
Conservation Area Character Survey

FOUR ASHES



WHAT IS A CONSERVATION AREA?

Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, which are considered worthy of preservation or enhancement. They are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Within conservation areas there are special controls on some alterations to buildings and their demolition or partial demolition and on works to trees. The Council's Heritage Guidance Note on conservation areas gives further details of the specific controls that apply.

Designation of a conservation area does not preclude the possibility of new development, but such development must be designed positively to enhance the special character of the area.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS SURVEY

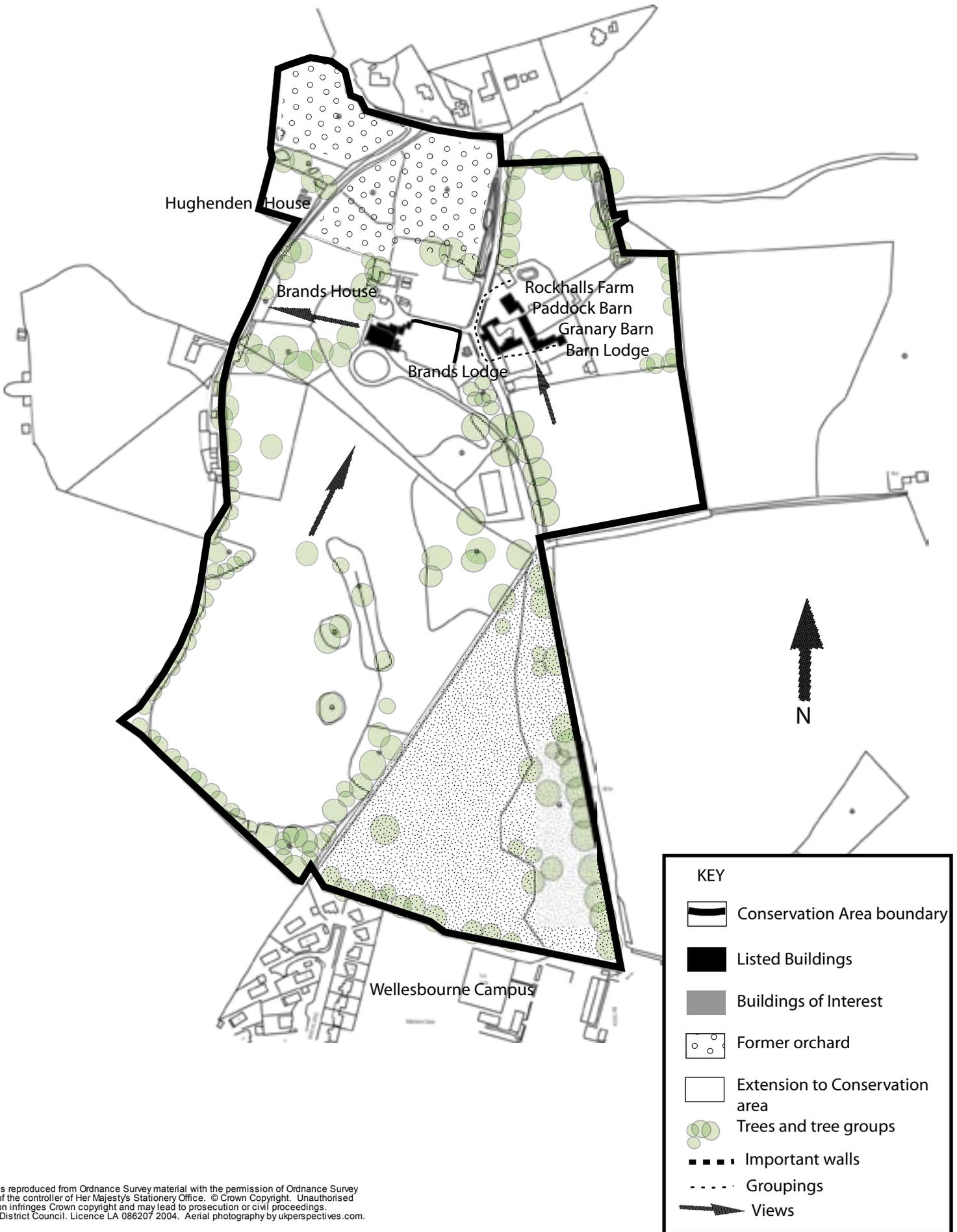
The designation of a conservation area imposes specific duties on local authorities to formulate and publish proposals to ensure that the special characteristics of the area are preserved and enhanced.

This conservation area character survey describes the main features of special architectural and historic interest that justify the designation of Four Ashes as a conservation area.

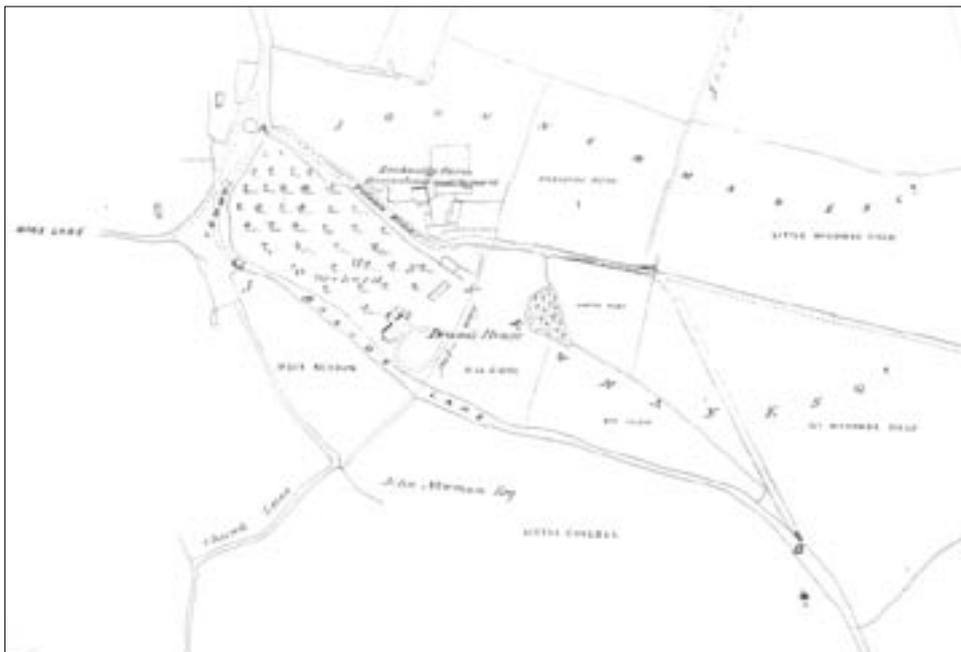
This survey is in accordance with Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and PPG 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment), complies with the requirements of PPG12 (Development Plans), and contributes to the Council's Strategic Aim 4 The Environment. It is intended to complement the approved policies for conservation areas in the Council's Wycombe District Local Plan to 2011 and is consistent with Paragraphs 11.36-11.41 of that Plan. It is also a material consideration in deciding Planning, Listed Buildings and Conservation Area applications.

This survey was the subject of public consultation prior to adoption as supplementary planning guidance. The views of the consultees were taken into account and in some cases changes made. A copy of all representations made to the Council during public consultation, and the Council's response to those representations is available from the District Council Offices.

FOUR ASHES CONSERVATION AREA



KEY	
	Conservation Area boundary
	Listed Buildings
	Buildings of Interest
	Former orchard
	Extension to Conservation area
	Trees and tree groups
	Important walls
	Groupings
	Views



1841 map of Brands Estate (Bucks CC)

once the heart of a 730 acre estate, and remains in its parkland setting, although much of the surrounding farmland has now been sold off.

Roman coins have been found in the locality, and it is understood that the main routeway from places like Naphill and Kingshill passed through the area. Lipscomb's History of Buckinghamshire and The Bucks Archaeological Society's "Records of Bucks" both refer to early 19th century finds of coins, pottery and a burial on nearby Wycombe Heath. More recently a coin of Edward the Confessor's time has been found in the parkland.

Few early records of the hamlet are to be found and most refer only to the two large houses. Rockhalls manor house, a large moated building, survived

until the 1790s when it was replaced with the farmhouse seen today. Lipscomb describes the "remnants of antiquity" which were taken from the old house and inserted into the walls of the newer farmhouse. These comprise stone heraldic shields bearing the arms of the Montfort-Wellesbourne family. Most historians have focused on this aspect of the hamlet's history, due mainly to the fact that Hughenden Church contains a number of effigies of what was thought to be members of the family, descendants of Simon De Montfort, Earl of Leicester. It has transpired since the early 1900s that three of the effigies are in fact fakes, some crude, some more carefully crafted: only careful perusal of the heraldry by modern historians has identified the deception, carried out in Henry VIII's time. Pevsner is dismissive of the Wellesbourne claim for the area, stating that after a century of life in Buckinghamshire the Wellesbourne family doubtless felt in need of an authentic pedigree. Regardless they were a well respected family in the locality, with Sir John Wellesbourne returned as Member of Parliament for High Wycombe in 1429, 1446 and 1448, and his son Thomas in 1477. Humphrey Wellesbourne was Mayor of the town during the reign of Henry VII.

The Wellesbourne family are known to have inhabited the manor house until 1552, when it passed (probably through marriage) to the Widmer family, whose name lives on in Widmer End. They stayed in the house until 1790 when Rockhalls and its associated

CONTEXT

Four Ashes hamlet lies within the parish of Hughenden, just north of the built up area of High Wycombe. It lies on the eastern flank of the Hughenden Valley with far reaching views across the valley floor to the west, and south across High Wycombe. The hamlet is dissected by the main Kingshill to Wycombe Road which essentially cuts the conservation area into two. The area is covered by Green Belt designation and lies within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a belt of high ground which runs from Goring in Oxfordshire, through Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire into Hertfordshire, and which contains very high quality landscape. The specific landscape type (as specified in the Bucks Landscape Plan) within which Four Ashes is located is identified as the "incised dip slope" of the Chilterns.

HISTORY

The history of the settlement essentially revolves around the two main houses that once stood within its boundaries. The first, Rockhalls Manor (the name derives from Deroquille) has long since disappeared, only its moated enclosure remains, and its name lives on in Rockhalls Farm House. The second, Brands House, was

Brands House





Rockhalls Farm

barns passed into the ownership of Brands House. The precise date of the demolition of the original house is unknown; the barns are likely to be late eighteenth century, although one has a dated tiebeam from 1704 (possibly a reused timber).

The history of Brands House is also somewhat obscured by time. The name goes back to the 12th century, when Robert, son of Brand was party to a legal agreement concerning land in Kingshill. Brand was of Old English and Old Norse descent, and provides an example of a pre-Conquest family retaining a good position in society. Further evidence of a Scandinavian element among the

12th century landholders of the district is found in the place names of Skirmett and Fingest.

The earliest part of the house now standing survives as the west wing. This dates from the mid-18th century - it appears on maps from 1770 (Thos Jeffreys) onwards, and is shown on Bryant's Map of Buckinghamshire (1825) as part of an E shaped complex, together with the name Four Ashes. The main part of the house was built in the early 19th century by the Newman family who owned the property until 1919. The walled garden has a dated brick from 1797. John Newman first appears in the ratebooks in 1836 - he went on to become an eminent gentleman, and a JP sitting on the bench at the same time as Disraeli.

At various times the estate included agricultural land at Millfield Farm, to the west, and land to the east including Cockshoot Wood.

When the estate was sold in 1919 it comprised some 733 acres - a substantial country estate that had been built up by the Newman family during their tenure. Sold as 14 lots it was split up, and Brands House, together with Rockhalls Farm was bought by a Mrs Vicars. The house became known for its shooting parties, point to points, and even aeroplanes landing on the lawn during the 1930s. Rockhalls remained the home farm for the estate, and at one stage was a model farm.

The last of the Vicars family lived in the house until 1978, and the house fell into disrepair. Part of the formal parkland was sold off to the County Council. Rockhalls Farm and its barns were sold off, the barns to be converted in the 1980s into residential units. The lodge and the gardener's cottage, more closely linked with the House, also went. Brands House eventually became offices for a couple of decades suffering some neglect, before once again becoming a family home. Most of the parkland associated with the estate, which creates the grand vista, remains as such, and the grounds are being restored.

Four Ashes was closely linked to Hughenden. Church Lane,

a bridleway and ancient burial route, originally ran down to Hughenden Church. Brands Lane, which linked up to Green Hill, ran close to the western side of the house, indeed the original house would have faced onto it. The Kingshill Road was constructed in 1841, and it essentially cut the estate in two, dividing much of the agricultural land from the formally planted park.

The conservation area was first designated in 1981 and revised to include the parkland setting of Brands House in 1992 and 2005. Conservation Area designation does not cover the whole of the hamlet - those houses to the north of the road are more modern and not visually or historically linked to the older part.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments identified within the conservation area although there is an Archaeological Notification Site covering the moated Manor environs around Banking Meadow. Expert advice on the type and extent of archaeological interest would be sought by the Council in the event of any proposal for this site (given Green Belt designation this is most unlikely). The hamlet is clearly of an historic nature, and in the event of archaeological deposits being found, the Council may require archaeological conditions attaching to planning permissions where appropriate, including watching briefs, excavation, or similar recording procedures.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Four Ashes is a tiny conservation area, which has at its heart the buildings and grounds of Brands House and its associated farmhouse and agricultural buildings (now separated and converted into dwellings). The setting of Brands House is also included within the conservation area as it is historically important and plays an intrinsic role in views to and from the main buildings. The only other buildings included within the boundary are Hughenden House), formerly two staff cottages, linked by architectural and historic reference to the main estate (the gardener had one of the cottages), and Brands Lodge.

The estate is divided now by the main road between High Wycombe and Kingshill, which separates Brands House, its Lodge and Hughenden House, Rockhalls Farmhouse and barns. The character of each side is very different, with the Rockhalls side more open to the road, some of the barns being hard up to it, and in a traditional arrangement of farmyard. Brands House is hidden from the road although there are open views from a footpath across the parkland. Likewise Hughenden House (formerly Brands Cottage) is tucked away down Church Lane, now a bridleway linking up with Hughenden and footpaths in the area. In the past the main road passed much closer to the west of the house, and across the parkland, so that the buildings were more closely linked together. The road was diverted by the owner of the estate in about 1850 to increase his parkland, and the overall privacy of his estate.

Despite the conservation area being split by a major road, the historic country house estate character





Brands House - Queen Anne Wing

remains. The open parkland to the south, beyond the more formal gardens of the house itself, plays a vital role in creating the setting within which the house sits. There are long range views from the house across the parkland to the valleys beyond. To the rear of the principal building an area of former orchard, identified as such on the 1841 map of the estate, and beyond, at the junction of Church Lane and Four Ashes Road, an area that was once common land. This delineates land ownership boundaries, the pattern having remained unchanged in this specific location for a century and a half.

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF BUILDINGS

There are a number of listed buildings in the conservation area.

The focus of the area is naturally Brands House. This is an imposing Grade II country mansion, dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. The west wing, in the Queen Anne style, was the original house. It has been incorporated into a grander classical design which re-orientated the house to a south westerly aspect. The house was further added onto at the rear.

The eighteenth century part of the house is of three bays, rendered, with a dentil-eaves cornice. The centre bay has an attic gable with a small lunette within it, otherwise the fenestration is four-pane boxed sashes. Double doors, half glazed and shuttered and a later wooden porch complete the central bay.

The more imposing early 19th century section has been added onto the back of the early house. The grand south front in a classical style is rendered and colour-washed a soft buttermilk colour. Five bays, and two storeys, it has a plinth, moulded cornice and parapet below the hipped slate roof, and rendered chimneystacks.

The three central bays project slightly under a single pediment, which is reflected in the pedimented Ionic porch with Doric antae. Windows are three pane sashes, with narrow architrave surrounds and moulded stone sills.

Previously there were shutters, but these have been removed and the building looks better for it. To the left of the building is the gable end of the Queen Anne block, to the right a 20th century Tuscan loggia .

Behind the south front are further extensions, also rendered and colourwashed, of two and three storeys, with a variety of window patterns, and roof shapes. A walled garden (the wall is listed in parts) runs to the east of the house, beyond which can be seen the roofs of Brands Lodge, and Granary Barn.

Associated with Brands House are the two Victorian buildings, one the former Lodge, and the other the staff cottages at Hughenden House. Both are very attractive in a late Victorian Vernacular style, utilising local flint work. Neither are shown on the 1841 map but are on the 1883 OS plans, and they are likely to date from the later part of the 19th century.

Brands Lodge was once a prominent eye-catching building on the corner, but is now hidden by fence and trees, which act as a buffer to the busy road. Flint with brick quoins and a tile roof, it has attractive white painted carved bargeboards. Of particular interest are the window surrounds, of moulded brick with drip moulds above. The house was extended in the early 1980s with a two-storey side and rear extension, and later by a conservatory. The door bay (originally in the centre) has one of the Rockhall shields above it.

Hughenden House is of a similar date and style; originally it was two cottages used by staff on the estate. It is set along a quiet leafy lane, and is somewhat separate from the rest of the conservation area. Again knapped flint plays a prominent role in its exterior decoration.

On the other side of the Kingshill Road lie Rockhalls Farm and its farm buildings. The Farmhouse is Grade II listed. Dating from the early 19th century, it incorporates earlier features, said to be from the demolished Manor. Of brick, it stands on a flint plinth, and has decorative dentil eaves. Upper walls to the right and rear have reused 17th century bricks, probably sourced from the older building. Double pile, of two storeys, the left hand side has a brick lean-to under a catslide roof. Of particular interest are the worn shields found above the front door, under the eaves to the left

Garden Wall and Brands Lodge





Barns at Rockhalls



Moat Barn

and right on the front elevation, on the rear elevation and to the right. The shields bear the incorrect arms of the Wellesbourne and Montfort families. There is a 17th century leaded cross window to the rear, the rest of the windows are 19th and 20th century sashes, with cambered heads on the ground floor. The gabled front porch is of later construction, with Victorian styling. The house presents an attractive façade to the roadway and plays a key role in the character of the conservation area.

The former agricultural barns associated with the farm are all also listed. These have now been converted into four separate dwellings. For the purposes of listing they have been grouped into twos.

Moat Barn and Granary Barn form the range that lies closest to the road. They are late 18th century construction with later weather-board cladding. Moat Barn is of 5 bays, and is the larger of the two linked buildings. It has a gabled projection at its centre bay, which was originally a gabled cart entry, but is now glazed. On either side of this wagon porch are catslide extensions. Granary Barn is lower with a hipped roof and octagonal turret at one end. It has a gabled projection onto the road, originally a cart entrance, and barred wooden casements.

On the east side of the former farmyard lies another range of buildings. Paddock Barn is dated R 1704 W on tie beams, and is weather-boarded, under an old tile roof. Barn Lodge is a lower single storey range at right angles to the rear, of flint and brick. The buildings retain their agricultural feel, although there are rather a lot of rooflights in the conversions. The old clay tiled roofs create interest, with their varying shapes and forms and play an important role in the street scene. The visual link between the Barns and the Farmhouse have been retained.

MATERIALS

The conservation area encompasses buildings which employ a whole range of building materials, and none particularly dominate. Render is the key element of Brands House, both the pale buttercream of the main building and the uncoloured

Garden wall



render of the Queen Anne wing. The slate roofs contrast with the pale colour of the render, the white painted windows and their surrounds add to the quiet elegance of the classic exterior. There is a walled garden of brick and flint, which links visually with the knapped coursed flint elevations of Brands Lodge, which also employs red brick to effect in window surrounds, quoins and chimney. Hughenden House is also of brick and flint. Flint is commonly seen on vernacular buildings in the Chilterns as there is a general lack of other building stone – the presence of good brick earth means that the two are often found together. The Victorians liked to add embellishments to their vernacular buildings, thus the decorative details on these two former estate cottages.

Across the main road the farmyard complex is mainly of brick, weather-board and old tile. White-painted woodwork on Rockhalls Farmhouse, both in the fenestration and the porch, highlights some of the 19th century detailing. The weatherboarding on the barn complex is dark-stained, the traditional form, and there is some flintwork as well.

TREES AND VEGETATION

The conservation area is particularly verdant, with trees and hedges obscuring many of the properties from public highways. Many of the roadside trees are from estate planting, others have been allowed to grow up to screen houses. Trees surround the moats of the former Manor; and the land to the rear of Brands House – formerly orchard as shown on the map, is now semi-woodland. Church Lane is well treed where it joins Four Ashes Lane, further down the trees thin out, and the views across Church Lane and the Hughenden Valley from Brands House are more open. Some larger trees remain in the hedgerows.

The general planting within the grounds of Brands House is typical of the mid 19th century, with ornamental trees such as Scots Pine and Fir, overlooking areas of lawn, interspersed with rhododendron and laurel. In the parkland beyond several mature deciduous specimens, mainly oaks, are dotted around here and there, together with more exotic species, but the overriding impression is of grazed open parkland. The east side of the park retains an avenue, and closer to the house the grounds are wooded, hiding the building from the main road

The major trees and tree groups have been noted on the map as being of particular significance to the conservation area and views within it.

OPEN SPACE

There is no public open space within the conservation area,



Moat remnant

although parts of the area are criss-crossed by public footpaths. The main area of private open space is the park and grounds of Brands House, which form the fundamental core of the historic area. The park is still used for grazing, which helps retain its open character.

GROUPINGS

The buildings within conservation area are diverse, and the only real grouping is that of Rockhalls Farmhouse and the four dwellings that have been converted from its barns. This is a traditional farmyard arrangement with the barns around the edge of the yard. Traditional openings such as wagon-porches and cart entrances have been adapted to the new use; their historic form remains. One side of the farmyard runs along the road, the proximity of the buildings here create a distinct focal point.

SETTING AND VIEWS

The boundary of the conservation area was altered in 1992 and again in 2005 to include the parkland beyond the grounds of the house – it was considered that this area played an important role in understanding the layout of the estate, and established the house within its proper historical setting. Likewise, despite being divided by the main road, the historic farm buildings of Rockhalls are closely linked both economically and historically with Brands House, and have been included within the conservation area not only by virtue of their antiquity, but because they were an intrinsic part of the original landholding.

The key views within the conservation area are across the open parkland, both towards and from the principal building. Approaching the conservation area from the south, one gets a feeling of being in the open countryside, despite having just left the built up area of Wycombe. The best views of the house within its intended setting are from the public footpath that bisects part of the park. Views out from the house towards the Hughenden Valley are equally as important, and are likely to have played a role in the original siting of the building – from its elevated position one can see across the Hughenden and Wye Valleys. The rest of the buildings within the conservation area are hidden, and there are no long range views of them available.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL ADVICE

The policies and proposals of the Wycombe District Local Plan are the primary source of reference for development control

advice. In addition the Council's approved Heritage Strategy is seen as a supporting document to the plan.

This character survey is also intended to provide broad guidance of an informal nature in considering new development in the conservation area. Below is a brief checklist taking account of the above text.

The Conservation Area lies entirely within the Green Belt and The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

To safeguard, preserve or enhance the appearance and special character of Four Ashes Conservation Area:-

- There are no sites for possible new houses or development that would not intrinsically harm the special character of this conservation area.
- In the conservation area higher standards of design are required, as it is the function of the planning authority to consider all applications as to whether they preserve or enhance the special character as identified in this appraisal.
- Any new building works such as extensions must be designed not as a separate entity, but should be sympathetic in form and scale with the existing buildings and the conservation area as a whole.
- Significant buildings are identified on the survey map and their specific qualities are described in the text above.
- Materials for any new building works or surfacing must be sympathetic to the rural character of the area.
- Applications for development adjoining but beyond the conservation area boundary will be assessed for its effect upon it, and may be refused permission if this is considered adverse. As the Conservation Area and most of its surroundings lie within the Green Belt, such development is only likely on the former Wellesbourne School site or the houses to the north of the Conservation Area along Four Ashes Road. Any proposals for development here must respect the character of the conservation area.
- Surfacing within domestic curtilages for driveways and the like should be in keeping with the rural nature of the hamlet and of an informal type. Large areas of tarmac and concrete are out of place in this rural setting. Regular paving, pavements and

Granary, Rockhalls



setts may also look discordant, and may not be appropriate. Paths to front doors historically were surfaced with clay tiles or brick, and this is a tradition that could be encouraged.

- Inappropriate replacement windows and doors can damage the character of the conservation area. Traditional natural materials should be used in order to safeguard the special character of the conservation area. Generally speaking painted timber windows and doors are appropriate and modern substitute materials such as UPVC and aluminium are not.
- Flint and brick walling is a feature of the Four Ashes Conservation Area. New sections of walling or repairs to existing walling should respect and be equal in quality to the workmanship of original sections of walling. In particular the use of an appropriate lime mortar will enhance the appearance of walling. New guidance on flint and brick can be found in the technical notes published by the Chilterns Conservation Board.
- Areas of open space, and gaps between buildings will be carefully considered for protection from development or enclosure in order to protect the character of the Four Ashes Conservation Area, the setting of listed buildings, and any important views.
- All trees in conservation areas are protected but special consideration should be given to those trees indicated on the conservation area map to ensure that they are not harmed. New development should recognise this and not present a risk to their continued future growth and habit.
- Although hedges cannot be specifically protected through legislation, those hedgerows indicated on the character survey map should be retained and where possible enhanced.
- Special care must be taken to ensure that views looking into and out of the conservation area are not spoilt. Those of particular importance are marked on the survey map. Given the prominence of the main house in the landscape particular care should be taken to preserve long range views.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

The following references were used when researching this document: Victoria County History for Bucks, RCHME Monuments of Bucks, Pevsner - Buckinghamshire, The Bucks Landscape Plan. Information on the history of Brands House was kindly provided by R Griffiths. Old photographs of the area provided by T Dickie.

Wycombe District Council's Department of Planning and Sustainability has a number of publications which offer further guidance. Ask the Conservation Officer for information on which Heritage Guidance Notes are currently available and appropriate.

The Chilterns Conference published the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide in 1999. More recently the Chilterns Conservation Board, which superseded the Conference, has published supplementary guidance notes concerning flint and brick. These will be followed

by a note dealing with tiles. They all provide guidance aimed at conserving the outstanding qualities which make the Chilterns a landscape of national importance. Copies can be inspected/or purchased at the District Council Offices. It is used by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance

The Conservation Officer and Heritage Officer are always pleased to give advice on all heritage matters and can be contacted on 01494 421578/421527 or seen by appointment in the Council Offices or on site.

Development Control matters within the Four Ashes Conservation Area are the responsibility of the East Team who can be contacted on 01494 421531.

Planning Policy matters are the responsibility of the Policy Unit who can be contacted on 01494 421545.

Listed Buildings:

Brands House
Rockhalls Farm
Granary Barn/Moat Barn:
Paddock Barn and Barn Lodge:

Parkland Trees, Brands House

