to Edmund & Kathleen Heys

- Galvanised steel streetlights to the main highways.
 - Often inconspicuous against the tall and dense trees behind.
- Crude, concrete streetlights to Vale Royal Drive.
- Ground based floodlights protected by galvanised steel cages around the Church.
- The erratic located on the corner of 'Hamlett's House'/'Whitegate Cottage' is a prominent feature in the streetscene, originally placed to deflect carriage wheels.

5.2 Shop fronts, advertisements

- No commercial shop fronts or advertisements within the Conservation Area.
- Various lower-key forms of advertisement most prominent of which is the Church board.
 - All are sympathetic and in keeping with the character of the area.



Church board in wooden frame with Church name engraved across top

- An interpretation panel, giving a brief history of the village and surrounding area is located in the entrance porch of the Mews.



Interpretation Panel within the Mews entrance

5.3 Landmarks and focal points with historic connection or visual interest

- Church spire is the visual focal point of the Conservation Area.

- When in close proximity the golden weathervane at the peak of the spire catches the eye.



St. Mary Church spire

- War memorial – large stone cross on stepped plinth in the rear yard of the Church draws the eye.
 - Especially when entering the area from the north.



War memorial in Churchyard

5.4 Floorscape - materials, colour and texture

- Dominant street paving material is tar macadam with concrete kerbs, emphasising the dominance of the vehicle.

- Absence of continuous footpaths reinforces vehicular dominance.
- Stone setts have been retained along the edging of some sections of the highway.
 - Where possible care should be taken to retain these in the event of any future resurfacing works.



Setts along highway edge adjacent to the Church

- Small cobbles set in concrete provide an interesting change of colour and texture to the floorscape adjacent to 'Whitegate Cottage'.
- A mixture of stone paving flags and the use of some gravestones provide an unusual and interesting floorscape immediately around the Church.
- Loose stone chippings are used to form paths to the rear of the Church and across the graveyard.
- Late C20th enhancement schemes:
 - Sett paving aprons introduced at each end of 'Church Green' loop.
 - Traditional York stone paving and cast iron bollards in the vicinity of the School entrance.
 - Buff sandstone steps and strings leading to the Church introduced later.
- Early C21st enhancement – three phases
 - Additional York stone paving, dark red bitumen macadam to 'Church Green' loop flanked by and broken by sett stone drainage channels.



Floorscape improvements to 'Church Green' loop

- Standard macadam with sett stone drainage channels to the remainder of the school access/parking area.
- A short macadam pathway along the highway frontage of the school.

LANDSCAPE

6. Landscape setting

- Village occupies a pleasant, natural landscape setting within a shallow valley but to the northeast of its lowest point.
- To the south of the village is ploughed/arable land, which forms a neutral platform against which the Conservation Area develops.

7. Green spaces, trees, hedges



'Church Green'

- Open grassed areas are present around the Church, graveyard and 'Church Green'.
 - All are very well maintained.

- Large area of grassland to the west of the village, outside the Conservation Area.
- Village has good tree cover, many mature trees – many are the subject of Tree Preservation Orders.
 - Significance of this tree cover is seen in the restriction of views by summer foliage.
 - Cover especially strong around the end of Vale Royal Drive, to the north of its access to Whitegate Road.
- Trees also line the verge of the Cinder Hill approach into the village from the south.



Tree lined approach from south along Cinder Hill

- Stream forming southern Conservation Area boundary is well lined with trees.
 - Scots Pine behind 'Whitegate House' and also in the well ordered Churchyard along with other evergreens.



Evergreens in the Church/grave yard

- Some recent replacement planting in the area of grass directly adjacent to the school.

- Hedgerows alongside the main highway through the village have visual significance.
 - Hedgerows are also a significant feature in the landscape immediately surrounding the Conservation Area.
- Significant and prominent evergreen laurel hedge is used to define the eastern curtilage boundary of 'Lodge Cottage'.

8. Water features

- No significant water features within the Conservation Area.
- Pettypool Brook is a stream that forms the southern Conservation Area boundary.
- A dried up stream, now a ditch, forms the northwest Conservation Area boundary.

OTHER FACTORS

9. Negative Factors

- Fast and moderately heavy vehicular traffic passes through the village along the north-south highway.
 - Junction with Grange Lane also busy.
 - Some physical damage to older property has been experienced as a result of increasing heavy traffic.
- Village especially busy and prone to congestion during school drop off and collection times.
 - Parking at these times and during school hours is visually intrusive.
 - Along Vale Royal Drive, tree 'logs' (trunks and large branches) have been used to prevent vehicle parking on the grass verge encroaching into the woodland.



Parking control tree 'logs' along Vale Royal Drive

- These are untidy and most likely ineffective in their purpose.
- Soil erosion from this area washes down the road and covers old cobbles.
- Disused shed to the rear of the Mews is in poor condition and detracts from the pleasant and well-maintained setting of the adjacent 'Church Green'.



Untidy shed to the rear of the Mews

- The surface of the vehicle turning area at the entrance to Vale Royal Drive is uneven and untidy.
 - Despite much patch reinstatement it is still badly pot-holed in places.
- The New Vicarage has been constructed mainly of reclaimed materials but has poor detailing and historic referencing.
 - It lies outside the boundary of the Conservation Area but does detract from its character because of its prominent visual position.



The Vicarage adjacent to the Conservation Area

10. Neutral areas

10.1 Areas which neither enhance nor detract from the character or appearance of the area

- Impact of the large scale late C20th housing development immediately to the northwest of the Conservation Area is reduced due to the screening effect of the wooded areas to the north of 'Lodge Cottage' and adjacent to Vale Royal Drive.



Late C20th development to the north of the area

10.2 Areas and opportunities for development and/or enhancement

- Few areas with development potential within the Conservation Area.
 - Impact on tree cover will be an important factor to be considered in any proposals.
 - Potential threat from unsympathetic alterations or development adjacent to the boundary.
 - General tendency to locate mobile classrooms in school threatens the character of the area.
- There is a need for a solution to the problem of fast moving traffic, especially around the school and at the sharp bend outside the Church Lychgate.
 - Also for the management of parking and traffic associated with the school.
- Parking control 'logs' and soil erosion on Vale Royal Drive need to be addressed.

- The imposing scale of the new development to the north could be better screened through additional planting.
- The vehicle turning area at the entrance to Vale Royal Drive could be resurfaced.



Vale Royal Drive entrance – requires re-surfacing

11. Ambience/Uniqueness

11.1 Sounds and smells

- Bird noise from the many birds roosting in the extensive tree cover throughout.
 - Particularly crows cawing.
- Children during sports and at play during break times in the school grounds.
- Hourly chimes from the Church clock are an attractive aural element within the village that should be preserved.

11.2 Vitality and vibrance of the area

- The church and school are the focus for many community activities.
- Interaction of parents outside the school is a regular social element between 3.00pm and 3.30pm, whilst awaiting their children.
- Other than the daily activity from the school and Church however, the Conservation Area is rather quiet, with little activity other than the through traffic.
 - Ambience is therefore one of a pleasant rural village, threatened however by increasing volumes of traffic.

11.3 Historical associations with unusual crafts, famous people and events

- Historic core of the Conservation Area has strong associations with the nearby former Vale Royal Abbey.
- Cholmondeley/Delamere family exerted considerable influence over what was essentially the estate village for many years.
 - Family vault located in the Churchyard.
 - Church Lychgate erected in memory of Katherine Lucy Cholmondeley in 1922 by her children.



Memorial engraved into Lychgate timber

- John Douglas, one of Cheshire's most famous architects, was employed to redesign the Church in 1875.
- Within the Churchyard lies the grave of Sir David Muirhead Bone, who was appointed as Britain's first official war artist in 1916.
 - Knighted in 1937 he was also a World War II war artist.
 - Has a memorial stone in St. Paul's Cathedral, London.

11.4 Other characteristics which make the area unique

- Focal event in the village during the year is the Mayday celebration utilising the open areas on and adjacent to 'Church Green'.

Whilst an appraisal aims to identify the essential elements that give an area its character, it can only be a 'snapshot' in time. Elements and details of an area may be important even if they are not specifically referred to in the document.

This document should be read in conjunction with "Conservation Area Appraisals", produced by Vale Royal Borough Council in July 1997.

Whitegate Conservation Area was designated by Cheshire County Council on 12th February 1974 and revised by Vale Royal Borough Council on 22nd October 1998.

This updated appraisal relates to the revised designation and was adopted on 29 September 2005 by Vale Royal Borough Council as supplementary planning information for the purpose of informing relevant planning decisions.

Whitegate Conservation Area Appraisal
(Update)
(one of a series to be produced)

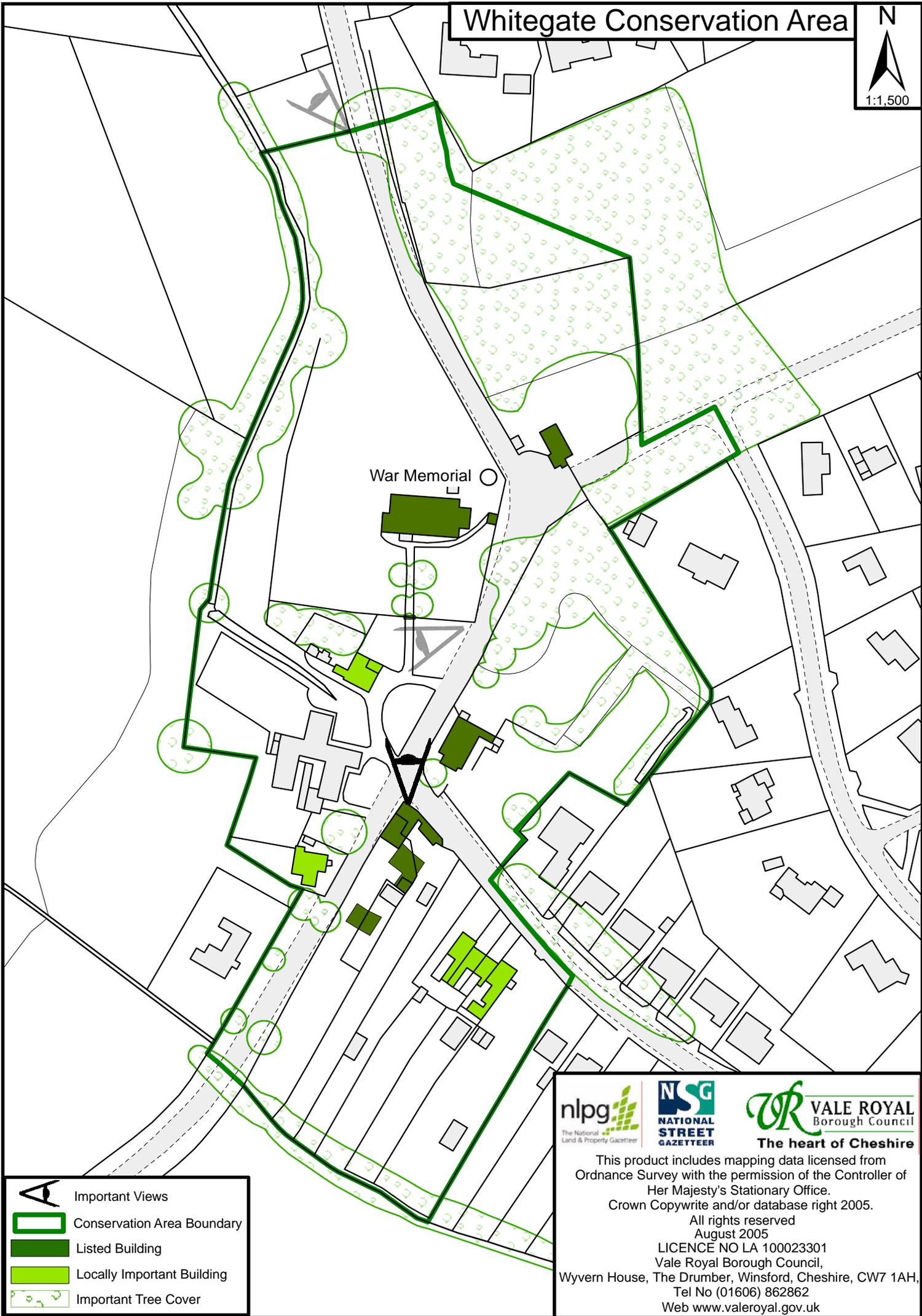
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Whitegate Conservation Area



1:1,500



- Important Views
- Conservation Area Boundary
- Listed Building
- Locally Important Building
- Important Tree Cover



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