ST MICHAEL’S CHURCH
CONSERVATION AREA

DRAFT CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

June 2005
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June 2005
PREFACE

This appraisal is part of a programme of appraisals of all the current and proposed conservation areas in West Lancashire.

The District Council has an obligation under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to review, from time to time, its conservation area designations and consider any new areas, and under Section 71 of this Act, to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these areas.

When West Lancashire’s existing conservation areas were designated in the 1970’s and 1980’s it was generally recognised that these areas were of a special character which warranted preservation and enhancement. However, very little was actually written down as to which features were important in this respect. English Heritage now recommend the carrying out of appraisals which will allow a full assessment of the characteristics of existing and proposed conservation areas. This will enable the Council to decide whether the conservation area still has sufficient character to warrant its designation or whether the area needs extending in any way.

The appraisals will also highlight the implications for the future preservation and enhancement of a conservation area.

The policies on conservation areas contained within the West Lancashire Local Plan and the Replacement Local Plan (Re-Deposit Draft January 2005) form the basis for determining planning applications for development in these areas. This appraisal should be read in conjunction with these policies and will form a material consideration in the consideration of planning applications and planning appeals. The relevant policies are included in Appendix C.

The appraisals will also provide a basis for: reviewing conservation area boundaries; guiding future local authority action in preparing enhancement schemes and in guiding the actions of others; and, where appropriate, increasing planning controls.

It is intended that these issues will be considered in full consultation with local residents and landowners, local interest groups, the Parish Council, the Conservation Areas Advisory Panel and Lancashire County Council.

Finally, this document will hopefully raise awareness of the special qualities of the Conservation Area so that as the area continues to evolve, it does so in a sympathetic way and the essential character of the area is maintained for future generations.

What is a Conservation Area?

A conservation area is an area of “special architectural or historic interest”, the character of which is considered worthy of protection and improvement. It is the combination of the buildings, street patterns, open spaces, vistas, landmarks and other features which give a conservation area its distinctive character. This character should be the focus of efforts towards preservation and enhancement.

Under Planning Legislation the local authority has wider powers than usual to control development which might damage the area’s character. The controls which exist in conservation areas are contained at the end of this document.

It is important that there is a consensus on the quality and importance of a particular conservation area in order to assist in its maintenance and enhancement. To be successful, conservation policy must be a partnership between West Lancashire District Council and the many interests involved in the conservation area’s future.
INTRODUCTION

The St Michael’s Church Conservation Area was designated by West Lancashire District Council in 1975. The Conservation Area covers an area of approximately 7.8 hectares, is situated in Aughton parish and centres on the junction of St Michael Road with Church Lane. The A59 immediately borders the Area on the western side. The area has a number of substantial detached properties in large plots, with a mixture of domestic and service buildings. There are a number of older properties complemented by later development up to and including modern development from the twentieth century.

LOCATION AND SETTING

Location and Landscape Setting

Aughton Parish lies in the fertile plain between the Ribble and Mersey estuaries and is a traditional farming district.

Aughton parish adjoins the south and south-west side of Ormskirk with the A59 running south through its centre. It is an extensive agricultural and residential parish crossed by both the road and railway from Liverpool to Ormskirk and including the original main-road village of Aughton. Aughton is one of the most attractive residential districts in the area with pleasant tree-lined roads being found in all parts of the parish. There are rural views westwards towards the coast, east to the pennines and south westwards to the Welsh mountains.

St Michael’s is located in the south western part of the parish at NGR SD391055 (centred) The settlement is situated approximately 4.8km south of Ormskirk and 11km west of Skelmersdale. The underlying solid geology are the Permian and Triassic deposits of the sherwood sandstones with overlying glacio-fluvial sand and gravel.

The village is situated on ground approximately 30m aOD and would have formed the very eastern edge of the West Lancashire lowlands before they rise to the ridge and hills on the southern side of the Douglas Valley. Woodland is sparse in this area and St Michael’s is surrounded by Green Belt land where there is rich grazing for dairy and other cattle and arable yield includes heavy crops of corn and roots and market garden and horticultural produce.

St Michael’s Church Conservation Area is situated at the north end of Church Lane. Holt Green Conservation Area is situated at the south end of the Lane, approximately 200m away.

Important Views

Important views in the Area include the initial views of St Michael’s church when entering the Conservation Area both from the south up Church Lane and from the west up St Michael Road. The views look over open fields with the church set in the background. A number of mature trees surround the edges of the churchyard, framing views of the church and enhancing the views into the Conservation Area and out from the churchyard.
The trees around the edge of the churchyard were covered by a tree preservation order but this has since been revoked, although they are still protected due to their location within the Conservation Area.

The view down the mature beech avenue at Church View, culminating with the attractive Victorian semi-detached houses at the end is also an important feature of the Area.

The views across the open fields west and north-west from the back of the old alms houses (No.s 3-9 Church View) has an attractive woodland boundary and contributes to the character of this part of the Conservation Area.

The view into the area from the north, down St Michael Road from the junction with the A59 is of a winding road disappearing from view, lined by low stone walls in front of mature vegetation. As no focus point can be seen from this viewpoint it increases the sense of anticipation when entering the Area from this direction.

The view of the Conservation Area from the A59 is completely screened by mature hedges.
HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Origins

It has been stated that Aughton has had a relatively uneventful history apart from during the Civil War period. As mentioned above, the place name Holt Green derives from Old English and therefore has Anglo-Saxon origins. It is recorded that a Saxon thane called Ustred or Uctred, held Achetun or Acketun (meaning Oak Farm or Oak Town) at a time when the sea probably covered all low-lying areas towards the coast and the plain was a mass of swamps. The altar / chantry in the church is dedicated to St Nicholas (the patron saint of sailors) which helps to support this. It can therefore be surmised that the area was a wooded area rising above sea level in the Anglo-Saxon era.

In the Domestday period the parish was in the Hundred of West Derby. By 1250 a band of Welsh people had settled on Aughton Hill but the settlement had not grown large enough to be taxed by Pope Nicholas IV in 1291. In 1362, the first rector of the parish is mentioned as Henry le Walsh. By 1556 Peter Stanley, of the famous Stanley family, had built Moor Hall a little to the east of the Area. Other interesting personalities were the Rev. John Nutter, who held the living of Aughton from 1577 to 1602 and the Rev. George Vanburgh (1786 – 1834). Amongst other traits and titles Rev. Nutter was an inveterate persecutor of Roman Catholics, Dean of Chester and known as Queen Elizabeth’s ‘golden ass’ on account of his great wealth. Rev. Vanburgh left a fund through which the seven almshouses at Church View were built.

St Michael’s Church

It is thought that the first church on the site was probably built around 850 AD. Early churches on the site are thought to have been burnt down several times by Viking raiders who landed at Formby and came inland.

By 1150 AD a small stone church was well established, the Norman doorway remains in the south wall of the nave. The church was extended and altered many times over the years and includes remains from the 13th, 15th and 16th centuries with a major restoration in 1876.

Records from 1579 indicate that the church was a legal and business centre as well as a spiritual one. During the seventeenth century three cottages were built at the north east corner of the churchyard and a school was erected in the south east corner. One of the cottages was an Inn named the Ring O’Bells, where the post from Liverpool to Preston stopped to deliver and collect the mail. It reverted to residential use after the Stanley Arms was built and was demolished during the graveyard enlargement in 1877.

The sundial situated in the churchyard south of the church dates from 1736 and was reset in 1811. It has the original plate with a Latin inscription, which translates as: I only count the sunny hours.

In 1739 the graveyard was much smaller than it is now and the graveyard had become very overcrowded, so a Charnel House was erected on the north side of the Tower. Charnel Houses were buildings where the bones of the disinterred dead were stored as graveyards became more crowded and new spaces for graves were required. This is a medieval practice and they became less usual from the 16th century, one dating from this period is unusual,
unfortunately it was pulled down during the church refurbishment of the 19th century.

In 1843 the churchyard was extended to the present western boundary. In 1877 all of the above mentioned additional buildings in the churchyard were demolished when the churchyard was enlarged yet again. The school had been re-established at Holt Green in 1835/6.

The Medieval stone cross base, situated at the south east point at the meeting of the two paths in the southern part of the churchyard is recorded as being moved in 1912 from Holt Green.

In 1930 the church was broken into and much damage was done.

Other points of interest in relation to the church include:

- **Canopied niche.** This 16th century carving is set in the interior splay of the window to the side of the pulpit. It is thought to have contained the figure of St. Nicholas and was probably associated with an altar but was moved to its present position during an earlier re-construction of the church.

- **Pulpit.** The present pulpit was erected in 1886 in memory of Thomas Bland and replaced an earlier three-decker pulpit. It rests on a slab of Irish marble with a solid base of Scottish stone and is elaborately carved with tracery and figures: the four Evangelists with five scenes from our Lord's Passion depicting the Agony, the Betrayal, the Scourging the Carrying of the Cross and the Crucifixion.

- **The Lectern.** as well as the clock in the bell tower and a silver Communion Set were presented by the parishioners to commemorate Rev. W. H. Boulton's 50 years as Rector (1834-1885)

- **Stone Angels.** The eight stone angels, which serve as Corbels replaced the wooden angels which were removed in 1875 when the oak-beamed roof of the Chancel was replaced by one of pitch pine. The shields bore the crests of the Stanley family and these were copied onto the shields of the stone replacements. Only four of the wooden angels have survived and these can be seen near the font.

- **Rheredos.** This was erected in memory of Thomas Bland in 1885

- **East Window.** This depicts Our Lord's Ascension and was installed in memory of Catherine Bland in 1900.

- **Choir Stalls.** Mrs Seddon of West Towers presented these in 1900. In 1735 a gallery was erected across the west end of the nave to accommodate the choir and musicians before the advent of the organ. This was removed in the 1913/14 restoration of the church.

- **Memorial to Rev. G. Vanbrugh.** Located in the Chancel on the North side of the Altar this is a memorial to the Rector from 1786 to 1834. It was carved in Caen stone by the famous sculptor Westmacott.

- **Plumbe Chapel.** Prior to the 1913/14 restoration this was the choir vestry. It was restored as a morning chapel or Lady Chapel and divided from the Chancel by a beautiful oak screen. It was named after John Plumbe, the elder son of a former Rector.

- **Bell Tower.** The tower and steeple were erected in the 14th century. Four of the bells
were cast in 1715. Two are inscribed with the names of churchwardens of that year and the tenor is inscribed "Robert Hindley, Rector". In 1935 two new trebles were added and all six bells hung in a new frame.

- **Base of the Bell Tower.** The 14th century Font was originally situated in the North aisle. It has been cleaned so many times that all the carvings have disappeared. Hasp marks for the cover and locks show that it was once secured to prevent Holy water from being taken. The four remaining wooden angels are displayed here.

- **North Aisle Roof.** This is the oldest part of the church roof dating from 1545 with the original oak beams.

- **Saxon Cross.** In a niche on the North wall are remains of the Saxon Cross. This cross, which has been dated at circa 850 AD shows that probably before that time there was a place of Christian worship in Aughton. The rubble found under the South West part of the church in 1913/14 showed that earlier churches may have been made of reed, mud and wood. Only 14 other pre-Norman crosses - indicating Christian settlements - have been found in Lancashire.

- **Records.** The first parish register was kept in the 16th century and is one of the oldest in Lancashire. The earliest churchwarden’s accounts date from 1737.

**The Stanley Family**

The Stanley family (Earls of Derby) were and are a nationally influential gentry family, who had their seat at Lathom House until it was destroyed during the Civil War. The Stanleys had profited from their support for Henry VII at the battle of Bosworth in 1485 and were the crown’s representatives in the county, owning huge tracts of land in the area and beyond. For three centuries they were in succession lords-lieutenant of Lancashire and occasionally of Cheshire as well. Lathom House was rebuilt by the ninth earl, but sold by his daughters. The Stanleys had also owned Knowsley Hall since 1385. The Hall, still in the possession of the Stanleys, was originally a substantial medieval hunting lodge and was remodelled in the 18th century and is now one of the most important country houses in Lancashire. The present wealth of the Stanleys is largely derived from the great industrial development of Lancashire.

The Stanley family obviously had a great deal of influence in the Aughton area with the Stanley Arms public house being named after Arthur Stanley, the prominent local landowner at Knowsley Hall. It was built when the Ring O’Bells proved too small to cope with the traffic using the turnpike road.

**The Civil War**

The Civil War caused extensive disruption in West Lancashire, including the execution of James Stanley, Earl of Derby, in 1651 after a failed rebellion against the Commonwealth. The Battle of Aughton took place in 1644 when Cromwell’s men routed the Royalists at Cromfield. The encampment was opposite Rose Place in Aughton Park. The head of the Holt Green village cross was broken off at this time leaving only the base and pedestal, which was later moved to St Michael’s churchyard.
Aughton Old Hall

This property is currently up for sale and a short history has been produced for prospective buyers. The following is a summary of this.

Aughton Old Hall is one of the most significant and historic buildings now remaining in south west Lancashire. It is a rare surviving example of a medieval manor house with a rich history that dates at least as far as the Anglo-Saxon period. By the early 1200s the Hall was the home of the de Aughton family, part owners of the manor of Aughton. A map from the 15th or early 16th century appears to show the Hall as a long timber framed building with a single storey porch and a stone tower at the eastern end. It is thought that this tower would have been a defensive pele tower.

The hall was re-built in its present form in the 16th and 17th centuries by the Starkie family. During the Civil War Edward Starkie, who had inherited Aughton in 1639, fought for the Parliamentarians and was one of their commanders during the siege of Lathom House. Legend says that Oliver Cromwell stayed at the Hall prior to the Battle of Aughton in 1644. Another legend tells of the existence of a priests hole – a hiding place for Catholics and others during the religious intolerance of the 16th and 17th centuries – perhaps this could be connected with the Rev. Nutter’s known persecution of Roman Catholics from nearby St Michael’s church.

The Hall was considerably reduced in size during the first half of the 17th century reflecting the declining fortunes of the Starkie family. The Hall changed hands several times after this period and its status fell from manor house to working farm.

Post Medieval

Other interesting post-medieval historical facts include the first mention of Aughton races in 1705, the muster of volunteers in Aughton against the ‘Young Pretender’, Bonnie Prince Charlie and the running of the first coach along the turnpike road from Liverpool to Preston on the 1st June 1774, which passed through the parish. This turnpike was a busy route until road traffic declined when the Liverpool, Ormskirk and Preston railway was opened in 1849. In 1835/6 the new school was built at Holt Green, leaving the way clear for the demolition of the old school building at the edge of the churchyard in 1877. There was also an influx of Irish agricultural workers into the area at this time. The first parish council was elected in 1894. In 1912 a new cross was made to celebrate George V and Mary’s coronation, the remains of the old cross being moved to St Michael’s churchyard. In 1913 the South West Lancashire Farm labourers’ strike was organised from Aughton and the village was bombed in 1940, when it had become a reception centre for Merseyside evacuees.
Plan 2: Map of 1845 showing St Michael’s Church and Area

Plan 3: Map of 1892 showing St Michael’s Church and Area
LAND USES

Much of the land and property within the Conservation Area is in residential private ownership and use. The obvious exceptions are the Church and The Stanley Arms public house. It also appears that Aughton Springs may be, at least partially, let out as office units, but this has not been confirmed at the time of writing.

Most of the residential properties are large detached houses set in substantial plots. Only the area including the two Edwardian semi-detached (68 & 70 Church Lane) and the houses down Church View, in the southern eastern part of the site, are smaller with more compact grounds.

The churchyard provides the largest public open space, while the right of way leading from Old Hall Farm to the A59 crosses fields to which the public have access. The Stanley Arms has a large area set aside as a bowling green, which is only accessible by private members and it is fenced off from public view.

The densest area of development is the group of structures around No.s 78-80 opposite the Stanley Arms. This appears to be the remains of a farming settlement from the second half of the nineteenth century.

A small electric substation is situated on the north side of St Michael Road between the Stanley Arms car park and the property called Greenwells.

The settlement is indicative of the development of many small rural settlements, clustering around the old hall, the church and the inn, spawning new development such as the early school building and alms houses.
BUILDING FEATURES

St Michael’s Church Conservation Area has three structures that have been identified as being of special architectural or historic interest and which have been provided statutory protection through the Listing system.

St Michael’s church is a Grade I listed building faced with local sandstone and has a stone slate roof. It is one of only 5 Grade I Listed buildings in West Lancashire and in the top 2% of the most historically and architecturally important buildings in the country. It gives the Conservation Area its name and has an extremely attractive setting. Striking modern doors have been inserted in the doorway of the porch at the southern entrance to the church. These are tinted glass with an etched design.

The Medieval stone cross base in the churchyard is Listed Grade II and has been mentioned above. It is square in plan with a squared socket.

Aughton Old Hall is a Grade II Listed building situated on the west side of the northern part of St Michael Road. It dates from the 15th century, altered probably in the late 18th century and restored in the mid 20th century. It is constructed of brick and sandstone rubble with the remains of a timber-framed construction. It is a private residence.

Important Unlisted Buildings

In addition to the above listed buildings, there are other buildings of historic interest which add to the character of the area and its attractive appearance. These buildings have no statutory protection and are most at risk from harmful alterations, and in some cases have already been subject to substantial changes.

- The Stanley Arms, an 18th century coaching inn this property is still in use as a public house. It started life playing a subservient role providing accommodation and refreshment for the coach hands, while the elite stayed at The Swan hotel, approximately half a mile to the south. A rendered building with grey slate roof, the Stanley Arms has several later additions and extensions. It is rumoured that a tunnel lead from the priest’s hole at the Old Hall to the pub. Situated at the junction of St Michael Road and Church Lane it is a focal point for the centre of this Conservation Area.
• The Victorian development at the end of Church View is an extremely characterful cluster of properties. The large semi-detached property (No.s 1 & 2) terminate the view down the tree lined avenue of Church View. They are referred to as the School Houses on the 1892 map. The old Alms Houses (No.s 3-9 Church View) are an extremely attractive row of Alms houses erected in 1851 (according to the Roman numerals on the front of the building) after the Rev. Vanburgh left a fund to assist the deserving poor. An inscription in Latin above the front door can be translated as *Rest after Labour*. The building is predominantly Victorian gothic in style, constructed of quarry-faced ashlar with grey slate roofing. A number of lucarnes rise from the front façade and a two storey corner tower with a pyramid roof with sprocketed eaves. Interesting carved stone details including the hood-moulds around the windows with delightful carved label stops and stone mullioned windows.

• Old Hall Farm is a collection of buildings and presumably was once the farm that supported the Old Hall. The current property fronting the road is a barn conversion built of red brick with a replaced grey stone slate roof and would appear to date approximately from the eighteenth century. It is a semi-detached property with Stonebarn to the north. Both these properties considerably enhance the Conservation Area. A public footpath runs through the property and across some small fields before joining the footpath along the east side of the A59.

• Stonebarn - the property immediately to the north is indeed a stone barn, obviously originally part of the farm, has been converted into a separate residence. It is coursed stone ashlar with a grey stone slate roof.
• The Croft in St Michael Road is of modern design but with some interesting architectural detail, which gives it some value in terms of contributing to the character of the Conservation Area. It is situated in a good size plot and set back from the road, along the drive are some good tree specimens.

• Aughton Springs appears to be a Victorian house standing in the remains of a formally laid out garden. It was built at some point in the second half of the nineteenth century. The mature vegetation screens the buildings, which appear to have been extended. The property is protected by security systems. The western boundary wall and mature vegetation of the property greatly influence the character of the northern part of St Michael Road. Unfortunately access to the property was not available to inform this assessment.

• The attractive stone terraces of No.s 78-80 also contribute to the character of the Area, while the buildings behind, including No. 82 also contribute to its rural character. They date from the last half of the nineteenth century. No. 82 may be shown on the earlier 1845 map.

• No.s 70 & 68 are two semi-detached Edwardian properties backing onto open fields. They are both rendered, painted white with steeply pitched red clay tile roofs and small brick porches with tiled roofs and curved brick doorways. Some decorative brick detailing is left unrendered.

Other Important Features

The **churchyard** is an attractive feature and greatly contributes to the views into and out of the Conservation Area.

The **Lych gate** in Church Lane is an example of solid country craftsmanship, constructed of timber with nice carved details.

Many of the **boundaries** to properties are traditional low stone walls with mature vegetation behind, partially screening the properties from view. These boundary features greatly contribute to the character of the Area.

There are a number of mature and attractive **trees** in the Conservation Area, especially those mentioned above surrounding the churchyard and the mature beech avenue at Church View, which provide a high amenity value. These groups of trees have been described as an important element of the setting of St. Michael’s church, some are in excess of 150 years old.

The remains of a formal **kitchen garden** which appears to be within the grounds of South Springs is likely to have originally belonged to the property at Aughton Springs as a formal orchard / kitchen garden and is shown in this situation on the 1892 map. The remains include greenhouses, brick built cold frames and other structures.
The Lancashire **Cycleway** passes through the Conservation Area, giving the site an amenity value.
PRESSURES AND DETRACTING FEATURES

The Council has a duty to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. The effect on the character or appearance of the area has to be considered in all development. Policies CA.1 to CA.6 in the West Lancashire Local Plan (and Policy EN4 of the Deposit Draft Replacement Local Plan) provide the basis on which the Council will consider all development in the conservation area.

However protecting the special character of the area cannot be carried out in isolation. A substantial amount of the changes, both to buildings and the surrounding land and natural features does not come under the control of the Local Authority. Minor changes, may appear small seen in isolation but the cumulative effect can, over time, harm the special character of the area. The long term future of the St Michael’s Church Conservation Area relies a great deal on the sustainable and sensitive approach of the residents who live in the area.

In general the street furniture does little to enhance the street scene at St Michael’s and in some cases actively detracts from its character:

- The bus shelter on Church Lane is of timber construction with a mineral felt roof. It is located just on the boundary of the designated area. The design and quality of this feature detracts from the character of the Conservation Area. This is exacerbated by the graffiti inside the shelter.

- The finger signpost on the northern corner of St Michael’s churchyard at the junction of St Michael Road and Church Lane is of an attractive design, with a cast iron column. This feature has the potential to be an important character feature of the Conservation Area, but has been neglected and the finger arms are in need of refurbishment.

- The only bench within the Conservation Area that is not located with St Michael’s churchyard is of low quality, constructed of concrete supports with wooden slats on the seat and back.
• There are a variety of lighting columns within the Area, none of which enhance its character. However, the privately installed columns within the curtilage of the Stanley Arms are of a traditional design with ‘Victorian’ type lanterns and do not actively detract from the character of the Area.

• The railings around the field to the south of St Michael’s, along the west side of Church Lane are in poor condition and affect the view into the Area from the south.

• The extensions to the rear of the old Alms Houses (No.s 3-9 Church View).

• The lack of public access to view these attractive and historic properties, especially the front façade, is detrimental to their contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

• The scout hut to the south east side of Church View, and its setting, although outside the Conservation Area would benefit from enhancement. Any development or change to this property is likely to have an impact on the Conservation Area.

• The Church Hall.

• The condition of the greenhouses and remains of the formal kitchen garden to the south of Aughton Springs (now part of the South Springs property).

• There is a lack of public access both physically and visually to the amenity of the bowling green behind the Stanley Arms.

• The expanse of tarmac and wide open space of the car park behind the Stanley Arms, although surrounded by a stone wall, is at odds with the rest of the Conservation Area which tends towards low stone walls backed by mature vegetation screening the properties behind.

The use of UPVC windows in some of the buildings surrounding the junction by the Stanley Arms does not reflect the historic qualities of the properties and do not contribute to their character and the character and appearance of the Area as a whole. In the same way installation of satellite dishes and burglar alarms demonstrate how small insignificant additions and alterations can threaten the character of the Area.

The north end of St Michael Road and the western boundary of the Conservation Area suffers noise pollution from the A59.
CONCLUSIONS

A conservation area is defined as “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. This appraisal clearly demonstrates that the St Michael’s Church Conservation Area contains both architectural and historic interest which continues to justify its conservation area status.

This appraisal provides an opportunity to highlight some of the important features and buildings in St Michael’s Church Conservation Area, as well as promoting a better understanding of the issues which specifically relate to the area as a way of retaining the area’s special character or appearance.

Many individual properties are of significant value within the local context and have been highlighted as making a significant contribution to the special character of the area.

St Michael’s Church Conservation Area clearly contains features of both historical and architectural interest, which justifies part of the settlement’s status as a conservation area. The settlement provides a cohesive example of the development of a small rural settlement around the church, old hall, Inn and the associated services that grew up around these. The settlement contains a variety of informal vernacular architecture and more formal architectural styles. The boundary walls and mature screening vegetation are important to the character of the Area and significantly contribute to its amenity value.

The character of St Michael’s Church Conservation Area must be considered in context, i.e. taking into account the neighbouring Holt Green Conservation Area.
ST MICHAEL’S CHURCH CONSERVATION AREA PROPOSALS

It is the duty of the local planning authority to determine whether the existing boundary of the conservation area is still appropriate and whether any further parts should be designated as a conservation area or indeed deleted from it.

The local planning authority must also from time to time formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. Any enhancement proposals formulated, under this section, will be submitted for further public consideration.

This appraisal document has raised several issues which should form part of any proposed action and be considered alongside policies for the area as set out in the West Lancashire Local Plan.

In common with other conservation area appraisals produced by the local authority, the following issues have been recognised for consideration in respect of St Michael’s Church Conservation Area:

- whether the existing conservation area boundary is appropriate
- whether it is necessary to sanction additional controls over development in the form of the imposition of an Article 4 (2) direction
- to look at further development in the Conservation Area
- to assess the need for environmental improvements in the Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Boundary

Following a full assessment of the area, it is recognised that the St Michael’s Church Conservation Area still retains a special character which is well defined and worthy of protection and designation as a Conservation Area.

While it has been noted that the Holt Green Conservation Area is extremely close by and historically related, the current boundary of both Areas divorce the two parts of the settlement. The uninspired modern development between the two areas probably precludes the joining of the two Areas through a boundary extension. However, consideration should be made to linking the two parts of the village and the appraisal for each Area should be linked to the other.

It has been identified that the open fields surrounding the settlement are a vital part of its character and significantly contribute to views into and out of the Area.

It is recommended that efforts are made to ensure that the two Conservation Areas of St Michael’s and Holt Green do not become divorced from one another in the eyes of those who have decision making powers in these areas.

It is recommended that the boundary of the Conservation Area is extended to include the field surrounding the graveyard to the south and west.
It is recommended that any review of this appraisal be undertaken in conjunction with a review of the Holt Green Area.

Article 4 Direction

There is currently no Article 4 Direction in place at St Michael’s Church Conservation Area and owners can currently carry out certain small alterations to their residential properties such as replacing windows and doors and partially removing boundary walls for example without needing planning permission.

An Article 4(2) Direction allows the Council to remove some of these permitted development rights available to residents meaning that planning permission would then be required for such work albeit only on those elevations which front a highway.

Properties that are not houses do not benefit from the same permitted development rights, and planning permission is required for any works that would materially affect the appearance of a building.

However, it has been noted that some areas of the Conservation Area are vulnerable to minor uncontrolled development and alteration which have over time been identified as detracting from the area’s character and appearance. In particular, this has been identified as the central area around the junction. While an Article 4 would not prevent all of the inappropriate additions it would serve to provide some control over the area.

After careful consideration the Council considers that the application of an Article 4(2) Direction over the whole of the St Michael’s Church Conservation Area would be an important ‘tool’ in restricting the permitted development rights of property owners and could result in a reduction on minor, uncontrolled development within the Area.

Further Development in the Conservation Area

It has been indicated that good quality new design has enhanced the character of St Michael’s Conservation Area and equally that poor or bland design detracts from its character. However, the character of a small isolated settlement, in conjunction with the Holt Green end of the settlement, surrounded by rural open fields should be maintained and protected.

The large plot sizes of many of the properties may lead to sub-division and an increase in housing density due to demand for housing.

Any new development would have to be considered very carefully if it is not to compromise the character of the area.

Works to Trees in Conservation Areas

Most trees in Conservation Areas are subject to controls which exist to protect this special character. If a tree is not protected by a Preservation Order (TPO), but is within the conservation area, 6 weeks notice must be given in writing to the District Council of an intention to carry out works to trees (pruning or felling) or any root systems. This is often difficult to monitor on
private land that covers such a large area. The existing Tree Preservation Orders in the area are shown on page 17.

The Council is keen to promote good tree management within the conservation area and the Council’s Arboricultural Officer offers advice to owners both indirectly through leaflets and directly with specialist advice.

**Environmental Improvements in the Conservation Area**

The Appraisal identifies several detracting features within the Conservation Area. Some of these features, and the action required to remedy the situation, are set out below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detracting Features</th>
<th>Action Required</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The cumulative effect of minor alterations and extensions (inc. demolition) to</td>
<td>Better understanding of architectural designs and the wider conservation area and better control and enforcement where necessary,</td>
<td>The appraisal should become adopted by the Council as SPG and be used by Development Control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buildings, which affect the character and erode the special character and appearance of the area.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate additions and unsympathetic improvements</td>
<td>Help and guidance to owners to help them make the best informed decisions relating to alterations.</td>
<td>Through advice from the Conservation Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street furniture and lighting (as specified above)</td>
<td>Consider enhancement of street scene through replacement with appropriate street furniture</td>
<td>Through discussion and potential partnership with LCC for replacement if funding becomes available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paucity of building design which positively contributes to the Area’s character.</td>
<td>Encouragement of good design using good quality materials and workmanship</td>
<td>Through advice from Development Control and the Conservation Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of character and historic features</td>
<td>Help and guidance for owners with the repair and replacement of traditional features.</td>
<td>Consider grant scheme for repair / reinstatement of traditional features, if funding becomes available, especially for those buildings and features that have been identified as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Owners</th>
<th>Owners</th>
<th>Owners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of public access to properties of special interest</td>
<td>Encourage owners to participate in Heritage Open Days or similar schemes</td>
<td>Partnership working with owners</td>
<td>Through advice from Development Control and the Conservation Unit and use of Development Control measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detritmental effect of the Scout Hut on the setting of the Area</td>
<td>Encourage positive change</td>
<td>Partnership working with owners</td>
<td>Consider applicability of grant scheme, should funding become available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor condition of formal kitchen garden at South Springs</td>
<td>Research, use and maintain garden for original purpose or new use</td>
<td>Partnership working with owners</td>
<td>Consultation with private club and Stanley Arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of physical and visual public access to the bowling green</td>
<td>Provide some form of public access</td>
<td>Consultation with private club and Stanley Arms</td>
<td>Consider removal of fence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of screening of large open spaces and loss of mature vegetation</td>
<td>Additional screening vegetation</td>
<td>Consultation with Stanley Arms</td>
<td>Local Authority action and advice from the Aboricultural / Landscape and tree officer and through the Development Control process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise pollution from A59</td>
<td>Reduce noise levels within the Area</td>
<td>Consider ways and opportunities to mitigate</td>
<td>Ensure any grant or enhancement schemes that may become available apply to both areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of St Michael’s in its context with Holt Green</td>
<td>Increase links between the two Conservation Areas.</td>
<td>Conduct consultations for both areas at the same time.</td>
<td>Local authority to provide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Consideration of St Michael’s in its context with Holt Green            | Increase links between the two Conservation Areas.                     | Conduct consultations for both areas at the same time.                 | Local authority to provide                                             |
Summary

The St Michael’s Church Conservation Area is an area of architectural and historic interest, encompassing the area around and immediately north of the junction of St Michael Road and Church Lane.

The Appraisal has identified many positive features and properties within the Conservation Area. It has also identified some opportunities for enhancement, many of which will involve partnership working between the various authorities, private owners and residents. This type of co-operation will be vital if the special character of the Area is to be enhanced and maintained for future generations.

How the works are financed largely depends on the ownership situation and on the availability of public sector finance to support those works that are not viable for the landowners. The list above should be used as a starting point for determining the areas for priority action and for where funds should be targeted in the future should they become available.

In addition this appraisal has identified that an extension to the Conservation Area boundary is recommended, as it would be beneficial for preserving the context and setting, and therefore the character, of the settlement.
APPENDIX A

PRINCIPAL EFFECTS OF CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION

By designating a conservation area the Council is confirming that it regards the area as a place where special care should be taken to maintain and improve its visual character. This means that change in a conservation area is subject to greater control than elsewhere, principally:

1. Special attention shall be paid in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

2. Conservation Area Consent is required from the Council for the demolition (with some exceptions) of buildings and walls.

3. The Council must be given six weeks notice of any proposal to carry out any work to any tree within the area.

4. Permitted Development Rights (i.e. those building works that do not require planning permission) can be removed if the Council makes an Article 4(2) Direction to do so, and these rights are in any case more limited than outside a Conservation Area. Even without an Article 4(2) Direction, building works within the curtilage of a single dwelling house in a Conservation Area require planning permission if they involve:
   - the erection of a side or rear extension which is more than 50 cubic metres or 10% of the volume of the original dwelling house, whichever is the greater;
   - the cladding of the exterior with stone, artificial stone, timber, plastic or tiles;
   - the erection of any new building with a cubic content greater than 10 cubic metres;
   - the enlargement of the dwelling by adding to or altering its roof;
   - the installation of a satellite dish/antenna if it is on a chimney, on a building which exceeds 15 metres in height or on a wall or roof which fronts a highway.

[The legislation relating to permitted Development Rights is complicated and could be subject to change. It is, therefore, advisable to check with the planning authority before carrying out any building works].

PRINCIPAL EFFECTS OF LISTED BUILDING CONTROL

The statutory list of buildings of architectural or historic interest is compiled by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and includes a wide variety of structures. Inclusion of a building on the list identifies that building as having special interest and brings any alterations to that building under planning control.

There is a general presumption in favour of the preservation of listed buildings because they represent a finite resource. Controls apply to the whole building, both internal and external and to all works which would affect a building’s character. Works of basic maintenance are exempt from control - on a like for like basis, unless there is an element of alteration or rebuilding.

It is a criminal offence to carry out unauthorised alterations to a listed building, so it is always best to consult with the Local Authority to determine whether consent for work to a building is required.

APPENDIX B
REFERENCES


Adams, M. (undated). *St Michael’s Church: A Brief History* (unpublished)


http://www.aughtonmvc.co.uk/abtaughton.htm

http://www.funforall.co.uk/Towns-Villages/Lancashire.htm

http://www.lancslinks.org.uk/linkcontent/mycommunity/localcommunity/westlancs/

http://www.lancstowns.co.uk
APPENDIX C

RELEVANT LOCAL PLAN POLICIES

West Lancashire Local Plan

Policy CA.1 Control of Development in Conservation Areas
Designated Conservation Areas, as shown on the Proposals Map, and areas designated in the future will be preserved and enhanced by:-

i. only permitting development in a Conservation Area which:-
   a) would not detract from the character, appearance or setting of the Area;
   b) accords with the special architectural and visual qualities of the Area and harmonises with its surroundings in terms of volume, scale, form and quality;
   c) retains and improves important landscape elements, including walls, trees and hedges, attractive open spaces (especially those which provide a setting for historic buildings), traditional paving, plots and thoroughfares and natural building materials; and
   d) uses materials which are appropriate to the locality and which are sympathetic to the existing buildings;

ii. preparing appraisals to define and assess the special interest of each Conservation Area. These appraisals will then be used:-
   a) to justify the making of Article 4 Directions where appropriate to withdraw permitted development rights;
   b) as a material consideration in the development process; and
   c) to publicise schemes and proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the Area which are to be implemented by the Council, the owners of properties or any other organisation, as appropriate;

iii. where appropriate, only accepting full planning applications for consideration.

N.B. The Council has a statutory duty to carry out a survey of its Conservation Areas in order that an Area’s status can be justified. This may involve some variation in Conservation Area boundaries. Up to date plans and details are available from the Council’s Conservation Officer.

Policy CA.2 Alterations and Extensions to Buildings in Conservation Areas
Proposals for the alteration or conversion of existing buildings in Conservation Areas will be permitted providing that:-

i. they retain existing historic features and details. The Council will encourage the reinstatement of features and details which have been lost in the past, where there is evidence for accurate replacement;

ii. the detailed design of extensions or conversions is in keeping with the character of the existing building in terms of proportion, materials and construction details;

iii. the design minimises the impact that any proposed works will have on the special character or appearance of the building itself; and

iv. the design minimises the impact that any proposed parking provision and servicing arrangements will have on the setting of the building.

Policy CA.3 Important Views
In determining applications for development, the Council will require that important public views from and into Conservation areas remain unspoilt and opportunities will be taken to
improve the views of and the setting of Conservation Areas.

Policy CA.4 Demolition in Conservation Areas
Applications for demolition of buildings which make a positive contribution to the character of Conservation Areas will be refused. Where demolition is allowed, and would leave an unsightly gap in a built-up frontage, any consent would be conditional on the building not being demolished before a contract for carrying out work of redevelopment to a high standard of design is made, and for which planning permission has been granted.

Policy CA.5 Shop Fronts in Conservation Areas
In Conservation Areas, proposals for new shop fronts, or the replacement or alteration of existing shop fronts will be permitted providing:-

i. any existing shop front is incapable of repair or is not worthy of retention by virtue of its contribution to the street scene; and

ii. the design of the new or altered shop front:-
   a) is appropriate to the building in terms of proportions, detailing and materials;
   b) respects the context of the surrounding street scene;
   c) accommodates any advertisements in a way that contributes to the overall design;
   d) ensures that any security measures do not harm the appearance of the shop front or the street scene; and
   e) makes full and proper provision for access by people with disabilities.

Policy CA.6 Trees in Conservation Areas
In Conservation Areas:

i. development will not be permitted which would have a detrimental effect upon trees or require the removal of trees that make a significant contribution to the area;

ii. Tree Preservation Orders will be made on those trees which are threatened and make a significant contribution to the amenity of the area; and

iii. any trees which are removed because they are dead, diseased, damaged or dangerous should be replaced on a 2:1 basis, where practicable, with suitable species within the site.

West Lancashire Replacement Local Plan (Re-Deposit Draft January 2005)

Policy EN4 Conservation Areas
The special historic or architectural interest of West Lancashire’s Conservation Areas will be preserved or enhanced by:-

i. assessing the special interest of Conservation areas by preparing Conservation Area Appraisals and producing schemes to preserve or enhance their character and appearance;

ii. requiring all development in conservation Areas to accord with the objective to preserve or enhance the areas character or appearance and in particular harmonise with its surroundings in terms of mass, scale, form, use of materials and overall design quality;

iii. requiring all development in Conservation areas to retain and improve important landscape elements, including walls, tress and hedges, attractive open spaces (especially those elements which are an essential part of the setting to a historic building), traditional paving, plots and thoroughfares and natural building materials;
iv. requiring all development to respect the setting of important views into and out from Conservation Areas

v. the refusal of applications for the demolition of buildings which make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of Conservation Areas. Where the demolition of a building would leave an unsightly gap in a built-up frontage, any consent would be conditional on the building not being demolished before a contract for carrying out work of redevelopment to a high standard of design is made, and for which planning permission has been granted.

vi. not permitting development which would have a detrimental effect upon trees or require the removal of trees which make a significant contribution to a Conservation Area or important green or open spaces.

N.B. Although the Conservation Area boundaries shown on the Proposals Map were accurate when this Plan was printed the Council has a statutory duty to review the character and appearance of its Conservation Areas, from time to time, in order that an Area’s status can be justified. This may involve some variation in Conservation Area boundaries. Up to date plans and details are available from the Council’s Conservation Officer.